

# **Which Method Of Biblical Exposition Is More Loving?**

## **A Comparison Of The Historical-Critical And Historical-Grammatical Methods Of Biblical Exposition With Special Focus On The Presuppositions.**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Our goal will be to examine the historical-critical and the historical-grammatical methods of Biblical exposition to ascertain which is more loving in its approach. Central to our work will be a discussion of the presuppositions that are underneath the historical-critical method. We shall accomplish our task by first expressing what true love for a Christian is all about and then by examining the presuppositions and underlying thoughts of the two methods. Our outline is:

1. What is loving in Biblical Exposition.
2. Positive statements on historical-criticism from its advocates.
3. The tenets of historical- criticism.
4. The presuppositions which underlay historical-criticism.
5. How might the presuppositions and attitudes of the historical-critical method subtly enter into WELS?
6. The tenets and presuppositions of the historical-grammatical-Scriptural method.
7. Conclusion.

In part, this paper was assigned as an element in the on going discussion of the issue concerning the roles of men and women. We would be remiss if we did not touch upon some of the hermeneutical concerns surrounding the issue. To that end we have added part eight.

8. Addendum: Hermeneutical concerns affecting the roles issue.

### **WHAT IS LOVING IN A BIBLICAL EXPOSITION**

Certainly all of you at some time or another have been confronted by someone who accuses you of being unloving. Possibly you just had to tell a young man and woman who were living together that their unmarried relationship is a sin. Perhaps you needed to tell someone who was homosexual that their "life style" is not an acceptable alternative to heterosexuality, but a sin. In any event, they would accuse you of being unloving.

The world has a concept of loving as being "let me do whatever I think is best or you are not showing love towards me." Of course, you can show "tough love" with someone, just as long society accepts tough love in that situation, otherwise, again you are unloving.

The worldly concept of love just mentioned does not do justice to our responsibility to the LORD. Jesus has called us to have a love for souls, not a wishy-washy love, but one that looks out for keeping souls out of hell. On occasion we know that what God has called us to say, may not always be seen as loving.

When we speak about which method of Biblical exposition is loving, we must understand that we will not make every one "feel good". Our main loving purpose is to witness and express God's law and Gospel with the specific desire that they will hear and be moved to believe by the Holy Spirit. At times speaking lovingly may have to include speaking the law which will not be viewed as loving. Our second purpose will be to express God's Word so that the hearer is moved to live a life in accord with God's will. At times telling the truth in love may not always be seen as loving, especially if you must speak candidly about sin. Any "method" or thought process that does not witness Christ to, keep people out of hell is not truly loving. Any "method" or thought process that does not proclaim God's will for life will not be loving either.

Before examining negative aspects of the Historical-critical method, let's first let an advocate of the historical-criticism express positive reasons for the method. Those written below are from Krentz's book *The Historical-Critical Method* and are presented without comment.

Krentz's little volume is one of the most lucid, positive presentations concerning historical-criticism. In preparation for this paper the author contacted Luther Northwestern Seminary and they recommended only two books, Krentz's book and an encyclopedia of historical-criticism.

Krentz gives this definition of scientific biblical interpretation taken from Ulrich Wilckens:

The only scientifically responsible interpretation of the Bible is that investigation of the biblical texts that, with a methodologically consistent use of historical understanding in the present state of its art, seeks via reconstruction to recognize and describe the meaning these texts have had in the context of the tradition history of early Christianity." [Krentz, p. 33]

"He [the historian] uses every linguistic tool at his disposal to determine the sense the text had for its writer and first audience (the *sensu literalis sive historicus*). He seeks to hear the text apart from the mass of biblical interpretation that has been laid over it in the history of its use. This basic respect for the historical integrity of a text is inherent in all historical criticism." [Krentz, p.39]

"Historical sources are like witnesses in a court of law: they must be interrogated and their answers evaluated. . . . In external criticism the historian examines the credentials of a witness of determine the person's credibility (authenticity) and whether the evidence has come down unimpaired (integrity). Dates given must be verified; if absent they must be supplied (as far possible) from internal references to persons, institutions or events, from stylistics, or from quotations made. The historian seeks information as complete as possible not in order to discredit his source, but to understand its credibility and use its witness. There are no rules of thumb for determining authenticity; the skilled judgement of the knowledgeable historian must serve as guide." [Krentz, 42,43]

"The difference between biblical scholarship and secular history derive from the major source, the Bible, and not the methods used. Biblical scholars use the methods of secular history on the Bible to discover truth and explain what happened. The methods are secular. The procedures may be modified to fit the Bible, but are not essentially changed." (Krentz, 48)

"It is a basic assumption that the evidence in sources can be recovered by the historian, verified by another researcher, and that history is therefore a controllable discipline. This assumption implies the axiom that all knowledge (or even all truth) is historically conditioned, so that the historical coefficient must at all times be taken into account. . . . This assumption allows history to be scientific, for historical knowledge is capable of verification or correction by a reexamination of the evidence. This openness to correction implies that historical research produces only probabilities, a conclusion which raises questions about the certainty of faith and its object in theology." [Krentz, 56,57]

"Historical method is in its general axioms at best not hostile to theology, at worst a threat to the central message of the Scripture." [Krentz, 61]

"Historical criticism is not a threat to the Scriptures because it is congruent with its object, the Bible. The Bible is an ancient book addressed to people of long ago in a strange culture, written in ancient languages. Historical criticism respects this historical gap and uses a method to determine as precisely as possible the significance of the words for the people then. Historical criticism sets the Bible squarely into our history and makes the 'full brightness and impact of Christian ideas' shine out." [Krentz, 61]

"The Bible's time-conditioned words speak to specific situations in the literary conventions and forms of their day. They have the appearance of the accidental because they are written *more hunzano et historico* (in a human and historically conditioned manner). . . . This basic recognition about the nature of the Bible entails the axiom that one interprets the Bible by the same methods and procedures used on any other book. No serious Bible student denies this evaluation." [Krentz, 62]

