

THE ROLE OF SCHOLARSHIP

IN

ARRIVING AT DOCTRINE

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Introduction

What is the role of scholarship in arriving at doctrine? Some would answer, "This is like asking, What is the role of a neurosurgeon in diagnosing a tumor on the brain? Of course it is essential to go to the specialist to get reliable information." But others would respond, "Scholarship is quite unnecessary, the Bible is God's word to man and as such has been written in a way that all may understand. To hand it over to the theologians is like the medieval church incarcerating the Bible among its few learned men. Scholars constantly contradict each other and only make the simple and obvious meaning of the Bible obscure."

It would seem to this writer the truth lies somewhere between. I shall seek to set forth in this paper a case for the proper role of scholarship in the derivation of doctrine.

But let us affirm clearly from the beginning that scholars are not essential for religion, piety or salvation. Religion, in thousands of forms, exists without academic endeavors. In fact it thrives among thousands in third world countries, sometimes in the most primitive of settings. Each of these religions has its "beliefs," no matter how amorphous they may be, and as Rudolf Otto has argued in his incisive essay, "The Idea of the Holy," mankind has an innate predisposition to be religious. Given certain conditions, beliefs and motivations, this religious experience can readily issue in a very real form of piety. As the recent rise of numerous Eastern-styled cults has indicated, all of this may easily occur without reference to the Bible.

For Christians, a reading of the New Testament will readily reveal all that is necessary for salvation. The person of Jesus, one's personal sinfulness, the priority of faith, and the ensuing benefits to the one

who believes are sufficiently self-evident in the New Testament that no scholar is needed for this purpose either. It may also be urged that a great deal of insight into Christian doctrine may be gained without the aid of technical assistance offered by the scholar. So we affirm that the scholar is not essential to the Christian.

However, any serious Christian who seeks to intelligently explore his faith, must surely value the Christian scholar as a wonderful aid in the search for full comprehension of his Christian experience and the documents upon which that experience is based. So precisely what is the scholar's role within the Christian community?

I would suggest that the scholar's role is to work with the source documents of Christianity to ascertain their meaning and contemporary relevance, and to interact with fellow scholars in such a way that the community of faith of which he is a part is profited. That is to say, he is to use his gift to serve the church of Christ. The scholar will serve the body of Christ by research and study in the context of prayer and humility, and seek to use his findings to both preserve the best in his religious tradition and to seek to modify those ideas which prove to be imprecise as expressions of the meaning of Scripture.

There has been a growing awareness of the need for theology to be practical or relevant. There has been some movement in recent years toward a "case study" approach to theological education in an attempt to encourage a more applied theology which practically addresses the real world. It is an attempt to make theology and life intersect. Robert A. Evans observes:

The primary criterion...[in formal and informal Biblical study aids] seems to be the accuracy with which one can grasp and articulate the theological insights of scripture, Church tradition, or leading contemporary theologians. Unfortunately, one often feels theologically competent if he or she cites and persuasively interprets the words of an authoritative theologian. However, it is difficult to tell whether one has made a decision and taken¹ a stand so that theology becomes not only learned but also owned.

It is a task of the scholar to facilitate the "owning" of theology.

Perhaps above all it is the task of the theologian to bring to bear certain tools and skills in his study of the Bible which are not available to the average lay person. Like any specialist, he has at his disposal tools, experience, expertise and a scholarly community which provide him with resources for a more precise understanding and statement of the meaning and relevance of biblical ideas than that possible by the lay person. Also, like any specialist, he may be wrong. But once again, like any specialist, given the absence of prejudicial presuppositions, his probability of being correct is higher because of his expertise. The scholar knows the meaning of Karl Barth's words, "There can be no theology without much distress, but also none without courage in distress."² Because of the care with which the scholar has agonized over his task, yet faithfully borne it out, he comes forth to the community of faith with valued insights which may enrich and enhance individual Christian lives.

One more thing needs to be said by way of introduction. Doctrine, as an attempt to express the divine view of things, should be a positive and joyful thing. This happy science (as Barth calls theology) is performed with due humility requisite in any efforts to describe things divine. Never should doctrine, which at the most mundane level boils down to intellectual concepts we carry in the attics of our brains--never should these ideas be presented in such unequivocal terms and with a kind of arrogance that betrays the God who is represented in them. It is truly tragic when the positive force of doctrine is turned to divisive purposes and utilized as a wedge to dissect the body of Christ. Scholars, above all others, should see to it that doctrine is used for happy purposes.

We now turn our attention to the heart of the matter. What is the role of the scholar in arriving at doctrine? It is to fulfill certain obligations to himself, the text, his scholarly colleagues and his church.

THE SCHOLAR'S OBLIGATIONS TO HIMSELF

The scholar who truly seeks understanding of God's word needs to first personally prepare himself for the task. The man without faith may approach the Bible as a literary work, which it is, and applying the tools of critical and exegetical studies may uncover the meaning it held for those originally addressed, and may even use his creativity to derive some relevance for today. This kind of study would not be significantly different from studies in other ancient literature such as that of Plato, Homer or Josephus. But if we are to move beyond this rather clinical approach, and attempt to hear the word of God spoken again to us afresh today, then we must come to the task of theology with a whole new attitude.

