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Robert W. Yarbrough

## Evangelical Theology in Germany

*Many may be tempted to echo Nathanael's words, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' in relation to German theology since the Enlightenment. Dr Yarbrough, who teaches at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, gives an encouraging sketch of the development of conservative, evangelical theology in Germany during recent years.*

Germany has been the source of seminal ideas in biblical and theological studies for over two centuries. Semler, Reimarus, Lessing, Kant, Gabler, Hegel, Baur, Ritschl, Holtzmann, Harnack, Troeltsch, Wrede, Schweitzer, Barth, Bultmann, Käsemann, Moltmann—a distinctly Teutonic echo reverberates across the annals of biblical and theological discourse like a lusty yodel through an Alpine ravine. And this echo is more than purely academic interest: its vibrations have accompanied, and sometimes actually launched, many an avalanche of sweeping doctrinal change. Historians will one day speak of the hegemony of Germany in the course of post-Enlightenment Christian theology in the West as they do of Neo-Platonic, Augustinian, or Thomistic thought in other epochs.

This essay seeks to identify and characterize a particular band in the spectrum of biblical and theological activity currently discernible, though not widely appreciated, in German-speaking Europe. For those who are not convinced that the progress of doctrine in Western Christendom since the Enlightenment has always been in a desirable direction, this new wave of research is of considerable moment. For it represents a dissenting voice, small but hardly still, calling for spiritual renewal and biblical fidelity in a land which has done much to undermine, or at least radically redefine, both of these in recent generations.

The essay will first attempt to create a self-portrait of these dissenters based on information they themselves provide. It will then allude to specific examples of recent work emanating from dissenting circles. It will finally offer some reflections on the implications of these unified though variegated impulses in terms of

their significance for responsible and rigorous biblical and theological work.

### I. Self-perceptions

In preparation for this essay questionnaires went out to nearly four dozen scholars and church leaders who are at or near the center of renewed theological reflection in Germany (or German-speaking Europe). Over twenty individuals responded to the questionnaire, entitled 'Evangelical Scholarship in German-Speaking Europe'. A number of their responses were substantial in length, depth of reflection, or both. They document the existence of a solidly Christian sub-stratum within the current German scene. A summary of their responses to the five questions they considered will give insight into their identity and views.

(1). First, who are the leaders in this movement? These names were cited most often: Horst W. Beck, Peter Beyerhaus, Helmut Burkhardt, Rolf Hille, Georg Huntemann, Gerhard Maier, Helge Stadelmann, Rainer Riesner, the late Klaus Bockmühl (+ June 1989), and Lutz von Padberg.<sup>1</sup> One questionnaire respondent offers a helpful taxonomy for making sense of these names by identifying

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<sup>1</sup> Representative works, here and in nn. 3-9 all from Brunnen/R. Brockhaus Theologische Verlagsgemeinschaft, Gießen and Wuppertal, unless otherwise noted: H. Beck, *Biologie und Weltanschauung* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1979), *Biblische Universalität und Wissenschaft: Grundriß Interdisziplinärer Theologie* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1987), 'Die ökologische Krise und die christliche Lehre von der Schöpfung', *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie* 4, 1990, 62-77; P. Beyerhaus, *Shaken Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), *Theologie als Instrument der Befreiung*; H. Burkhardt, *Die Inspiration heiliger Schriften bei Philo von Alexandria, Das biblische Zeugnis von der Wiedergeburt, Die biblische Lehre von der Bekehrung, Wiederkehr der Religiosität?*; R. Hille, *Das Ringen um den säkularen Menschen: Karl Heims Auseinandersetzung mit der idealistischen Philosophie und den pantheistischen Religionen*; G. Huntemann, *Die verräterne Reformation* (Bremen: Verlag für Reformatorisches Christentum, 1983), as well as some twenty other books and numerous articles; G. Maier, *Biblische Hermeneutik* and numerous other publications; H. Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, WUNT II/6 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), *Epochen der Heilsgeschichte, Grundlinien eines bibeltreuen Schriftverständnisses*; R. Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988<sup>3</sup>), numerous articles in H. Burkhardt et al., eds., *Das Grosse Bibellexikon*, 3 vols., and elsewhere; K. Bockmühl, *Atheismus in der Christenheit, Gesetz und Geist, Leiblichkeit und Gesellschaft, Theologie und Lebensführung*; K. Bockmühl, ed., *die Aktualität der Theologie Adolf Schlatters*; L. von Padberg, *Die Bibel, Grundlage für Glauben, Denken und Erkennen* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1986).

four groups,<sup>2</sup> all of them interrelated but each of them possessing its own distinctives.

One group consists of Gerhard Maier, rector of the Albrecht-Bengel-Haus in Tübingen, and others upholding the venerable heritage of Schwabian Pietism (which predates the German Enlightenment). More recently this trajectory received impetus from Tübingen theologian Karl Heim (1874–1959). In addition to Maier one should mention H. Krimmer, C.-D. Stoll, H. W. Neudorfer, Rolf Hille, and E. Hahn.<sup>3</sup> This group is thoroughly biblical in outlook and calls for rethinking of historical criticism's assumptions, methods, and resulting theology,<sup>4</sup> but does so without taking up what Burkhardt calls the theory of the inerrancy of Scripture ('die These von der Irrtumslosigkeit der Schrift').

A second group is associated with Stadelmann and others (e.g. H. Bayer, L. von Padberg, E. Schnabel) centred at, but not limited to, the Freie Theologische Akademie in Gießen, as well as with Horst Beck of the 'Studiengemeinschaft Wort und Wissen.' These are said to embrace an inerrantist hermeneutic, both in the theological realm (Stadelmann et al.) and in the realm of the natural sciences (Beck et al.; here views are at work that are reminiscent of creation science proponents in North America).<sup>5</sup>

A third group surrounds S. Findeisen, one of a number of leaders within the German Protestant church seeking reform from within (the 'Bekennnisbewegung', or confessional movement). Their efforts center on helping theological students in the university with the formidable task of maintaining credible Christian convictions amidst

<sup>2</sup> Another taxonomy of two groups is suggested by T. Schirmacher: 'The evangelical scholarship in Germany is split into two parts, one being more in favor of the state church and allowing parts of higher criticism to be included, the other being in favor of the free churches and defending biblical inerrancy, but therefore lacking real financial support.'

<sup>3</sup> Representative works (see also no. 1 for works by Maier and Hille): C.-D. Stoll, *Ehe und Ehescheidung*, 'Krankmachender Glaube? Biblische und praktisch-theologische Aspekte', *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie* 4, 1990, 78–98; H.-W. Neudorfer, *Der Stephanuskreis in der Forschungsgeschichte seit F. C. Baur*; O. Hahn, *Wo ist Kirche Jesu Christi? Theologische Beurteilung kirklicher Trennungen anhand von Fallbeispielen*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. Maier's now dated but still important *Das Ende der historisch-kritischen Methode*, Wuppertal, 1975.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Representative works (see also n. 1 [Stadelmann, L. von Padberg, Beck]): E. Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul*, WUNT II/16 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), *Inspiration und Offenbarung*, 'Der biblische Kanon und das Phänomen der Pseudonymität', *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie* 3, 1989, 59–96; H. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection*, WUNT II/20 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), numerous articles in H. Burkhardt et al., eds., *Das Grosse Bibelllexikon*, 3 vols.

the corrosive regimen of the critical indoctrination they face. The Bodelschwing-Studienhaus in Marburg is a key component in their ministry.<sup>6</sup> The publication *ICHTHYS* chronicles developments and progress in the group.

