The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism

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1. Introduction

It is not exaggerating the issue to say that redaction criticism has been one of the chief sources of contention among conservative scholars in recent years. R.T. France[1] has justifiably stated that all such scholars are agreed on three propositions:

1. Special revelation is necessary for a true knowledge of God,
2. The Bible is the supreme and only sufficient *locus* of such revelation,[2]
3. The Bible is the inspired word of God.

What they are *not* agreed upon, France observes, can be summed up largely in terms of the following three issues: the problem of traditional authorship of biblical books; the question as to how, precisely, Scripture can be accepted as reliable; and the matter of how one may arrive at the true meaning of the text. Redaction criticism impinges directly upon the latter two of these. The question of scriptural reliability, of course, embraces the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy; if the Bible is the word of God, it cannot be in error. But how can redaction criticism, with its emphasis on authorial purpose and literary techniques which serve to alter the tradition, be reconciled to this doctrine? The diverse conservative responses to this question, which reflect both the seriousness of, and lack of agreement over the issue, fall into three broad categories. A minority of scholars has settled at opposite ends of the spectrum: those who, like J.W. Montgomery, H. Linsdell and R.L. Thomas, deny that the doctrine of inerrancy is compatible with any form of redaction criticism[3] are diametrically opposed to scholars such as R.H. Gundry[4] who assert that the method is acceptable even in its more liberal form because the authors were guided by the Holy Spirit, even to the extent of being inspired to compose fresh material. The vast majority of conservatives, among them Carson, Osborne, Hagner, Guelich, Turner, Lane, Marshall and France,[5] occupy the middle ground; they accept that redaction criticism in a mild form is a legitimate critical method.

It is the purpose of the present paper to examine critically the conservative evangelical approach(es) to redaction criticism. Since, as we have seen, the scholars in question occupy various positions along the spectrum of 'orthodoxy', we should perhaps conduct our enquiry by taking a cross-section of their work and studying each sample independently; in so doing, some common concerns will no doubt emerge. Since we are more

likely to obtain a truly representative presentation of the evangelical view if we concentrate our attention on the centre rather than at the extremes, we have decided to select for our purposes the approaches of Don Carson and Grant Osborne. In addition, we shall take a brief look at a conservative scholars' forum on redaction criticism which was presented in an issue of *Christianity Today*.

Before we begin, it should be noted that our comments will be based on definitive statements made about the method in specific articles which I take to be representative of each scholar's views. It is indeed possible—and even desirable—that a critic might modify his opinions from time to time (in fact, Norman Perrin made a 'pilgrimage' out of doing so!), but to excavate every slight shift in position from what may often be a formidable *corpus* of academic endeavour (particularly in Carson's case) would, even if it were a viable proposition, merely serve to obfuscate the issue.

2. Don Carson's Approach

Carson's 1983 essay in *Scripture and Truth* consists of a brief sketch of the development of redaction criticism, an impressive list of its weaknesses, a discussion of two specimen passages to which the method may be applied, and a conclusion wherein some guidelines for its use are presented. There is also a short appended note concerning the relationship between redaction criticism and epistemology. It will not be necessary for us to explore the article in meticulous detail, but the following points should be made:

2.1 Carson appears to be preoccupied with drawing rather sharp distinctions between evangelical and radical critics, on which basis he distinguishes between mild and severe forms of redaction criticism.[6] Surely, however, we must begin with the criteria and claims of the method itself rather than with the subjective presuppositions underlying the doctrinal stance of the critic.

2.2 Carson's list of twenty weaknesses that beset the discipline may look daunting until we discover, on closer inspection, that many of the objections are really objections to *form* criticism. Thus, for example, it is said of the view that some of the *logia Jesu* were in fact created by the early Christian community:

> . . . whether or not the early church was adept at thinking up stories about Jesus to fit church settings, the form-critics have certainly been adept at thinking up church settings to fit the stories about Jesus.[7]

This is all very well, but it hardly affects redaction criticism in principle unless it is conceded, with a small minority of critics, that the evangelists themselves created material *ex nihilo*.