Bernard Ramm has commented on the requisite qualities of the biblical scholar:

The theologian is a redeemed man standing in the circle of divine revelation. He is a changed man; he has undergone regeneration. He is a committed man; he has found the truth in Jesus Christ and in Scripture. He comes not as a religious speculator but as a man with a concern. He seeks the fullest explication he can of the meaning of the divine revelation and his personal experience of the grace of God. His motivation to engage in theology stems from his experience of the gospel, and he seeks the meaning of that Book from which the gospel is preached.³

The scholar has an obligation to himself to set about his task with an attitude of humility and expectation. It is the humility of the scholar that enables him to engage in his studies with an expectant attitude. He who approaches the text with his conclusions already determined, who is confidently assured of his position prior to the commencement of study, can hardly expect that the Lord will perform the miracle of discovery and illumination at his desk.

And this humble attitude of expectancy will continue even after the scholar has completed his study. His conclusions will be set forth with a degree of tentativeness, fully recognizing the awful (full of awe)

task that he has engaged in--he has dared to speak on behalf of God! He has sought to recover the meaning for today of ancient documents that are God's chosen means of revealing his divine self. Surely such a bold endeavor may only be engaged in with the greatest sense of responsibility. His sense of expectation also continues because he now awaits evaluation from his scholarly colleagues and the body of Christ in whose service he works.

One further obligation that the scholar has to himself is that of prayer. The profound words of Karl Barth are applicable here:

The first and basic act of theological work is prayer... Theological work does not merely begin with prayer and is not merely accompanied by it; in its totality it is peculiar and characteristic of theology that it can be performed only in the act of prayer. In view of the danger to which theology is exposed and to the hope that is enclosed within its work, it is natural that without prayer there can be no theological work.⁴

What is the scholar's role in arriving at doctrine? First, to fulfill important obligations to himself. Without the fulfillment of these, scholarship may well be bankrupt and sterile.

THE SCHOLAR'S OBLIGATIONS TO THE TEXT

Christianity is a religion which shows a high regard for maintaining continuity with the inspired documents which testify to its Source and express the faith of its early adherents. Christians seek to utilize the Bible and the Bible alone as their source of authoritative doctrine and behavior. This raises crucial questions as to the relation of the Old Testament, a compilation of books written for Jews and by Jews, to the New Testament which is a compilation of documents written by Christians (some from Jewish backgrounds) with a uniquely Christian perspective on religion and life. It is not our task here to unravel the intricacies of this problem, but suffice it to say that the Old and New Testaments both contribute significantly to the corpus of Christian doctrine.

It is because of Christians' commitment to a religion based upon this collection of documents which was acknowledged as early as the fourth century to be canonical, that scholars must pay special attention to the careful study of the Bible. If Christianity is to be a dynamic force in the twentieth century, one must do more than uncover the meaning of the original text. One must also allow God to utilize that ancient text to bring a message to persons today. Consequently, the scholar's obligations to the text within the Christian community involve several questions.

(i) What is the text? According to Gordon D. Fee there are now extant 5,338 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. In addition there are hundreds of ancient translations and over 8,000 copies of the Latin Vulgate. No two of these manuscripts are exactly alike.⁵ Furthermore, most Christians read the Bible in a language other than the original Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic in which it was written. So the question must be asked, What is the original text? To the best of our knowledge, what was the exact wording of the autographs? This, of course, is the task of the textual critic. Obviously it is foolish to proceed to develop doctrine and explain meanings in texts if the text with which one is working has been corrupted in the transmission process and a better text is available.

It should also be pointed out that the average lay Christian should not be unduly disturbed by these textual variations. Very few of them have critical significance for Christian doctrine; many are simply spelling, grammatical or stylistic variations. However, to be confident that the text being dealt with is in fact as close as we can know to the original, and to ensure that we are not building a key idea on one of the few texts, the reading of which is genuinely uncertain, the scholar has an obligation to ascertain, to the best of his ability, what the text actually is.

(ii) What does the text say? Having decided what the text is, the scholar must proceed to determine what the text says. That is, he must engage in legitimate exegetical procedures including the study of word meanings,

grammar, the significance of historical references (if any), the literary style, the immediate context, and the place the text has in the overall progression of the document. A variety of tools are at the scholar's disposal for this task: lexicons, Hebrew and Greek grammars, concordances, atlases, archaeological works, theological dictionaries, commentaries, etc.

(iii) What does the text mean? The next duty is to ascertain as precisely as possible the original meaning of the text. This is perhaps the most demanding of all procedures in the exegetical business. The scholar must now put himself back into the times and culture of the writer (and this may not in fact be known exactly). He must seek to perceive the needs and the personality of the intended audience and by entering the world of both the author and the audience, ascertain what he believes to have been the original message of the text. It is at this point that the relevance of studies such as the identity of the author, date of writing, and the historical setting of the composition, become particularly important. For example, portions of Colossians cannot be fully understood without some understanding of incipient gnosticism.

