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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: CRS814

COURSE TITLE: BIBLICAL CRITICISMS

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Introduction

CRS814: Biblical Criticism is a one-semester 3 Credit unit course. It will be available toward the award of the Masters degree in Christian theology. The course is also suitable for anybody who is interested in the theological interpretation of the Bible.

The course will consist of 21 units and it will examine a different types of Biblical criticisms including: Historical Criticism; Source Criticism; Form Criticism; Rhetorical Criticism; New Criticism; and Structuralism Criticism; etc. The material has been especially developed for students in African context with particular focus on Nigeria.

There are no compulsory prerequisites for this course. The course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It also emphasizes the need for Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs). Detailed information on (TMAs) is found in the separate file, which will be sent to you later.

There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

What you will learn in this course

The overall aim of CRS814: Biblical Criticism is to lead you to study the different approaches in biblical interpretation that will aid you in a better understanding of the Bible. Biblical criticism was developed to try to address the question: How should we approach the various literary genres that we find in the Bible? Was each book written at one sitting, or was there a longer process of composition? Could there have been previous editions of some of the books that have gone through the stages of editing to reach the form in which we now have them? Do some of the books incorporate texts of one genre? All these questions are part of an attempt to understand the literary mechanisms as much as possible so that interpretation may proceed.

Biblical Criticism is not an abstract study of the scriptures. In this course, the student will find enough life application issues with African context in view that would aid one in proper interpretation and understanding of the Bible.

Course Aims

The aim of this course (CTH 814 – Biblical Criticism) is to study different approaches to Biblical Interpretation, discussed under three broad divisions: Author-Centred approaches; Text-Centred approaches; and Reader-Centred approaches. It will draw life application issues from African context for a better understanding of biblical message for the believing community in Africa.

This will be achieved by:

- Examining the definition and tools for Biblical Criticism.

- Showing how a good understanding of the authorship, dating and transmission of a text could aid a better interpretation and application of biblical message.
- Analyzing the importance of surface features of texts, such as repetition and keywords, etc, that can also aid interpretation and application.
- Recognizing that hearers or readers are involved in the reception of messages, and have become much more prominent in recent critical discussion.
- Discussing the history and relevance of Biblical Criticism in African Context.
- Equipping Christian leaders, teachers and scholars with necessary tools for a better interpretation and application of the Bible to Africa.

Course Objectives

To achieve the above course aims, there are set objectives for each study unit, which are always included at the beginning. The student should read them before working through the unit. Furthermore, the student is encouraged to refer to the objectives of each unit intermittently as the study of the unit progresses. This practice would promote both learning and retention of what is learned.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the aims of the course as a whole.

On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Define and grasp the tools for biblical criticism.
- Discuss the historical development and relevance of biblical criticism.
- Synchronize the different approaches to biblical criticism, namely: author-centred; text-centred; and reader-centred approaches.
- Acquire some skills in an attempt to reconstruct the ways and means by which some texts came to be in its present form.
- Appreciate the role of history before the text, history in the text, and history after the text in biblical interpretation.

Working through this Course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and read other materials provided by National Open University of Nigeria

(NOUN). Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at points during the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course there is a final examination. Below you will find listed all the components of the course and what you have to do.

Course Materials

Major components of the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignments File
5. Presentation Schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the text materials.

Study Units

There are three modules, twenty-one study units in this course, as follows:

Module 1: Author-Centred Approaches

- Unit 1: Introduction – Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism
- Unit 2: Historical Criticism
- Unit 3: Source Criticism
- Unit 4: Form Criticism
- Unit 5: Redaction Criticism
- Unit 6: Textual Criticism
- Unit 7: Textual Criticism (continued)

Module 2: Text-Centred Approaches

- Unit 1: History of Biblical Criticism
- Unit 2: History of Biblical Criticism (continued)
- Unit 3: Rhetorical Criticism
- Unit 4: Rhetorical Criticism (continued)
- Unit 5: New Criticism
- Unit 6: Structuralism Criticism
- Unit 7: Structuralism Criticism (continued)

Module 3: Reader-Centred Approaches

Unit 1: Relevance of Biblical Criticism

Unit 2: Relevance of Biblical Criticism (continued)

Unit 3: Audience Criticism

Unit 4: Audience Criticism (continued)

Unit 5: Indeterminacy Criticism

Unit 6: Ideological Criticism

Unit 7: Ideological Criticism (continued)

Please note that Module 1 focuses on Author-centred approaches, namely: Historical, Source, Form, Redaction and Textual criticisms. Module 2 discusses Text-centred approaches, namely: Rhetorical, New, and Structuralism. The last Module 3 presents Reader-centred approaches, namely: Audience, Indeterminacy and Ideological criticisms.

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply it in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. Together with tutor marked assignments, these exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

Textbooks and References

The student is encouraged to buy the under-listed books (and more) recommended for this course and for future use.

1. *The Holy Bible* (RSV or NIV).
2. Adamo, D T (ed). *Biblical Interpretation in African perspective*. Lanham: University of America, 2006.
3. Hayness, S R & Mckenzie, S L (eds). *An introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their application: To each its own meaning*. Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1993.
4. Soulen, R N & Soulen, R K. *Handbook of Biblical criticism*. Louisville, London: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001.
5. Stuart, D. *Old Testament Exegesis (3rd ed)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
6. Wood, D.R.W; Marshall, I. H., Millard, A. R. (eds). *New Bible Dictionary (3rd ed)*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996 (pp. 138-140).

Assignments File

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this *Course Guide* in the section on assessment.

Presentation Schedule

The *Presentation Schedule* included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against lagging behind in your work.

Assessment

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor marked assignments; second, there is a written examination. In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAS)

There are twenty-one tutor marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best five (i.e. the highest five of the fourteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total course mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your viewpoint and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it together with form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given. If, however, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an extension.

Final Examination and Grading

The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor–marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

Course Marking Scheme

This table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignment 1-4	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count at 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of work	Week's Activity	Assessment (end of unit)
	Course Guide	1	
Module 1			
Unit			
1.	Introduction – Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism	1	Assignment 1
2.	Historical Criticism	2	Assignment 2
3.	Source Criticism	3	Assignment 3
4	Form Criticism	4	Assignment 4
5	Redaction Criticism	5	Assignment 5
6	Textual Criticism	6	Assignment 6

7	Textual Criticism (contd)	7	Assignment 7
Module 2			
Unit			
1	History of Biblical Criticism	8	Assignment 8
2	History of Biblical Criticism (contd)	9	Assignment 9
3	Rhetorical Criticism	10	Assignment 10
4	Rhetorical Criticism (contd)	11	Assignment 11
5	New Criticism	12	Assignment 12
6	Structuralism Criticism	13	Assignment 13
7	Structuralism Criticism (contd)	14	Assignment 14
Module 3			
Unit			
1	Relevance of Biblical Criticism	15	Assignment 15
2	Relevance of Biblical Criticism (contd)	16	Assignment 16
3	Audience Criticism	17	Assignment 17
4	Audience Criticism (contd)	18	Assignment 18
5	Indeterminacy Criticism	19	Assignment 19
6	Ideological Criticism	20	Assignment 20
7	Ideological Criticism (contd)	21	Assignment 21
22	REVISION	22	
23	EXAMINATION	23	
	TOTAL	23 Weeks	

Table 2: Course Overview

How to get the best from this course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other material. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives enable you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a *Reading* section.

Remember that your tutor's job is to assist you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this *Course Guide* thoroughly.
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on it and write in your own dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they lag behind in their course work.
4. Turn to *Unit 1* and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this *Course Guide*).

Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- you have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises,
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Summary

CRS814 intends to introduce you to the study of Biblical Criticism. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

- What is the definition for Biblical Criticism?
- What tools are used in Biblical Criticism?
- Why is the study of the historical development of Biblical Criticism important?
- Of what relevance is the study of Biblical Criticism to Africa?
- How can a good understanding of authorship, dating and transmission of a text help in its interpretation?
- What are the physical features in the text that can aid its interpretation?

- How can a combination of both diachronic and synchronic approaches facilitate a better interpretation of a text?

Of course, the questions you will be able to answer are not limited to the above list. This adventure in the study of Biblical Criticism will offer you more. You are welcome to enjoy your time as you work through this course, which will definitely offer you some new skills in interpreting the Bible.



MAIN COURSE

MODULE 1: AUTHOR-CENTRED CRITICISM

Unit 1: Introduction – Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism

Unit 2: Historical Criticism

Unit 3: Source Criticism

Unit 4: Form Criticism

Unit 5: Redaction Criticism

Unit 6: Textual Criticism

Unit 7: Textual Criticism (continued)

Unit 1: Introduction – Definition and Need for Biblical Criticism

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2.0 Objective

3.0 Main body

3.1 Defining Biblical Criticism

3.2 The Need for Biblical Criticism

3.3 The Place of Biblical Criticism in Theological Study

3.4 The indispensability of biblical criticism

3.5 Some limitations of criticism

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0 References/Future Reading

1.0 Introduction

This Unit defines Biblical Criticism, and discusses the need for Biblical Criticism, and the possible implications for Africa. The student is encouraged to pay close attention to this unit because it gives the foundational basis for the study of modern biblical criticisms and previews the different approaches of biblical criticism discussed in this manual.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define Biblical Criticism.
- Understand the need for Biblical Criticism.
- Be acquainted with the tools for doing Biblical Criticism.
- Discuss some of the implications of doing Biblical Criticism as an African
- Have an overview of the different approaches to modern Biblical Criticism

3.0 MAIN BODY

3.1 Defining Biblical Criticism

Biblical Criticism refers to the techniques employed by biblical scholars in interpreting a given text of the Bible in order to ascertain their original wording, the nature of their composition, their sources, date, authorship and the like. Biblical criticism is neither a derogatory term nor a value judgment. It is a descriptive generally brandished proudly by those to whom it is applied. “Criticism” here refers to the exercise of an expert sense of judgment about the text and should not be confused with “criticism” in the sense of making negative statements (Wood 138). Technically, biblical criticism simply refers to the scholarly approach of studying, evaluating and critically assessing the Bible as literature in order to understand it better (www.theopedia.com/Biblical_criticism - 7/4/12).

Some critical methodologies attempt to reconstruct the ways and means by which the text came to be in its present form. These are referred to as “diachronic” for they explore the history of the text and look for meaning in previous forms and settings of portions of the text. Other methodologies recognize that there may well be a history of the text but seek meaning in the form of the text currently possesses. These approaches view the text as self-sufficient, requiring no outside information for interpretation and are referred to as “synchronic”. Biblical criticism draws upon a wide range of scholarly disciplines including archaeology, anthropology, folklore, linguistics, oral tradition studies, and historical and religious studies.

Biblical Criticism, in particular **higher criticism**, deals with *why* and *how* the books of the Bible were written; **lower criticism** deals with the *actual teachings* of its authors. The word "*criticism*" must be one of the all-time least appropriate religious terms. Theologians do not engage in actual criticism - at least as the word is commonly understood. They analyze the Bible in order to understand it better. Mather (1993) defines **Higher criticism** as the study of the sources and literary methods employed by the biblical authors,” while **Lower criticism** was defined as “the discipline and study of the actual wording” of the Bible; a quest for textual purity and understanding.

3.1 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Define Biblical Criticism. How would you differentiate between “Higher Criticism” and “Lower Criticism”?

3.2 The Need for Biblical Criticism

In order to provide reasonable answers to the questions of authorship, when, why and how individual books of the Bible were produced, biblical scholars have employed scientific and quasi-scientific methods. According to Alan C. Mitchel (2000), “Biblical criticism is as much an art as it is a science. Its objects are the interests we have in knowing as much as we can about the Bible, its world, its ideas, its teachings, indeed its very truth. The point of departure for any kind of biblical criticism, then, is the human desire to know whatever can be known about the Bible.

The desire to know the origin of biblical traditions went beyond the establishment of a reliable text and inquired into the sources of the stories and narratives included in the Bible. Often comparison of biblical texts with other ancient literatures, or with other texts in the Bible itself, was helpful in isolating subtle differences among these texts. The noted differences became important clues. They may indicate, for example, that some biblical stories did not originate only with their written transmission. It is very likely that these stories or at least some parts of them were, at first, handed on by word of mouth. Or, the observed differences of style, vocabulary, and viewpoint may show that a given biblical story was passed on in more than one form.

Other scholars were prompted by an interest to know about the kinds of materials contained in the Bible and how they may have related to the real lives of those who were responsible for producing it. In view of the realization that the transmission of biblical tradition may be quite complex, these scholars set out to catalogue the various shapes that tradition, preserved in the Bible, took. With the help of comparison with other ancient literature, contemporaneous with the Bible, they were able to isolate narrative, poetic, cultic, legal, literary and historical materials, which had their own definite shapes or forms. These, they conjectured, functioned in relation to the various circumstances of life in the ancient biblical world. Such criticism came to be known as form criticism. For example, knowing that in Philippians (2:5-11) Apostle Paul preserved a very early form of a Christian hymn; one might reasonably conclude that one way of handing on important tradition about the life, death and exaltation of Jesus was related to early Christian worship.

Biblical criticism is, also helpful in relating the meaning of the Bible to the world today. Often the methods employed to connect the Bible with our own experience are more literary and less historical in nature. Narrative, rhetorical and reader-response criticism fall under this heading. Appreciating these forms of biblical criticism helps us to understand how much biblical criticism is informed and influenced by the language and interests of the day.

Other methods that try to relate the Bible to our own experience use the feminist method and critique to produce other enriching ways to interpret the Bible meaningfully. So also does one find interest in relating the Bible to minority and

non-Western cultures. Taking their lead from interpretive clues provided by these cultures, biblical scholars read the Bible in non-traditional ways, rendering its meaning in a manner that historical criticism is perhaps unable to do.

3.2 Self Assessment Questions

- Discuss five reasons why you think Biblical Criticism is important with reference to the above section.

3.3 The Place of Biblical Criticism in Theological Study

According to Gordon J. Wenham (1989:84-89), “The role we ascribe to biblical criticism depends to a large extent on our understanding of the nature of Scripture. Is it a divine book or a human one? Is the fundamentalist right to insist on the divinity of Scripture, or the biblical scholar more correct in underlining its humanity?” It is safe to argue that none of these positions should be taken in isolation. The Scripture is fully human and fully divine. Example, the OT constantly claims divine authorship. Most of the laws begin 'the LORD said to Moses', while the Ten Commandments are said to have been written by the finger of God. The prophets typically introduce their messages with 'thus says the LORD', while the narrator of the historical books adopts an omniscient perspective (Exodus 20). Within the NT the divine authorship and authority of the OT is always assumed and frequently asserted. For Jesus the OT is the word of God (Mk. 7:13; Jn. 10:35). According to St Paul it is all inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). And the claim that the NT comes from God too is also clear in many passages (Mt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, *etc.*; 1 Cor. 14:37). This attitude towards the Bible was continued by the early church. Kelly writes, 'It goes without saying that the fathers envisaged the whole of the Bible as inspired... their general view was that Scripture was not only exempt from error but contained nothing that was superfluous.' According to Jerome, 'In the divine Scriptures every word, syllable, accent and point is packed with meaning' (Wenham 85)

Traditionally, the divine source of the scriptures has been affirmed over the years of both Judaism and Christianity. But in the last two centuries, human qualities evident in the scriptures have been spotted by careful readers. Most obviously, the fact that we have four gospels demonstrates the humanness of Scripture. Here we have four portraits of our Lord by four authors each with their own particular slant and emphasis. Then the epistles are addressed to different churches each with their own special problems, each demanding a response by the apostle to their particular needs. The variety of styles, the tendency for the writers to go off at tangents, all attest the fact that we are dealing with human compositions by human authors each with their own idiosyncrasies. Indeed the more you think about it, the more obvious it is that Scripture has to be a human book, if it is to communicate with man. For if it had been written in God's language as opposed to Israelite Hebrew or Koine Greek, no-one could have understood it without first learning God's language. But written in Hebrew the OT was at least immediately intelligible to an ancient

Israelite, while the NT was equally accessible to first-century readers of Greek (Wenham 86).

So then, Scripture is both a completely divine book and a totally human book. Neither aspect should be overlooked in the study of Scripture. We must bear both in mind as we read it and seek to apply it today. The dual nature of Scripture causes various problems, but none of the tensions are intrinsically any worse than those posed by the other doctrines like the Incarnation, Trinity, Law and Grace, etc. There is a paradox and mystery here, just as we do in understanding the incarnation and atonement. But if we acknowledge that we do not understand how the immortal could die, we will not despair when confronted by the mystery of Scripture's dual nature (Wenham 87).

3.3 Self Assessment Questions

- How can you reconcile the understanding that the Scripture is both human and divine in nature?

3.4 The Indispensability of Biblical Criticism

The place of biblical criticism in the study of Scripture cannot be overemphasized. Biblical criticism is essential to the understanding of Scripture as a divine work. It is so because Biblical criticism seeks to understand the situation of the original recipients of the Word, to discover exactly what the original authors of the scriptures meant by their words. Whenever documents are copied, especially when copied by hand, mistakes are liable to creep in. The branch of Biblical criticism that traces this error is Textual criticism. And even in this age of computer typesetting, very odd mistakes still from time to time. Similar things have unfortunately happened in the copying of the biblical text. We do not have the original text of Isaiah or St Paul's epistles, only copies; indeed in most cases copies of copies of copies, so that there has been plenty of chance for errors to creep in. This is particularly the case in the NT, partly because there are many more manuscripts of it and partly because Christians were less careful copiers than the Jews! However thanks to the skills of the textual critics these errors can be spotted and the text restored to very nearly its original purity. To quote F. F. Bruce, 'The various readings about which any doubt remains ... affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice' (Wenham 85). We can in other words be very confident that our restored texts are so close to the original that there is no significant difference in meaning between them and the originals.

But once we have our restored texts, as near as makes no difference to the original, how do we establish what they mean? This brings us to the science of philology and linguistics, which has been most fruitfully applied to the understanding of the Bible; in particular James Barr has here made an immense and positive contribution to biblical interpretation. His studies have transformed our approach to determining the precise meaning of words in Scripture. So often sermons are based on sloppy etymologies or words or phrases taken out of context, but linguistics has shown that

this is quite mistaken. So quite central terms in the Bible's theological vocabulary, *e.g.* faith, soul, redemption, justification, may have been misunderstood by amateurs who fail to understand how language works. Modern linguistics has taught us to examine the context in which words are used rather than their etymology to determine their meaning. It has taught us to study language synchronically before studying it diachronically. In practice this means we must examine the usage of a word in a particular book of the Bible before examining its usage and meaning elsewhere. Just because a word means one thing in one writer, it does not necessarily follow that another writer uses it in exactly the same way. And once we recognize this principle we may well be on the way to resolving the apparent contradictions between different parts of Scripture, for example between Paul and James.

The next area of biblical criticism has burgeoned in the last decade. It is the new literary criticism, especially associated in Britain with Sheffield University. It is, I believe, one of the disciplines in biblical criticism of most potential value to would-be biblical expositors in that it opens up whole new vistas in the biblical narratives so that characters in the story come alive as real people not as mere names on the page. The new literary criticism has made us much more sensitive to the inner feelings of the actors in the Bible so that we can identify with them more closely.

Let me give a short example. Literary critics insist that repetition within a story often offers very valuable clues to the attitudes of the people involved. We must examine closely who says what, and what phrases they use.

There is another area of criticism that sometimes raises problems, but again has produced many valuable insights, indeed is indispensable to a fair and accurate understanding of Scripture. It is historical criticism. It includes source criticism, issues of dating biblical books, and the writing of biblical history. To understand the message of the Bible it is absolutely essential to have some understanding of the social setting in which its books were written. Otherwise we shall import our own twentieth-century models, impose them on the text and come up with quite a misleading interpretation. According to Wenham (86), we should read in the context of OT society, rather than modern ideas. Historical criticism has a most important role to play in delineating the nature of biblical society. Without such sociological study we are liable to make terrible mistakes in interpreting and applying Scripture today.

Other disciplines of source, form, and redaction criticism can also contribute to our understanding of the Bible. Form criticism has made us aware of the conventions that guided the biblical authors. It enables us to appreciate why they arranged material in the way they did, for example in the laws, the psalms, and the epistles. Through form criticism we can be clearer about the writers' intentions: why they included certain details and omitted others. And this knowledge should keep us from misinterpreting and misapplying biblical texts today.

3.4 Self Assessment Questions

- Why do you think Biblical Criticism is indispensable?

3.5 Some limitations of criticism

The aspect of biblical criticism that is often the most sensitive is the dating of the biblical material and the attempt to assess its historicity. Establishing the historical setting of a book is often of great value in interpreting it. For example it makes a great difference to the interpretation of the book of Revelation whether we date it before AD 70, when Jerusalem fell, or afterwards. On the former view we can read it as a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem, of the great whore Babylon. Dated later it is more natural to read it as an anticipation of the end of the Roman Empire. And there are many other books in the Bible where it makes a considerable difference to our understanding of them, when we date them (Wenham 88).

While issues of dating and authorship are very important in understanding the message of the scripture, we are encouraged not to expend all our time on them. Discussions on them should be kept in perspective for obvious reasons.

Authorship and dating are not as securely based as is sometimes claimed. The assured results of criticism are not quite as sure as they seem. Commenting on the source criticism of the Pentateuch, Professor Rendtorff of Heidelberg has written: 'We possess hardly any reliable criteria for the dating of pentateuchal literature. Every dating of the pentateuchal sources rests on purely hypothetical assumptions which only have any standing through the consensus of scholars.' And in his book *Redating the NT* J. A. T. Robinson makes much the same point. He wrote, 'Much more than is generally recognized, the chronology of the NT rests on presuppositions rather than facts. What seemed to be firm datings based on scientific evidence are revealed to rest on deductions from deductions (Wenham 88).

The second thing to bear in mind is that historicity is not everything. It of course matters whether Jesus lived, died, and rose again. But there is a Jewish scholar Pinhas Lapide who believes in these facts without being a Christian. And I suppose that if the Turin shroud had proved to be genuine, it would not have persuaded many unbelievers that Jesus was indeed resurrected. It is most heartening when archaeologists find evidence corroborating the historical record of the Bible, whether it be the names of the patriarchs, the ashes of towns sacked by Joshua, the pool of Bethesda or the house of Peter in Capernaum. All these discoveries confirm our faith in the historical reliability of the Bible. But the Bible is more than a human history book. Throughout, it claims to be offering a divine interpretation of public historical events, an interpretation that is beyond the scope of human verification.

Finally, we should not spend too much time on the critical issues: it can easily divert us from the purpose of Scripture. Like the Jews we should be searching the Scriptures to find eternal life. Or as St Paul said, 'Whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction, that we might have hope' (Rom. 15:4). The purpose of the Scriptures is not simply to stimulate us academically, or to provide a

living for professional biblical scholars. It is to lead us to God. Biblical criticism offers us indispensable aids to the interpretation and understanding of the Bible. But often instead of being the handmaid of Scripture it has become its master. When the academic study of Scripture diverts our attention from loving God with all our heart, soul and strength, we should pause and take stock. We should ask ourselves whether we are using it as it was intended. As said earlier, it is both a divine book and a human book. Because it is a human book we cannot understand it unless we employ all the types of biblical criticism to the full. But because it is also a divine book we must recognize that these tools are insufficient by themselves for us to grasp and apply its message. To do that we must have a humble mind and a heart open to the guidance of the Spirit.

3.5 Self Assessment Questions

- Summarize the three reasons why biblical criticism is limited.

4.0 Conclusion

Biblical criticism simply refers to the scholarly approach of studying, evaluating and critically assessing the Bible as literature in order to understand it better. It draws upon a wide range of scholarly disciplines including archaeology, anthropology, folklore, linguistics, oral tradition studies, and historical and religious studies. In order to provide reasonable answers to the questions of authorship, when, why and how individual books of the Bible were produced, biblical scholars have employed scientific and quasi-scientific methods. Biblical criticism is, also helpful in relating the meaning of the Bible to the world today. The role we ascribe to biblical criticism depends to a large extent on our understanding of the nature of Scripture, whether or not it is a divine book or a human one. While issues of dating and authorship are very important in understanding the message of the scripture, we are encouraged not to expend all our time on them. Discussions on them should be kept in perspective for obvious reasons.

5.0 Summary

This unit discussed the meaning and need for biblical criticism, presented under the following subheadings: Defining Biblical Criticism; The Need for Biblical Criticism; The Place of Biblical Criticism in Theological Study; The indispensability of biblical criticism; and some limitations of criticism. Next unit will discuss in detail one of the tools in Biblical Criticism, namely: Historical Criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Show five reasons why biblical criticism is indispensable
- What limits do biblical criticism present?

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MODULE 1: AUTHOR-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 2: Historical Criticism****Contents**

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5.0 Summary

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1.0 Introduction

Historical criticism is a branch of literary criticism that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand "the world behind the text"; it is also known as the historical-critical method or higher criticism. The primary goal of historical criticism is to ascertain the text's primitive or original meaning in its original historical context and its literal sense, including authorship and dating. The secondary goal seeks to establish a reconstruction of the historical situation of the author and recipients of the text (Levenson). This Unit discusses: Definitions for Historical Criticism, History of HC, Interpretation of HC, and Views on higher criticism/historical Methods.

2.0 Objective

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define Historical Criticism
- Narrate the History of Historical Criticism
- Discuss various Interpretations of Historical Criticism, and
- Identify different views on higher criticism or historical Methods.

3.0 Main Body

- **Defining Historical Criticism**

The approach of Historical-critical methods typifies the following: (1) that reality is uniform and universal, (2) that reality is accessible to human reason and investigation (3) that all events historical and natural are interconnected and comparable to analogy, (4) that humanity's contemporary experience of reality can provide objective criteria to what could or could not have happened in past events. Application of the historical critical method, in biblical studies, investigates the books of the Hebrew Bible as well as the New Testament.

When applied to the Bible, the historical-critical method is distinct from the traditional, devotional approach. In particular, while devotional readers concern themselves with the overall message of the Bible, historians examine the distinct messages of each book in the Bible. Guided by the devotional approach, for example, Christians often combine accounts from different gospels into single accounts, whereas historians attempt to discern what is unique about each gospel, including how they are different.

The perspective of the early historical critic was rooted in Protestant reformation ideology, inasmuch as their approach to biblical studies was free from the influence of traditional interpretation. Where historical investigation was unavailable, historical criticism rested on philosophical and theological interpretation. With each passing century, historical criticism became refined into various methodologies used today: source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism, canonical criticism, and related methodologies (Levenson). The rise of historical consciousness brought a flood of philosophical, historical, and literary questions regarding the origin of the biblical texts: date, place, authorship, sources, and intention (Soulén).

3.1 Self Assessment Questions

- Discuss the four perspectives historical criticism typifies.

- **History of Historical Criticism**

Historical criticism began in the 17th century and gained popular recognition in the 19th and 20th centuries. Earlier, the Dutch scholars like Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536) and Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) are usually credited as the first to study the Bible in this way. The phrase "higher criticism" became popular in Europe from the mid-18th century to the early 20th century, to describe the work of such scholars as Jean Astruc (mid-18th century), Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918). In academic circles today, this is the body of work

properly considered "higher criticism", though the phrase is sometimes applied to earlier or later work using similar methods.

Higher criticism originally referred to the work of German biblical scholars of the Tübingen School. After the path-breaking work on the New Testament by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the next generation – which included scholars such as David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72) – in the mid-19th century, analyzed the historical records of the Middle East from Christian and Old Testament times in search of independent confirmation of events related in the Bible. These latter scholars built on the tradition of Enlightenment and Rationalist thinkers such as John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Gotthold Lessing, Gottlieb Fichte, G. W. F. Hegel and the French rationalists.

These ideas were imported to England by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and, in particular, by George Eliot's translations of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1854). In 1860 seven liberal Anglican theologians began the process of incorporating this historical criticism into Christian doctrine in *Essays and Reviews*, causing a five-year storm of controversy which completely overshadowed the arguments over Darwin's newly published *On the Origin of Species*. Two of the authors were indicted for heresy and lost their jobs by 1862, but in 1864 had the judgment overturned on appeal. *La Vie de Jésus* (1863), the seminal work by a Frenchman, Ernest Renan (1823–92), continued in the same tradition as Strauss and Feuerbach. In Catholicism, *L'Evangile et l'Eglise* (1902), the magnum opus by Alfred Loisy against the *Essence of Christianity* of Adolf von Harnack and *La Vie de Jesus* of Renan, gave birth to the modernist crisis (1902–61). Some scholars, such as Rudolf Bultmann have used higher criticism of the Bible to "demythologize" it.

3.2 Self Assessment Questions

- Show how historical criticism was referred to higher criticism. Who were the main players?
 - **Interpretations of Historical Criticism**

Scholars of higher criticism have sometimes upheld and sometimes challenged the traditional authorship of various books of the Bible. A group of German biblical scholars at Tübingen University formed the Tübingen School of theology under the leadership of Ferdinand Christian Baur, with important works being produced by Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach and David Strauss. In the early 19th century they sought independent confirmation of the events related in the Bible through Hegelian analysis of the historical records of the Middle East from Christian and Old Testament times.

Their ideas were brought to England by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, then in 1846 Mary Ann Evans translated David Strauss's sensational *Leben Jesu* as the *Life*

of *Jesus Critically Examined*, a quest for the historical Jesus. In 1854 she followed this with a translation of Feuerbach's even more radical *Essence of Christianity* which held that the idea of God was created by man to express the divine within himself, though Strauss attracted most of the controversy. The loose grouping of Broad Churchmen in the Church of England was influenced by the German higher critics. In particular, Benjamin Jowett visited Germany and studied the work of Baur in the 1840s, then in 1866 published his book on *The Epistles of St Paul*, arousing theological opposition. He then collaborated with six other theologians to publish their *Essays and Reviews* in 1860. The central essay was Jowett's *On the Interpretation of Scripture* which argued that the Bible should be studied to find the authors' original meaning in their own context rather than expecting it to provide a modern scientific text.

3.3 Self Assessment Questions

- Demonstrate how the Tübingen School sought to interpret Historical Criticism.
 - **Views on higher criticism or historical Methods**

The historical-critical method of Biblical scholarship is taught widely in Western nations, including in many seminaries. According to Ehrman, most lay Christians are unaware of how different this particular academic view of the Bible is from their own. Conservative evangelical schools, however, often reject this approach, teaching instead that the Bible is completely inerrant in all matters (in contrast to the less conservative Protestant view that it is infallible only in matters relating to personal salvation, a doctrine called biblical infallibility) and that it reflects explicit divine inspiration. However, the Catholic Church, while teaching inerrancy, also allows for more nuance in interpretation than would conservative Evangelical schools, because of its historical understanding of the "four senses of Scripture". In the Pontifical Biblical Commission's "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," the need for historical criticism is clearly expressed and affirmed.

With Protestant historical-criticism, the movement of rationalism as promoted by Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), held that reason is the determiner of truth. Spinoza did not regard the Bible as divinely inspired; instead it was to be evaluated like any other book. Later rationalists also have rejected the authority of Scripture

3.4 Self Assessment Questions

- Compare and contrast the different views on Historical Criticism by Conservative Evangelical schools and Catholic Church.

4.0 Conclusion

The emergence of Historical Criticism, evidently, raised questions concerning the origins of biblical books. Prior to this time, many people looked to the church for their interpretation and for guidance in their understanding of the Scriptures. By Reformation period, new era of biblical interpretation evolved, which challenged the authority of Rome as the sole interpreter of the Scriptures. On the one hand, this meant that people recognized the fact that Scripture itself is its own interpreter. On the other hand, this also meant that, in the eyes of some, people had license to develop their own ideas on the meaning and origin of Scriptural books apart from an external authority. The whole aim of Historical Criticism is not to seek out faults from the scriptures, but to develop a systematic way of its interpretation through verifiable data.

5.0 Summary

This Unit has shown that Historical Criticism or Higher Criticism is an attempt to investigate the origins of ancient text in order to understand "the world behind the text", including the dating, authorship and place. It discussed the different definitions, history, interpretation and views about Historical Criticism. Next Unit will concentrate on one of the tools of Historical Criticisms, namely: Source Criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Discuss the history of Historical Criticisms, comparing and contrasting the Catholic and Evangelical views.

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 1: AUTHOR-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 3: Source Criticism****Contents**

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3.0 Main body

3.1 Defining Source Criticism

3.2 Scholars of Source Criticism

3.3 Documentary Hypothesis

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1.0 Introduction

Source criticism is the tool scholars use to figure out what sources, or materials, biblical authors drew on. They use it to unravel the pressing questions of why some passages seem so similar to one another and yet also quite different. In other cases, Bible scholars use the way a text is written (changes in style, vocabulary, repetitions, and the like) to determine what sources may have been used by a biblical author. This Unit defines Source Criticism, Documentary Hypothesis, Problems of Source Criticism, and Recent Trends in Biblical Source Criticism.

