

Eta Linnemann Testimony

Early Years

When I was a child, my exposure to God including hearing a sermon only once a month, as well as some teaching in religion. Young assistant pastors, who changed about every one and a half years, would come over from the little town nearby to teach us. So I did not learn much, but after I was born again, I was reminded by the Holy Spirit of all those times when I had the chance to hear something of Christ.

When I had my lessons for confirmation, the pastor was not born again, and whatever I learned did not give any connection to the Lord. To me the gospels were just different biographies of Jesus, so nothing of which I was taught really stuck in my heart.

After World War II ended, I needed a new orientation. The so-called thousand years kingdom had vanished after twelve years, but the church was still there. I was interested in finding out more about the church, but there were no believers around to help me. Yes, we had some lessons, but they were taught by the same pastor who had confirmed me. Additionally, as I was also an unbeliever, I was not able to formulate my questions well enough to tell him what I was looking for. I began to think maybe I should study theology to satisfy my thirst for knowledge.

After I had made my matura, my father said he had heard of a retreat for those who have just made the matura. He told me that if I wanted to study theology, most likely I should go to it. I did not want to go there at all, but I was too much of a coward to tell that to my father! At that time in Germany, religion was the most private thing in a person's life. No one would dare to speak about sex, but it was even more secret what you were thinking about religion. It just was not mentioned, even in the family. Not daring to tell my father I did not want to go, I went to the retreat. There the Lord provided something special. For those of us who had just matriculated and were going to become students, the organizers had provided a pastor-doctor. The intent was to impress us with his knowledge and status. Through the providence of God this man got the flu and was not able to come. Having to make a last-minute appointment, the organizers finally found a pastor who could afford to be taken from his other duties for ten days. In fact, this young man was the only one available. But he had something special: He really believed in Christ. Now, I would say he was a born-again Christian; at that time, I had never heard about being born again. One day this pastor dared to tell us that we were sinners and needed a Savior-Jesus Christ. Of the twenty or so students, about six or seven of us agreed with him and accepted Christ. A day full of joy followed our decision, and then everyone had to return home.

My life changed after that. I started to read the Bible every day and my attitude towards my mother improved. Before, when she asked me to do something, I would say, "Oh, do I have to?" or "Yes, but not now. I'll do it later." But now my behavior changed. It was not that I was trying to change; it just happened.

After about half a year, I got a place to study at the university. At that time not everybody was allowed to study; those who had been in the war had first priority because they were already beyond the average age of taking the classes, while others had to wait. Now I had a chance and I grasped it.

Theological Training

So I came to Marburg. Marburg meant Rudolf Bultmann, the famous German critical theologian. Through his influence I became a dyed-in-the-wool historical-critical theologian. But, though Bultmann was at Marburg, it would not have made a real difference if I had gone to Berlin or Münster or Köln or Heidelberg or Tübingen, because there were historical-critical professors, many of them Bultmann's disciples, in the New Testament chairs in all the German universities then. Thus, the most well known names in historical critical theology became my teachers.

When I began my studies, I had to start with the ancient languages-Greek and Hebrew. As I had practiced Greek some before going to the university, I had only to finish one course. Then I thought I was fit to go into the lectures of Bultmann on 1 Corinthians. I started attending when he was at chapter 12, and I do not remember what he had said concerning chapters 12-14. But I still remember what he said when he came to chapter 15:1-5, where Paul said,

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some of them have fallen asleep.

When Professor Bultmann came to the next verse, he said, "Here Paul is not at the usual height of his theology because he is speaking of the resurrection of Christ as if it were a historical fact.' Thus I learned as a young student in my very first term that we were not allowed to think of the resurrection of Christ as a historical fact. This great professor had said it, so it had to be. After all, how could I, as a young student, know more than my professors!

I must note here that this is why it is so important to get biblical teaching. We are surrounded by unbiblical ideas, and if we are not solidly trained in the Bible, we will not even realize what is contrary to the Bible. This is especially important for those attending universities, where authority is an issue. Suppose you are a student, just beginning to learn something, and your professor, who has been working in his field for maybe thirty or forty years, is an accomplished, recognized authority in that field. Additionally, the very reason you are at the university is to learn something, not to shut your ears and eyes, but to learn. So when you are taught the wrong thing, it is dangerous. Many students, even those with believing parents, have drowned in atheistic teaching from university professors and have grown to despise the faith of their parents. If you are a student, ask the Lord for guidance and never feel too secure. It is the Lord who can keep you, not your own wisdom. Do not think, "Oh yes, I have got everything, I have been in Sunday School and church all my life; nothing can happen to me.' If you are in that state you will fall. The devil is not sleeping; he will try anything to destroy you. You must be aware and know that God's word is better than all the wisdom of the world. Psalm 19 tells us God's word is more precious than silver and gold. It is more precious than any worldly wisdom in any discipline.