One danger that the scholar faces at this point is that of inadvertently contemporizing the meaning of the text. Krister Stendahl has accused the Lutheran tradition of doing this in their reading of the Pauline passages on justification by faith. Some will differ as to the accuracy of this accusation but none can deny that this type of faulty exegesis has often invaded the Christian church. The problem of (particularly church) theologians interpreting texts in the light of a "canon within the canon" is well known. Justification by faith, the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-11, and the cleansing of the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 have suffered from this abuse.

(iv) How does this text with its meaning relate to other texts with their meanings? The scholar is now faced with the task of synthesizing or relating the meaning of the text under discussion to the meanings exhibited

by other texts. It must be stated that this is really an optional task. Great benefits may be obtained simply by following the first three steps and then proceeding to the fifth. But the human mind is not always satisfied with the compartmentalization of knowledge into unrelated categories. So the theologian is confronted with the task of integrating the meanings he has uncovered in a particular text into some kind of coherent pattern of which that text with its meaning contributes some significant element.

This area of study, commonly referred to as "systematic theology" as opposed to "biblical theology" which concerns itself with the meaning of texts as units in themselves, has usually been performed in the context of a church tradition and thereby has been related to the history of particular doctrines within the tradition. One might say that systematic theology and historical theology often converge to form dogmatic theology.

This endeavor is marked by serious hazards. The greatest is the obsession for "harmonization" which has plagued the worst attempts at systematics. Nothing in the sphere of systematics may deny the rightful meaning ascribed to a text once it has been established by proper methods. Scholars must resist the temptation to undo their hard work in step three so as to ease problems in step four. Carelessness in this respect demonstrates an inexcusable neglect of the integrity of the very documents which Christians use to establish their faith. It is far better to say that John's view of judgment is this and Paul's view of judgment is that, than to artificially contrive a supposed harmonization that the inspired writers themselves were not concerned for. I am sure that in such cases both views will prove to be valuable and relevant to Christians, each in its own way. It may also be necessary to recognize the development of religious thought within the Bible. For example, Job's view of evil in the world is nowhere near so sophisticated and insightful as that of John the revelator who lived in the literal shadow of demonic forces.

(v) What relevance does the meaning of the text have for today?

Christianity, as an historical religion, maintains that events that occurred in history and the documents that testify to these events are the source for meaningful perception of the world and the key to relations within it at all times. The significance of this should hardly be taken for granted. James Barr asked the question in his provocative book, Fundamentalism, "Why should I give one speck of attention to those ancient manuscripts we call the Bible as I go about my life in the twentieth century?" It is in the light of such modern day skepticism, which lies in the heart of every thoughtful Christian, that this step becomes crucially significant. In a context where the very act of trying to show the significance of the Bible is questioned, it is crucial to demonstrate in a meaningful and intellectually satisfying way that those ancient manuscripts can in fact be relevant today.

To refer again to Barth, who had an urgent desire to make the Bible relevant, we observe his comments on theological study which he divides into two portions: the first conversation, with the text of the Bible itself; and the second conversation, with the scholarly community of the past and the present. Regarding the first conversation he declares:

. . . the student, whether he be young or old, will (like all students who preceded him) have to inquire directly into what the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament have to say to the world, to the community of the present day, and to himself as a member of the community.⁶

For the scholar to fulfil his duty it is indispensable that he enable the community to hear again the word of God. It must hear the voice of the Bible anew every moment. It is the scholar's duty to the text to creatively suggest applications of its meanings in the lives of those who compose the body of Christ. In doing this he will show sensitivity to the meaning of the text as he has uncovered it, and to the perceived needs of the community. In this way he will seek to make relevant applications of the text without violation of its true and original meaning.

Of course it would be absurd to suggest that these steps are totally independent. There will be times when one task will overlap with another, particularly when discussing what the text says and what it means. But one of the roles of scholarship in the determination of doctrine is to do its utmost to fulfil these obligations to the text: to discover its original form, to derive what it says, to determine what it means, to discuss its relation to other similar passages, and to apply it to contemporary situations.

THE SCHOLAR'S OBLIGATIONS TO HIS COLLEAGUES

A scholar's colleagues can be divided into several categories: those of years gone by (e.g. patristic writers, the Reformers, Christian scholars of past centuries), those of the twentieth century who have created or reacted to contemporary currents in the theological world; those who presently live and write and are likely to influence or be influenced by current scholarly endeavors; those within one's tradition; those without; those who belong to the exact denomination; and those who do not. The obligations of the scholar to each of these may be somewhat different, but here we shall have to keep our remarks very generalized. Our emphasis, though not exclusive attention, will be on the scholars who also comprise the academic context of the particular denomination of the scholar.