2.0 Objective

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Define source criticism.
- Describe some of the sources that may have been used by biblical authors.
- Discuss some of the problems related to source criticism.
- And survey the recent trends in biblical source criticism.

3.0 Main body

3.1 Defining Source Criticism

Source Criticism, which is formerly called “literary criticism” or “higher criticism,” is a method of biblical study, which analyzes texts that are not the work of a single author but result from the combination of originally separate documents. This method has been applied to texts of the Old Testament (especially but not exclusively the Pentateuch) and New Testament (especially but not exclusively the gospels).

Reading Genesis chapters 1 and 2 present one with two different accounts of creation, which poses some questions. Was humanity created last, as chapter 1 has it, or created at the beginning of the process, as chapter 2 suggests? Similarly, the same sorts of questions arise when scholars read other parts of the Bible, example: the Gospels. The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are called the Synoptic Gospels because they seem to see things ‘with the same eye’ (synoptically) and are very close in their outline of events. These similarities have led most scholars to see them as related or interdependent to some extent. So, source criticism is a tool used by Scholars to unravel the pressing questions of why some passages seem so similar to one another and yet also quite different.

Source criticism is to be distinguished from other critical methods. Where original documents prove not to have been free compositions, but to rest on older, oral tradition, FORM CRITICISM may then be used to penetrate behind the written text. The study of the editing process, whereby the sources have been linked together and incorporated into the present, finished text belongs to the province of REDACTION CRITICISM. Source criticism should also be distinguished from textual (sometimes called lower) criticism, which is concerned to establish the exact wording of the earliest manuscript of the present text, not to reconstruct hypothetical earlier stages in the text’s growth. Nevertheless, there is some overlap between source and textual criticism, since the tell-tale signs that a text is composite may include the kinds of minor inconsistency that scribes were apt to correct when copying manuscripts, and the textual critic needs to be aware of this when making conjectures about textual transmission. Conversely, source critics must be careful not to appeal to such inconsistencies without first making sure that they cannot be accounted for as slips in copying.

3.1 Self Assessment Questions

- What is the meaning of Source Criticism?
- Explain how Source Criticism differs from Form Criticism or Textual Criticism.

3.2 Documentary Hypothesis

Out of source criticism developed the Documentary Hypothesis. The Documentary Hypothesis considers the sources for the Pentateuch, claiming that there were four separate sources that combined to create the first five books of the bible. These sources are the Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly source. The Jahwist source is characterized by the use of the name YHWH, has a human-like God, and is especially concerned with the kingdom of Judah.

The Jahwist source is thought to be written c. 950 B.C. The Elohist source is characterized with God being called Elohim, and deals more with the kingdom of Israel. The Elohist source is thought to be written c. 850 B.C. The Deuteronomic source is characterized by a sermon like style mostly concerned with law. The Deuteronomic source is thought to be written c. 721-621 BC. The Priestly source is characterized by a formal style that is mostly concerned with priestly matters. The Priestly source is thought to be written c. 550 BC. While there are many opponents to the Documentary Hypothesis, the majority of biblical scholars support it. Some of the other hypotheses that have been raised by source criticism are the fragmentary and supplementary hypotheses.

According to this theory, the Torah subsumes a composite of literary works, or sources, instead of being the work of a single author. Proponents of this theory, the "sources critics," identify these sources by highlighting sections of the Torah that display different writing styles, ideological assumptions, word choice, particularly with regard to Divine names, and any number of other differences. Source critics attribute the sources to authors coming from different time periods and ideological backgrounds, and have named them "J" (for passages that use the Tetragrammaton), "E" (for passages that use Elohim), "P" (Priestly) and "D" (Deuteronomist). Until recently, this theory was considered the unshakable bedrock upon which any academic Bible study was to be proposed.

In 1886 the German historian Julius Wellhausen published *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Prolegomena to the History of Israel). Wellhausen argued that the Bible is an important source for historians, but cannot be taken literally. He argued that the "hexateuch," (including the Torah or Pentateuch, and the book of Joshua) was written by a number of people over a long period of time. Specifically, he identified four distinct narratives, which he identified as Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist and Priestly accounts. He also identified a Redactor, who edited the four accounts into one text. (Some argue the redactor was Ezra the scribe). He argued that each of these sources has its own vocabulary, its own approach and concerns, and that the passages originally belonging to each account can be distinguished by differences in style (especially the name used for God, the

grammar and word usage, the political assumptions implicit in the text, and the interests of the author.

“Briefly stated, the Documentary Hypothesis sees the Torah as having been composed by a series of editors out of four major strands of literary traditions. These traditions are known as J, E, D, and P.” We can diagram their relationships as follows.

J (the Jahwist or Jerusalem source) uses the Tetragrammaton as God's name. This source's interests indicate it was active in the southern Kingdom of Judah in the time of the divided Kingdom. J is responsible for most of Genesis.

E (the Elohist or Ephraimitic source) uses Elohim ("God") for the divine name until Exodus 3-6, where the Tetragrammaton is revealed to Moses and to Israel. This source seems to have lived in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the divided Kingdom. E wrote the Aqedah (Binding of Isaac) story and other parts of Genesis, and much of Exodus and Numbers.

J and E were joined fairly early, apparently after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE. It is often difficult to separate J and E stories that have merged.

D (the Deuteronomist) wrote almost all of Deuteronomy (and probably also Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings). Scholars often associate Deuteronomy with the book found by King Josiah in 622 BCE (see 2 Kings 22).

P (the Priestly source) provided the first chapter of Genesis; the book of Leviticus; and other sections with genealogical information, the priesthood, and worship. According to Wellhausen, P was the latest source and the priestly editors put the Torah in its final form sometime after 539 BCE. Recent scholars (for example, James Milgrom) are more likely to see P as containing pre-exilic material.

Contemporary critical scholars disagree with Wellhausen and with one another on details and on whether D or P was added last. But they agree that the general approach of the Documentary Hypothesis best explains the doublets, contradictions, differences in terminology and theology, and the geographical and historical interests that we find in various parts of the Torah.

3.3 Evidence for Composite Character (ABD)

1. Inconsistencies.

Suspicion that a book is not the work of a single author, composing freely, is most readily aroused when inconsistencies are noticed. These may be of various kinds. In narrative texts it may be impossible to extract a coherent sequence of events. For example, in Gen 12:1, Abram is told to leave Haran after the death of his father,

Terah. According to 11:26, Abram was born when Terah was 70; according to 11:32 Terah died at the age of 205; hence Abram must have been 135 when he was called to leave Ur. But 12:4 says that he was only 75 when he left Haran. The difficulty is explained if the story in Genesis 12 is drawn from a different source from the genealogical information in Genesis 11. Thematic inconsistency arises when a text seems to give expression to two incompatible points of view. Thus in the stories about the rise of the Israelite monarchy in 1 Sam 8-12, some accounts seem to regard Saul's election and anointing as reflecting a decision by God (e.g., 9:15-16; 10:1), while others present the people's insistence on selecting a king to be a sinful rejection of God (e.g., 8:1-22; 10:17-19). The simplest explanation is that the compiler of the books of Samuel used more than one already existing account of the origins of the monarchy, and that these accounts did not agree among themselves. On a smaller scale, there are often puzzling inconsistencies of detail, such as the variation in the names used for God in Genesis and Exodus ("Yahweh," "Elohim," "El Shaddai," "El Elyon," etc.).

2. Repetitions and Doublets.

In almost every narrative book in the OT a careful reading reveals difficulties in following the sequence of events because the same incident seems to be related more than once. The earliest example is in Genesis 1-2, where in 1:27, "God created man in his own image," but then in 2:7, "the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground," just as if the man's creation had not been mentioned before. Where this kind of repetition is found, the simplest explanation is often that two versions of the same story have both been allowed to remain in the finished form of the book, not-reconciled with each other. In some cases material from two or more sources seems to be interwoven: the classic example is the Flood Narrative of Genesis 6-9, where one version speaks of a 40-day flood and the other of a 150-day flood, with incidents from the two versions set down in alternating blocks. Similarly repetitious accounts, often extremely complex and hard to analyze, may be found in Exodus 24, where Moses seems to go up the holy mountain three times, and Joshua 3-4, in which the account of the crossing of the Jordan under Joshua's leadership is impossibly convoluted. Where two accounts or versions are closely similar in extent, they are often called a doublet: compare, for example, 2 Kgs 24:10-14 with 24:15-16, or Gen 37:21-22 with 37:26-27.

3. Stylistic Differences.

Some OT books show extraordinary variations of style, ranging from a preference for particular words or phrases to peculiarities of grammar and syntax. In the Pentateuch, variation is particularly marked in Genesis and Exodus, where some sections are written in a lively narrative style akin to that of the books of Samuel,

while others are marked by a stylized and repetitive manner, full of recurring formulas, lists, and technical terms. Compare, for example, the vivid narrative of Exodus 2—the childhood and early career of Moses—with the ponderous accounts of the building and equipping of the tent sanctuary in Exodus 36-40. Such variations in style can also be found in poetic books. Among the oracles in Jeremiah, for example, there are some (e.g., chapters 30 and 31) whose similarity to the style of Isaiah 40-55 (the so-called “Second Isaiah”) is so close, and whose dissimilarity from the rest of Jeremiah is so great, that they seem likely to derive from a different hand than the rest of the book. Other chapters in Jeremiah, especially those in prose, seem close to the style of the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua-2 Kings). While an appreciation of stylistic difference is often to some extent subjective, the variations within books such as these are wide enough to make it unlikely that a single author is responsible for all the material. English translations of the Bible tend to flatten out such differences by using uniform “biblical English,” but in the Hebrew they are easily detected.

3.3 Self Assessment Questions

- Discuss some of the evidences for the composite character of the Pentateuch

3.4 Recent Trends in Biblical Source Criticism

The mid-1980s and the early 1990s witnessed a resurgence of biblical scholars challenging, revising, and even rejecting the Documentary Hypothesis. First and foremost, scholars relinquished claims to a scientific methodology. In *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, 2 Jeffery Tigay insists that “The degree of subjectivity which such hypothetical [source critical] procedures permit is notorious.” In fact, he characterizes these procedures as “reading between the lines.” Moreover, Edward Greenstein maintains that source critical analysis is analogous to the blind men and the elephant: “Each of five blind men approaches a different part of an elephant's anatomy. only part of the elephant, each man draws a different conclusion as to the identity of what he encounters.” According to the preceding remarks, not only are source critical methods subjective, but also account for only a fraction of the total evidence. Especially when analyzing a literary corpus “as bulky and complex as an elephant,” a system which fails to consider all the evidence, and wherein “scholars shape the data into the configurations of their own imagination” hardly warrants the label scientific.

While surveying many conflicting proposals for the nature of the hypothetical sources, Gerhard Larsson gives a more specific account of the methodological shortcomings. He says that:

. . . there is no sound objective method for recognizing the different sources, there is also no real consensus about the character and extent of sources like J and E, [and] no unity

concerning limits between original sources and the insertions made by redactors.

Rather, as Greenstein says, "each scholar defines and adapts the evidence according to his own point of view."⁷ Such an approach not only yields results which are, as Tigay highlights, "hypothetical (witness the term 'documentary hypothesis')," but, as David Noel Freedman declares, allows and encourages, "the pages of our literature [to be] filled with endless arguments between scholars who simply reiterate their prejudices."

The lack of a sound and rigorous methodology leads scholars to produce varying and even contradictory theories, which ultimately undermine the enterprise as a whole. In addition to Wellhausen's four sources J, E, P, and D, some scholars speculate about sources labeled Lay (L), Nomadic (N), Kenite (K), Southern or Seir (S) and the "foundational source" Grundlage (G). Not only do scholars multiply the number of sources, some, applying the same methodology, fragment J, E, P, and D into further subdivisions, and view these documents as products of "schools" which "shaped and reshaped these documents by further additions."

After summarizing the different opinions, Pauline Viviano says, the more "sources" one finds, the more tenuous the evidence for the existence of continuous documents becomes, and the less likely that four unified documents ever existed. Even for those able to avoid skepticism and confusion in the face of the ever increasing number of sources, the only logical conclusion seems to be to move away from [Wellhausen's] Documentary Hypothesis toward a position closer to the Fragmentary Hypothesis.

In addition to being a victim of its own ambition, the Documentary Hypothesis suffered many challenges, from the time of its inception through contemporary scholarship. Scholars have contested and even refuted the arguments from Divine names, doublets, contradictions, late words, late morphology, Aramaisms, and every other aspect of the Documentary Hypothesis.

As a result, some scholars denounce source criticism *en toto*, while others posit alternate hypotheses. However, one wonders if these hypotheses will not share the same fate as the ones they just disproved. These problems have brought source criticism to a sad state. In Greenstein's words, "Many contemporary Biblicists are experiencing a crisis in faith The objective truths of the past we increasingly understand as the creations of our own vision." He continues, "All scholarship relies on theories and methods that come and go, and . . . modern critical approaches are no more or less than our own midrash."

This "crisis," or "breakdown" to use Jon Levenson's characterization, has encouraged droves of scholars to study the Bible synchronically, a method which effectively renders source criticism irrelevant. Among other advantages, the synchronic method of biblical study encourages scholars to detect textual phenomena which, upon reflection, seem obvious, but have not been recognized until recently. Levenson explains these recent detections as follows:

Many scholars whose deans think they are studying the Hebrew Bible are, instead, concentrating on Syrio-Palestinian archeology, the historical grammar of Biblical Hebrew, Northwest Semitic epigraphy, or the like – all of which are essential, but no combination of which produces a Biblical scholar. The context often sup-plants the text and, far worse, blinds the interpreters to features of the text that their method has not predisposed them to see.

This statement could not be truer when referring to source criticism, and to this end Larsson says, albeit in a harsher tone: "Source criticism obscures the analysis. Only when the text is considered as a whole do the special features and structures of the final version emerge."

The rediscovery of the Bible's special features and structures has proven to be extremely rewarding in its own right, and, in addition, it has recurrently forced scholars to revise and even reject source critical theories. Larsson states this latter statement quite clearly: "Many scholars have found that when the different [patriarchal] cycles are studied in depth it is no longer possible to support the traditional documentary hypothesis." Even the Flood narrative, traditionally explained as two independent strands (J and P) woven together, has been unified by scholars who perceive a literary structure integrating the various sections of the story. In fact, a statistical analysis of linguistic features in Genesis lead by Yehuda Radday and Haim Shore demonstrates that with all due respect to the illustrious documentarians past and present, there is massive evidence that the pre-biblical triplicity of Genesis, which their line of thought postulates to have been worked over by a late and gifted editor into a trinity, is actually a unity.

3.4 Self Assessment Questions

- Give a brief summary of the Recent Trends in Biblical Source Criticism.

4.0 Conclusion

Source Criticism confirms that the Bible, especially the Pentateuch is a composite document, and not the work of a single author. The Documentary Hypothesis is an attempt to identify some of these sources that were used in authoring the Pentateuch. The reader should note some of the evidences for the composite nature of the Pentateuch discussed in this unit.

5.0 Summary

This Unit discussed some of the aspects of source criticism, namely: defining source criticism, documentary hypothesis, evidence for composite nature of Pentateuch, and the recent trends in source criticism. The next chapter will discuss another form of Author-centred biblical criticism: Form Criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Define Source Criticism and show how it is different from other biblical criticisms
- Discuss the main evidences for the composite nature of the Pentateuch.

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 1: AUTHOR-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 4: Form Criticism****Contents**

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1.0 Introduction

Form Criticism has since been used to supplement the documentary hypothesis explaining the origin of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament) and to study the Christian New Testament. This Unit discusses: Definition for Form Criticism; Scholars of Form Criticism; and how Form Criticism works.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define Form Criticism
- Identify some of the scholars of Form criticism
- Discuss how Form Criticism works.
- Note some limitations of form criticism

3.0 Main body

3.1 Defining Form Criticism

Form criticism is a method of biblical criticism that classifies units of scripture by literary pattern and that attempts to trace each type to its period of oral transmission. Form criticism seeks to determine a unit's original form and the historical context of the literary tradition. Hermann Gunkel originally developed form criticism to analyze the Hebrew Bible. Form criticism begins by identifying a text's genre or conventional literary form, such as parables, proverbs, epistles, or love poems. It goes on to seek the sociological setting for each text's genre, its "situation in life" (German: *Sitz im Leben*). For example, the sociological setting of a law is a court, or the sociological setting of a psalm of praise (hymn) is a worship context, or that of a proverb might be a father-to-son admonition. Having identified and analyzed the text's genre-pericopes, form criticism goes on to ask how these smaller genre-pericopes contribute to the purpose of the text as a whole.

3.2 Scholars of Form Criticism

Form criticism was originally developed for Old Testament studies by Hermann Gunkel. Martin Noth, Gerhard von Rad, and other scholars, used it to supplement the documentary hypothesis with reference to its oral foundations. It later came to be applied to the Gospels by Karl Ludwig Schmidt, Martin Dibelius, Rudolf Bultmann, and Robert M. Price among others. Over the past few decades, form criticism's emphasis on oral tradition has waned in Old Testament studies. This is largely because scholars are increasingly skeptical about our ability to distinguish the "original" oral traditions from the literary sources that preserve them. As a result, the method as applied to the Old Testament now focuses on the Bible's literary genres, becoming virtually synonymous with genre criticism.

3.3 How it Works

The Bible is a compilation of individual literary works. The diverse literature of the Bible represents a wide variety of genres (narrative, history, law, poetry, prophecy, song, letter, etc.) that were originally intended for use within a specific setting to accomplish a specific function. Unfortunately, there are no editorial introductions within the Bible to orient the reader regarding the genre, setting, and function of a specific text.

In addition, most scholars believe that a large portion of biblical literature was spoken, or passed on through oral tradition, long before it was written. In their view, the stories of the Bible are best understood as folk traditions that were originally spoken for many years, by many different people, and in many different settings. The biblical text that we now possess is the culmination of this long developmental process.

By helping the reader recognize the numerous (and not always obvious) types of literature within the Bible, form criticism attempts to recover the underlying oral

form of the biblical text as well as its original social setting (where it was used) and function (why it was used).

a) Form Criticism and Genre

The method's originator, Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), proposed that a text's genre is indicated by its structural form and is bound to a particular social setting and function. As a result, Gunkel attempted to organize the writings of the Bible according to their genre. In this endeavor, Gunkel was highly influenced by the Brothers Grimm, who had collected German folk traditions and classified them into specific categories such as fairy tale, myth, saga, and legend.

For Gunkel and the early form critics, the identification of biblical genres provided important information regarding the early oral form of a text and its original setting and function in ancient Israel. For example, an individual psalm (a designation meaning "praise") can be classified into specific categories, such as hymn (song of praise), lament, or thanksgiving psalm. Because each distinct genre was used in a specific setting for a specific purpose, accurately categorizing a psalm (or any text) helps to reveal this information.

Even in our society, the genres that we use are bound to the situations in which we employ them. You would not begin a research paper, "Once upon a time, there lived a man..." No, this genre (the fairy tale) is used in a different situation and for a different purpose. Writing a research paper has an identifiable structure (MLA or APA format) and a specific social setting (school) and function (a graded assignment).

b) How Does Form Criticism Work?

In order to apply the form critical method, one must first define the boundaries of the biblical text, to study it on its own. This means isolating an individual literary unit from its surrounding context. If a passage within a larger narrative begins, "A long time afterward," this is a textual clue that a new unit has begun. Or when a prophet writes, "Thus says the Lord," readers know that they are reading a separate divine speech. Generally, a new scene in a narrative or an individual poem, prophecy, or song constitutes a distinct literary unit.

Second, once a text is separated into its component parts, the form critic identifies the genre of the specific literary unit under consideration based on its form and content. Psalm 150 serves as an example from the Bible of the structured form of a genre. A quick reading of this individual literary unit reveals its key emphasis: praising the Lord. Based on its content, Psalm 150 is a "hymn" or a "song of praise." Aside from its content, however, a hymn provides very clear structural indications of its genre (cf. Psalms 146-49). First, a hymn begins with a command to "praise the Lord" (vs. 1). Second, a hymn typically includes reasons why one should praise the Lord (vs. 2). And third, a hymn concludes with a final command to praise (vs. 6b). Therefore, the content of the psalm (giving praise) and the structure of the psalm (the elements included) indicate its genre.

Third, the identification of the genre leads us to an understanding of the text's original setting, or the situation in which it was used prior to its inclusion in the Bible. In biblical scholarship, the setting of the text is known as its *Sitz im Leben* ("setting in life"). To be clear, form criticism is not attempting to understand the historical setting of the author, but rather, the social situation in which the text was used. For example, because Psalm 150 is a hymn, it is very probable that it was used in the context of ancient Israel's worship. Consequently, the identification of the genre also indicates how the text was used (its function), which, in this case, is to give praise to Israel's God.

Form criticism is a helpful tool that allows interpreters to gain insights into a text based on what they can learn about its formal characteristics. By analyzing the form and genre of individual texts, form critics are able to offer ideas about its probable social setting and function.

While this method appears daunting for beginners, readers of all levels can identify genres. Form criticism simply emphasizes this task for a particular purpose – to recover the early stages of a biblical text.

3.3 Self Assessment Questions

- Can you describe how Form Criticism works?

3.4 Some of the Forms found in the Old Testament/New Testament

The Pentateuch is a rich collection of literary genre or types. These multiple and complex literary forms have been directly responsible for the ongoing debate over the composition and date of the Pentateuch. The literary types in the Pentateuch include: Prose narrative, ancient poetry, prophetic literature and law.

- 1) **Prose Narrative:** The narrative is simple but direct and forceful. The text is largely a third-person account of early Israelite history interspersed with prayer, speeches, and other types of direct discourse (e.g. Abraham's interesting prayer for Sodom in Gen. 18:22-23) Yahweh's speech to Moses in Exd. 3:7-12, and the exchange between Pharaoh and Moses in Exd. 10:1-21. The narratives artfully blend historical reporting and theological interpretation (cf. Gen. 50:15-21). The language of the Pentateuch is simple and beautiful. It uses anthropomorphic language (i.e. ascribing human qualities to God), and frequent reference to theophany (i.e. a visible and audible manifestation of God to a human being).
- 2) **Ancient Poetry:** The Pentateuch contains some of the earliest examples of Hebrew poetry in all the OT. Specific poetic forms in the Pentateuch include:
 - Prayers (e.g. the Aaronic Benediction Num. 6:22-27)
 - Songs of Praise (e.g. Miriam's Song, Exd. 15:2) cf. Nu. 21:17-18)

- Victory hymns in epic drama style (e.g. Yahweh's triumph over the Egyptian in Moses' song of the sea, Exd. 15)
 - Blessings on family members by Patriarchs (e.g. the blessing of Rebecca, Gen. 24:60; Jacob's death-bed blessing of the twelve sons, Gen. 49)
 - Prophetic utterances (e.g. Yahweh's promise to Rebecca about her twin sons, Gen. 25:23; Balaam's oracles to Israel, Num. 23-24.
 - Covenant promises (e.g. Yahweh's promises to Abram, Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1)
 - Taunt song (e.g. Lamech's taunt, Gen. 4:23)
- 3) **Prophetic Revelation:** Prophetic literature in the OT include both foretelling (or divine revelation) and exposition (or interpretation) of Yahweh's covenant-oriented revelation to Israel. The Pentateuch contains examples of both. Prophetic revelation with law occurs in prose narrative and poetic forms. E.g. there is Yahweh's revelation to Abram regarding the oppression and slavery of his descendants (Gen. 15:12-16) and Moses' prosaic forecast about a prophet who will appear in Israel (Dt. 18:17-20; ultimately fulfilled – Jesus of Nazareth according to John 1:45).

Examples of poetic prophecy in the Pentateuch include Jacob's patriarchal blessing, which connects kingship with the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8-12), and Moses' lyrical pronouncements over the tribes of Judah (Gen. 49:8-12), and Moses' lyrical pronouncements over the tribes of Israel (Dt. 33). The clearest examples of prophetic-like commentary or interpretation of Yahweh's divine revelation are Moses' understanding of Israel's earlier covenant history and God's providential guidance and preservation of his people (in the so-called historical prologue of Dt. 1-4), and Moses' pointed exposition of the stipulations by which Yahweh would enforce covenant keeping in Israel by means of blessings and curses. In each case, instruction to the Israelites is followed by admonitions to covenant obedience (Dt. 4:1-10; 29:9).

- 4) **Law:** The OT affirms the divine origin of Hebrew law through Moses as Yahweh's law giver. The Pentateuch is most often associated with law, as many of the Hebrew titles for the five books attest. The English word translates the Hebrew word Torah, and OT law includes commandments, statutes, and ordinances. More than six Hundred laws are contained in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The purpose of the biblical legislation was to order and regulate the moral, religious or ceremonial, and civil life of Israel in accordance with the holiness necessary for maintaining the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The purpose of Hebrew law also had implications for the literary form of OT legislation. OT law was covenant law; it was contractual law binding and obligating two separate parties. The covenant law paralleled the so-called suzerainty covenants of the ancient world, especially those of the Hittites. Most exemplary are the Covenant Code (Exd 20-24) and the book of Deuteronomy. The suzerain covenants were granted by independent and powerful overlords to dependent and weaker vassals, guaranteeing them certain benefits including protection. In return, the vassal was obligated to keep specific stipulations certifying loyalty to the suzerain alone.

In general terms, OT law comprised declarative and prescriptive covenant stipulations for the life of the Hebrew people (quite literally in Deut. 30:15-17). The bulk of the OT legal materials is found in Exodus 20 – Deuteronomy 33, and they stem from covenant agreement or renewal ceremonies at Mount Sinai and Mount Nebo.

3.4 Self Assessment Questions

- Discuss the four distinctive genre of Form Criticism from the Old Testament.

3.5 Form Criticism and in the New Testament

a) Some Axioms of Form Criticism

Form-critical methods were first applied systematically to the Gospels by three German scholars—K. L. Schmidt, M. Dibelius, and R. Bultmann. In order to understand how the method works, we must now list some of the axioms from which form criticism proceeds.

- (1) The Synoptic Gospels are “popular” or “folk” literature rather than literary works in the classical sense. And the evangelists, according to Dibelius, “are only to the smallest extent authors. They are principally collectors, vehicles of tradition, editors.” Although both these claims are regarded by more recent scholars as over-statements, they are important because they emphasize that the evangelists were not historians employing modern methods of research, but receivers and transmitters of traditions cherished by Christian communities.
- (2) Between the time of Jesus’ ministry and the writing of the Gospels there was a period when the sayings of Jesus and stories about him were communicated orally among Christians. Even though “Q” may have existed as a document as early as A.D. 50, the church continued to set great store by oral tradition until well into the second century. Thus Papias stated: I supposed that things out of books did not profit me so much as the utterances of a voice which lives and abides” (Eusebius, H.E. III.39.4).

- (3) During this oral period the traditions about Jesus circulated as in dependent units. It can hardly have been otherwise, since the acts and sayings of Jesus would be recounted by preachers and teachers as occasion demanded. We cannot imagine the apostles giving a series of lectures in the temple precincts on the life of Jesus. Rather they would use some particular story or word of Jesus to bring home some point in the course of their preaching. This is why when we look, for example, at Mk. 2:1-3:6 we find a collection of short paragraphs (known as pericopae), each complete in itself and with no essential connection with what precedes or follows.
- (4) During the oral stage these “units of tradition” assumed particular forms according to the function which they performed in the Christian community. Form critics recognize certain forms or categories in the gospel tradition—such as “pronouncement-stories” and “miracle-stories” and insist that these distinctive forms are no creation of accident or free invention, but are determined by the setting in which they arose and the purpose for which they were used. The technical term for this setting is *Sitz im Leben* (“life-situation”). Just as information about the qualities of particular toothpaste will be told in a distinctive manner by an advertisement, but in a quite different manner by a scientific report, so stories about Jesus acquired different forms or shapes according to their *Sitz im Leben*. Thus form critics claim the ability to deduce the *Sitz im Leben* of a gospel pericope from its form. If we find several pericopae with the same form, we may assume that they all had the same *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., they all performed the same function in the church’s life, whether it be worship or apologetic or catechesis or some other function.

b) The Various Forms

A form critic’s main purpose, then, is to classify the gospel pericope according to their forms, and to assign them to their respective *Sitze im Leben*. Apart from the Passion Narrative, Dibelius found five main categories, outlined below:

1. PARADIGMS

These are brief episodes which culminate in an authoritative saying of Jesus, or sometimes in a statement about the reaction of onlookers. A typical “pure paradigm” is Mk. 3:31-35:

And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

2. TALES (NOVELLEN)

These are stories of Jesus' miracles which, unlike paradigms, include details betraying "a certain pleasure in the narrative itself", and which Dibelius therefore attributed to a special class of story-tellers and teachers (for whose existence there is no New Testament evidence, unless these stories are themselves evidence). The stories may be subdivided into exorcisms (e.g. Mk. 5:1-20; 9:14-29), other healing miracles (e.g. Mk. 1:40-45; 5:21-43) and nature miracles (e.g. Mk. 4:35-41; 6:35-44, 45-52). All the stories follow the same basic pattern: (1) a description of the disease or situation to be remedied; (2) a statement of the cure or solution achieved by Jesus; (3) a statement of the results of the miracle—either the effects on the person healed or the reaction of the onlookers. This is a natural pattern for any story of this kind, shared by Jewish and pagan miracle-stories, as well as by TV adverts for vitamin pills and medicated shampoos.

3. LEGENDS

Dibelius took over this term from its application in later Christian centuries to "legends of the saints". It does not necessarily imply that what is recorded is unhistorical—though that may often be the case, in the opinion of Dibelius, and particularly of Bultmann, who treats these pericopae under the heading "historical stories and legends". What is important is the purpose of these narratives. They are "religious narratives of a saintly man in whose works and fate interest is taken". And they arose in the church to satisfy a twofold desire: the wish to know something of the virtues and lot of the holy men and women in the story of Jesus, and the wish which gradually arose to know Jesus himself in this way.

Thus there are legends about Jesus (e.g. Lk. 2:41-49; 4:29f), Peter (e.g. Mt. 14:28-33; 16:13-23), Judas (Mt. 27:3-8) and other characters. In narratives like this the characters are not simply foils for some word of Jesus, as in paradigms—they become real people and are presented as examples to follow.

4. MYTHS

Myths are narratives which depict "a many-sided interaction between mythological but not human persons"—the supernatural is seen breaking in upon the human scene. ¹⁹ Only three narratives are listed in this category: the baptismal miracle (Mk. 1:9-11 and parallels), the temptations (Mt. 4:1-11 and parallel), the transfiguration (Mk. 9:2-8 and parallels). Bultmann does not use the term "myth" to denote a category, but includes these three narratives among the "historical stories and legends".

5. EXHORTATIONS

Exhortations (Paränesen) is Dibelius' term for the teaching material in the Gospels. Their Sitz im Leben is catechesis. Formally, the sayings of Jesus may be divided into maxims, metaphors, parabolic narratives, prophetic challenges, short commandments, and extended commandments including some kind of motive clause (e.g. Mt. 5:29f, 44-48; 6:2-4).

Bultmann's treatment of the sayings of Jesus is more extensive. He divides them according to content into three groups: (1) logia or wisdom sayings; (2) prophetic and apocalyptic sayings; (3) laws and community regulations. Formal characteristics cut right across these categories, provoking B. S. Easton to ask: "What formal difference is there between the 'logion'—Whosoever exalts himself shall be humbled—the 'apocalyptic word'—Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, the Son of Man shall be ashamed of him—and the 'church rule'—Whosoever puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery?" On grounds of form rather than content, Bultmann was able to isolate only two main types: "I-sayings" in which Jesus speaks of himself, his works and his destiny (e.g. Mt. 5:17; Mk. 10:45); and "Parables". His analysis of the parabolic material is particularly illuminating.

3.5 Self Assessment Questions

- Discuss the various forms of Form Criticism in the New Testament

3.6 Some Limitations of Form Criticism

We must now mention some limitations of form criticism as it has hitherto been practised, and some questions which it has not yet answered satisfactorily.