2.3 Some of Carson's criticisms seem to have a pre-emptive slant, as if anticipating objections which are expected to arise out of the sceptic's

camp. Thus, at one point, Carson declares, 'It is methodologically irresponsible to pit history against theology as if the two could not be compatible.' and again, '. . . redaction criticism is *intrinsically incapable* of dealing believably with questions of authenticity.'[8] Quite so! But what responsible critic would suggest otherwise? There is simply no *a priori* reason why the method should distinguish between history and theology. In the first place, it is perfectly possible for theology to develop out of an historical situation; indeed, the most fundamental claim of the orthodox Christian faith is that it did! Secondly, it is undeniable that redaction criticism is incapable of dealing with questions of authenticity precisely because it was never developed to do so; all the emphasis is on the author's use of the material available to him, and it is quite beside the point to discover whether or not some or all of it is authentic in the sense of its having been derived from the *Sitz im Leben Jesu*. In the first-cited statement, Carson appears to be anticipating a threat from the sceptic which, like Jeremiah's 'foe from the north', has never fully materialized, though it is expressed in the work of academic 'leftists' like Perrin. The second statement, concerning authenticity, may be aimed at the 'enemy within', for it appears that the critic most likely to misuse redaction criticism to identify authentic material is the conservative evangelical. In reality, of course, it is tradition criticism, not redaction criticism, which should be used to recover, if possible, the *strata* of development in a text.

2.4 Further, we should not mistake Carson's rhetorical turn of phrase for critical argument. At one stage, he writes: 'Redaction criticism hangs far too much *theological* significance on every changed *kai* and *de*.'[9]

Yet how many serious redaction critics *actually* regard such minutiae as theologically significant? Is it not normally argued that minor details of this kind are stylistic in character? Significantly, one of the scholars most deserving of Carson's charge, Robert H. Gundry, was himself a prominent member of the Evangelical Theological Society until his ejection in 1983.[10] It is true that the redaction critical method is overstretched by some scholars, but that is due to the excesses of those who use it, not to the method itself as Carson seems to imply.

2.5 The question as to whether redaction criticism is a holistic or a 'disintegrating' method continues to baffle. The consensus is with those such as Smalley[11] who see its prime achievement as having been to counterbalance the 'disintegrating' tendency of form criticism. Certainly, the redaction critical pioneers developed the discipline as a holistic literary approach. Yet, unaccountably, Carson shares with R.M. Frye[12] the opposite view. Disintegration may result from studying *pericopae* as individual units out of context, it is true; but if it is to 'help us discern more precisely the distinctive witness of each Evangelist to Jesus Christ', as Carson avers, redaction criticism must be regarded as a holistic discipline.

2.6 Regrettably, Carson resists using his two worked examples (Matt. 5:17–20; Matt. 19:16–20 par.) to illustrate what redaction criticism can

achieve; instead, his approach is almost entirely negative. In the case of Matt. 5:17–20 he seeks only to show that words or phrases which have been regarded as redactional by others are open to alternative interpretations; he passes no judgment on what, if anything at all, he considers to be redactional. Similarly, with Matt. 19:16–20 par., he seeks only to demonstrate, first that the presence of redactional features in parallel accounts does not necessarily preclude the possibility of harmonization, and secondly, those variations which are explicable on the basis of redaction criticism alone are often motivated by matters of style rather than of theology. In view of Carson's frequent recourse to sentences such as, 'It is difficult to see how some of these changes are anything other than stylistic', and 'It is difficult to detect theological significance in the change',[13] one hesitates to take very seriously his conclusion that one of the main benefits of redaction criticism lies 'in aiding us to discern more closely the Evangelists' individual concerns and emphases.'[14] Even the most significant of the differences in the parallel accounts that he treats, notably the rich man's question and Jesus' initial response (*cf.* Matt. 19:16–17 with Mark 10:17–18/Luke 18:18–19) is dismissed as having little theological import. Moreover, Carson uses his selected specimens to illustrate certain weaknesses of the method which may or may not be capable of a more extensive application. To take an example, he points out the fallacy of accepting Luke's use of the term *archon* in Luke 18:18 as redactional simply on the grounds that it is absent from the synoptic parallels; after all, the discrepancy could be explained on the theory that Luke had a special source available to him in which the term was already present. This argument is sound enough as long as it remains confined to *this particular case*; but perhaps in the context of the gospel as a whole, *archon* may prove to be a characteristic Lukan term, and then Carson's specific objection would look more tenuous. As it turns out, Luke uses the word seven times to denote a person or persons in office, compared with only three instances in Matthew and none at all in Mark (we are excluding the references to the 'prince of demons'). This illustrates the dangers that would accrue from forcing objections related to specific cases to apply to general principles.