Our main concern here is that theology take place in a cooperative setting. It seems that the humility of the theologian will inevitably lead him to submit his ideas to the thoughtful consideration of his fellows. They will examine the data and reflect upon his conclusions. They will seek to rid their minds of presuppositions and prejudices and freely enter into the spirit of the presentation. They will test the ideas against those of their learning and experience, always approaching their task with an open mind and never with predetermined conclusions. Nothing is more fatal to true theology with integrity than the actions

of a person who approaches biblical or theological data with his conclusions already determined. This "inverted theology," which manipulates the evidence to conform with preexisting conclusions, cannot interact in a healthy and positive way with proper biblical theology.

The following paragraph expresses well the necessity for cooperative effort in the search for full understanding in doctrinal matters.

The inability of any human mind to grasp every aspect of truth relative to any particular subject renders cooperative effort in the quest for truth essential. Cooperative effort provides data that might otherwise be missed, leads to sources that might not have been explored, recommends methods that might otherwise not have been utilized, suggests principles that may not have been applied, and reveals flaws in reasoning that might otherwise have passed unnoticed. . . . In all cooperative effort it is essential that there be genuine confidence in the sincerity, competence, and fair judgment of those invited to consider the problem, and willingness to benefit by the counsel given.

It is the task of the scholarly community within a church always to ensure that there is an atmosphere and stance conducive to honest inquiry and candid evaluation of ideas. Administrators and lay persons must tolerate this openness and not insist on the false security of closed mindedness. It is the task of scholars to continually educate people to be tolerant of new ideas and open to alternative points of view. The scholarly world exhibits this characteristic supremely and thereby sets an example for the rest of the community to follow.

There is a duty of the scholar to consider his colleagues not only at the conclusion of his theological work but also during it. Many have trod the ground before him. Many have tested ideas and found them to be right, wrong, or in need of modification. The scores of scholarly books, journals and monographs available today provide invaluable resource material which cannot be ignored. In fact a scholar is perhaps more than anything else one who knows how to use such resources and

calls upon them freely in his research. This is what Barth called the secondary conversation.

No one, however, should ever confuse this secondary conversation with the primary one, lest he lose the forest for the trees. In such an eventuality, he would no longer be able to hear the echo of divine revelation in the Scriptures, for the sheer volume of patristic, scholastic, reformation, and above all, modern academic voices would drown it out. On the other hand, no one should imagine himself so inspired or otherwise clever and wise that he can conduct the primary discussion by his own powers, dispensing with all secondary discussion with the fathers and brothers of the Church.⁸

For a scholar to rightly perform his role in the derivation of doctrine, he must ably fulfil his obligations to his scholarly colleagues. He must consult them as he prepares his positions, he must approach them with humility and the expectation of profiting from them as he presents his views, and he will make himself available to respectfully critique the presentations of others. He must function as an integral part of a whole sub-community, the academic world, who jointly seeks to find the true meaning of God's word and to apply it in meaningful and legitimate ways. John Donne's dictum that no man is an island applies with special force to theologians.

THE SCHOLAR'S OBLIGATIONS TO HIS CHURCH

As we noted above, some scholars are employed in a denominational setting. These have special obligations to their church. Like all other members he is to exercise his gift for the upbuilding of the community of faith. This means having a conscious respect for the traditions of the church, a sensitivity to the needs of the community and an eye to applying the meaning of texts especially to the corporate personality of the church. In other words, a church scholar is not only to ensure the relevance of his exegetical work, but to ensure its relevance within a particular setting.

The major duty incumbent on the church scholar, above those duties that all scholars partake of, is to interact with the church's tradition. This will take several forms. He will set out to relate his exegetical work to the traditions and doctrines of the church. He will also specifically set out to evaluate the value and validity of the church's doctrinal positions. This task he will participate in with as open a mind as possible, listening carefully to his colleagues both within and outside the church. The temptation to do "inverted theology" will be the greatest here, but the scholar will do his utmost to be truly objective. Assuming that no church's traditions are wholly without fault, and certainly that every expression of them within the church is not impeccable, there will be times when he will criticize the tradition or recent expressions of it. This will be done with due sensitivity to those who adhere to views different from his own and by using the proper mechanism provided for such critiques. A church which does not provide such mechanisms is being grossly unfair to its scholarly community. There will be other moments when another will wrongly criticize the church tradition and the scholar will come to the aid of the church and provide a defense of its positions.

The important thing through all of this is that the scholar is always remaining true to the text which is his source. If he is to retain his integrity within the Christian community he cannot afford to promote doctrine or tradition independently of textual support. Nor may he deliberately manipulate the text to arrive at conclusions consonant with the tradition he has a predisposition to defend. Rarely does a scholar do such a thing without being aware of it, usually through the vicarious interaction he has with the scholarly community in books and journals. The burden that this places upon him is rightly too heavy for his conscience to bear.