- (1) How many of the forms or categories commonly referred to by form critics have in fact been satisfactorily established? We can agree that the "paradigms" and "tales" are distinctive types (though the names "pronouncement-story" and "miracle-story" are more meaningful in English), and that parables are a particular form within the sayings tradition. But what of the rest? Dibelius' "myths" are classified by their content, not by their style or form. On grounds of form alone, the temptation story in Mt. 4:1-11 would more naturally be described as a controversy dialogue (it is not very different from Mk. 10:2-9; 11:27-33 or 12:18-27), and is in fact so described by M. Albertz. Similarly the "legends", though they may have certain typical features in common, can hardly be said to have a common form or shape. "What common form can be perceived in the stories of the Confession of Peter, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Transfiguration, and Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve?" asks Redlich. He therefore calls such pericope "form-less stories", and Taylor for similar reasons speaks simply of "stories about Jesus". Most of the discourse material, too, refuses to be categorized according to form. Bultmann's categories, for instance, "do little more than describe stylistic features; they do not denote popular forms into which an individual or a community unconsciously throws sayings."
- (2) The assumption that there was an "oral period" before any of the gospel material came to be written down has been questioned by H. Schürmann. He suggests that during Jesus' ministry his disciples may have written notes on main aspects of his teaching.

- (3) How did the traditions about Jesus arise and how did they develop? These are questions which form criticism has not taken seriously enough. Dibelius and Bultmann wrote confidently about the “laws of tradition”, giving the impression that these were well-proven laws of the development of oral tradition which could be scientifically applied both to biblical narratives and to extra-biblical material. Their main contention was that traditions develop from the simple to the more complex—hence, in general, legends were regarded as later creations than paradigms. But in fact no one has thoroughly examined these “laws of tradition”, and there is no agreement on this matter among the experts on “folk tradition”. E. P. Sanders has shown that in the manuscript tradition and the apocryphal gospels there are developments both from the simple to the more complex, and from the complex to the simpler. The situation is not straightforward.
- (4) The concern to draw parallels with extra-biblical material can sometimes distort rather than help exegesis. This is the fault of many form critics’ approach to the miracle-stories. Noting formal parallels with stories of Hellenistic “divine men” and miracle-workers, they have underplayed the didactic purpose of the miracle-stories and regarded them as quite distinct from the proclamation of Jesus as bringer of the kingdom of God. This is ironical when we observe that Bultmann, for example, regards as genuine sayings of Jesus Mt. 11:4-6 and 12:28, where Jesus clearly relates his miracles to his message of the kingdom. It is quite misleading to suggest that the miracle-stories have “no didactic motive”. In Acts 3:1ff, often in John’s Gospel, and in the paradigms involving a miracle, we see miracles used as springboards for teaching. And Richardson has shown how suitable many of the miracle-stories are, not just to exalt Jesus as a wonder-worker, but to point to various aspects of the Christian message.

3.6 Self Assessment Questions

- What are the four major limitations of Form Criticism?

4.0 Conclusion

Form criticism begins by identifying a text's genre or conventional literary form, such as parables, proverbs, epistles, or love poems. It goes on to seek the sociological setting for each text's genre, its "situation in life". It is often used in a broader sense with reference to attempts to trace the development of units of tradition during the oral period and thus to make historical value-judgments on the material.

5.0 Summary

This Unit defined Form Criticism, Scholars of Form Criticism, how it works, its forms in NT and OT, and its limitations. Next chapter discusses Redaction Criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Outline and describe the various forms of Form Criticism in the OT and NT
- What are the limitations of Form Criticism?

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MODULE 1: AUTHOR-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 5: Redaction Criticism****Contents**

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1.0 Introduction

Redaction criticism is a historical and literary discipline which studies both the ways the redactors/editors/authors changed their sources and the seams or transitions they utilized to link those traditions into a unified whole. The purpose of this approach is to recover the author's theology and setting. This unit defines Redaction Criticism;

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define Redaction Criticism
- Discuss the origin of redaction criticism
- Examine the methodology of Redaction Criticism
- Evaluate the weaknesses of Redaction criticism

3.0 Main body**3.1 Defining Redaction Criticism**

Redaction criticism is the third of four schools of criticism developed in the 19th century to study the Gospels and other biblical narratives: Form criticism, which seeks the original or authentic tradition behind the final form found in the Gospels but tends to assume that the Evangelists were mere scissors-and-paste editors who

artificially strung together the traditions they inherited; tradition criticism, a stepchild of form criticism, which tries to reconstruct the history or develop merit of the Gospel traditions from the earliest to the final form in the Gospels but often ignores the contribution of the Evangelists; and literary criticism, which bypasses the historical dimension and studies only the final form of the text, assuming that the value of the Gospels is to be found apart from considerations of originating event or author. Redaction criticism originally developed as a corrective to areas of neglect in form and tradition criticism, but it functions also as a corrective to excesses in literary criticism.

Discussing the Process of Redactional Inquiry, it is shown that Redaction criticism must build upon the results of source criticism, for the final results are determined in part by one's choice of Markan or Matthean priority. The most widely held hypothesis remains the Oxford, or four-document, hypothesis of B. H. Streeter, who taught that Matthew and Luke utilized two primary sources, Mark and Q, along with their own secondary sources (M and L). Redaction critics begin with this assumption and study the alterations which the Evangelists made to their sources. This means that redactional study is most relevant for Matthew and Luke, less so for Mark (we don't know what sources he may have used) or John (independent for the most part from the Synoptics).

Redaction critics work also with the results of form and tradition criticism, assuming the process of tradition development but studying primarily the final stage, the changes wrought by the Evangelists themselves. When examining Luke's redaction of the crucifixion narrative, these scholars ask which of the three «last sayings» peculiar to Luke (23:34, 43, 46) may have been added earlier by the community and which were added by the Evangelist. They believe that these changes to the tradition provide a clue to the Evangelist's theological intentions and the life-situation (*Sitz im Leben*) of his community. This is accomplished by asking why the changes were made and by seeking consistent patterns in the alterations made by the redactor. Such modifications denote redactional interests or theological tendencies on the part of the Evangelist who introduced them. In Luke's crucifixion narrative two such tendencies might be noted: a christological stress on Jesus as the innocent righteous martyr (exemplified also in Lk 23:47, «Surely this man was righteous dihaios») and an emphasis on the crucifixion as a scene of worship (seen in the absence of negative aspects like the earthquake, in the redaction of the taunts which in Luke are contrasted with Jesus' prayer for forgiveness, and in the fact that two of the sayings are prayers). Finally, the setting or situation of the Lukan church is reconstructed by asking what led to these changes. This is of course a speculative enterprise, but most critics believe that sociological factors hinted at in the text were behind the pastoral concerns which determined the final form. Thus redaction criticism is interested in both the theological interests and the ecclesiastical situation behind the Gospel texts.

3.2 The Origins of Redaction Criticism

There were several precursors to this movement, such as W. Wrede's 'Messianic secret'; N. B. Stonehouse's study of Christological emphases in the Synoptic

Gospels; R. H. Lightfoot's Bampton lectures of 1934, which studied Mark's theological treatment of his sources; or K. L. Schmidt's form-critical treatment of the Markan seams. Like the origins of form criticism via three German scholars working independently in post-World-War-1 Germany (Schmidt, Dibelius, Bultmann), redaction criticism began in post-World-War 2 Germany with three independent works--those of Bornkamm, Conzelmann and Marxsen.

G. Bornkamm launched the movement with his 1948 article, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew", later combined with articles by two of his students in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*. He argued that Matthew not only changed but reinterpreted Mark's miracle story into a paradigm of discipleship centering on the "little faith" of the disciples as a metaphor for the difficult journey of the "little ship of the church." In a 1954 article, "Matthew As Interpreter of the Words of the Lord" (expanded to «End-Expectation and Church in Matthew» and included in the volume mentioned above) Bornkamm considered Matthew's Gospel as a whole, stating that for Matthew eschatology is the basis for ecclesiology: the church defines itself and its mission in terms of the coming judgments. N. Perrin states, "If Günther Bornkamm is the first of the true redaction critics, Hans Conzelmann is certainly the most important". Conzelmann's study of Luke began with a 1952 article, "Zur Lukasanalyse", later expanded into *The Theology of St. Luke* (1954). He challenged the prevalent view by arguing that Luke was a theologian rather than a historian; the delay of the Parousia led Luke to replace the imminent eschatology of Mark with a salvation-historical perspective having three stages--the time of Israel, ending with John the Baptist; the time of Jesus (the center of time, the original German book title); and the time of the church. According to Conzelmann the kingdom in Luke has become virtually a timeless entity, with the Parousia no longer the focus. Mark's brief interim has become an indefinite period, and the church is prepared for prolonged conflict in the lengthy period before the final judgment.

W. Marxsen in his *Mark the Evangelist* (1956) was the first to use the term *Redaktionsgeschichte*, and the first and most influential portion of his work described the differences between form and redaction criticism, asserting that form-critical research has missed the third *Sitz im Leben* (after the situations of Jesus and the early church), namely that of the Evangelist. His method is called «backwards exegesis», which interprets each pericope from the perspective of those preceding it. By this theory Mark used the John the Baptist story not to tell what happened but rather to provide a base for what came after, the story of Jesus. Marxsen's actual theory regarding Mark was much less influential; he stated that Mark wrote to tell the church to flee the terrible persecution during the Jewish war of AD 66 and to proceed to Galilee where the imminent return of the Son of man (Parousia) would take place.

3.3 The Methodology of Redaction Criticism

The difficulty in redactional research is determining with some degree of probability that a redactional nuance is present in the text. The discipline is prone to highly speculative theories because the methodology as well as the thoroughness of

the search completely determines the results. Marxsen, on the one hand, makes Mark a Jewish-Christian work centering on an imminent Parousia, while Weeden, on the other hand, turns Mark into a Hellenistic work countering a «divine man» heresy by recasting Mark's battle with his opponents in the form of a dramatic conflict between Jesus (= Mark) and his disciples (= Mark's opponents). Few interpreters have followed either theory because both failed to consider all the evidence. The key to redactional study is a good synopsis of the Gospels, which becomes the basis for the research. A scholar compares the Gospel accounts, compiles the differences and then studies the resultant data by means of the following stages of analysis.

a) Tradition-Critical Analysis

The historical development of the pericope from Jesus through the early church to the Evangelist is determined by applying the criteria of authenticity to the passage:

1. Dissimilarity (the tradition is authentic if it exhibits no ties to Judaism or the church);
2. multiple attestation (the pericope is repeated in several of the primary sources like Mark, Q, M, L or in more than one form);
3. divergent patterns (it is contrary to emphases in the early church);
4. unintended evidence of historicity (details which suggest an eyewitness report);
5. Aramaic or Palestinian features (Semitic constructions or Palestinian customs which point to a early origin); and
6. coherence (it is consistent with other passages proven reliable on the basis of other criteria).

These in and of themselves do not prove authenticity, of course, but they can demonstrate that the tradition goes back to the earliest stages and they do shift the burden of proof to the skeptic.

These criteria were originally developed under a so-called hermeneutic of suspicion which assumed that the stories were “guilty unless proven innocent” that is, they were non-historical unless shown otherwise. However, it has repeatedly been shown that the criteria when used in this manner have proved inconclusive, and most today use them more positively to trace the text's development. In this way tradition criticism provides the data for the form-critical and redaction-critical stages which follow. Nevertheless, demonstrating the text's reliability (the positive side) is an important step in itself since it grounds the interpreters in history and forces them to realize that they are not just tracing the ideas of Mark or Matthew (a danger of redactional study) but also the very life and teachings of the historical Jesus.

Tradition criticism used in this way is an important step prior to carrying out redactional study. Its primary value lies in the area of historical verification, for it

links redactional study with the quest for the historical Jesus and anchors the results in history. One danger of redaction criticism is the tendency of many critics today to take an ahistorical approach--to study the Gospels as purely literary creations rather than as books which trace the life of Jesus. Tradition criticism provides a control against such tendencies.

Moreover, the study of the history of the development of the text, though admittedly speculative at times, leads to greater accuracy in identifying redactional tendencies. By tracing with greater precision how an author is using the sources and how the sources have developed, the results of redactional criticism will be established on a stronger data base.

b) Form-Critical Analysis

Before beginning the detailed study of a pericope it is crucial to determine the form it takes, since the interpreter will apply a different set of hermeneutical principles to each subgenre in the Gospels. A pericope can take the form of a pronouncement story (the setting and details lead up to a climactic saying of Jesus); miracle story (some emphasizing the miracle or exorcism, others discipleship, Christology, cosmic conflict or the presence of the kingdom); dominical saying (further classified by Bultmann as wisdom logia, prophetic or apocalyptic sayings, legal sayings or church rules, «I» sayings and similitudes); parable (further into similitudes, example stories, and one-, two- or three-point parables depending on the number of characters involved); event or historical story (episodes in Jesus' life like the baptism or Transfiguration--often labeled «legends» because of their supernatural nature); and passion story (considered a separate type even though the passion narrative contains several actual «forms»). In the final analysis the formal features help more in the stage of composition criticism than in redactional study, but these are two aspects of a larger whole and therefore form-critical analysis is an important part of the redactional process.

c) Redaction-Critical Analysis

The interpreter examines the pericope and notes each time the source (Mark or Q) has been changed in order to determine whether the alteration is redactional or stylistic; that is, whether it has a theological purpose or is cosmetic, part of the Evangelist's normal style. While this process is obviously more conducive for Matthew and Luke, since sources in Mark are so difficult to detect and John is so independent, most scholars believe that a nuanced redaction criticism may still be applied to Mark and John (though without many of the source-critical techniques). The principles which follow are intended to guide the student through the process as it applies to all four Gospels. There are two stages--the individual analysis of a single pericope, and holistic analysis which studies redactional strata that appear throughout the Gospel. These aspects work together, as the data emerge from the individual studies and are evaluated on the basis of recurring themes in the whole.

i) Individual Analysis

The text of the synopsis should first be underlined with different colors to denote which readings are unique to a Gospel, which are paralleled in Mark and Matthew, Mark and Luke or Matthew and Luke (Q), and which are found in all three. The next step is to evaluate the data. S. McKnight (85-87) notes seven ways the Evangelists redact their sources:

1. They can conserve them (important because this also has theological significance for the Evangelist);
2. correlate two traditions (as in the use of both Mark and Q in the temptation story of Matthew and Luke);
3. expand the source (e.g., Matthew's added material in the walking-on-the-water miracle, Mt 14:22-33; cf. Mk 6:45-52);
4. transpose the settings (as in the different settings for Jesus' compassion for Jerusalem in Mt 23:37-39 and Lk 13:34-35);
5. omit portions of the tradition (e.g., the missing descriptions of demonic activity in the healing of the demon possessed child, Mt 17:14-21; cf. Mk 9:14-29);
6. explain details in the source (e.g., Mark's lengthy explanation of washing the hands, Mk 7:3-4; or Matthew changing «Son of man» to «I», 10:32; cf. Lk 12:8); or
7. alter a tradition to avoid misunderstandings (as when Matthew alters Mark's «Why do you call me good?» Mk 10:18 to «Why do you ask me about what is good?» Mt 19:17).

By grouping the changes the student can detect patterns which point to certain theological nuances within the larger matrix of the story as a whole. Each change is evaluated in terms of potential meaning; that is, does it possess theological significance as it affects the development of the story? For instance, Matthew changes the endings of both Mark 6:52 («Their heart was hardened», cf. Mt 14:33, «Surely you are the Son of God») and 8:21 («Don't you understand yet?» cf. Mt 16:12, «Then they understood ... »). In both Gospels these two sets of endings conclude the group of stories centered on the feedings of the five thousand and four thousand. It is likely that the differences are due to Mark's stress on the reality of discipleship failure and Matthew's emphasis on the difference that the presence of Jesus makes in overcoming failure.

ii) Holistic Analysis

The individual analysis is now expanded to note the development of themes as the narrative of the whole Gospel unfolds. Decisions regarding single accounts are somewhat preliminary until they are corroborated by the presence of similar themes elsewhere. Also, these steps enable one to discover redactional emphases in Mark and John, for which the interpreter has difficulty noting sources. The «seams» in a Gospel are the introductions, conclusions and transitions which connect the

episodes and provide important clues to the theological purpose of the author. They often contain a high proportion of the author's own language and point to an Evangelist's particular reasons for including the pericope. For instance, the two seams in Mark 1:21 and 3:1 provide a synagogue setting for the Christological emphasis on Jesus' authority in word and deed as he confronts the Jewish leaders. Also, the summaries in a Gospel are redactional indicators of theological overtones. An example of this would be Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 (introducing the Sermon on the Mount and missionary discourse, respectively), which contain similar wording and summarize Jesus' itinerant missionary activity. The threefold emphasis on teaching, preaching and healing are major theological emphases in Matthew.

Editorial asides and insertions are key indicators of the theological direction a narrative is taking. John has long been known for his tendency to add explanatory comments to describe the significance more fully, as in his famous commentary (3:16-21) on the soteriological significance of the Nicodemus dialog (3: 1-15). In similar fashion, repeated or favorite terms show particular interests. Again, John is the master of this technique; nearly every theological stress is highlighted by terms which appear nearly as often in his Gospel as in the rest of the NT together (e.g., *aletheia* 85 of the 163 NT uses, *zoe* 66 of the 135 NT uses, or *kosmos* 105 of the 185 NT uses) and by word groups of synonymous terms (e.g., the two terms for «know», two for «love» or five for «see»).

Finally, theme studies (McKnight calls this “motif analysis”) trace the development of theological emphases within the Gospel as a whole. Here one reads through the Gospel, noting the theological threads which are woven together into the fabric of the whole. For instance, one of Mark's primary themes is discipleship failure, introduced in Mk 4:38, 40 and then emerging as a major emphasis in the «hardened heart» passages of Mk 6:52 and 8:17. The passion predictions are contrasted with the disciples' failure (Mk 8:31-33; 9:31-34; 10:32-40). Chapter 14 contains several scenes of failure (Mk 14:4-5, 10-11, 17-20, 27-31, 37-40, 5~51, 66-72), and the Gospel ends on a note of discipleship failure (Mk 16:8).

Mark is a special test case for holistic analysis and for redaction criticism as a whole. If one accepts the prevalent theory of Markan priority, then there are no obvious sources (Matthew and Luke have Mark and C!) with which to compare Mark in order to determine redactional peculiarities. The traditions behind Mark are very difficult to detect, and no scholarly consensus has yet emerged as to their identity. As a result there is a bewildering array of theories regarding the redactional nature of the Second Gospel. In order to overcome these problems, R. Stein (positive regarding the possibilities) and M. Black (skeptical about the possibilities) have proposed several criteria for redactional research:

- (1) Study the seams, insertions and summaries;
- (2) determine whether Mark has created (a controversial criterion) or modified traditional material;
- (3) note Mark's process of selecting and arranging material;

- (4) ask whether Mark has omitted material (also controversial because the question always arises whether Mark has omitted an emphasis or been unaware of it, e.g., the famous Matthean addendum to the divorce passage, «except for adultery»);
- (5) study Mark's introduction and conclusion; and
- (6) Elucidate Mark's vocabulary, style and Christological titles.

When all these tools are used together, the Gospels of Mark or John open themselves to redactional study.

d) Composition-Critical Analysis

The task is incomplete so long as one focuses only on the redactional changes, so most recent redaction critics wish to study the traditions included as well as the redactional modifications. Obviously, each Evangelist unified tradition and redaction into a larger whole in producing a Gospel. It is erroneous to examine only the redaction.

i) The Structure

The way the Evangelist arranges material tells a great deal about the meaning of the whole. At both the micro and macro levels the rearrangement of the inherited tradition is significant. In the temptation narrative Matthew and Luke reverse the last two temptations. Most believe that Matthew contains the original order and that Luke concludes with the Temple temptation due to his special interest in Jerusalem and the Temple (Lk 4:9-12). But it is also possible that Matthew concludes with a mountain scene for thematic reasons (Mt 4:8-10; cf. 5:1; 8:1; 14:23; 15:29; 17:1). At the macro level, one could note the quite different things which Mark and Luke do with Jesus' early Capernaum-based ministry, with Mark placing the call to the disciples first, due to his discipleship emphasis (Mk 1:16-20), and reserving the rejection at Nazareth for later (Mk 6:1-6), while Luke begins with Jesus' inaugural address and rejection at Nazareth (Lk 4:16-30) in order to center upon Christology, reserving the call of the disciples for later (Lk 5:1-11).

ii) Intertextual Development

Each Evangelist arranges pericopes in such a way that their interaction with one another yields the intended message. Intertextuality at the macro level is the literary counterpart to redaction criticism at the micro level, for the Evangelist uses the same techniques of selection, omission and structure in both. This is exemplified in Mark's strategic placing of the two-stage healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26 (found only in Mark). On one level it forms an inclusion with the healing of the deaf man in Mark 7:31-37, stressing the need for healing on the part of the disciples (note the failure of Mk 8:14-21, in which the disciples are accused of being both blind and deaf!). On another level it metaphorically anticipates the two-stage surmounting of the disciples' misunderstanding via Peter's confession (Mk 8:27-33).

only a partial understanding) and the Transfiguration (Mk 9:1-10, at which time they glimpse the true nature of Jesus, cf. esp. Mk 9:9).

iii) Plot

Plot refers to the interconnected sequence of events which follows a cause-effect pattern and centers upon conflict. The student examines how the characters interact and how the lines of causality develop to a climax. For redaction criticism this means especially the individual emphases of the Evangelists. The differences are often striking, as in the resurrection narratives. Mark follows a linear pattern, tracing the failure of the disciples and concluding with the women's inability to witness (Mk 16:8). This is countered by the enigmatic promise of Jesus to meet them in Galilee (Mk 16:7; cf. 14:28), apparently the place of reinstatement (note Mk 14:28 following 14:27). Matthew constructs a double-edged conflict in which the supernatural intervention of God (Mt 28:2-4) and the universal authority of Jesus (Mt 28:18-20) overcome the twofold attempt of the priests to thwart the divine plan (Mt 27:62-66; 28:11-15).

iv) Setting and Style

When the Evangelists place a saying or event in different settings, they often produce a new theological thrust. For instance, Matthew places the parable of the lost sheep (Mt 18:12-14) in the context of the disciples and the church, with the result that it refers to straying members, while in Luke 15:3-7 Jesus addresses the same parable to the Pharisees and scribes, so that it refers to those outside the kingdom.

Style refers to the individual way that a saying or story is phrased and arranged so as to produce the effect that the author wishes. There can be gaps, chiasm, repetition, omissions and highly paraphrased renditions in order to highlight some nuance which Jesus gave his teaching but which is of particular interest to the Evangelist. Here it is important to remember that the Evangelists' concern was not the *ipsissima verba* (exact words) but the *ipsissima vox* (the very voice) of Jesus. They were free to give highly paraphrastic renditions to stress one certain aspect. One example is the Matthean and Lukan forms of the Beatitudes, which most scholars take to be derived from the same occasion (Luke's «plain» can also mean a mountain plateau in Greek). In Matthew the central stress is on ethical qualities («blessed are the poor in spirit», Mt 5:3), while in Luke the emphasis is on economic deprivation («blessed are you poor», Mt 6:20; cf. «woe to you rich», Mt 6:24). Both were undoubtedly intended by Jesus, while the two Evangelists highlighted different aspects.

3.4 The Weaknesses of Redaction Criticism

Many have discounted the value of redaction criticism due to the excesses of some of its practitioners. Primarily, it has been the application of redaction criticism along with historical skepticism that has led some to reject the approach. As a result of the influence of form and tradition criticism in the past and of narrative criticism in the present, the historical reliability of Gospel stories has been called into question.

Certainly some critics have begun with the premise that redaction entails the creation of Gospel material which is unhistorical, but this is by no means a necessary conclusion.

Techniques like omission, expansion or rearrangement are attributes of style and are not criteria for historicity. Another problem is redaction criticism's dependence on the four-document hypothesis. It is true that the results would look quite different if one were to assume the Griesbach hypothesis (the priority of Matthew). However, one must make a conclusion of some sort regarding the interrelationship of the Gospels before redactional study can begin, and most scholars have judged the four-document hypothesis to be clearly superior to the others.

As in form criticism, redactional studies tend to fragment the pericopes when they study only the additions to the traditions. Theology is to be found in the combined tradition and redaction--not in the redaction alone. The movement to composition criticism has provided a healthy corrective. The Evangelists' alterations are the major source of evidence, but the theology comes from the whole. Similarly, there has been a problem with overstatement. Scholars have often seen significance in every «jot and little» and have forgotten that many changes are stylistic rather than theological. Once again, composition criticism helps avoid excesses by looking for patterns rather than seeing theology in every possible instance.

Subjectivism is another major danger. Studies utilizing the same data frequently produce different results, and thus some argue that no assured results can ever come from redaction-critical studies. The only solution is a judicious use of all the hermeneutical tools along with cross-pollination between the studies.

Interaction between theories can demonstrate where the weaknesses are in each. Subjectivism is especially seen in speculations regarding *Sitz im Leben*, which are too often based on the assumption that every theological point is addressed to some problem in the community behind the Gospel. This ignores the fact that many of the emphases are due to Christological, liturgical, historical or evangelistic interests. The proper life-situation study is not so much concerned with the detailed reconstruction of the church behind a Gospel as in the delineation of the Evangelists' message to that church.

3.5 The Place and value of Redaction Criticism

A careful use of proper methodology can reduce the problems inherent in redaction criticism, and the values far outweigh the dangers. In fact, any study of the Gospels will be enhanced by redaction-critical techniques. A true understanding of the doctrine of inspiration demands it, for each Evangelist was led by God to utilize sources in the production of a Gospel. Moreover, they were given the freedom by God to omit, expand and highlight these traditions in order to bring out individual nuances peculiar to their own Gospel. Nothing else can explain the differing messages of the same stories as told in the various Gospels.

There is no necessity to theorize wholesale creation of stories, nor to assert that these nuances were not in keeping with the original Gospels. Here a judicious

harmonizing approach like that espoused by C. Blomberg is valuable. In short, redaction criticism has enabled us to rediscover the Evangelists as inspired authors and to understand their books for the first time as truly Gospels; not just biographical accounts but history with a message. They did not merely chronicle events but interpreted them and produced historical sermons.

Until redaction criticism arose, Christians tended to turn to the epistles for theology. Now we know that the Gospels are not only theological but in some ways communicate a theology even more relevant than the epistles, because these truths are presented not through didactic literature but by means of the living relationships reflected in narrative. The Gospels are «casestudy» workbooks for theological truth, yielding not just theology taught but theology lived and modelled. Redactional study enables us to reconstruct with some precision the theology of each of the Evangelists by noting how they utilized their sources and then by discovering patterns in the changes which exemplify themes developed through the Gospels. The whole (tradition, redaction and compositional development) interact together to produce the inspired message of each Evangelist.

In this way the reader understands the twofold purpose of the Gospels: to present the life and teachings of the historical Jesus (the historical component) in such a way as to address the church and the world (the kerygmatic component). History and theology are valid aspects of Gospel analysis, and we dare not neglect either without destroying the God-ordained purpose of the Gospels. While redaction criticism as a discipline centers on the theological aspect, it does not ignore the historical nature of the Gospels. Finally, redaction criticism is a preaching and not just an academic tool. The Gospels were originally contextualizations of the life and teaching of Jesus for the reading and listening audiences of the Evangelists' time. They were biographical sermons (one aspect of the meaning of the term «Gospel») applying Jesus' impact on his disciples, the crowds and the Jewish leaders to first-century readers and listeners. This is perhaps the best use of life-situation approaches, for they show how Matthew or Luke addressed problems in their communities and demonstrate how they can address similar problems in our churches.

4.0 Conclusion

Redaction Criticism does not operate in isolation. The study of the editing process, whereby the sources have been linked together and incorporated into the present, finished text belongs to the province of redaction criticism.

5.0 Summary

This unit defined Redaction Criticism; the origin of redaction criticism; the methodology of Redaction Criticism; and some of the weaknesses of Redaction criticism. Next unit discusses Textual Criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Highlight the main weaknesses of Redaction Criticism

- What are the methods of enquiry in Redaction Criticism?

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 1: AUTHOR-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 6: Textual Criticism****Contents**

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- 2.0 Objective
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1.0 Introduction

If we possessed the original autographs of Genesis or Paul's epistles, textual criticism would be unnecessary. Unfortunately we do not. The earliest complete manuscript of the NT dates from about 300 years after its composition, while in the case of the OT, the gap is more than 1000 years. Whenever a text wore out, it had to be copied, and in the course of copying a number of mistakes were introduced. It is the aim of textual criticism to identify and, if possible, eliminate these mistakes. Jewish scribes were particularly scrupulous in copying the OT, so fewer mistakes have crept in than might be imagined, as the Dead Sea Scrolls from the turn of the era prove. Even in the less carefully copied NT, textual criticism can be fairly confident of restoring the text to its near-original purity.

This unit discusses: Definition for Textual Criticism; the need for textual criticism; four principles of textual criticism; textual errors and their causes.

2.0 Objective

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define Textual criticism
- Discuss the need for textual criticism
- Examine four principles of textual criticism
- Identify textual errors and their causes

3.0 Main body

3.1 Defining Textual Criticism

The ultimate goal of textual criticism was almost without exception, the establishment of texts as intended by their authors. The controversy that has always characterized the field was concerned with how best to approach this goal, not with whether this goal was the proper one. There can be no dispute as to the work and necessity of textual criticism. The ultimate aim of all biblical study is the interpretation of the biblical text. The first requisite for this work is to have the biblical text in its original purity. The work of textual criticism is to examine into the existing text and see, with the help of all the best aids at our disposal, whether the form of the words as they have been handed down to us are the *ipsissima verba* of the sacred scribes; and, if there are legitimate reasons to believe that the text has in the course of centuries undergone changes, to restore, if possible, the original readings. Textual criticism thus seeks either to confirm the traditional texts as the original one, or to restore the original where this is necessary. Being such in character, textual criticism is really not a theological discipline at all, but philological, critical and historical. The Old Testament student has essentially the same work to do that the editor of a Latin or Greek classic has, when, on the basis of his MSS., he prepares a critical edition of Cicero, Caesar, Homer or Thucydides. The same principles have been applied, with no serious opposition at present, to the New Testament text, with the outcome that the "resultant text" of the three leading authorities, Tischendorf, Tregelles and Westcott and Hort, is essentially the same, although differing more or less from the old so-called *textus receptus* of former times. Indeed, in the New Testament field, the work of textual criticism is almost a *fait accompli*, while in the Old Testament department the real scientific work is only beginning.

3.2 The Need for Textual Criticism

Unfortunately no original manuscripts (called 'autographs') of any of the biblical books have been recovered, and since no extant manuscripts agree with each other in every detail, textual criticism is necessary to resolve questions of variation. Alfred E. Houseman, a text critic of classical works, observes that "textual criticism is based on 'common sense and the use of reason'". Briefly stated, textual criticism is the science and art that seeks to determine the most reliable wording of a text. It is a science because specific rules govern the evaluation of various types of copyist errors and readings, but it is also an art because these rules cannot rigidly be applied in every situation. Intuition and common sense must guide the process of determining the most plausible reading. Informed judgments about a text depend on one's familiarity with the types of copyist errors, manuscripts, versions and their authors. It is a complex process with few short cuts, but one that can be learned through systematic effort.

The importance of textual criticism is threefold. First and foremost, it attempts to establish the most reliable reading of the text. Second, in cases where a definitive reading is impossible to determine, it can help to avoid dogmatism. Third, it can

help the reader better understand the significance of marginal readings that appear in various Bible translations. Textual criticism is not a matter of making negative comments or observations about the biblical text; instead, it is the process of searching through the various sources of the biblical texts to determine the most accurate or reliable reading of a particular passage. It can, in fact, actually lead to increased confidence in the reliability of the biblical texts. TC mainly concerns itself with the small portion of the biblical text called 'variant readings.' A variant reading is any difference in wording (e.g. differences in spelling, added or omitted words) that occurs among manuscripts.

It is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God (Sir Frederic Kenyon (d. August 1952, a renowned NT text critic of the 20th century)

3.3 Principles of Textual Criticism

Jerome adopted the following principles in Biblical Textual Criticism:

First was the importance of the title of a work. Jerome regarded the title as an important part of the work to which it belonged, for it contained such essential information as the author's name," the nature of the subject matter, and, if the work was divided into books, the number of the particular book to which it belonged. In books made up of a collection of short poems, such as the book of Psalms, the separate poems might have individual titles serving a purpose similar to that of the titles of longer works. It seems reasonable to presume, therefore, that Jerome thought of the title as something to be carefully transcribed by copyists. He recognized the fact, however, that some works might not have a title, and that occasionally a title might be added without authority, as was done in the case of certain psalms which, though lacking inscriptions in the Hebrew text, had been given titles in the translations. Such titles he regarded as spurious.

