

Biblical Criticism in the Contemporary Homiletic Praxis

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Abstract

Biblical criticism had been a tedious task over the years tailored towards unveiling the locus of meaning and theological significance of a selected biblical text. The exegetes undertook a systematic process and critical methods to interpret a text for the comprehension of the contemporary readers or hearers in order to avoid heretical teachings as a result of misinterpretation. These methods exhumed under the umbrella of hermeneutics and exegeses of sacred books include textual or lower criticism, source or higher criticism, literary criticism with other sub-methods that emanated from it. This paper through a historical approach explained the various methods and tools of biblical criticism that could be relevant in contemporary homiletic praxis if properly harnessed. The paper discovered the Bible as an indispensable library and holy book to humanity that attracted global attention of scholars and theologians in the development of critical and systematic methods of interpretation known as biblical criticism. These critical tools illuminate the knowledge of an exegete for effectiveness in homiletic practicum. The paper recommends that the acquaintance with biblical criticism would give better insight in understanding Old Testament religion and theology. Nevertheless, biblical criticism should be conscientiously studied in order to be equipped for theological education and to avoid heretical teachings as a result of misinterpretation of the scriptures. A good knowledge of Biblical criticism helps to provide balanced comprehension in homily preparation and to abrogate

the obliviousness of hermeneutical theories and the Sitzim Lebenof a biblical text.

Introduction

The search for understanding the Bible's meaning originated with particular questions not only about the content of individual books, but also about when, why, how these biblical books were written before canonization. In order to provide reasonable answers to these questions, Mitchell (1990) avers that biblical scholars have employed scientific and quasi-scientific methods. It must, however, be said that 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.

According to Barton(1984) biblical criticism is a form of literary criticism that seeks to analyze the Bible through asking certain questions about the text, such as who wrote it, when was it written, for whom was it written, why was it written, what was the historical and cultural setting of the text, how well preserved was the original text, how unified is the text, how was the text transmitted over time, what is the text's literary genre, and how did it come to be accepted as part of the Bible? Providing possible answers to the above questions gives insight in homiletics which is the art and science of preaching the gospel. Homiletics involves both the preparation and delivery of a sermon which borders on the interpretation of the scriptures to the contemporary audience. This paper therefore, aims to x-ray biblical criticism and its relevance to homiletics in the contemporary era.

Biblical Criticism

Biblical criticism is an umbrella term for those methods of studying the Bible that embrace two distinctive perspectives: the concern to avoid dogma and bias by applying a non-sectarian, reason-based judgment, and the reconstruction of history according to contemporary understanding. Muller (1998) observes that biblical criticism uses the grammar, structure, development, and relationship of language to identify such characteristics as the Bible's literary structure, its genre, its context, meaning, authorship, and origins.

Biblical criticism has been traditionally divided into textual criticism also called lower criticism—which seeks to establish the original text out of the variant readings of ancient manuscripts; and source criticism - also called higher criticism which focuses on identifying the author, date, sources, and place of writing for each book of the Bible. For Barton (1984) biblical criticism generally treats the Bible as a human book rather than accepting it as the inspired Word of God, but the tools of biblical criticism today are used both by skeptics and believers alike to better understand the scriptures in relation to the spiritual lives of the contemporary audience. Although questions about the sources and manuscripts of the Bible date back to ancient rabbinical and patristic times, Renaissance humanism and the Protestant Reformation which laid the foundations for modern biblical criticism.

Lower Criticism

The so-called lower criticism is a branch of philology that is concerned with the identification of errors (variants) in biblical texts and manuscripts, as well as the comparison of various ancient texts. No original biblical texts exist today. What we have are copied materials from the original documents, with several

generations of copyists intervening in most cases. Lower criticism was developed in an attempt to discover what the original text actually said. It has also become an essential tool of scholars engaged in "higher criticism." Morgan and Barton suggest that when an error consists of something being left out, it is called a *deletion*. When something was added, it is called an *interpolation*. Biblical critics attempt to recognize interpolations by differences of style, theology, vocabulary, etc.

When more than one ancient manuscript exists, they can also compare the manuscripts, sometimes discovering verses that have been added, deleted, or changed. Old Testament textual critics often compare versions of the Dead Sea Scrolls with the Septuagint Greek and Hebrew Masoretic texts.