A fourth group draws strength perhaps most directly from the heritage of Adolf Schlatter (1853–1938) and the recent encouragement and memory of the late Klaus Bockmühl. One questionnaire respondent refers to this group as ‘theologians working with scientific rigor’ (‘wissenschaftlich arbeitend[e] Theologen’).<sup>7</sup> They are said to include Rainer Riesner, the first young German evangelical recently to have achieved the *Habilitation*;<sup>8</sup> Helmut Burkhardt; Werner Neuer, assistant to Peter Beyerhaus; K.-H. Michel; and W. Bittner. H. Hempelmann also deserves mention in close connection with this cluster of scholars.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the members of these four groups, a number of questionnaire respondents noted scholars like M. Hengel, K. Haacker, Otto Betz, Oswald Bayer and Otto Michel (all in Tübingen except for Haacker, Wuppertal) as important. Each is in the state church and holds a teaching chair in a state-accredited institution. Each also stands ‘more or less in proximity to the evangelical movement’, one writer notes, although another points out that they are on the ‘critical’ side of the watershed dividing a hermeneutic that affirms thoroughgoing biblical authority from one that does not. Interestingly, Peter Stuhlmacher, a favorite among many North American evangelicals, is repeatedly singled out as patently unfriendly to evangelical approaches. The occasionally conservative conclusions at which he arrives, sources insist, must not conceal the

<sup>6</sup> Representative works: S. Findeisen, ‘Biblische Lehrbildung und kirchliche Ausbildung’, in *Martyria*, ed. by J. Kniffka, Fs. P. Beyerhaus, 28–35; idem, ‘Was ist Wissenschaft?’ *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie* 4, 1990, 107–115.

<sup>7</sup> It would be unkind and inaccurate, however, to suggest that none in the three previous groups strives for and achieves the same level of rigor: note publications listed in previous notes.

<sup>8</sup> Riesner currently serves as Privatdozent in the University of Tübingen. Findeisen mentions another young scholar who is on the verge of completing the *Habilitation*.

<sup>9</sup> Representative works (see also n. 1 [Bockmühl, Burkhardt, Riesner, Beyerhaus]): W. Neuer, *Mann und Frau in christlicher Sicht* (ET *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, trans. by Gordon J. Wenham [Wheaton: Crossway, 1991]), *Die Zusammensetzung von Dogmatik und Ethik bei Adolf Schlatter*, over two dozen articles on Schlatter; K.-H. Michel, *Immanuel Kant und die Frage der Erkennbarkeit Gottes*; H.-P. Hempelmann (with Klaus Haacker), *Hebraica Veritas: Die hebräische Grundlage biblischer Theologie als exegetische und systematische Aufgabe*; *Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi—eine historische Tatsache?*, *Kritischer Rationalismus und Theologie als Wissenschaft: Zur Frage nach dem Wirklichkeitsbezug des christlichen Glaubens*.

fact that he has 'never really broken with Bultmannian theology'. One source is more sanguine, protesting that Stuhlmacher's distance from the mainline critical university guild in New Testament studies is proof that he is squarely on the evangelical side when it comes to theological and methodological matters. This source, however, stands virtually alone among those polled.

Another figure, in somewhat of a class by herself, is Eta Linnemann. Since her conversion and dramatic turn from university duties at Marburg, this former post-Bultmannian has, in addition to teaching as a missionary in Indonesia, completed two books that limn her views. The first, *Historical Criticism of the Bible*<sup>10</sup> is a call to repentance that touches on her personal pilgrimage, then launches into a critique of what she calls historical-critical theology. A second raises the question of whether there really is a synoptic problem as that term is normally understood. While Linnemann might come closest to fitting into the second group (Stadelmann et al.) above, the uncompromising tone of her repudiation of critical biblical scholarship has seemed extreme to some, leaving her somewhat isolated. We will have more to say about her work in section II below.

(2). The second question on the questionnaire has already been partially answered in the preceding footnotes. It ran, 'What recent publications would you point to as good examples of current evangelical research?' One can readily see that there is a significant flow of books and articles issuing from various pens in a number of fields.<sup>11</sup> It can hardly be called a flood; as one writer notes, 'things are so far just getting underway. And we "young" evangelical theologians in the German-speaking realm must certainly guard ourselves from over-estimating our importance.'<sup>12</sup> Another warns that by the very act of calling attention to these groups and persons, as this essay seeks to do, there is danger of creating 'an unwarranted over-optimism regarding the development of evangelical theology in Germany'. The point bears heeding. Still, however dim the current scene, it is brighter than it was even a decade ago. And current trends suggest that it could grow brighter in the years ahead.

<sup>10</sup> Trans. by R. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, 1990); German original *Wissenschaft oder Meinung* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart, 1986). The English translation is in its second printing.

<sup>11</sup> The single most helpful series of shorter publications for orientation in recent discussion and work is probably the *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie*, the fourth volume of which appeared in early 1991.

<sup>12</sup> '... alles ist bisher nur ein Anfang. Und wir "jungen" evangelikalen Theologen im deutschsprachigen Raum müssen uns sicher vor Selbstüberschätzung hüten.'

(3). The questionnaire's third query ran: 'What, in your opinion, is the major distinguishing feature of evangelical scholarship in comparison to non-evangelical?' Many respondents answered along these lines: 'Evangelical scholarship is distinct in maintaining the reliability of the Holy Scripture and in the rejection of the historical-critical method. Yet many evangelicals accept a number of [historical-] criticism's results'. The emphasis on a high view of Scripture,<sup>13</sup> along with some type of conversion awareness and resulting life of practical obedience to Scripture,<sup>14</sup> are recurring features on questionnaires. Yet so is concern about significant acceptance of and concessions to critical assumptions and methods by some (as responses to the next question will show). Hans Bayer's response to question three is particularly succinct:

—evangelical: considers the significance and meaning of the historical aspect of biblical faith.

—non-evangelical: ignores or discredits historical aspect.

—evangelical: takes all claims of Scriptures seriously (inspiration, literary aspect, historical aspect, etc.) and relates them directly to exegetical and biblical-theological methodology. Takes notice of both modern linguistic analysis and the Hebrew/Semitic background of the NT.

—non-evangelical: uses common tools for historical criticism often without reflecting upon presuppositions and without taking hold of the claim of superiority of biblical truth over secular, immanent methodology.<sup>15</sup>

Jürgen Schwarz notes the following features of an evangelical

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<sup>13</sup> Commonly expressed on questionnaires in terms of Scripture standing in judgment over the interpreter rather than vice versa.

<sup>14</sup> Expressed, e.g., with these words: 'Evangelisation mit persönlicher Entscheidung' ('evangelization leading to personal decision'); 'Betonung eines biblischen Ethos' ('stress on a biblical lifestyle'). Other sources call attention to the heritage of German pietism's various strands with their similar emphases on personal decision and holy living. Von Padberg speaks of 'das Bemühen um *praxis pietatis* nach Spener' ('the concern for practical living imbued with [biblical] piety, as Spener taught').