But I learned in my first term that we were not allowed to take the resurrection of Christ as historical fact, hearing it from the great Bultmann himself. I do not think he thought about what Paul said in the same chapter, in verses 17 to 19: "And if Christ had not been raised your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in

Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.’ This is the situation of the historical-critical theologians and of any who adhere to higher criticism, as it is called in America. Because they have some belief in Christ, they are convinced that they are believers, but they are believing for this life only. Paul says those who do this are to be pitied more than all other men.

The Teachings of Historical-Criticism

Unbelief in the resurrection is not the only distinguishing mark of the historical-critical theologian. Another aspect is found in 2 Peter 3:3: “First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” I remember how Professor Bultmann said that, yes, now nearly two thousand years were over and Christ had not yet come back, so we must think of ways to interpret these portions so as not to take them literally. But even today we can put the Bible on the side of the newspaper and see things happening which in former times looked so unlikely. I used to scoff at the description in Mark 13 of worldwide fighting, kingdom against kingdom and nation against nation, but we see these things happening throughout the world today. As the Lord said, when these things happen, it is not yet the end, but it shows us that it is coming. Jesus said we should lift up our heads because our salvation is drawing near. But historical-critical theologians do not believe that Christ is coming again.

Additionally, we were taught that we must study as if there were no God. Although it can happen that when you study the Bible like that, you might experience something of him, in general, you have not the slightest chance of finding God this way. It is like working with a computer: what you see on the screen depends on the program you chosen. If you decide to study as if there were no God, you will not meet him. Instead, you may learn, as I did, that what we have between the two covers of the Bible is not necessarily the word of God, but when we read a portion of it or hear it in the sermon, it can become for us the word of God. Karl Barth spoke of this idea.

We were also taught that when we read something in the Bible, we must realize it could have never taken place. For example, in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy we read that God led the Israelites out of Egypt and took them to the Holy Land in a wonderful, out-of-the-ordinary, one-time event. But these teachers would say, “No, things were quite different. These people were nomadic shepherds who would always feed their flocks in the wilderness in the summer, and bring them into Canaan in the winter to feed from the already harvested fields.’ Where did they get this idea? It is the habit in Germany. But I would say that we should not take our wisdom about the ancient times from what is the practice today, for it may lead you on a wrong track. And if you would have asked these professors, “But here it is written that these people, with the grace of God, conquered the land. Then each tribe got their special portion, which they then had to take from the former inhabitants,’ the professors would say, “That is just the interpretation of the Israelites.’ As students, we were supposed to believe what these professors said, and, sadly, we did. So we could say, “As it is written, it can never have been.’

When I was student, I did not know why my professors always would say, “No, it cannot have been as it is written.’ Normally, one would think they would follow the worldview of the Bible, which discerns between the visible and the invisible world. But these theologians could not bring themselves to say, “Yes, there is the earth, which we see, and then there is with God with his angels.’ There is an invisible

world surrounding and going through the visible world, a higher dimension standing over and permeating the lower dimension. Acts 17:28 tells us, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” But these theologians cling to another worldview, named after Hecker’s monistic worldview, but which existed already earlier in the Enlightenment philosophies, that there is only the one visible, tangible world. If you hold to this monistic worldview, you cannot believe that God is a speaking and acting being. Then you get into difficulties with the Bible, because God is portrayed that way on every page.

So the purpose of these people is to demythologize the Bible. To do so, they must come up with ideas to explain away what is plainly stated in it, what God said and did. That, of course, is a difficult task. So such theologians have to work hard, giving much time and money to this task, all the while thinking that what they are doing is right. But they are on the wrong track. Not only do they not reach their goal, but they also lead many people astray with them. I have been such a theologian, but the Lord has forgiven me.