Second was the collation of textual readings. The evidence pointing to Jerome's knowledge of collation as a part of critical procedure must be considered with due regard for the nature of his works in which most of it occurs - commentaries and letters, in which he is concerned primarily with the readings of Biblical texts in translation rather than with the readings of various copies of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament or of the Greek text of the New Testament. Hence by far the greater part of the evidence is contained in his citation of readings drawn from different translations for the purpose of comparison with the text of the original. Such a procedure is only suggestive of collation in a technical sense; yet because of the similarity of the method involved, some weight may be given to it as evidence, especially when the authenticity of the translation is judged by the comparison with the original. For Jerome frequently rejects readings in translation because they lack the authority of the original, and he produced an edition of the book of Job and of

the Psalms in which all passages of the Septuagint version not supported by the Hebrew text were marked with the obelus, the symbol of rejection.

It is also significant that he exhibits a familiarity with different Biblical texts, both Hebrew and Greek. He owned a copy of Origen's Hexapla, which he had corrected for himself according to the authentic text; he had copied certain Hebrew texts brought to him from a Jewish synagogue by a friend; he speaks of certain others which he used as those which the Jews considered authentic, though he realized that the Hebrew texts available to him might not be identical in their readings with those used by the Septuagint translators. Of the Greek texts of the New Testament known to him, he refers to the following: an edition by Origen; an edition attributed to Lucian and Hesychius; certain other texts which he designates simply as "old." It is to the latter that he refers when he writes of his translation of the four Gospels: *"Igitur haec praesens praefatiuncula pollicetur quattuor tantum evangelia.. codicum Graecorum emendata collatione, sed veterum."*

The evidence thus far presented as indicative that Jerome was familiar with the procedure of collating textual readings is confirmed by certain passages which, though relatively few, contain citations of genuine textual variants. One, which is perhaps unique, points out a difference of reading in the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament; 38 the others deal with variants in the Greek texts of the New Testament, of which the following may be cited as typical: two variants in the text of Corinthians I; one in the text of Galatians; one in the Greek translation of Hosea. Jerome's citation of variants, moreover, is usually accompanied by a discussion in which he states his opinion as to which is the correct reading. Judgments of this sort are based on such considerations as the appropriateness of a word to its context or the appropriateness of a form, such as the person of a verb. The weight of support of other MSS. is also taken into account, apparently, but is not necessarily the determining point.

Third was the evaluation of manuscripts. It is clear from the remarks of Jerome that he did not consider all MSS. of equal value, but attached considerable weight to the readings of old ones, realizing that as copies were multiplied in the course of time errors tended to increase.* It may be inferred, however, that apart from age, he gave due consideration to the reliability of well-written and carefully corrected MSS." Further, his critical evaluations were extended to editions, such as the Koink edition of the Old Testament and the edition of the New Testament attributed to Lucian and Hesychius, both of which he regarded as inferior.

Fourth was the importance of testimonia. That quotations found in the works of an author are of value in determining the correct reading of the source from which they are drawn was recognized by Jerome, who on different occasions uses such evidence in his criticism of textual readings. At the same time he was aware that, since quotations might be made from memory or might reproduce the thought only and not the actual words of the original passage, they must be used for the purpose of criticism with due caution. It should be observed, too, that he made it a habit to compare all quotations of the Old Testament which he found in the New Testament with the readings of what he terms the original books.

3.4 Textual Errors and Their Causes

In his many discussions of textual readings, Jerome exhibits a degree of caution and restraint such as should characterize the work of a competent critic. For although convinced of the necessity of correcting errors; he did not overlook the fact that an ill-judged attempt at emendation might introduce an error where none had existed before. Hence at times he cautions others against an unjustified presumption of error in the readings of a text.⁵² Yet in the course of his critical remarks he points out, in addition to a number of errors for which he offers no explanation, some thirteen types of faulty readings which he attributes to specific causes. The evidence, therefore, pointing to Jerome's knowledge of the causes of error are presented next.

First, however, it should be explained that this evidence is derived at times from his comments on the work of translators rather than of copyists who were transcribing a text. Nevertheless, on the presumption that faulty translation arising from a misreading of a text involves the same causes which result in a copyist's errors of transcription, it seems that such evidence may be regarded as valid.

i) Faulty Word-Division

Since it seems that in Jerome's time the separating of words in texts was little practiced, it is only natural that he should refer to copyists' errors of word-division rarely. In fact, it appears that only once does a statement of his imply that copyists may be responsible for this sort of mistake." Frequent references, however, to faulty translations which have resulted from the erroneous division of words as read in the Hebrew texts by the translators of the Old Testament indicate that Jerome realized the importance of correct word-division."

ii) Faulty Accentuation

The evidence for Jerome's knowledge of errors involving a faulty accentuation of words is very slight. The use of the signs for the accents seems to have been quite limited in his time, though a freer use of them in the MSS. of an earlier period may well have been known to him. At all events, even though he seems not to suggest anywhere that copyists make errors of accentuation, he discusses in at least three passages the importance of Hebrew accentuation in the determination of the meaning of words.

iii) Faulty Punctuation

Frequent references made by Jerome to the effect of punctuation on the sense of a passage indicate his familiarity with this source of textual errors. In discussing questions of punctuation, he often exhibits a willingness to expound a passage according to the punctuation familiar to his readers; yet he also points out what he regards as the preferable punctuation and suggests that the evidence of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments respectively should be carefully observed.

iv) Confusion of Number-Signs

An interesting example of an error caused by the confusion of numerical symbols occurs in Jerome's explanation of the reason why Mark seems to disagree with Matthew and John in his record of the hour when Christ was crucified. Here he lays the blame for the discrepancy in the record upon the copyists whose confusion of the number-signs and -y' caused an error in the text; for he writes, "*Error scriptorum fuit: et in Marco hora sexta scriptum fuit, sed multi pro rnarip-p Graeco putaverunt esse gamma.*"

v) Confusion of Similar Letters

Of all the errors discussed by Jerome, those which are caused by the confusion of similar letters are perhaps most commonly mentioned. Yet the great majority of examples to be found in his writings illustrate a confusion of Hebrew letters by the translators of the Old Testament. He frequently speaks of the confusion of the letters resh and daleth, which are distinguished only by a small apex, and of the letters yod and vav, which differ only in size. It may be observed further that his comments indicate confusion of sight rather than of sound; the latter, to my knowledge, he does not allude to clearly at any time." Furthermore he nowhere, so far as I have found, refers to the confusion of Latin letters; and only occasionally does he indicate a confusion of Greek letters, as, for example, when he criticizes copyists for writing A instead of A and 9 instead of 0.

vi) Confusion of Abbreviations

Specific examples of errors caused by a misunderstanding of abbreviations seem not to be cited by Jerome. Yet he shows that he was aware of this source of error, both on the part of a person dictating material to be written by a copyist and on the part of a copyist reading for himself the material to be copied, when he says that serious errors were introduced into a text which was copied from dictation because the reader in his haste misread the abbreviations, and when in discussing Greek abbreviations he points out that the last letter of the abbreviated word is written to make the case-ending clear to the reader.

vii) Dittography and Haplography

Both the repetition and the omission of similar letters in a word are indicated by Jerome in his comments on faulty readings, though examples of these specific errors are very few. The repetition of letters, however, is noted in his criticism of the copyist's error in writing Iudaeae instead of Iudae, and the omission of letters is criticized in his comment on the reading Bariona, for which Bar Ioanna should have been written.

viii) Metathesis of Letters

There seems to be only one passage in the works of Jerome in which he states that a textual error has resulted from the transposition of letters in a word, and in this passage the error is charged not to a copyist but to a translator, whose misreading

of a Hebrew word caused an error in the Greek text.⁷⁰ On another occasion, however, he seems to be illustrating this same kind of error when he discusses the variants $\alpha\kappa\pi\lambda$ & ω and $\beta\alpha\kappa\pi\beta\omega\nu$, although what he says is that the similarity of the words caused the error.

ix) Assimilation

That a line which a scribe has finished copying may cause an error in the copying of a following line is noted by Jerome, who cites examples showing that the error may consist of an addition of a part of the preceding line, or of a substitution of it for what should have been written. He seems also to indicate a similar cause of error within a line when he remarks that the change of one letter has resulted in the reading *reppulisti et respexisti* instead of the correct *reppulisti et despexisti*.

x) Omissions

In a few of his comments on textual errors, Jerome points out omissions which he accounts for by the occurrence of the same word immediately before and after the omitted portion of the text, which causes the copyist to pass over everything from the first occurrence of the word to the second. He cannot always be sure, however, that the copyists were at fault, since he recognizes the possibility that the translators may have overlooked the omitted passage; but in either case, he assigns the same cause of error.⁷⁶

xi) Transpositions

As is clear from several passages in his writings, Jerome was familiar with errors caused by disturbances in the order of words, phrases, and larger units of a text, for which he occasionally blames, whether explicitly or implicitly, the negligence of the copyists.⁸ Some of the confusions of arrangement he criticizes sharply, remarking that they make the thought obscure, and that they disturb the sequence of the parts of a passage. Yet he distinguishes carefully actual confusions in the text from what may appear to be confusion but is rather a stylistic arrangement peculiar to the author or to the form of his work. Thus he makes a distinction between the sequence of facts in the books of the prophets and that in the historical books of the Bible.⁸

xii) Conscious Emendation

Very frequently Jerome censures the efforts of copyists to emend the readings of a text, because such efforts usually result only in making errors. These errors differ in form, one of the most common being the substitution by the copyist of a familiar word for an unfamiliar one. Or the copyist, because of a misunderstanding or because of his disapproval of a word, may substitute one which he judges to be more appropriate to the context. Still other forms are illustrated in Jerome's references to a copyist's deletion of a word which he thought was erroneously repeated in the exemplar," to the addition of what he thought was omitted in the exemplar," and to the changing of a word from the singular to the plural or from the plural to the singular."

Finally an interesting example is discussed by Jerome which may be included here. In one of his letters, he writes that someone incorporated in the text of a certain passage a marginal notation which he himself had written for the benefit of the reader. The discussion makes it reasonably clear, however, that it was not the whole note which found its way into the text but only a word which Jerome was defending against the reading of the text and which he would accept as a correction of the text. Yet he maintains that the copyist should not have taken it on himself to insert the reading of the note into the text, but should have followed the text exactly as it was.

xiii) Interpolations

Examples of Jerome's criticism of interpolations in the text of the Bible are comparatively numerous. For convenience of presentation, I have divided these examples into three groups, of which the first comprises discussions of passages drawn from one book of the Bible and inserted in another. In commenting on interpolations of this kind, Jerome usually indicates their source in support of his criticism." In the second group may be included the many passages in which he points out additions made in the Greek version by the Septuagint translators without any support in the Hebrew text." The third group consists of two examples in which his arguments for deleting an interpolation are different from those already mentioned and different from each other as well. In one he comments on the inconsistency of the suspected words with the sense of the passage as a whole; in the other he simply remarks that a word was added through the fault of the copyists.

xiv) Various Errors

In addition to the kinds of errors which have been enumerated, there are many others mentioned by Jerome from time to time in his works without any specific indication of their nature. Hence they cannot be classified according to any explanation offered by Jerome; but a few examples may be included here for their cumulative value as evidence of his thoroughness in his critical procedure. At times he remarks that a word or passage found in some copies of the Bible is either different from the reading of other copies or omitted altogether. He notes also various faulty readings which have found their way into the text, such as the erroneous unxit for benedixit. Still other matters which his criticism takes into account include the inflectional forms of nouns and verbs," and the spelling of Hebrew words in the translated texts."

4.0 Conclusion

Textual criticism attempts at restoring the text to its original meaning, as it was intended by its authors. Briefly stated, textual criticism is the science and art that seeks to determine the most reliable wording of a text. It is a science because specific rules govern the evaluation of various types of copyist errors and readings, but it is also an art because these rules cannot rigidly be applied in every situation

5.0 Summary

This unit defined Textual criticism, the need for textual criticism, four principles of textual criticism, and textual errors and their causes.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Define Textual criticism
- Discuss the need for textual criticism
- Examine four principles of textual criticism
- Identify textual errors and their causes

7.0 References/Future Reading

G. Thomas Tanselle, "Textual Criticism and Literary Sociology", *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 44 (1991), pp. 83-143

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MODULE 1: AUTHOR-CENTRED CRITICISM

Unit 7:

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MODULE 2: TEXT-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 1: Theology and Biblical Criticism****Contents**

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1.0 Introduction

Text-centred approaches focus on the text as it exists now, rather than on the processes whereby it has come into being. These synchronic approaches have a variety of emphases. Some, like rhetorical criticism, focus on surface features of texts, such as repetition and keywords, others deal with methods of storytelling, of writing poetry, yet others claim to elucidate underlying structures of literature. The module begins with the outcome of biblical criticism and theology, and sets forth the features of some of the text-centred criticisms like: rhetoric; new criticism and structuralism.

What is the outcome of biblical criticism for systematic theology? Scholars have been pursuing their investigations concerning text and date and authorship and historical setting until it is comparatively easy to know the status of scholarship on these points. But what does it involve for our theology? This is a practical question which has not yet received its final answer. This Unit appraises the impact of biblical criticism with systematic theology

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the contribution of biblical criticism to systematic theology.
- Discover that theology and scientific inquiry are not hostile to each other
- Confirm that Theology and Scientific Inquiry are not hostile to each other
- Examine the Fundamental Nature of Biblical Criticism

3.0 Main Body

3.1 What Difference does Biblical Criticism Make?

Indeed, there exists a remarkable lack of agreement on this point. Some men are growing impatient of the leisurely way in which important questions are being discussed, and are vigorously demanding that criticism shall announce its "assured results" so that a new dogmatics may be established which shall not need to be revised. Others, observing the wide variety of opinions among the critics, insist that the whole critical movement is so pervaded with subjective vagaries that it cannot be trusted to yield any definite results. A few scholars who employ the critical method feel that no important changes in theology are necessary. Others insist that when the full implications of criticism are understood, far-reaching alterations will take place. Some men fear that if modern biblical scholarship is allowed to go its way unhampered by doctrinal restrictions, it will prove subversive of Christianity.

Others believe that we have never yet known the real essence of Christianity, and that critical scholarship will purify and enrich our faith. In view of these conflicting opinions, it is not superfluous to ask just what the outcome of biblical criticism is in so far as it affects the task of the theologian.

It is the purpose of this article and of those which follow to inquire whither we are bound if we make positive use of the principles of critical scholarship. Just what difference does it make in the theologian's work if he recognizes the legitimacy of modern methods of biblical interpretation? What ought to be the conception of the field and the task of systematic theology on the part of the one who welcomes criticism as a right and fruitful means of discovering the truth? Does it alter in any significant way the conception of the task which has hitherto prevailed? If so, what are the positive principles of constructive thinking which emerge?

3.2 Theology and Scientific Inquiry, Not Hostile to Each Other

At the outset of our inquiry, let us get rid of the feeling which is all too prevalent, that theology and scientific inquiry are necessarily hostile to each other. The past generation has, indeed, been so unfortunate as to witness a species of warfare which was largely due to the fact that neither science nor theology had quite "found itself" in our modern world. But the attitude of hostility which was so prominent in the last generation is not characteristic of all ages.

The history of religious thinking reveals the fact that a theologian must use the scientific tools of his age for the organization of his thought. The man who

translates the Bible from Hebrew and Greek must possess and use precisely the same linguistic skill and must adopt precisely the same critical processes as a translator of Homer or of Plato. The scholar who attempts to tell us what the apostle Paul meant in his arguments must use methods of interpretation which would also serve the expounder of Aristotle's philosophy.

The systematic theologian who attempts to put in convincing form the religious convictions of Christian believers must employ the canons of logic demanded by the secular philosopher in expounding his system. If the theologian is to make himself intelligible at all, he must use the thought-processes with which his age is familiar. It is thus inevitable that he shall make positive use of the science of his day.

3.3 Examples from Christian History

A single example taken from Christian history will illustrate this fact. It is customary today to poke fun at those theologians of the late Middle Ages whom we call "schoolmen" or "scholastics." It seems to us (in our ignorance of what they actually did) that they often were spending their time on barren questions of no importance to anyone. But they were really trying to set forth religious doctrines in terms of the science of the day, which they had learned from Aristotle's writings. We think the scholastic method uninteresting because we have abandoned the formal logical science which scholasticism embodied. When pupils in our schools no longer memorize the Barbara celarent we can scarcely expect that a theology which proceeds by formal syllogisms will seem to them convincing. But this should not blind us to the fact that the schoolmen were genuinely scientific theologians in their day.

Now biblical criticism is simply the study of the Bible by the methods approved by modern science. How the word "criticism" is misunderstood! It is often assumed that a critical student of the Bible will proceed to find all the fault possible with the venerable book. "Higher critics" are thus sometimes portrayed as a class of disgruntled pessimists whose sole remaining pleasure in life is to destroy whatever last vestiges of authenticity have been left in the Bible. In their supposed superior wisdom they are imagined to be adequately described by the word "hyper-critic." The portrait thus drawn is anything but a lovely one; and a movement which can outlive the ridicule which has for a half-century been lavished upon biblical criticism has at least an amazing vitality.

But what is criticism? We feel no resentment at the art critic. On the contrary many of us pay for the privilege of attending his lectures. We feel that the Shakesperian critic merits the honorary degree which is perhaps conferred upon him for his researches. When by critical examination the atomic theory which we learned in our textbooks on chemistry is modified, we have only praise for the scientists who thus revise our doctrines. It belongs to the very nature of any scientific procedure to be "critical." One who adopts the methods of science in any realm must become a critic. That is, he must use his powers of discernment. He must not be satisfied with reading another man's statement. He must investigate and verify for himself, if he is to have any standing among modern scholars.

Now an axiom of this critical spirit of modern scholarship is that there can be no theories which are immune from re-examination. In the realm of natural science the doctrine of gravitation is, I believe, popularly thought to be absolutely established. But there are not wanting scientists who question the correctness of Newton's conclusions in certain particulars. In the field of biology Darwin's name is universally honored today. But no aspect of the science of biology is more perplexing to the layman than the wide differences of opinion among specialists concerning some of Darwin's conclusions. The critical spirit means that every man has a perfect right to discredit traditional conclusions if he can do it by scientific methods. And there is nothing to prevent one from putting forth the most preposterous theories if he chooses. But whoever does so must remember that his new theory will have to run the gauntlet of critical scholarship. If it does not endure this test, the author of the theory loses the respect of his scientific colleagues.

3.4 The Importance of Diversity

In the world of science a man is judged not so much by his conformity or nonconformity to established conclusions as by his fidelity to scientific method. Scientists who disagree can meet and argue with each other, all the time preserving the inquiring spirit which prevents denunciation. The fact of diversity in opinion is thus welcomed in the scientific world as a source of fruitful investigation. It is then hardly creditable to one's intelligence if questioning in science is looked upon as honorable and desirable while questioning in theology is identified with disloyalty to truth. Yet the art critic or the literary critic or the critic of Darwinism is treated with respect, while the biblical critic is too often misunderstood and caricatured. The questioning of the scientist has been recognized as the preliminary essential to a surer understanding of the truth. The questioning of the biblical critic has been treated as if it were final, involving a denial of everything which is questioned. But the biblical critic, like the art critic, is simply attempting to investigate things carefully, in order to put human knowledge on a firmer basis. The simple recognition of this fact would prevent much confusion. It is true that just as vagaries in the field of art criticism are accepted as an inevitable accompaniment of freedom of research, so vagaries in biblical criticism must be expected as a by-product of the serious work of that science. But the scientific spirit holds that eventually the truth will be better established by letting every man have a free opportunity to question the theory of any other man. The dread of the disapproval of one's fellow investigators can be relied upon to keep most scholars from rash excursions into absurd realms of theory. Biblical criticism, then, means that the same methods of investigation which in other realms are believed to lead to the truth shall be applied in the study of the Bible.

It would seem that nothing but good could come of the application of such sober methods of inquiry to the Bible. Those who believe in the critical method of Bible-study are firmly convinced that only good does result. But the applications of modern biblical scholarship have brought about certain modifications in theological attitude which have been a source of real perplexity to many earnest and honest men. The reason for this perplexity, resulting, as it sometimes does, in distrust or

denunciation of the entire process of criticism, we must understand, if we are to see rightly into the relation of theology to biblical criticism. The older theologies were constructed by what is known as the "proof-text" method. It is true that this method has been employed by men who first made a careful study of the Bible, collecting the evidence in an inductive manner and building upon this induction their doctrinal conclusions. But there are not wanting examples of a more superficial use of biblical texts. If a man believed strongly a certain doctrine, he felt that it must be scriptural; consequently he was under the temptation of trying to make as good a showing as possible from the Scriptures. Such a theologian was likely to overlook and neglect those passages which made against his theory. The prevalence of this method of proof has led to the skeptical remark so often heard that "one can prove anything he chooses out of the Bible." When both total abstinence and moderate drinking, both emancipation and slavery, both Trinitarian and anti-Trinitarian appeal to the Bible, the layman may be forgiven for feeling that the ways of the theologian are past finding out. It is manifestly impossible to retain the confidence of men in theology if it comes to such varied conclusions without giving to those who are perplexed any clue as to the method by which the conclusions are reached. Biblical criticism undertakes to establish a method by which investigations may be made with the same expectation of reaching stable conclusions in biblical interpretation as in any other realm where scientific method has taken the place of unscientific assertion.

3.5 The Primary Question

Now the primary question which the critical Bible student asks is very different from the primary question which was asked by theologians in the past. The older theologian assumed that the purpose of Bible study was to ascertain directly what one ought to believe. But a very short examination reveals the fact that, whatever our method, it is not so easy to determine what biblical "truth" is. The suggestions of the tempter in the early chapters of Genesis can scarcely be said to embody "truth." The speeches of the friends of Job are pronounced untrue by the book itself. Paul's injunction to women to keep silence in the churches is not generally regarded as binding today. No one holds that one should literally cut off his hand when it does wrong, or pluck out the right eye. How many of us always give to any man that asks, and turn not away from him who would borrow? The matter of finding what we ought to believe by a mere reading of the Bible is not so simple as it seems. Consequently, theologians have always been obliged to make discriminations within the Bible.

One means of discriminating was in ancient times formulated in what was then regarded as scientific method. This was the doctrine of a double or a triple or even a quadruple sense of Scripture. Early in the history of Christianity it was laid down as a rule that nothing discreditable to God could be in the Bible. Any statement, therefore, which seemed to be unworthy of God was not to be taken literally. It must be figuratively interpreted. But how may we know whether to take a given passage of Scripture literally or figuratively? Unless we can discern some test of this, we are left to the vagaries of individual opinion. It is the recognition of the

uncontrolled subjectivism of this allegorical method that has led modern scholars, following the spirit of Luther and Calvin, to discard the doctrine of a threefold or a fourfold sense of Scripture. So long as two scholars may take the same text and one may declare that it means one thing, while the other asserts that it means something entirely different, it is evident that no really scientific method of discovering the meaning of the Bible has been established. Modern biblical criticism holds that it ought to be just as possible for men to agree as to the meaning of the Bible as it is possible for them to agree concerning the motions of the stars or the constitution of a chemical substance. And the method by which this desired certainty is to be attained is called biblical criticism.

The general principles of biblical criticism are too familiar to readers of the *Biblical World* to need extended explanation. There are two main tasks, one exactly technical, the other more vital and general. The technical task is undertaken by textual criticism, which seeks to ascertain so far as possible the exact text of the books of the Bible. During the long centuries when copies of the biblical books were made by hand, many variations in the text appeared. This task of textual criticism is so complicated that it requires a special training in order to be able to estimate the relative value of different readings.

So far as systematic theology is concerned the consequences of textual criticism are comparatively slight. The theologian cannot, indeed, maintain the absolute correctness of any specific reading of a doubtful passage. In most cases, however, the variation is of minor importance so far as doctrine is concerned. Yet the question whether Paul ever called Jesus God is made doubtful by uncertainty as to punctuation in one crucial text. The famous saying in II Timothy concerning the inspiration of Scripture is translated in three different ways by scholars, on account of doubt as to grammatical construction. A Syriac text of Matthew declares Joseph to be the father of Jesus. Is this reading more authentic than the Greek text underlying our accepted versions? Just what words did Jesus speak in establishing the Lord's Supper? These are some of the questions upon which a defensible conclusion is bound up with the problem of knowing what the authentic text is. Still, as has been said, the variations are not usually of sufficient importance to demand serious changes in our interpretation of biblical doctrine.

The other branch of criticism—the so-called "Higher Criticism"—is less exactly technical, but is quite as difficult. It is concerned to discover the literary and historical genesis of the books of the Bible, in order that we may better comprehend what they mean. For example, it is almost impossible adequately to understand the content of the books of the prophets unless one is able to interpret them in their historical setting. Then we can see what allusions mean, and can appreciate the message of the prophets. When we read the contents of the priestly ritual without reference to the circumstances which produced the law, we have merely a mass of statistics. But when we see the way in which that law served to hold the nation fast to the religious ideal of holiness which the prophets had proclaimed, we appreciate the spiritual significance of this attempt to make all the life of the Jew consecrated to Jehovah. When we read the Epistle to the Hebrews without regard to the circumstances which brought it into existence, we are likely to be puzzled by the

elaborate argument drawn from priests and sacrifices. But when we picture a group of Christians, discouraged by persecution and weary of waiting for the triumph of the kingdom which was so long delayed, thinking perhaps that after all they had been mistaken in adopting Christianity, the elaborate arguments to show how much better Christ is than the best that Hebrew religion had produced gain new meaning. When we try to derive from the Book of Revelation specific predictions of history in our day so that we may ascertain the exact date of the end of the world, we are likely to become confused by the visions and beasts and symbols. But when we know something of the apocalyptic hopes of the Jews and early Christians, we can see how this book of splendid visions would serve to encourage those who were disheartened by persecution. It thus is of great importance for the right understanding of the books of the Bible to know the dates and circumstances of their composition.

3.6 Consequences for the Theologian

These critical attempts to estimate the significance of a book of Scripture by appreciating the religious problems which called it forth have certain important consequences for the theologian. The item which has attracted most public attention-viz., change of theory as to authorship-is really of little significance, so far as the theologian is concerned. The contents of the Twenty-third Psalm remain the same whether David wrote it or whether, as seems to be implied in the words, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever," the author lived after the temple existed. The Book of Leviticus, with its elaborate descriptions of tabernacle and priestly service, is just as foreign to our way of regarding religion if Moses wrote it, as it is if it comes from post-exilic times. In fact, those questions which are of primary interest to the critical student are often of little or no consequence to the systematic theologian. Thus much of the controversy which rages between conservative and radical scholars in the realm of biblical criticism may be ignored by the systematic theologian. His business is to set forth Christian convictions; and conclusions as to the date or authorship of a book can hardly be classified as either Christian or non-Christian.

So far as theology is concerned the real significance of biblical criticism, then, is not to be found so much in its technical conclusion as in a change of view as to the way in which any biblical message is to be interpreted. Instead of seeking to derive directly from a scriptural utterance a decisive answer to our modern theological problems, the critical scholar attempts rather to discover what problems were present in the mind of the biblical writer, and what answers to the questionings of his heart he discovered. The determination of date and authorship is only preliminary to an understanding of the historical significance of the book in question.

If, for example, the last chapters of Isaiah were written by the prophet who wrote the first portion, we must interpret the passages concerning Cyrus and events in his time as the result of miraculous foresight on the part of a prophet who lived two centuries before the events which he prophesied took place. The statements which he makes must have come in some mysterious way out of an unknown realm. But

if, as is now generally believed among scholars, the book was written by a contemporary of Cyrus, or even at a later date, it becomes possible to interpret it as an expression of religious aspiration and insight growing directly out of the bitter experiences of Israel. So, too, the Book of Daniel, if dated in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, must be viewed as an essentially magical prevision. If it came from the Maccabean period, its message is seen to be vitally related to the religious problems of the time.

In short, the modern biblical student is not satisfied with biblical statistics. He is not content to know what doctrines are in the Bible. He desires to feel also something of the glow of religious conviction which gave to the doctrine its power. He wishes to share in imagination the indignation of Amos at the corruption of his day, to have his soul thrilled with the Isaiah of the Exile at the vision of a people so purified through suffering and discipline that God calls them his elect to bring the gentiles unto him. He attempts to reproduce sympathetically that intense longing for holiness on the part of the later Israelites which led to the elaboration of the Levitical cultus. And if he succeeds, if he can feel himself one in spirit with the biblical interpreter of some crisis of history, he gains a sense of reality which arouses a new wonder at the majesty of the biblical messages. The Bible has become a new and living book to thousands in our day just by this process of historical interpretation. But this very sense of reality means that the utterances of a given author gain their religious power from their connection with specific historical conditions. And historical conditions change. The religious interpretation of history at one time may not suit another time. We may follow Isaiah with the keenest sympathy as he strives to reassure Israel by asserting the inviolability of the Temple at Jerusalem. Then, a century later, when Jeremiah denounces as false prophets those who repeat this earlier message of Isaiah, we may with equal zeal do homage to the courageous soul of the man who dared to face the changes which a hundred years had brought and in the light of these to reverse the judgment of an earlier prophet. We may find ourselves with hearts beating higher as we live over in imagination the scenes of primitive Christianity when religious fervor and courage were kept up by the apocalyptic expectation of the miraculous consummation, and yet may realize that history did not fulfil the hopes of those early followers of Christ. In other words, the modern Bible student has learned to think of the biblical utterances, not as timeless truths, but as living convictions of men who lived under definite historical circumstances. The theology of the Bible is a theology framed to meet definite problems called forth by the exigencies of specific historical conditions.

The theology is addressed to that particular situation, and gains its vitality from its ability to lift men's hearts to new courage as they face their peculiar problems. But if the situation changes, the message also must change. If new problems arise in the experience of men new solutions become imperative. Thus we find in the Bible a changing theology as the needs of men change. It is this discovery of a changing theology in the course of the biblical history which makes impossible the retention of the older theological practice of treating scriptural statements as if they were timeless and absolute expressions of truth. Moreover, the perception of an evolution

in the biblical literature is only a specific application of the larger recognition of the fact that human history is continually in the process of change and adjustment. The ideas which seem absolutely true to one age appear inadequate to a later time. The doctrines which in one century are potent means of arousing high aspirations may in a later century have lost their power. If it was impossible for Jeremiah to approve the reiteration of Isaiah's message in his day, we see that even the word of an inspired prophet is subject to temporal limitations. Thus the outcome of higher criticism is something more important than a revision of traditional opinions about dates and authorship. It leads us straight into the realm of historical interpretation as contrasted with dogmatic interpretation. One who has accepted the principles of higher criticism finds that the very process of discovering the literary genesis of the books of the Bible makes him aware that the literature which he is studying is a record of genuinely human experience, and that the convictions contained in it were wrought out by actual wrestling with fundamental problems of life. As one traces the history of the experience portrayed in the biblical books, one becomes aware that a virile theology was never produced merely by the repetition of an authorized message, but that, on the contrary, the greatest books of the Bible owe their origin to a determined attempt to find an adequate expression for a living faith in opposition to a dead formalism.

3.7 Fundamental Nature of Biblical Criticism

The great prophets of Israel and the apostle Paul were violent nonconformists. The message of the Bible therefore appears in a fundamentally altered perspective because of the processes of historical interpretation. The utterances of prophet and apostle are no longer viewed as finished doctrines which may be appropriated by us just as they stand. The Scriptures rather reveal to us the mighty upheavals and the determined struggles of a living faith. One who has come to realize the significance of this point of view will inevitably seek to ascertain the problems which confront men of a given age before attempting to give an accurate account of the theology of that age. Thus the center of gravity is shifted from the outer aspects of doctrine to the inner aspects of religious experience. The key to the understanding of the biblical theology lies less in a theory of inspiration than in an adequate understanding of the thoughts and fears and hopes of men who faced the crises portrayed in the books of the Bible. The critical scholar must be constantly on his guard against assuming that a writer in biblical times will have had the same religious ideas as men in the twentieth century. He must gain as accurate a picture as possible of the actual problems with which the ancient writer was grappling.