<sup>15</sup> Bayer would no doubt want it noted that these are preliminary and allusive comments, not comprehensive or systematic descriptions of either approach. His (unpublished) ms. 'Thesen über die Voraussetzungen und Methoden einer biblisch-historischen Exegese' sets out his views, and critical alternatives, much more fully. Quite valuable in this connection is 'Konsultation zur Frage der sachgemäßen Schriftauslegung', with an introduction by Rolf Hille, in *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie* 4, 1990, 99–106. This gives the results of a three-year series of seminars in which evangelical and non-evangelical theologians and biblical scholars discussed their hermeneutical and methodological similarities and differences. The article is the joint communiqué issued by the consultation at the end of its work.

approach (in addition to the focus on Scripture already mentioned above):

(a). refusal to accept pluralist/universalist assumptions; upholding of Christ's uniqueness; (b). focus on sin—no belief in human perfectibility of man; (c). concern for *truth* and its relation to *reality*—non-evangelicals belittle the truth question, concerned rather for the self-understanding texts may yield.

(4). The questionnaire's fourth query asked respondents to contrast German evangelical scholarship with its counterparts in Britain and the U.S. Appreciation was expressed for the work of such British scholars as F. F. Bruce and I. H. Marshall. The empirical prowess and thoroughness of British research was also acknowledged. Yet there is criticism of British reserve, of their blending into the cultural scenery rather than risking ostracism by a clearer advocacy of biblical truth. One writer notes that they can seemingly afford this luxury since 'the critics there hold to more conservative views in historical matters than their colleagues on the continent would do'. Overall the assessment is positive, though seldom enthusiastic.

Assessments of American work range from politely appreciative to disparaging. One writer speaks of American work being 'well developed', yet warns of the 'need to be alert on methodology questions'. American evangelicals are 'partially still unaware of what historical-critical methodology *really* presupposes' as is indicated by their 'partially lighthearted use of terms such as "form-critical", "redactional", "tradition-historical".' Americans seem largely unable to 'see the need of presenting true alternatives to [the] historical-critical approach, not just following new forms of study such as modern linguistic analysis, reader-response criticism, sociological criticism, narrative criticism, etc.' The same writer concludes with this call to his American counterparts: 'What is the full claim of the *Word of God*?'<sup>16</sup> His brief assessment is, though, less black than another which asserted: 'American evangelical theology doesn't deserve its name. . . . shallow, not reflective . . . cannot hold its ground in Germany'.<sup>17</sup> Yet positive remarks are also to be heard: Bayer suggests that some negative German opinion is simply due to ignorance of evangelical scholarship outside of Germany, while Stadelmann flatly asserts that 'much can be learned from recent detailed work by American and English [i.e. British] evangelicals,

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, another source speaks of the danger of combining 'openness to the historical-critical method and forsaking the old doctrine of inspiration'.

<sup>17</sup> The same source cited two Americans, however, whose work did not fit into this category: Scott Hafemann and E. Earle Ellis.

because in both countries evangelical theology is already far more advanced than in Germany'.<sup>18</sup>

(5). The questionnaire's final question was two-fold: 'What major challenges or dangers does evangelical theology in Germany currently face? How do you think this challenge should be met?' Challenges cited were numerous, varied, and sometimes poignant. One New Testament scholar cited the challenge 'not to be taken seriously by the historical-critical theological establishment—currently 60% of all chairs of NT exegesis and theology in German universities are occupied by students of Bultmann'.<sup>19</sup> In the same vein another called for 'adherence to biblical-historical research despite contempt from university theology' and 'holding the line despite unscrupulous procedures of some conservatives who ultimately do not work from the basis of an inspired Bible'. While some worry about pressure from the left, others stress the danger of lurching to the right: more than one warning against 'rationalistic fundamentalism' was registered.<sup>20</sup> Several, however, pointed to the ecclesiastical challenge that the evangelical groups, along with their scholars, must come to grips with. Is any real long-term impact at either the popular or academic level possible given the current state-church parameters within which many German evangelicals are content to operate?<sup>21</sup>

In terms of dangers facing evangelical theology, many were cited. Eckhard Schnabel stated, 'The main danger is the general climate, affecting also the free churches, that "truth" is elusive, that love and harmony are more important than biblical truth'. Another writer warns, 'The danger of thinking that we are making great inroads, and that we are being heard or read by non-evangelicals, may be very great'. Bayer points to the danger of avoiding (a). 'the question of historicity by delving, e.g., into trendy and safe approaches of narrative criticism' and (b). 'questions of the unity of NT theology, authorship, dating, exegetical methodology, etc.' Schwarz points to a two-sided danger: 'too *much* identification with the culture of

<sup>18</sup> Agreeing with Stadelmann is e.g. Holthaus (although with qualifications).

<sup>19</sup> One respondent insisted that 'Bultmann has not been an issue in Germany certainly for the last two decades'. But in view of other statements that underscore the ongoing influence of Bultmann, at least in terms of continuance, of the hermeneutical revolution he fomented, that respondent seems somewhat out of touch. See also n. 61 below.

<sup>20</sup> Demandt stated it well in speaking of the danger 'that the label "evangelical" . . . will become more important than the Bible itself and the living God' ('daß das Etikett "evangelikal" . . . wichtiger wird als die Bibel selbst und der lebendige Gott').

<sup>21</sup> For searching discussion on this question see Eckhard Schnabel, 'Kirche—Gemeinde—Gemeinschaft', *Bibel und Gemeinde* 84/3, 1984, 302–309.

criticism for the sake of contact on the one hand, and too *little* on the other hand, thus losing contact and credibility'. Werner Neuer's own two-edged caveat is an apt summary here: 'The danger is the weakening of evangelicals through the pluralistic *Zeitgeist* and the openness to biblical-critical positions, on the one hand, and on the other an unnecessarily defensive, anxious mentality that hinders a really *scientific* overcoming of liberalism'.<sup>22</sup>

As to how these challenges and dangers should be met, it is obvious that respondents called for avoidance and overcoming of the challenges and dangers they cited. Beyond that, several concrete proposals were forthcoming. The cry 'ad fontes' was heard, as was the need for accredited, university-level institutions that would uphold a high view of Scripture ('bibeltreue Hochschulen'). One source sympathetic to the confessional movement (Bekennnisbewegung) flatly denied that this could ever come about in Germany due to the prevailing academic climate, but in light of recent social changes in Germany and Eastern Europe, such a pronouncement may be overly sour. There was a repeated call for continued and increasing high-level scholarship, with Bayer sketching a publication strategy among key groups and publishers that would span the next twenty to forty years.

To summarize, questionnaire responses and the publications they cite document the presence of a sizable and growing academic presence calling for and hastening a rigorously researched alternative to prevailing academic theology in Germany. It would be misleading to overestimate its size and relative importance, but it would also be misguided to ignore it. In the interest of appreciating both the depth and breadth of this work, we will now examine four examples of recent or pending publications that are representative of current more or less evangelical outlooks in Germany. These have been selected according to such criteria as accessibility, relevance to both British and American scenes, and representativeness of the full range of views current in German-speaking Europe.

## II. From Haacker (through Maier and von Padberg) to Linnemann

We will now examine concrete examples of the nature, quality, and range of research among those who are the subject of this essay.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Gefahr ist die Schwächung d. Evangelikalen durch den pluralist. *Zeitgeist* u. die Öffnung für bibelkrit. Positionen einerseits und eine unnötige Mentalität d. Defensive u. Ängstlichkeit andererseits, die eine wirklich *wissenschaftliche* Überwindung d. Liberalismus erschwert'.

