



Method in Studying Biblical History

Author(s): Floyd V. Filson

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Mar., 1950), pp. 1-18

Published by: [The Society of Biblical Literature](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3261406>

Accessed: 09/04/2012 10:37

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Society of Biblical Literature is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

METHOD IN STUDYING BIBLICAL HISTORY*

FLOYD V. FILSON

McCORMICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE serious and competent student of the Bible must be a historian. It is not merely the date of writing of the several books but even more the content which makes the Bible a proper object of historical investigation. Naturally, therefore, the work of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis involves such historical study, and a presidential address may fittingly deal with its method and presuppositions. In the consideration of this topic, I shall deal with the Bible in its Christian definition, which includes both the Old and New Testaments. But the basic issue which I raise is no less present in the Scripture as defined by those of Jewish faith.

I

It is commonly said that Christianity is a historical religion. The full and specific meaning of this statement, however, is not always clear. It obviously includes the fact that the Christian faith arose in ancient times and claims to have direct and significant antecedents which reach back to the dawn of history. The statement further means that the origin and center of the Christian message is a series of historical occurrences. It finds its foundation in events in which it sees unique divine revelation

*The Presidential Address delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis on December 29, 1949, at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.

and to which therefore it attaches unique significance. Upon the basis of the Old Testament history and the preparatory work of John the Baptist, the central career of Jesus took place, and it was a ministry of action carried to the Jewish people and issuing in a fellowship which became the Christian Church. Even the letters of the New Testament, which have often been regarded merely as doctrinal statements, were effective instruments in the life and work of the Church. The revelation of which the Christian Gospel speaks was not the detached disclosure of ideas, but the self-disclosure of God in specific occurrences and through the actions of chosen spokesmen.

The statement that Christianity is a historical religion implies also that this faith has had a further history, and that in the later life of the Church believers are linked back to the decisive Biblical events in a way that brings benefit and understanding. Thus not only is there a further history, but in this further history the message embodied in the Biblical history continues to play a decisive role. That classic story is not a temporary scaffolding which is discarded as soon as the movement advances to a new stage. At every subsequent stage the believer goes back to the Biblical account. He would cease to be a Christian if he no longer found his Gospel in the Biblical history.

Such a situation makes two things clear. In the first place, the study and understanding of this particular history will always be necessary not only to know the Christian message but also to be a constructive leader in the Church. In the second place, Christian thinking can never be an unrooted process of endless free exploration. Theology must continually concern itself with the meaning which this Biblical history has for modern faith. When theology becomes merely a modern venture in the philosophy of religion, it forfeits its right to be called Christian. Furthermore, those who have thought that they could give up the historicity of Jesus and content themselves with the Christ-idea have not understood the essential nature of the Christian Church's faith, which is anchored in the occurrence and meaning of certain historical events and therefore can never let the embarrassing difficulties of historical study obscure its essential basis in the story of Christian origins.

II

It is not sufficient, however, to note that Christianity is a historical religion which must always have deep roots in its living remembrance and understanding of its origin. We must also see clearly that the Biblical history to which the Church constantly looks is a quite particular kind of history. It is not history as that term is widely understood today.

In the first place, the Bible focuses upon a special history. It directs attention to a narrowly limited series of events, in which God acts to redeem and discipline men and so reveals himself. He chooses one man, Abraham. He calls one people, Israel. From among them he raises up individuals, and it is usually a minority of this people who are responsive to his leading. He does not require that his representatives be in the social, political, or academic "Who's Who" of their day. He not only permits this people to be decimated by war and captivity; he actually brings such judgments upon them for their perverse ways. In the New Testament he raises up a climactic prophetic leader, who is recognized as the Messiah, but this Messiah is so lacking in outward position that few accept the identification, he is officially disowned and publicly crucified, and his resurrection is attested by a relatively few people of no official position. His followers are on the average quite ordinary people, who have their faults, and for all the stress which the Book of Acts lays on the growth of the Church, the number of disciples is small indeed in comparison with the population of the time. They are so few, so often scorned, and apparently so insignificant that Roman governors regard them mainly as a nuisance and Roman historians hardly notice them.