How did the historical-critical teachers handle the prophets? By taking over an idea of Spinoza, saying that not everything in the books of the prophets is from the prophets themselves. In fact, Spinoza said more extremely that the prophetic books are only quotations from the originals. For example, if they wanted to speak about the prophecy of Jeremiah, we would turn to chapter 47 and underline all the verses that seemed to be most genuinely spoken by this prophet. So we might underline verses 3,4, 11, and 12, but on verse 13 we might put an underline with an interruption. Then we would go on to underline verses 19 and 20. We had all our pens and did this at the beginning of each lecture. The rest of the chapter would be counted as not original, as something not from this prophet, but added later.

Not only would these teachers say that only part of a book was original, but they also said that the only genuine words were those expressing God’s wrath and judgment. All the good words about Israel—that God still loved her and had good in store for her, including restoration after exile—were not considered original. In fact, they would say that Israel made up these stories much later on to comfort herself in bad times. Thus, they would not believe that Israel has the right to be in the Holy Land. Not only does such thinking have consequences in politics, but it ignores all the thousands of promises that have been fulfilled in subsequent history.

Worst of all, these theologians have another god. Since they take for genuine only what speaks of God’s judgment and wrath, then the God of the Old Testament for them is only a God of judgment and wrath. They say Jesus came and brought another idea of God, the God of love. But their concept of the God of love is inaccurate. They do not recognize sin, or that all have sinned and thus are lost and will go to hell if they do not receive salvation. They say that God is so full of love that he just loves us and forgives our sins. But it is not the job of God to arbitrarily forgive our sins. As holy God, he must take sin very seriously and cannot forgive us just like that! He had to send his beloved Son to carry our sin to the cross and die for our salvation. That is the real love of God that these theologians miss.

How many people are baptized as infants, attend Sunday school, are confirmed and married in the church, and then attend throughout their adult life until the time comes to be buried by the pastor, yet never hear that they are sinners who need salvation, and that to be saved, they must personally receive Jesus Christ as their Savior! This is exactly what happens in churches whose pastors are taught this historical-critical theology. Those who have been the most faithful in church can be lost because they have never heard the true message of salvation. This is the absolute worst problem of higher criticism.

God Intervenes

As a theologian, I was steeped in historical-criticism. If the Lord had not taken me out of it, I would still be in it. But the Lord can do all things, and he is able even to save one out of this theology. How did he do it?

First, the Lord convinced me with several experiences. I came to the realization that all the hard historical-critical work I was doing as a professor was not truth. To find this out was a dreadful shock for me, because truth had been my guiding star from childhood days. At the same time, through other experiences, I realized that historical-critical work gives no help in preaching the gospel. I, as most historical-critical theologians do, thought I was serving the church and God, but finally realized that my theological work did not help at all.

The result was great frustration: What was I working for? Fortunately, this frustration was not the goal of our heavenly Father; it was just a means to stop me. Then the Lord helped me hear the real gospel, using, in my case, a dissertation.

When I was teaching in Marburg once a week, I was assigned to look at the new dissertations. If our body agreed with their statements, I would sign them; otherwise, I would write a different one. One day I came across a dissertation that mentioned something I had never heard of. Describing a church in Africa, the author spoke about modern-day prophecies and miracles. This was amazing to someone who did not even really believe in the prophecies of the Bible! I do not remember them all, but one example in particular gave so much honor and glory to God that I was deeply impressed with its veracity. But when I moved from Marburg to Braunschweig, I forgot about it totally.

About nine months later, God got my attention again. In a post-seminary meeting on the historical-critical method, I had written on the blackboard, “If you want to speak about something as a miracle, you must adhere to certain points,” and then I listed the points. After I had passed this on to my students, as I had done for years, I added one more thing, “Yes, Jesus was the type who did miracles. We can learn this out of the Talmud, the Jewish wisdom which names Jesus as a sorcerer. They would not have done it if he could not have done miracles. But that still does not give us a right to think that any the miracles written in the New Testament ever had happened. The historical-critics think it is possible that Jesus had healed the mother-of-law of Peter from the fever. How? They would say his impressive personality gave her the impetus to overcome the sickness. In that way, even they believe in miracles, but not in real miracles. They never think that Jesus ever has raised a dead person or given sight to the blind, and so on.”