(1). We begin with Klaus Haacker and his *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft: Eine Einführung in Fragestellungen und Methoden*.<sup>23</sup> While Haacker belongs to none of the four groups mentioned in the previous section, he is named by several (e.g. Burkhardt, Bayer, Demandt, Schwarz) as sharing the critical-of-prevailing-criticism outlook of those four groups. His discerning analysis and constructive proposals are perceived, at least, as being more thoroughly amenable to biblical authority and thus more consistent than those of e.g. Stuhlmacher.

Haacker's study of NT 'science', or criticism as North Americans tend to call it, contains ten sections. These range from an overall rationale for technical NT studies as a discipline, including an excursus on the controversy surrounding historical criticism spawned by Maier's *Das Ende der historisch-kritischen Methode*, through various text- and literary-critical topics, to biblical theology and how to put together an exegetical paper.<sup>24</sup> Haacker is sympathetic to Maier's concerns and appears to share his rejection of a pair of moves that largely dominate historical-criticism in its classic expressions: (a). the separation of the Bible from the Word of God (cf. Semler [1725–1791]), and (b). the practice of *Sachkritik*, defined by Bultmann as interpreting what biblical texts say by what the interpreter decides they mean to say—even when the interpreter's construal is quite divergent from the text's own surface affirmations.<sup>25</sup> At the same time Haacker shows that Maier's concern is not dissimilar from Stuhlmacher's to a point—and at that point Haacker indicates that he does not follow Stuhlmacher in the latter's stress on tradition rather than the text itself as furnishing the normative framework for valid interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

Haacker manages what no other similarly oriented study does with comparable succinctness, precision, and thoroughness: to cover

<sup>23</sup> (*New Testament Science: An Introduction to the Way It Poses Its Questions and Its Methods*) Wuppertal, 1985.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The contents in full: (1). the assumptions and modus operandi of NT and historical criticism in general, (2). translation, (3). textual criticism, (4). literary criticism, (5). form criticism, (6). redaction criticism, (7). comparative religions methodology, (8). history of the NT era, (9). NT theology, (10). writing an exegetical paper.

<sup>25</sup> Haacker, *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 21. Bultmann's view is perhaps most succinctly expressed in his 'Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments', in *Das Problem der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, ed. by G. Strecker, *Wege der Forschung* 367 (Darmstadt, 1975), 253, where he speaks of a 'Sachkritik' which 'zwischen Gesagtem und Gemeintem unterscheidet und das Gesagte am Gemeintem misst' ('distinguishes between what is said and what is meant and measures what is said by what is meant').

<sup>26</sup> Haacker, *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 22.

the major areas of NT criticism, focusing on the major underlying premises; subject these areas to searching analysis and critique; then commend the valid aspects of the various areas of study, proposing constructive alternatives where he finds flaws or inadequacies.

A notable strength of Haacker is how he relates methods and assumptions used by NT critics to methods and assumptions that hold sway in others disciplines (e.g. the natural sciences).<sup>27</sup> In other words, he relativizes NT criticism by presenting it as a function of post-Enlightenment certainties and philosophies, instead of acting as if it were an irreproachable operation with self-evident bases always leading to certain conclusions. While he is not an inerrantist, therefore, he is anti-positivist, and the effect of his work is to make room for a thoroughly biblical, yet rigorously analytic, investigation of the NT and related data.

This précis of Haacker must suffice to show that despite his apparent non-membership in the active ranks of German evangelical circles as outlined above, his work addresses a number of their stated concerns, though without the up-front avowal of a high view of Scripture that many insist on the need for. His careful interaction with Maier points us now to that figure's latest impressive work.

(2). Maier's *Biblische Hermeneutik*<sup>28</sup> is an important contribution to the present hermeneutical debate. The research undergirding the positions he takes is wide-ranging and sure-footed. He notes<sup>29</sup> that hermeneutics involves two concerns: (a). the correct conception of how to go about the interpretive task, and (b). the correct interpretation of the material. The first concern has commanded Continental emphasis, the second Anglo-American (one thinks, e.g., of Berkeley Mickelsen's *Interpreting the Bible*).<sup>30</sup>

Maier focuses on the first concern. This is valuable, for the epistemological question of *how* one interprets, the question of 'validity in interpretation' to use Hirsch's phrase,<sup>31</sup> has been a stumbling block in biblical and theological scholarship since Kant. Maier does the most comprehensive job of dealing with this issue that I have seen in print in terms of relating his discussion explicitly to the recent history of the problematic of interpreting sacred Scripture with its unique claims and problems.

The section 'Fehler der Schrift?' ('Errors in Scripture?')<sup>32</sup> is a quiet but powerful assertion of the Bible's 'perfect reliability'

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 90ff.

<sup>28</sup> Wuppertal and Zurich, 1990.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Grand Rapids, 1963.

<sup>31</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven/London, 1967).

<sup>32</sup> Maier, *Biblische Hermeneutik*, 118–125.

(‘vollkommene Zuverlässigkeit’). His views are quite in harmony with the Chicago Statement on inerrancy. Any ‘errors’ we might find in the Bible are errors of our cognitive understanding, not of the Bible itself. Maier does, however, object to simplistic reliance on the syllogism: Because the Bible is God’s word, and because God does not lie, the Bible is without error. He notes that terms like ‘inerrant’, ‘without error’, and ‘infallibility’ are not used in the Bible. At the same time, the Bible gives even less indication of containing ‘mistakes’ or the like. There is a need for our terminology about the Bible to correspond to the Bible’s own terminology about itself. ‘Perfect reliability’ is, therefore, an apt rubric under which to proceed.

I do not see Meier as advocating a ‘limited inerrancy’ position like some have come to hold. While few will confuse Meier’s position with that e.g. of Norman Geisler, a leading American evangelical advocate of what one might term ‘unlimited’ inerrancy, neither will they see in him a Teutonic Clark Pinnock, whose *The Scripture Principle*<sup>33</sup> quite unambiguously leaves open the possibility of demonstrable errors in Scripture in matters of fact. Maier points to the Chicago Statement (Article 14) in addressing ‘alleged errors and discrepancies’ which even inerrantists cannot presently unravel to their own mutual satisfaction. He alludes to Carl Henry’s admission that ‘inerrancy’ is not a biblical term, that it is only ‘implicitly taught’ in the Bible, but that it is ‘logically deducible’ from the Bible. Maier responds: ‘At such a decisive juncture we ought to insist on biblical language and conceptuality rather than opting for a logical-rational argument’.<sup>34</sup> In a sense Maier’s entire book sets forth a sophisticated methodological framework (1). for apprehending the Bible’s ‘perfect reliability’ inductively from study of the Bible itself (rather than deductively using Aristotelian logic) and (2). for appropriating the Bible’s contents theologically in the context of conversion and obedience to Christ (rather than in the context of a primarily cognitive model of what it means to ‘understand’ what the Bible is saying).

While he defends the integrity of American evangelicalism’s inerrantist approach against many unfair charges, he cites several reasons why he and his German readership should continue to opt for a somewhat contrasting view. I will mention two of them. First, they are German pietists, not American or British fundamentalists or

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<sup>33</sup> San Francisco, 1984.