New Testament examples include comparisons of various ancient texts of the Gospels and epistles. Soulen and Kendall (2001) discovers that probable later additions to original text include: The name of the woman taken in adultery in John 7:53–8:11. The word usually translated as "virgin" who will be "with child" in the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14) may be better rendered as "young woman," since the Hebrew term does not specify virginity. Similarly, the word "camel" in Jesus' saying that, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God," (Mark 10:25) may actually involve a similarly-spelled word in Aramaic meaning "rope."

Higher Criticism

Higher criticism is a name given to critical studies of the Bible that treat it as a text created by human beings at a particular historical time and for various human motives, in contrast with the treatment of the Bible as the inerrant word of God. According to Brueggemann, Birch, Fretheim, and Petersen (1999), Higher

criticism thus studies the biblical text as it would study any other ancient text, in order to discover its cultural context, audience, purpose, influences, and ultimately its meaning.

The term "higher criticism" became popular in Europe from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth century and many scholars dealt with general theories regarding the sources, editing, and historical context of the Bible as opposed to dealing with the more detailed minutiae of textual criticism. Higher criticism was also at the heart of the historical Jesus movement, which finds its expression today in the Jesus Seminar. Source criticism is one type of higher criticism, in which scholars seek to understand the possible components of the current texts, as well as what historical and cultural factors influenced their development.

Two primary examples of source criticism are the Documentary hypothesis in Old Testament studies and the theory of the Q Document in New Testament studies. The Documentary hypothesis, also known as the Graf-Wellhausen theory, holds that the Pentateuch or first five books of the Hebrew Bible are not the work of Moses as traditionally claimed, but come from several later sources which were combined into their current form during the seventh century B.C.E. The Q Document was posited by New Testament scholars to explain the relations among the Synoptic Gospels. Coggins and Houlden (1990) opines that the most popular theory is that Mark was written first, with both Matthew and Luke using a "sayings" source, called "Q" to expand Mark's basic narrative.

Methods/Types of Biblical Criticism

Biblical criticism has spawned many subdivisions other than the broad categories of higher and lower criticism, or textual criticism and source criticism, as well as using techniques found in literary

criticism generally. Some of these subdivisions are: textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism and other criticisms under literary criticism.

Textual Criticism

Textual criticism examines the text itself and all associated manuscripts to determine the original text. It is one of the largest areas of Biblical criticism in terms of the sheer amount of information it addresses. McKenzie and Kaltner (2007) reveal that the roughly 900 manuscripts found at Qumran include the oldest extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. They represent every book except Esther, though most are fragmentary. The New Testament has been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work, having over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages including Syriac, Slavic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Coptic and Armenian. The dates of these manuscripts range from c.110 - 125 (the 52 papyrus) to the introduction of printing in Germany in the 15th century. There are also a million New Testament quotations in the collected writings of the Church Fathers of the first four centuries. There are a total of 476 extant non-Christian manuscripts dated to the second century. These texts were all written by hand, by copying from another handwritten text, so they are not alike in the manner of a printed work. The differences between the manuscripts are called variants. A variant is simply any variation between two texts, and while the exact number is somewhat disputed, scholars agree that more texts produce more variants. This means there are more variants concerning New Testament texts than Old Testament texts. Variants are not evenly distributed throughout the texts. Aland and Barbara (1987) explain that charting variants shows that the New Testament is 62.9%

variant-free. Many variants originate in simple misspellings or copying wrongly. For example, a scribe would drop one or more letters, skip a word or line, write one letter for another, transpose letters, and so on. Some variants represent a scribal attempt to simplify or harmonize, by changing a word or a phrase. Ehrman (2005) illuminates that scribe 'A' will introduce mistakes which are not in the manuscript of scribe 'B'. Copies of text 'A' with the mistake will subsequently contain that same mistake. The multiple generations of texts that follow, containing the error, are referred to as a "family" of texts.

Over time, the texts descended from 'A' that share the error, and those from 'B' that do not share it, will diverge further, but later texts will still be identifiable as descended from one or the other because of the presence or absence of that original mistake. Textual criticism studies the differences between these families to piece together what the original looked like. Sorting out the wealth of source material is complex, so textual families were sorted into categories tied to geographical areas. The divisions of the New Testament textual families were *Alexandrian* (also called the "Neutral text"), *Western* (Latin translations), and *Eastern* (used by Antioch and Constantinople). Some scholars have recently called to abandon older approaches to textual criticism in favour of new computer-assisted methods for determining manuscript relationships in a more reliable way.