“Gerhard Ebeling relates the use of historical critical method to the *sola fide* of the Reformation theology and defends it with almost confessional fervor in ‘The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology’ (1950). The Reformers left Protestantism a legacy in which the ‘Word of God must be left free to assert itself . . . against distortions and fixations.’ The Reformers were also critical of tradition and held that theology must be left free to translate the Bible into whatever language is required at the moment. This attitude results from the combination of the distinction between law and Gospel and the insistence of the Reformation that Jesus is the Word of God.” [Krentz, 73]

“The Gospel is what is important; therefore *sola scriptura* in the Reformation sense does not mean *tota scriptura*. When historical criticism points to problems in the history of the canon or within the Bible, it asks faith about the basis of its certainty and thereby fights against naive docetism<sup>1</sup> in the understanding of the Bible. This tenacious hold of this docetism is demonstrated by the frequent ecclesiastical attempt to silence those who point out the problems by treating them as heretics.” [Krentz, 75]

“G. Eldon Ladd, for example, argues with some vehemence that the helpful results of historical criticism should encourage conservatives to use the method, purifying it of its rationalist presuppositions with the conviction that the Bible ‘is the Word of God in the words of men.’ The alternative to using historical criticism is an unthinking acceptance of tradition.” [Krentz, 77]

Summarizing and rephrasing: An advocate of the historical-critical method would contend that the method removes the human foibles and opinions of the interpreter by using scientific analysis on the Bible so that we have a purer interpretation of the Word without all the preconceived, church encouraged baggage that previous methods have had. Clearly, we can see that the method does not fulfill the high hopes which advocates might wish. Years of use have shown that historical-critical scholars cannot agree upon interpretation. Their lack of agreement they speak of as a strength and a necessary result of truly free, unbiased scholarship.

Krentz does mention the historical-grammatical method once, but does not express any substantive arguments as to why it is inferior. He wrote,

The attempt of the school of Antioch to use only the historical-grammatical sense failed. Ambrose, Hilary, Augustine, and the Western medieval commentators followed the East in rejecting the literal-grammatical sense by itself as a humiliation of Scripture. [Krentz, p 77]

Luther is raised as an example of using all the tools available to have a better exposition of the Bible against the tradition based interpretation of the church. Of course, Luther did use the Bible study tools available, but by no stretch of the imagination could he be viewed as on the road to historical-criticism. Even Krentz’s comment makes that clear.

Luther used all the means that the humanists had developed to discover this literal sense . . . Yet he insisted that the Holy Spirit was necessary for a proper interpretation. [Krentz, p. 9]

Proceeding, Krentz tries to establish Luther in the evolution of the historical-critical method.

The Reformers freed the Scriptures to exercise a critical function in the church. They found a criterion of interpretation in the literal sense. One decides between variant interpretations by looking at the intention of the texts, understood either as the Gospel (Luther) or the *analogia fidei* (the analogy of faith, Flacius). [Krentz, 10]

In this essayist’s estimation the historical-critical method rose as a reaction to several items. (1) It was a negative reaction to the church, whether Protestant or catholic made no difference, making assertions of dogma, or absolute truth. That negative reaction was founded in a prejudice that affirmed scholarship over and above

anything that remotely hearkened of a “churchy” attitude. (2) It arose to affirm the rise of science in the world and scholarship over against the miraculous and faith.

### TENETS OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM

We shall operate under these two simple definitions: 1) The tenets of a hermeneutical method are those specific steps needed to bring the task of Biblical interpretation or exposition to conclusion; and 2) The presuppositions are those underlying attitudes which guide the work.

The Tenets of Historical Criticism can be simply stated, although you must realize, that these generally accepted tenets are open to disagreement even among the advocates of historical-criticism. You already have a working knowledge of these, so we will mention them only briefly.

First, in “Textual Criticism,” the exegete examines the existing copies of the Greek manuscripts and variants in order to conclude which manuscript is correct, reflecting the autograph. This aspect of textual examination we practice also and so will not delve any further.

Second, “Source Criticism”: the exegete examines the text to discover the original sources used in the document. Historical critics contend that the books were not the work of one author, but evolved from other sources, and, were compiled. Source criticism gave rise to the J,E, P, and D theory which hypothesized that four sources were used by the writer, not Moses, to compile the Pentateuch. Source criticism proposes that the Synoptic Gospels were compiled from other documents such as Ur-Markus (the precursor volume to Mark but used in Matthew and Luke), Q (a second source used in compiling Matthew and Luke), and M (the original source of material which is unique to Matthew) and L (the source of original material in Luke). Even some practitioners of historical-criticism are disappointed with the results of source criticism, for source criticism just doesn’t seem to be helping in Biblical interpretation.

Third, “Form Criticism”: It is in “form criticism” where we see some of the presuppositions of historical-criticism most clearly. Form criticism asks, what were the original forms of the texts from the lips of Jesus or Paul. This presupposes that some words found in the Bible were not originally from the lips of Jesus or Paul but went through an oral stage of transmission during which time the original words were spoken accurately or inaccurately. As the original words were filtered through individuals and the church they took on the forms of those filters until finally gathered together into our New Testament by editors. Simplifying, the form critic must examine the texts, conclude which words were original, and which were added by others, the church, or the editor(s). You may recall that a number of “scholars” gathered not too long ago to decide what Jesus did or did not truly say. This is in reality an application of form criticism. The “scholars” were to vote by using black pieces, for something Jesus did not say, pink, for texts he may have said, and red, for something he definitely said. The result of the conference was that Jesus did not say much of what was credited to him in the Gospels. Form critics also concluded that the theology of Paul and Peter and other Apostles is different, and that all the Apostles and Evangelists were “children of their time” writing from the knowledge and concerns of their time. Form criticism has concluded that the New Testament is a compilation of what Jesus said (in the case of the Gospels), the theological conceptions of the original writers or editors, and the theological insertions of the church. The form critics task is to get rid of the “chaff” and find out what was original and useful for today.