3. Grant Osborne's Approach

Although Osborne has written rather widely on redaction criticism, his definitive statement on its methodology appears in a *J.E.T.S.* article of 1979.[15] Several talking points emerge from it, especially with regard to the question of presuppositions.

3.1 After a brief survey of evangelical positions on the issue, Osborne progresses to an appraisal of the method, declaring:

> The radical critic moves from his assumptions to the evidence and places the burden of proof on the gospel claim to be authentic. In other words, it is

> 'guilty until proven innocent'. The evangelical, however, moves from the evidence to the assumptions and places the burden of proof on the critics who deny their genuineness.[16]

What are these assumptions, according to the radical scholar? The fundamental one derives from his scepticism; since he questions the historicity of some *pericopae* and sayings, he assumes that redaction criticism is able to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic. Osborne counters:

> . . . redaction study is not a divisive tool that dichotomizes the *logia Jesu* into authentic and inauthentic categories. That only accrues when one accepts the negative presuppositions of the radical critics.[17]

Now, if the critic were to make this kind of presupposition, then, of course, it would be a false presupposition, as Osborne suggests; one does not need to be an evangelical as opposed to a radical critic to understand that. But to what extent do radicals *in fact* make this assumption? As we saw when discussing Carson's work, redaction criticism is now generally understood as a device for unlocking the secret of the evangelist's theology, and the approach taken is as likely to be ahistorical as unhistorical. Indeed, by its very nature, the method assumes a residuum of material which is *not* redactional, and therefore traditional, and it is simply not the business of the method to pronounce on the authority or otherwise of this.

A further assumption of most redaction critics is that of Markan priority. Some such scholars have been taken to task for holding to this view too inflexibly,[18] and both Carson and Osborne[19] warn against over-confidence. The two-document hypothesis is too simplistic to solve the Synoptic Problem completely, and the redaction critics need to be alert to fresh developments. We can concur with this judgment; but what would happen to redaction criticism should the Streeterian hypothesis founder? Clearly, it would affect certain of the critic's conclusions; on the basis of the Griesbach hypothesis, for instance, it would need to be established why Mark omitted so much material rather than why Matthew added so much. But it would not affect the method itself! Any viable set of criteria should stand to be applicable to whatever assumptions are held.

Finally on this point, the statement of Osborne cited above is a little ambiguous. At first glance it looks as though Osborne is saying that radical scholars proceed on the basis of certain assumptions, like those just mentioned, whereas the evangelical does not. It is only when we read, later on, '. . . presuppositionless exegesis is impossible'[20] that we realize he does not mean that after all. Of course, there is one fundamental presupposition at the heart of all evangelical scholarship—namely, that the Christian faith is rooted in history, and that any critical methodology must be consistent with that prior assumption. The evangelical, therefore, accepts a mild or restricted form of redaction criticism precisely because

he presupposes that a more thorough-going approach would be inconsistent with his basic assumptions. In this manner, the evangelical does allow his presuppositions to impinge upon or shape his critical method; indeed, they may be said to be inherent in it. The presuppositions of the radical, on the other hand, appear to be of a different order. Even the sceptic's basic doubts about historicity are not going to affect seriously the criteria by which he decides what is redactional. The evangelical, however, has no option but somehow to limit the functional capability of any criteria which might allow for the possibility of genuine composition.

In the last analysis, it must be said, with G.N. Stanton, that 'one must allow the text to dominate, challenge and determine one's presuppositions.'[21] If, as the conservative critic believes, the sceptic fails to do that, we might wonder whether the conservative himself is any the less irreproachable.

