

ProMundis Texte • 03/2019

## **Wilhelm Lütgert and his Studies of the Apostles' Opponents: Aspiring to a better Understanding of the New Testament Letters**

Thomas Schirmmacher

*An abridged German version was published in  
Jahrbuch für evangelikale Theologie  
(The Yearbook for Evangelical Theology)  
19 (2005): 139–166.*

*An abridged and edited English version was published in  
Evangelical Review of Theology 43 (2019) 1: 40–52.*

“The Freedom which Jesus gives is not a heathen lawlessness.”  
(Wilhelm Lütgert in his 1919 Commentary on Galatians)

### **Summary**

There is no good reason why the life's work of the Greifswald Professor for New Testament and Systematic Theology, Wilhelm Lütgert (1867–1938), has been forgotten. His central topics were 1. the critique of idealism, 2. the recovery of the doctrine of creation for epistemology and the recovery of 'nature' for the doctrine of God, and 3. the recovery of the significance of love in ethics. In the area of exegetics, his investigations of numerous New Testament books were ground-breaking. It was through this effort that Lütgert successfully broke with Christian Baur's reigning tradition that James and Peter represent a legalistic and Paul an antinomian Christianity. Above all, and depending on the letter one examines, Lütgert viewed Paul as being caught between two fronts that had formed, one front of Jewish-Christian legalists and the other front of Gentile, enthusiastic antinomians. Against the legalists, Paul emphasized freedom from the law and life in the Spirit, and against the antinomians Paul emphasized that God's Spirit never endorses sin and that the Old Testament continues to be God's word.

## Part 1: Wilhelm Lütgert – His Life, Work, and Theology

### *Wilhelm Lütgert (1867–1938)*

After completing his college preparatory studies in 1886, Wilhelm Lütgert<sup>1</sup> (born April 9, 1867 in Heiligengrabe in Ostprieznitz, died February 2, 1938 in Berlin) studied theology in Greifswald under representatives of the so-called “Greifswald School,”<sup>2</sup> namely Hermann Cremer (1834–1903), professor of systematic theology, and Lütgert’s later longstanding friend and co-worker, Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) from Switzerland. After his move to Berlin, and in addition to attending lectures by Adolf von Harnack, he attended history lectures given by Heinrich von Treitschke. After his theological exams, Cremer invited him to pursue a doctorate. In 1892 he completed his *lizentiat*ur in systematic theology<sup>3</sup> with the topic “The Method of Dogmatic Proof in its Development under Schleiermacher’s Influence,” and then in 1899 he received his postdoctoral qualification with the topic “The Kingdom of God according to the Synoptic Gospels.” In 1895 he was given a paid, associate New Testament professorship.

In 1898 Lütgert married Martha Sellschopp, with whom he raised seven children as a caring and warm father. In 1901, as was usual at the time, he was additionally presented with a doctorate for his 1899 research “The Johannine Christology.” Then, in 1902 he was given a full professorship in New Testament, the result being that he did not go to Erlangen as a systematic theologian. It was not until about a decade later, in 1913, that he received the eagerly awaited Professorship for Systematic Theology as the successor to Martin Kähler and became ‘Ephorus’ (head) of the Seminary at Halle. In 1929 he moved to Berlin as a systematic theologian and director of the theological seminary.

In an opinion dating from 1934 Lütgert spoke out against the use of Aryan paragraphs that related to the church, for which reason the district leadership (*Gauleitung*) of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party) complained to the government. In 1935 he was removed from office and was prohibited from lecturing.<sup>4</sup> In 1936 two lectures were forbidden before he could hold them,<sup>5</sup> whereupon he had them printed. He participated in the illegal examinations held by the confessing church,<sup>6</sup> although he was very skeptical about Karl Barth’s influence. The significantly more complicated circumstances, when

<sup>1</sup> On Lütgert comp. Paul Althaus, Gerhard Kittel, Hermann Strathmann, Adolf Schlatter and Wilhelm Lütgert in commemoration, BFChTh 40, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1938, 41–55; including Hermann Strathmann: “Wilhelm Lütgert als Theologe,” 41–44; Adolf Schlatter: “Adresse zu Wilhelm Lütgerts 70. Geburtstag“ (April 9, 1937), 44–47 and “Lütgerts autobiografische Notizen“: Wilhelm Lütgert, “Antwort,” 48–55, also separately printed as Wilhelm Lütgert, “Antwort auf die mir am 7. Mai überreichte Adresse,” Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1935; Horst Stephan, Martin Schmidt: *Geschichte der deutschen evangelischen Theologie seit dem deutschen Idealismus*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1973<sup>3</sup>, 376–377, 431, 444 and often (see Register); Werner Neuer: “Lütgert, Wilhelm” (1867–1938), ELThG 2, 1278–1279; Werner Neuer: “Einführung,” (without page numbers) in: “Wilhelm Lütgert: Schöpfung und Offenbarung,” Reprint, Gießen/Basel 1984, 1–9 expanded as “Wilhelm Lütgert: Eine kleine Einführung in Leben und Werk eines vergessenen Theologen,” JETH 1, 1987, 108–124; Gerhard Bially: “Wilhelm Lütgerts These vom ‚Zweifrontenkrieg‘ des Paulus gegen Nomisten und Enthusiasten.” Wuppertal: Magister der Theologie, 2000 (unpublished), 7–22; Walter Sparr, “Wilhelm Lütgert,” TRE XXI, 497–500, 1991 (with a list of the major works); Wilhelm Lütgert, <http://www.catalogus-professorum-halensis.de/luetgertwilhelm.html>; Jochen Eber: “Lütgert, Wilhelm,” BBKL XVI, 2000: 870–874 (additional literature about Lütgert there), with the longest bibliography up to now. To add there would be, for example, “Wilhelm Lütgert: Union und Bekenntnis,” 32–43 in: Adolf Schlatter, Wilhelm Lütgert, Hermann Strathmann: „Müssen wir heute lutherisch oder reformiert sein? Beiträge zur Frage einer neuen kirchlichen Einheit,” Essen: Freizeiten-Verlag 1936. A complete bibliography is in progress within the framework of a dissertation in Basel.

<sup>2</sup> He belonged to this ‘school’ later, if one wants to call this group of likeminded, but very different professors a ‘school’ at all. This is due to the fact that they all stood for themselves and what it involved was an intensive cooperative effort.

<sup>3</sup> What used to be *lic. theol.* corresponds to the present day D. Th. (Doctor of Theology).

<sup>4</sup> This is often stated (e.g., Werner Neuer: Lütgert, Wilhelm, JETH, pp. 199–200 and Jochen Eber: Lütgert, Wilhelm). However, only Bially provides a source for it: “Lütgerts These,” 16–17.

<sup>5</sup> This is mentioned in all biographical articles, but I could not detect any sources.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

looked at in detail, were researched for the first time by Peter Müller on the basis of available files and will soon be published. In 1938 Lütgert died at the age of 70 after a short, severe illness.

## **A Plea for coming to Terms with Lütgert**

With this article I would particularly like to commend the study of exegetical works by Wilhelm Lütgert to evangelical theologians.

For my part, I have much for which I must thank Lütgert. I have made use of Lütgert's point of view on the letters to the Corinthians<sup>7</sup> in various essays and research on the same, and his 'ethics of love' and view of 'creation and revelation' have often been taken up in my *Ethics*.<sup>8</sup> Lütgert's view on Romans provided the basis for my work on the book of Romans.<sup>9</sup> My book *Law and Spirit* is an adapted and modern edition of Lütgert's research on the letter to the Galatians and is for that reason dedicated to him.<sup>10</sup>

Our task here cannot be to discuss the exegesis of every individual verse or book discussed by Wilhelm Lütgert. The current state of scholarship on introductory questions, the history of interpretation of the New Testament, and early church books, as discussed by Lütgert, is also not something that we can trace or about which we seek to report herein. Indeed, given the limited space, our task cannot be to update Lütgert's opinions or offer alternatives. This is due to the fact that such an undertaking would mean unrolling about one-half of the New Testament. Besides that, I am a systematic theologian, not an exegete, even if I am convinced that no systematic theology can be developed – much less evangelical systematic theology – without the continual correction offered by exegesis. For that reason, every systematic theologian should be at home in the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>11</sup>