The fourth tenet of historical-criticism is redaction criticism. The exegete’s task is to study the redactor or editor to understand his theological point of view. This task presupposes that the editor’s point of view not God’s is what the text contains.

Krentz mentions a fifth tenet which some practitioners of historical-criticism use, *Sachkritik* or content criticism. The exegete is to evaluate the theological adequacy of an author’s statements. *Sachkritik* is an attempt to place the

...biblical traditions into the broader world of their time, that is in the religious and cultural-political context. This procedure describes the cultural and religious terrain in which Biblical authors looked as they wrote. It stresses the ties of biblical literature to its context. [Krentz, 52]

Sachkritik is the same as what Soulen calls “sociological interpretation” in which “knowledge of the social milieu in which the texts of Scripture arose is necessary for any adequate understanding of the texts themselves.” [Soulen, 179]

Other tenets of historical-criticism are proposed, but those listed above are the most common.

### **PRESUPPOSITIONS OF HISTORICAL-CRITICISM**

There are nine presuppositions, or attitudes, about the Bible and exegesis that we will examine. These nine are touched upon by a number of different writers who have analyzed historical-criticism. It is interesting to note that none of the advocates of historical criticism that this writer used attempted to clarify their own presuppositions.

This writer must sound the same trumpet that Prof. Becker made so clear in his articles. A major, underlying attitude of historical-criticism is that it is a method of doubt. At the very heart is doubt of what Scripture says in its words and promises. Historical-criticism claims advanced scholarship, but the entire method says, “I don’t trust what the Bible say, and must make the Bible real for me.”

#### **1. The Bible must be read like all other books.**

Krentz writes,

In the nineteenth century, “The Scriptures were, so to speak, secularized. The biblical books became historical documents to be studied and questioned like any other ancient sources. The Bible was no longer the criterion for the writing of history; rather, history had become the criterion for understanding the Bible. The variety in the Bible was highlighted; its unity had to be discovered and could no longer be presumed. The history reported was no longer assumed to be everywhere correct. The Bible stood before criticism as defendant before judge. This criticism was largely positivist in orientation, imminentist in its explanations, and incapable of appreciating the category of revelation.” [Krentz, 30]

Marquart points out that in historical-criticism the Bible is fully human and historically conditioned. He goes on, “The Biblical books count as ancient near-eastern sources, and the concepts contained in them are ancient near-eastern [Marquart, 233]

This attitude towards the word is supported and advanced by five other presuppositions common to historical-criticism.

#### **2. We can’t approach the Bible as inspired**

Marquart writes,

The historical reality of Scripture cannot be approached by appealing to inspiration and authority. Corollary: Since inspiration, canon, inerrancy, etc., are not critical/scientific categories, the Biblical literature cannot be allowed any special status, exemptions or privileges, but must be treated exactly like any other ancient writing. [Marquart 232]

A close cousin to denying inspiration is to redefine inspiration while still using the term. If one were to say, “The Bible is inspired for those to whom it was written”, you have redefined what inspiration is all About. The doctrine of inspiration does not attach any contingencies, but simply, completely and overwhelming holds the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. A person who redefines inspiration is really saying, “The Word is inspired . . .” but which is not the doctrine of inspiration at all.

### **3. The Bible possibly contains errors**

Both form criticism and source criticism are guided by the assumption that some aspect(s) of the Bible are not actually what Jesus had in mind or said, but were added by others. At the conclusion of all his study someone who uses historical-criticism must say this was or this was not truly said. Becker writes, “ We have heard one of the critics say that the goal of historical criticism is to decide what is more or less probable.”<sup>2</sup> In this regard Becker quotes Paul Tillich, “The ideal of historical research, he says, is ‘to reach a high degree of probability,’ but, he admits, ‘in many cases this is impossible.’”<sup>3</sup>

### **4. Miracles and Prophecy cannot be accepted**

Krentz states:

Divine interference in history is a *deus ex machina* explanation for Carr, a joker in the deck that is not compatible with the integrity of history as the study of man (p. 75). Harvey holds that faith in some kind of divine interference has a falsifying effect, because it is really special pleading for the Christian position that assumes what needs to be proved (pp. 107-115). . . . Miracle, the overt intrusion of God into history, destroys the neutrality that is required for the historian’s work. Harvey states that miracle cannot be ruled out as a logical possibility: but “nothing can be said in [its] favor and a great deal counts against it” [Krentz, 59] [except reference, brackets are his]

### **5. Nothing can be settled by faith.**

Marquart writes, “The historical-critical method, consistently—that is unrestrictedly—applied, cannot allow the question of the facticity of Biblical events to be settled by ‘faith’” [Marquart 234] The historical critic can only allow “facts” as he perceives them to compel his conclusions. That sounds fine, but totally excludes what God said in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that faith is needed to understand the Word.

### **6. Scripture has no unity**

Briggs, an advocate of historical-criticism, writes,

The ‘unity of the scriptures’ has been understood as an alleged unity of teaching. . . . untenable . . . First, the scriptures do not reflect unified historical expectations. This is most evident when the Old Testament hope for an earthly political Messiah is compared with the New Testament confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Also, Paul seems to have expected the return of Christ within his lifetime. Secondly, the scriptures do not express unified theological concepts. The Gospel of Mark interprets Jesus as the divine Son of God whose presence upon the earth represented God’s challenge to the demonic lordship over the world. In contrast, the Gospel of Matthew refers to Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish expectations. [Briggs, 274, 275]

Briggs thus holds that unity of Scripture does not exist,

### **7. The Writers Reflect their period.**

Since there is no inspiration, or a modified inspiration, advocates of historical-criticism conclude and hold as their exegetical attitude that the writers reflect their period. The prophets and apostles were only children of their day with the attitudes, biases, and cultural thinking of their day. We, the exegetes, must then sift through their time bound words and lift from the heap what is truly useful.

