

Name: Eric Adarkwah

Course Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey P. Garcia

Course: Introduction to Biblical Studies -BIB103

Topic: Book Review on the Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously

12/14/2020

The book entitled “The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible critically and Religiously, Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns and Daniel J. Harrington collaboratively emphasis on how to critically and religiously read the Bible having been convinced of the ongoing religious relevance of the texts of the Bible. They address the challenge of reading the Bible both critically and religiously from Jewish, Catholic and Protestant perspective. They do this by integrating the complex nature of religion into short essay and responses. Having enough information about the historical background of the first century Jews will help us to analyze the text critically and meaningfully and apply it accordingly. Most of the Bible passages were first written to specific Jewish audience and so for us to get the full meaning of the text we must take into consideration the historical cultural background of the people who wrote the text and the audience who first received the text.

The writers emphasize on how Jews, Catholic and Protestant can and do read both the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament from a critical and religious perspective simultaneously. It is very relevant to look at the similarities and the differences in how biblical text are read, interpreted, and applied in each tradition to make a meaningful critical analysis. The writers noted that to understand the meaning of the biblical text’s in its original setting, they use the tools and methods of historical criticism as a necessary preliminary to a sound religious reading. Biblical criticism, higher criticism, historical criticism, and historical critical method were frequently used interchangeably not to point out errors in the Bible but to establish the original, contextual

meaning of biblical texts and assess their historical accuracy. In biblical studies, textual criticism means gathering the ancient witnesses in Hebrew, Greek, and other ancient language, comparing them, and then discerning which reading most likely represents what the original author wrote or at least discerning the earliest form of the text that can be reconstructed. Some scholars adopt higher criticism with the intention to recover the original text, but they end up being biased, over speculative and untrustworthy in their research. Sometimes Because of ancient textual errors, scholars use conjectural emendation. Scholars establish the meaning and use of a word and determine what it may have meant in a particular context. The writers address the nature of historical criticism emphasizing that the historical critics of the Bible argue that they know enough about the world and language of the Bible that they can offer reasonable and compelling explanation of the author's meaning. They use corroborating evidence from antiquity to see if certain models that are propose are reasonable. Non historical critical insights are good, but they do not give us understanding of the biblical text in its original context. Biblical interpretation has its root in the Hebrew Bible itself.

The writers reiterated on the emergency of modern historical criticism. They noted that the modern historical criticism which had its deep roots in early Jewish, patristic, medieval, Renaissance and Reformation biblical interpretation began to undermine biblical authority. This occurred when biblical interpretation moved from the monastery and the pulpit to scholar's study and eventually to German university. Some circles of European Enlightenment ceased to acknowledge the Bible as reforming and purifying the Church and this eventually affected the Church's authority and even the authority of the state by which the Church whether Protestant or Catholic was supported. People criticized that religious tradition should be subject to historical criticism and thus the historians cannot speak of what did or did not happen, only probabilities.

The idea that the same criteria use to deal with the present should be used to deal with the past became very common. For instance, some scholars believed that the red sea did not part by a miracle of God but by a strong wind. Some scholars started focusing on pointing out errors, contradictions and shortcomings found in the biblical text and because of that many regarded the Bible as harmful, irrelevant and others also ignored it. The central theme of the Bible stressed on divine intervention in history and in human affairs and because of that the Bible cannot be interpreted in terms of worldly cause and effect relation.

The Jewish scholars believe that the Bible is the literal record of earlier pre-normative stages in Israel religion and the role played by man in the creation of the Bible itself, not merely in its interpretation and determination of its normative application, but in the text and its transmission. Judaism is a Bible centered religion that believed that the Bible is a fundamentally cryptic document, written in special divine speech that must be decoded. Judaism is the evolving religious civilization of Jewish people which began in the biblical period and has been changing ever since. The historical critical method is important part of the study of the Hebrew Bible because it helps form Jewish identity, informs lifestyle, and help one to understand what the Bible meant in its earliest periods and who try to integrate those understanding, if possible, into contemporary life. Judaism is not interested in the Torah, or in the entire Hebrew Bible, primarily in terms of what the text first meant, and how it originated from a historical critical perspective because in Judaism the Torah is more symbolic than real, more celebrated than maintained. Over the last few decades, some Jewish scholars has been actively involved in critical biblical study even though it is seen as a taboo. Scholars who discuss issues such as critical Jewish studies including biblical studies reconcile critical, academic study and Jewish belief and practice in a variety of ways. Biblical scholarship and traditional Judaism are mostly

incompatible. In Judaism, interpretation of rabbinic tradition is focus on the biblical text and not on the individual just like the New Testament in Christianity. In Judaism, the Torah is the central part of the canon, so when the critical method for the study of the Torah was developed it became a threat to Jewish belief and practice although certain passages of the Hebrew Bible itself support the historical critical perspective. In Judaism, belief is a matter of trust in God expressed in obedience to the Torah and the idea of Torah being God's word is spoken of metaphorically because God does not speak the same way human do. Some Scholars believe that God did not dictate the entire Torah to Moses and several medieval scholars recognized that mistakes must have transpired as the Torah was transmitted. Revelation is understood in Judaism as a core Jewish experience and that the Torah somehow reflects revelation but not in its entirety the process of revelation. Scholars over the years have been changing the Torah text as they search for more original text closer to the early revelation.

The Catholic theology regards the Bible as a divine revelation and most Catholic today work on the principle of limited inerrancy of the Bible and point that the Bible teaches firmly, faithfully and without error the truth that God wishes to be recorded in the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation. The Catholic teachings on biblical interpretation provides us with a good framework. It encourages us to place the biblical text in their original historical context and to grasp as best what the biblical writers were trying to say to their original audiences. The task of biblical interpretation does not end with determining the text's meaning in the past, it challenges us to consider its significance for today and invites us to engage in religious or spiritual reading of it. Historical criticism has an official, recognized, and respected place in Catholic tradition. It has promoted an attitude of openness toward scholarly advances in our understanding of Scripture and provides considerable credence to criticism of modern scholarship when offered.

The growing knowledge of ancient Israel's intellectual and religious context has challenged many conventional, traditional interpretation of the Bible.

Protestants have a view of Scripture and its relationship to biblical criticism that is determined by factors wholly outside the boundaries of Judaism. Many conservative protestant old testament scholars accept a very limited notion of source criticism and for them to engage in critical scholarship on the compositional history of the Pentateuch, they have the unique burden of framing Jesus' words in such a way s to make that possible while also maintaining theological integrity. The analogy of incarnation can help Christians to imagine how they can hold that their Bible is divine and human at the same time, and that therefore they should welcome ancient Near East parallels and influence that historians and archaeologists may bring to their attention as part of the world in which the Bible as the word of God took shape. It is important that when one is studying the Scripture, he recognizes that there are different ways of reading the texts and that much depends on the attitude and assumption that various interpreters brought to the text.

Application of the historical critical method to a biblical text can open that text to greater understanding and appreciation, can cross denominational religious lines, and can enrich the theologies of the interpreters and the communities in which they stand. The divine Torah in contemporary Judaism hold the view that modern discoveries of scientific research in the domain of nature and history does not oppose the doctrines of Judaism. The Bible reflect the primitive ideas of its own age, and a time clothing its conception of divine providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narrative. The Bible is an ancient text and must be updated not through emendation or rewriting but through interpretation. Distinguishing between the world of, behind, and in front of the text help us to interpret the text within the right context. Most scholars are now able to effectively combine the critical and religious approaches to Scripture meaningfully.

## Word Cited

Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. “*The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously*” published by Oxford University Press 198 Madison Avenue, New York, 2012