3.2 Most evangelicals accept some form of gospel harmonization process, and Osborne is no exception. Thus, while he refutes the extremism of Linsdell,[22] he accepts harmonization in its more moderate form.[23] As just one example of what is meant by moderate, we may cite his approval of Carson's suggestion that Jesus' great ethical sermon (Matt. chs 5, 6 and 7) may have begun on a mount (so Matthew) and ended on a plain (so Luke). Regardless of whether or not this specific case seems plausible, there is no doubt that some minor variants can be explained on the grounds of harmonization. There is, however, a methodological problem in that it seems impossible to develop any criteria for ascertaining just how we can identify such cases. As we have seen, many variants are explicable purely on the basis of style, while others are truly redactional in the sense that they betray something of an evangelist's theological interests. Thus, harmonization is but one explanation among others, and should not be overstressed. Indeed, perhaps variants should be harmonized only after the other possible explanations have been considered and found to be inadequate or unsatisfactory.

4. The '*Christianity Today*' Forum on Redaction Criticism

In 1985, the Christianity Today Institute invited four well-known evangelical New Testament scholars—Don Carson, Harold Hoehner, Vern Poythress, and David Scholer—to discuss redaction criticism. Kenneth Kantzer, who served as moderator, contributed to the debate by means of a paper, while Robert Thomas, too, was asked to provide a written comment. These, along with a record of the forum discussion, appeared in the October, 1985 issue of the journal.[24] Now, granted that the forum was intended for non-specialist consumption, and was necessarily limited in its scope, certain of the issues raised, either directly or incidentally, are deserving of critical comment.

4.1 As we might expect, the thorny question of presuppositions comes to the fore. The contention that the evangelists could have invented any

material, it is alleged, must in itself be understood as a presupposition. Now, we have already intimated that present critical methods would not allow us to establish beyond doubt that sayings or stories were invented; but perhaps it is not totally fair to argue that any suggestion of invention must inevitably be derived from presupposition. It is possible to envisage a situation in which a *pericope* appears to have been heavily redacted (even if, in effect, this means to understand the material as being characteristic of the evangelist in question), in which case the presence of the evangelist's creative hand is possible, even though it cannot be proved. This possibility, however, surely derives from the redaction critical method itself rather than from prior assumption. In any case, if, as here, the evangelical is to treat the sceptic's presuppositions with disdain, it should be recalled that he, too, has his fundamental presuppositions—presuppositions of the historical Christian faith which lead both Scholer and Thomas to declare that arguments in favour of an evangelist's selectivity, arrangement and minor modifications are acceptable, whereas those for major modifications and creativity are not![25] By what criteria would we distinguish between such modifications?

Another flaw in the reasoning of the average redaction critic, according to many evangelicals, is the tendency to operate on the basis of preconceived solutions to the synoptic problem. Says Hoehner:

> We need to deal with the text as it is, and not with theoretical suppositions. All too often scholars dogmatically presuppose which gospel was first and then show how the other gospel writers altered material from the first writer. . . . It is better to see agreements and differences with what we have than to speculate with preconceived source-theories.[26]

While there is commendable caution in this statement, it does, nevertheless, raise a couple of difficulties. First, it is difficult to envisage how we can proceed at all without invoking certain working hypotheses. Carson has stated that redaction criticism is not possible without the presence of sources:[27] the critic must proceed on the understanding that the creative techniques of an author (selectivity, arrangement, modification) can be detected only in the light of the changes he has made to his sources—and the sources must be available to us for comparison. Yet surely, we must know what these sources are, and since, as Hoehner rightly observes, we cannot be certain of the literary relationships between the synoptic gospels, it is not possible to proceed further other than on the basis of certain working assumptions. In our view, redaction criticism is impossible without these and I, for one, simply do not understand what is meant by operating without some theoretical solution to the synoptic problem in mind, although, of course, I do appreciate that any such solution must, by its very nature, remain open and susceptible to modification.

The second problem is really a caveat to the first. If Carson believes that sources are essential for redaction criticism, and he accepts that it is possi-

ble to apply the method to Matthew, he must be presupposing a particular synoptic hypothesis—presumably that of Markan priority. Of course, this is not to say that he is assuming the validity of a specific form of it in every detail, but it does threaten Hoehner's apparent indifference to the problem. Perhaps some point of agreement lies in the word 'dogma'; as Hoehner says, we should not *dogmatically* presuppose a solution, but we should operate with a tentative one in mind.