Prof. Becker writes concerning this attitude, “. . . the Gospels is not a factual record of what actually happened but an edited version that is more or less founded on fact but that has been freely altered and modified in the interest of a certain point of view.”<sup>4</sup> Quoting Bultmann, Becker writes, “ Bultmann, for example, says,

‘Man’s knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world . . . we can no longer believe in spirits, whether good or evil.’<sup>5</sup>

Krentz makes very clear that he holds this attitude:

One normally assumes that an author, within the limitations of the culture and morality of his own age, does not willfully lie. But an author who is a poor observer, who has a bad memory, who writes long after the event, or who has reason to conceal material that may harm him, a friend, or his own social group may well bend the truth. . . . Therefore, the historian must not only determine what his witnesses say, but also evaluate their truthfulness. [Krentz, 45]

### **8. The Scholarly Critic must decide what is Useful.**

Again we refer to Krentz,

Historical sources are like witnesses in a court of law: they must be interrogated and their answers evaluated. . . . In external criticism the historian examines the credentials of a witness to determine the person’s credibility (authenticity) and whether the evidence has come down unimpaired (integrity). Dates given must be verified; if absent they must be supplied (as far possible) from internal references to, persons, institutions or events, from stylistics, or from quotations made. The historian seeks information as complete as possible not in order to discredit his source, but to understand its credibility and use its witness. There are no rules of thumb for determining authenticity; the skilled judgement of the knowledgeable historian must serve as guide. [Krentz, 42,43]

Prof. Marquart well summarizes the attitude that permeates historical-criticism and its users.

The “formal principle” is autonomous reason [science, history] as supreme judge. . . . Seeing itself as the historical version or counterpart of the general scientific method, historical criticism must proceed empirically TOWARDS truth as its *TERMINUS AD QUEM*. Criticism relentlessly questions all dogma and certainty, and its results are merely provisional, probable, and in principle always open to modification. [Marquart, 232,234] [first brackets are his, “*Terminus ad quem*—the goal to which]

We know that as soon as we place ourselves as judge of Scripture, then we will move away from what God actually has said. We know that we are to use all of our intelligence, all of the talents to reason which God has given us, but Satan would push our great intelligence away from the Word to deciding what the Word says or doesn’t say on the basis of our reason. We are neither rationalists or scholastics, nor Pentecostals or pietists, we are believers in bondage to the Words and promises of God. Professor Becker in his book, *The Foolishness of God* says, “ But while the form of the Word, that is, the language and the grammar in which it is couched, is subject to the judgment of reason and sense, the content of the Word is beyond all sense and reason.”<sup>6</sup> Later he goes on, quoting Luther,

Reason, you are a fool. You do not know the things of God. So do not get in my way, but be quiet. Do not judge, but hear the Word of God and believe!

In this writers opinion gained from the books read which favored historical-criticism, there is a strong bias against anything which comes out of the “church”. They only do homage to efforts which arise out of “scholarship” and anything which even hints of coming from someone who might be a churchman, or a church

leader, or might speak of dogma, is not scholarly enough, but only speaks to support the status quo. Most certainly intellect has become of greater concern than what the Word says.

### **9. The Bible's authority today is in its theology not its history.**

This is an interesting case, for number nine is a presupposition of the method and a result of using the historical-critical method as well.

We have noted that many<sup>8</sup> advocates of the historical-critical method approach the Bible with the preconception that it is not accurate in its history or factual. The Bible is viewed as a composite of the writers' ideas, early church ideas, social views of the time, and some items which maybe good for today. So removed from its place in reality, the question naturally arises, "What authority does the Bible have for us today?" To answer the question the historical-critic has looked to the Bible's theology, the kerygma, or central core of a section or text. By dividing history and theology they allow themselves to claim the bible as their Bible, but still remove all historical truth from it.

We must understand the subtlety here. The Bible is true, but only in its theology is timeless. The history stated by the Bible, the miracles, the statements credited to Jesus, Paul, the Apostles and the prophets are inaccurate and contain mistakes, and the notions of men. Still the Bible is authoritative for we can glean from it those kernels, those concepts, that kerygma which touches and guides our life.

Smart has some delicious quotes attempting to justify the separation of theology and history.

What Protestants may be slow to recognize, however, is that childishly naive submission to the Scriptures is of a piece with childishly naive submission to the pope. . . . It is not in the nature of God's authority to keep the members of his family perpetually in the role of children subject to a tutor, but rather the opposite, to make them stand on their own feet in his presence and in their relations with their fellowmen and face with open eyes the alternatives of life. [Smart, 91] Yet again and again in history churchmen have in various ways tried to assert an authority that will be visible, tangible and incontestable. It need not take the irrational form of attempting to maintain an inerrancy in Scripture. . . . It is in the exposition of the text that the Bible recovers its authority. It has to be laid open in its meaning for life now, whether in print, sermon, group discussion, or private conversation. The content of the text, freed from its time-conditioned context and given a new contemporary clothing in which to meet the present human situation asserts its own authority. It requires the services of the scholar and the interpreter to find its liberty but neither of them can ever, however much he tries, make its authority other than invisible, intangible, and contestable." [Smart, 101] [Knowledge and science have blossomed]... And yet the church officially - regardless of what it does in actuality - asks men to believe that the last word concerning man's relation with God and with his fellowman is set down in writings which were complete by the end of the first century A.D.! [Smart, 151] It is sad that so many Christians are still imprisoned by the idea that to share the Biblical faith in the creator they have to share in some degree the primitive conceptualities of twenty-five hundred years ago when, as a matter of fact, it is intrinsic to the nature of the Biblical faith at every point that it sits loosely to all time-conditioned conceptualities. [Smart, 155,156]