From the standpoint of the world at large, the stamp of mediocrity or even inferiority is upon the faithful in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Yet the Bible makes the astounding claim that in this history God is at work to give his decisive revelation and to call men to faith and obedience. It declares that this slender line of apparent futility is the one important line of history and is the key to the understanding of

the divine will and of human duty and destiny. It is the one important history; it is the clue to the meaning of history.

This Biblical history is set in an extra dimension of both length and depth. Starting from the assurance that God has chosen and redeemed his people and cares for them, his followers see this central work of God in a larger framework which reaches back to his creation of this world and forward to the full realization of his will in the final fulfilment of his plan. Compared with the Old Testament, the New Testament presents new features in the time setting which it gives to history; these concern particularly the role of the Son in the creative work of God and the decisive beginning of God's eschatological action in the historical career of Jesus Christ. But in both Testaments the facts of creation and eschatological fulfilment give the framework in which the special history of the chosen people of God is finally understood.

By the extra dimension of depth which runs through the Biblical history I mean the constant prophetic interpretation of what happened. It is present in both Testaments, and in both it is not limited to a part but pervades the whole. Moses was a prophet. The Pentateuch has a prophetic strain which we often fail to note. The books which tell of the judges, the kings, and the exile are not merely narrative. They are, as the Jewish description so well puts it, the "former prophets." They interpret the history upon the prophetic platform. The writings vary greatly in character and content, but they were written and used in the context of this prophetic interpretation of history. In the New Testament, it is worth attention that not only John the Baptist, but also Jesus, Paul, and many others were called prophets, and the explicit interpretation of the events of the Christian story continues the procedure which the Old Testament has made familiar. The Bible has no interest in what we call "pure history." Its writers would not have understood the term; indeed, I am confident that if the idea had been made clear to them, they would have denounced it.

In all of this story, the Bible presents God as the chief actor. The explanation of what occurs is found only by reference to him; he has revealed his character and purpose in what he has

done and has sent men to say. Even when it proves impossible for men to find the explanation, even when revelation gives no clear explanation, as in the Book of Job, or in Paul's confession in Romans 11³³ that human thought is unable to fathom fully the mystery of God's ways, the faith is expressed that ultimately everything will be found to have its place in the wise working of God. To be sure, men are treated as responsible. They play significant roles in the drama in which God works out his purpose. But the Bible never seeks to understand history by analysis of the natural, psychological, and social factors which trained observation could discover. If I understand the Bible rightly, its writers maintain that there is no understanding of history on any other basis than that of confessing in faith that God the righteous redeemer of men is working out his gracious, just, and wise purpose on this earth.

Because God is the chief actor and history is interpreted with reference to him as its center, the criterion by which the Bible judges the role of the individual and group is that of obedience or rebellion in response to what God does and asks. From the earliest commands of God to the final dramatic picture of the Book of Revelation, where every man bears the mark of either the Lamb or the Beast, this book presses home the claim that man must "choose this day" whom he will serve. Its conception of human life is such that no place for neutrality remains. God may "wink" at times of ignorance, but once his action and claim come to man's attention — and it is the purpose of this redemptive history, this calling of the chosen people, that this shall take place — then life assumes an immediate and terrible urgency, tempered but not removed by the deep discernment that both righteousness and mercy are operative in the divine action which shapes and explains this history.

III

The question which we now must raise is: How should scholarship deal with a history such as that which we have described? Implied in the very raising of the question is our conviction that serious study is necessary to understand and

interpret this history. Indeed, this Society was founded and exists to further the critical study of the Scriptures. In contrast to those who believe that any critical study of the Bible is an error and a profanation, we hold that such careful investigation of the Scriptures is a constant need. It may be of value to state the reasons for this position.