## **Wilhelm Lütgert's Major Themes**

Much of Lütgert's stimulus and many of his areas of research still await analysis, especially by evangelical theologians. Lütgert's central themes were 1. the critique of idealism – this complex of topics and his monumental work, *The Religion of Idealism and its End*,<sup>12</sup> are worthy of serious research, 2. the recovery of the doctrine of creation for epistemology and the recovery of 'nature' for the doctrine of God, and 3. the recovery of the significance of love in ethics. Only the third area has so far been partly reviewed by several scholars.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Thomas Schirrmacher: *Paulus im Kampf gegen den Schleier: Eine alternative Auslegung von 1. Korinther 11,2–16*, VKW: Bonn 1993<sup>1</sup>, 1994<sup>2</sup>, 1995<sup>3</sup>, 1997<sup>4</sup>; VTR: Nürnberg 2002<sup>5</sup>; English: *Paul in Conflict with the Veil!?* Nürnberg: VTR Nürnberg, 2002; from the same author. "Der Christ und die dämonischen Mächte," 100–122 in: Walter Nitsche, Benedikt Peters: *Dämonische Verstrickungen – Biblische Befreiung*, Dillenburg: CVD 1997<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Schirrmacher: *Ethik*, 7 vols., VTR: Nürnberg & RVB: Hamburg 2002<sup>3</sup>; 2009<sup>4</sup>; e.g., on natural law vol. 1: 148, on love 1:200–202 and on conscience 1: 80–81; comp. also from the same author: "Love is the Fulfillment of Law – Essays in Ethics," Hamburg 2001 and "Medical Killing – An Evangelical Perspective," *Christian Bioethics* 9, 2003: 227–244.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Schirrmacher: *Der Römerbrief*, 2 Bde, Hänssler: Neuhausen 1994<sup>1</sup>; VTR: Nürnberg & RVB: Hamburg 2001<sup>2</sup>, in part. vol. 1. 32ff+281–280+291–294 and vol. 2. 14–53+242–262.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Schirrmacher: *Gesetz und Geist: Eine alternative Sicht des Galaterbriefes*, RVB: Hamburg 1999; English: *Law or Spirit? An Alternative View of Galatians*, RVB: Hamburg 2001; Kiswahili: *Sheria au Roho? Mtazamo Mbadala kwa Wagalatia*, Trans-Africa Swahili Christian Ministries: Mwanza, Tanzania, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Comp. my article: "Romans as a Charter of World Mission: A Lesson in the Relation of Systematic Theology and Missiology." *Reflection: An International Reformed Review of Missiology* 4, 1993/94, 1/2 (Sept–Nov): 34–39 = *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10, 1993, 4 (Oct): 159–162; Dutch. Romeinen: het handvest voor werelzending, *ibid.*, 40–43.

<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die Religion des Idealismus und ihr Ende*. 4+1 vols., Gütersloh: Bertelsmann 1923–1925+1930 (reprint: Hildesheim: Olms 1967).

“Creation and Revelation,” the major work relating to the second central theme, could become the point of departure for a fundamentally new evangelical epistemology. For Werner Neuer<sup>13</sup> the work is primarily a refutation of the thesis put forth by Kant, that God is inscrutable.<sup>14</sup> After all, recognition of God occurs only on the basis of revelation and not on the basis of reason alone.<sup>15</sup> Actually the work is an “evaluation of the epistemological relevant passages of the New Testament (in particular in the Gospel of John)” and with that a later manifestation of his Johannine Christology.<sup>16</sup>

In addition I would like to point out that within and around these complex topics there are a number of individual questions which would be worthy of thoroughgoing examination. I would like to limit myself to one example for each area.

### **Lütgert’s Critique of Pietism**

Within his epistemology one finds Lütgert’s sympathetic but profound critique of pietism. In his difficult to read but valuable work, *Creation and Revelation*, Wilhelm Lütgert<sup>17</sup> criticized modern pietism<sup>18</sup> for grabbing people’s conscience instead of starting with creation and objective revelation.<sup>19</sup> As a created being, mankind also sins objectively when his conscience does not communicate this to him. Only in the case of a conscience formed by Christianity can pietistic evangelization be successful. For that reason the conscience cannot be made into its own lawgiving authority.<sup>20</sup> The Gospels are not based on the conscience but rather on the law.<sup>21</sup> The second chapter of Romans serves to convict the Jews, not to justify the Gentiles and their conscience.<sup>22</sup> The mark of a Christian is precisely that, not a bad conscience, rather a good conscience.<sup>23</sup>

### **On Missiology**

Now on to an example for consideration in an area not counted among Lütgert’s research focuses. Lütgert should be – and I allow myself the comment as someone who in addition to systematic theology also teaches missiology – given consideration in the area of missiology. He has a highly interesting essay ent-

---

<sup>13</sup> Werner Neuer: “Einführung,” (without pp.) in: *Wilhelm Lütgert: Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, reprint, Gießen/Basel 1984, 9–14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Schöpfung und Offenbarung: Eine Theologie des ersten Artikels*, BFChTh 2, 34, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1934, reprint: TVG 232, Gießen: Brunnen 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Comp. on the understanding of conscience in Pietism at Lütgert’s time: Chr. Ernst Luthardt: *Geschichte der christlichen Ethik*, vol. 1: *Bis zur Reformation*, Dörffling & Franke: Leipzig 1888, 310–313 and often.

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Schöpfung und Offenbarung*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

itled “Mission as Proof of the Divinity of Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> Jesus’ divinity cannot be proven by drawing clever conclusions.<sup>25</sup> Jesus does not accept the witness of people, because only God can prove Jesus’ divinity.<sup>26</sup>

“As long as Jesus’ Lordship over the world is not apparent, his divinity is open to doubt and our acknowledgement of his divinity remains a belief that anticipates the future.”<sup>27</sup>

However, at this point the worldwide proclamation of the gospel itself becomes a proof of the Lordship of Jesus. “The decisive proof for the divinity of Jesus is, for this reason, mission.”<sup>28</sup> For that reason there is an undeniable connection between Christian confession and mission. “To whomever Jesus’ divinity is questionable, in the same way missions will also be questionable, or he will replace them with different purposes.”<sup>29</sup> This is due to the fact that “with a confession of the divinity of Jesus not only is the definition of success declared, but the motive for missions is declared as well.”<sup>30</sup>

What can be derived from this, as far as Lütgert is concerned, is that every indication of force has to be guarded against in missions.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, missions has nothing to do with imposing one culture on another, no matter how Christian that culture might be. God desires consent that comes from within, not as a coerced confession.

“The divinity of Jesus is also made apparent in that the church does not conduct missions with the sword, but rather with words. Every rape in mission is a denial of the divinity of Jesus.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Love as the Basis of Ethics**

It has often been pointed out that Lütgert’s emphasis on love as the point of departure for all of ethics in the Protestant realm can be found nowhere else in such foundational form and with such consistency. Werner Neuer has repeatedly expressed his high esteem for Lütgert’s point of view and the ethics of love,<sup>33</sup> from the first study on love in the New Testament instigated by Adolf Schlatter<sup>34</sup> up to the posthumously published *Ethics*. Lütgert

“was able to overcome, on the one hand, the contrast of brotherly love and self love, selfless and craving love, *agape* and *eros*, which had defined Protestantism beginning with Luther and lasting into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, Lütgert was able to overcome the reigning identification of

---

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: “Die Mission als Beweis der Gottheit Jesu,” 13–21 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Gottes Sohn und Gottes Geist: Vorträge zur Christologie und zur Lehre vom Geiste Gottes*, Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchh. 1905.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 17+19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> The clearest in: Werner Neuer: Lütgert, Wilhelm (1867–1938), ELThG 2, 1278–1279 and Werner Neuer: „Einführung, V–VIII“ in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die Liebe im Neuen Testament*, TVG, Brunnen: Gießen 1986<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Werner Neuer: “Einführung, 7–18” in: Adolf Schlatter. *der Dienst des Christen: Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Liebe*. Gießen: Brunnen 1991; 2002, 9; comp. the entire work as Schlatter’s contribution to the ethics of love.

God's love with brotherly love (already seen in Luther) and to ensure the independence of, necessity of, and right to love directed towards God."<sup>35</sup>

Lütgert conceived and developed his almost completed work on ethics, eventually published by his wife under the title *Ethics of Love*,<sup>36</sup> under the biblical twofold law of love. This work is only partially laid out in an exegetical manner, as in one of his earlier publications he had already laid the exegetical foundations.<sup>37</sup> Out of the love of God the commandment of love arises. Lütgert writes:

“With the commandment of love it is said that love is a duty. It is required and is obedience. In contrast it is demurred – this objection was above all adopted by Kant – that ‘external acts can be commanded, while love cannot.’”<sup>38</sup>

In the end, love is a free decision of the will and a deep, internal, almost automatic drive. Lütgert does not contradict that, but sees love for that reason as something that we cannot do on our own.

“For that reason love can only be commanded by one who can arouse love. It is first of all something that is given before it is something commanded. And it is a gift before it is a duty. This is because it originates only out of love and is always required love. For that reason it can only be a gift of the Creator, an echo of his love, which as the love of the Creator himself is itself creative. With regard to love Augustine's rule applies:<sup>39</sup> give what you command, and command what you wish.”<sup>40</sup>

Also in the *Ethics of Love* Lütgert's basic thesis has an effect, since love and “only love is just.”<sup>41</sup> In this way he writes about “justice:”

“It is overcome by freedom from the law, which does not rest upon a denial but rather on an acknowledgement of the law. The Gospel stands above the law: both conduct themselves towards each other like love and justice.”<sup>42</sup>

For this reason he also begins the first sentence of “The Love of the New Testament” with the claim that Jesus did not bring a new ethic; rather, his ethic was drawn from the law.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Lütgert's Attitude towards the Historical-Critical Method***

Nowhere did Lütgert deny the historical-critical method nor endorse an interpretation of Holy Scripture that began with its infallibility, such as, for instance, was advocated by his contemporary Benjamin

<sup>35</sup> Werner Neuer: *Lütgert*, 1278–1279.

<sup>36</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Ethik der Liebe*, BFChTh series 2, vol. 29, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1938.

