

1. The old alternative between "scripture alone," on the one hand, and "scripture and tradition," on the other, is obsolete. Ever since the Enlightenment, when the Bible came to be considered from a consistently historical standpoint, it has become ever clearer that the New Testament itself is a work of tradition. So instead of saying "scripture," one must say "early tradition," and instead of saying "scripture and tradition," one must say "early and later tradition."

2. But why can't the confessions agree in appealing to early tradition as norm? Because early tradition—i.e., the New Testament—is not unified enough to function as a norm. Far from grounding the unity of the church, it is really the basis of the plurality of the confessions (Käsemann).

3. To recognize this, however, is already to have taken the first step toward the unity of the church. Whatever our confession, we are all in the same predicament: none of us can appeal to the *whole* New Testament, because there is something somewhere in it that contradicts our position, even while supporting the position of others.

4. But, then, what is the right method of using the New Testament? The *wrong* method is to use it as a recipe book with whose help one can immediately answer dogmatic or ethical questions. Critical study of the New Testament—often represented as criticism of the New Testament—is, in fact, criticism of this (wrong) method of using it. But the right method is not something still waiting to be discovered; the right method is the method already laid down in the New Testament itself. The New Testament writings are one and all to be taken as sermons or proclamations—not in our situation and to us, but—in specific situations in the past and to persons in those situations. As such, they are not *immediately* practicable for us today.

5. Mediatly, however, they are very practicable. For common to all the New Testament writings is that they preach or proclaim to later times what happened in and through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the texts are not themselves the subject matter, because they are the time- and situation-conditioned witnesses to the subject matter. The norm lies neither in scripture (= early tradition) nor in scripture and tradition(= early and later

tradition), but in the revelation itself that lies *before* tradition, because before the New Testament. This means that one has to inquire critically behind the tradition in which one stands, and even behind the New Testament, to the revelation itself. The appropriate method for using the New Testament, therefore, is the critical method.

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