1. The student himself requires an intense discipline before he can become qualified to formulate conclusions in historical study. The difficulties of understanding are never limited solely to the documentary and archaeological data. The reader is held back from full understanding by his ignorance, his failure to include all relevant data, his thoughtlessly inherited conceptions, and his improper grouping and interpretation of the items of evidence. Least of all should the believer, who knows he is a finite and erring human, ignore such barriers to truth. I had a teacher of church history who used to say that no man is entitled to have an opinion until he has taken the time and pains to qualify himself to form an opinion. Obligatory upon every student of history is this continual self-preparation and self-discipline.

2. History by its very nature calls for critical study. The data are abundant, varied, and often confusing. Even for the study of contemporary or very recent history the sifting of evidence, the discarding of false clues, the estimate of the relative importance of various factors, and the grasping of the stream of history in its connections calls for the most careful and seasoned judgment. The stream of events never tells a perfectly clear story. At the first meeting of this Society which I ever attended, Dr. William E. Barton discussed the historical problems of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to show how even eyewitnesses and contemporary documents contradict one another and so necessitate critical study and judgment. History continually presents such problems.

3. The Biblical history makes an especial demand for such careful study, because it comes from so ancient and different a period. Most of the members of this Society are neither Jews nor Greeks, and I dare say that even the Jews in our number are conditioned by factors which are quite different from the actual life setting of the prophets or the apostles. The student

of the Bible needs to get back as far as possible into the external situation, the cultural ties, the psychological mind-set, and the vital faith of the Biblical man. It is not easy. The ancients were not moderns, and we are not ancients. But we have to recognize the gulf, and by careful study bridge it as well as we can.

4. The influence of a long tradition necessitates critical alertness.* No book has been studied so much as the Bible, and around none has so much traditional interpretation gathered. In almost every religious group there are great leaders of the past to whom men now look back with gratitude; Luther and Calvin will serve as examples. Generations which follow them tend to interpret the Bible through their eyes. Indeed, they can give great help, for they were great interpreters, but they were interpreting the Bible, and that is what we must do. Believers, who are concerned to hear the word of God in the Bible, need the help of critical study if they are to hear that word and not merely the voice of Luther or Calvin.

5. The content of the Bible itself raises critical problems. There are militant conservatives who insist that critical scholars arbitrarily foist problems of modern origin on these ancient documents. Such a practice would indeed be indefensible, and where it occurs it is to be regretted. But it is a fact that the ancient manuscripts differ among themselves and are all imperfect, so that critical study is necessary to restore as far as possible the original text. The narratives of Kings and Chronicles, and of the Synoptic Gospels, differ one from the other, so that knotty historical problems arise out of the actual content of the Scriptures. No one can deny that untenable solutions of these problems have often been proposed, and this has happened more than once in the free discussions of this Society, but that the problems arise out of the content of the Bible itself is the fundamental insight which gives critical study its charter and field of work.

The battle to establish the full right of critical study of the Bible has been a long and hard one. It has not ended, and it will never be securely and finally won by us or any later generation.

*On this and other points I am indebted to discussions with my friend and colleague, Professor Leonard J. Trinterud.

Moreover, the rebels who under threat of official or popular penalty have insisted at personal cost that the data must be studied honestly and without fear deserve our gratitude, even from those of us who would reject many of the specific conclusions which they reached. In times of fierce controversy clarity and balance are hard to preserve, and men in violent reaction from untenable positions powerfully defended often go to extremes which their successors should not maintain. We can recognize the contribution of pioneers and rebels even while we reject some of their conclusions. Moreover, in disowning such distorted conclusions we are under no obligation to discard the central discernment which marked their work, the discernment that the Biblical data are not automatically self-interpreting, but require the patient and persistent service of critical study if they are to supply a reasonably clear picture of the sources and meaning of the Biblical history.