<sup>37</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die Liebe im Neuen Testament*. Leipzig: Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchh. 1905<sup>1</sup>; reprint: TVG, Brunnen: Gießen 1986<sup>2</sup>; summarized in Wilhelm Lütgert: *Schöpfung und Offenbarung*, 375–398 and in Wilhelm Lütgert: *Liebe*, RGG<sup>2</sup> II, 1638–1641. What one finds at the same time from the Protestant domain and at the same level is in my opinion only Benjamin B. Warfield: “The Terminology of Love in the New Testament,” in: *The Princeton Theological Review* 16, 1918, 1–45+153–203, printed in Benjamin B. Warfield: *Biblical Doctrines*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh 1988 (1929 reprint), 511–597; since then only Leon Morris can be named: *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible*, Grand Rapids (MI): Grand Rapids (MI) 1981.

<sup>38</sup> Lütgert: *Ethik*, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Augustine directs the following appeal to God.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>43</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die Liebe*, 1.

Warfield. His position is, however, *de facto* free from all historical suspicion regarding the canonical text, and in introductory questions (about authorship and origin) Lütgert always concurred with the tradition.

Typical, for instance, is what he said at the beginning of his examination of the pastoral letters. He thought that, given the contemporary state of scholarship, the Pauline origin of the letters could not be presupposed. However, he added: “I am personally convinced that Paul is the author of the letters. . . .”<sup>44</sup> Apart from that, his study could possibly support this position. And with that said, the topic is settled for him. This is similar to Lütgert’s study of the Johannine gospel and to the Johannine letters, of which he considers John to be the author without categorically representing the position that it could not be otherwise.

In his essay “The Reliability of the Image of Christ in the Gospels,”<sup>45</sup> Lütgert, who famously composed exhaustive works on the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John, assumes the following: “The entire image of Christ is the same throughout all the Gospels.”<sup>46</sup> Historically, he considers this image to be completely reliable. Often doubted, but for Lütgert not a matter of doubt historically or with respect to his faith, is the report of Jesus’ confession to be the Messiah.<sup>47</sup> This picture emerges from the study entitled “The Worship of Jesus.”<sup>48</sup>

I believe the fact that Lütgert held the ascription of authorship to be as the New Testament presented it and as the early church also believed it to be, that is, true and reliable, was a great hindrance to his acceptance in German historical-critical research.<sup>49</sup> For that very reason evangelical theologians are, in my opinion, called upon to maintain Lütgert’s legacy and advance it.

## **The Theology of Biblicism**

In 1936 Lütgert advocated not resolving confessional differences via church policy or via liberal or pietistic confessional disregard, but rather via “The Theology of Biblicism.”<sup>50</sup>

“The fact of this biblical theology, which finds the motivation for further learning from the Bible itself, which seeks a deepening understanding of the Gospel, is the ecclesiastical root of union.”<sup>51</sup>

He points out that the Reformed theology of Luther, Calvin, and others does not start with dogma or ecclesiastical confession.<sup>52</sup> “Calvin and his students were Biblicists.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Lütgert: *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: “Die Glaubwürdigkeit des Christusbildes der Evangelien,” 22ff in: by the same author: *Gottes Sohn und Gottes Geist: Vorträge zur Christologie und zur Lehre vom Geiste Gottes*, Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchh. 1905.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. similarly 23: “We have a single a single image of Christ“ (emphasis not included).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die Anbetung Jesu: BFChTh 8, H. 4*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1904, 49–66.

<sup>49</sup> Werner Georg Kümmel. *Das Neue Testament: Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme*. Orbis Academicus Verlag Karl Alber: Freiburg, München 1970<sup>2</sup> does not mention Lütgert in his history of New Testament research. On p. 550, in note 281 there is, however, a charge against Lütgert that he did not mention someone in one of his texts!

<sup>50</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: “Union und Bekenntnis,” 32–43 in: Adolf Schlatter, Wilhelm Lütgert, Hermann Strathmann: *Müssen wir heute lutherisch oder reformiert sein? Beiträge zur Frage einer neuen kirchlichen Einheit*, Essen: Freizeiten-Verlag 1936.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Lütgert was “from the standpoint of his educational background free and open to theological cooperation that went beyond school and confessional lines.”<sup>54</sup> In the “Textbook on German Systematic Theology” Lütgert is included along with Beck, Kähler, Schlatter, Heim, and Otto Piper and classified with an excerpt from “Creation and Revelation”<sup>55</sup> under § 15 entitled “Recent and older forms of Biblical Realism.”

### *At the Intersection between Exegesis and Dogmatics*

“In Lütgert’s work there is an unusual breadth of exegetical, historical, and systematic studies.”<sup>56</sup> “His theological thought was marked by diversity. . . .”<sup>57</sup> This also applies specifically to his to overarching association with specialized areas of theology.

Lütgert did not so much produce monumental individual exegetical commentaries on New Testament books as much as he generated comprehensive exegetical interpretations of New Testament books and comprehensive presentations of central concepts and teaching. He worked at the intersection of exegesis and doctrinal studies,<sup>58</sup> whereby his goal was and remained systematic theology. For him, ethics and doctrinal studies were most closely entwined, even if they were independent tasks. He had taken this on from Schlatter,<sup>59</sup> from whom he also took over a systematically oriented exegesis. Regarding Schlatter’s influence, he wrote the following: “The book about faith in the New Testament was the model of a new exegesis.”<sup>60</sup>

In his research and teaching, Lütgert combined what was exegetical with systematic and historical work. The point of departure of his theology is not a feeling of guilt, or man’s bad conscience, as it was with his teacher Cremer. Without wanting to deny the central reformational position of the second article of faith, salvation for Lütgert is based in creation. Its basis is the doctrine of God, and its pinnacle is the theology of love.”<sup>61</sup>

Most of Lütgert’s books set standards for exegetical works which lead at least to biblical-theological conclusions but frequently also have dogmatic significance. His postdoctoral thesis “The Kingdom of God according to the Synoptic Gospels”<sup>62</sup> make this just as clear as, for instance, his investigation “Love in the New Testament”<sup>63</sup> or his “Johannine Christology.”<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Sparn: Lütgert, 498.

<sup>55</sup> Richard H. Grützmacher, Gerhard G. Muras (eds.): *Textbuch zur deutschen Systematischen Theologie und ihrer Geschichte vom 16. bis 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. I: 1530–1934, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1955<sup>4</sup>, 189–191.

<sup>56</sup> Werner Neuer: Lütgert, 1278.

<sup>57</sup> Stephan, Schmidt: *Geschichte*, 376–377.

<sup>58</sup> Also Werner Neuer: *Wilhelm Lütgert: Eine kleine Einführung*, 111–114, et. al.

<sup>59</sup> Comp. Werner Neuer: *Der Zusammenhang von Dogmatik und Ethik bei Adolf Schlatter*, TVG, Gießen: Brunnen 1986. In part. 23.

<sup>60</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert, “Antwort,” 48–55 in: Paul Althaus et. al., Schlatter, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Eber: *Lütgert*.

<sup>62</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: “Das Reich Gottes nach den synoptischen Evangelien: Eine Untersuchung zur neutestamentlichen Theologie,” post-doctoral dissertation (Greifswald), Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1895; comp. above all the summary definition of the Kingdom of God, 38.

<sup>63</sup> Lütgert: *Die Liebe*.

<sup>64</sup> *Die johanneische Christologie, BFChTh 3, H. 1*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1899<sup>1</sup>, 1916<sup>2</sup>.

A typical example of this is his book about the letters to the Corinthians. The first chapter, “Christian Freedom according to Paul”<sup>65</sup> is systematically oriented, while the second and third chapters treat the letters to the Corinthians exegetically. The fourth chapter, “The Validity of the Law according to Paul,”<sup>66</sup> is again systematically oriented.

Gerhard Bially believes that for Lütgert “what is at stake is not so much an exact historical reconstruction, but rather a theological penetration into the biblical witness.”<sup>67</sup> But this judgment is surely not justified. With all caution regarding interest-led exegesis: For Lütgert, what is first in importance when it comes to every early Christian piece of writing is exegetical and historical correctness, and in discussion with all other researchers to understand which situation underlies it. For instance, in his various writings he records opponents’ differences very precisely, as we will see.

Lütgert repeatedly emphasized at the outset of his investigations that he did not want to prove a predefined proposition, but rather first of all he sought to trace the historical picture for himself. For instance, at the beginning of his investigation of the letter to the Philippians, he writes: “This perception of the letters to the Corinthians should not be presupposed but rather newly examined.”<sup>68</sup> “The exegesis of the letter to the Philippians should be newly begun without a particular historical view from the apostolic era ruling exegetes prejudicially.”<sup>69</sup>

To combine exegesis and dogmatics into a new conceptualizing of New Testament history and current dogmatics was something that Lütgert had in common<sup>70</sup> with his former teacher and later friend Adolf Schlatter.<sup>71</sup> Both thought from the standpoint of a theology of love,<sup>72</sup> both were active for the cause of the confessing church, although they viewed Barth’s influence and the rejection of a creation theology as a danger.<sup>73</sup> On the one hand, Schlatter represented personally and in terms of content the most defining influence at the beginning of Lütgert’s theological career, as this was expressed in Lütgert’s article upon Schlatter’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>74</sup> Lütgert writes, for example: “The book about faith in the New Testament was for me the paradigm of a new exegesis.”<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, Lütgert’s hypothesis regarding Paul’s dual

---

<sup>65</sup> Lütgert: “Freiheitspredigt,” 10–40.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 136–157.

