

“Definitions of Varied Criticisms & their Erroneous Use of Interpretations”

Dr. E.K.D. Quick

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION-----	3
LOWER (TEXTUAL) CRITICISM-----	4
SOURCE CRITICISM-----	4-5
FORM CRITICISM-----	5-6
REDACTION CRITICISM-----	6-7
HISTORICAL CRITICISM-----	7-8
ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION-----	9-10
CRITERIA OF CANONICITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH-----	10-11
ANTISUPERNATURALISM-----	11
CONCLUSION-----	12
BIBLIOGRAPHY-----	12

Introduction

By inerrancy we mean that the Bible is fully truthful in all that it affirms when properly interpreted. This includes all words, all parts and all concepts. The Doctrine of Verbal Inspiration (Inspiration extends to every word) and The Doctrine of Plenary Inspiration (Inspiration extends to all parts equally) leads naturally to the Doctrine of Inerrancy. According to Paul D. Feinberg, “Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical or the life sciences”.¹

With the exception of Textual Criticism, the following Criticisms use formats and methodologies of interpretation that result in anti-Christian application, unscriptural hermeneutics and un-Biblical exegesis.

1 – “The Meaning of Inerrancy”, In *Inerrancy*, ed. Dr. N.L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) pp. 265-304

Lower (Textual) Criticism

Lower Criticism is the study and comparison of manuscripts to arrive at the original meaning of the text. Lower criticism evaluates which Bible texts are most accurate. Lower Criticism uses the Septuagint translation in textual criticism. The Jews were spread out during the late years before Christ's birth. With the influence of the Grecian Empire, the Hebrew language and the Aramaric 'lost some of its widespread punch'. There was a need for scripture translating to the Greek. The Septuagint served also a 'check' on what the Hebrew words meant. Lower Criticism also used the Massoretic Text in textual criticism, which included from the Massoretic Text footnotes that accounted for accurate number of every word and the accurate number of every letter. Further, Lower Criticism used the Dead Sea Scrolls to underscore the fact that the translations were without error and that there were no doctrinal differences in the texts. Because the study is within textual context using textual accountability coupled without the inference of any independent human insight, this Criticism is used by conservative Christendom.

Source Criticism

Source Criticism is often called the Synoptic Problem. The oral period of transmission eventually gave way to written tradition, which led to the Canonical Gospels. Source Criticism is devoted to the investigation of this written stage in the production of the Gospels".² Source Criticism as manifested in the Synoptic Problem, is

2 – An Introduction to the New Testament (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) p. 26

basically broken down into four so called solutions: *Common dependence on one original Gospel, Common dependence on oral sources, Common dependence on gradually developing written fragments and Interdependence.* These premises consists of The Augustinian Proposal, The “Two-Gospel” Hypothesis, The “Two-Source” Hypothesis and the “Four-Source” Hypothesis, which state variously among themselves that Matthew, Mark or Luke borrowed from each other or a source document, resulting in denying the Apostolic Authorship of the Synoptic Gospels. Further, this Criticism decimates the Biblical text, pronounces certain books inauthentic, rejects the very notion of Verbal Inspiration and allows so-called scholars to reject the authority of Scripture in order to modify the Canon to accommodate their own conclusions.³

Form Criticism

Form Criticism was first applied to the O.T. by Herman Gunkel and then brought to the N.T. by Schmidt, Dibelius and Bultman.⁴ Six assumptions form the basis of this position... 1) The stories and sayings of Jesus circulated in small independent units, 2) The transmission of the gospel material can be compared to the transmission of other folk and religious traditions, 3) The stories and sayings of Jesus took on certain standard forms, 4) The form of a specific story or saying makes it possible to determine its Sitz im Leben (“setting in life”) or setting in life of the local church, 5) As it passed down the sayings and stories of Jesus, the early Christian Community not only put the material into

3 – Dr. N.L. Geisler, Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Baker Book House, 1999) p.436

4 – An Introduction to the New Testament (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) p. 21

certain forms, it modified it under the impetus of own needs and situations and 6) Classic form critics have typically utilized various criteria to enable them to determine the age and historical trustworthiness. These positional statements are refuted by the following: 1) Form Criticism is Anti-Historical, 2) The gathering of material over a specific time frame used to draw conclusions can be seriously questioned, 3) Questions arise about the so-called laws of transmission and 4) Failure to come to grips with live eyewitnesses. Form Criticism believes that the Biblical Evangelists were merely Cut & Paste editors and believes that the Early Church was not interested in preserving accurate information about Jesus, but rather transmitting their own faith experience. From the data above, we can easily see how this Criticism denies the accuracy, validity and inerrancy of Scripture.