IV

The Christian scholar has both the Biblical Gospel of the redemptive working of God in history and the task of serious critical study. Can he combine these two things? He not only can but must. He must vindicate the ultimately constructive role of critical study in the Christian understanding and presentation of the Biblical message. He dare not deny the right of free inquiry, and he cannot justly ask the protection of a doctrinal or ecclesiastical barrier to free study. Yet such a distrust of critical research exists. We need to understand how far it is justified and wherein it cannot be defended.

The distrust rests upon a legitimate complaint. It serves neither the Church nor the truth to have wrong views taught to laymen and especially young people. Yet decades after scholars have learned better, parrot-like voices continue to repeat theories which were once proposed. Every responsible scholar must feel keenly the human cost of untenable assertions, and he needs to be much more cautious than many have been in statements concerning the assured results of historical study.

Yet because historical study is involved in any intelligent

use of the Bible, we cannot hide behind a protecting barrier. For example, we cannot forbid such study by use of a doctrine of verbal inerrancy. I have talked with people who held that this doctrine should put an end to free study. They stated the authority of the sacred Book for faith and life in the form that the very words of Scripture present the accurate and infallible word of God, and they sometimes declared that this kind of Scripture is essential to salvation. If it were, we would all be lost. Textual criticism makes it clear that before the books of the New Testament were collected into the Canon, variant readings had already crept into the text. Thus a letter perfect Bible has never existed. Other data also refute the claim of verbal inerrancy. For example, the reference in Mark 2 26 to Abiathar as high priest clashes with the evidence of I Samuel 21 1-6 that Ahimelech was high priest when David asked for bread at Nob. Both free study and faith must deal frankly with such relevant facts, and build upon them.

Moreover, we cannot subject questions of date and authorship to ecclesiastical control. The Roman Catholic use of Biblical commissions and official pronouncements to determine such questions is sparing; it is based upon careful study; it leaves large areas of freedom in historical study. But in practice the method is a barrier to free study. Literary and historical questions must be worked out in free discussion, and this Society is intended to offer the forum for such discussion, to which all scholars of all faiths or persuasions are invited.

V

It is not only by doctrinal pronouncement or ecclesiastical control, however, that the attempt is made to ease the tension between critical study and the role of faith in understanding. At the other end stand methods which remove the tension by claiming that historical understanding is possible without the insight of faith and obedience. I refer to various allegedly objective and scientific standpoints, which in reality are world views or interpreting platforms that leave no room for a ministry of faith to intelligence.

One of these is the materialistic philosophy which logically leaves no place for either human intelligence or purpose or divine initiative. This point of view is wrecked by an inner inconsistency, for it seeks by intelligent discussion to prove that there is no intelligence operative in life. On its own premises this view cannot exist.

More serious are the claims which naturalism and humanism often make. These two terms are by no means identical in meaning. Moreover, humanism may be so used as to leave full place for faith in God, and naturalism may either be limited to sub-human and human life or indicate a wider view of the world in which all things are conceived as integral parts of one consistently interacting whole. I use the terms here in the sense that each of them often has, in which the independent, intelligent, and purposeful action of God is excluded, and the explanation of life, of events, of history, is sought in terms of the natural order of life as we observe it in men and the world of nature. We may include the attempt which even theistic thinkers sometimes make to understand history first of all and as far as possible without admitting the possibility of a divine purpose. The common thing in all of these approaches to the understanding of history is the assumption, usually concealed, that such understanding is not only possible but can be more easily and more clearly attained by rigid elimination of that divine action which for the Biblical mind is the only factor which makes sense of the process.