4.2 Many years ago, Rudolf Bultmann drew attention to the importance of distinguishing between presuppositions and prejudices. Exegesis without the former had proved impossible, so acceptance of that situation was more than simply desirable; it was inevitable.[28] Prejudices, on the other hand, were but personal factors that were allowed to interfere with the interpreter's judgment,[29] and so could not be tolerated. In the present case, Poythress proves himself capable of laying a foundation of altogether viable conservative presuppositions—that the Bible is inerrant and inspired, and hence trustworthy; that God is able to make providential use of human processes in order to consummate his revelation to mankind; and that God is able to transcend natural and rational processes, signifying that, unlike the secular historian, the biblical critic must reckon seriously with the supernatural factor.[30] Unfortunately, the forum as a whole is shot through with prejudicial comments. Hoehner shows his colours when he speaks of the evangelical as having 'proper' presuppositions, or 'acceptable evangelical presuppositions' as opposed to unacceptable liberal ones. On more than one occasion there is reference to 'misuse' of redaction criticism, when the expression 'liberal use' might have been less prejudicial. Again, Kantzer's short article, which sums up the discussion, is awash with this same kind of language. There is said to be a 'misuse' (= non-evangelical use) of redaction criticism when it falls into the hands of the 'wrong' (= non-evangelical) person, who uses it only to 'lead away from the truth'. Evangelical presuppositions are 'correct', and not 'faulty' like those of the non-evangelical. Even the word 'risk', which is found in the title to the forum discussion, is a loaded term! Invective of this kind should certainly not be mistaken for genuine critical argument and, in the last analysis, serves only to further alienate the conservative from his more liberal colleague at a time when we should be seeking to close the gap.

4.3 Finally, two points of terminological clarification are in order. First, the point is often made, as in this instance by Hoehner,[31] that the expression 'redaction criticism' was coined by Willi Marxsen.[32] Perhaps the German expression, *Redaktionsgeschichte*, used as a *terminus technicus*, is what is really in view, for the English verb and its cognates have been used by biblical scholars since the nineteenth century, particularly with regard to the editorial task of combining or conflating sources.[33] One wonders whether it would not be more accurate to say that Marxsen's contribution was to apply the term to a scientific discipline in a new and systematic way rather than to 'coin' it.

Secondly, Carson would have us distinguish rather sharply between redaction- and modern literary criticism, and he harbours serious reservations about the suggestion that these methods are virtually indistinguishable.[34] But it is possible that this latter approach may have more merit than Carson allows. It has been contended by certain scholars recently[35] and, indeed, by Carson himself, that redaction criticism cannot do all that has been claimed for it. In fact, there is a growing school of thought contending that the method tells us less about the evangelist's distinctiveness than about the characteristic traits of his gospel. Now, to admit that much is to approach a holistic theological reading which is properly the domain of modern literary criticism. Perhaps it is the desire to keep the disciplines separate that leads Carson, in *Scripture and Truth*, to agree with Frye on the disintegrating tendency of the redaction method. Nevertheless, it was never so conceived from the outset; all the leading German pioneers took a holistic approach which, self-evidently, was to form the basis of the new literary criticism.

Once again, Carson's reservations can be traced directly to his presuppositions about the historical Christian faith. Modern literary criticism, he argues, 'self-consciously disavows any interest in the historical Jesus'. This criticism seems imprecise. It may be true that it is unnecessary for literary criticism to presuppose the historical Jesus in order to operate as a method on its own terms, but that is very far from the disavowal of historical interest claimed by Carson. The truth of the matter is that literary criticism is an *ahistorical*, not an *unhistorical* method, and if questions of historicity are not raised, it is only because they are not directly pertinent to the aims of the discipline. The attempt to understand the theological message of a gospel in its final, canonical form is not at all to betray an indifference to the authenticity and meaning of the words and works of Jesus himself.

5. Overview

It is time now to make some general comments and draw conclusions on the basis of our discussion of particular evangelical approaches.