Redaction Criticism

Redaction Criticism seeks to describe the theological purposes of the Biblical Evangelists by analyzing the way in which they use their sources.⁵ Proponents of this theory say that Redaction Criticism takes a serious look at the role of the Biblical Evangelist, author and theological positions in applying techniques used for literature, thus producing interesting insights into the Biblical Evangelists' message. Redaction Criticism assumes that the Four-Source theory is correct. Of course, this theory is Source Criticism based. If the Four-Source theory is disproved, Redaction Criticism is disproved. Historical accuracy must also be discounted for this theory to thrive. Moreover, according to Dr. Geisler, Redaction Criticism also has a view that Biblical

5 – An Introduction to the New Testament (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) p. 39

Books were written much later and by different authors while late theological editors attached names out of history to their works for the sake of prestige and credibility.

Historical Criticism

Historical Criticism must be handled with 'kit gloves'. Historical Criticism is very relative. With Historical Criticism, "meaning is located not in the author's intention but in the encounter of text and reader",⁶ hence, this very criticism is not concert with classical exegesis. Pundits and defenders of this approach would justify its dependence and usage on the following premise..."with *Historical Criticism*, we are not interested at first in the question, "What does it mean to me?" but rather, "What did it mean to those to whom it was originally written?" Two other examples would be found in Rev. 2:12,13 – Pergamum was the center of the worship of Aesclepius and I Cor. 11:4-6 - Shorn hair was typical of Aphrodite priestess-prostitutes; shaven heads were typical of convicted adulteresses (vs. 5)." To protect the comprehensive contextual interpretation of Scripture, we should apply the following...Interpret in light of the context of the passage, Interpret scripture in harmony with other scripture, Interpret with dependence upon the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to teach you, Interpret the "spirit" of the passage, not necessarily the "letter", or the literalistic meaning, especially when the text is a literary genre prone to figures of speech or colorful statements. Moreover, to properly utilize a technique such as this, a serious student of the scriptures would recommend using *Historical Interpretation* to protect the exegesis of the text. *Historical Interpretation*

6 – An Introduction to the New Testament (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) p. 48

means that we take into account the historical background of the author and the recipients as possible. An application of this method would be the incorporation of geographic data to aid in exegesis and hermeneutics. A proper case study of Genesis 13 would have to include knowledge of the land that was to be chosen when Abram separated from Lot. Another example would be the evaluation of Luke 10...as the scripture says, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho...". Jerusalem is at a southwesterly angle in relation to Jericho, however, it is higher in elevation. A brief testimony refuting Historical Criticism can be claimed by German Theology Professor Eta Linnemann, who had studied under the prominent Historical Critical theologian Rudolf Bultmann, she declared "because of the testimony of the Holy Spirit in my heart, I have clear knowledge that my former perverse teaching was sin ... I regard everything that I taught and wrote before I entrusted my life to Jesus, as refuse. I have pitched my two books ... along with my contributions to journals, into the trash with my own hands ... I ask you sincerely to do the same thing with any of them (that) you may have on your bookshelf."⁷ She is making reference to her two scholarly books, *Gleichnisse Jesu*, and *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte* and a number of learned articles in theological journals. She has since given up her responsible position at Marburg, has distanced herself completely from historical-critical theology, and has become a missionary teacher at a Bible Institute in Batu, Indonesia.

7 – Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology, p.20

Allegorical Interpretation

"Allegory, is a tool whereby a writer conveys hidden, mysterious truths by the use of words which also have a literal meaning. Even if the writer did not intend the hidden meaning, allegory is a method of interpreting a poet, a story teller, or a Scripture in such a way that the interpreter sees a mysterious meaning which the writer may not have intended".⁸

An example of an Allegorical Interpretation is found in the various examples of The Song of Solomon. There are three suggestions in most Christian circles... A picture of God's love for Israel, Christ's love for the Church and Solomon's love for the Shulamite woman. A positive from this method can be the expansion of application of scripture as supported by the following statement: "Attributing this song to Solomon is but an allegory, for one greater than Solomon is spoken of here."⁹ However, a negative can be the neglect of the literal interpretation of scripture as supported by the following statement: "The text does not indicate it was the author's intent to allegorize."¹⁰ The people, places, and experiences in the Song of Solomon are real, not literary devices".¹¹ The people and places named are real...the wife and Jerusalem. They are not literary devices. They are historical persons and places. Some proponents use scripture to cite their use of this Criticism, such as Galatians 4:21-31 so that the text remains

8 – The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, J. K. Grinder, Allegory, vol 1, p. 104

9 – The Bride-Groom and His Bride, an Exposition and Commentary on the Song of Solomon, R.F. Thompson, pp 3, 7

10 – Song of Songs, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, D.F. Kinlaw, vol 5, p. 1203

11 – (ibid)

authoritative. Another example is the contrast of interpretations of the 144,000 found in Rev 7. When juxtaposed, John D. Grassmick believes that the 144,000 are Israel and Leon Morris believes the 144,000 is identified with the Christian church.¹² Grassmick uses the Grammatical-Historical-Contextual approach.¹³ and Morris uses the allegorical Interpretation.¹⁴ Grassmick views their differences as ‘disjunctive’.