Each such approach breaks down, for in fact it cannot deal with the data without some pattern which its professed position does not supply or the data do not support. The materialist, as we have said, assumes intelligence and purpose in the very process of stating and arguing his position. Any interpretation of life in terms of mechanism or impersonal process encounters this self-contributed refutation, for the philosopher himself does not fit into the proposed scheme; he finds a meaning in life which mechanism or impersonal process does not provide. The humanist or naturalist who allows no place for divine purpose or action is repeatedly led to adopt some interpreting scheme. He may interpret history in terms of cycles, such as the Greeks

repeatedly postulated and later writers, Spengler for example, have attempted to identify. He may seek his clue in some idea of progress, such as the Hegelian development to the perfect German philosophy, or the Marxist development to the perfect economic order, or the positivistic development from theology through metaphysics to the positivistic philosophy, or the more general and pervading modern idea of progress in culture and civilization.

Common to all such patterns is the very expression of an inevitable urge to find a pattern, to organize the data to show their meaning. Even when the picture painted is gloomy, one feels a satisfaction in understanding the process; one sees how it works and what it means. The other common feature of all these patterns is that they seek to make clear what is going on in history without introducing the Biblical idea of divine action in fulfilment of divine purpose.

Each of these modern standpoints is an interpretation of the data. It has an interpreting platform by which it organizes the individual items which the student encounters. Usually it is not conscious that it brings to the data an interpreting platform, but contends that it is simply presenting the material in a clear and organized form. In this claim is contained the most important problem with which we have to deal.

VI

The continual recurrence of an organizing point of view or interpreting platform raises the question of objective method. Many would say that in the paragraphs just read I have been talking not about historical study but about the philosophy of history, which takes the clear results of historical study and adds to them an interpretation. They would say that what we need to do is to reject all such personal bias, whether that of the Biblical mind or that of the modern Marxist or positivist or idealist, and study the facts as they really are. All scholars, it would be argued, can unite in the co-operative study of the actual data, and agree on the essential results, after which each may follow his personal conviction concerning the ultimate mean-

ing and interpretation of these data. The main purpose of what I have to say is to challenge this point of view.

The word "objective" is the issue. The ideal of objectivity in historical study stands for so much that is right and indispensable that it is difficult to attack current ideas connected with it without seeming to weaken the standards of integrity which this study demands. When we read in the Webster's New International Dictionary that one meaning of "objective" is "expressing facts without distortion from one's personal feelings or prejudices," we recognize that the word points to a necessity of all true study. It stands for honesty and accuracy, for seeing and reporting things truly, for knowing the difference between fact and theory and personal preference. Whether we read the daily paper, where the editorial policy determines the content and point of emphasis on the front page, or study historical documents, where both ignorance and partisan expression are often found, we know that we must work to get beyond distortion and wishful thinking to the actual facts.

How, then, can a historical student justifiably raise a question concerning the demand for objectivity in his work? The objection to some current thinking arises on two grounds. In the first place, the word "objective" is ordinarily taken to mean the study of man and nature without reference to the divine purpose and action. There is in it the claim that to be rational, to be clear-minded, to be balanced and discerning — in short, to be able to explain things — we need to get away from the realm of faith and the assertion of divine action and look at the historical scene as the working of human and natural factors. The divine will and action can be taken into account as an idea of man, but not as a functioning and determining factor in the things which occur. The role of God can be reconciled with this view if he is conceived in strictly immanent terms, but this means if everything which occurs can be included in the working of human personality, social interrelation, and natural process. The sovereign and transcendent God cannot be taken into account. The one factor which the Bible sees as the creator and mover, the judge and hope of history, cannot be utilized in this method of study.

This raises a basic question of truth. If God does so act, a method which studies and writes history without putting him at the center is not simply faulty from a theological point of view. It is equally unsatisfactory as a historical method, for it is not telling the story as it really was brought about, as it really happened. I know that it will be said that history can be written as the life story of mankind in the natural world, and then faith will be free to supplement or complete that story if it so chooses. My answer to this is that if man is in fact dealing with God in a responsible way, there can be no accurate and complete way of writing history which does not take this into account. For him who thinks of God not in terms of the sum total of human and natural processes but in terms of independent personal will and action, history which ignores the divine action is as incomplete as an automobile without an engine.