Krentz agrees:

The Gospel is what is important; therefore *sola scriptura* in the Reformation sense does not mean *tota scriptura*. When historical criticism points to problems in the history of the canon or within the Bible, it asks faith about the basis of its certainty and thereby fights against naive docetism in the understanding of the Bible. This tenacious hold of this docetism is demonstrated by the frequent ecclesiastical attempt to silence those who point out the problems by treating



them as heretics. [Krentz, 75] Because it [historical-criticism] is critical and liberating, it points theology to the task of determining what is binding for today. Theology is directed to the contemporary world; it finds in historical criticism a good introductory science, a model of how men once understood the Christian faith. It receives the freedom to ask about the nature of Christianity. [Krentz 76]

No wonder modern expressions of God's Word feel comfortable only speaking about the works of Christians today. If their church body or their pastor hold historical-criticism's presuppositions and attitudes, there is nothing but existentialism left because the words and thoughts are not trustworthy.

We have heard, and many have used, the illustration that the Bible is food for the soul, like a steak for our soul. Historical-criticism claims that the reality of the Bible is not important. That is like reducing a steak to smoke, aroma, and ashes. Such a "steak" is not satisfying as food any more than a Bible which has been stripped from reality is food for the soul.

We cannot leave this point without asking "What has become of faith." We would say that faith is trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior," and would also add, "in the words and promises of God in the Bible." Our faith, since it rests in the Bible is labeled as "bibliolatry" worship of not God but the Bible. Advocates of historical-criticism claim that they are truer to faith for they are taking away the crutch of the Bible so that our faith can be in God alone, independent of any misplaced confidence in the words of the Bible. In reality, their faith is in the concept of faith, not God who has given us the Bible including its very words. Of course, their concept of faith has been expressed before in a children's story—The Emperor's New Clothes—except its about the theologians true Bible.

A serious concern before proceeding with a brief discussion of the presuppositions and tenets of the historical-grammatical method is whether one can drop the presuppositions expressed above and use the tenets of the historical-critical method. Proposed by some is that the method is neutral and if conservative Bible believing theologians use the method with their presuppositions the results will be acceptable. We must conclude, "No, it won't work!!" Without the presuppositions listed above, the historical-critical method would fall into disuse, for theologians would realize that the "results" are subjective, useless and unedifying. The negative presuppositions that were used in developing the method of historical criticism are woven completely through its fabric. As in the Jesus' parable of the weeds and the wheat, you can't go through the field and pull out the weeds of the presuppositions without uprooting the whole method for the roots are totally intertwined.

### **HOW MIGHT HISTORICAL-CRITICISM SUBTLY ENTER INTO WELS?**

This is an important question for us to consider as we look to the future. First, we are aware that all have a sinful nature and being a WELS pastor does not make us immune to any temptation, even a temptation to adopt the historical-critical method. Second, the history of church bodies in America makes a consideration of this question imperative. Let us never forget one sad truth in the evolution of the church and the pastors that make it up. A church or a synod and pastors always start out firmly grounded in the Word but devolve to being lax in areas of doctrine and practice. Germany was the heart of the Word's revitalization, but now is liberal. The Lutheran bodies that make up the ELCA were not always liberal. Some will strongly contend that the Missouri Synod is trying with some difficulty to stop their own boulder that rolls towards liberalism. As WELS pastors we would be very arrogant and naive to think that it couldn't happen to us. The only physical reason that we have for being "safer" is that we are smaller and our very size will help in our doctrine and practice. Our size is too small a wall of safety. We all know what is needed—solid grounding in God's Word and clear use of the Word.

We can be assured, if this is any comfort, that no WELS pastor, professor, or administration will jump up and say, "I advocate the use of the historical-critical method." The method as a method will not make inroads. The presuppositions and attitudes are where the road lies. For a moment let's consider what might encourage a WELS pastor in adopting the attitudes and presuppositions of the historical-critical method.

In answer to our question of subtlety, several men were phoned to get their opinion. Be aware of two points. First, these were phone conversations which, were not preplanned. What they expressed came from their previous experience and off the tops of their heads and were not expressed in the same types of words that might have used if a paper was being presented on this topic. Second, since the conversations were not recorded, no exact quotes are given. Third, the initial statement expresses their opinion and the statements following of explanation are this author's.

There are several presupposition and attitudes which underlay the historical-critical method that lend themselves to subtle entrance into the church.

1. The writers reflect their period.
2. The scholarly critic must decide what is true and applicable for today.
3. The Bible's authority is in its theology, not its history.
4. We can't approach the Bible as inspired (The stark statement of this attitude may not be a danger, but if you change it to the half-truth, "The Bible is inspired but. . . ." it is useful to subtly affect our synod and pastors).

Professor Panning is the first too whom we posed our question. He expressed three possible inroads.

*First, to make the Word intellectually and socially acceptable, we may be tempted to adopt the presuppositions of the historical-critical method.*

Since portions of, much of, the Bible is unacceptable to modern thinking and "morals", we may find it to our benefit to "do as the Romans do." Science has made the "creation and miracle myths" unacceptable and has ingrained in people the concept that everything changes, and that truth is only true for the time. Social practices have strongly challenged the sexual morality expressed in the Bible. With such pressures, if we want to be socially acceptable, and seem up to date, certain teachings of the Bible may have to go. The only way we could discard such teachings is by adopting the presupposition of Biblical doubt.