THE SCHOLAR'S TOOLS

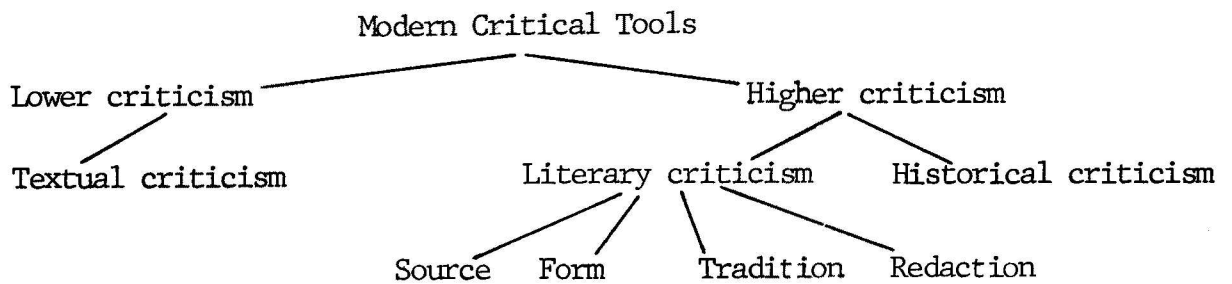
We have already noted that what identifies a scholar perhaps more than any other feature is his access to certain tools not readily available to the lay person. It is these tools that give him an advantage in answering the questions discussed earlier about the text, and hence at arriving at a relevant and legitimate application of the meaning of the text for today. Of course, the scholar's tools are many and include journals of research; reference books such as theological, historical and biblical dictionaries; atlases; commentaries; patristic writings; various biblical translations; critical editions of the original texts; works on Greek and Hebrew grammar, syntax and etymology; archeological studies and an endless array of books that approach almost every topic from every perspective.

But in addition to literally thousands of scholarly works that shed light on the text and its meaning, there are modern critical methodologies that can provide helpful insight into the original text, the intent of its author and the process whereby the text has come to us in its present form. It is our purpose to give a brief overview of these critical tools and the value they can be to the scholar. Let it first be noted that these tools have often been used in a highly subjective and negative way, in a way that denies the inspiration of the Bible and robs it of any authority. Prejudicial presuppositions denying the historicity of the records, the fact of miracle, the reality of inspiration, the accuracy of the early church's gospel narratives, etc., do not need to accompany the use of these critical tools. The scholar's task is to deal with the evidence that the Bible presents us with. Conservative scholars cannot pretend to be fully honest when they ignore the problems that liberals are grappling with and then discount the work of liberals because of what they evaluate as arbitrary and subjective assumptions. It is the task of the evangelical scholar to deal with those exact problems with his own set of presuppositions.

What we seek to avoid here is the arbitrary imposition upon Scripture of certain views which do not inductively arise out of it. On the one hand there are liberal views such as a totally skeptical attitude towards historical accuracy, an antisupernaturalist stance, a quickness to relegate certain materials as non-authentic and hence of little or no value, etc. On the other hand, fundamentalists impose on Scripture a virtually superstitious view of inspiration, define the Bible as a divine book with little or no human element, claim inerrancy and perfect harmonization, insist on singular authorship of books without any significant pre-history, etc. These humanistic tendencies--the imposition of categories onto Scripture devised by humans--must be shunned in favor of a truly inductive approach which does not allow an assumed view of "inspiration" dictate various qualities (either liberal or conservative) to the Bible.

So we would affirm here that despite the excessively negative use of modern critical tools, they do have a place, when rightly applied, in the scholarly work of the evangelical scholar. It needs to be recognized that the critical tools themselves are not wrong, it is their application that may be destructive or applied in a way contrary to the principles of one's faith.

Critical tools fall into two recognized categories--lower criticism and higher criticism. Lower criticism concerns itself with an attempt to carefully reconstruct the original text. Higher criticism divides into two broad categories--literary and historical. In recent years literary criticism has developed several strands, each of which is not totally mutually exclusive. These include source, form, tradition and redaction criticism. We could represent this diagrammatically thus:



Textual criticism has the task of restoring, in so far as possible, the actual ancient text. This is done by a process of comparing all the known manuscripts of a particular text in an attempt to trace the history of the variations that occur. Out of this comparison of the texts in the original language (Hebrew or Greek), and early translations, one seeks to ascertain the patterns and trends in the variations that occur, account for the reasons for the variations and hence derive a suggested original text.

Gordon D. Fee points out at least three values that this study has:

1) It helps to determine the original words of the author; 2) It helps in the selection of a translation, which is what most Christians use for practical purposes, for the translation must be based upon the best available texts; 3) It helps the interpreter understand the way the early church understood the text.⁹

Literary criticism approaches the Bible as literature and seeks to analyze texts in terms of style, structure, composition methods, the use of sources, etc. The following four subheads define the most prominent aspects of this tool for understanding the text and its meaning.