<sup>34</sup> Maier, *Biblische Hermeneutik*, 326: ‘An einer so entscheidenden Stelle wäre jedoch biblische Sprache und Begrifflichkeit einem logisch-rationalen Argument vorzuziehen.’

evangelicals. (Maier calls the fundamentalist-evangelical movement represented by the likes of Machen, Packer, Ramm, Marshall, Warfield, Geisler, etc., 'wissenschaftlicher Fundamentalismus', i.e. 'scientific' or 'scholarly fundamentalism.') 'An identification' between Americo-British outlooks and terminology, on the one hand, and German evangelical views, on the other, is neither advisable nor possible. 'From the standpoints of church history, cultural history, conceptions of spirituality, and theological history, [Anglo-American] "fundamentalism" has its own distinctive character'.<sup>35</sup>

Second, the inerrantist approach is unnecessarily defensive. While this defensiveness is understandable in its historical American context, Maier feels the need to stress instead 'the offensive encounter between God and man that comes about through the revelation that has taken the form of Scripture'.<sup>36</sup>

Maier concludes on a hortatory note in which he calls for a hermeneutic of encounter to replace both the hermeneutic of suspicion favored by modernity and the hermeneutic of consent which Stuhlmacher,<sup>37</sup> drawing on Schlatter and others, proposes:

Only in these categories—in discussion, in communication, in witness and in encounter—can the process of interpretation be grasped correctly. A 'hermeneutic of encounter' must arise. For encounter is the fundamental nature of revelation. True, it does not have its goal in itself. Its goal is rather—Jesus (John 21:4, Matt. 17:7).<sup>38</sup>

Much of Maier's book is simply a careful clarification of contemporary hermeneutical confusion. But far more importantly: it is a fairly detailed *positive* program for moving ahead given the demonstrable inadequacy, even collapse, of the myriad 'critical' proposals that have dominated discussion since the Enlightenment. And this positive aspect, backed as it is with something approaching erudition in a literature that most English speakers, even with

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 325: 'Somit ist eine Identifizierung nicht möglich. Kirchengeschichtlich, kulturgeschichtlich, frömmigkeitsgeschichtlich und theologieggeschichtlich hat der Fundamentalismus seinen unverwechselbar eigenen Charakter.'

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 326: 'die offensive Begegnung von Gott und Mensch mittels der schriftgewordenen Offenbarung'.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Stuhlmacher's *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen, 1979), which has since appeared in a revised edition.

<sup>38</sup> Maier, *Biblische Hermeneutik*, 358: 'Nur in diesen Kategorien: im Gespräch, in der Kommunikation, im Zeugnis und in der Bewegung ist der Vorgang der Auslegung richtig faßbar. Daraus muß notwendig eine "Hermeneutik der Begegnung" entstehen. Denn Begegnung ist der Grundcharakter der Offenbarung. Sie hat freilich ihr Ziel nicht in der Begegnung mit ihr selbst. Ihr Ziel ist vielmehr—Jesus (John 21, 4; Mt. 17, 8).'

academic training, have minimal exposure to, marks this as a work of considerable importance to both the critical and practical discussion of hermeneutics both within and without Germany. It is to the credit of Crossway books that they have already arranged for an English translation of this work in the U.S.

(3). Our move from Haacker to Maier was, so to speak, from more left to more center in the context of German evangelical thought. Still another move to the right, which puts us at dead center or a little beyond, finds us at Lutz von Padberg's *Die Bible—Grundlage für Glauben, Denken und Erkennen: Prolegomena zu einer biblischen Erkenntnistheorie*.<sup>39</sup> This is a programmatic sketch, nearly 40% of it meaty endnotes, with the following headings: A. Introduction to the Scope of the Problem; B. Development of the Concept of Knowledge and Its Effects on Modern Thought; C. Formulating a Biblical Epistemology; D. Practical Consequences.<sup>40</sup> Von Padberg, an historian with particular expertise in the history of missions in early medieval times, goes for the jugular of post-Enlightenment theological thought: the methodological separation, in the wake of Kant, between what is asserted to be true theologically (faith) and what is alleged to be demonstrable on formally critical grounds (knowledge, 'Erkenntnis'). This separation is the death knell, he feels, for any Christian theology worthy of the name, and it must be healed if an intellectually viable proclamation of the Gospel is to be recovered and sustained on a wide front in European circles.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> (*The Bible—Foundation for Believing, Thinking, and Knowing: Prolegomena for a Biblical Doctrine of Knowledge*) Neuhäuser-Stuttgart, 1986.

<sup>40</sup> A. Zur Einführung in den Problemhorizont; B. Zur Entwicklung des Erkenntnisbegriffes und seiner Auswirkungen auf das moderne Denken; C. Zur Grundlegung einer biblischen Erkenntnistheorie; D. Praktische Konsequenzen.

<sup>41</sup> Following von Padberg in seeing this as a nodal point with ultimate consequences for the viability of truly Christian impact in thought and society are e.g. Hempelmann and Michel (n. 9 above). Renewed interest in J. G. Hamann (1730–1788), an opponent of Kant who was in many ways equal to the latter's steel, is indicative of another line of thought reflecting von Padberg's concern. See e.g. Helgo Lindner, *J. G. Hamann: Aufbruch zum biblischen Denken in der Zeit der Aufklärung* and Martin Seils, ed., *Johann Georg Hamann* (both from Wuppertal/Gießen: R. Brockhaus). Re Hamann, the Tübingen systematician Oswald Bayer, who has gained much from reflection on Hamann, should not be overlooked; he is one of the very few non-Kantians, it would appear, on the German theological scene. His work is of great interest, or should be, for any wishing to take account of post-Enlightenment, and now post-modern, thought without simply capitulating to it. As an entrée to Bayer see his *Aus Glauben Leben: Über Rechtfertigung und Heiligung* (Stuttgart, 1984); the recent major work is *Autorität und Kritik* (Tübingen, 1991), which includes and expands on many earlier studies. My thanks to J. Schwarz for first calling my attention to Bayer's writings.

Von Padberg proceeds as follows. In 'A. Introduction to the Scope of the Problem' he points to the contemporary widespread rejection of philosophical foundationalism (Kuhn; more radically Feyerabend). Rather than opting for relativism (Kuhn) or anarchism (Feyerabend), von Padberg suggests capitalizing on the observation of the provisional nature of human intellectual frameworks<sup>42</sup> (Kuhn's paradigms) while arguing rigorously for the viability of a critical realist approach to perception. If positivism is dead at the hands of Kuhn, Feyerabend, and post-modernist epistemological relativism generally, then the way is open for thoughtful Christians to advance their claims once more, no longer denied access to academic bars of judgment by a priori dismissal for making 'faith' assertions. In a sense all assertions are by faith.<sup>43</sup> With the ground now cleared of unwarranted prejudice against faith's claims, the gospel, responsibly formulated, admits of proclamation in the marketplace of ideas once more, at least in theory.

In 'B. Development of the Concept of Knowledge and Its Effects on Modern Thought' von Padberg traces the concept of knowledge from the pre-Socratics through Plato, Aristotle, the Middle Ages,<sup>44</sup> and into the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment era right into the 20th century. He sketches the effects of modern certainty (= uncertainty<sup>45</sup>) in the disciplines of theology, history, education ('Pädagogik'), psychology, and sociology ('Sozialforschung'<sup>46</sup>). He then lays out an eight-fold morphology of modern thought systems with their tendencies toward subjectivism, criticism, evolutionism, immanentism, pluralism, relativism, domination by ideologies ('Ideologisierung'), and reductionism.