Source Criticism

Source criticism is the search for the original sources that form the basis of biblical text. It can be traced back to the 17th-century French priest Richard Simon. In Old Testament studies, source criticism is generally focused on identifying sources within a single text. For example, the modern view of the origins of the

book of Genesis was first laid in 1753 by the French physician Jean Astruc. He presumed Moses used ancient documents to write it, so his goal was identifying and reconstructing those documents by separating the book of Genesis back into those original sources. He discovered Genesis' alternates use of two different names for God while the rest of the Pentateuch after Exodus 3 omits that alternation. He found repetitions of certain events, such as parts of the flood story that are repeated three times. He also found apparent anachronisms: statements seemingly from a later time than Genesis was set. Bird (2010) avers that Astruc hypothesized that this separate material was fused into a single unit that became the book of Genesis thereby creating its duplications and parallelisms. Further examples of the products of source criticism include its two most influential and well-known theories concerning the origins of the Pentateuch (the Documentary hypothesis or JEDP sources by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918)) and the four gospels (two-source hypothesis).

Form Criticism

Form criticism began in the early twentieth century when Karl Ludwig Schmidt observed that Mark's Gospel is composed of short units. Schmidt asserted these small units were remnants and evidence of the oral tradition that preceded the writing of the gospels. Bauckham (2006) says this "most significant insight", which established the foundation of form criticism, has never been refuted.

Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932) and Martin Dibelius (1883-1947) built from this insight and pioneered form criticism. Form criticism breaks the Bible down into those short units, called *pericopes*, which are then classified by genre: prose or verse, letters, laws, court archives, war hymns, poems of lament, and so

on. Form criticism then theorizes concerning the individual pericope's *Sitzim Leben* ("setting in life" or "place in life"). Based on their understanding of folklore, form critics believed the early Christian communities formed the sayings and teachings of Jesus according to their needs (their "situation in life"), and that each form could be identified by the situation in which it had been created.

Muller (1998) observed that writing tends to develop in a linear manner, beginning with a crude first draft which is then edited bit by bit to become more polished. Oral tradition is more complex and multidirectional in its development. Religion scholar Burke O. Long sums up the contemporary view by observing that, since oral tradition does not follow the same developmental pattern as written texts, laws of oral development cannot be arrived at by studying written texts. Additional challenges of form criticism have also been raised; form criticism throughout the mid-twentieth century was so focused toward finding each *pericope's* original form, which it distracted from any serious consideration of memory as a dynamic force in the construction of the gospels or the early church community tradition. For some, the many challenges to form criticism mean its future is in doubt.

Redaction criticism

Redaction is the process of editing multiple sources, often with a similar theme, into a single document. Redaction critics focus on discovering how the literary units were originally edited - "redacted"—into their current forms. Soulen and Richard (2001) narrates that Redaction criticism developed after World War II in Germany and in the 1950s in England and North America, and can be seen as a correlative to form criticism. It is dependent on both source and form criticism, because it is necessary to identify the

traditions before determining how the redactor has made use of them. However, redaction criticism rejects source and form criticism's description of the Bible texts as mere recollections of fragments. Where form criticism fractures the biblical elements into smaller and smaller individual pieces, redaction criticism attempts to interpret the whole literary unit. As a result, redaction criticism "provides a corrective to the methodological imbalance of form criticism". Form criticism saw the synoptic writers as mere collectors and focused on the *Sitzim Leben* as the creator of the texts. Redaction criticism deals more positively with the Gospel writers restoring an understanding of them as theologians of the early church.

Richard and Kendall Soule explain that when redaction criticism is applied to the synoptic gospels, "it is the evangelist's use, disuse or alteration of the traditions open to him that is in view, rather than the form and original setting of the traditions themselves." Since redaction criticism was developed from form criticism, it shares many of its weaknesses. For example, it assumes an extreme skepticism toward the historicity of Jesus and the gospels just as form criticism does. Redaction criticism seeks the historical community of the final redactors of the gospels, though there is often no textual clue, and its method in finding the final editor's theology is flawed. Wegner (2001) notes that in the New Testament, redaction discerns the evangelist's theology by focusing and relying upon the differences between the gospels, yet it is unclear whether every difference has theological meaning, how much meaning, or whether a difference is a stylistic or even an accidental change. Further, it is not at all clear whether the difference was made by the evangelist, who could have used the already-changed-story when writing a gospel. The evangelist's theology more likely depends on what the gospels have in common

as well as their differences. One of the weaknesses of redaction criticism in its New Testament application is that it assumes Markan priority.