Source criticism is "the analysis of the features of a literary piece in order to delineate authorship, historical setting, and compositional character. It is especially concerned to determine whether a document is a unity or composite and, if the latter, the nature of the sources used and the stages of composition."¹⁰

Ancient texts, both within and outside the Bible, suggest that literary works were sometimes the result of composition by use of a variety of sources. Numbers 21:14, Joshua 10:13 and Luke 1:1-3 all refer explicitly to the use of other sources in the preparation of the text. This, along with obvious stylistic variations suggest the reality of a compositional method involving the bringing together of a number of earlier sources in the preparation of some texts. If this is a serious possibility, then source criticism is a valid and necessary endeavor. Clearly, it will help us determine the meaning of the text if we can ascertain some knowledge of the sources which were brought together in its composition. Our understanding of Isaiah, for example, will be enhanced if we correctly understand whether it had one or more than one author. It will also ease some of the tension created by certain factual phenomena associated with the text such as the use of Elohim for "God" in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the use of Yahweh Elohim when the creation story is repeated in Genesis 2:4-25.

Note the following two important considerations in connection with the use of source criticism.

The theory and practice of the historical-critical method is not bound to an understanding which views history as a closed continuum in which there is no room for divine activity. Source criticism must recognize that the biblical literature emanated from a religious community. The intention of its authors was never merely literary or historical, and due consideration must be given to theological intentions, which inevitably affected literary composition. Moreover, this means that source criticism cannot be an end in itself, but must stand in the service of the explication of the full meaning of the biblical text.¹¹

The use of the method must not be controlled by philosophical or dogmatic preconceptions of historical or religious developments in Israel (e.g., Wellhausen, or fundamentalism). For example, it ought not be assumed that fewer anthropomorphic references to God represent a later or more sophisticated stage in the history of the tradition.¹²

Form criticism is concerned with analyzing the distinctive literary features of texts (pericopes of varying lengths) and ascertaining how these relate to their sociological settings. Thus the life-setting of the text is highly significant to the form critic. For example, the letters of Paul, the miracle stories of the Gospels, the psalms of the Old Testament and levitical regulations each arise out of a unique life-setting which to some extent determines the form (structure and style) of the resultant literature. Thus form criticism is a tool for understanding texts in their original contexts.

Kinds of forms that have been suggested in the New Testament include: sayings of Jesus, miracle stories, parables, editorial remarks, doxological statements, confessions, hymns, Old Testament quotations and allusions, etc. Each of these forms is viewed as possessing certain identifiable characteristics.

Most students are aware of the excesses that are possible in this kind of study and the tendency towards highly subjective evaluations of the text. An antisupernaturalist tendency is frequently evident and some scholars seem bent on continually insisting that the early Christian community invented many of the sayings traditionally ascribed to Jesus and inserted them into his mouth in the Gospels as post Easter inventions. It is difficult to have a high level of certainty with such conjectures and no two form critics agree fully on just what is authentic and what is not. So, without discounting the value of form critical studies, they certainly should not, at this stage of their development, be taken as conclusive or definitive. Neither should the insights gained from this kind of studies be totally ignored. We certainly know more about the origins of the text of both Old and New Testaments as a result of form critical studies than we did a century ago before they began to flourish.

Tradition criticism is a process for analyzing, and suggesting causes

for, the various stages through which a unit of biblical literature moved until it reached its final form. The method assumes that some biblical literature originated as folk material and was passed on in the religious community for generations by word of mouth. It seems to this writer that there is no a priori reason why God could not have used social processes such as these as the context in which his Word should develop. The fact of inspiration does not ipso facto eliminate the possibility of biblical records having a long history in the traditions of the community. While it is true that a fundamentalist view of inspiration may not be able to accommodate itself readily to the idea of inspiration occurring within such a setting, this makes it necessary for the fundamentalist to examine 1) his view of inspiration; and 2) the feasibility of the fact of an oral tradition preceding portions of the written documents. It is arbitrary and prejudicial to simply deny the possibility of the need for tradition criticism on the basis of one's definition of inspiration.

Those who utilize this tool must do so with the view to better understanding the text.

. . . a history of a tradition is valuable by virtue of its contribution to an understanding of the final text. But the significance of that text can be seen most clearly when the interpreter identifies the process that produced it, along with the interpretive reshaping which the process effected.¹³

Redaction criticism is the study of the way an editor (redactor) or "author" used preexisting materials and adapted them for his own purpose. "Redaction is the conscious reworking of older materials in such a way as to meet new needs. It is editing that does not simply compile or retouch but creatively transforms."¹⁴ Like form criticism, redaction criticism recognizes the importance of the life-setting of the final author of the text and the possibility that he adapted the material and included his own editorial insights into preexisting material, by virtue of the needs of his audience. Thus, for example, because the

Gospels were written approximately half a century after the events they record, the life-setting of their composition is somewhat different from both that of the time of Christ and the times in which the oral tradition which precedes them circulated. Redaction criticism assumes that the authors creatively used their sources to address needs in real communities to whom they wrote. There is strong textual evidence for this in the fact of the variations that occur between the Gospel accounts and the perceptible theological and liturgical emphases that the Gospels exhibit. Mark tends to be a theological proclamation of the good news, while Matthew is seen to be more like a manual for belief and practice for a particular Christian community, and Luke has produced a history, albeit a theological history rather than a purely factual one.