5.1 We have noticed the tendency of the evangelical to identify his own position with 'proper' redaction criticism, and that of the sceptic with a misuse of the method: it is as if the non-evangelical is incapable of using the tool. But it seems unsatisfactory to make distinctions on the basis of doctrinal presuppositions. Surely, the fundamental need is to discover a way, based on the text as it stands before us, of establishing a set of effective criteria by which to identify redactional elements, and we should not allow the question of which doctrinal camp we stand in to cloud the issue.

Many evangelicals seem eager to 'build a fence around the law'—that is to say, they insist on minimal redaction criticism so that the major tenets are not compromised. But if we allow our presuppositions to limit the scope of redaction criticism—and the real value of the discipline is to

allow us to determine what is characteristic of a particular gospel—we may end up with a distorted view of what those characteristics are, especially in respect of key doctrines, if the conservative refuses to allow redaction criticism to touch them.

Also, with regard to the terminology, the word 'sceptic' as opposed to 'evangelical' assumes a rather black *versus* white conflict over historicity, as if the former has totally abandoned the view that the gospels could be in any way historical. Of course, it is obvious that the situation is exceedingly more complex than this: it is far better to use terminology which might allow us to see scholarly viewpoints as being placed along a sliding scale or spectrum ranging from the purely historical to the purely non-historical. In the centre, we would find a considerable degree of overlap between the evangelical (better, 'conservative') and the sceptic (better, 'liberal').

5.2 We have seen that presuppositional exegesis is a fundamental issue for the biblical scholar. The evangelical takes a high view of biblical historicity, and asserts that redaction criticism which fails to take account of this is invalid. On the other hand, it is contended, the 'sceptic' assumes that the early Church had little or no interest in the historical Jesus, and that, clearly, his presuppositions are wrong and inadmissible. Really, however, this debate is not a question of history *versus* non-history, but of what *kind* of history is being envisaged. The German distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* sums up the issue rather neatly;[36] for the difference between what Jesus actually did and said, and the manner in which those words and deeds have been interpreted down the ages to make them applicable to successive generations lies at the heart of the issue. Redaction criticism, indeed, is concerned with explicating the initial stage of this process as applied to the written text: how did the final author/redactor interpret the tradition for the benefit of his own community?

It is just too simplistic to speak of 'proper' evangelical presuppositions as opposed to 'wrong' or invalid sceptical ones: that merely trivializes the issue, reducing it to one of prejudice.[37] The distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* which, as we have seen, is a more accurate assessment of the situation than the proposed dichotomy between history and non-history, is itself a misreading of the issue; for we are not dealing with two incompatible factors, but with the superficial as against the profound. *Geschichte* is an existential principle of which *Historie* is but a facet. Between the extremes of Harnack and Ott[38] the mediating position of Pannenberg[39] begs for acceptance. History (*Geschichte*) can be understood only in terms of universal history within whose parameters the quest for *Historie* by means of legitimate historical critical methods has its proper place. Presuppositional exegesis, therefore, is to be carried out on this basis, and not simply on that of *Historie* as divorced from *Geschichte*.

Further, the practice of hermeneutics has taught us the importance of interaction between reader and text; it is not simply the reader who inter-

prets the text, but the text which interprets the reader. Both evangelical and sceptic, therefore, must be prepared to allow for modification of their presuppositions as they interact with the text and feel its transforming power.

5.3 The evangelical's preoccupation with historicity in the sense of *Historie* is once again evident in his use of redaction criticism to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic. As we have argued, the method was not developed to perform this function, but rather to identify the evangelist's theology. It is thus a *Geschichte* rather than a *Historie* method, but, of course, this is not to say that *Historie* is denied; it is simply that the question concerning Jesus as an historical figure, and the quest to rediscover that history as it really was ('wie es eigentlich gewesen', to quote Ranke's celebrated expression) is not the redaction critic's concern.