This dismal panorama sets the stage for 'C. Formulating a Biblical Epistemology'. Von Padberg addresses both the opportunity and the responsibility for aggressive Christian intellectual activity:

<sup>42</sup> There are important points of contact here with Mark Noll, 'Traditional Christianity and the Possibility of Historical Knowledge', *Christian Scholar's Review* 19/4, June 1990, 388-406.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. more recently Frederic B. Burnham, 'Introduction', *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. by Robert N. Bellah, et al. (San Francisco, 1989), x-xi: 'The cultural hegemony of science has ended. The fundamental characteristic of the new postmodern era is epistemological relativism . . . "In a postmodern world", as Diogenes Allen asserts, "Christianity is intellectually relevant".'

<sup>44</sup> I.e. from Augustine through Anselm and William of Champeaux (early scholasticism); through Abelard, Albert Magnus, and Aquinas (high scholasticism); to Duns Scotus and William of Ockham (late scholasticism).

<sup>45</sup> See von Padberg, *Die Bibel*, 47-53.

<sup>46</sup> The word is perhaps broad enough to include much of what North Americans call political science, as well.

It is therefore virtually culpable behavior when Christians give up positions in the intellectual arena willingly and without struggle. Church history offers a wealth of examples of courageous spiritual awakenings in which the certainties of faith pioneered new directions in times that had lost their bearings. Biblically based knowledge leads to salvation; knowledge grounded on any other basis leads into error. Therefore the intellectual labor of Christians who are steadfast in their loyalty to the Bible is called for in special measure.<sup>47</sup>

Von Padberg goes on to speak of specific features of a biblical epistemology; of the cultural mandate and soteriological aim of scientific research carried on under its aegis; and of some concrete effects of such an epistemology in the disciplines of theology, history, education ('Pädagogik'), psychology (which after discussion von Padberg renames 'Anthropologie'), and sociology ('Sozialforschung'<sup>48</sup>). His study, by now probably in need of at least cosmetic updating and a new edition, has found no one to translate and publish it as far as I am aware, but ignorance of it these last seven years in Anglo-Saxon circles is unfortunate. For its high level of sophistication, bibliographic richness, and lucid argumentation, von Padberg's book merits a wide readership beyond German-speaking Europe. It is yet another example of the rigor, imagination, and quiet passion of Christian scholarship in Germany today.

(4). A fourth example of such a scholarship takes us yet a step further to the right in some respects—some would say at least as far right as others would peg Haacker on the left. Yet it could also be argued that the recent work of Eta Linnemann (see n. 11 above) is simply a spirited attempt to put von Padberg's program, informed by Haacker's insider's understanding of historical-criticism and something akin to Maier's hermeneutical paradigm, into practice in the context of Linnemann's own existential *Sitz im Leben*. From the position of a confirmed and then disenchanting post-Bultmannian, Linnemann progressed to Christian conversion and eventually missionary teaching in Indonesia. Her popular-level book on historical criticism has already been mentioned; its sequel appeared in English translation in November 1992.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 8f.: 'Daher ist es ein geradezu schuldhaftes Verhalten, wenn im denkerischen Bereich von Christen freiwillig und kampflös Positionen aufgegeben werden. Die Kirchengeschichte gibt eine Fülle von Beispielen für mutige Aufbrüche, durch die Glaubenserkenntnisse zu Wegweisern in orientierungsloser Zeit wurden. Biblisch begründete Erkenntnis führt zum Heil, jede anders fundierte Erkenntnis führt in die Irre, deshalb ist die Denkarbeit der bibeltreuen Christen in besonderem Maße gefragt.'

<sup>48</sup> See n. 46.

<sup>49</sup> *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* (Grand Rapids, 1992); German title *Gibt es ein synoptisches Problem?*

Whereas Linnemann's *Historical Criticism of the Bible* was sweeping and expository in many sections, her new book is historical and analytic. It asks a question which many will scoff at taking seriously: 'is there a synoptic problem?' In reply she proceeds in three steps.

First she examines the claim that exegetical work on the Bible is 'scientific'. In Germany this claim is self-evident—recall the title of Haacker's book, *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*—and it sometimes has the effect of leaving key 'assured results' of biblical scholarship beyond the pale of any serious questioning.<sup>50</sup> This is the case, Linnemann shows, with the synoptic problem and its widely held solution, the two-source hypothesis. She argues that the theory was never shown to be cogent on linguistic grounds; it rather gained currency through Lessing, was taken up by Griesbach, and through repetition and variation was widely assumed to be proven, still with no cogent linguistic demonstration, by the first half of the 19th century. 'Scientific' theology is not necessarily scientific at all, she concludes, and one may be amply justified in questioning its most sacrosanct precepts.

Second, Linnemann painstakingly shows the question-begging artifices used in a range of student introductions—Strecker and Schnelle, Marxsen, Conzelmann and Lindemann, Zimmermann, Koester—as they effectually foist critically-predetermined solutions to the 'problem' they claim to identify on the unsuspecting reader. The pseudo-scientific nature of synoptic study, as Linnemann sees it, since the time of Lessing continues, and its unfounded assumptions are preached with missionary fervor by critical theologians to the present hour.

Third—and this is by far the bulk of the book—Linnemann undertakes to show the statistical implausibility of either Marcan or Matthean priority. In other words, she claims to have disproven the theory of literary dependence among the synoptic gospels. The approach here is highly analytic and technical, with statistics, word counts, vocabulary comparisons, and other means of investigation being brought to bear. She then goes on to make constructive suggestions as to how we should envision the synoptics as having arisen, assuming that there was no literary interdependence. Linnemann moves beyond critique and analysis, therefore, to

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<sup>50</sup> E. Earle Ellis has called attention to this problem in the matter of dating NT documents in 'Dating the New Testament', *New Testament Studies* 26, 1980, 487–502; idem, 'Die Datierung des Neuen Testaments', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 42, 1986, 409–430.

graphic depiction of the circumstances, means, and results that most probably gave us our gospels in their present form.

One questionnaire respondent (see section I. above) expressed great reservation about Linnemann, who having disavowed her former historical-critical associations now finds herself, it appears from his vantage point, in a no-man's land between them and scholarly evangelicals who are uncomfortable with at least the tone of her work. This respondent observes, 'Earlier statements from her were so radically critical of [biblical and theological] science that one could hardly expect her to make any positive contributions to that science'. Hearing of her latest work on the synoptics, however, the same source graciously admits, 'But that may have changed'.<sup>51</sup> This openness is commendable and well-advised. While I am not sufficiently competent in synoptic studies to pronounce an informed, objective final verdict on her latest work, I will say that her arguments are substantial, her evidence compelling, and her conclusions at least plausible. She may admittedly find it difficult to receive a fair hearing given the apparent rashness of her basic thesis—could so many have been so misled for so long?—and the details of the alternative view she outlines. On the other hand, the recent ground-breaking study of John Wenham<sup>52</sup> may signal a wider willingness to entertain views like Linnemann's than many would have thought possible scant years ago.

Our survey in this second section has taken us from Haacker to Maier to von Padberg to Linnemann. We have, then, examined individual examples along a continuum from left to right, so to speak, of recent work in Germany emanating from circles polled in the first section. It remains now to reflect on the implications of this body of scholarship and conviction and in terms of its significance for biblical and theological work in North America and Britain, and more broadly for intellectual labor everywhere that wishes to carry on its work in full recognition of the authority of Christ through the Scriptures.

### III. Winds of Challenge

While this is not the place for a comprehensive assessment of and interaction with current Christian scholarship in Germany, a few

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<sup>51</sup> 'Frühere Äußerungen von ihr waren so radikal wissenschaftskritisch, daß man von ihr kaum noch positive Beiträge zur Wissenschaft erwarten konnte. Aber das mag sich geändert haben.'