Criteria of Canonicity in the Early Church

The word *canon* comes from a Greek word that means “measuring stick”.¹⁵ When we speak of the “canon of Scripture” today, we are referring to all the Biblical books considered to be inspired and authoritative that collectively constitute God’s Word. The Criteria of the Canon is based on the Holy Scriptures and Inspired by the Holy Spirit. Scriptures such as *II Peter 1:21* attest to this fact. God did not permit the will of sinful human beings to misdirect or erroneously record His message. Rather, “God *moved* and the prophet mouthed these truths; God revealed and man recorded His Word.”¹⁶ The development of the N.T. Canon was a process consisting of the compiling of Papyri and Epistles coupled with various and sundry confirming Councils as to the authority of the Epistles. When the authority of the manuscript was confirmed, the epistle was

12 – The Revelation of St. John , Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) p.114

13 – Principles and Practices of Greek Exegesis, J. D. Grassmick (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974) pp. 11-13

14 – Principles and Practices of Greek Exegesis, J. D. Grassmick (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974) p. 9

15 – The Complete Book of Bible Answers, R. Rhodes (Harvest House Publishers, 1997) p. 27

16 – A General Introduction to the Bible, Geisler & Nix (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978) p. 28

considered Canon. However, this process was, as we said before, led by God and not by man. Thousands of Papyri were the earliest manuscripts, followed by more complete forms known as Codexes. Early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus recognized the Gospels, Acts and the Pauline Epistles. Tertullian and Clement agreed with Irenaeus. Origen later said that Hebrews and Jude should be included. Even though Epistles were being compiled by the power of the Holy Spirit, 'pseudologia' was also being developed. Thus, as the Holy Spirit was leading, guiding and developing the inclusion all Epistles ordained by God, the Holy Spirit was also leading, guiding and developing the exclusion of all false Epistles. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria was the first to name the current 27 Epistles we have today. This was also confirmed by the Councils of Laodicia in 363, the Council of Hippo in 393 and the Council of Carthage in 397.

Antisupernaturalism

According to Dr. Geisler, Antisupernaturalism is a form of Negative Criticism which is very destruction. This premise is based on the following...the Bible is partly true, the mind of man is the final authority and its role is to determine truth.¹⁷ The view of Positive Criticism is constructive and also explained by Dr. Geisler as follows...the Bible is wholly true, the Word of God is the final authority and the role is to discover truth.¹⁸ Negative Criticism calls for intense scrutiny and uses Source Criticism, Form Criticism and Redactive Criticism. Lastly, one of the major faults is that this Criticism was used by Strauss and Bultmann and by Spinoza, who declared that Isaiah had two authors.

17 – Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, Dr. N.L. Geisler (Baker Book House, 1999)

18 – (Ibid)

Conclusion

When it comes to the aforementioned criticisms, all but Literary (Textual) Criticism will violate the truth of scripture. The Bible is without error, but more so, when any fact is called in question, whether it is science, life, morality, historical or prophecy...the Bible is without error. We must be careful to avoid the Criticisms of man that lead to lethal pitfalls and wrong turns and follow the Biblical path that leads to the road of Christian application, scriptural hermeneutics and Biblical exegesis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A General Introduction to the Bible, Geisler & Nix (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978)
- An Introduction to the New Testament (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992)
- Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, N.L. Geisler (Baker Book House, 1999)
- Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology (Baker Book House, 1990)
- The History of Christian Doctrines, Berkhof
- Papias – Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord, ca 140 A.D.
- Principles and Practices of Greek Exegesis, J. D. Grassmick (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974)
- Song of Songs, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, volume 5, Dennis F. Kinlaw
- The Complete Book of Bible Answers, R. Rhodes (Harvest House Publishers, 1997)
- The Meaning of Inerrancy”, In Inerrancy, ed. Dr. N.L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979)
- The Revelation of St. John , Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969)
- The Bride-Groom and His Bride, an Exposition and Commentary on the Song of Solomon, Roland F. Thompson
- Zondervan New International Dictionary (Zondervan Publishing House, 1987)
- The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, (Zondervan Publishing House)