Redaction criticism can only function when sources are already known, and since redaction criticism of the Synoptic has been based on the Markan priority of two-source theory, if the priority of Matthew is ever established, redaction criticism would have to begin all over again. Followers of other theories concerning the Synoptic problem, such as those who support the Greisbach hypothesis which says Matthew was written first, Luke second, and Mark third, do not accept redaction criticism.

Literary criticism

Hayes and Holladay (1987) states that literary criticism shifted scholarly attention from historical and pre-compositional matters to the text itself, becoming the dominant form of biblical criticism in a relatively short period of about thirty years. New Testament scholar Paul R. House says the discipline of linguistics, new views of historiography, and the decline of older methods of criticism opened the door for literary criticism. In 1957 literary critic Northrop Frye wrote an analysis of the Bible from the perspective of his literary background that used literary criticism to understand the Bible forms. It became influential in moving biblical criticism from a historical to a literary focus. By 1974, the two methodologies being used in literary criticism were rhetorical analysis and structuralism.

For Soulen and Richard (2001), rhetorical analysis divides a passage into units, observe show a single unit shifts or breaks, taking special note of poetic devices, meter, parallelism, word play and so on. It then charts the writer's thought progression from one unit to the next, and finally, assembles the data in an attempt to

explain the author's intentions behind the piece while Structuralism looks at the language to discern "layers of meaning" with the goal of uncovering a work's "deep structures": the premises as well as the purposes of the author.

Types of literary criticism

(a) *Canonical criticism*: Canonical criticism has both theological and literary roots. Its origins are found in the Church's views of scripture as sacred as well as in the literary critics who began to influence biblical scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s. Canonical criticism responded to two things: 1) the sense that biblical criticism had obscured the meaning and authority of the canon of scripture; and 2) the fundamentalism in the Christian Church that had arisen in America in the 1920s and 1930s. Canonical criticism does not reject historical criticism and sociological analysis, but considers them secondary in importance. Canonical critics believe the texts should be treated with respect as the canon of a believing community.

Oswalt (1987) opines that Canonical critics use the tools of biblical criticism to study the books of the Bible, but approach the books as whole units. They take the books as finished works and treat each book as a unity, instead of taking them apart and focusing on isolated pieces. Sanders (1992) agrees that this begins from the position that scripture contains within it what is needed to understand it, rather than being understandable only as the product of a historically determined process. Canonical criticism helped literary criticism move biblical studies in a new direction by focusing on the text rather than the author. It uses the text itself, the needs of the communities addressed by those texts, and the interpretation likely to have been formed originally to meet those needs. The canonical critic then relates this to the overall canon.

(b) *Rhetorical criticism*: Rhetorical criticism is the systematic effort to understand the message being communicated in a focused and conscious manner. Biblical rhetorical criticism asks how hearing the texts impacted the audience. It attempts to discover and evaluate the rhetorical devices, language, and methods of communication used within the texts to accomplish the goals of those texts. Rhetorical criticism seeks to understand text type, as does form criticism, but moves beyond form criticism by looking into the inner theological meaning the author was trying to communicate. The rhetorical scholar, Foss (2009) says there are ten methods of practicing rhetorical criticism, but each focuses on three dimensions of rhetoric: the authors, what they use to communicate, and what they are trying to communicate.

(c) *Narrative criticism*: Here, critics approach scripture as story. Narrative criticism began being used to study the New Testament in the 1970s, and a decade later, study also included the Old Testament. However, the first time a published approach was labeled *narrative criticism* was in 1980, in the article "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," written by Bible scholar David Rhoads. Narrative criticism has its foundations in form criticism, but it is not a historical discipline. It is purely literary. Historical critics began to recognize the Bible was not being studied in the manner other ancient writings were studied, and they began asking if these texts should be understood on their own terms before being used as evidence of something else like history. It is now accepted as "axiomatic in literary circles that the meaning of literature transcends the historical intentions of the author. For Powell (1990) narrative criticism embraces the textual unity of canonical criticism, while admitting the existence of the sources and redactions of historical criticism.