To illustrate once more, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary has the following to say about the composite work of 1 and 2 Kings:

The books of Kings are more in the nature of a compilation of selected materials brought together by an editor rather than an original production from a single hand. They contain highly valuable and reliable historical material. Items drawn by inspired men from early sources have been brought together and arranged into a framework following a specific pattern, with comments indicating a deep religious purpose. Many items have been taken directly or indirectly from official court or temple records.¹⁵

It is the work of the redaction critic to trace the bringing together of the various sources in such a work and in particular to ascertain as precisely as possible what the "deep religious purpose" of the editor was.

Historical criticism is largely distinct from literary criticism and derives its relevance from the fact that Christianity is an historical religion and that Christians believe that God has revealed himself in history. The concern of historical criticism is to discover the actual historical setting of texts and to examine the historicity of the

historical references in them. For the Old Testament the "primary purpose of this activity is to give the readers of Scripture as accredited an historical picture of ancient life as possible."¹⁶ Historical criticism seeks to resolve problems such as that of the identity of Darius the Mede (Dan 5:30; 6:1; etc.) who is unknown in secular sources as a real personage at the time of the fall of the Babylonian empire.

Donald Guthrie has wisely pointed out regarding the New Testament:

Most scholars would agree that to put the NT into its historical setting is not only legitimate but essential for a right understanding of the text. It is not sufficient to maintain that as the Word of God the NT is applicable to any age irrespective of the original purpose of its parts. A true application of the NT text depends on a right understanding of its original aim. The Corinthian correspondence, for instance, is intelligible only against the first-century situation to which it is addressed, but it has universal application because it enunciates abiding principles in dealing with local needs.¹⁷

It should hardly need to be said that once again, as in every area of modern critical study, one may approach historical criticism with an array of arbitrary and negative presuppositions. But it is not necessary for the use of this tool to be accompanied by sweeping generalizations about, for example, the evangelists' total disregard for historical accuracy, or the level of legendary material in the Old Testament. Historical criticism is helpful in understanding the original meaning of the text when it is used respectfully as a tool and not as a weapon to justify arbitrary and subjective assumptions one has made about the text. As in all theological study, historical criticism must be used to discover the truth about the text and not simply to bolster assumptions about it.

In concluding this section, let us place the issue of the tools of modern critical studies in perspective by the following quotation.

The preceding methods can each be used as an end in itself, but they treat the Bible as what it incidentally is and not as what it essentially is. It is language but not a textbook on language. It is literature, and often superb, but it was not written for aesthetic ends. It is history but not history for history's sake. Essentially it is a book of faith. Biblical criticism within its sole proper framework--the totality of theological reflection--is all prolegomena to biblical theology. It clears the way to ask intelligently of each writer the questions which impelled him to write: What of God? What of man? What of the world? What of life and death and salvation? Biblical theology is the constructive and positive phase of biblical criticism.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Returning to the original question, the role of scholarship in arriving at doctrine, we ask, Is a scholar wrong because he is a scholar? The answer most surely must be No. Is he right because he is a scholar? Again, No. Like all human beings he may be right and he may be wrong. It is an equally bigoted position to maintain that scholars rarely err, as it is to maintain that they are a faithless lot of academics who lack a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Surely we can affirm a position which avoids these foolish extremes.

Is a scholar important in the determination of doctrine? Yes, he certainly is. He has gifts of knowledge, insight and interpretation which must be respected within the community of the church. These abilities, utilized under the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit, must be taken very seriously by the church. It is perverse blindness for a church to go on insisting it is right in its adherence to its traditions in the face of evidence presented by scholars, within and without, to the contrary. It is the duty of the church to ever create a climate within its academic circles where there will be freedom to speak clearly and forthrightly to the theological issues that are of relevance to the church.

Does it appear that we have not precisely answered the question of what the scholar's role is in the determination of doctrine? This is true.

There is no simple recipe, no mathematical formula with variables that may be carefully substituted to arrive at the precise equation. But we do affirm that scholars have certain obligations to fulfil to themselves, the text, their colleagues and their church. We also affirm that they have certain tools at their disposal that must be used carefully. We further affirm that their conclusions must be respected and thoroughly considered. Scholars are not infallible, but they may well be more often right than lay persons who lack special training in theology.

The following words from Helmut Thielicke provide an appropriate conclusion as they suggest what the relation may be between the work of the scholar and the more creedally specific doctrinal statements of a church.

. . . A purely intellectual encounter in question and answer form can go on forever and never reach a decision. This is one reason why doctrinal decisions are not made in the framework of theological discussion but take the form of confession and anathema, using theological arguments and provoking theological controversies, but not being themselves the product of theological argumentations.¹⁹

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APPENDIX

I have not made any extended applications of the foregoing principles to the contemporary SDA situation. However, it would seem that this paper may be especially valuable if we were to attach a brief outline of the consequences of the proper fulfillment of scholarly obligations for some of the traditional beliefs of Adventism.