*Second, historical-criticism forces a biblical interpretation which tends to existentialist in focus.*

Bultmann is considered to be by many the advocate of the existential use of the Bible. Since historical-criticism divides the Bible into history, which is doubtful, and theology, which changes, you cannot speak of anything definite. You cannot speak of the Bible as being right or wrong. You can only speak about what the Bible teaches for today and life which is existentialism.

Today, many practitioners of the historical-critical method do not go as far as Bultmann in making everything in the Bible existential. Normally, they will advocate some concept of existentialism to the degree that they have removed reality from the words of the Bible, although they may not use the term "existentialism".

This author contends that as the reality, the concrete, is removed from the Bible by systematic doubt, interpretation and application will become focused on the "existence" of the day, the here and now, the day to day, for there is nothing else left to do with the Word. Said another way, since the truth of the Word has been removed, only how that word "meets" today will have any significance.

Even among our own members we see "existential-like" leanings. Which sermons and Bible classes do your people enjoy hearing, the Law or the Gospel?; justification or sanctification?; what God has done for us or what are we supposed to be doing? Too often the sermons our own people like to hear the most are the law, sanctification, and what we are supposed to be doing today.

We see an existential trend among the growing churches in the US—they are primarily the churches which have sermons and programs meant to deal only with today but with little focus on justification and salvation from sin, death, and devil.

The presuppositions of historical critical thinking may enter WELS as we are tempted. to use increasingly existential styles of sermons,, Bible classes and the like, "if we are going to 'speak to our people'

and truly touch them. “Of course, we know that the Word has a great deal for day to day life, but if we limit the Gospel, justification, and eternity, we are missing at least a “small” part of the Bible’s message.

*A third way in which the presuppositions might encroach into the WELS is that it appeals to a person’s ego.*

Several authors who spoke positively for historical-criticism made clear that it is the method used by all truly scholarly people. So if a pastor of the WELS wants to be viewed as scholarly, he will have to adopt and speak well of the presuppositions of historical-criticism. And of course, you don’t have to agree with it all, but must speak well of the system in general or at least accept the approach as scientific.

Also, since a major presupposition of historical-criticism is that the interpreter is the judge of the Word, it is ego lifting to know that you have that power to say what God did or did not say.

Prof. Kuske at our seminary added one basic way that the presuppositions could enter WELS. *His basic comment was that if there was something a particular pastor did not like in Scripture, then the historical-critical presuppositions offered the perfect opportunity for adjusting the words, to fit their own conclusions.*

Prof. Kurt Marquart spoke from his experience within the Missouri Synod and the inroads of historical-criticism with two points.

*First, within Missouri there developed a certain intellectual inbreeding so that the historical critical method seemed like a breath of fresh air.*

One danger when we speak the truth is that the truth gets so normal that we do not speak it with gusto and enthusiasm. We all know that there is no such thing as “dead orthodoxy” but we also know that those who speak the truth can do so in a dead fashion. Sadly, our sinful nature will encourage us to speak the truth in a dead fashion. The presuppositions of the historical-critical method might then be engaging, for they will seem new and fresh and add freshness to our work, even though wrong.

*Second, our society is secular one and we breath of that same secular air of which the attitudes, of the historical-critical method are part.*

Other possibilities for the subtle encroachment of historical-criticism into WELS may be:

1. This item is first, because it is probably one of the most important subtle methods of infiltration. As with the inroads of anything that was born of our LORD’s enemy, the devil, the attitudes of historical-criticism speak in half truth. It may be tempting for us to hear the half truth, and ignore the false, thereby adopting the false. We can appreciate the zeal with which some use the historical-critical method. But their zeal does not make their conclusions correct.
2. It is very clear that those who hold the attitudes which underlay the historical-critical method are highly intelligent and accredited individuals. This makes them very intimidating to those of us who are regular, “in the trenches” kind of pastors. The temptation can become to honor the man and the gift of intelligence which God has given them. We might be tempted to ask ourselves, “How can such an intelligent, studied, and sincere individual be wrong?” Does not the Missouri Synod bear out that kind of an inroad of the attitudes and the method?
3. Third, it’s indefinite, nebulous conclusions, its probability in theological issues are what are expected by people in society. Our own members may feel uncomfortable with definite statements and assertions based on the Word. If a pastor feels any pressure in this way from, members he may feel inclined to give in where he can until he may say that the doubt of the historical-critical method is not affecting him but in reality it is.
4. On a daily basis pastors feel pressure from our own members and even society to be “politically correct.” And when we aren’t “politically correct” we have to spend time in discussions which seem so futile, for the member we have worked so hard to teach, that new member that we worked so hard to gain, will stop coming.
5. In our highly educated society we may begin to wonder or redefine inspiration. The orthodoxy doctrine makes clear that God’s Word is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. The attitudes within historical-criticism changes inspiration into -

The Word is inspired for those to whom it was written. We must now find out what they mean for us today.

In that thought resides a half truth, for indeed those words were written for those people, indeed our cultures have some differences which at times need explanation, but the Word is not time bound, but timeless and is what God wanted for all time and all people, for our faith and our application.

This writer hopes that we realize that we are not immune to these temptations any more than sincere, committed, and intelligent pastors of the Missouri Synod were. The wording of the above may not always be to your liking, but we cannot brush those subtle inroads aside, for they are real possibilities, ways that the attitudes of historical-criticism can “hitch hike” into WELS.