<sup>67</sup> Bially. “Lütgerts These,” 18.

<sup>68</sup> Lütgert, *Die Vollkommenen im Philipperbrief*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>70</sup> Comp. Werner Neuer: *Zusammenhang*, in part. 496. Comp. also the many references to Schlatter’s letters to Lütgert in Werner Neuer: *Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche*. Stuttgart: Calwer 1996 (see index).

<sup>71</sup> Werner Neuer: Schlatter, 453 refers to Lütgert as Schlatters best friend.

<sup>72</sup> See in part. *ibid.*, 104 and Werner Neuer. “Einführung,” 7–18 in: Adolf Schlatter. *der Dienst des Christen: Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Liebe*. Gießen: Brunnen 1991; 2002, 9.

<sup>73</sup> See *ibid.*, 765. This also applies to the other member of the Schlatter school among systematians, Paul Althaus.

<sup>74</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Adolf Schlatter als Theologe innerhalb des geistigen Lebens seiner Zeit: Eine Festgabe der Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie ihrem Begründer zum 80. Geburtstag dargebracht*, *BFChTh* 37,1, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1932, 1–52.

<sup>75</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert, “Antwort,” 48–55 in: Paul Althaus et. al., *Schlatter*, 51.

opponents deeply impressed Schlatter<sup>76</sup>; otherwise, Schlatter learned much from Lütgert, as is seen in Schlatter's article celebrating Lütgert's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>77</sup>

### ***Wilhelm Lütgert, the Reformers, and the 'Enthusiasts'***

As a member of the Pentecostal movement, Gerhard Bially assumes that Lütgert would read the Lutheran view of rejecting 'enthusiasts' into New Testament texts. He assumes this given the fact of the Lutheran renaissance and the resurgent interest in 'enthusiasts' from the time of the Reformation.<sup>78</sup> He asks whether there is not "a favored polemic among Lutheran theologians read into New Testament texts."<sup>79</sup>

As justified as the question is and as much as the concept of 'enthusiasts' arguably arises from the language of Reformation research,<sup>80</sup> and even if for a long time it has also been at home in comparative religion, the evidence is missing that Lütgert himself was defined by this type of Luther research. Lütgert was anything but a confessional Lutheran. And most of his hypotheses are, similar to his teacher and friend Adolf Schlatter, as well as to the third member of the so-called Greifswalder School,<sup>81</sup> Martin Kähler, actually inimical towards constrictions of Lutheran theology. With his view of the letter to the Galatians, Lütgert brought the same charge against Luther, of being too one-sided in reading the traditions of men into the Catholic Church's incorrect handling of the law of God at the time of Paul.<sup>82</sup>

Absolutely non-Lutheran and rather Reformed – even if also completely distinct – is Lütgert's view of law and gospel. His lecture "The Sermon on the Mount as the Constitution of the Church"<sup>83</sup> deviates from the Lutheran view, since the fulfillment of the Sermon on the Mount is possible, for "without fulfillment of the law no fellowship is possible."<sup>84</sup> Lütgert also rejects, for instance, the Reformed differentiation between the moral, ceremonial, and civil law and establishes a completely different view of freedom from the law while at the same time maintaining its moral order.<sup>85</sup>

Cremer's influence and the influence of Lutheran theology are found in Lütgert's teaching on justification.<sup>86</sup> "Justification is not only a thought but rather an act of God."<sup>87</sup> From there he also turns against Pie-

<sup>76</sup> Comp. e.g., Adolf Schlatter: *die Theologie der Apostel*. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag 1997<sup>3</sup> (1922<sup>2</sup> reprint), 403–432, in part. on Gnostic Christianity, 407–409, as well as 427–432 on the pastoral letters. Comp. also the presentation of Schlatter's view of the Corinthians below.

<sup>77</sup> Adolf Schlatter: "Adresse zu Wilhelm Lütgerts 70. Geburtstag" (9. April 1937), 44–47 in: Paul Althaus, Gerhard Kittel, Hermann Strathmann, Adolf Schlatter und Wilhelm Lütgert in commemoration, BFChTh 40, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1938.

<sup>78</sup> Gerhard Bially: "Wilhelm Lütgerts These vom ‚Zweifrontenkrieg‘ des Paulus gegen Nomisten und Enthusiasten." Wuppertal: Magister der Theologie, 2000 (unpublished), 22–27, 110, 112, 113, 41 Note. 110 and often. I am thankful for the availability of a copy of this work, which contains many historical details not researched before now.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>80</sup> So also Will Deming: *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*. Society for New Testament Studies: Monograph Series 83, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, 21.

<sup>81</sup> See, however, the qualification above.

<sup>82</sup> Most clearly in: Lütgert: *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe*, 18.

<sup>83</sup> "Die Bergpredigt als Grundgesetz der Kirche," 63–79 in: *Wilhelm Lütgert: Der Kampf der deutschen Christenheit mit den Schwarmgeistern*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1936.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>85</sup> E. g., Wilhelm Lütgert: "Freiheitspredigt," 19–20+13.

<sup>86</sup> Presented in brief in: "Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung durch den Glauben," 50–70 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Gottes Sohn und Gottes Geist: Vorträge zur Christologie und zur Lehre vom Geiste Gottes*, Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchh. 1905.

<sup>87</sup> Lütgert. "Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung," 52.

tism.<sup>88</sup> However, here it becomes immediately clear that Lütgert as well as Schlatter, in borrowing the Reformed position, wants to avoid soteriological reductionism. This is because faith is the goal God has in justification<sup>89</sup> and faith for Lütgert is also always love and, with it, truth and action.

How strongly Lütgert sympathizes with Calvin in many questions – especially there where it comes to his emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in creation, salvation and community – has already been demonstrated in the quote of his statement on Calvin’s Biblicism. Furthermore, his article entitled “Calvin’s teaching on the Creator,”<sup>90</sup> which is easily recognizable as the preparatory work for his work that appeared in 1934 with the title “Creation and Revelation,” is also strongly influenced by Calvin. On the one hand Lütgert basically agrees with Calvin that teaching about the savior always has to build upon teaching on the Creator.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, he was impressed by the fact that for Calvin theological scholarship and practical piety were one.

“Calvin cannot think about God without thinking of him. Knowledge becomes obedience and the *meditatio* becomes *oratio*. Calvin, just as Augustine, thinks in a way that includes prayer.”<sup>92</sup>

I believe that Lütgert comes very close to Calvin’s interlocking of exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology into a combination of dogmatics and ethics. We have already seen that Lütgert refers to the fact that the Reformed theology of Luther, Calvin and others begins with the interpretation of the Bible and not with dogma or ecclesiastical confessions. Lütgert consciously saw in this a relativizing of Lutheran and Reformed confessions.

Surely it is correct that Lütgert says: “The church stood between legalists and antinomians, just as the Reformers stood between the old church and enthusiasts.”<sup>93</sup> He frequently repeated this in similar form, but this remained a general statement, which nowhere led to Lütgert’s mixing opponents of an apostolic letter with the opponents of the Reformers. On the contrary, Lütgert proceeds in detail to demonstrate the differences among the different libertine, Gnostic, and antinomian opponents of the individual New Testament books, such that one cannot charge him with taking later movements and reading them back into New Testament texts. In any case, in all the disputes regarding Lütgert’s theses, none of his exegetical opponents brought this charge against him.

Apart from that, Lütgert’s exegetical arguments, even if they were led by personal interest, can only be rebutted by better exegesis. Even though his results have certain dogmatic consequences, which particularly lead to certain questions about the Pentecostal movement, it should be noted that these same consequences also lead to certain questions about the Lutheran and other movements. However, this is naturally no proof that his results are wrong or false.

Bially also admits there is no evidence that Lütgert was aware of the emerging Pentecostal movement or its precursors or similar movements of his time, or that his statements referred to certain explicit movements of the present. Still, when one follows Bially in his argumentation, and if one no longer wants to work with the concept ‘enthusiast’ and does not see the Pentecostal movements as a rigid block to be thrown out lock, stock, and barrel, the question is still to be posed as to whether Lütgert is not basically

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 59–60.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>90</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert, “Calvins Lehre vom Schöpfer,” in: ZSyTh 9, 1932, 421–440.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 431+438.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>93</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: “Freiheitspredigt,” 8.

correct that Paul also fought a movement that appealed to the Spirit of God which found moral norms to be unimportant. This problem is not unknown to Pentecostal movements and has to be handled through a reaction that makes direct reference to the Scriptures. It does not get sorted out by ascribing false motives to interpreters when they refer to it.

At any rate, where Lütgert detected enthusiasm during his life, it had to do with the National Socialist German Faith movement, for which reason a glance at his stance towards National Socialism and its theological defenders is appropriate.