For the following, I am totally indebted to Raymond F. Cottrell. Most of the statements that follow are taken verbatim from his unpublished, 38-page paper, "A Hermeneutic for Daniel 8:14." Because later papers in this series will elaborate these points, for the sake of brevity and convenience, I am, at this point, simply citing the conclusions of Cottrell's thirty years of research.

First, we note Cottrell's hermeneutic. The method should:

- (i) be faithful to the inspired Word;
- (ii) proceed inductively;
- (iii) be objective;
- (iv) consider the historical situation to which each message originally spoke;
- (v) be based on the text of the Bible in its original languages;
- (vi) consider textual variations in the ancient manuscripts and versions;
- (vii) recognize the context of each word, expression, or statement as normative for its meaning;
- (viii) make discriminating use of the analogy of Scripture, an extended form of context;
- (ix) follow a sound, coherent reasoning process;
- (x) lead knowledgeable persons of good will to a reasonable working consensus.

Second, we observe the results of the application of these principles to Daniel 8:14 alongside the results of using a "proof text" method.

PROOF-TEXT METHOD

1. Sanctuary

The sanctuary in heaven (by analogy with the Book of Hebrews).

2. Its (implied) defilement, or desecration.

The sanctuary in heaven is defiled by the confessed and forgiven sin-guilt of God's repentant people, transferred in figure to it as Christ our High Priest accepts responsibility for it (by analogy with the ancient sanctuary service).

3. Its cleansing, or being set right

The cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven by the removal of the accumulated sin-guilt of God's repentant people, and transfer of responsibility for it to Satan, who is ultimately responsible for it. This is accomplished through a process of investigative judgment on a great antitypical day of atonement, in which each person's life record is investigated in order to determine his eligibility for admission to Christ's eternal kingdom (by analogy with the day of atonement of Leviticus 16 and the judgment of Daniel 7).

4. The evenings and the mornings

The dark and light parts of a 24-hour day, and thus "days" (by analogy with Genesis 1:5, etc., and accepting the KJV "days").

HISTORICAL METHOD

The temple in Jerusalem (by context throughout the Book of Daniel).

The temple in Jerusalem is defiled, or desecrated, by an alien tyrant--the little horn of 8:9-13, the prince who is to come of 9:26-27, or king of the north of 11:31; 12:11 (by context).

The cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, or restoration from its desecration by the alien tyrant, to its rightful state (as required by the context in chapter 8 and analogous passages in chapters 9 and 11-12).

The evening and morning ritual worship services of the temple (based on the inherent meaning and usage of the words in a sanctuary context throughout the Old Testament, as in Daniel 8:9-14).

PROOF TEXT METHOD

5. Two thousand and three hundred

2,300 literal "days" interpreted as figurative for 2,300 years of prophetic time (assuming that 'ereb and boqer designate 24-hour days, and by analogy with Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6).

6. Commencement of the 2,300 evenings and mornings

The 2,300 evenings and mornings begin with the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. (By a series of assumptions: [1] 9:24-27 continues the explanation of the vision of 8:9-14, begun but not completed in 8:20-27, so making 9:24-27 essentially parallel to 8:9-14, [2] defining the Hebrew word nehtak of 9:24 as "cut off," [3] the 70 weeks of years of 9:24 were thus "cut off" from a longer period, [4] given the parallel between chapters 8 and 9, the 70 weeks of years were therefore "cut off" from the 2,300 days/years, [5] the 70 weeks of years begin with the decree to restore and build Jerusalem, verse 25, [6] there were three such decrees, by Cyrus in 538/7 B.C., by Darius in 520/19 B.C., and by Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. The fact that a third decree was necessary proves that the first two were not effective and that the third decree therefore marks the beginning of this time period, [7] the 2,300 days/years and the 70 weeks of years begin simultaneously. The fact that 9:24-27 presents Christ entering upon His ministry at the beginning of the 70th of the 70 weeks of

HISTORICAL METHOD

2,300 ritual worship services, of which there were two each day. 2,300 such services would be conducted over a period of 1,150 days, which is, accordingly, the period of time indicated (based on the meaning of the words themselves and on their uniform usage throughout the Old Testament in a sanctuary context, as in Daniel 8:9-14).

At the middle of the 70th of the 70 weeks of years of Daniel 9:27.

PROOF TEXT METHOD

years, and dying on the cross in the middle of the week, confirms the dates 457 B.C. and A.D. 27, 31, and 34 as those indicated by the prophecy).

7. Conclusion of the 2,300 evenings and mornings.

The 2,300 evenings and mornings (= 2,300 days/years) ended on October 22, 1844 (on the basis of the analogies and assumptions and on the 1844 date for the Passover by Karaite reckoning).

HISTORICAL METHOD

The 2,300 evenings and mornings (= 1,150 literal days) ended 110 days prior to the ending of the 70th of the 70 weeks of years (on the basis of the explicit statements of the angel Gabriel).

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