Responses to Biblical Criticism

At first, biblical historical criticism and its deductions and implications were so unpopular outside liberal Protestant scholarship it created a schism in Protestantism. The American fundamentalist movement of the 1920s and 1930s began, at least partly, as a response to nineteenth century liberalism. Some fundamentalists like Bendroth (2017) believed liberal critics had invented an entirely new religion “completely at odds with the Christian faith”. However, there were also conservative Protestants who accepted it.

William Robertson Smith (1846–1894) is an example of a Contemporary developments nineteenth century evangelical who believed historical criticism was a legitimate outgrowth of the Protestant Reformation’s focus on the biblical text. According to Rogerson (2000) He saw it as a “necessary tool to enable intelligent churchgoers” to understand the Bible, and was a pioneer in establishing the final form of the supplementary hypothesis of the documentary hypothesis. A similar view was later advocated by the Primitive Methodist biblical scholar A. S. Peake (1865–1929). Other evangelical Protestant scholars such as Edwin M. Yamauchi, Paul R. House, and Daniel B. Wallace have continued the tradition of conservatives contributing to critical scholarship. Prior (1999) says that Catholic studies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries avoided the use of critical methodology because of its rationalism [so there was] no significant Catholic involvement in biblical scholarship until the nineteenth century. In 1890, the French Dominican Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855–1938) established the École Biblique in Jerusalem to encourage study of the Bible using the historical-critical method. That two years later he funded a journal, spoke thereafter at various

conferences, wrote Bible commentaries that incorporated textual critical work of his own, did pioneering work on biblical genres and forms, and laid the path to overcoming resistance to the historical critical method among his fellow scholars. Furthermore, Horell (1999) notes that socio-scientific criticism is part of the wider trend in biblical criticism reflecting interdisciplinary methods and diversity. It grew out of form criticism's *Sitzim Leben* and the sense that historical form criticism had failed to adequately analyze the social and anthropological contexts which form criticism claimed had formed the texts. Using the perspectives, theories, models, and research of the social sciences to determine what social norms may have influenced the growth of biblical tradition, it is similar to historical biblical criticism in its goals and methods. Elliott (2003) opines that it has less in common with literary critical approaches. It analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the text and its environmental context.

Relevance of Biblical Criticism in Contemporary Homiletics

Much of what we know as biblical criticism today originated with modernity, but interest in understanding the meaning of biblical texts is much older than that. Even the Bible itself recognizes the need for the explanation and interpretation of its contents. The simplest form of this is translation, taking the biblical tradition, which has been recorded in one language, and making it accessible to those whose language is different. The relevance of biblical criticism cannot be overemphasized to the modern preachers as the following can be seen as some of the implications:

1. Biblical criticism emancipates the preacher from *scribism*:

The scribe takes the doctrines and the precepts found in the Bible as if they were entities in themselves. He elaborates these doctrines

into a system, and then calls upon men to subscribe to the system. It is a significant fact that literalism with its attendant dogmatism flourishes in schools which make little or no use of the methods of biblical criticism. It is difficult to see how a modern preacher could escape the influences of modern *scribism* without the aid of biblical criticism. To know the truth about the Bible delivers men from the extravagances of literalism. To be willing to let the biblical writers say what they actually did say, instead of compelling them to teach the doctrine which we prefer, is a discipline of wholesome honesty indispensable to effective preaching (Hayes and Holladay, 1987).

2. Biblical criticism compels us to find a vital, rather than a formal, test of belief: Since we find in the Bible some beliefs which we do not share, as well as some which we gladly welcome, the mere fact that a doctrine is found in the Bible does not determine whether it shall find a place in a modern theology. It is true that the revised kind of test required by biblical criticism is not often clearly worked out. Too often the attempt is made to continue talking about the sufficiency of a biblical norm in such a way as to obscure the problem in line with the views of Wasserman and Gurry (2017). But when outgrown biblical categories fail to furnish an acceptable solution to a problem, we are left with the problem on our hands without any biblical solution at all. And the problem is there anyway. It grows out of the experiences of modern life. We are driven by the inescapable consequences of biblical criticism to the recognition of the fact that the real test of doctrine is that it shall be inherently believable rather than that it shall conform to some biblical norm. We are led to ask, what actually convinces living men? Rather than to ask, what is taught in an ancient literature? That literature may suggest fruitful thinking; but so also

may modern considerations. The preacher who really follows biblical criticism will be led to a first-hand study of the religion of living people as his primary task.