The second criticism of the current use of the word "objective" is that it not only ignores divine action but misstates the human relation to the study and telling of history. The word assumes that man can put himself outside of the total process which he is studying and describing. It suggests that he can so discipline his mind and technical methods that he can act as a neutral and detached supreme court, and thus grasp and report the course and meaning of history without bias or personal reaction. I no longer believe that this is possible. For one thing, it does not happen. Recently I had occasion to re-read Hans Windisch's instructive book, *Der Sinn der Bergpredigt*. It was amusing to note that in his survey of previous study of the Sermon on the Mount, he was able to see the influence of a world view, a philosophy of life and history, an interpreting platform, in every man he passed in review. The only man of whose trustworthy objectivity he was convinced was Hans Windisch. We need not smile at him, as though he were the only scholar with this weakness. It is common. I am likely to think that I am objective, but that all others are warped in this or that respect. Would it not be reasonable to conclude rather that everyone fails in fact to manifest that detached, neutral, and completely disinterested attitude which the word "objective" is used to suggest?

It may be replied that we all fail to a greater or lesser degree in our attempt at impartiality, but that we must keep striving towards it as a goal. There is truth in this. Self-interest and prejudice we must constantly fight. But it remains true that detachment and neutrality is not a live option for us. Life confronts us with a certain ambiguity and an insistent demand that we decide what it really means. It may be easy to determine many individual facts, although often in sizing up single points we must judge in the light of a total outlook. However, life and history are far more than an unconnected mass of isolated items. Things and events are tied together and we have to understand them in their relations. We have to grasp them in the framework of some general point of view. We may stop at times to examine and criticize that outlook; we should do so. But we have it, and whenever we think about the things which are most crucial and influential, we are of necessity required to understand them and relate them to one another on the basis of such an interpreting platform.

The scholar thus deceives himself, and so hurts his work, if he thinks that he is not personally involved in life even in his study, and if he thinks that he can understand the course of events without assuming at least unconsciously some interpretation of the meaning of life and events. History in any full and true sense includes and expresses a deep-reaching interpretation of the meaning of life. Therefore it is a false antithesis to contrast the partisanship of the Biblical mind with the objectivity of the scientific mind. Certainly the Biblical writers were lacking in many scientific techniques which we need and use, but their basic affirmation, that in human history there is involved a divine will and purpose other than the individual and collective will of men, is no more an interpreting platform than the contention that one can understand and portray the course of history intelligibly as a working of human and natural factors. Strong historical writing expresses a world view. To write history is to interpret.

In the consideration of the relation of the scholar himself to his task, one further fact is of the utmost importance. For the believer, whether a member of the Church or of the Synagogue,

it is not possible to study and write history from a neutral standpoint. He is a committed individual. His God is the God of his mind and heart and will. His total activity is an expression of faith and obedience to God, whose claim on him is never partial or intermittent. His study as well as his prayer is an expression of his religious relation to God.

I once shared a viewpoint according to which in critical study I put aside my faith and examined the facts to see what they were and how they could best be stated in their relations, after which I was at liberty to resume my life as an active believer and use those facts as I considered proper. The radical error in that way of thinking was its placing of scholarship under the banner of temporary or practical atheism. The believer cannot consistently and rationally take such an attitude. To demand that a believer put aside his faith while he studies and take no account of God in the explanation of what goes on in history is to ask him to surrender his faith. He cannot have any portion of his life which is not related to his faith, and he cannot accept an account of history which leaves the will and working of God out of account. In the light of his faith he has to say that the spectator attitude would be not only impossible but sinful. As a committed believer his study is a service to God. He will insist that to be objective involves dealing with life as it really is, and that this involves taking into account not merely the existence, but far more, the reign and work of God.

