

## Lesson 9

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I read all of the assigned pages in the Hayes and Holladay text and took careful notes on each chapter.

Here is an explanation of each criticism studied in this assignment:

- Literary Criticism encompasses all questions pertaining to the composition of a text such as authorship, historical setting, purpose for writing, literary purpose and literary form (Hayes and Holladay, p.90). Literary criticism encompasses a broad range of interests.

These include:

- o Literary structure: how a text is arranged or organized
- o Literary style: techniques of language usage
- o Literary purpose: author's intent or as a function of the text itself
- o Literary mood: emotions associated with, or created by, a writing
- o Literary strategy: how various elements are deployed within a single genre to achieve a certain purpose
- o Literary imagination: the world reflected in a text and the world a text creates in the reader's mind.

There are some important points to remember when we look at the Bible using literary criticism: The Bible is being read like any other body of literature. We must read the Bible with some literary competence and discretion (Hayes and Holladay, p.91). It is important to note two essential parts of literary content which are that we must read what precedes and follows the text immediately and the chapter in which the text is found or a slightly larger literary unit (Hayes and Holladay, p. 93-94). When we look at the Bible in terms of literary structure we can keep the following in mind: thematic interests are called Wisdom Writings, Chronological schemes are known as the Historical books, plot or plot motifs are called narratives, argumentative strategies are found in some Pauline letters, alphabetic lines in which the successive letters of the alphabet are used to give external arrangement to material are found in several of the Psalms and Lamentations, speeches and summations are found in Deuteronomy - 2 Kings and Matthew, geographical references are in Exodus through Numbers, common subject matter is found in the OT law codes and we will find series of visions in some of the OT prophetic books and Revelation (Hayes and Holladay, p. 95).

Structuralist Criticism is a set of methodologies used to analyze many types of human thought and behavior. Here are some basic assumptions of structuralism: all social activity is governed by certain conventions, convictions, and rules, the foundational structures of all cultural systems manifest themselves in every form of

human social activity, and humans have an innate capacity to structure their experiences into patterns of meaning by creating polarities and binary opposites (Hayes and Holladay, p. 140). Structuralists are more interested in how texts communicate meaning than in what they communicate. There are two underlying exegetical assumptions of structuralism known as ahistoricity and universal ordering principles. Ahistoricity refers to how one experiences a text as present to then – now. Text is timeless and structuralists try to discern underlying assumptions of the text and how it expresses universal concerns. They also tend to concentrate on how the text works in the reader-text relationship (Hayes and Holladay, p. 141-142).

Structuralists are concerned with the final form of the text meaning that the text is viewed as a completed text that sets the agenda for structuralist critics and they accept a given text as received and work with it (Hayes and Holladay, p. 142). Structuralists understand time by setting aside questions related to the author, original audience, and historical setting. Time is also studied in terms of diachronic (concerns of a text as having developed over time and implies a linear form of investigation in which we can chart development along a time line) and synchronic (a text is read “without time” or without reference to time). The universal ordering principles that are part of structuralist criticism are theory of language (a complex set of ordered symbols verbal and non verbal through which meaning is conveyed), surface and deep structures (a text reflects deep structures of conviction and world ordering and deep structures are encoded within the text) (Hayes and Holladay, p. 143). There are three principles of structuralist exegesis which are: the structures of the text reflect the subject matter and theology of the material, the principle of binary opposition is evident throughout and the focus is on how we read a text instead of how the author writes a text. Here is structuralist criticism we are concerned with how we perceive meaning in the text as opposed to what the author originally intended.

Canonical Criticism says that the Scriptures were created by the communities of Israel and the Christian Church or we can say that those communities were created by their Scriptures. When we look at sacred texts in this criticism we see that these texts are the foundational documents of a religious community and they play a role in constituting the religious community and regulating its life and faith. The texts reveal divine truth in a unique and unrepeatable matter. The writings originated through special inspiration which gives them revelatory character. The writings also reveal truth about God and the divine will in ways that other religious writings do not (Hayes and Holladay, p. 152). Here are some distinctive features of canonical criticism: it is synchronic, the interest is in the final form of the text, the focus is on complete biblical writings rather than individual passages, the stress focused on the relationship between the text and its reader and lastly canonical criticism is overtly theological in its approach

(Hayes and Holladay, p. 156). There are three factors that affect the practice of canonical criticism; different biblical canons, different faith perspectives and different canonical arrangements (Hayes and Holladay, p. 157).

The conscientious Bible reader is aided by these criticisms because of their formal structure and processes that guide the reader. These criticisms also help the bible reader to contextualize their approach and their method of reading with meaning and purpose.

I think that the breakdown I listed earlier with regard to literary structure explain how we use this criticism when reading the text. I'd like to add that there are some relevant questions we can ask of the text from this perspective such as how does the particular passage function within its immediate and larger context?, is it transitional, is it climactic?, is it illustrative?, Is it extrinsic to the larger literary unit – does it intrude into the literary context? (Hayes and Holladay, p. 97). The structuralist critic looks at the parable of the Good Samaritan in this way:

- Sender is God – sends a message
- Object – well being
- Recipient – wounded person (Message is sent to ensure the recipient's well being)
- Helper – innkeeper
- Subject – Samaritan (Agent commissioned by the sender to transmit the object to the recipient)
- Opponent – Robbers – sent to foil the sender's plan
- It is important to note here that in most narratives life's normalcy or equilibrium is disturbed in some way, anarchy or trouble develops (Hayes and Holladay, p.145-146).

The canonical critic gives us a look at the book of Isaiah as the sacred text we are to examine. This book provides one of the clearest illustrations of the impact of canonical reading. "Second Isaiah" as this material is called, has been attached to a collection of prophetic oracles attributed to the prophet Isaiah, who lived during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE reigns of Kings, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. In the editorial process that produced the canonical book of Isaiah, chapters 40-55 were detached from the events of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The canonical material no longer has explicit associations with this historical period. When these chapters were added to the earlier section of Isaiah (chapters 1-39), they were rehistoricized by being associated with the prophet Isaiah and the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This shift gave chapters 40-55 a future oriented perspective. In their new setting, these chapters also acquired a more redemptive character (Hayes and Holladay, p. 160).

Selected Text for Criticism: Psalm 150

Literary Criticism

- How does this psalm of thanksgiving relate to the entire book?
- What is the mood of this text?

- What patterns are dictated for use in rituals and worship?
- How is literary style shown here with the repetition of “Praise” to begin each verse?
- What is the literary purpose of the text?
- What comes up in the mind of the reader in terms of the world reflected in a text and in the reader’s mind?

#### Structuralism

- How is this topic of praise in worship timeless?
- What emotions are invoked?
- Are there any binary oppositions?
- Why is there an exhortation (command) to praise God?
- What deep structures are encoded in the text?
- How are the underlying ordering principles conveyed by the author’s use of language?

#### Canonical

- What theological principle is the text teaching?
- How do the Psalms create a community of faith and believers in Israel? In the Christian church?
- What is the revelatory character of the author?
- What does the author want us to understand about the revelatory character of God?