### ***German Christians as Enthusiasts***

In 1936 Lütgert made the following warning in “Race and Religion”<sup>94</sup>: The faith “has nothing to do with race.”<sup>95</sup> In “Mysticism and Faith”<sup>96</sup> Lütgert turned against the theory that Aryan-Germanic religion has been watered down by oriental-semitic religiosity. In “The Master Race and the Crucified One”<sup>97</sup> he writes:

“The German faith movement’s deepest contrast with Christianity appears to be the position taken towards the actual center of the Gospel, which is the crucified Christ.”<sup>98</sup>

Lütgert’s work entitled “The Theological Crisis of the Present and its Origin in Intellectual History,”<sup>99</sup> also from 1936, made it most clear why he worked in the confessing church but at the same time was deeply unsettled by the great influence exerted by Karl Barth. Lütgert found himself forced to say the following about National Socialism and its inner-church offshoots: “the battle against the German Christians is becoming a battle about the validity of natural theology.”<sup>100</sup> But in Barth, since there was the desire to not leave any creation ordinances in force, he especially sees a “battle against natural revelation.”<sup>101</sup> While Lütgert had not mentioned Barth by name in his 1934 work entitled “Creation and Revelation,” in 1936 he took up Barth directly. The theology of the (not named) first thesis of the Barmen Declaration, which is the reduction of revelation to the Bible and to Jesus, is, as Lütgert sees it, the end of Christian ethics.<sup>102</sup> “The Dissolution of Christian Ethics as a Reason for the Religious Crisis of the Present”<sup>103</sup> declares, “Christian ethics has been dissolved”<sup>104</sup> and for this reason not only Christianity but all actual religion stands in opposition to race.”<sup>105</sup> The cause of this dissolution of Christian ethics is found in “the pes-

<sup>94</sup> Rasse und Religion, 9–24 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Der Kampf der deutschen Christenheit mit den Schwarmgeistern*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1936.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>96</sup> “Mystik und Glaube,” 25–45 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Der Kampf der deutschen Christenheit mit den Schwarmgeistern*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1936.

<sup>97</sup> “Der Herrenmensch und der Gekreuzigte,” 46–62 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Der Kampf der deutschen Christenheit mit den Schwarmgeistern*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1936.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die theologische Krisis der Gegenwart und ihr geistesgeschichtlicher Ursprung*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1936.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>101</sup> Section *ibid.*, 19–26; comp. collectively with Barth 19–26.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–46.

<sup>103</sup> Lecture caption *ibid.*, 65–100.

<sup>104</sup> Lecture caption *ibid.*, 65–100.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

simistic judgment of nature and history, which leads to an attack on faith in the creator and in his rule over the world.”<sup>106</sup>

## **Part 2: Lütgert’s Exegetical Studies on the Opponents of the Apostles**

### ***Lütgert’s Thesis***

The first indication of Lütgert’s lifelong occupation with the topic of the opponents of the Apostle is found in a letter to Adolf Schlatter dated January 25, 1907. In that letter he announces a new topic, “Christians and Enthusiasts.”<sup>107</sup> Lütgert wrote 1935 retrospectively:

“According to the theological tradition which was brought to a close by Ritschl, the Pauline gospel rested on a rejection of the law. According to this, Marcion appeared as the consistent representative of the Gospel. It is no accident that the last large theological work by Harnack dealt with Marcion. The rejection of the Creator was also at this point tied to the rejection of the lawgiver. With it the current crisis was initiated. It had long been clear to me that in complete opposition to it, Paul’s gospel rested on an acknowledgment of the law. From that there came the knowledge that Paul was not only in opposition to the legalists, but also in opposition to the antinomians. Given this, there was not only a new point of view with respect to the explanation of several of the Pauline letters, but also a notion of the history of the Apostolic era which went beyond that of the Tübingen School as well as that in Ritschl’s ‘The History of the Formation of the old Catholic Church.’ In a number of individual studies I have pursued my notion of the history of Jewish Christianity up into the second century and back into Judaism at the time of Christ. A summarized presentation of this course of history, which also includes the emergence of the first persecution of Christians, is the next larger task which is placed before me in my studies. I have the urgent desire to still achieve this wish. This is due to the fact that from the opinions about my investigations which have been published up to now, I see that otherwise the recognized results of this work would be for naught and that beyond the details no discussion regarding the overall concept of early Christianity would occur. I delayed this work because, instead of New Testament theology, I assumed the responsibility for systematic theology. Late, too late, did I achieve my scholarly goal.”<sup>108</sup>

What follows is a brief chronological introduction of Lütgert’s exegetical studies on this topic.

### ***The Letters to the Corinthians: Libertine Spirituality***

Ferdinand Christian Baur and the Tübingen School assumed that in New Testament times, on the one hand, there was a legalistic Jewish Christianity represented by Peter and James, and on the other hand, there was an antinomian Gentile Christianity with Paul, a Jew, as its spokesman. What came from this, according to Hegel’s scheme, was the synthesis of early Catholicism. Baur determined the understanding of the first Corinthian letter for a long time; he saw the same Jewish opponents in the Christ ‘party’ that he saw in the letter to the Galatians.

In 1908 Lütgert opened the investigation of the opponents who were fought in the early Christian letters with his “The Preaching of Liberty and the Spirits of Enthusiasm in Corinth: An Article Concerning

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>107</sup> According to Gerhard Bialy: “Lütgerts These,” 19.

<sup>108</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert, “Antwort,” 51–52.

the Characteristics of the Christ ‘Party,’”<sup>109</sup> which above all was directed against Baur’s representation of history. In the opening sentence he writes: “The Christian church has, from the beginning, had to stand between two fronts. . . . the circle of Apostles had opponents on both sides.”<sup>110</sup>

As Lütgert saw it, Paul stood between Jewish Christian legalists and Gentile Christian antinomians. “In his view, freedom from the law was always just as far from antinomianism as it was from legalism.”<sup>111</sup> Whoever is free from the law, according to Lütgert’s understanding of Paul, is in fellowship with God and for that reason free from sin.<sup>112</sup> This means that to be a Christian is demonstrated in the fact that the Christian wants to avoid sin. The law is not abolished; rather, it is fulfilled in life. Lütgert closes his investigation with the following words:

“It was with certainty that Paul maintained freedom in his struggle against legalistic Judaism; he exhibited the same certainty when the issue was the validity of the law in his struggle with the antinomians. The clarity with which he knew how to unite the two tendencies is paradigmatic for all times.”<sup>113</sup>

The antinomians are “libertine spiritualists”<sup>114</sup> and Gnostics. The faith, however, does not rest on human wisdom, but rather “on God’s power”<sup>115</sup> (1 Corinthians 2:5). For that reason the church does not have to seek *gnosis* but rather faith. “Preaching does not save those who understand, the wise, but rather those who believe.”<sup>116</sup>

“What we have in the Corinthian church is for the first time a Gnosticism in the sense that it is a gnosis that surpasses faith, which rests upon revelation and the possession of which accounts for Christian perfection and counts as the essence of Christianity.”<sup>117</sup>

Lütgert’s view has been disputed; he claimed asceticism is suppressed libertinism and assumes that both stem from the same movement,<sup>118</sup> instead of seeing two contradictory deviations from God’s creation ordinances.

---

<sup>109</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Freiheitspredigt und Schwarmgeister in Korinth: Ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik der Christuspartei*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1908; erweiterte Fassung: *Freiheitspredigt und Schwarmgeister in Korinth: Ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik der Christuspartei*, *BfChTh* 12, H. 3, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1908 [1–157 = 124–279 from the total count] (the edition quoted here).

<sup>110</sup> Both *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>118</sup> E. g., *ibid.*, 126–128+135.

## ***The Letter to the Philippians: The Perfected Ones***

In 1909 there followed an examination of “The Perfected Ones in the Letter to the Philippians.”<sup>119</sup> As a point of entry Lütgert emphasizes that Philippians 3 makes it clear that Paul stood between two fronts.<sup>120</sup>

At the time that Paul was active in Philippi and at the time the letter was composed, there was in Lütgert’s opinion a large number of Libertines in Philippi. They deny the preaching of the cross and think they have already achieved the resurrection, making the hope of a resurrection and of the *parousia* untenable hopes. The fear of God, humility and obedience were for them a lower form of piety.<sup>121</sup> The Jews threw the Pauline Gospel into the same pot with these notions. With the Libertines in Corinth they have promiscuity, the rejection of humility, the lack of a fear of God, and the absence of preaching the cross, as well as a dispute regarding the hope of resurrection in common.<sup>122</sup>

Very unusual, if also worthy of a second thought, is Lütgert’s point of view that the term “mutilators of the flesh” (and “dogs”) in Philippians 3:2 do not have to do with mockery of Jewish circumcision – something which Lütgert thought would have been unthinkable for Paul – but rather something that has reference to pagan circumcision rites. Lütgert continued this in his view of the term “emasculate” in Galatians 5:12.

## ***The Letters to the Thessalonians: the Enthusiasts***

Directly subsequent to the aforementioned was an article from 1909 entitled “The Enthusiasts in Thessalonica.”<sup>123</sup> There is no generally accepted answer surrounding the historical situation of the letters.<sup>124</sup> It is also an open issue as to whether both letters to the Thessalonians address the same situation, even if Lütgert ultimately affirms this and considers the second letter’s authenticity to be important.<sup>125</sup>

Basically Lütgert writes about the overall picture, that it is more than probable

“that in the Apostolic era there were more trends and tendencies, that the life of the community was richer, more colorful, and more diverse than it appears in the traditional historical view.”<sup>126</sup>

For him it is amazing that

“Christian literature begins with a polemic against libertine enthusiasts and those who denied the resurrection. With this the portrayal of history is significantly changed . . .”<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: “Die Vollkommenen im Philipperbrief,” 1–54 in: from the same author. *Die Vollkommenen im Philipperbrief und die Enthusiasten in Thessalonich*, *BFChTh* 13, H. 6, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1909, [1–102 = 546–654 from the total count].