## **THE HISTORICAL-GRAMMATICAL-SCRIPTURAL HERMENEUTIC TENETS & PRESUPPOSITIONS**

Presuppositions:

- a. All Scripture is Christ Centered.
  - b. All Scripture is verbally inspired and inerrant.
  - c. The entire Bible is God’s Word, timeless, even while written by people in time.
  - d. Scripture, not reason, is the supreme judge of all Biblical exposition whether for the strengthening of faith in Jesus Christ, or the Christian’s life of service.
  - e. Faith is needed for true understanding of God’s Word.
  - f. The Bible is clear.
  - g. The history presented is accurate and true.
  - h. The Bible is a unity.
- 
1. Ascertain which Greek variants are best (textual study or criticism).
  2. Study the history, cultural situation, the author, the audience of the book as extensively as possible. One warning is presented—“The Bible interpreter does not study the historical setting in order to alter or to change what Scripture says, but rather that he might understand both fully and rightly what the inspired author has written.” [Kuske, 118]
  3. The only meaning of the words is the simple, plain understanding compelled by word study, grammar, and syntax (taking into account genre of literature. and figurative language). There is only one intended meaning. Unclear passages are to be understood in the light of clear texts.
  4. The immediate context of a section is an imperative consideration in understanding what a text, and the words of that text are saying. Passages which are used to assist in understanding a given text, parallel, passages, must indeed be passages which speak on the same subject.
  5. The wider context of the Bible sometimes called the analogy of faith must be observed in exposition.
  6. Only Scripture can interpret itself. The meaning of the words we study must be found in the words of the Bible, not behind or under the words of the Bible.
  7. The Bible alone is the only source of Doctrine. Reason, human traditions and new revelations are rejected.
  8. Doctrine can only be established from passages which specifically teach that doctrine (*sedes doctrinae*—a Biblical passage or passages upon which a particular doctrine is dependent). The passages we use to establish doctrine must actually apply to the doctrine.
  9. Only doctrines, which come from the Bible are acceptable. Other sources cannot establish or state doctrine for the church.
  10. To properly understand Scripture we must properly distinguish between law and gospel.
  11. There is a distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines. Fundamental doctrines are those which deal with Christ and the plan of salvation, and are supportive of salvation doctrines.
  12. There is a distinction between the Old and the New Testament. We are not Old Testament Jews.

## **CONCLUSION**

We now come back to our thesis, which method of Biblical exposition is most loving, that is will carry out true Christian love which proclaims God's Word for the salvation of souls. Our main analysis has been on the presuppositions so it is on their basis that we will build our conclusions.

We conclude that we must use those presuppositions and that method which best illuminates the Word and lets the Word speak for itself. Since the presuppositions of the historical-critical method only doubt the Word, they are not loving for they do not foster faith, but encourage doubt, so that the Word cannot speak for itself, but must be spoken for.

We must use those presuppositions and that method which best proclaims the Word accurately so that the Holy Spirit can work faith in the heart. Since the historical-critical method and presuppositions can only arrive at hesitant, possible, or probable conclusions, it is all but useless for faith for it builds uncertainty in the heart and mind. True Love builds unity with Christ, not uncertainty.

We must use those presuppositions and that method which best serves the LORD Jesus. Since the historical-critical method and presuppositions are founded upon the judgment of the scholar and are simply in line with the original temptation of Eve who wanted to be like God, again it is unloving for it turns people from the Lord to themselves, rather than to the Lord.

We are not free to do as we please. We cannot simply work, teach, preach, or anything else to suit our own desires or the readings of society. We are completely and totally bound by love, commitment, and awe to the LORD and his Word and must speak as he directs, even when what is said will not be popular or "politically correct."

We are not free to sound the unclear trumpet of the historical-critical method or its presuppositions. We are not free to turn the Word into a gaseous cloud of ether which might get a person high, but finally kills the soul. When or if we do we will simply become part of the prostitute church of Revelation 17 and 18.

## **ADDENDUM:**

### **SOME HERMENEUTIC CONCERNS AFFECTING THE ROLES ISSUE**

In part, this paper was assigned as an element in the on going discussion of the issue concerning the roles of men and women. While we do not intend to delve too deeply, we would be remiss if we did not at least touch upon some of the hermeneutical concerns surrounding this issue.

One aspect of the current discussion concerns the usage of the terms such as *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή*. Since the terms could be translated as "man and woman", or "husband and wife", the hermeneutical question becomes what criteria must we use to decide the translation in the critical cases (1 Ti 2:11-15; 1 Co 11:2-16; & 14:33-38). Simply taking a "bean count" and concluding that the majority use will apply to the critical passages is not good hermeneutic. Yet some have seemingly arrived at their conclusions in that way. Neither are we free to simply elect the translation we personally like best for whatever reasons.

The best hermeneutical point of analysis to this essayist is the context. Does the context, of the critical passages mentioned just above, move us to conclude that we are speaking about man and woman in marriage? In that case we must translate "husband/wife". In this essayist's studied opinion, none of the three contexts of the critical sections focus on marriage or the relationship of husband and wife, certainly not in an explicit, nor even an implicit way. We may be able to express applications to marriage from those sections, but to limit their focus to marriage does not do justice to the context, Therefore, the only acceptable translation is "man/woman".

A tenet of good hermeneutics for letting the Bible interpret itself is that the clear passages must guide in the understanding of the difficult. That hermeneutical point has arisen in the discussion of the roles issue. It has been proposed that since Ephesians 5:22-33 speaks easily and clearly about the role of man and woman as husband and wife, therefore it should be the hub around which all others are understood. Continuing, since Ephesians 5:22-33 is clear then other sections which deal with the relationships of men and women must be viewed within its context, i.e. marriage. That proposition does not take into account that parallel passages must indeed be parallel. Ephesians 5:22-33 plainly deals with marriage. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph the

three other critical passages (1 Ti 2:11-15; 1 Co 11:2-16; & 14:33-38) do not focus, on marriage. To make Ephesians 5:22-33 the hub would be comparing apples to oranges, and is not good hermeneutic.

A question and corollary that suggest a hermeneutical tenet have been posed with words similar to the following:

Are not Jesus' attitudes towards women to be taken into account? Since Jesus said nothing about headship, a role issue, or leadership in the family, or church, then we are treading where Christ does not want us to go.