3. The historical interpretation of the Bible creates interest in the social situation out of which doctrines arose: Historical interpretation trains one to look at the industrial, political, and social conditions under which men live, rather than to consider doctrines as such. The contrast between a non-critical and a critical attitude is strikingly illustrated if we compare the interpretation of the prophetic books of the Old Testament given by James M. Gray, with the interpretation given by a critical scholar. In the former case, the statements of the prophets are used to bolster up preconceived theological views; in the latter case they are windows through which we look at the life of great souls, and see the battles fought by idealistic faith in the face of discouraging circumstances. For the non-critical interpreter, the doctrines supposed to be taught by the prophets are primary. For the critical interpreter the doctrines are significant as showing the way in which a noble religious faith struggled to triumphant expression. The vision of these great souls standing in the midst of the corruption and the short-sighted complacency of their day and summoning men to face the judgment of a righteous God is a challenge to the modern preacher. His task comes to be that of challenging his own generation to face God's judgment on us. The critical study of the Bible greatly reinforces the practical and social conception of the minister's task. Bird (2010) observes that this is due to the fact that when biblical interpretation is carried through, it brings us ultimately face to face not with biblical books, not with questions of text and authorship, but with people living and aspiring under definite social and industrial conditions. The preacher inevitably

comes to be more interested in living people than in doctrinal systems.

4. Biblical criticism makes it clear that the biblical writers were children of their own age, and were speaking to their own contemporaries: The power of their preaching lay precisely in that fact. They, of course, appealed to the past. But it was to an idealized past that they made their appeal. Their primary concern was to make the present better. As the critical scholar interprets their utterances, he discovers religion in the making. The past, if it is to have spiritual value at all, must become an inspiration for living men. When we see the way in which biblical writers interpreted their own past, Clines (1998) wonders how impossible it is that a living religion should slavishly reproduce all the details of a former age. The re-edition of the materials of the Old Testament represents the constant attempt to make the past edify and inspire the present. The writers of the Bible were much more concerned to interpret religion to their contemporaries than they were to furnish exact historical narratives. This dominant interest in their present is so characteristic of biblical writers that modern historical interpretation of a book is concerned in the first instance to ascertain what the writer thought concerning his own times, regardless of whether his use of history is accurate or not. The quotations from the Old Testament found in the New throw light on the religious ideas of the New Testament writers; but scholars scarcely expect these to furnish information as to the original setting and meaning of the texts quoted. If the preacher catches this spirit of the biblical writers, he will concern himself with the religious needs of living men, using the past in such a way as to minister to those needs. McKenzie and Kaltner (2007) view no secret that biblical scholars are generally keenly aware that the

exposition of the Bible by preachers often violates the principles of accurate interpretation. If it be assumed that preaching should always be shaped by critical, historical interpretation, most preaching will fall far short of this test. If the analysis given be true, it cannot be expected that biblical criticism will have any large part in determining the message of the preacher. The biblical critic discovers the interpretation of religion to a bygone age. The preacher is speaking to a living generation. To reproduce the ancient message is the work of the technical historian rather than of the preacher. Muller (1998) asserts that the frank recognition of the fundamental difference between the historical interpretation of the Bible and the evangelical interpretation of modern religion would free both the biblical scholar and the preacher from unwelcome constraint.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that intensive effort should be exacted in understanding biblical criticism for a better comprehension of Old Testament religion and theology. Again, the knowledge of biblical criticism gives a balanced insight in homiletic preparation and deliveries. Nevertheless, biblical criticism should be conscientiously studied in order to be equipped in theological education and to avoid heretical teachings as a result of misinterpretation of the scriptures. A good knowledge of Biblical criticism helps to nullify the ignorance of hermeneutical theories and the *Sitzim Lebenin* discovering the locus of meaning of a biblical text.

Conclusion

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 commonly understood. They analyze Bible in order to understand it better. This constructive criticism strikes a balance in the preacher’s or interpreter’s knowledge of the scriptures to enrich the preparation and delivery of a homily.

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