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, complete, in part. 53–54.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>123</sup> “Die Enthusiasten in Thessalonich,” 55–102 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die Vollkommenen im Philipperbrief und die Enthusiasten in Thessalonich*, *BFChTh* 13, H. 6, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1909, [1–102 = 546–654 from the total count].

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

## ***The Pastoral Letters: Order instead of Gnosis***

In 1909 there also appeared Lütgert's study "The false Teaching of the Pastoral Letters,"<sup>128</sup> which he understood as a direct continuation of the examination of the Corinthian letters.<sup>129</sup> The false teachers in the pastoral letters are for Lütgert Jewish antinomians, who preached freedom from the law. As spiritualists they were Gnostics who had a higher knowledge than the Scriptures. They were shaped by asceticism and a rejection of every kind of order. Antinomianism, asceticism, Gnosis, and enthusiasm are the catchwords by which it is distinguished. Moreover, it is identified by an "unwillingness to suffer."<sup>130</sup>

Again what is central here is the correct integration of the law into the Gospel. As in Romans 2:16 and 7:12 – as Lütgert sees it – 1 Timothy 1:9 also correctly understood law as an ethical order integrated into the Gospel.<sup>131</sup> The defense of the correct use of the law is at the same time a defense of the Scriptures, as in particular 1 Timothy 3 makes clear.

"In that the false teachers wanted to lead the congregation beyond the Scriptures, they also rip themselves loose from a connection with the piety of Israel."<sup>132</sup>

What the opponents of the Corinthian letters have in common with the opponents of the pastoral letters<sup>133</sup> is that as liberal Jewish antinomians they distort the preaching of freedom. They invoke wonders and visions and a knowledge that is independent of the Scriptures. Both reject suffering and lowliness as well as the hope of resurrection.

"The difference consists in the fact that Paul's opponents in Corinth were Libertines and the false teachers of the pastoral letters were ascetics. Still, this asceticism is only a suppressed Libertinism."<sup>134</sup>

## ***The Letters of John: Office and Spirit***

In 1911 Lütgert devoted himself primarily to First John in the first part of his work "Service and Spirit in Battle."<sup>135</sup> Among others he found himself at this point in a dispute against Libertines. The author emphasized that love also always means freedom from sin.

1 John 5:17 is central for him. Sin is also sin when it comes to Christians. The church has "no privileged wrongdoing."<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe*, BFChTh 13, H. 3, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1909 [1–93 = 108–281 der Gesamtzählung], eine kürzere und frühere Fassung erschien unter dem Titel *Antinomismus und Askese in den Pastoralbriefen*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1909.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>135</sup> "I. Johannes und die Antichristen", 7–59 Wilhelm Lütgert: *Amt und Geist im Kampf: Studien zur Geschichte des Urchristentums*, BFChTh 25, H. 4–5, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1911 [1–164 = 396–540 from the total count].

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

“What is sin for the rest of the world is sin for them. Their freedom does not consist in there no longer being sin for them.”<sup>137</sup>

This is how he understands the disputed statement in 1 John 1:8 and 20 about being sinless. The false teachers do not consider themselves sinless because they actually do not sin, but rather because they no longer consider what they do to be sin.<sup>138</sup> “Antinomianism and perfectionism are therefore tied together.”<sup>139</sup>

I consider this to be exegetically justified and a central insight for ethics! All in all Lütgert made use of the letters of John in both of his large works on love more than practically all Protestant ethicists. The church has to be protected against the “lax feature” of the prophets:<sup>140</sup> “. . . I write this to you so that you will not sin” (1 John 2:1)

Characteristic for John’s letters is also the struggle against Docetism and the denial of the hope of resurrection. Next to this one again finds the emphasis on knowledge as opposed to apostolic preaching and the commandments.

“The false Prophets are therefore libertine Gnostics. Because they are Gnostics, *gnosis* stands out so strongly in John. The letter speaks much more frequently about knowledge (2:3, 4, 13, 14; 3:1, 6, 20; 4: 6, 7, 8, 16; 5, 20) than it does about faith. To know God and to obey him are the two most important parts of Christianity as far as this letter is concerned.”<sup>141</sup>

Within the framework of his results, Lütgert draws parallels between the false teachings in John’s letters and those which arise out of the studies up until now.<sup>142</sup> He finds:

1. “Antinomian libertines:” Corinthians, Philippians, Thessalonians
2. “Enthusiasts:” Corinthians, pastoral letters
3. “Gnostics:” Corinthians, pastoral letters
4. “Spiritualistic deniers of the resurrection:” Corinthians, pastoral letters (the resurrection has already occurred), Philippians (the resurrection has already been achieved)
5. Christians, “who wanted to rescind the internal contrast between the church and the world:” Corinthians
6. Absence of love as characteristic: Corinthians
7. Aversion to the death of Christ: Corinthians, Philippians
8. “All of these phenomena are features of a movement.”<sup>143</sup>

### ***The Letter of Clement and the Letter of Ignatius: Service and Spirit***

Together with his study of the letters of John, Lütgert continued his investigation of the opponents of the early Christian documents beyond the New Testament.

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 23–24.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 24. It is interesting that Lütgert views this perfectionism as justified, although he was by all means familiar with another type of perfectionism of his time, as is demonstrated in his talk Wilhelm Lütgert: *Sündlosigkeit und Vollkommenheit: Ein Vortrag*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1897.

<sup>140</sup> Lütgert, *Amt und Geist*, 48.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 48–49.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 49.

In “Turmoil in Corinth”<sup>144</sup> he above all studied Clement’s first letter, as well as Clement’s second letter briefly in an appendix.<sup>145</sup> He emphasized the affinity of the relationship with those letters from the time of Paul.<sup>146</sup> Among the opponents he simultaneously found asceticism and sexual excesses of the worst order.<sup>147</sup>

In “Separation among the Churches of Asia Minor”<sup>148</sup> he goes into Ignatius’ letters. Ignatius’ opponents only recognized the gospel and rejected the authority of the Old Testament which is held up to them, that is to say, they reject all Scriptural evidences.<sup>149</sup> Here if anything there are parallels to the false teachers referred to in the pastoral letters<sup>150</sup> and John’s letters.<sup>151</sup>

To the best of my knowledge, the studies Lütgert conducted on these earliest writings of the Church Fathers have not been taken up in scholarly discussion, although according to their content they do not lie far from the present day consensus.

### ***The Letter to the Romans: Antinomianism, Anti-Semitism, and Revolution***

In 1913 Lütgert continued his investigation of New Testament books by addressing Romans.<sup>152</sup> Lütgert assumes that Romans defends against many misunderstandings which Gentile Christians tended to have. Otto Michel briefly summarizes Lütgert’s concerns:

“According to W. Lütgert it is incorrect to understand Romans only in an anti-Jewish sense. Many remarks (e.g., Romans 3:31; 8:4; 13:8–10) teach a positive evaluation of the law and appear completely inexplicable in an anti-Jewish sense. It is more probable that Paul had to address a Gentile antinomianism. Indeed the Apostle himself stood under suspicion of being a participant in the emergence of this antinomianism (Romans 3:1–8). That Romans 6 is directed against libertine tendencies is generally admitted. Romans 9–11 captures a more lively picture, if one understands this section historically and assumes an anti-Semitic Christianity that enjoys a haughty disdain of Israel.”<sup>153</sup>

Lütgert himself summarizes the results of his study in the following manner:

“Romans is meant to protect the predominantly Gentile church in Rome from an antinomian Christianity, which at the same time joins a disdain for Israel and a Jewish-Christian lack of freedom and feeds revolutionary tendencies in the church. This Christianity is rampant in the Gentile churches, initially invoking Paul but already having begun to move in opposition to him. Paul therefore has

<sup>144</sup> “II. Der Aufruhr in Korinth“, 50–119 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Amt und Geist im Kampf: Studien zur Geschichte des Urchristentums*, BFChTh 25, H. 4–5, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1911 [1–164 = 396–540 in der Gesamtzählung].

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 111–118.

<sup>146</sup> In part., 106.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>148</sup> “III. Die Separation in den kleinasiatischen Gemeinden“, 120–164 in: Wilhelm Lütgert: *Amt und Geist im Kampf: Studien zur Geschichte des Urchristentums*, BFChTh 25, H. 4–5, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1911 [1–164 = 396–540 from the total count].

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 163–164.

<sup>152</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Der Römerbrief als historisches Problem*, BFChTh 17, H. 2, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1913 [1–112 = 31–140 from the total count].

<sup>153</sup> Otto Michel: *Der Brief an die Römer*, KEKNT 4<sup>14</sup>, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1978<sup>5</sup>, 40 (typographical errors corrected).

reason to demarcate the Gospel with respect to what these people were saying, to warn the Roman church about them, and in so doing to ensure acceptance which is necessary for effectiveness in the Roman church. From this it can be explained why he emphatically expresses his positive stance in Romans towards the law and why he gives his teaching on grace the form of a teaching on justification. With this approach his positive relationship to the law can be absorbed into his teaching on grace. . . . Paul is compelled to embrace the law and Jewish Christianity against Gentile Christians.”<sup>154</sup>

In Romans, therefore, Paul addresses 1. disdain for the law (antinomianism<sup>155</sup>), 2. disdain for Israel (anti-Semitism<sup>156</sup>), and 3. revolutionary tendencies in the Roman church.<sup>157</sup> With the third point, Romans 13:1–7 receives its natural place, as does the end of chapter 12. For points one and two there is encouragement to clarify the relationship between the Gentile Christian church and Old Testament revelation. Romans 9–11 then becomes a truly decisive component of Romans.