VII

There are dangers in this attempt to state the constructive role of critical study in the life of faith and the vital role of faith in the work of study and understanding. The cause of these dangers, however, I do not see in an inevitable irrationality which some scholars argue is at work in the recent renewed emphasis on the deep insights of the classic Christian faith. There may be and no doubt are now, as there always have been, tendencies to discount reason in the face of the unfathomable mystery of life. These tendencies appear particularly when that sense of the mystery of life has been slighted by the too confident

claim that reason is competent to pierce all veils and solve all questions. A deeper understanding drives men to assert that no such complete rational grasp of the total scope of life is possible. It is not rational to ascribe so much to reason. The reaction to a rationalism which overstresses the role of reason may introduce irrational elements into human attitudes. The remedy for this is not to press still harder for the sole rights of reason, but to combine a careful intellectual life with a recognition of the finiteness of man and his dependence upon a larger order. There is a position which is much more reasonable than strict rationalism, and it is the position which gives faith a vital role in the understanding of life and history. That role of faith must be coupled with constant searching study, to be sure, but the recognition of God and of the perverse and blundering nature of human life is not irrational in any true sense; it is the one defensibly rational position. To one who stands upon the platform of faith, that faith takes into its service all the abilities of reason and research.

But as already stated, even if we recognize that the rightful role of critical study is within the context of the religious life, the dangers of such a position must be averted as far as possible. No position, in scholarship or in life, is without its dangers and its possibility of deterioration. He who undertakes to study as a believer is always subject to the temptation of laziness of mind. He may sin by letting his faith substitute for study. He is also in danger of coming to have a closed mind. He may be so confident in faith that he forgets his finiteness and the imperfection of his grasp of that by which he lives, and so no longer examines critically what he holds; or he may so misconceive his faith that he thinks of it, not as the constant response to the effective working of the living God who in history did and still does mighty acts to redeem and renew him, but as the impartation of finished and fixed dogmas which he has only to learn and affirm. He also stands under the temptation of narrowing his field of interest to the most decisive actions of history, forgetting the larger areas of life and study in which the Biblical history must be set to yield its full meaning. He is further in danger of putting a strain on friendly co-operation among scholars by

insisting that other students in the same field share completely his position and conclusions.

Such dangers are real. Those who take my position should be particularly concerned to avoid and combat them. But they do not reduce me to the dilemma of choosing between a conservatism fearful of free study or a so-called "objective" method which is equally fearful of the affirmations of faith and the role of faith in the scholar's life. I stand in constant need of both things, the revelation of God and the honest study of all relevant data. I am obligated to make a personal response in both cases; in the one case, the response of faith and obedience, which is a total life response, and in the other case the response of active and honest study of the Christian history. I need not and must not choose between these two obligations, of which the former is the inclusive one. Nor can I as a Christian, whose entire life should be an expression of faith and loyalty to God through Christ, alternate between the two activities. That faith I cannot shelve as though it hindered true study or made no contribution to real understanding. I study in the context of my Christian faith and in the service of my Lord. Even when I dig out a negative fact or confirm a knotty difficulty, I am serving the God of truth and my work is a constructive activity.

How then am I to deal with the dangers which are inherent in my position? Since I am not two men but one, my fundamental solution has to be in terms of the loyalty which I have professed. As a believer I can have no sympathy with laziness, frozen-mindedness, narrowness, distortion of data, or unfriendliness. Moreover, while honesty, industry, and thoroughness are indeed academic and scholarly obligations, they are more than that. They are a part of the total religious obligation of the believer. A life lived as a response of faith and obedience to the God of truth must be an intelligent search for truth and an active loyalty to all obtainable truth.

There are many technical skills which contribute to this total work. There are indispensable scholarly standards of judgment and methods of deciding upon the significance of data. No right of free study, no solid result of research is called in question by what I have said. But since, in the long run and in the full work

of historical scholarship, an interpreting platform inevitably enters in, I take my stand with the essential affirmation of faith which I find in the Biblical view of history, and it is my purpose to build the activity of critical study into the life of faith as an integral and constructive factor and thereby to regain for the student's life the fundamental unity which a false standard of objectivity has tended to destroy.