<sup>52</sup> *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove, 1992).

concluding thoughts beg to be aired. The breezes of which we have taken a brief reading above confront the English-speaking reader with a three-fold challenge: ecumenical, intellectual, and Christological.

(1). To glimpse the ecumenical challenge, we may refer to a plea issued to North American readers by a German scholar some years back—145, to be precise. Its source is Augustus Neander in the preface to his *The Life of Jesus Christ in Its Historical Connection and Historical Development*,<sup>53</sup> a work that directly confronted D. F. Strauss' bombshell *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*.<sup>54</sup> The preface's title runs, 'To my Christian brethren in the United States of America', and it contains the following assessment of the German scene, with a prescient appeal to its English-speaking audience:

This book has arisen (and it bears the marks of its origins) amid the intellectual struggles which yet agitate Germany, and constitute a preparatory crisis for the future. Those who are unacquainted with those struggles may, perhaps, take offence at finding not only many things in the book hard to understand, but also views at variance with old opinions in other countries yet undisturbed. The English churches (even those of the United States, where every thing moves more freely) have perhaps, on the whole, been but slightly disturbed by conflicting opinions of precisely the kind that find place among us. Had they to deal with the *life-questions* with which we have to do, they would be otherwise engaged than in vehement controversies about church order and other unessential points. It would be easier, *then*, for them to forget their minor differences, and rally under the one banner of the Cross against the common foe. Perhaps a nearer acquaintance with the religious condition of other lands may contribute to this end.<sup>55</sup>

Neander's appeal is as applicable today as his forecast of a future crisis was correct. It contains the following elements: (a). the reader ought not dismiss the theological battles of Germany as irrelevant to the religious future of his own nation; (b). the reader can gain a preview of the 'life-questions', or matters of life-and-death significance, that his own society will face by encountering them at a distance in the form they are taking in German society; (c). attention to matters of life-and-death significance will facilitate concentration on truly decisive issues rather than marginal ones; and (d). the Gospel and its concerns, instead of marginal matters, will then occupy center stage.

This counsel from the 19th century is not without point as we enter

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<sup>53</sup> Trans. by John M'Clintock and Charles E. Blumenthal (New York, 1848).

<sup>54</sup> 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1840<sup>6</sup>).

<sup>55</sup> Neander, *Life of Jesus Christ*, x.

the 21st. More than one observer has noted that the 20th century's theological debates have been, ultimately, variations on themes already advanced in the 19th; there was, in a sense, a finite range of possibilities for carrying out the post-Kantian agenda, and last century saw good coverage of that range.<sup>56</sup> Since we are not yet out of Kant's (and more specifically Schleiermacher's) shadow, Neander's admonitions retain their importance. The call for American readers to consider their ways by observing them proleptically as they unfold in a different social setting, a call restated by German evangelicals treated above, is a summons to transcend internecine conflict through a biblical ecumenism. Such an ecumenism is enhanced by careful attention to debates being conducted in foreign settings that can shed light on analogous or identical issues at home. It would have the maturity to grant mutual freedom with respect to genuine adiaphora, without forsaking aggressive commitment to meaning and truth as it is in Jesus, as Scripture sets it forth, on non-negotiable matters. It would likewise have the sense to see faddish firestorms of conflict for what they are and avoid dissipation of precious time and energy through fruitless polemic in response.

Neander points the way, then, to a sort of Christian 'other cultures' emphasis, one probably not yet sufficiently heeded in North America, at least among evangelicals. He reminds us of the value of seeing our own work and plans in the light of realities playing themselves out elsewhere—in this case Germany; though the same point could and should be made with respect to any number of other settings where godly thinkers are applying kingdom verities that we would do well to ponder. Americans, notorious as we are for obliviousness to what we ought to be learning from others elsewhere, can ill afford to minimize Neander's point, a point restated and underscored in various ways by current German theological leaders mentioned above. There is apt to be room for applying this insight in the British setting as well.

(2). The intellectual challenge posed by the current work in Germany that we have surveyed is, of course, a very broad subject. But a central aspect of it amounts to this question: is there a distinctively Christian approach to biblical and theological studies; and if so, in what does it consist? The question can be clarified and

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. e.g. 'Editorial Introduction', *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. by Ninian Smart et al., vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1985), 2: 'twentieth-century religious thought is very much the child of the nineteenth.' Karl Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, seen as prolegomena to his *Church Dogmatics*, illustrates the point.

illustrated by noting a parallel debate in the U.S. regarding Christian thinking in the area of politics.

This debate is laid out succinctly on two pages of a recent number of *First Things*.<sup>57</sup> James Skillen, executive director of The Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C., protests that Dean Curry's review of Skillen's *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square* misrepresents Skillen's views. In his book, says Skillen, he argues for 'a distinctively Christian view of politics'. Skillen explains that

the book, from start to finish, is an argument for a distinctively Christian view of politics. The fact that the Bible is silent on how the U.S. and others should deal with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait is totally beside the point of my argument, which is urging the development of a Christian political philosophy . . . something more fully, integrally, and distinctively Christian . . . I am calling for a biblically grounded and distinctive Christian political philosophy . . . .

Curry, while he shares Skillen's concern, calls for a different understanding of the Christian political task:

Unlike Skillen, whose Reformed theology bears the mark of strong Dooyeweerdian influences, I am persuaded by a more traditional reading of Reformed theology that understands politics as earthly service on behalf of the holy kingdom. There is nothing holy or special about the tasks of politics, just as there is nothing holy about any of the common tasks of common culture. Christians have access to the truths of common culture the same way as do non-Christians, through common grace. Christians have no special wisdom regarding politics; prudence is a gift to all men and women . . . I believe [Skillen] is misguided . . . in his quest to define a *uniquely* Christian third way.?

Skillen believes, therefore, that biblical revelation grants a platform, not of inerrant political decision or omniscience, but of distinctively Christian analysis and response. His epistemological basis, in other words, is illumined by biblical truth and truths in such a fashion that it is not essentially congruent (though neither is it totally incongruent) with the basis of non-Christians. Curry demurs. Common grace, not the special grace of either subjective regeneration or the objective revelation that precipitates it, furnishes sufficient and necessary common ground for Christian political activity—or, as one should perhaps say from Curry's point of view, political activity by Christians.

Relating this to our survey of biblical and theological work in Germany, we note that the approach we have most commonly

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<sup>57</sup> 'Correspondence,' *First Things*, 16 October 1991, 2f.

encountered is analogous to Skillen's rather than Curry's. That is, it is apparent to evangelical thinkers in Germany that what some call common grace in the intellectual world, if it has ever left room for the full-orbed Gospel since the Enlightenment, has done so less and less, so that today it hardly does so at all. Curry's elevation of 'truths of common culture' sounds naive in a culture, typified by university biblical scholars and theologians, that systematically rejects, or at least radically reinterprets, every cardinal point of classic Christian doctrine. Germans believers live amidst not only the theological wreckage but also the social tragedy of two centuries of Curry's 'there is nothing holy about any of the common tasks of common culture' applied with increasing militancy to the area of biblical interpretation and theological thought. They are under no illusions regarding the need to transcend this mentality in its many unfortunate manifestations.<sup>58</sup>

German evangelicals see some of their English-speaking counterparts as hopelessly out of touch with modern intellectual realities and enmeshed in a brazen fundamentalism that does little more than tickle the ears of its reactionary clientele. But German evangelicals are no less concerned with Anglo-American brethren who are increasingly enamored of ideas that have long since established themselves in mainline theological thought but are inimical to the Gospel. While most, at least, would agree with Curry's view applied to the theological realm if it meant interaction with, learning from, and at times cooperation with non-Christians scholarship, they would stop short of such a sweeping affirmation of common grace. For it seems to imply a higher view of man's goodness, a lower view of special revelation, and a vaguer conception of Christ's kingdom—one placing it far less thoroughly in proximity to the Church—than their outlook and sensitivities would allow.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Of considerable value in grasping both the problem and means to surmount it is H. Thielicke's *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 1 ['Prolegomena: The Relation of Theology to Modern Thought Forms'], trans. by G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, 1974). Thielicke is cited extensively by von Padberg (section II above).