### ***Galatians: Law and Spirit***

The end and culmination of the studies regarding the opponents of New Testament letters is surely the 1919 study of Galatians entitled “Law and Spirit.”<sup>158</sup> A central passage for Lütgert is Galatians 5:13. The Galatians are “called to be free,” and it is said to them, however, to “not use . . . freedom to indulge the sinful nature” but “rather, serve one another in love.”

Galatians itself reports on controversy in the church. The clearest example is Galatians 5:15: “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”<sup>159</sup> It is unlikely that this is dealing simply with personal quarrels between individual church members, but rather with disputes about the stance towards Old Testament law. The same applies to Galatians 5:26: “Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

Since the church predominantly consisted of Gentile Christians, but at the same time Jewish Christian problems were addressed, it stands to reason that, on the one hand, Jewish Christian false teachings would be addressed and, on the other hand, the false teachings of Gentile Christian opponents.<sup>160</sup>

It is entirely unlikely that a Jewish-Christian church with no ifs and buts would have opened itself completely to the Jewish temptation. If, however, some Gentile Christians had followed the Jewish corrupters, and others rejected the Jewish temptation – not necessarily with Apostolic arguments – then that is an explanation of why the letter repeatedly speaks about contention among themselves.<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Der Römerbrief*, 111–112.

<sup>155</sup> In part. *ibid.*, 69–79.

<sup>156</sup> In part. *ibid.*, 79–90.

<sup>157</sup> In part. *ibid.*, 98–111.

<sup>158</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Gesetz und Geist: Eine Untersuchung zur Vorgeschichte des Galaterbriefes*, *BFChTh* 22, H. 6, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1919 [1–106 = 472–576 from the total count].

<sup>159</sup> So presented above all in Wilhelm Lütgert. *Gesetz und Geist*, 9 (there also the translation).

<sup>160</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: *Gesetz und Geist*, 9–11.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Only a part of the church is addressed in Galatians 3:1, where Paul writes: “. . . you who are spiritual.”<sup>162</sup> Here we are dealing with Christians who consider themselves more spiritual than the rest of the church. Theodore Zahn<sup>163</sup> called this group who invoked the Spirit spiritualists. He correctly places them on a parallel with the “strong,” that is to say, the Gentile Christians, in Romans 14–15, who elevate themselves above the “weak,” the Jewish Christians.<sup>164</sup>

Lütgert’s view of Galatians was above all taken up<sup>165</sup> by James Hardy Ropes<sup>166</sup> in 1929 and Frederic R. Crownfield<sup>167</sup> in 1945. The fact that Paul did not rescind the validity of the moral law was shown by the Swedish Lutheran Ragnar Bring in his commentary on Galatians.<sup>168</sup>

## **Reactions to Lütgert’s Studies, in particular to the Corinthian Letters**

The reaction to Lütgert’s point of view has varied greatly.<sup>169</sup> The most heated response was and remains up until today the dispute surrounding his view of the Corinthian letters. The least dispute was with his viewpoint on Romans. That surely also has to do with the fact that Adolf Schlatter came to the side of Lütgert as an exegete with his monumental commentary on the Corinthian letters. As much as Schlatter thinks independently in detail, he assumes Lütgert’s description of Paul’s opponents<sup>170</sup> as enthusiasts and writes: “This interpretation . . . advances Lütgert’s observation.”<sup>171</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 12–13 (there also the translation).

<sup>163</sup> Theodor Zahn: *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*. R. Brockhaus: Wuppertal 1990 (1922<sup>3</sup> reprint), 270–272; Lütgert refers to Zahn. *Gesetz und Geist*, 13–14.

<sup>164</sup> Comp. to this Thomas Schirrmacher. “Römerbrief 2,“ 263–284 and Thomas Schirrmacher. *Ethik 1*, 560–596.

Comp. the (negative) presentation of the history of Lütgert’s interpretation of the letter to the Galatians in F. F. Bruce: *Commentary on Galatians*, NIGTC, Exeter: The Paternoster Press & Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans 1992 (1982 reprint), 23–25. Bruce also lines up Johannes Munck here: *Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte*. Acta Jutlandica: Aarsskrift for Aarhus Universitet XXVI, Kopenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard 1954, 79–126 (English: J. Munck: *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, London 1959, 87ff); still, Munck distanced himself rather far from Lütgert, without, however, following the traditional interpretation. – James Hardy Ropes, Frederic R. Crownfield and Johannes Munck further developed Lütgert’s thesis in the process and assume, in contrast to Lütgert, that the Judaizers were Gentile Christians who advocated circumcision, etc. “The opponents who were Judaizers in Galatians are Gentile Christians.” (Johannes Munck: *Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte*, 79). According to that, the arguing parties in the Galatian church were both Gentile Christian. The main argument is that Paul speaks of the fact that the Judaizing false teachers wanted to have themselves circumcised (Gal. 6:13) (e.g., *ibid.*, 79), that is, that uncircumcised must be heathens. Gal 6:13 may also refer to antinomians, who in the end possibly wanted to have heathen castration conducted.<sup>165</sup> Ragnar Bring: *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*, Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus 1968; English. Ragnar Bring: *Commentary on Galatians*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg 1961; Ragnar Bring: *Christus und das Gesetz: Die Bedeutung des Gesetzes des Alten Testaments nach Paulus und sein Glauben an Christus*, Leiden: E. J. Brill: Leiden 1969, 73–111; comp. also David H. Stern: *Kommentar zum Jüdischen Neuen Testament*, Neuhausen: Neuhausen 1996. 3 vols., vol., 2, 301–387.

<sup>166</sup> James Hardy Ropes: “The Singular Problem of the Epistle to the Galatians,” *Harvard Theological Studies* 14, Cambridge (MA) 1929.

<sup>167</sup> Frederic R. Crownfield: “The Singular Problem of the Dual Galatians,” in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64, 1965, 491–500.

<sup>168</sup> Ragnar Bring: *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*, Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus 1968; English. Ragnar Bring: *Commentary on Galatians*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg 1961; Ragnar Bring: *Christus und das Gesetz: Die Bedeutung des Gesetzes des Alten Testaments nach Paulus und sein Glauben an Christus*, Leiden: E. J. Brill: Leiden 1969, 73–111; comp. also David H. Stern: *Kommentar zum Jüdischen Neuen Testament*, Neuhausen: Neuhausen 1996. 3 vols. vol., 2, 301–387.

<sup>169</sup> Lütgert also served to inspire similar studies of New Testament books which he did not conduct. Hermann Werdermann serves as an example: *Die Irrlehrer des Judas- und 2. Petrusbriefes*, *BFChTh* 17, 6, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann 1913, in part. on Lütgert 123–126, 130–132.

<sup>170</sup> Klaus Berger: “Die impliziten Gegner: zur Methode des Erschließens von ‘Gegnern’ in neutestamentlichen Texten,“ 373–400 in: Dieter Lüthmann, Georg Strecker (ed.): *Kirche: Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm zum 75. Geburtstag*, Tübingen: In 1980 J. C. B. Mohr presented a basic and helpful methodological criticism of the common interpretations of Paul’s opponents since Baur in 1831, which are expressly used against Lütgert. According to 392–394 he wants to lift the opponents out of traditional history. However, it is not quite clear to me where in the end the difference lies when one looks at his own presentation of the opponents of the most important Pauline letters (500–509).

<sup>171</sup> Adolf Schlatter: *Paulus: Der Bote Jesu: Eine Deutung seiner Briefe an die Korinther*, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag 1969<sup>4</sup>, 42, comp. overall 20–46, in part. 41–42; comp. generally with Paul’s opponents by Adolf Schlatter: *Die Theologie der Apostel*, Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag 1997<sup>3</sup> (1922<sup>2</sup> reprint), 403–432.

In 2001 Michael D. Goulder acknowledged that Lütgert had a central place in investigations having to do with the Corinthian letters<sup>172</sup>, even if he expressly goes in a different direction as to how he designates the Christ party.<sup>173</sup> As Goulder sees it, Lütgert in 1908 was the first to exhaustively criticize Baur's reconstruction of the parties in the early church.