That was what I wanted to pass on to my students-that we were not allowed to take for granted that the miracles in the New Testament actually happened. I don’t know how far I got, but when I opened my mouth to speak, I heard myself saying, “But so-and-so wrote about this in his doctor’s thesis,” and I proceeded to tell my students about the miracles recorded in the doctor’s thesis. In the providence of God, there were quite a few born-again students in this class. Normally there might be one, or at most, two. But this class had six or seven, so when I spoke about this miracle, they thought, ‘Oh maybe even a professor is able to repent,’ and started to pray for me. These students prayed, their families prayed, and

all their prayer circles prayed for me. It must have been really a big campaign. Later on, people would come up to me and say, “We remember praying for you.’

Then one of these born-again students dared to say that something similar had happened in the town. I was already a professor-doctor only interested in form critics, so I thought, “Let it write him down, and that will be more convincing to the student than what I have tried to pass on. I have already said that one cannot write something as a miracle if he does not go according these points.’ The student wrote down his account, and when he came next week, I read it to the students. I was so impressed that I brought it to the next meeting of the society for New Testament, where only high-browed scholars were allowed. Although I had no chance to share it, the fact that I even brought it with me demonstrates God was working in me.

I saw God moving again in my life later that year. This group of students had been unusually nice to me, so I wanted to be nice to them. One of my colleagues would go to the communist student group to show appreciation to his students, but I was not a communist. As the student who had given the testimony had mentioned a prayer group, I thought I could, just as a favor, go to his prayer group. I did go, but I was not right for it, because I had not yet been born again. Then another student invited me to a Christian meeting. I got the first invitation in May, but I did not go. I received another invitation in June, then, July, then, August and September, but I did not go to any of these meetings. If these students had not been so patient and had not continued to send me invitations, though it cost them time and money, I might not be standing here today. But they were patient and in October I finally went to their monthly meeting. I was deeply impressed with the atmosphere of joy and love, and, after the checking the message (as you do it when you are a theologian), I decided that, yes, it was sound in its treatment of justification in faith. So I decided to come again.

I also observed that when these students had a tangible need, they would pray for it. I knew about prayer and prayed every morning, but I was astonished that someone could pray for a real thing, and others would know if he received it or not. That was strange, yet impressive to me. I began to go to the meetings every month I was available, and after one year and one month, I gave my life to Christ. I heard a message and was so hungry for this life with Christ the speaker had spoken of. When he gave an altar call, I was about to jump up, but then he asked, “Is there anybody who wants to believe in Christ?’ I told myself, “Oh, that’s not for me because I already believe in Christ.’ That is the problem with theologians; they think they are believers. But then he repeated it, asking who was willing to surrender his life to Christ. Then I knew it was for me. I lifted my arm, the Lord saw my heart, and my life was changed.

New Life in Christ

One month later I went to a Christian conference for the first time in my life. Before, I would have said that more than one sermon a day and that more than once a week would be spiritual overfeeding. But now I went to this conference where a missionary from Nepal spoke about his language helper, Paul. The missionary said that although he was not a criminal, Paul had gone to prison, not only for becoming a Christian, but for leading others to Christ, which was a capital crime at the time. Then this missionary

recounted the bold defense Paul gave when he had to stand up before the judge.

My first reaction was that this fellow could never have said this. Through listening to the missionary speak earlier, I had an idea of what sort of person Paul was and thought it would have been impossible for such a man to speak in this way. But because I had given my life to Christ, I immediately had a second reaction, which was, “Didn’t Jesus say in Mark 13:11, ‘Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.’ This is a fulfillment of that prophecy.”

You must realize that for a Bultmannian, there are no fulfilled prophecies. If something comes to pass that is mentioned in biblical prophecy, a Bultmannian will say the prophecy was made up afterwards. So my reaction surprised me. At this point in time, I realized that if God was doing all these things today, it would be silly to say the miracles in the New Testament could not have happened. At that point, all the testimony I had heard over the years fell together into a picture of the true and living God.

The god of historical critical theology is like the statue of three monkeys: one is covering the eyes, the next covering the ears, and the third covering the mouth—seeing nothing, hearing nothing, speaking nothing—and as the hands are always occupied, doing nothing. But now I became aware of the living God! And in the same moment I became aware that I had been a blind teacher leading my blind students. I repented of my wrong teaching. I also realized that, despite all my years of study, I knew nothing of God. But through the grace of God, my reaction did not lead me to despair but to the conclusion that now I must get to work learning about this God.