Only thus can he do justice to the messages of the Bible. But this means that when the message of a biblical writer has been discovered, it will not necessarily be a universally valid doctrine. It will portray convictions which grew out of a very definite historical situation. For example, the prophets of Israel lived at a time when history was apparently disproving the national belief that Israel should be the supreme nation of the world. The discovery that mighty Assyria on the one hand and ancient and formidable Egypt on the other were counting for vastly more in contemporary history than was the little people sandwiched in helplessly between

these two world-powers-this fact must be constantly put in the background of the messages of the earlier prophets. The theology of the prophets, therefore, is primarily and directly a message to a people whose political future is doomed. Can a nation's God permit his nation to perish? If so, what does it mean? This is the problem which the prophets of Israel attempt to answer in their theology. Now to transfer that theology bodily to another age with its different national problems is manifestly impossible. Another instance of this difference between biblical problems and modern problems is to be found in the eschatological hopes of the early Christians. In order to understand the references to the second coming of Christ, one must appreciate how the often disappointed expectations of the Hebrew people that they would become politically supreme in the world had led to the belief that humanly speaking such triumph was impossible. But their indomitable belief in the fidelity of God to his promises had taken expression in the belief that God in a miraculous way would put an end to this evil age in which his people were oppressed, and would establish on earth a kingdom from heaven under the sway of his chosen Messiah. It was the persistence of this Jewish belief in the minds of followers of Christ that led to the emphasis in the New Testament on the second coming of Christ. When we read the eschatological passages of the apostolic writings against this background, we can see the tremendous influence which these visions would possess in fortifying them against persecution and discouragement.

To be able to feel that the Lord would soon come to put down the powers of evil meant that the hardships of the day could be endured with fortitude. But to transfer bodily to our own day these millennial hopes means to encourage such movements as that of the Millerites in the past century, who prepared their ascension robes so as to be ready on the given day. It means that the numbers in the Book of Revelation will be made the basis of elaborate computations so that one may have the certainty that the end of the world will come on a given date. The biblical student must read these passages with a sympathetic understanding of the hopes and beliefs of the first century. The systematic theologian must do his work in a century to which the eschatological visions are foreign. Here, again, a simple transfer of doctrine from ancient times to modern is out of the question. It is therefore evident that one who adopts the critical method of studying the Bible will find himself led to the conclusion that theological doctrines cannot be treated as "truths" existing independently of religious experience. Religious convictions are answers to the questions which earnest men ask when confronted with serious issues. To learn the answer to a question without knowing the exact nature of the question itself is a proceeding as formal as it is superfluous.

4.0 Conclusion

The attempt of expositors to relate biblical doctrines to the questions which men were asking in biblical times inevitably affects the work of the systematic theologian. He, too, must accurately define the questions which men are asking in his day if his answers are to be pertinent. To preserve a vital relation between theology and life is the plain duty of the theologian who really understands the nature of the biblical utterances. Now it requires only a little reflection to see that

the problems which confront men of the twentieth century are likely to be quite different from those which men of the first century were compelled to meet. Indeed, one of the conspicuous features of present-day theological activity is the attempt to adjust theology to the vital experiences of men today. To write theology for the "modern mind" is a favorite enterprise. It is seen that only as doctrines shall actually help men to answer the questions in which they are interested can they preserve the function which biblical utterances fulfilled. The most important outcome of biblical criticism is the recognition of the supreme importance of this fundamental aspect of theology. But when this conception of the task of theology is clearly apprehended, it will inevitably lead to a method of theological study which shall seek to do complete justice' to present-day religious conditions. Some aspects of this new task will be considered in subsequent articles.

5.0 Summary

This Unit discussed the following subtopics: What Difference does Biblical Criticism Make?; Theology and Scientific Inquiry, Not Hostile to Each Other; Examples from Christian History; The Importance of Diversity; The Primary Question; Consequences for the Theologian; and Fundamental Nature of Biblical Criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Theology and Scientific Inquiry are not hostile to each other. Discuss.
- Describe the fundamental nature of Biblical Criticism.

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 2: TEXT-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 2: Rhetorical Criticism****Contents**

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1.0 Introduction

Rhetorical criticism is not just about persuasive techniques, but all approaches which are concerned with the surface features of the text. We now realize that Hebrew writers had a range of tricks or devices that they used, maybe unconsciously, in composing poems or stories. Parallelism is the best known poetic device. In prose, repetition of phrases or keywords is very important. The beginning and end of sections may be marked by inclusion (repetition of the opening). Writing in panels (ABCDABCD), or chiastically (ABBA), or in longer palistrophes (mirror-image patterns ABCDEDCBA, etc) are some of the devices that have been noted in both OT and NT. This unit studies definition of rhetoric criticism, history of the discipline,

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define rhetoric criticism
- Understand the history of rhetoric criticism
- Apply rhetorical criticism to both OT and NT

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Defining Rhetoric Criticism

One branch of literary critics compared the biblical materials to the Greco-Roman orators. They observed the writers of the Bible had similar interests, similar goals of persuasion, and similar techniques. They began to look for specific literary devices that gave clues to the composition of the passage. If these devices could be found, they would unlock the interpretation of the text.

Rhetorical criticism functioned in two dimensions. (1) Its proponent claimed it helped focus on the writing as a whole, rather than on its individual parts. Such knowledge emphasized the progress (movement) of the text, so the reader knew exactly "where" a particular passage occurred: the logical flow of the book. This location helped identify how that section functioned in relation to the whole text. (2) Rhetorical critics claim proper analysis of the text provided better knowledge of the provenance of a writing. With proper classification of literature came proper understanding of the circumstances that promoted it. Particularly, they believed the discipline reveals the emotional attitude of the writer, as well as what he hoped to achieve through the material. Thus, rhetorical criticism flourished. The founding of the movement is credited to James Muilenburg perhaps the most influential early scholar was George Kennedy. The approach better suits the Epistles than the Gospels and Acts. Consistent with that, it was applied to Epistles like Galatians, Philemon, Philippians, and Thessalonians. It has application, however, to the Gospel and some have begun to apply it there.

3.2 History of the Discipline

Scholars agree that the modern emphasis on rhetorical criticism began in 1968. In a presidential address before the Society of Biblical Literature Muilenburg called for scholars of the Bible to "go beyond form criticism,,. Specifically, he was interested in the OT and Hebrew literary composition. He wanted to find "the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose," and to discern "the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole." He described this "as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism, of course, throughout history scholars had interacted with rhetorical approaches, but the modern revival came because of the bankruptcy of form critical approaches. In actuality, rhetorical critics do not necessarily oppose other critical approaches. Some claim to see values in other methods. They objected to the fact that a piecemeal dissecting of the text failed to take account of the "wholeness" of the document. Critical methods employed until that time traced the prehistory of the text. They had little value in explaining the impact the whole text had on its readers. Kennedy stated the role of the discipline as follows: Rhetorical criticism takes the text as we have it, whether the work of a single author or the product of editing, and looks at it from the point of view of the author's or editor's intent, the unified results, and how it would be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries. Most scholars see the discipline as complementary. It is "a valuable additional methodology, largely untapped, for understanding biblical material."

3.3 The Purpose of Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism attempts to understand the text as a whole. It focuses on the point the author made and the response of the reader. Specifically, the goal is to understand two important aspects of biblical study: Why did the author write this text, and how did he put it together? Obviously this relates to issues of biblical introduction. It assumes that the literature has a purpose and that the document itself (and sometimes by itself) reveals that purpose. It further assumes a given author had access to rhetorical devices that enabled him to address a situation powerfully. In other words, the author arranged his material as he did to make the best impact on his readers.

Some assumptions underlie this approach. (1) A rhetorical study assumes the author consciously employed literary devices. Since orators were common in the Greco-Roman world, it seems likely the writer employed such an honored form of persuasion. On the other hand, one might ask: Is this too much to expect of the writers of Scripture who, in some cases, appear to be untrained in classical disciplines? Further, is this consistent with a concept of the inspiration of the Scriptures which the church has affirmed throughout the centuries? (2) Rhetorical criticism assumes the writings were basically formal. If the writers utilized common rhetorical devices, they obviously thought about what they wanted to write and how they wanted to express it.¹⁷ It is indicative of the discipline that Episodes which have been understood traditionally as informal were among the earliest objects of rhetorical criticism. These included Philippians, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. (3) The discipline assumes the readers were comfortable with a more formal address from the writer. According to this approach, a friendly letter from and to friends seems impossible. The critic assumes the writer employed various persuasive techniques. Ultimately, rhetorical criticism hopes to reveal the historical situation.

The style and tone of written persuasion reveals the atmosphere that existed between the writer and his readers. It also clarifies the seriousness of the situation and the response the writer desired. Other aspects of biblical study contribute to this understanding, but rhetorical critics believe that the flavor of the writing helps most.

3.4 The Process of Rhetorical Criticism

Doing rhetorical criticism involves two major investigations. First, the interpreter must identify the rhetorical unit. Following that, the interpreter must determine the structure of the text and what type of rhetoric it is. Both of these require quite complex forms of analysis. Discovering the Rhetorical Unit: this task includes both the larger unit; the entire piece of literature—and the smaller units which comprise it. Every complete literary unit has an introduction, body, and conclusion. These may occur on a broad, comprehensive scale, or they may occur in isolated portions of writing. If the unit is a piece of larger work, clear reasons are needed to identify the particular smaller units. Generally, rhetorical units have clear literary boundaries. Most of these involve word repetition. The most common "boundary marker" is inclusion, called "inclusion" in English. Inclusion is a literary device by which a writer reveals the limits of his discussion of a particular subject. Most often,

inclusion occurs with a word or phrase. When the writer first employs the phrase, the discussion begins. At the conclusion of the discussion, the writer uses the phrase again, thus indicating in a summary fashion the discussion has ended. Of course, the word or phrase may be essential to the content of the unit and therefore may be repeated many times within the inclusion.

Sometimes grammatical markers form the inclusion. For example, probably the most common form of inclusion is the chiasm. A chiasm is a discussion of two parts of a subject arranged in an A B B A order. That means the first part of the subject occurs in the first and fourth positions, normally designated as A and N.. The second portion of the discussion occurs in the second and third positions, normally designated as Band B'. The inclusion occurs with the more significant material, the first and fourth positions. When the chiasm concludes, the reader understands that the particular literary unit also concludes. For example, Moises Silva employed this technique in his commentary on Philippians. He used it to demonstrate the unity of 1:27--4:3.22 Vernon Robbins used it to mark off the introduction of Mark's Gospel.

Other common lexical devices help the reader isolate literary units. Another common device is the repetition of words in an anaphoric manner. This means the author repeats a word or phrase frequently enough that a pattern occurs. The Beatitudes of Matthew 5 repeat the word "blessed." Hebrews 11 repeats the word "by faith" (one word in Greek) to form a pattern. Sound devices also form inclusions and mark literary divisions. Sometimes a writer employs words or phrases that sounded "poetical" for purposes of memory recall. This may well occur in Mark 2:1_12.25. A final example of these devices is rhetorical questions. Frequently in the NT the writer asks such questions. They introduce a subject to be addressed, and when the address concludes, the writer asks another question. This device occurs in Romans 5-8 in particular. Not everyone agrees on the specific rhetorical devices a writer might employ. Sometimes almost diametrically opposite conclusions occur. Perhaps this happens because the science is in its infancy. Perhaps there will never be a consensus. Nevertheless, these methods help in text analysis, particularly in isolating a rhetorical unit.

Analyzing the Kind of Literature. The second step involves analysis of the rhetorical unit. Here the interpreter considers three major categories of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, and style. Invention refers to the "proofs" and "refutations" of a speech or writing. When a writer addressed a reading audience, he first considered the kinds of proofs he would use. The selecting process came to be known as "inventions. "

"Arrangement" (Lat. *dispositio*; Gr. *taxis*) concerns the organization of the material. The Greek orators divided their speeches into four main parts. The exordium occurred first. It consisted of an introduction to the entire writing. The exordium set the direction of the relationships and prepared for the main elements of the literature. The rhetoricians then moved to the narratio. This was the statement of the case. It set the direction for the literary proofs that would follow. Third came the probatio, which included the body of the speech or writin~. Finally, each speech ended with the peroratio. This was the conclusion. These occurred regularly, so any literary piece could be analyzed this

way. If the documents parallel the Greek orations, the rhetorical critic will find these elements in each NT book. As will be noted later, the forms may vary, but the structural elements remain. In addition to invention and arrangement, each orator considered style. This meant he would consciously determine the type of approach to an audience. Many ancient Greeks, such as Aristotle, pointed to two different kinds of persuasive techniques. Some persuasions were "artless"; that is, they occurred "outside" rhetoric. They included such things as laws, witnesses, contracts, and oaths. On the other hand, a rhetorician had at his disposal many "artful" ways of persuasion. These were appeals to action which demonstrated the orator's ability. It made rhetoric powerful. These "artful" devices corresponded to different aspects of persons. Some arguments appealed to the rational faculties. These sometimes related to logos, the "reasoning" capability of the human mind. Other arguments appealed to the emotions. These were known as pathos arguments. They intended to move someone by touching the feelings.

Finally, the ethos involved morality. They called people to action based on ethical or moral principles. The type of argumentation-style helps to determine the nature of the discussion. It further anticipates the type of response desired by the speaker or writer. Ancient orators learned various devices they could use in each of these areas to persuade their hearers of appropriate action. All of this analysis provides the interpreter with the data to determine the rhetorical situation. The discourse is like an answer to a question; the rhetorical situation is the question. Applying that analogy to the NT, the piece of literature is the answer to a question that surfaces only by considering the rhetorical context. At this point, it is helpful to note the kinds of rhetoric used by the Greeks. First, they had deliberative oratory. In general use, this was what an orator used to persuade someone of his or her opinion or way of going about something. It occurred commonly, because most of the "everyday" debates involved such decisions. For example, political discussions were deliberative, as were things that had to do with public affairs. In addition to deliberative orations, the ancient Greeks had judicial oratory.

This was the language of the courtroom. Particularly suited to defending or condemning specific actions, it could be used for anyone wishing to accuse or justify himself or someone else. Because of the highly developed legal system of the Greco-Roman world, this style developed into a fine art. Finally, there were epideictic orations. This was the language of praise and honor, as well as blame and dishonor. Orators used these techniques when they wanted to inspire an audience. It was the oratory of festivals as well. NT scholars debate which NT writings contain these various types of rhetoric. Their assumption is if a writing fits into one of these styles, it helps the interpreter understand the situation of the readers and the intent of the writer. Of course, there is a circular element here, since the style depends on the literary characteristics, and the literary characteristics are derived from the style of writing.

3.5 Applying Rhetorical Criticism to The New Testament

Many biblical scholars answered the 1968 call of Muilenburg to engage in rhetorical criticism. A little over a decade later, biblical commentaries began to

appear. In addition, in the decade of the 1980s many wrote articles examining the literary features of biblical books.'! and the rhetorical arguments provided ammunition for solving critical questions of introduction. At least one series is dedicated to helping scholars and laypeople appreciate the impact of rhetorical studies. Rhetorical criticism does not promise an entirely positive picture for biblical interpretation, however. Two questions haunt biblical scholars. Are the NT writings really as rhetorical as many have concluded? Further, is there any unanimity of conviction regarding the specific conclusions of rhetorical critics? The last question may pose the most difficulties. For example, a comparison of five recent approaches to the Epistle to the Romans reveals a broad spectrum of conclusions about the discourse. Romans provides a particularly good illustration of the problem, because scholars agree more on its basic genre than they do on most other NT books. The table below presents the reader with an overview of how rhetorical analysis has been applied to NT studies.

4.0 Conclusion

Rhetorical criticism has occupied the minds and energies of an increasing number of scholars in the last twenty-five years. No doubt it will remain for years to come. It brings the promise of helpful analytical insights. It particularly helps the interpreter see the whole of a discourse, and it provides the tools for analysis of the structure of the parts. Nevertheless, interpreters should move slowly into this study, particularly if it is the only perspective taken of the text. As with other approaches, there is need for the wisdom of the community of scholars.

5.0 Summary

This unit discussed: Defining Rhetorical Criticism; History of Rhetorical Criticism; the Purpose of Rhetorical Criticism; the Process Of Rhetorical Criticism; and Applying Rhetorical Criticism To The New Testament. Next Unit will continue with part two of rhetorical criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

- Narrate the history of Rhetorical Criticism
- Outline the Process of Rhetorical Criticism
- How can one apply Rhetorical Criticism to the New Testament

7.0 References/Further reading

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MODULE 2: TEXT-CENTRED CRITICISM

Unit 3: Rhetorical Criticism and the Hermeneutics of the New Testament

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5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0 References/Future Reading

1.0 Introduction

Burke’s book (1950) specifically deals with the question where rhetorical criticism is taking us. Wuellner (1987:462) answers this question with: “it takes us to interdisciplinary studies ... (it) approaches all literature”. When interpretations of the New Testament are studied – especially the use of rhetorical criticism for New Testament interpretation, it becomes clear that confusion exists about the concepts “rhetoric”, “rhetorical theory” and “rhetorical criticism”. In some cases writers use the word “rhetoric” as a synonym for “rhetorical theory” or sometimes “rhetorical criticism”. Thuren (1990:43) for example, in discussing the nature of rhetorical criticism, states that “rhetorics seeks to study what is the purpose of any discourse ...”. He, however, continues that “rhetorics analyzes the means utilized in a text ...” (Thuren, 1990:43). He also describes rhetorics as “a method of practical criticism”, when he discusses modern conceptions of rhetorics (Thuren, 1990:52). These quotations serve to demonstrate the confusion in this regard.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this study, you should be able to distinguish between the following concepts:

- rhetoric and its relation to “communication” and epistolography”;
- rhetorical act and artefact;

- a theory of rhetoric; and
- rhetoric and its relation to “communication” and “epistolography”;
- rhetorical criticism.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Rhetoric and its relation to “communication” and “epistolography”

Aristotle (*Ars Rhetorica* I:ii,1) and Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* II:15-21) define rhetoric respectively as follows: (Rhetoric, then, may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject.)

- *Scientia bene dicendi*. (Rhetoric is the science/knowledge of eloquence/speaking well.)

Rhetoric is often seen as part of modern theories of argumentation (Van Eemeren et al., 1987:55-107). Others consider it to be the art of persuasion (Miller et al., 1984:400-403). Thuren (1990:58) agrees with the latter definition, except that he adds that it is the art of persuasion “in general”. Foss (1989:4) defines rhetoric as “the use of symbols to influence thought and action; it is simply an old term for what is now commonly called communication”. Kennedy (1992:2) argues that rhetoric should not be identified with communication, since there seem to be various degrees of rhetoric among kinds of communication. Kennedy explains that “zero grade” rhetoric, for example, may be approached but never quite achieved. Rhetoric in the most general sense, he says, may perhaps be identified with the energy inherent in communication. Communication involves emotional energy that impels the speaker to speak, and implies physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the energy experienced by the recipient in decoding the message. The point is that a form of communication may be a zero grade rhetoric, and there may be various degrees of rhetoric among kinds of communication, but it is still “rhetoric”. Any form of communication is an attempt to bring about changes in, or a strengthening of people’s thoughts, words, attitudes, emotions or actions. I therefore persist in identifying rhetoric with “communication”.

When classical theoreticians of both disciplines are consulted about the relationship between rhetoric and epistolography, it transpires that confusion exists (see the survey of Cornelius, 1991:18-30). The whole Elma M. Cornelius debate, Watson and Hauser (1994:121) says, is based in part upon the fact that epistolary theory and rhetorical theory were developed separately in antiquity. Epistolary theory in antiquity belonged to the domain of the rhetoricians, but it was not originally part of their theoretical systems. Murphy (1974) makes a valuable contribution in this regard with his *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*. He (1974:202-203) is of the opinion that the existence of the *ars dictaminis* can be linked with the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino in central Italy. According to Murphy, a monk with the name Alberic was the first to link rhetoric and epistolography in a formal treatise round about 1087. Alberic gave an application of the rhetorical principles to the practice of letter-writing (*Alberic Dictaminum radii* and *Brevarium de*

dictamine). From this it appears that even Alberic could not succeed in distinguishing between the formal categories of ancient rhetoric and epistolography. He considered for example the “letter-greeting” (an epistolary form) as the first part of the letter and the exordium, narratio, argumentatio and conclusio (rhetorical forms) as the ensuing parts. Thus he does not consider the first epistolary form (the letter-greeting) as part of the first rhetorical form (the exordium). Murphy (1974:194-268) considers the *ars dictaminis* as “a sharp break with the ancient rhetorical practice”, but also as “a rare example of applied rhetoric”. He summarizes the relationship between the two disciplines very well when he says that “eloquent letters, like eloquent speeches, were expected to be the product of broad rhetorical education” (Murphy, 1974:195).

In the research tradition, one can identify three different approaches to the interpretation of New Testament letters:

- Some theoreticians interpret letters only in terms of epistolographical categories (see for example White, 1972; 1984).
- Theoreticians like Berger (1974), Kraftchick (1985) and Johanson (1987) interpret letters with an approach in which rhetoric plays a more important role than epistolography.
- Others, like Wuellner (1976) and Stowers (1986), try to use both rhetoric and epistolography to the same degree in the interpretation of letters.

From these different approaches it is clear that the relationship between rhetoric and epistolography is an actual problem, especially in the development of a method of interpretation of New Testament letters. Rhetorical criticism and the hermeneutics of the New Testament Thuren (1990:58) correctly summarizes this problem when he says that the dilemma of divergent opinions on the relationship between ancient rhetoric and epistolography is mostly due to different views of rhetoric. If “rhetoric” is seen narrowly as a study of the conventions of a speech, the first and second possibilities above will be considered. Thuren, however, chooses the third possibility because he argues that rhetoric should be perceived on a higher level than the art of persuasion in general. Vorster (1991:76) is of the opinion that a letter should be seen as part of the rhetorical act and that all the elements of a letter are rhetorical. According to him (1991:75-76) letter-writing is a species of the genus rhetoric. In the interpretation of letters it must thus be an ideal not to work only formally epistolographically, but to analyze the rhetorical situation as well. Botha (1994:140) concludes by saying that, from the discussion of the relationship between rhetoric and epistolography, it is clear how important it is not to confine one’s conception of rhetoric to classical rhetoric alone, but to work with the broader perspective proposed by modern rhetoric.

3.2 Rhetorical act and artefact

Campbell (1982:6) defines the “rhetorical act” as an intentional, created, polished attempt to overcome the obstacles in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end. Foss (1989:5) differentiates between “rhetorical act” and “artefact”. The rhetorical act is executed in the presence of the

rhetor's intended audience. The artefact is the trace or tangible evidence of a rhetorical act.

3.3 Theory of rhetoric

Croft (1965:414) defines rhetorical theory as a basis for criticism which should consist of a series of formal techniques drawn from the history of rhetorical theory and unified into a general system. A theory of rhetoric states the basic facts, central laws, and fundamental components of the rhetorical process. The theory describes how rhetoric operates in human communication (Johannesen, 1971:2). Brinton (1981:239) says it is the normative theory of fitting response to certain kinds of situations – it provides the basis for rhetorical criticism. Any critic has to spell out his or her theory of rhetoric, which is a theoretical framework for the way in which rhetoric can be conceptualised for the purpose of rhetorical criticism, and an explanation of one's view of the rules and means of effective communication.

It is important to realize that a single, unified, complete, generally accepted body of precepts for rhetorical theory is an impossibility (see Winterowd, 1968:77-78). It is, however, essential to spell out the particular theory of rhetoric which I presuppose in my interpretation and evaluation of the effectiveness of the rhetorical act. It is important to indicate what I consider effective communication to be, as no unified theory of rhetoric exists. Choosing an appropriate theory is not an easy task. We are mainly confronted by two groups of theories: traditional (also called classical) and the so-called "new rhetoric". The classical theory of rhetoric, for the first time systematically recorded in Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica*, is the only systematized system available. The "new rhetoric" is a concept used by various authors, but none of these authors interprets this concept in the same way. There is, however, one resemblance, namely that all the representatives of the "new rhetoric" attempt to break away from the traditional theory (see for example Simons, 1971; Ohmann, 1971; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Hochmuth Nichols (1971a and 1971b) also classifies Burke and Richards as representatives of this "new rhetoric". But still there is no single theory of the "new rhetoric".

Croft (1965:407) is of the opinion that the forms or techniques of an art are of no value in themselves to a critic, but that they are only tools with which to pry into a specimen of the art. Criticism does not consist of finding illustrations of standard, preconceived forms. The critic must use the frameworks of standard techniques and strategies as norms to help him or her discover and evaluate the ways in which the speaker's use of these techniques and strategies for example is distinctive. The theory of rhetoric is thus used for practising rhetorical criticism.

3.4 Rhetorical criticism

Hughes (1989:23) acknowledges that rhetorical criticism is becoming more and more recognized as a method of interpretation of Pauline as well as other biblical literature. Rhetorical criticism is more than mere stylistic analyses, social descriptions or historical reconstructions (see Wuellner, 1995:161). Andrews (1990:3) considers rhetorical criticism to be the process of focusing attention on human efforts to be persuasive. To be more specific, rhetorical criticism regards a

speech as an act of communication with a specific audience, and mainly concern the analysis and appreciation of the orator's method of imparting his or her ideas to the hearers (Andrews, 1990:6). Foss (1989:5) considers rhetorical criticism to be the investigation and evaluation of rhetorical acts and artefacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes. A critic, Richards (1954:180) says, must first discern what meanings are being Rhetorical criticism and the hermeneutics of the New Testament communicated, and thereafter, how successfully these are being communicated. What is common to all these definitions is that rhetorical criticism concerns the interpretation and evaluation of a specific act of communication. This definition is closely related to the objectives of rhetorical criticism.

a) Objectives of rhetorical criticism

The primary purposes of rhetorical criticism are to describe or analyse, interpret, and evaluate a rhetorical act (Scott & Brock, 1972:9; Campbell, 1982:16; Andrews, 1990:6). The central objective of critical research, Croft (1965:411) says, is evaluation. Thonssen et al. (1970:19) elaborates this view by saying that rhetorical criticism seeks an answer to the question to what extent, and through what resources of rhetorical craftsmanship, has the speaker achieved the end. One can summarize this view by saying that the purpose of rhetorical criticism is a determination of the communicative functions of a text and the evaluation of the probable effectiveness of a text.

Audience adaptation is very important in this kind of study (Croft, 1965: 408). A very important function of rhetorical criticism is to show how propositions and audiences are connected; how speakers use techniques and strategies to adapt their ideas to the ideas of their audiences. The flaw in many aspects of modern rhetorical criticism, Croft (1965: 408) says, has not been that it ignored this necessity, but rather that it has devised inadequate tools to deal with it. Audience adaptation is a job of being aware of societal and cultural predispositions as premises in arguments, of fitting the speaker's basic social values to those of the listeners, of taking into account the cultural myths or images to which the audience responds as well as the nonverbal cues to which the audience reacts – such as artifacts and space (see Larson, 1998:210-233).

Croft (1965:409) identifies the following objectives of rhetorical criticism:

- The historical function: to report and interpret the manner in which a speaker's social values have been related to the social values of his or her audience in the course of his or her rhetorical adaptation.
- The evaluative function: to evaluate the effectiveness of the rhetorical act by estimating the appropriateness and evaluating the uniqueness of the idea-adaptation.
- The creative function: to re-examine, re-evaluate, and if possible to modify contemporary rhetorical theory through the examination of the adaptive processes.

The creative function seems to be the conclusive function of rhetorical criticism – the last step in which the rhetorical critic concludes his or her study by re-evaluating rhetorical theory. It could, for example, be possible to say that, from the specific study, it became clear that communication took place in a different way from what has actually been assumed. This study can also, for example, end with the realization that Paul communicated in a different way from that prescribed by the rules of classical rhetoric. And that may be the starting point of a new rhetorical theory, specifically concerning Paul’s communication in the New Testament.

It is a challenge to try not only to describe and interpret, but also to evaluate the probable effectiveness of a rhetorical act. To determine effect, however, is not just finding out what happened after the act of communication; it is a careful examination of the interrelationships between text and context in order to offer the most reasonable explanation for the probable result of any given message (see Andrews, 1990:8). But, as I have already mentioned, up till now inadequate tools have been devised to deal with the particular function of evaluation. Therefore it is necessary to consider a number of the available methods of rhetorical criticism.

b) Methods of rhetorical criticism

To describe “the” method of rhetorical criticism is an impossible task. The development of methods of rhetorical criticism is influenced by the development of rhetorical theories. Cohen (1994:69) observes that the past three decades have witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in rhetorical theory. This interest, however, has taken a number of distinct forms. Mack (1990:19) acknowledges that there is no single network of scholars exchanging ideas about rhetorical criticism – no school, acknowledged master, or canon of methods. “Some theorists”, Cohen (1994:69) says, “have sought to extend the traditional understanding of rhetoric as a methodology for the study of argument”. Others have paid little heed to rhetoric’s historical parameters since they have reconceptualised rhetoric as the analysis of fictional narrative. Still others have attempted to overcome the ancient antagonism between philosophy and rhetoric by construing rhetoric as the framework for a philosophy of discourse. Finally, “post-modernist thinkers have turned to rhetoric precisely because of its repudiation of philosophical conceptions of knowledge and truth” (Cohen, 1994:69). Scott and Brock (1972) identify the different trends within the frame of rhetorical criticism as the traditional perspective, the experiential perspective, and the “new rhetoric”. In the third revised edition of this book *Rhetorical criticism and the hermeneutics of the New Testament* (Brock et al., 1990) the perspective of the “new rhetoric” was replaced by a discussion of the dramaturgical perspective, and they also added the sociological perspective and the postmodern perspective. In the next section I will briefly summarize both discussions of the various trends in rhetorical criticism. I do this in order to indicate that the various trends in rhetorical criticism are closely linked to different underlying theories of rhetoric.

i) The traditional perspective

Within the traditional perspective, the critic concentrates on the speaker to consider the speaker’s response to the rhetorical problems that the speaking situation poses.

The classical system of rhetoric is used as rhetorical theory and the different rhetorical strategies are studied. With the use of the classical rhetorical theory, rhetoricians generally agree on what the ideal rhetorical process is, and the critic makes the following assumptions:

- Society is stable; people, circumstances, and rhetorical principles are fundamentally the same throughout history.
- Rhetoricians have discovered the essential principles of public discourse.
- Rhetorical concepts are reasonably discrete and can be studied separately in the process of analyzing rhetorical discourse.
- A reasonably close word-thought-thing relationship exists. Rhetorical concepts accurately describe an assumed reality.

ii) The experiential perspective

For critics working from this perspective, no single element or rhetorical principle can be assumed as the starting point for criticism. The critic must make the fundamental choice. The critic believes that no special pattern exists for the study of public discourse. Discourse must continually be studied anew. No specific method is used and the critic makes the following assumptions:

- Society is in a continuous process of change.
- An infinite combination of concepts, strategies, and principles are available for the study of public discourse.
- Any system of categorizing is arbitrary and does not accurately reflect an assumed external reality for extended periods of time.

iii) The perspective of the “new rhetoric”

According to the perspective of “new rhetoric”, rhetorical criticism must find a starting point in the interaction of humans and their social environment. The perspective of the “new rhetoric” can be divided into different approaches. The semantic-grammatical and dramatic approaches are examples of the “new rhetoric”. In these approaches we find, for example, textual analyses and analyses of motives. All “new rhetoric”-critics, however, agree that a unified rhetorical framework is necessary for productive rhetorical criticism. The following assumptions are made:

- Society is in a process of change, but fairly stable relationships can be found that govern the interaction of humans with their environment.
- A flexible framework may be constructed for the study of public discourse.
- People’s symbol systems influence their perceptions of reality.

iv) The sociological perspective

For rhetorical critics employing the sociological perspective, society and communication are intimately related forces that mutually define each other. The structure, institutions, and processes of society and communicative exchanges are

viewed as continuously interacting and mutually defining systems. A wide diversity of theories is likely to emerge from this perspective of rhetorical criticism. The four major approaches to rhetorical criticism that can reasonably be viewed as related extensions of a sociological worldview, include the “sociolinguistic”, “generic”, “social movements”, and “feminist” approaches. The following assumptions are made:

- Societies develop built-in adjustment and control mechanisms that minimize change and promote stability and inertia.
- The values and consensus mechanisms of societies establish the parameters for the study of communication.
- The symbolic frameworks unifying and regulating society determine the psychology of individuals and the range of feasible rhetorical options available to individuals in rhetorical situations.
- The word-thought-thing relationship is directly regulated by the structure, institutions, and processes of society.

v) **The postmodern perspective**

The purpose of the postmodern critic is to identify how power texts construct social realities and in their turn can be deconstructed. Postmodern criticism is essentially anti-theoretical. Of these approaches the constructionist and deconstructionist approaches are examples. The following assumptions are made:

- The modern industrial state creates, maintains, and uses a series of paradoxical symbolic constructions of reality as modes of social control.
- To understand the control systems employed by societal systems, the diverse symbolic constructions of reality must be identified by the rhetorical critic.
- In order to promote equality, the rhetorical critic functions as a social activist, deconstructing the symbolic constructions of reality erected by political elites.
- The word-thought-thing relationship is directly challenged by postmodern critics. The word-thought-thing relationship is cast as solely arbitrary and conventional, designed to create and reinforce word thought relationships that facilitate dominant and subordinate relationships.