“Lütgert's analysis convinced many and is a basis for the modern discussion of the two letters, even if parts of it have been discarded. It is on account of his sharp thinking that the Tübingen theory lost its position among the wise and those in the know.”<sup>174</sup>

In 1995 Will Deming noted that he saw Lütgert's interpretation of the Corinthian letters as a radical change and writes: “In one way or the other Lütgert's explanation has received broad support.”<sup>175</sup> According to Deming, what was convincing was tracing Libertinism and asceticism back to the same source. Indeed, for him Lütgert's viewpoint as well as later variations of it, were substituted by Ernst Käsemann's similar thesis, that it was not Gnostic but rather apocalyptic movements which stood in the background and that it had to do with ‘realized eschatology.’ This is what Deming himself justified in his study and wanted to adapt. Since Lütgert's view could not answer many questions, it was in this connection that Deming exercised a fundamental critique of Lütgert's viewpoint.<sup>176</sup>

### **The Gnosis Discussion**

A longstanding discussion in religious studies, as well as in research about the New Testament and the early church, is connected with the question of ‘Gnosis.’ According to Adolf Harnack,<sup>177</sup> it is a question of a Christian heresy, which emerged out of Judaism and Christianity. For the representatives of the so-called history of religions school, it is an independent pre-Christian and non-Christian religion, which then mixed with Christianity. With respect to the New Testament, there was the additional question of whether a first century Gnostic religion influenced Christianity and in particular influenced Paul, or whether the New Testament, in particular Paul, fought against this vehemently. Primarily Rudolph Bultmann and his students thought the former to be the case. Nowadays in theology the name Walter Schmithals<sup>178</sup> is above all associated with the latter position, and in religious studies it is Kurt Rudolph. The theologian Martin Hengel is associated with the denial of the latter position.<sup>179</sup>

However, with all due respect to the arguments Hengel presents, it should be pointed out that Hengel can only maintain his viewpoint on the basis of a late dating of several of the writings of the New Testa-

<sup>172</sup> Michael D. Goulder: *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth*, Library of Pauline Studies, Peabody (MS): Hendrickson 2001, 13–15, 25–29.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–29.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>175</sup> Will Deming: *Paul*, 22, to 21–23, 30–32.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–32. As a further example of a newer appraisal of Lütgert's studies of Paul's opponents, Robert Jewett: *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study in Their Use in Conflict Settings. Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Christentums 10*. Leiden: E. J. Brill 1971, 19–20.

<sup>177</sup> Comp. the excerpt from Harnack's dogmatic history in: Adolf von Harnack. “Rezension über: Wilhelm Bousset, Hauptprobleme der Gnosis“ (1908), 231–237 in: Kurt Rudolph (ed.). *Gnosis und Gnostizismus. Wege der Forschung 262*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1975.

<sup>178</sup> E.g., Kurt Rudolph. *Gnosis: Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1990<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>179</sup> See most recently Martin Hengel. “Paulus und die Frage einer vorchristlichen Gnosis,” 473–510 in: Martin Hengel. *Kleinere Schriften 3: Paulus und Jakobus. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 141*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002. The most important literature is mentioned in the notes, *ibid.*, 474–476, and the development of Gnosis research is outlined in note 7,475.

ment. The famous warning in 1 Timothy 6:20–21 against “what is falsely called knowledge” is, for Hengel as well as for Lütgert, directed against Gnostics. However, contrary to Lütgert, the warning is of course not Pauline: “the earliest evidence for a Christian ‘Gnosis,’ 1 Timothy 6:20, belongs in the beginning of the second century” and is dated by Hengel at 110–120 A.D., as are Ignatius’ letters.<sup>180</sup>

The question of the origins of Gnosticism is nowadays farther away than ever from being cleared up.<sup>181</sup> Hans-Martin Schenke correctly asks whether, in light of the controversies and breadth of the textual findings, a summary presentation of Gnosis is possible.<sup>182</sup> H.J.W. Drijvers writes after modern discoveries of many new sources relating to Gnosis: “The problem of the origins of Gnosticism is today one of the most disputed questions in the field of religious studies.”<sup>183</sup>

Lütgert is responsible for initiating the discussion of the relationship of Gnosis and the New Testament. It is for this reason that Rudolf Bultmann, of all people, interacted with him extensively.<sup>184</sup> Yet in contrast, Lütgert had nothing to do with the viewpoint that Paul himself was influenced by Gnosis, since he implicitly rejected it. The philosopher Hans Leisegang wrote in 1924 in his classic presentation of Gnosis that the gospels “were all more or less filled and infiltrated with Gnostic motives”<sup>185</sup> and that “the Apostle Paul lived in the world view of Gnosis and thought along its lines.”<sup>186</sup> In 1927 Richard Reitzenstein named Paul “not the first, but arguably the greatest of all Gnostics.”<sup>187</sup> For Lütgert, in contrast, it was beyond question that Paul was the greatest debunker of Gnosis.

As far as Lütgert is concerned, the concepts ‘Gnosis’ and ‘Gnostic’ have no relationship to Gnosis in church history. He does not mention some sort of precursors of later movements. One does Lütgert an injustice if one considers him disproved by later Gnosis research. For him ‘Gnostic’ describes a movement in which the acts of God or salvific revelation are not in the center but rather a higher knowledge is in the center. Let us quote his definition:

“With the Corinthian church we have for the first time Gnosticism in the sense that Gnosis surpasses faith, with that Gnosis based on revelation so that the possession of it makes for Christian perfection, the essence of Christianity.”<sup>188</sup>

As Hengel correctly indicates, the idea of Gnosis was not precisely defined until around 1960, the result being that there were a number of meanings attached to the notion. It was not until Schmithals that

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>181</sup> So also Walter Schmithals. *Neues Testament und Gnosis. Erträge der Forschung* 208. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1984, 7. On the history of Gnostic theories comp. Geo Widengren, “Die Ursprünge des Gnostizismus und die Religionsgeschichte“ (1966), 668–706 in: Kurt Rudolph (ed.). *Gnosis und Gnostizismus. Wege der Forschung* 262. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1975, as well as the entire anthology with the most important texts.

<sup>182</sup> Hans-Martin Schenke; “Hauptprobleme der Gnosis“ (1965), 585–600 in: Kurt Rudolph (ed.): *Gnosis und Gnostizismus. Wege der Forschung* 262, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1975, 586.

<sup>183</sup> H. J. W. Drijvers: “Die Ursprünge des Gnostizismus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem,” 798–841 in: Kurt Rudolph (ed.): *Gnosis und Gnostizismus. Wege der Forschung* 262. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1975, 841.

<sup>184</sup> Comp. Walter Schmithals: *Die Gnosis in Korinth: Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1965<sup>2</sup> (revised 1969<sup>3</sup>), 113–116 and Walter Schmithals. *Neues Testament und Gnosis. Erträge der Forschung* 208. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1984, 25+29–30 on Lütgert and Adolf Schlatter’s meaning for Bultmann and the Bultmann school’s critique of Lütgert.

<sup>185</sup> Hans Leisegang: *Die Gnosis*. Stuttgart: Kröner: Stuttgart 1985<sup>5</sup> (reprint of the 1924 edition), 2–3.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 3; comp. Hans Leisegang: *Denkformen*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1928, 87–127.

<sup>187</sup> Quoted according to Martin Hengel: “Paulus und die Frage . . .,” 473.

<sup>188</sup> Lütgert: “Freiheitspredigt,” 134.

the term was defined more precisely.<sup>189</sup> One should not look at Lütgert's writings prior to World War I in light of the discussions that occurred between the World Wars or since 1960. This is the case although Lütgert played a large part in initiating the discussions surrounding the relationship between Gnosis and the New Testament. Lütgert's outlook can be reconciled with Hengel as well as with Schmithal. Bultmann's view that Paul was himself a Gnostic was, in contrast, an abuse of Lütgert's position. For Lütgert it was clear that Paul fought relentlessly against Gnosis everywhere.

Whether one wants to name Paul's opponents Gnostic or proto-Gnostic/early Gnostic, libertine, or antinomian, and the fact that all notions are contestable in one way or another, does not alone decide what these opponents stood for. The fact is first of all what they advocated or what was opposed with respect to them, even if the origin of these perceptions is not always clear and it remains unclear from which sources they were fed. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 6:16–20 some people visited prostitutes without seeing themselves as having breached God's will, while others practiced sexual abstinence in marriage. These are circumstances which are important for our exegesis as well as for our systematic theological evaluation, regardless of whether we can reconstruct the provenance of the points of view and find the exact terms to describe them.

For instance, at the time of 1 Corinthians the church in Corinth was divided with respect to almost all questions. One person did not eat meat sacrificed to idols, and the other participated in an observance of an idol in order to eat this meat. One individual was for sexual laxness, and the other even rejected sexuality in marriage. Paul, however, practically never conceded a point to one or the other Corinthian party. He had to equally admonish both parties in Corinth, since neither opinion corresponded to godly thinking. This undisputed initial position should play a much larger role in the overall interpretation of the letter as well as in doctrinal evaluation, instead of getting lost in the question of the anterior historical reconstruction.

## **Law and Freedom**

Lütgert also supported the principle of law and freedom outside of theology. This is the case even if in the final event it was borrowed from theology, as for instance in his 1917 lecture "Law and Freedom."<sup>190</sup> That lecture was held when he assumed the position of Rector at the University of Halle-Wittenberg. In that lecture he said the following, which summarized his world view:

"Law and freedom are the two poles, the two focal points of our lives. Neither of the two lets itself be reduced to the other. Such a duality points to a uniform will, which reveals itself in both of these norms."<sup>191</sup>

I believe that the necessity of defending the Christian faith against legalism as well as lawlessness, which Lütgert demonstrates to be a central theme in many New Testament documents, is at the present moment an important legacy for Evangelical theology, which again finds itself in a struggle on these same two fronts.

---

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 474.

<sup>190</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert: "Gesetz und Freiheit," Talk given in the assembly hall when Lütgert took over the position of rector at the United Friedrichs University Halle-Wittenberg [1917], *Hallische Universitätsreden*, 6, Halle a.d. Saale: Max Niemeyer 1917.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 18.