The conference had a choir from a Bible school. Though I had been a theologian for several decades, I did not know what a Bible school was, or that they even existed. But upon hearing of such institutions, I thought it would be a good place for me to go to learn more about God. I found the small school, where the youngest student was a boy of 16, and the oldest a grandma of 70. I cannot forget sitting on a bench, listening to the teacher speak about Psalm 119. As I sat there, I asked, “Where does he get this knowledge? Though he is young, this man knows so much more than I do.” Then he came to the passage where it said, “You made me wiser as my teachers are,” and I thought, yes this must have happened to him. Later, when I had been coming for a while, the leader spoke of this young Bible teacher, saying, “Oh, he has not been here long, but he reads his Bible, eats his Bible, and lives his Bible so much that whenever he opens his mouth, the word of God comes out.”

It was in this Bible school that, for first time in my life, I learned the basics of Christian belief.

From Criticism to Christ

While I was at this conference, one of the leaders encouraged me to buy a book about the inspiration of the Scriptures. I had been a theologian for many years, but I had never thought about the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. All I knew was that in church history some theologians at the end of the sixteenth century thought the Bible had been dictated. As I read through this book, I was deeply ashamed to learn that every page of the Bible is the word of the living God. Though I was a theologian, I never realized it.

I decided to write lectures on the basis of the inspiration of the Holy Scripture. By that time I was holding my lectures and seminars at the university and, on the days in-between, I went to the Bible school and sat on the bench as a student. I also had, by that time, attended a one-month summer Bible school. But this was a not a big basis to lecture on the line of the inspiration of the Holy Scripture. I needed a lot of grace and even miracles at this juncture. But, strengthened through the word and through the prayers of my church, I began to write.

I noticed a struggle immediately in myself as I began to lecture on articles of the Christian faith. I had no problem saying I believed in Jesus, for I had all the material about the so-said historical Jesus at my doorstep. But when it came to the next word, ‘Christ,’ it was a whole day fight. But finally I got it: he is Christ. Then it was another half-day fight each to find out that he is the Son of God and the Son of man. For historical critical theologians these are mere titles. They will say, ‘Yes, Jesus himself never said that he was Jesus or Christ or the Son of God. He merely connected himself in some way with the Son of Man, but only for the future, not for the present.’ They say that the early church pinned all those titles on the historical figure of Jesus to show those they wanted to lead to Christianity the importance of Jesus.

But now I realized that these things were true. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Son of man, God incarnate in human flesh. I began to teach these truths to my students, who had to that point only been getting historical critical teaching from me. Then I realized Jesus was born of the virgin and began to teach that. You must realize this was a Bultmannian saying these things! I had been taught that the virgin birth was just a legend, designed to show the importance of Jesus. But I realized that if Jesus was not born of a virgin, he would just have been an offspring of the first Adam. Then it could never be true that he was without sin, and if he was not without sin, he could not have died for our sins. In fact, he would have had to die for his own sin, and we would be still in our sins. I did not think all this out at once, but I did begin to tell my students, ‘Yes, Jesus is born of the virgin.’ Then my best student asked me, ‘Does this mean that you also believe that Jesus is coming again?’ At that time, I could only say I did not yet believe it, but within two months, I could say that also was true, and after several years, the Lord gave me the task of criticizing the critical theology.

For many years I had taught my students the historical-critical theory that there is a synoptic problem, whose only solution is the two-source theory. I taught that Matthew and Luke copied Mark, and then added their own information from another source. Now I found this had no basis. It is nothing but a hypothesis, though it is considered by many to be a fact. I began to examine these things, studying the arguments one by one. I concluded that there is not the slightest proof of it, and the arguments for it are based on secular reasoning.

Then I was led to the question of whether or not there non-genuine letters in the New Testament. The historical-critical theologians say that of the thirteen letters attributed to Paul, only seven are really written by him, although it is plainly written in the Bible that Paul wrote them all. In fact, these theologians say that the writers were lying when they said the letters were from Paul. Thus, they call these Scriptures pseudepigraphs, falsely inscribed writings. I began to investigate and after much time found that none of the arguments for doubting Paul’s authorship was valid.

So I found out you can trust your Bible. You cannot trust historical critical theology or higher criticism. It is not trustworthy. I praise God for bringing me out of it, and pray that he will use me to bring others from criticism to Christ.