Watson and Hauser (1994:115) summarizes this process as follows: “Rhetorical analysis using modern rhetoric is often combined with literary criticism, text linguistics, semiotics, social description, stylistics, reader response criticism, discourse analysis, and/or speech act theory”. And they then acknowledge that these cross-disciplinary studies and their trends are difficult to identify and categorize.

From this summary, it is clear that there are different perspectives of rhetorical criticism just as there are different theories of rhetoric. Attention has been given to the assumptions underlying each perspective which are closely connected with the philosophical presuppositions of each perspective. But still, it has not been spelled

out how rhetorical criticism should be done. Rhetorical critics usually limit themselves to descriptions of typical strategies used in communication, while one hardly finds an evaluation of the probable rhetorical effectiveness of the rhetorical act. Clearly there are serious problems with rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism, understood as interpretation and evaluation, remains a vague concept. In the next section I will briefly review and criticize various proposals for a suitable approach to rhetorical criticism.

c) Problems of a method of rhetorical criticism

With regard to rhetorical critical studies in the field of biblical interpretation, Vorster (1991:22, 35) distinguishes between rhetorical studies before 1975 and after 1975. Those before 1975 (and some of these even proceeded after the attempts of Betz [1975] and Wuellner [1976]) are mere ornamental or elocutional rhetorical criticism, while Wuellner (1976) advocated a departure from elocutional rhetorical criticism to argumentative analysis. "Rhetorical criticism as exegetical activity within New Testament studies", Vorster (1991:22) says, "developed from problems posed by epistolographical studies". Because epistolographical studies are mainly concerned with the structure of the letter, the problems posed by epistolography are therefore structurally related. "Structure" plays a very important role in the work done by New Testament rhetorical critics. This can be seen in the attempts to prove the relationship between various textual parts.

Croft (1965:406) describes the situation of rhetorical criticism as follows: ... a researcher takes the old theory, finds illustrations of it, piles these up, and concludes, for example, that a given man's speaking exhibits characteristics which may be said to fall properly within the categories of traditional rhetoric. "This sort of criticism," he says, "works upon the presumption that rhetoric is rhetoric, and, beyond deciding which traditional doctrine he prefers, the critic shall not fancy himself a creative theorist." "And so," Croft concludes, "we have made rhetorical criticism a dead-end street".

Croft (1965:406) is of the opinion that the standard forms in rhetorical criticism in the field of speech treat traditional theory as a closed, fixed system and that very little effort is made to evaluate the rhetorical act –no critical conclusions are drawn. This approach, he says, cannot be called criticism in the sense of evaluation. Croft (1965: 406) encourages creative theorizing as a part of criticism. Wuellner (1987:451) is of the opinion that rhetoric has been restricted, distorted and paralysed throughout history, while biblical exegetes remained unaware of it. He identifies two fragments of rhetorical criticism from Augustine in the fourth century to Eagleton in the twentieth century: Augustine views rhetorical analysis as synonymous with literary criticism (with the emphasis on stylistics), while Eagleton views it as synonymous with practical criticism (Wuellner, 1987:450-453). Muilenburg (1969) made rhetorical criticism fashionable again with his Presidential Address at the Society of Biblical Literature entitled "Form Criticism and Beyond". Even so, Wuellner (1987:451) claims that the Rhetorical criticism and the hermeneutics of the New Testament

Muilenburg school still did not succeed in developing an identifiable model. Black (1989:254) suspects that Muilenburg's definition of rhetoric is too narrow because his method focuses upon the literary features of texts. Muilenburg probably considered "rhetoric" to be "literary artistry". Black (1989:253) describes the Muilenburg method as exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit and discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Black (1989:253) is, however, of the opinion that with his definition and execution of rhetorical criticism, Muilenburg was the most influential figure in Old Testament rhetorical criticism. For most Old Testament scholars "rhetorical criticism" meant what Muilenburg proposed, namely the study of a particular text in its present form, separate from its generic rootage, social usage, or historical development. It thus seems as if Muilenburg was responsible for a change in Old Testament interpretation to rhetorical criticism, but he did not succeed in defining a clear method. The greatest merit of his work was that he pointed to a challenging task (Kessler, 1982:5).

In 1977, Kikawada (1977:67-91) also called for a method of rhetorical criticism. During the past twenty years, alternative methods have indeed been developed. And if one wants to study the different methods, it is of great help to start with the methods used by those who are considered to be the "leaders" – who made the most important contributions. Wuellner (1987:453-454) is of the opinion that Perelman (1982) and Kennedy (1984) have turned rhetorical criticism around. Kennedy's model of rhetorical criticism (1984) was in a way an answer to the need for renewed interest in rhetoric. He also paid attention to other researchers' interest in the development of rhetoric. Kennedy (1984:3-14) considers "rhetoric" as "the art of persuasion", as practised by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Based on the precepts of ancient classical theorists, Kennedy (1984:33-38) proposes the following method of rhetorical criticism:

- Determine the rhetorical unit.
- Define the rhetorical situation.
- Identify the rhetorical problem.
- Examine the arrangement of the parts into a unified discourse.
- Analyse each part for its invention and style.
- Evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness of the unit.

Black (1989:255) is of the opinion that Kennedy's primary contribution is methodological: the presentation of a distinctive method of rhetorical criticism that is lucid and systematic. Kennedy's approach to a text is purely rhetorical. He approaches a letter as an argument, considers the methods of persuasion in the various parts of the argument, and determines their functions. His analysis of the rhetorical situation entails mainly two aspects: the audience, and the rhetorical problem faced by the speaker (Kennedy, 1984:25, 36). Kennedy, therefore, intends to explain the form of communication by means of the "rhetorical situation". Even so, he confuses his categories again when he inquires about the author's intention (1984:4,12) which is part of the "historical situation". According to Kennedy

(1984:34), this concept of “author’s intention” more or less corresponds to the *Sitz im Leben*. The rhetorical critic, he says (1984:4), takes the text as it is, and considers it from the perspective of the author’s intention, as well as the way in which it would have been received by a contemporary audience. When Kennedy distinguishes between rhetorical and literary criticism (1984:4-5), he explains that literary criticism investigates the reception of a text by modern audiences, while he himself endeavours to read the text in the same way as it would have been read by its first readers. Thuren (1990:68) says that Kennedy (1984) employs rhetoric as an ancient version of literary criticism. Kennedy’s model is based completely on the ancient rhetorical system, which he uses both formally and functionally.

The sixth step in Kennedy’s method, namely to evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness of the rhetorical unit, seems to remain only one step in the whole process. In Kennedy’s (1984:141-144) interpretation of 1 Thessalonians, he never comes to an evaluation of the possible success of the rhetorical act constituted by this letter. A clearer method of rhetorical criticism is therefore no guarantee for writing good criticism. It seems as though the last step of evaluation remains a vague concept. Wuellner (1987:461) says that “... rhetorical criticism leads us away from a traditional message- or content-oriented reading of Scripture to a reading which generates and strengthens ever-deepening personal, social and cultural values” and he regards Perelman as the scholar who brought about radical changes in rhetorical criticism. Arnold, who translated Perelman’s work (1982), notes in the introduction of this book (1982:xvii) that the broad conception of rhetoric, as presented by Perelman, primarily originated in the USA, where students in literary prose were responsible for its rebirth. According to Arnold, Baldwin’s work,

Rhetoric in Monroe’s *Cyclopaedia* (1914), emphasized the fact that rhetoric is more than stylistics. At the same time, a group of rhetoricians, and literary and classical scholars, referred to as the Cornell University School, focused their research on the study of the theory and praxis of ancient rhetoric. Since 1914, the Speech Communication Association has emphasized the importance of practising rhetorical criticism from a variety of disciplines. These studies were conducted in a number of disciplines, including psychology and historical criticism. Starting with Perelman, philosophy received more and more emphasis. Arnold (in the introduction of Perelman, 1982:xix) indicates that Perelman writes as a philosopher. Perelman analyses the logic of arguments in a philosophical way and he can thus be regarded as a rhetorical critic working from a philosophical perspective.

The new rhetoric, presented by Perelman (1982), entails communication directed at all kinds of audiences on any topic. The general study of argumentation should, according to Perelman (1982:5), be supported by various disciplines that might be valuable. He does take note of the ancient rhetorical system (1982:6), but also transcends it. In 1987 Schussler Fiorenza (1987:386) identified the need for an “integrative” paradigm for rhetorical criticism. This new paradigm requires a balance between the historical approach and literary criticism and sociological approaches to New Testament exegesis. Her work presents an important indicator for the future direction of rhetorical criticism, and it also emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary studies. Thuren (1990:42) defines rhetorical criticism as a

“general approach”. He says that rhetorical criticism in the field of biblical exegesis is not yet based on a unified view of rhetoric (Thuren, 1990:45). Some scholars apply ancient rhetoric, while others use modern linguistics, still others work with rhetoric, but they use new terminologies and concepts. His own method of rhetorical criticism is closely related to that of Kennedy (1984), and comprises the following:

- identification of the rhetorical unit;
- identification of the rhetorical situation;
- study of the order; and
- analysis of stylistic elements.

With these four steps, Thuren makes full use of the ancient rhetorical system, both in the formal and in the communicative-functional sense. The same critique can, however, be applied to Thuren as to Kennedy. An evaluation of the probable effectiveness of a rhetorical act in its original rhetorical situation does not occur. Wuellner (1987:449) makes good use of Perelman’s model and indicates that rhetorical criticism brings us to a greater harvest – a harvest of new attempts made in various fields of rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism goes further than the view of language as a reflection of reality. It takes us to the social aspects of language as an instrument of communication, an instrument with the potential to influence people. Black (1989:256) is of the opinion that in most rhetorical critical studies, with the exception of Kennedy’s (1984), the interpretative tactics and exegetical implications have not yet come completely into focus. The question remains whether Kennedy really succeeded in doing what he had in mind in the last step of his rhetorical criticism, namely the “evaluation.” Most of the work that has been done on Paul in the name of rhetorical criticism, Wuellner (1987:455) says, falls short in his (that is Wuellner’s) view.

For Vorster (1991:23) rhetorical criticism is concerned with the question of why an argument could be deemed appropriate within a certain context. It is concerned with pragmatics. He (1991:39) typifies his work as an “interactional analysis” and uses an “interactional model”. He further acknowledges that to a certain extent he has adopted an eclectic and pragmatic approach because he has used elements from various models and adapted where necessary. To establish the purpose of the letter to the Romans, he restricts the field of study to the framework of the letter, especially the beginning and end of the letter (1:1-17 and 15:7-16:23). He uses insights from reader-oriented disciplines such as pragmatics, reception-criticism and rhetoric. Vorster definitely brought new insights concerning the purpose of the letter to the Romans.

Methodologically he introduced us to the value of pragmatics. This study, however, also does not provide us with a method of rhetorical criticism, specifically when it comes to the evaluation of the probable effectiveness of a rhetorical act. Robbins (1996a and 1996b) calls his method of biblical interpretation “socio-rhetorical criticism”. With this method he approaches a text as a thick tapestry, seen from different angles in order to grasp different configurations, patterns and images. “When we explore a text from different angles”, he says, “we see multiple textures of meanings, convictions, beliefs, values, emotions and actions” (Robbins,

1996a:18). He describes four arenas of texture: inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture and ideological texture (Robbins, 1996a). And then in another book he adds the sacred texture (Robbins, 1996b).

- Inner texture, he (1996b:3) says, concerns features like the repetition of particular words, the creation of beginnings and endings, alternation of speech and storytelling, particular ways in which the words present arguments, and the particular “feel” or aesthetic of the text.
- Intertexture concerns a text’s configuration of phenomena that lie outside the text. Examples of such texture are social intertexture such as the structure of families, political arrangements, and cultural intertexture such as the ideas of people about their responsibilities in the world, and historical intertexture such as events which occur outside the text.
- Social and cultural texture concerns the capacities of the text to support social reform, withdrawal, or opposition and to evoke cultural perceptions of dominance, subordination, difference, or exclusion.
- Ideological texture concerns the way the text itself and interpreters of the text position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups.
- Sacred texture exists in the texts that somehow address the relation of humans to the divine and exists in communication about gods, holy persons, spiritual beings, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics. Robbins focused our attention on the multiple textures of a text and the necessity of various disciplines to interpret such a text. His method is also a very thorough way of interpretation. But I still miss the issue of evaluation of the probable effectiveness of the rhetorical act in his method.

Scott and Brock (1972:404) conclude their study by saying that we should expect, at the very least, a lessening of interest in theorizing about rhetorical criticism and a revitalized concern with criticizing public discourse. During the past twenty five years, however, this still has not happened. In connection with this, Andrews (1990:62) states that it is most important that a practising rhetorical critic does criticism. We have to realize that the ideal of a “unified view” of rhetorical criticism will remain an ideal. Rhetoric is much too complex a concept to capture in one single system. For much too long researchers on the New Testament have been quarrelling about the proper method of rhetorical criticism. Knowledge about what rhetorical criticism is, does not automatically translate into the ability to do criticism (Foss, 1989:11). The goal of rhetorical criticism, Andrews (1990:62) says, must be to write good criticism, and good criticism is that which ultimately promotes a richer understanding of the influence and operation of discourse and contributes to the comprehension and refinement of humane values. The complex of interactions that take place between a speaker and his or her audience is never easy to understand fully indeed; total comprehension of any rhetorical exchange is not to be obtained (Andrews, 1990:61), but the critic, nevertheless, should strive to come

as close to the achievement of that goal as he can to contribute to the ongoing work of other rhetorical scholars.

In this section I have tried to give an overview of the problems regarding a method of rhetorical criticism in general.

d) Choosing or developing a method of rhetorical criticism

Foss (1989:17) gives three possibilities when selecting a method:

- a. use an existing critical method;
- b. create a method from an existing concept; and
- c. create a new method.

Many critics have already done rhetorical critical studies of the New Testament. As I have already indicated, there does not exist only one method for rhetorical criticism. In so far as rhetorical criticism concerns description and interpretation of typical persuasion strategies, to find a method is no problem at all as there are many different methods and strategies to explore the different textures of discourse. But in the case of an evaluation of the probable effectiveness of the rhetorical act, “method” is an issue. Although there are various expositions of possible approaches to rhetorical criticism available today, nobody has spelled out a clear method for the evaluation of the probable effectiveness of the rhetorical act as an integral part of rhetorical criticism. According to Andrews (1990:5) any rhetorical critic has one or both of the following tasks: to answer questions about the rhetorical message or to develop a methodical way of answering those questions. The best way to interpret a text would be to investigate all three main elements in the process of communication, namely the author, text and readers. Such an attempt, although not an easy one, can open up new perspectives and make possible the consideration of old issues, although on a different level. The question, however, is – will such a design of a paradigm not end up in eclecticism? Kael (1964:309) answers this question as follows: “eclecticism is the selection of the best standards and principles from various systems of ideas ... it requires more orderliness to be a pluralist than to apply a single theory”. Campbell (1982:5) agrees that a rhetorical perspective is eclectic and inclusive in its search for what is influential and why. A method of rhetorical criticism is the use of a combination of existing and “old” methods in order to answer new questions.

The challenge for any critic is to use a method which has the potential to answer questions about the probable effectiveness of the rhetorical act represented by the artefact. An adequate rhetorical analysis of an ancient document is according to me an analysis that is thorough, consistent, taking cognizance of ancient theory, and providing the analytical tools for an eventual evaluation of the probable effectiveness of the rhetorical act constituted by the artefact. The question, however, remains how to determine effectiveness. Bettinghaus and Cody (1994:6) are of the opinion that the effects of an act of communication are determined by the change in (or strengthening of) behaviour, cognition and affect. They present four criteria to be considered in judging the effects of persuasive communication, namely the nature of the correspondence between the intentions of the participants, the degree

of correspondence between the intentions of the source and the subsequent behaviour of the receiver, the nature of the opposition to be expected to the communicator's position, and the difficulty level of the task being engaged in (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994:16-17). In the interpretation of New Testament texts, it is impossible to determine to what degree there has been a change in or strengthening of the first readers' concepts, beliefs, values and perceptions. It is also impossible to determine whether there was indeed a change in, or strengthening of the readers' emotional states, their actions, thoughts and words. It is, however, possible to determine the "probable" effectiveness of the New Testament by asking the following questions:

- a) Is the author's creation and presentation of the "truth" similar to what the readers will accept and acknowledge to be the "truth"? If it is not similar, the effectiveness of the text will probably decrease.
- b) Does the author attempt to arouse in the minds of his readers as clear, accurate, and complete a picture or conception of his subject as possible? If the readers have a blurred image of the subject, the effectiveness of the act will be influenced.
- c) Are relevant aspects provided by the text to inform the readers in order to respond constructively to the purpose of the text? If not, readers may not respond effectively.
- d) How does the pattern of the argument in the letter contribute to the clarity of the author's intentions and subject?
- e) How creatively does the author respond to the obstacles faced with regard to his creation of an environment of socialization, his creation of the attributes and roleplay of the participants in the socialization process, his use of persuasion strategies, style, and epistolary conventions? All these aspects contribute to the effectiveness of the author's act of communication.
- f) How inventively does the author fulfil the requirements of the situation?
- g) How ethical are the author's means of persuasion as well as his appeals to the readers' emotions, and his use of language?
- h) What will be the cost of participation for the readers? As the power of a text depends on the reader's willingness to participate in the communication process, it is important to determine how much inconvenience and discomfort are involved, how much time, energy and commitment are needed, how much of the reader's resources, money, and expertise must be expended, and how much social resistance can be expected from family, friends and neighbours (see Campbell, 1982:106-109).
- i) What is the potential power of the text to change beliefs, attitudes and actions? In order to answer the above questions a rhetorical analysis consisting of the following elements is needed:
- j) the nature of the text (in the case of the New Testament we are confronted by "sacred" texts e.g. which will ask more commitment from the readers);

- k) the structure, argument, pattern of the arguments, persuasion strategies and style (in order to determine the clarity e.g. of the text and the author's creativity);
- l) the value system presented in the text (to determine the clarity of the text);
- m) social and cultural topoi (to determine whether the relevant aspects are provided);
- n) the purpose of the text (to determine whether the purpose of the text has been reached, we at least need to know what the purpose of the text is);
- o) the characteristics of the author, his/her role, social power, relationship with the readers, value system, issue orientation, and communication (to determine e.g. whether the readers will be willing to accept the author's presentation of himself);
- p) the readers' characteristics, their receptivity to the rhetorical act and top of, their circumstances, their knowledge and faith presupposed by the author, their value system, and the cost of participation (to determine whether the readers can recognize themselves in the author's presentation of the ideal readers).

A method for rhetorical criticism will be a holistic approach and will involve a close reading of the text in which different methods may play a role. The text will also be approached from a socio-historical perspective for the interpretation of typical ancient communication strategies, typical ancient topoi, ancient epistolary structures, ancient values, and roles in ancient society and the ancient church.

4.0 Conclusion

It was argued that rhetorical criticism is becoming more and more recognized as a method of interpretation of biblical literature. From the discussion it became clear that there are different perspectives of rhetorical criticism just as there are different theories of rhetoric. There are, however, serious problems concerning rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism, understood as interpretation and evaluation, remains a vague concept. Rhetoric has been restricted, distorted and paralysed throughout history. Critics need to develop an interdisciplinary method of rhetorical criticism in order to answer questions about the potential effectiveness of a rhetorical act. It is concluded that the rhetorical critic needs a combination of "old" methods in order to answer new questions.

5.0 Summary

This unit discussed: Rhetoric and its relation to "communication" and "epistolography; Rhetorical act and artefact; Theory of rhetoric; Objectives of rhetorical criticism; and Methods of rhetoric criticism. Next Unit will study New Criticism and Structuralism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

- Outline and discuss the methods of rhetoric criticism

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 2: TEXT-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 4: New Criticism and Structuralism****Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main body
 - 3.1 Explaining New Criticism
 - 3.2 Defining Structuralism
 - 3.3 Other Perspectives of Structuralism
 - 3.4 History of Structuralism
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 - 3.6 The Process of Structuralism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 Introduction

New criticism holds that a literary work should be interpreted as a text on its own, without reference to its historical background or the author's intention. To this end, new critics pay very close attention to the way a book is composed: its plot, themes, its use of ambiguity and irony, the portrayal of character, the viewpoints of the actors and the narrator, etc. this involves close reading of the text, attention to subtle detail, such as slight variation in wording when material is repeated. Often new critics take account of the clues rhetorical criticism relies on (e.g. keywords), but try to integrate them within a total understanding of the work. This approach has led to some rich and powerful interpretations of biblical texts.

Whereas rhetorical and new criticisms pay attention to textual features that may be presumed to have been consciously employed by writers, structuralists argue that literature also expressed deep structures that characterize all communication (e.g. binary contrasts). The jargon of structuralism makes many of its ideas difficult to grasp, but it is concerned to elucidate recurrent patterns of thought, e.g. in grammar, law, folk-tales and parables.

This unit explains the dynamics of New Criticism and structuralism.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the concept new criticism and structuralism
- Make a distinction from New criticism and other forms of text-centred criticism

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Explaining New Criticism

The origins of new criticism appeared in the 1940s and 1950s by secular literary critics such as T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, and William Empson. W K. Wimsatt's and M. C. Beardsley's article "The Intentional Fallacy" articulated New Criticism's challenge to traditional criticism. New Criticism distinguished literary history, which answers historical questions concerning author and composition, from the proper business of literary criticism, which is the study of the literary object itself. J. Barton describes New Criticism as a reactionary movement to the ideals of Romantic criticism, which viewed the task of literary criticism as discovering the poet's experience of reality. As a result, literary biography was an important component in traditional literary studies. New Critics contended, however, that the author's state of mind and feelings as well as the circumstances of the work were distractions. They did not believe that all historical questions concerning the text were irrelevant (e.g., what words meant in the author's day), but that a *valid* interpretation had to be based on the text alone. The literary object itself was determinative for meaning. This opinion opened the door for viewing texts as having lives of their own with many possible meanings as the text experienced new contexts.

Since New Criticism perceived the text as an autonomous entity, it took an ahistorical stance toward the text, a position which significantly departed from traditional literary criticism. While this criticism had a short life among secular literary critics, superseded by structuralism and deconstructionism, it has had a stronger hold on biblical studies. Among these are the studies edited by literary critics K. R. R. Gros Louis, J. Ackerman, and T. Warshaw.² Gros Louis comments, "Our approach is essentially ahistorical, the text is taken as received, and the truth of an action or an idea or a motive, for literary criticism, depends on its rightness or appropriateness in context."

In the same essay, he adds, "We know, as students of literature, that the author's intention, his goals in writing for his contemporary audience, and his religious convictions play a small role indeed in literary criticism and, more important, in the analysis of literary texts., Biblical scholars who are text-focused do not always follow a strictly uniform theoretical approach. Their methods at times are eclectic, bridging composition and New Criticism with the more pragmatic features of structuralism

3.2 Defining Structuralism

More impressive in secular literary circles was the emerging discipline of structuralism in the 1960s. By "structure," we are not referring merely to an internal plan or design of a composition; this is organizational structure and it describes the appearance (surface) level of the text which is consciously created and perceived. Structuralism, however, is a philosophy of reality; it is far more than a method of literary study.

Theoretical structuralism is applied to any entity that is a "system. As a theory it cuts across diverse disciplines, such as anthropology, linguistics, mathematics, and literature. Literary structuralism is indebted to the structural linguistics of F. de Saussure. De Saussure's theory envisions language as *systems* of signification. He centered on defining the relational- effects in language systems, that is, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic relationships, rather than on the origins and changes of language systems. E. McKnight illustrates these relationships by the sentence "James runs." The syntagmatic relationship is the linear sequence between "James" as the topic and the second word in the series "runs."

Together they form an acceptable sentence, and the sequence helps define the relationship of the words. Paradigmatic, on the other hand, looks at each word in isolation. Each word bears "associative" meanings. Thus, "runs" has the related meanings "move," "flee," and "hasten," which also help define the word.

A second feature of Saussure's theory is his understanding of how words convey meaning in a language system. Words are arbitrary signs. There is a gap between a language sign (signifier) and what that sign signifies (the signified). For example, there is no inherent conceptual relationship between the word "pencil" (sign) and the mental concept "pencil" (signified). This means that words have meaning only in terms of their contrast with other signs within a language system.

Third, Saussure differentiates between language as a system (*langue*) and language as a speech act (*parole*). *Langue* is the structural network of language which is intuitively imposed on a speaker. *Parole* is the specific expression of language, a particular discourse. The structuralist seeks primarily to discover the underlying or "deep" structure which governs specific language acts. It is contended that the brain discerns meaning at the underlying structure by contrasts or oppositions. These opposites are known as binaries or pairs of opposites. In other words, to know what something is, the mind must know what it is not. Typical of binary pairs, for example, are life/death, wet/dry, and light/dark. Since literature is conceived by structuralists as a language product, it is fertile ground for structuralist readings. Literature, it is contended, is a network of self-regulating operations. A specific text has many potential meanings (polyvalence) because it possesses several structures working at different levels.

Semiotic research focuses on the systems of signification which are the universals of language's network. For a structuralist the task is to discern the hidden, intuitive

network of relationships; the deep level is the *determinative* meaning that gives rise to a derivative literary expression.

Meaning, it is assumed, is a relational-effect-"the effect produced by the relations among various elements which in and of themselves do not have meaning, but are merely poles between which the sparks of meaning flash.,,Therefore, a specific text, while a textual system, is secondary to the semiotician's analysis, because universal meaning is discovered at the *langue* level. The quest is to describe *how* literature is created as opposed to *what* is created. Structural exegesis, on the other hand, acknowledges the universals of the semiotician's network of meaning and brings them to bear in the analysis of a specific literary expression. The exegete seeks to show how the universals take part in the meaning of a specific text.

Related to structuralist theory is the recognition that the communication process includes conventions (rules) of reading that are unconsciously shared by the author/speaker and the audience. Conventions of communication function both at the cultural and language (oral/written) levels. We have already clarified that surface structure is a conscious exchange between author and reader whereas deep structure is an intuitive exchange. A reader who is competent at the surface level must know the rules of grammar and syntax to both process and generate text at the conscious level.

Structuralists believe that the deep level also has its "grammar." The conventions are public codes (accessible to all) that determine the meaning of the composition. Therefore, the "meaning" of the text resides not in the authorial intention or even at the surface level of the composition but in the conventions themselves. An analogy is a board game where a knowledge of the rules is required for the game to be executed meaningfully. A move on the board has meaning because the conventions *a priori* dictate the meaning. When a reader is not competent in recognizing the conventions of a particular genre (i.e., parable or law), then determinative meaning is lost.

With these features in mind, we can turn to structural narratology, the discipline which has had the greatest impact on biblical structuralism. Structural narratology attempts to define the components of narrative as a system. Representative of this movement are V Propp, C. Levi-Strauss, and A. J. Greimas. Propp, the Russian formalist, defined the "grammar" of folktale by defining its form. By analyzing one hundred examples of Russian folktales, he identified the possible number of plots and character roles that make up "folktale."

The structure of folktale consists of any combination of seven character "spheres of action" (e.g., villain, donor, hero) and thirty-one plot functions (e.g., a family member leaving home, hero marries and ascends the throne). Moreover, there are six kinds of possible plot "moves" that occur within a tale. In other words, folktale has a fixed range, or set of "recipes," which determine what constitutes folktale. His approach was syntagmatic since he described the organization of the folktale in terms of its chronological (linear) sequence or narrative plot development.

Structural reading of OT texts was pioneered by French structuralists, particularly R. Barthes whose studies in narrative drew largely on the theories of Greimas and Propp. His analysis of Jacob's struggle with the angel (Gen. 32:23-33) has become a signal example of structural readings among biblical texts. Appealing to Greimas' model of actants, he recognizes that the narrative Structure of the account expresses an unexpected and ambiguous picture for the roles of "Sender" and "Opponent"-both are filled by God. Clearly, Jacob is the "Subject" and the crossing of the Jabbok is the "Object," but God who sends Jacob on this "Quest" proves to be the very "Opponent" who guards the river. Moreover, Barthes points out the structural oddity of the struggle itself where the angel delivers the "deathblow," disabling the patriarch. Yet, rather than victor, the angel himself, surprisingly, cannot wrench free from Jacob until he concedes to the patriarch's wishes. This kind of analysis, Barthes points out, exposes the discontinuities layered in the text at the unconscious level!

Propp's model of structural narratology has made its impact on Hebrew narrative studies through, among others, J. M. Sasson and R. C. Culley. Sasson applied Propp's model to the Book of Ruth. He identified the character roles of the story in terms of Propp's folktale roles: "Dispatcher" (Naomi), "Hero on a Quest" (Ruth), "Sought-for Person" (Obed), and both "Donor" and "Helper" (Boaz). On the basis of the story's agreement with Propp's model, Sasson concludes that the appropriate genre for Ruth is "folktale. Culley, who modified Propp's theory, organized a group of fourteen biblical narratives around a series of linear sequences or actions. His goal was to define what makes up Hebrew narrative plot. He describes the patterns for particular story prototypes, such as deception stories and miracle stories, and offers a typology.

Finally, the field of biblical studies has shown an indebtedness to Levi-Strauss' model for understanding myth. Edmund Leach, the British anthropologist by using Levi-Strauss' paradigmatic model analyses Genesis 1-4 as comprising three "myths": the seven-day creation, the Garden of Eden story, and the Cain and Abel story. He explains that myths contain the same recurrent patterns, regardless of their outer trappings, which can be recognized when each tale is superimposed upon another paradigmatically. These mythic structures are best interpreted where they are expressed as contradictions or binary oppositions in a series of paradoxes, such as death/life, static world/moving world, God/ man, man/woman. The Genesis myths taken together therefore tell the same story.

There is a flood of structuralist studies in Hebrew narrative. In particular, the experimental journal *Semeia* has devoted several issues to this subject. Among them, for example, is a collection of essays on Genesis 2 and 3, which shows different structuralist approaches to the same passage.

3.3 Other Perspectives of Structuralism

From another perspective, scholars analyzed the structure of the text. The leading contributors in biblical studies were Daniel Patte, Edgar McKnight, Eugene Nida,].

P. Louw, and Robert Longacre. Some, such as Patte and McKnight, moved in more philosophical directions with the discipline. Others, such as Nida, Louw, and Longacre, approached the subject as professional linguists who had deep interests in the practical use of the Bible. They ultimately hoped to facilitate Bible translation. From their study of many languages, they refined tools of analysis and applied them to the biblical texts. Discourse analysis, one aspect of structuralism, basically observes the patterns of discourse. It analyzes the way people talk and what they mean by what they say. Meaning comes from the deep structure of language, found in what lies beyond normal semantic and grammatical categories, New approaches to syntax developed, and the discipline took a language of its own. It is particularly helpful in gospel-like narratives, but the initial investigation of books came from the Epistles.

3.4 History of Structuralism

Structuralism is, in part, a reaction to a traditional approach to analysing texts. It came out of the linguistic schools of France, Russia, and the United States and applied linguistic theory to biblical documents. In actuality, structuralism is a broad movement encompassing many disciplines. It includes linguistics, anthropology, law, philosophy, and sociology., Structuralism is difficult to define. The term describes more a movement than a specific form of exegesis. Those who apply the basic principles of-ten differ with each other, so there seems to be no clear result to the study. Structuralism, therefore, implies more of a statement regarding a perspective of reality than an organized system or method. Before the twentieth century, most grammarians operated on what now may be called a traditional approach. The first grammatical studies came from the fifth century B.C. in Greece. They represented a clear philosophy about language and corresponded to a consistent philosophical view of reality. The Greek philosophers "debated whether language was governed by 'nature' or 'convention.' ,, If a grammatical or lexical form was "natural," it came from some universal or even eternal principle. If it were conventional, it came from the construct of the writer only. "To lay bare the origin of a word and thereby its 'true' meaning was to reveal one of the truths of 'nature.' ,, Etymologies and emphasis on the individual words dominated grammar.