That question and corollary implies that Jesus' inspiration of Paul is less than inspired since Paul did speak of a differentiation of role and headship. If Jesus' inspiration of Paul was less inspired than Jesus' own words recorded by the Apostles, then we must conclude that the Epistles are interesting, but not totally useful or trustworthy. Proper hermeneutical concern for the truth of Scripture will presume that all of the New Testament is inspired by Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and timeless for his people—for faith, proclamation, and application to life. To say otherwise is to take on the seed of the attitude which we spoke of in relation to the historical-critical method, "Inspired, but . . ."

Related to the preceding paragraph, is a concept that has been mentioned, but you don't hear much lately—that Paul's words, in some but not all instances, are culturally bound and represent his concept of his time. To declare that Paul is culturally influenced is a seed of that attitude which supports the hermeneutic of historical-criticism, i.e. the writers only reflect their period. Again the doctrine of inspiration comes to bear. If we were to say that Paul is inspired, but his comments reflect his time and cultural conditioning, we are left with the monster which has faced all of modern theology—"When is Paul to be taken as inspired, or as uninspired?". The answer is subjective, for one man's reading of Paul will be inspired and another's will be culturally bound, and thus uninspired. The only way you could say that Paul's comments are less inspired is either 1) by declaring that Paul is less inspired than other Apostles which does not fit with inspiration or Scriptural unity; or 2) by changing the definition of inspiration so that the texts were inspired for the people of Paul's day, but not for today. That redefinition is a seed of the attitude of what we have seen in the historical-critical presuppositional library. Forgive the bad English, but, "Is Paul is, or is Paul ain't inspired?" We can't have it both ways.

Another hermeneutic concern in the roles discussion has been asked something like this:

Aren't certain books written only to certain people and audiences? Needn't we be careful about applying their contents to ourselves for they were specifically directed to someone else? This is again either a challenge to Paul's inspiration, or a redefinition of inspiration as inspiration for Paul's time alone, or "inspiration, but . . ."

While the above question applies to books, the question has also been asked of individual contents or statements from Biblical books—Aren't some things which the Bible says only for particular people?

There is some truth to that concern for not all applies to New Testament Christians. Specific examples would be that the Old Testament sacrifices and worshipping only on Saturday, or not doing any work at all on the Sabbath, particularly applied to Old Testament Israel, but not to us. Yet, we better be very careful and precise before we exclude what God has said to us, and better have very good Scriptural guidance in our decision and not just our own desire that something does not apply to us today.

Good hermeneutical method would move us to several considerations. Does the context of the section lead us to conclude that its words were only for the very first hearers? To say a "Yes" at this point we better have definite points to make. Yet, there is a second step. Does the overall context of scripture contain any parallel passages which would lead us conclude that these words are only for someone specific and believers of all times? To answer "Yes" at this point we better be using truly parallel passages.

The use of extra-biblical material in our biblical exposition is another hermeneutical concern that has arisen. We know that non-Biblical material can be helpful in study. But if it changes the plain and straightforward meaning of the words in their context we must ignore it. Archeological material might state this

year that Jericho did not have walls which just fell down. We won't stop teaching that miracle. "Scientific" hypotheses are always discrediting the six day creation, but that will not affect our exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2. More to the point, speakers point out that the social system of Paul's day discriminated against women and treated them as second rate citizens. That may or may not be the case, but on the basis of that argument to conclude that Paul was a product of his time concerning women would be to ignore what Paul was inspired to write, or redefine inspiration. Either consideration of Paul ultimately challenges his inspiration.

Another hermeneutical concerns focuses on the difference between descriptive and prescriptive sections of Scripture. Those two terms give rise to the hermeneutical tenet, "we cannot make prescriptive to our lives what is stated in the Bible descriptively." First, from where did these two designations come? This writer does not know! Second, there is some truth and usefulness to the division, yet we can take it to extremes. The "Great Commission" describes for us what Jesus said to his disciples, specific disciples, but they were not said directly to us. We could conclude, since the section is descriptive, it needn't apply to us nor encourage or command evangelism. Since Paul's writings in Romans concerning homosexuality describe the social attitude then and has nothing to do with us. Ignore it. Those are extreme examples, but realistic when we take up the banner of getting nothing from God from descriptive language. As Paul was inspired to write in 2 Timothy 3:16 "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, . . ." Of course, that raises the question, did God really mean "ALL of Scripture" or just "All of Scripture which we understand as truly inspired"?

As is obvious from the above, this author is hermeneutically, and exegetically compelled to state that there is a God inspired role position for men and women as was adopted by the synodical convention almost two years ago. That leaves us with the need to apply the roles in a God pleasing fashion, making sure that the proper role positions are upheld, while applying all the talents which God has given men and women in a God pleasing way.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Krentz was very fond of saying that anyone who held to the history of the Bible, what some have called Bibliolatry, is like the heresy of docetism. We presume he means, for he was not clear, that like the gnostics, those who hold to the history of the Bible are non-intellectual, and prone to flight of fantasy.
2. Siegbert W. Becker, "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation", Part 1. *WLQ*, Vol. 74, Number 1, (January 1977), p. 21.
3. Siegbert W. Becker, "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation", Part 1. *WLQ* 74, Number 1, (January 1977), p. 21.
4. Siegbert W. Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation", Part 1. *WLQ*, Vol. 74, Number 1, (January 1977). p. 35.
5. Siegbert W. Becker, "The Historical-Critical. Method of Bible Interpretation", Part 1. *WLQ*, Vol. 74, Number 1, (January 1977), p. 20.
6. Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God. The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), p. 99.
7. Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God. The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), p. 116.
8. We say "many" because there are "evangelical conservatives", users of the historical-critical method, who assert that most of the Bible is factual but leave room from some errors, even if only a few.

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