<sup>59</sup> It is hard to avoid thinking here of G. E. Lessing, whose 'Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts' (*Lessing's sämtliche Werke*, ed. by R. Gosche, vol. 8 [Berlin, 1882], 51–71) is a locus classicus of Christian revelation being redefined as that which autonomous rationality, in contradistinction to thought as illumined by the light of revelation, affirms. The revealed truths of Scripture were 'not yet truths of reason [Vernunftwahrheiten] when they were revealed, but they were revealed so that they could become such truths' (§76). Revelation [die Offenbarung] 'gives the human race nothing at which human reason, left to itself, would not also arrive . . .' (§4). Modern German evangelicals may not all have read Lessing in particular, but they seem more aware of the danger of this

Whether one favours Skillen's or Curry's point of view, the German discussion we have surveyed confronts us with the intellectual challenge to assess the underpinnings of our work, to be aware of the savvy or naivete, as the case may be, that attends what we do. Our intellectual vision is clarified by fresh realization of the danger of a closed, siege mentality sealed off from all outside light, on the one hand, and on the other of an unguarded affirmation of mainline scholarship as somehow redemptive based, e.g., on some wooly notion of God's sovereignty; or on an ill-thought affirmation of all truth being God's; or an unwarrantedly optimistic view that unfettered intellectual inquiry of the Bible will eventually affirm the same truths for which prophets, apostles, and even the Messiah himself had to die in order to gain a hearing.<sup>60</sup>

(3). The Christological challenge posed by our survey may be glimpsed by relating a conversation with the director of an ecumenical study center in Germany several years ago. We were discussing theological education in the West Germany university and the rationale that undergirds it. This scholar and educational administrator stated that pietist students, i.e. students from German homes and churches that believe in personal relationship to Christ and the veracity of Scripture, must first be disabused of their notion that the Bible is true. They must rather accept the verdict of mainline scholarship that what the Bible says, as Christian communities have understood it across the centuries, is to be systematically doubted; that modern disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, and religious studies must rather form the basis for any proclamation of religion in European culture; and that only after destruction of belief in the Bible's trustworthiness as traditionally understood, and the substitution of current theories on everything from cosmology to personhood,

viewpoint—which an overemphasis on common grace can easily approximate—than many elsewhere. Lessing's essay is accessible in English in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. by H. Chadwick (Stanford, 1957).

<sup>60</sup> Pinnock, *Scripture Principle*, 143, appears to illustrate this last tendency in calling for Christian theology to be bound by the results of critical exegesis, then commending that exegesis as follows: 'We have to do the best exegesis in the good company of other scholars. The defenses against deceitful and unscrupulous persons are not impregnable. But we cannot surrender the liberty in interpretation we treasure and must continue to hope that those hypotheses that truly exalt the truthfulness of the Scriptures will persist and those that denigrate it will become apparent to all. Meanwhile, it is imperative that we not deny to our biblical scholars the freedom they have a right to, the freedom that, in the end, will serve the people of God through the new insights that come out of untrammelled investigation.' Given the actual history of critical investigation of the Bible, the optimism expressed here that 'new insights' arising from 'untrammelled investigation' will ultimately 'serve the people of God' may be overly optimistic.

religion, and values, can a student be regarded as on the way to being educated and equipped for parish service.

It is in this context that we must regard the work of German scholars noted above whose work reflects both intellectually and spiritually commitment to Christ. Like Luther before them, and in deliberate contradistinction to key affirmations of the culture that surrounds them, their consciences are captive to the claims to a king and kingdom not of this world. While the presence of believing scholars in an academic setting that has spent two centuries putting classic Christian belief to flight is not unprecedented—the German academic scene has always had its Schlatters—the persons to whom we have called attention offer a good deal in the way of example and encouragement to non-Germans who continue to be affected by impulses having their origins in Germany or the Germanic ideological thought-world.<sup>61</sup>

The danger is that we might glean far too little of what our Teutonic Christian colleagues have to teach us without a more concerted effort to establish and maintain contact with their views than is currently common. We might continue to fail to engage current thinking as effectively as we ought, due in part to ignoring the insights of the surefooted scholarship noted above. Even worse, we could find ourselves purveyors of what Linnemann calls 'a half-evangelical theology, one that is established on the turf of historical-critical theology and from that standpoint attempts to set limits to its claims—without realizing how it has already compromised its

<sup>61</sup> German or German-speaking scholars, and Bultmann in particular, still play the dominant role in North American New Testament studies. Evidence for this assertion is furnished by E. J. Epp and G. W. McRae, eds., *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia/Atlanta, 1989). The 'Index of Modern Authors' of this compendium of American (and in a sense international) NT scholarship at the end of the 20th century offers the following information. Some nine scholars are honored by five lines of references to their published works (this amounts to about 20 references each): C. K. Barrett, G. Bornkamm, O. Cullmann, N. A. Dahl, M. Dibelius, J. A. Fitzmyer, W. Marxsen, Morton Smith, C. H. Talbert. Only five scholars are honored by six lines of references to their published works (this amounts to about 25–30 references each); Raymond Brown, J. Jeremias, H. Koester, W. G. Kümmel, J. M. Robinson. Just two scholars are honored by seven lines of references to their published works (this amounts to about 35 references total): H. Conzelmann, E. Käsemann. No scholar receives eight lines, or nine lines, of references to his works in the index. But Bultmann receives ten, for a total of 45 different references to his writings or ideas. It is not hard to see who continues to set the tone for mainline NT study.

loyalty to Scripture in the process'.<sup>62</sup> While reflection on evangelical scholarship in Germany cannot guarantee informed theological response in other settings, careful attention to works like those cited above seems likely to contribute considerably to truly Christian labor in both academe and church.

### **Abstract**

Germany theology since the Enlightenment has gained a reputation, not totally undeserved, for theological innovation more in keeping with modernity's claims than the Scripture's. Today a small but significant group of theologians and biblical scholars is defying that image. An informal survey documents a solid core of well-thought evangelical conviction among a number of published scholars in German-speaking Europe. Figures like K. Haacker in NT, G. Maier in hermeneutics, L. von Padberg in historical theology and epistemology, and E. Linnemann in Synoptic criticism are registering telling criticisms of reigning disciplinary orthodoxies. They are also mapping out better paths. Their work deserves careful attention from evangelicals grappling with analogous, and sometimes identical, issues in English-speaking contexts.

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<sup>62</sup> 'Eine Halb-Evangelikale Theologie, die sich auf dem Boden der historisch-kritischen Theologie etabliert und von dort aus versucht, einige Abstriche an ihr zu machen und nicht merkt, wie viele Abstriche sie bereits an der Bibeltreue gemacht hat.'