In the twentieth century, several challenged this attitude toward language. Particularly, Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss scholar, turned his attention to another perspective. He published his *Cours de linguistique generale* in the first quarter of this century and spawned a host of linguistic interest. Saussure is considered by most to be the founder of modern linguistics. He was followed by Noam Chomsky and others who accepted his basic formulation of linguistic meaning.

3.5 The Purpose of Structuralism

Structuralism attempts to understand meaning by observing the deeper levels of thought expressed by language. Saussure articulated three major premises which determined the future of linguistic studies. First, he distinguished between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* refers to a system of organized sounds which communicate

effectively. It is a person's ability to speak a given language. Parole refers to the specific use of a language in making sentences. It occurs when one speaks. This meant the system must be separated from a person's speaking within that system. Saussure also distinguished between structural and functional features of language. For him, languages function differently at times from what one would expect by a cursory evaluation of their systems. This means language must be considered functionally, since a writer or speaker may actually mean something different from what he or she expresses. For Saussure, words must be analyzed according to the signified and the signifier. The particular word employed is the signifier. Determining the meaning of that word, however, requires some knowledge of how the signifier was used. The meaning given the word is what the writer signified. In actuality, there may be little or no correlation between the two. In modern English, for example, the word "bad" may signify something to some readers, e.g., that one should avoid what is described by it. On the other hand, the speaker might use the word in a positive sense. He or she might be actually complimenting someone by the term ("He is a bad ball player," meaning he is great!). Thus what is signified has no actual relationship to the signifier, the word chosen. Only a knowledge of American idiom discloses what the speaker meant. A third distinction of Saussure's work left a lasting impression. He distinguished between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships of words. A paradigmatic view of word relationships studies each word according to the "slot" it occupies in a sentence. Any given word may be related to other words in a paradigmatic relationship. That means a word is defined largely by its relationship to words which are not used in the sentence. For example, in the phrase "a brown dog," "dog" is defined by its relationship to other animal forms, such as "cat" or "sheep." In a sense, meaning comes from what is imported into the text by a preconceived understanding of the meaning of words. In a syntagmatic relationship, the reader sees the whole statement of which a word is a part. The entire context shapes the understanding so no word has meaning apart from the other words used in connection with it. This would be expanded beyond the words to the sentences and paragraphs, so the basic unit for understanding would become the paragraph.

Other linguists added to and modified these ideas. Most notably, Noam Chomsky, Leonard Bloomfield, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, and I. A. Richards contributed to this field of linguistics. The most significant, however, was Noam Chomsky. Among the many contributions he made, the most significant for biblical studies was the concept of "deep structure." Chomsky identified deep structure as "the underlying abstract structure that determines its semantic interpretation? In contrast to deep structure, the interpreter first confronts "surface structure." Chomsky called surface structure the "superficial organization of units which determines the phonetic interpretation and which relates to the physical form of the actual utterance.

Chomsky's work meant that what appeared on the surface did not express the intent of the writer. The author's meaning occurs in the deep structure. The words chosen to express the meaning only function to provide that meaning. Chomsky developed a system of rules to allow an interpreter to get to the deep structure, or the meaning.

He called these rules "transformational systems" which allowed one to see how the deep structure became the surface form.⁴² Chomsky developed two sets of rules for analyzing literature: the transforms (which allow the interpreter to bring deep meaning to the surface) and the base structure rules (which are employed at the deepest level). These principles formed the basis of Chomsky's system, now called transformational-generative grammar.

Among others, Eugene Nida applied these principles to biblical interpretation. He identified five basic steps in analyzing the deep structure. (1) Identify the basic structural elements of each word. (2) Make explicit any implicit structural elements which are needed to clarify these elements. (3) Determine the basic kernels (elements) which are necessary in making a structurally complete sentence. (4) Group the kernels into related sets. (5) State these relationships in a form which will facilitate understanding and translation. From this perspective, interpretation has three elements: determining the base meaning; determining the transforms employed to bring it to the surface; and determining the best meaning of the combination of "deep" and "surface" structures.

Structuralist exegesis contains at least three common elements. First, the whole of a statement is explained by examining the relationships of its parts. Structuralists sense that the whole will be greater than any individual part. Second, the significant part of communication lies below the surface of the literature. The interpreter, therefore, seeks to analyze meaning beyond what may be seen on the surface. Third, synchronic analysis predominates over diachronic. Synchronic analysis involves examining a word, phrase, or sentence in light of the contemporary setting, rather than taking a historical view through time (diachronic). All of this helps demonstrate the purpose of structural criticism. Structuralists seek to understand the message by analyzing the deeper forms of the text. Assuming that the surface is purely functional, they hope to uncover a real meaning by working beyond the text. In this, structuralists have moved in many different directions. Some assume the author has no meaning intended by the deep structure. For them, the structure *is* the meaning. Others assume this knowledge of linguistic reality provides the necessary tools for understanding and interpreting. They employ the various methods to arrive at the author's intent.

3.6 The Process of Structuralism

Structuralism approaches the text in various ways, depending on the particular nuance of the structural system. Some apply the basic methods in a philosophical sense. For example, the principles of Heidegger and Dilthey may be interpreted as conducive to structuralist thought. Indeed, the interaction between reader and writer has led to a "reader-response" hermeneutic which points out the structure of the language (text) and the meaning of the author (*or*, more likely, the reader's understanding of the text). Like the other methods, one of the frustrations is the fact that differing conclusions have been reached by scholars who apply the same

methods to specific biblical texts. Others apply structuralism in more textually oriented ways. For example, Eugene Nida's work attempts to help translate the text by understanding the author's meaning in the deep structure. Similarly, Robert Longacre and Kenneth Pike developed theories of discourse analysis which applied the functional nature of language and deep structure models in exegesis of texts. These have been applied to various texts and entire books of the NT. The results differ from traditional exegetical approaches but have many fruitful possibilities for analysis. Structuralism offers many positive helps for the exegesis of texts. It provides tools for understanding language and its functions. Further, it recognizes the dynamics of language and the contexts of people who use it. The distinctions between function and form, and syntagmatic versus paradigmatic approaches are especially helpful. Negatively, however, some of this type of exegesis is prone to "faddism." In its more philosophical aspects, it depreciates the biblical text and, certainly, the author's intent. Nevertheless, the desire to expose deeper meaning is positive, as long as this quest is undertaken with a seriousness appropriate to understanding an ancient author's mind. That, after all, is the task of biblical exegesis.

4.0 Conclusion

Whereas New criticism holds that a literary work should be interpreted as a text on its own, without reference to its historical background or the author's intention; structuralists argue that literature also expressed deep structures that characterize all communication (e.g. binary contrasts). These approaches nonetheless have contributed to some rich and powerful interpretation of biblical texts.

5.0 Summary

This unit studied: Explaining New Criticism; Defining Structuralism; Other Perspectives of Structuralism; History of Structuralism; the Purpose of Structuralism; and the Process of Structuralism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignemts

- In summary explain New Criticism
- Outline and discuss the purpose of structuralism.

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 2: TEXT-CENTRED CRITICISM**Unit 5: Gains and Losses of Modern Biblical Criticism****Contents**

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objective

3.0 Main body

3.1 What Gains Can Be Mentioned?

3.2 What Losses Can Be Mentioned?

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

7.0 References/Future Reading

1.0 Introduction

There is a distinction to be made between biblical criticism unmodified, and modern biblical criticism. We cannot conceive of their being anything lost through biblical criticism when by it we mean a devout and prayerful seeking of God's will concerning man in the Bible, and the gracious salvation through Jesus Christ which is its grand purpose to reveal. It is true, when we take biblical criticism in this sense, that "there is everything to hope and nothing to fear from its progress." But modern biblical criticism cannot be taken exclusively in this sense. It is not bringing a false accusation against it, in view of the destructive criticism of the Tuebingen school, and such wild, irreverent if that word is too strong then let us say presumptuous study of the Word of God, as shown by Kuenen, Wellhausen, Robertson Smith and others, to say that there are dangers and evils connected with it which make the question whether there is gain or loss to be derived from it; a pertinent one, and one which it is well earnestly to consider. It probably is too early in the day to hope to get a satisfactory or a just estimate of the gains and losses of modern biblical criticism. We have not yet reached final results in this. Its modern phase is only in its beginning, and there is still much to be done by it; yet it will not be out of place to stop a moment and see where we have arrived, and what ground we have covered. And this unit aims not at a final summing up of gains and losses, but will call attention only to a few of these.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Outline and discuss some of the gains and losses of Modern Biblical criticism.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 What Gains Can Be Mentioned?

First, the fact that attention is called by it to a direct study of the Bible. That is, the destructive attacks upon the Bible by some who claim to be "of the household of faith;" their apparently reckless treatment has directed to the Bible the attention of many who were occupied with discussions of things suggested by it, who were speculating about it, but were not engaged in its direct study. Now, undoubtedly, greater gain is to be derived from a direct study of the Bible than from the study of speculations about it, or of inferences drawn from it. If we can turn men's attention from a discussion -or study of non-essentials in religion, to a direct study of the Bible, with its "plain fact of a personal Creator, a God in history, a revelation of divine love and duty in his Son," we have gained much; and not the least gain is the fact that when this has been done, "we need not fear the atheism of to-day." There is nothing so refreshing to the thirsty soul, as to go directly to the fountain of truth, and drink deep draughts of divine, loving, inspiring truth. If it is served at second hand, be it brought in ever such beautiful and attractive cups, it loses its sparkle and its full power to assuage the thirst. Whatever, therefore, tends to turn men's attention to a direct study of the Bible, is a great gain to true religion. And certainly modern biblical criticism has done this.

A second gain is that through it the Bible has become a more real book to us. It has not always been such to men. They looked upon its history, poetry, song and story, as something which had nothing in common with other history, poetry, song and story. The Bible is indeed, a sui generis book: a book, which, in its application, construction and teaching, has for its object something distinct from any other book on earth; it has its peculiar characteristics. This is true because of its inspiration, and because of the fact that it is "our supreme and sole authority in matters of faith, and 'contains all truth necessary for salvation.'"

That it has so distinct an object, and characteristics of so unique a nature, has led men to look upon it as if it were not a real book—a book which all should read, ponder and study. This being the case, it was laid aside for only special use, and was not also used for the good a study of its history, its language, and its literature would do the world. A procedure which is fatal in many respects, since in accordance with it:

(1) The Bible was not man's constant companion, to help him, to cheer him, to instruct him, to encourage him, to warn him.

(2) Much valuable knowledge which the Bible alone contains, besides a knowledge of God and salvation, was kept hid from men's view. Sir Walter Scott said, "There

is only one book-the Bible. The other books are mere leaves, fragments." And our own Whittier has well written, " We search the world for truth; we call The good, the pure, the beautiful From graven stone and written scroll, From all old-flower-fields of the soul; And, weary seekers of the best, We come back laden from our quest, To find that all the sages said, Is in the Book our mothers read."

(3) People dared not approach the Bible with that holy boldness which makes it an arbitrator in all disputes with conscience in the various departments of life, outside of the salvation of the soul. Now, biblical criticism, and especially biblical criticism of our day, has assisted in making the Bible a real book. And this, Robertson Smith rightly calls its "great value." It is, however, true, that the Higher Criticism goes too far in this direction. It looks upon the Bible too much as it does upon a book of merely human origin, and hence has a tendency to destroy the reverence and holiness with which it should be approached, no matter how real it becomes to them or may be to them. The true course lies between the two extremes, and if the Higher Criticism will have ultimately as its end a following of this middle course, great gain will come from it. This seems to be the hope and promise of it. And, therefore, Professor Green rightly says, "Every encouragement should be given to the freest possible discussion.

The attempt to stifle discussion in the present posture of affairs would be in every way damaging to the truth."

A third gain, in brief, is found in the fact that the more the Bible is directly studied the more the divine truth is learned and discovered. Daniel Webster said, "There is more of valuable truth yet to be gleaned from the sacred writings that have thus far escaped the attention of commentators than from all other sources of human knowledge combined."

Biblical criticism which has for its object a direct study of the Bible helps in discovering, either intentionally, or accidentally, new truths which would never be discovered but for it.

The fourth gain: again, in so far as the modern biblical criticism has led to a rejection of the two extreme phases of biblical interpretation-the allegorical and the dogmatic-so as to rest the defence of revelation upon a ground which commends itself to reason and common sense, and upon facts, there is a great gain. The arbitrary fancies and the mystical principles of the allegorists cannot satisfy this age of critical knowledge of history and language. "The truth of Christ and his spiritual Gospel, which only could give the key to the Old Testament, was indeed a profound one. But instead of studying it in the clear method of history, the Bible was made a sacred anagram; the most natural facts of Jewish worship or chronicle became arbitrary figures of the new dispensation. Type and allegory were the master-key that unlocked all the dark chambers, from the early chapters of the Genesis to the poetry of David or the grand utterances of Isaiah. Wherever we turn to the fathers, to the Epistle of Clement, or the sober Irenaeus, to Tertullian, who finds tIW type of baptism in the Spirit brooding on the waters and in the passage through the sea; or

to Augustine, who explains the six creative days as symbols of the ages/of divine history, we have the numberless cases of this style of exposition.

We prize the early Christian writers for their intellectual and spiritual power in the great conflict of the faith with a Pagan wisdom; nay, we can often admire, with Coleridge, the rich, devout fancy glowing through the homilies of Augustine; but as biblical scholars all were simply of a time when true criticism was hardly known. Nor will the dogmatic principle of the Latin Church satisfy men of to-day; a principle which found in the Bible, by proof-texts, wrested from their real meaning often, support for any metaphysical or religious dogma which they might hold. Luther called such a procedure "a rover and a chamois-hunter." It was rightly done by Luther when he rejected the *analogia fidei*, and claimed the *analogia Scripturae* (Washburn). And in so far as modern biblical criticism has corrected such arbitrary rules, and has taught men "the study of Scriptures in their own meaning" it has led to great gain.

3.2 What Losses Can Be Mentioned?

We turn now to a few of the losses of biblical criticism.

- i) And there may be named the danger of its causing men to read the Bible with a too critical eye. When they do this, they lose the spirituality of heart and the inspiration to personal piety, which come from reading it in loving trust, and with a devotional heart. There is a great difference in reading the Bible with an eye to find in it literary beauty, or merely history, or reading it in a devotional frame of mind, for growth in spirituality of heart, and personal piety. The purpose for which the Bible was written was not its literary and historical value; on the contrary, it was given to us for our growth in Christian spirit, and as a revelation of God's will to and concerning man, and a revelation of salvation full and complete in Christ. Dr. Washburn has well said, "This word may speak to the mind and heart of a Christian reader, although he knows nothing of the methods of exact learning; and if the keenest criticism do not approach it with special reverence for a book, which has fed the spiritual life of men, as no other has done, it will be barren indeed even for the scholar."

Anything, therefore, which tends to cause men to look upon the Bible in any other than a devout, spiritual frame of mind is baneful. And who doubts that this has been the case, to some extent at least, with the Higher Criticism of our day? Having raised its many doubts -- many uncalled for and unfounded doubts, we may add it has led men to take up their Bible with an eye too exclusively critical, and to study the Bible with a mind too full of doubts.

- ii) This leads us to mention a second evil resulting from our Higher Criticism, viz.: That it has a tendency to cause men to lose their confidence in certain portions of the Bible. This tendency may not be seen or felt so much among specialists in biblical study, or among ministers, who have time and

inclination and whose business it is, to study the Bible critically, as among the people in general, who have no time to follow out the discussions, and only know that doubts exist in the minds of men who make biblical study a specialty. Learning that these are unsettled on many points, the natural consequence is that doubts are awakened in their minds and they lose their trust in the Bible. Could the work of biblical criticism go on quietly among specialists, and the rest not know of it, until results definite and satisfactory have been reached, the evil would not be so great. But as the discussions are now carried on, in every religious paper, and even in secular papers, there is no doubt that the result is to unsettle many in the faith of the Bible as the word of God. Let us devoutly hope and pray that this all-important department of sacred learning may be directed by the Spirit of God, to the end that the Word of God may not be made void, but may be glorified as a power of good and righteousness in the world.

4.0 Conclusion

The whole aim of biblical criticism is not find faults with scriptures, and overthrow people's faith in it. Biblical criticism has as its object a direct study of the Bible, which helps in discovering, either intentionally, or accidentally, new truths which would never be discovered but for it.

5.0 Summary

This unit highlighted some of the gains and losses associated with modern biblical criticism.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Outline and discuss three gains of modern biblical criticism
- Why do you think modern biblical criticism pose some problems to the believer in the bible?

7.0 References/Future Reading

Soulen, R N & Soulen, R K. *Handbook of Biblical criticism*. Louisville, London: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001.

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MODULE 3: READER-CENTRED APPROACHES**Unit 1: Reader-Response Criticism****Contents**

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1.0 Introduction

Whereas traditional criticism focuses behind the text and composition criticism and structuralism in the text, reader-response criticism may be said to discover meaning in front of the text. For the reader-response critic, reading the Bible "as literature is to retrieve it from the museum, to relate it to the life of contemporary readers. The actualization of literature is dictated by the interaction between the text and reader. All other readings, such as historical or theological ones, are valid but not complete. Full(er) meaning is possible only when the Bible is read as literature, where the Bible is reimagined by the reader in the sense of the reader's own world. This is the focus of this module.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Have an overview of reader-response criticism
- Discuss Deconstructionism and Canon Criticism

3.0 Main Body**3.1 Reader-Response Criticism: What is it?**

Reader-response criticism assumes that knowledge is grounded in life. Meaningful knowledge is discovered when the reader's social experience impacts the text so as

to make it meaningful to that person. As McKnight contends, "readers make sense" of texts, the world, and themselves. Since the interpretive process includes the reader's own worldview as well as that presupposed by the text, the text becomes infinite in its potentialities for meaning. Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of symbolism and phenomenology acknowledges that the text had a meaning for the author and original audience, but once that was experienced, the sense of the text lies beyond it and resides in us as readers "in front of" the text.

All other aspects of literary analysis, such as historical and text-centered readings, are incomplete and subject to the reader-significance reading. McKnight, however, cautions not every reading is valid. There are controls of interpretation in the process, "for systems of interpretation involve components that must be correlated with each other and with the reader—components that are dynamic in themselves as well as parts of a dynamic system. These include an interpretation that is possible, consistent, and satisfying to the reader and his worldview, Radical reader-response criticism, whose heart is the reader's eyes, invites readers to bring to the text their own ideological nuances. Marxist, feminist, materialist, and liberation readings are among these sociological approaches to the Bible.⁴⁶ Exemplary of ideological readings is feminist criticism which reads a biblical account through the lens of gender. E. Schussler Fiorenza explains the shift from androcentric readings to a feminist hermeneutic: "A feminist critical interpretation of the Bible cannot take as its point of departure the normative authority of the biblical archetype, but must begin with women's experience in their struggle for liberation. The means, then, is to deconstruct the male voice that dominates the story and its chauvinist ideology and construct the feminist voice by a retelling of the story.

P. Tribble combines her feminist readings with structural exegesis to critique the role of women and men in the Bible. In the account of Ruth, for instance, Naomi and Ruth are engaged in the on-going struggle of women to obtain security in a male-dominated society. Tribble concludes, "Ruth and the females of Bethlehem work as paradigms for radicality. All together they are women in culture, women against culture, and women transforming culture, what they reflect, they challenge. And that challenge is a legacy of faith to this day for all who have ears to hear the stories of women in a man's world.

3.2 Deconstructionism

Also known as "poststructuralism," this literary analysis has its roots in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida whose theory has resulted in extreme skepticism about the possibility of meaning. The publication of Derrida's *De la grammatologie* in 1967 inaugurated the movement. It has become an important force in literary criticism since the 1980s, but it has had little impact on biblical studies. To understand Derrida's theory, we must recall the long-held opinions of Western society concerning how meaning is achieved in communication.

First, it has been assumed that meaning is grounded in an objective reality which can serve as a basis for communication. This reality is referred to as the

"metaphysics of presence." Derrida terms this assumption "logocentric": Original truth is attributed to the logos, that is, a word, reason or the Word of God. In logocentricism, being is always determined in terms of an entity's presence. It is this ontological presence (being) or center that gives the elements of a system its balance and coherence.

Second, Western civilization has accepted that speech (word) is more reliable for discovering and relating meaning than writing since the speaker can exercise greater control. There is created an opposition between the origin (speech) and the manifestation (writing). Logocentricism assumes that these oppositions occur between an origin and its fall, with the first having priority; for example: presence/absence, voice/writing, sound/silence, being/nonbeing, conscious/unconscious, truth/lie, transcendental/empirical, meaning/form, literal/metaphorical, signifier/signified, and so forth.

All literary-critical methods assume this logocentricism, but Derrida challenges the tradition. He argues there is no absolute ground or origin. Every term is itself a product. Derrida exposes the weakness of Saussure's proposition of a gap between the signifier and what is signified in a language system (see structuralism above). Derrida contends that the gap is far less stable than Saussure's system permits. Derrida holds that meaning is not an original presence, rather an absence which distinguishes a word.

Moreover, a sign always has a dependence on a prior context or differentiation in a speech act. Writing, Derrida argues, is prior to speech. Thus, there is no original logos, and there is left a perpetual instability or distancing between the signifier and the signified. The oppositions created in this system are inverted, e.g., absence/presence, non being/being, signified/signifier, metaphor/literal.

Derrida invents the term *différance* as a concept to reveal the slippage between signifier and the signified. *Différance* has three significations: (1) to differ (to be unlike, dissimilar); (2) *differre* from Latin (to scatter, disperse) and (3) to defer (delay, postpone). In French the *a* in *différance* (to defer) is silent; the word sounds like *différence* (to differ). This distinction is perceived only in writing. "Differ" is spatial distinction and indicates the sign arises in terms of its differences or spaces (absence!) within the system. The "defer" is a temporal distinction, and the sign perpetually postpones presence. *Différance* for Derrida is not just a word or concept, a force or event; it can be conceptualized as "the structured and differing 'origin' of difference."⁵³ An example is the sign "chair" which brings to mind (consciousness) the idea of a chair (signified), but the real chair is not actually present. The sign is employed, but we delay or postpone producing the actual referent. In other words, the sign "chair" marks an "absent present." Both *différance* (delay) and *différence* between sign and referent disrupt logocentricism's center of presence. It is not actual presence but metaphor or delusion.

When applied to literary analysis, deconstructionists explain how the text subverts or deconstructs itself. J. Culler comments, to deconstruct a discourse is to show how

it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or promise."

The text does not have a meaning as a reference to something that is signified; the text is an infinite "play of signifiers" that is brought about by the contingencies of language. For the deconstructionist, meaning is not in the author, the textual artifact, the deep structure, or me reader. There can be no determinative judge or arbiter of meaning, for that, too, is sub" ject to deconstruction; the text is metaphor or pun. The critic "plays with the text" as an exercise of criticism for its own aesthetic sake. This kind of radical skepticism has hindered deconstructionism's influence among biblical scholars. P. D. Miscall is an Old Testament scholar who has read Genesis 12 and 1 Samuel 16-22 from a deconstructionist perspective. His "close reading" of the text exposes what he believes are the ambiguities, ambivalences, and gaps of the narrative. He concludes that no consistent reading is possible for rthe characters Abraham or David. He reads the text as "decidedly undecidable," which means there is no determinative meaning, wherher it be authorial, phenomenological, structuralist, or existentialist. The indeterminateness of the text prevents a definitive reading and a coherent one; there can be no historical or theological or ideological meaning.

3.3 Canon Criticism

We turn now to a criticism which is better known among biblical scholars because it was introduced by one of its own members and is uniquely suited to biblical studies. Canon criticism can be better apprehended by the student in light of what we have discovered up to this point since it shares fearures of the literary approaches. The seminal work of canon criticism is B. S. Childs' *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, which outlined a new direction in biblical interpretation. His contention was mat the development of historical-critical methods had created a crisis in rthe possibility of doing biblical rheology, He set forth a new agenda to save the discipline of biblical theology by giving it a new basis. This new beginning point is the extant canon which functions as the normative expression of religious faith by the believing communities of Judaism and Christianiry. The proper stance of the critic toward the Bible, contends Childs, is a person of faith within the community who views the text as "Scripture." Thus, Childs' Introduction focuses on the text in its final form as a fixed religious canon. 58 fu "religious" texts they are only properly interpreted when related to the fuller affirmations espoused by synagogue and church. In other words, the present canonical shape provides the interpretive framework for the expositor's reading.

Childs acknowledges his criticism shares with the synchronic literary approaches whose emphasis is the integrity of the text. Yet he insists canon criticism differs from such studies by its relating the text to a community of faith. Canon criticism is driven by theology, he says, not literary categories for their own sake. Approaching the text as "Scripture" gives the text its referential orientation in the roots of historic Israel whereas synchronic studies view the Bible as non-referential. Nevertheless,

Childs speaks of canonical context in the sense of its literary context, not its historical. Childs distances his analysis from historical-critical methods by insisting that only the canon, that is, the final form and arrangement of the biblical texts, can serve functionally as a hermeneutical norm. He opposes the fragmentation of the text as typically achieved by historical criticism.

Childs does not deny the efficacy of historical-critical methods when it comes to answering historical questions, but he believes such methods cannot provide an adequate basis for doing theology. In his opinion, the failure of historical criticism is its restriction of textual meaning to the past. A rival voice within this movement is J. A. Sanders whose work has much in common with Childs but which differs at significant points. Sanders agrees that historical criticism effectively cut the Bible off from the very communities that revered it. He comments, "For some the Bible has become a sort of archaeological tell which only experts can dig. He adds that the old criticism assumed that the original meaning of the text alone had a valid meaning worthy of "scientific" study. Consequently, such interpreters gave the original context, as reconstructed by form criticism, the only authoritative meaning. This false notion of authority encouraged a deconstruction of the canon where the layers of canonical shaping given by the faith communities were systematically stripped away. Sanders also agrees with Childs that an adequate hermeneutic requires relating the literature to the historic communities of faith. Thus, they concur that the concept of canon is not merely the closure of a sacred list but how the canon functioned within community.

Sanders, unlike Childs, sees canon criticism as a natural extension of the historical-critical methods. Canon as a process for Childs is limited to the period once the text was stabilized. Sanders believes that the proper canonical context is not solely the final form of the text but also includes the prior successive stages of the canonical process in its historical development. Sanders disagrees with Childs that there is one canon, but rather he contends for many canons. Historical tools, therefore, are needed to isolate the various stages of canonical development, tracing the function of those traditions that finally reside in the extant canon. For this reason Sanders insists on the terminology "canonical" criticism, as opposed to canon criticism, because he believes that the canonical process is a continuum operating along the same dynamics whether in the past (intrabiblical) or among the Jewish and Christian community life settings today. He sees canonical shaping reaching beyond the stabilization of the text, for he believes that the on-going history of hermeneutics continues along the same basic tenets as the canonical processes in antiquity.

Both Childs and Sanders make it clear their call for canon or canonical criticism is not a return to pre-critical traditionalism. Their work presupposes the advances of historical-critical studies, particularly the work of Sanders. Canon criticism does not provide solace for "fundamentalism." Childs does not encourage the pre-critical practices of allegory or harmonization practiced by the church fathers and reformers. Unlike evangelical scholarship, he admits the canon possesses theological and historical disagreements, but unlike historical critics he seeks to

discover a coherent: meaning within the parameters of the community's vision of the whole. He shows how the church successfully read the Bible despite its incongruities.

Evangelical scholars can applaud some consequences of Childs' and Sanders' efforts. (1) The correction of historical criticism, that is, its "decanonizing" of the text, is long overdue. (2) Childs' affirmation that the text is Scripture which can be and should be read as a cohesive whole is refreshing among critical scholars. (3) Childs acknowledges that the extant text provides the normative reading for understanding the text as opposed to the historical critic's specious "original" meaning. (4) The canonical method encourages evangelical scholars to look at passages in their whole biblical context, permitting them to impact and be impacted by the whole. The evangelical approach to canon understands the Hebrew Bible as "Old Testament," which affirms the genetic relationship between the Old and New.

"Where canon criticism fails is its continued dependence on historical-critical conclusions, though it curbs its excesses. Also, the opinion that the original meaning of a passage has been significantly altered in the development of the canon is unfounded. Rather, the canonical shaping of a passage unveils the already-present meaning (~latent) which is clarified and deepened by the intra-biblical commentary."

4.0 Conclusion

A message is encoded and sent by a speaker, then received and decoded by a listener. Similarly, a writer encodes a message in a text which is then read and decoded by a reader. The recognition that hearers or readers are involved in the reception of messages, though not a new insight, has become much more prominent in recent critical discussion. Previously, most attention had been given to trying to discover what the text said or what the author intended. Now it is recognized that the reader's input may significantly affect his understanding of the message. It is of course, obvious that if a reader is a poor Hebraist, he or she could easily misunderstand an OT text. Or if a reader were insensitive to genre, he or she might misunderstand parable of the Good Samaritan as history. Reading incompetence will lead to misinterpretation. But the reader contributes much more than this. The reader brings to the text the pre-understanding, the questions, the cultural assumptions, the religious and ethical convictions, that are bound to affect his conclusions.

5.0 Summary

This unit studied: Reader-Response Criticism: What is it?; Deconstructionism; and Canon Criticisms.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Give a brief description of Deconstructionism as a form of biblical criticism
- Canon Criticism is the brain child of B. S. Childs. Discuss

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 3: READER-CENTRED APPROACHES**Unit 2: Reader-Response Criticism (contd)****Contents**

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- 3.0 Main body
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 - 3.2 Indeterminacy
 - 3.3 Ideological criticism
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- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 Introduction

This unit is a continuation of reader-response criticism. It gives a quick overview of the following: Audience criticism, Indeterminacy; and Ideological Criticism.

2.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss the dynamics of Audience criticism, Indeterminacy and Ideological Criticisms.

3.0 Main Body**3.1 Audience Criticism**

When prophets preached, or apostles wrote epistles, they were addressing real people with particular outlooks and problems which the writer tried to address. Sometimes these beliefs were explicitly referred to, as Paul does in writing to the Corinthians: he seems to have received a letter to which 1 Cor. is a reply. In the case of Amos, there are few allusions to what his hearers were thinking, but if we are to make sense of the book's message, we must read it as a kind of dialogue between and his listeners. Though the term 'audience criticism' is new, scholars have long been aware of the importance of establishing the original situation a text envisages if it is to be correctly understood.

3.2 Indeterminacy

It is one thing to envisage the situation of the original readers: they knew the writer, his language, and the situation he was addressing. But the situation of the 20th century reader is different. There are many ‘gaps’ in the text, that is, things left unsaid, which a modern reader must supply. And different readers will fill these gaps in different ways. Can we be sure who is right on how these gaps should be filled? The world of ideas we inhabit is quite different from the biblical, and our knowledge of the original setting of the texts is so patchy that we may completely misconstrue them. Furthermore, according to deconstructionists, there are contradictions within texts, which make establishing a determinate meaning impossible.

3.3 Ideological criticism

Not only is it very difficult for moderns to understand the biblical world, but it must be recognized that our preconceptions affect our reading of the text. Rather than pretend that we have no pre-understanding that we bring to the text, ideological critics believe that they should be openly acknowledged and that their effect on our readings be explored. One may approach the text as a materialist or a vegetarian. What would materialists make of the frequent references to the supernatural in the Bible? How would a vegetarian react to the concept of animal sacrifice? Criticism of biblical texts from these perspectives is rare, but liberationist/Marxist and Feminist criticism is much more popular. Liberationists insist that texts be read from the standpoint of the poor and oppressed in the Third World, not, as is often done, from the standpoint of the comfort of the Western middle classes. What do the texts have to say about poverty and oppression? Feminist critics urge that texts be read from a woman’s standpoint. Some insist that texts should be evaluated against the principles of modern feminism and the patriarchy of many biblical passages exposed. Others merely highlight those passages that acknowledge the equality of the sexes or laud women’s achievements.

4.0 Conclusion

The issues raised by modern criticism are highly complex and cannot be adequately dealt with here. Though author-centred approaches have dominated biblical studies for more than two centuries, and still do, there is much more validity in the other critical methods than has been recognized. In particular, the –oriented approaches offer much of great value. Studies emanating from this school are gold mines of exegetical insight. Though many proponents of this school have wanted to divorce text from author and historical context, this is not really possible when we are reading an ancient text.

Reader-oriented approaches have drawn proper attention to the subjective input of the reader to all criticism. All readers come with their own agenda and preconceptions, which will inevitably colour their reading of a text. But this does not mean all readings are equally valid, or that texts are of indeterminate meaning. If that happened in everyday life, we should cease to communicate. Obviously, it is

easier to understand friends than those we meet for the first time, or those who speak a foreign language. But that does not mean we cannot understand someone or text better if we work at it.

Reader-oriented critics are right to draw attention to the ideology of the reader. What we bring to a text in the way of assumptions and questions will influence what we find in them. It is the postmodern world, where all truth is held to be relative, this does mean that any ideology may be brought to a text. But from a Christian perspective, there is only one God and therefore truth must be one, too. So it is essential for Christian critics to approach the text with a Christian ideology, not a secular one, or we will read against the grain of the text, imposing our own ideas on the bible instead of letting it address us with God's message for us. Its agenda is to show us how to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and our neighbour as ourselves. Unless we readers make that our priority, we are likely to distort its meaning at many points.

5.0 Summary

This Unit studied the remaining types of Reader-centred approaches in biblical criticism, namely: Audience Criticism; Indeterminacy; and Ideological Criticisms.

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Write short notes on:
 - Audience Criticism;
 - Indeterminacy; and
 - Ideological Criticisms

7.0 References/Future Reading

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MODULE 3: READER-CENTRED APPROACHES

Unit 3: Some Other Hermeneutical Issues and Approaches (Adapted from CTH 711)

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 **Sensus Plenior**
 - 3.2 Hermeneutical Circle
 - 3.3 Socio-Critical Hermeneutics
 - 3.4 Reader – Response Hermeneutics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 Introduction

What will be done in this unit is to further discuss some of the Hermeneutical issues and other approaches, namely, **Sensus Plenior**, Hermeneutical circle, socio-cultural Hermeneutics and reader – response Hermeneutics.

2.0 Objectives

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the perennial problem of **Sensus Plenior** in Biblical Hermeneutics,
- Discuss the Hermeneutical circle in modern Biblical interpretation,
- Describe and analyse socio-cultural Hermeneutics and reader-response Hermeneutics.

3.0 Main Body

3.1 Sensus Plenior

One perennial issue in biblical interpretation is the question of whether a particular text has single meaning or multiple sense. Some scholars are of the opinion that several scriptures (especially Old Testament) do have

a fuller sense (called **Sensus Plenior**). In contemporary study Raymond E. Brown

popularized the study and he defined **Sensus Plenior** as “that additional, deeper meaning intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or a group of texts or events or a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation”.

This controversy is based on the understanding that the Bible has double authorship, divine and human. It means that there may be fuller sense of a text meant by the divine author not known to the human author. For example, was Daniel aware that his dream (Daniel 2:31-35) which was interpreted in verses 36-45 would have a later ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ? (Rev. 19:17-21).

Some aspects of **Sensus Plenior** concern interpretation of allegory prophecy as well as typology and it will be done later.

Self – Assessment Exercise

What do you understand by the concept of **Sensus Plenior** in biblical hermeneutics?

3.2 Hermeneutical Circle

Hermeneutical circle can be defined as the process involved between the question (and prior understanding) that an interpreter brings into a text and the dialogue with subsequent questions reshaped or raised by the text (along with enlargement of understanding). This definition implies that interpreters do not approach the Bible text “neutrally, rather they move within a Hermeneutical circle.”

David J. Bosch (1997, p.423) explained the same point further: “Interpreting a text is not only a literary exercise, it is also a social, economic and political exercise. Our entire context comes unto play when we interpret a Biblical text.”

The various dimensions, types of Hermeneutical circle are: One, between the parts of a text and the whole or context,

Two, between the past (historical conditions) and the present,

Three, between the text and the context of worldview/human situation,

Four, between theory (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxis),

Five, between linguistic level (the scientific consideration of grammar and vocabulary) and psychological experience (the

interpreter has to enter into psychological rapport with the author), Six, between revelation (faith) and reason (logic).

Self – Assessment Exercise

Write a short note on the Hermeneutical circle.

3.3 Socio-Critical Hermeneutics

In social sciences Hermeneutical explorations have called attention to the role of ‘interest’ in interpreting texts. Those interests have to do with social assumptions and practices. Examples of contemporary socio-cultural Hermeneutics are liberation, feminist and black theologies that interpret Biblical texts about the poor/slavery/oppression, women and the black race, respectively.

Socio-critical Hermeneutics is an integral part of the methodology adopted for liberation theology. Liberation theologians interpret the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor, oppressed and marginalized. Three-part Hermeneutical agenda of liberation theology, according to Klein and Others (1993, 45) are:

Experience taking precedence over theory. The reference is to the experience of injustice, poverty, suffering, etc in the Third-world, Attempts to analyse or assess the reason for the impoverishment, Precedence of action over rhetoric.

Feminism, women voices in liberation theology, is concerned with the exploited sex. In some feminist Hermeneutics the Bible is accepted as only one of the sources of authority. Others are experience, tradition and intellectual research. The experience refers to the oppression of women.

It should be clarified, however that there are different and diverse models and agenda within the feminist hermeneutical group. While some are biblical and liberal others are social, radical and reject the biblical, Christian faith and theology for been hopelessly chauvinist.

In black theology the focus of liberation is freedom from racist oppression. Black theology emerged in the late 1960s as “a new reading of the black socio-political condition in the light of God’s revelation in Christ Jesus” (Copeland, 1987, 138). The idea developed in the USA and South Africa from black consciousness and black power due to the experience of racial oppression of black people. Some black theologians like J. H. Core endorse the use of violence to achieve liberation.

Self – Assessment Exercise

- Describe and analyse socio-critical Hermeneutics in liberation Theology.

3.4 Reader-Response Hermeneutics

The reader-response approach to Hermeneutics has become more prominent in the early 1970s. It “stresses the reciprocal relation between the text and the reader. This is opposed to an earlier emphasis on the autonomy at the text” (Corley and Others, 1996, p.137). Paul Ricoeur (1913) has explored the role of suspicion in interpretation of dreams, symbols and languages. He has also examined metaphors and theories of signs (called semiotics). The active role of the reader in creating meaning is being investigated in literary and biblical hermeneutic. This is what is called reader-response hermeneutics. The full meaning of the text is to be supplied by the reader.

This makes reader-response hermeneutics to be subjective and relativistic.

One issue close to the centre of current hermeneutical debate is what Ricoeur called the ‘career’ of the biblical texts after leaving the hands of the authors. This idea appears to go along with some aspects of biblical criticism.

Self – Assessment Exercise

- Discuss Paul Ricoeur’s idea of reader-response hermeneutics.

4.0 Conclusion

One recurrent issue in the history of Biblical Hermeneutics is whether a scripture has one or multiple sense or meaning. The issue is studied in contemporary interpretation with the term fuller sense (**Sensus Plenior**). Hermeneutical circle is a modern process that arose from the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Two contemporary approaches in the interpretation of biblical texts are socio-critical and reader-response.

5.0 Summary

This unit has considered some other Hermeneutical issues and approaches not discussed in the previous units. These are **Sensus Plenior**, Hermeneutical circle, socio-cultural Hermeneutics and reader- response Hermeneutics.

6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignment Questions

- Write short notes on two of the following issues and approaches in contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics:
 - Sensus Plenior,
 - Hermeneutical circle,
 - Socio-critical Hermeneutics,
 - Reader – response Hermeneutics.

7.0 References/Future Reading

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Nihinlola, Emiola (1997) The Task of Bible Interpretation, pp. 46-49. Bosch, David J. (1997), Transforming Mission. Maryknoll, New York:Orbis Books, p. 423.

Corley, Bruce and Others (1996), Biblical Hermeneutics, pp. 137-140. Klein, William W. and Others (1993), Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics, pp. 450-457.

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MODULE 3: READER-CENTRED APPROACHES**Unit 4: Recent Trends in Biblical Source Criticism****Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Torah subsumes a composite of literary works**
 - 3.2 Mid 1980s and 1990s**
 - 3.3 Crisis in Faith**
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

1.0 Introduction

This unit is a selection of articles on recent trends on biblical criticism. It is aimed at reinforcing the lessons of previous units on the subject.

2.0 Objectives

- At the end of the unit, you should be able to know the recent trends in biblical source criticism

3.0 Main Body**3.1 The Torah subsumes a composite of literary works**

. . . all hypotheses are working proposals until confirmed in detail, and . . . many must be discarded while others will require drastic overhauling in the face of new evidence. There is a grave temptation to hold on to a hypothesis that has served well in the past, and the more serious temptation to bend data to fit, or to dismiss what cannot be accommodated into the system. The commitment must always be to observable or discoverable data, and not to a hypothesis, which is always expendable (Freedman).

In the 19th century, scholars of the Bible posited the Documentary Hypothesis. According to this theory, the Torah subsumes a composite of literary works, or sources, instead of being the work of a single author. Proponents of this theory, the "sources critics," identify these sources by highlighting sections of the Torah that display different writing styles, ideological assumptions, word choice, particularly with regard to Divine names, and any number of other differences. Source critics attribute the sources to authors coming from different time periods and ideological backgrounds,

and have named them "J" (for passages that use the Tetragrammaton), "E" (for passages that use Elohim), "P" (Priestly) and "D" (Deuteronomist). Until recently, this theory was considered the unshakable bedrock upon which any academic Bible study was to be proposed.

3.2 Mid 1980s and 1990s

The mid-1980s and the early 1990s witnessed a resurgence of biblical scholars challenging, revising, and even rejecting the Documentary Hypothesis. First and foremost, scholars relinquished claims to a scientific methodology. In *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*,² Jeffery Tigay insists that "The degree of subjectivity which such hypothetical [source critical] procedures permit is notorious." In fact, he characterizes these procedures as "reading between the lines." Moreover, Edward Greenstein maintains that source critical analysis is analogous to the blind men and the elephant: "Each of five blind men approaches a different part of an elephant's anatomy.

Perceiving only part of the elephant, each man draws a different conclusion as to the identity of what he encounters."³ According to the preceding remarks, not only are source critical methods subjective, but also account for only a fraction of the total evidence. Especially when analyzing a literary corpus "as bulky and complex as an elephant,"⁴ a system which fails to consider all the evidence, and wherein "scholars shape the data into the configurations of their own imagination"⁵ hardly warrants the label scientific. While surveying many conflicting proposals for the nature of the hypothetical

sources, Gerhard Larsson gives a more specific account of the methodological shortcomings. He says that:

. . . there is no sound objective method for recognizing the different sources, there is also no real consensus about the character and extent of sources like J and E, [and] no unity concerning limits between original sources and the insertions made by redactors. Rather, as Greenstein says, "each scholar defines and adapts the evidence according to his own point of view." Such an approach not only yields results which are, as Tigay highlights, "hypothetical (witness the term 'documentary hypothesis')," but, as David Noel Freedman declares, allows and encourages, "the pages of our literature [to be] filled with endless arguments between scholars who simply reiterate their prejudices.'

The lack of a sound and rigorous methodology leads scholars to produce varying and even contradictory theories, which ultimately undermine the enterprise as a whole. In addition to Wellhausen's four sources J, E, P, and D, some scholars speculate about sources labeled Lay (L), Nomadic (N), Kenite (K), Southern or Seir (S) and the "foundational source" *Grundlage* (G). Not only do scholars multiply the number of sources, some, applying the same methodology, fragment J, E, P, and D into further subdivisions, and view these documents as products of "schools" which "shaped and reshaped these documents by further additions." After summarizing the different opinions, Pauline Viviano says,

The more "sources" one finds, the more tenuous the evidence for the existence of continuous documents becomes, and the less likely that four unified documents ever existed. Even for those able to avoid skepticism and confusion in the face of the ever increasing number of sources, the only logical conclusion seems to be to move away from [Wellhausen's] Documentary Hypothesis toward a position closer to the Fragmentary Hypothesis.

In addition to being a victim of its own ambition, the Documentary Hypothesis suffered many challenges, from the time of its inception through contemporary scholarship. Scholars have contested and even refuted the arguments from Divine names, doublets, contradictions, late words, late morphology, Aramaisms, and every other aspect of the Documentary Hypothesis.

3.3 Crisis in Faith

As a result, some scholars denounce source criticism *en toto*, while others posit alternate hypotheses. However, one wonders if these hypotheses will not share the same fate as the ones they just disproved. These problems have brought source criticism to a sad state. In Greenstein's words, "Many contemporary Biblicists are experiencing a crisis in faith The objective truths of the past we increasingly understand as the creations of our own vision." He continues, "all scholarship relies on theories and methods that come and go, and . . . modern critical approaches are no more or less than our own midrash."¹⁶ This "crisis," or "breakdown" to use Jon Levenson's characterization, has encouraged droves of scholars to study the Bible synchronically, a method which effectively renders source criticism irrelevant.

Among other advantages, the synchronic method of biblical study encourages scholars to detect textual phenomena which, upon reflection, seem obvious, but have not been recognized until recently. Levenson explains these recent detections as follows:

Many scholars whose deans think they are studying the Hebrew Bible are, instead, concentrating on Syrio-Palestinian archeology, the historical grammar of Biblical Hebrew, Northwest Semitic epigraphy, or the like – all of which are essential, but no combination of which produces a Biblical scholar. The context often supplants the text and, far worse, blinds the interpreters to features of the text that their method has not predisposed them to see.

This statement could not be truer when referring to source criticism, and to this end Larsson says, albeit in a harsher tone: "Source criticism obscures the analysis. Only when the text is considered as a whole do the special features and structures of the final version emerge."

4.0 Conclusion

The rediscovery of the Bible's special features and structures has proven to be extremely rewarding in its own right, and, in addition, it has recurrently forced scholars to revise and even reject source critical theories. Larsson states this latter statement quite clearly: "Many scholars have found that when the different [patriarchal] cycles are studied in depth it is no longer possible to support the traditional documentary hypothesis."¹⁹ Even the Flood narrative, traditionally explained as two independent strands (J and P) woven together, has been unified by scholars who perceive a literary

structure integrating the various sections of the story.²⁰ In fact, a statistical analysis of linguistic features in Genesis lead by Yehuda Radday and Haim Shore demonstrates that

. . . with all due respect to the illustrious documentarians past and present, there is massive evidence that the pre-biblical triplicity of Genesis, which their line of thought postulates to have been worked over by a late and gifted editor into a trinity, is actually a unity.

5.0 Summary

This unit discussed the current trends in biblical source criticism under the following subheadings: the Torah subsumes a composite of literary works; Mid 1980s and 1990s; and Crisis in Faith

6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

- Evaluate the developments of biblical criticism in the mid 1980s and 1990s.

7.0 References/Future Readings

D. Freedman, *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: Selected Writings of David Noel*

Freedman. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997) p. 160.

J. Tigay, *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985)

E. Greenstein, "Formation of the Biblical Narrative Corpus," *AJS Review* 15,1 (1990) p. 164.

David Stern, 'Recent Trends in Biblical Source Criticism', *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2008

MODULE 3: READER-CENTRED APPROACHES**Unit 5: Recent Trends in Biblical Source Criticism****Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Nature and Scope of Early studies
 - 3.2 Historical criticism challenges the chronology.
 - 3.3 The spectrum of studies embraces the cultural context
 - 3.4 The Influence of social locations on religious tenets and positions.
 - 3.5 Cultural Categories
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor – Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References and Further Readings

8.0 Introduction

TODAY, CULTURAL STUDIES ARE OPENING new vistas in our readings of the prophets, bringing the variety and complexity of these biblical traditions into rich engagement with the multiplicity of our contemporary situations and concerns. The developing story of biblical scholarship on the prophets shows how we have come to our present perspective and sheds light on its significance. This is the focus of this unit.

9.0 Objectives

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the variety and complexity of biblical traditions in conversation with contemporary situations.

10.0 Main Body**10.1 Nature and Scope of Early studies**

Studies on the biblical prophets have taken various routes over the past centuries. How prophecy arose in Israel, the formation of the prophetic books, the distinction between authentic and inauthentic sayings of individual prophets, the problem of false prophecy - these have been among the many focuses for study. Amidst this variety of topics, the relationship of the law to the prophets has commanded much attention and best exemplifies the nature and scope of early studies. The sacral traditions of the

Pentateuch, particularly the law and covenant, have long been recognized as intrinsically interwoven in the prophetic writings - as formative for them.

Early studies on the prophets During the nineteenth century, pre-critical scholarship assumed the Pentateuch to be chronologically prior to the rest of the biblical writings. Hence, the prophets' extensive engagement with materials from the Pentateuch was viewed as commentary on that treasury of sacred traditions. The prophetic message was understood to be derived from and built on the premise of the prophets' recalling of God's liberating action in the wilderness, the divine revelation at Sinai, the bestowing of the commandments, the binding nature of covenant - in short, the entire sacred heritage of the Pentateuch. When Jeremiah condemned the spiritual bankruptcy of cultic and religious formalism, he reminded the people, 'Yahweh, the God of Israel, says t h i s . . . "For when I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I said nothing to them, gave them no orders, about holocaust and sacrifice"' (Jer 7:21-22). Similarly, Hosea's condemnation of Israel's promiscuous political policies grew out of a rehearsal of the events of the past. 'When Israel was a child I loved them, and I called my child out of Egypt. But the more I called to them, the further they went from me' (Hos 11:1-2). Rather than being innovators in their own right, the prophets were viewed as reformers who, from the eighth century onward, summoned Israel to remember all that God had already done and to remain faithful to the sacral traditions and the promises made of old.

10.2 Historical criticism challenges the chronology.

With the advent of historical criticism at the beginning of this century, and particularly the work of Graf-Wellhausen on the sources for the Pentateuch, the assumptions of an early date for the Pentateuch as a whole were summarily dismantled. This kind of investigation, well known today as 'source criticism', identified at least four different strands making up the Pentateuch (Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly). It established them as being composed some time from the era of Solomon (c. 900 BCE) on down through the post-exilic period (540 BCE). Of particular importance for the work on the prophets was the late date assigned to the Priestly tradition or 'P'. The P material, much of which includes law and covenant traditions, was previously thought to have originated in the late exilic and post-exilic period in conjunction with the formation of Judaism. Suddenly, as a consequence of this historical criticism, the prophets' relationship to the law had to be dramatically reconceived. Scholars taking extreme positions hurried to redefine the prophets as creators of the law, as the authors of the sacral traditions themselves, even of the Very idea of covenant. Such positions erupted out of the enthusiasm for critical study of the Bible and, in particular, for source critical studies. However, in his Prolegomena, Wellhausen himself argued that while such material as P may not have been composed until quite late, the legal traditions that make up P may well have existed in early periods in various other forms.

By the middle of our century, a more qualified and refined position prevailed on the prophets and their relation to law. Building upon the findings of source investigations, form critics led by Hermann Gunkel attempted to trace the development of the Pentateuchal traditions back to their earliest oral formulations. At the same time, tradition critics such as Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth mapped the accumulation of these early forms that collectively led up to the development of the four Pentateuchal

strands. Consequently, the cumulative results of these sources of historical criticism made clear that the early developmental stages of Pentateuchal traditions predated at least the classical prophets of the eighth century (e.g., Amos, Hosea, Isaiah).

While most scholars agreed that by the time of the prophetic era in Israel many of the traditions concerning Moses, Exodus and the covenant, and especially much of the law, had already taken shape, they did not return to the precritical view that the prophets were merely commentators on these traditions. Von Rad's second volume of Old Testament theology in the 1960s best represented the reigning position on law and prophets: it integrated the findings of the first half of this century while avoiding any extremist claims. He argued that while the prophets and their message were indebted to the sacral Pentateuchal traditions that preceded them, the prophets also interpreted and appropriated the traditions for their own time and setting. Hence, the prophets both depended upon the early formulations and gave shape to the subsequent final edition of these traditions.

The preoccupation of historical criticism with the law and prophets during the first half of this century had a limiting impact on studies on the prophetic writings. Most notably, the direction and shape of research on the biblical prophets was all too often dependent upon the current state of research on the Pentateuch. The impact of other, equally formative factors upon the prophets and their message has gone largely unacknowledged and thus unresearched. Social theorists such as Max Weber argued that the emergence of Israel's prophets and their message was conditioned by Israel's political realities; the investigations of biblical critics remained focused upon such matters as composition history, authenticity of the prophets' words, and relation to sacral Pentateuchal traditions.

10.3 The spectrum of studies embraces the cultural context

In the late sixties, reservations about the adequacy of historical criticism as a whole emancipated the research on biblical prophets from the previously dominant questions and preoccupations, and enabled it to turn its attention elsewhere. Scholars began to consider the prophets and their message as being intimately tied to a culture, and influenced and shaped by that culture.

Questions regarding sources, literary genres and tradition history were all but replaced with a different kind of inquiry: what were the material living conditions of the people to whom the prophets spoke? Was there a social institution known as 'prophecy'? Where did this institution fit into the social structure of the society? What was the relationship between prophet and cult? What was the prophet's relationship to political forces and the hegemony of different kings?

Today, as scholars wrestle with these fundamental questions, they do so through the understanding of a host of disciplines - anthropological criticism, sociological approaches, social science criticism, cultural anthropological studies etc. Collectively they constitute 'cultural studies'. Theories and approaches from the disciplines of economics, anthropology, communication, psychology and sociology become the lenses through which to view these individuals and their writings. As a result, social, economic and cultural features of the texts and their context become central while the preoccupation with the religious or theological significance in isolation from other

cultural factors recedes. Prophecy is considered as a social institution rather than as a private religious call. The conventional notion of prophet as spokesperson for Yahweh is replaced with attention to the roles the prophets play in society.

Drawing upon anthropological studies and role theory, David Petersen defines the prophets' relationship to society along two lines. The first arises out of the individual's kinship with socially oppressed or underprivileged populations. Petersen investigates prophetic figures like Elijah and Elisha as advocates for such social groups with whom they are allied. By contrast, the second type is not clearly identified with any group or alliance and emerges in a time when society is under pressure or in crisis. Jeremiah and Isaiah, who function relatively independently in and around Jerusalem in response to national crisis, are good examples.

Similarly, Robert Wilson investigates the social role of prophets as intermediaries between the complexities of the sociocultural world and the elusiveness of the divine world. ⁶ Wilson examines this social function of intermediation by studying other comparable societies with similar specialists such as the shaman, diviner or medium. He distinguishes two groups among Israel's prophets, 'peripheral' and 'central' intermediaries, each with characteristic maintenance functions in the society. With the rise of monarchy those prophets who once had important social roles, such as responsibilities of cult, became peripheral, divested of their duties. As peripheral prophets, they championed the concerns of small support groups and worked to change the prevailing social structure. By contrast, central prophets worked within the establishment of monarchy. Concerned with fostering the status quo, they worked to bring about any necessary changes in an orderly and regulated fashion. Wilson enlists communication theory and anthropological parallels in support and development of these 'peripheral' and 'central' categories. In turn, these investigations serve to deepen our understanding of an individual prophet's social location and function within society.

10.4 The Influence of social locations on religious tenets and positions.

Building upon this work, Wilson also studies conflict between prophets such as the dispute between Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jer 27---28). Jeremiah advocates surrender of Jerusalem to the Babylonians while Hananiah predicts that God will deliver Jerusalem from the Babylonian threat. Wilson shows that the theological clash between the two prophets has much to do with their different social locations and different groups of supporters. Jeremiah is a peripheral prophet who with his small group of supporters stands against the political and religious establishment in Jerusalem. Hananiah, a central prophet, plays an important role in the Jerusalem-based temple and royal institution. In both instances, the prophet's relation to the capital city appears bound to their vision of its future. Hence, Wilson contextualizes the conflict and shows how social location in culture and community affects one's religious tenets and positions.

Burke Long also investigates prophetic conflict by using parallels from shaman studies, s Investigations on disputes among shamans show that these conflicts may have something to do with an individual's credibility among peers, maintaining one's social position in a community, or, in some instances, readying the community for necessary social change. Informed by these anthropological parallels, Long's study on Jeremiah

makes clear that not only is conflict an essential and formative element in prophetic activity but that the conflict is much more complex than a mere dispute over a religious issue. It establishes the integrity and credibility of a prophet and may also serve as an instrument for provoking social change. Moreover, beyond what these investigations reveal about prophetic conflict, Long's work discourages distortions that arise when matters such as disputes between prophets are treated solely as religious clashes and isolated from other forms of social discourse and concerns.

In another study, Robert Carroll makes use of cognitive dissonance theory from social psychology to interpret prophets. Cognitive dissonance is the description of how individuals, in this case, the prophets, react to contradictions or clashes between expectations and reality, between what they think will happen and what actually occurs. Attention to the individual's conscious perception of their own work in relation to the larger world explains the discordant elements. For example, the discordant elements in Isaiah of Jerusalem's call (Isai 6:9-13) stem from the prophet's response to the failure of his proclamation. Similarly, Jeremiah, having been faithful to his call while at the same time being rejected by his own people for his prophetic activity, wonders whether he has been deceived by God (Jer 15:15-18). Hence, by attending to the traces of dissonance in Jeremiah's confessions, Carroll discloses the prophet's inner struggles and conflicts in coming to terms with his role as prophet in Judaeen society.

10.5 Cultural Categories

This shift towards the study of the biblical prophets by cultural categories has been significant. First, it has radically qualified our understanding of the individual prophets and their messages. Hence today our reading of Amos is intrinsically bound up with whether we think of Amos as a peasant farmer from a southern garrison town, as a Jewish nationalist, or as a landholding entrepreneur from the Tekoa with material interests in the North. Second, investigations regarding both prophecy as institution and the cultural role of individual prophets contribute to our understanding of the dynamics, conflicts and power relations of Israelite society. The instance of Jeremiah's response to Josiah's religious reform is illustrative. King Josiah has instituted a comprehensive religious reform supposedly motivated by the finding of the law book during temple renovations (2 Kg 22 23). Interpreted by Huldah the prophet, the law book reveals how far the king and people have strayed from covenant fidelity, with regard to apostasy. In response, Josiah orders all local shrines to be dismantled, altars honouring foreign deities to be destroyed and the high places abolished, along with many other cultic changes. Jeremiah's silence concerning this major religious overhaul is curious, and thus often explained as an error in chronology - that Jeremiah was not really prophesying during Josiah's reign as king. However, this national renewal had consequences that extended beyond the cult. Many peasants who maintained local shrines lost their jobs. Moreover, the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem also centralized allegiances and monies in the capital city. Jeremiah's silence regarding Josiah's religious reform could be interpreted as disapproval, as well as inviting consideration of the political motivations and gains accompanying Josiah's plan. Hence, what a prophet says or, in this case, does not say can contribute to our investigation and understanding of the complexity of Israelite culture and society.

The cultural world grows more complex and particular. Recently, there has been another development. Initially, these investigations tended to explain the social and cultural dimensions of prophecy in general categories - for example, social location of prophets as either central or peripheral, or conflict as a formative ingredient in all prophecy, or intermediation as the defining characteristic of all prophecy. Cultural anthropological thought has become more sophisticated, turning attention away from these general features toward a more particular, culturally specific understanding. Culture itself, with all its component features, is considered 'text'. Pottery, scrolls, a cultic practice, seals, the biblical text and all cultural artefacts are viewed as 'texts' inscribed with narrative or story. Hence, the work of anthropologists begins to parallel the work of literary critics. Both read the narrative of these 'cultural texts' closely for meaning rather than data.

The work of cultural anthropologist and theorist Clifford Geertz has been especially influential in bringing about this shift. Borrowing from Max Weber, Geertz defines culture as 'webs of significance'. Religious, literary, aesthetic and economic conventions and meanings form these webs. Geertz calls the analysis of these webs 'thick description'. Thick description strives to discover and sort out the webs, to detail the significant features, layers and networks of prophetic discourse, interactions, institutions, contexts, behaviours, conventions etc. Thick description burrows deep into the labyrinth of a prophet's social world. It exposes the incongruities, the contradictions and the questions embedded within the text. Moreover, these descriptions capture the uniqueness, significant import and potential meaning of social reality of the Israelite world for the prophet. Here, the cultural study of the prophetic texts is not just confined to how the prophets addressed the realities of their culture but also to how culture shaped and influenced the prophets and their message.

How was Elijah's potential for social advancement intertwined with his activity against the prophets of Baal? What part did the agricultural policies of the reigning political party play in Amos' activity in the North? How did Micah's alignment with peasants of the hill country permeate and shape the production of the tradition assigned to him? The Prophetic writings are encoded with social data about class configuration and conflict; about the dynamics of societal roles, behaviours and identities; and about the functioning power of institutions. Rather than impartial religious treatises, these texts are viewed as sociocultural artefacts shaped by, inscribed with, and responding to the particular and prevailing values and ideologies.

Various studies on the Elijah-Elisha traditions exemplify this focus upon these kinds of intricacies and interchanges. In the biblical account (1 Kg 18), Elijah mounted a campaign of harassment on Mt Carmel against the religious waywardness in the Northern Kingdom. He opposed the Baal cult, Jezebel's prophets and Ahab's slaughter of Yahweh's prophets. But close attention to the intricacies of the discord suggests that such conflicts involved deeper and broader disputes than mere religious matters. The prophet's sphere of influence increased according to the extent of his or her victory over rival intermediaries. Hence, the contest between the deities, Yahweh and Baal, on Mt Carmel was in fact a competition between prophets, a competition riddled with social consequences. The end of the story confirms this. Yahweh's fire falling from the heavens as the sign of Yahweh's victory over Baal is not the conclusion. This comes

with Elijah's slaughter of the prophets of Baal. What appears as mere religious confrontation reveals itself instead as a rivalry fuelled by a complex network of social issues with significant consequences for these individuals. In another study on the Elijah tradition, Tamis Hoover Renteria challenges conventional understandings of Elijah as the model prophet who champions Yahwism and monotheism. ¹² Instead she reveals an individual ensnared in political controversy among the peasants of the Northern hill country who are resisting oppressive state rule. Her cultural analysis sets forth much about the struggles and sufferings of the people as well as about the prophet. It uncovers the experience of women and other oppressed peasant groups of the ninth century who suffered most under the Omride tyranny. Renteria shows how the interaction with the prophet empowered these people. Such studies dislodge the prophets and their religious identity from a lofty place above the fray and locate them in the thick of the human condition.

The recent work abandons pursuit of the author's intention as the privileged locus of meaning. It replaces interests in composition history and the authentic words of the prophet with an analysis of the prophet's discourse in conversation with the broader social discourse. It retreats from the distinction of text and historical context and instead views the text as cultural artefact, as a part of or piece of the context. Thus, it rejects popular but uncritical caricatures of the prophets - destabilizing, outraged or adversarial - that risk distortion and reduction of the multivalent character of biblical prophecy. Cultural studies dismantle any notion of a consistent theology - the product of sacral traditions - to which all the prophets subscribed. It situates the prophet's religious ideas and theological reflections squarely in the midst of other prevailing religious, social, economic and cultural ideas and values. Moreover, it understands these religious ideas as having an impact upon as well as being conditioned by this amalgam. As the various prophetic traditions are studied in this way, their inherent reflections on God not only differ from one another and from the sacral traditions of the past, but they emerge as samples of individual social location and statements of local theologies.

At the same time as we receive and interpret the prophetic word, whether it be Jeremiah's condemnation of cult in and around the holy city Jerusalem or Amos' admonition of the wealthy elite in the agricultural milieu of Northern peasant workers, we do so in the midst of our own location in the current postmodern secular culture. Interpretation of the prophetic message, as with all the biblical writings, involves us in that 'hermeneutical circle' that engages both the culturally contextualized understanding of the prophet's word and a culturally contextualized assessment of ourselves in our own local setting.

11.0 Conclusion

Meaning once located in the biblical text now appears to arise as a fusion of the sociocultural horizon of the prophet with our own sociocultural horizon. Attention to the cultural context of both the prophetic writing and the reader/interpreter opens the biblical text to a multitude of understandings. But this does not invite anarchy in interpretation. The responsible contemporary reader is called to mediate between his or her individual culture and the biblical text after the manner of the prophetic encounter with the sacral traditions of Israel. This is the witness of the prophetic tradition, of the

whole biblical tradition: that divine activity first understood in the life of the people of Israel continues to be recognized in the life of the biblical community and its individual members in each new age. Attention to culture, both that of the prophets and our own, makes possible that continuing recognition of the divine.

12.0 Summary

This unit discussed: Nature and Scope of Early studies; Historical criticism challenges the chronology; the spectrum of studies embraces the cultural context; the Influence of social locations on religious tenets and positions; and Cultural Categories.

13.0 Tutor Marked Assessment

- Discuss the nature and Scope of Early studies
- Historical criticism challenges the chronology. Discuss

7.0 References/Future Reading

Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the history of ancient Israel* (Cleveland/New York: Meridian Bks, 1965; first published in German in 1878).

Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament theology volume II*, trans D. M. G. Stalker (New York/San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960).

Robert Wilson, *Sociological approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp 67-80.