5.4 The grammatico-historical approach favoured by the conservative evangelical critic often neglects the validity of other kinds of interpretation of the text—the 'New Hermeneutic' approach,[40] and reader-response criticism,[41] for instance. It is often pointed out that the traditional evangelical critical method at least has the merit of adhering to the text, whereas the New Hermeneutic is simply too loose with the text, and hence too subjective to be of much value:

> The chief deficiency of the New Hermeneutic is that it is concerned with the existential situation of the believing Christian, but hardly at all with the understanding and interpretation of the texts.[42]

There are both strengths and weaknesses in this statement which we do not have room here to explore fully. It is necessary to clarify who, in fact, should be the beneficiary of this method: it is not merely the 'believing Christian' as Turner seems to suggest, but, ideally, the non-Christian also.[43] Further, the text lies far closer to the heart of the discipline than Turner intimates, for the New Hermeneutic is intrinsically bound up with the idea of the hermeneutical circle which, by definition, preserves the sanctity of the text. Of course, Turner is right to recognize that it is all too easy to forget about the meaning of the text as originally intended. As Thiselton[44] has pointed out, in the quest to understand the text more profoundly, the importance of also understanding it correctly is sometimes forgotten. So, too, is the text as divine word. Fuch's excessively existential approach may threaten to transform the word of God into a doctrine of men which can be applied subjectively by and to each individual. Thiselton again puts it succinctly: 'what is true *for me* may all too easily become the criteria for "what is true"!'

The dangers are real enough if we make the New Hermeneutic the golden calf of critical methods; but if we subject it to the controls afforded by using it within the framework of other, well-established critical methods (form-, redaction-criticism, and so forth) we not only minimize the

dangers but add a welcome new dimension to our interpretation of the text. Thus, we must demur from those conservative critics like J.W. Montgomery[45] who feel that the New Hermeneutic, despite its avowed intention to devise a way by which the Bible may speak to the modern world in its own language categories, should be excluded from the growing canon of critical methods.

A similar assessment can be made of reader-response criticism. It has been argued that it, too, is too subjective a method to be capable of making a correct interpretation of the text: what really matters is the reader's approach to it. But, as with the New Hermeneutic, to be properly effective it must be taken in conjunction with other, historico-critical methods. We should expect tradition-, form-, and redaction-criticism to construct a picture of how the text was formed and interpreted during the earliest stages of its development. The aim of reader-response criticism, though in some ways complementary to this, is methodologically quite independent. It is not a window opening onto the mind of the ancient reader, as has sometimes been contended; it was developed initially as a means of exploring how the reader comes to understand modern literature, and so is concerned chiefly with the modern reader's interaction with the text. Since both the mechanics of ancient reading and in all probability—though we know little of it—ancient psychology, too, were vastly different from those in operation today, it is clear that reader-response criticism is not able to tackle with confidence, that situation. At best, it can explore only how the *modern* mind interacts with ancient literature. And even then, in the case of the Bible, there is the problem of pre-knowledge. The reader is bound to interact with a text, the substance of which he already knows, in quite a different way from the manner in which he would interact with a previously unfamiliar text. Despite these problems, however, reader-response criticism is no less deserving than the New Hermeneutic of inclusion in the canon of critical methods.

6. Conclusion

The chief merit of the various evangelical approaches to redaction criticism is that they all urge caution in its use. Evangelicals have recognized that the scope of the discipline is rather more limited than most liberal scholars have been accustomed to suggest, although many non-evangelicals are now beginning to draw the same conclusion, if somewhat reluctantly. Redaction criticism is, in the last analysis, more likely to tell us what is characteristic of a canonical gospel as a whole than to disclose the theological emphases of a specific author writing to a particular historical community. In this sense, it is much more akin to modern literary criticism than to its acknowledged parent, form criticism.

Nevertheless, it is agreed that the method *does* aim to point up theological emphases, regardless of whether these are of a specific flesh-and-blood

author, or of an implied author who transcends the final form of the text; and these emphases are identified independently of presuppositions about history. Redaction criticism, in fact, tells us nothing of whether or not the author thought he was writing history: it discloses only how he sought to use and modify the traditions available to him for particular theological effect. This, of course, is not to say that the author did not think he was writing history as well as theology: it is simply that redaction criticism is incapable of dealing with the issue—it was never intended that it should. So to begin with historical assumptions, as do the evangelicals, is really not at all relevant to the task in hand. It is not that their historical presuppositions *per se* are invalid, but that redaction criticism simply does not face the question as to whether or not the tradition, as opposed to the redaction, is historically-based. Hence, there is no necessity for the history *versus* non-history debate that still goes on between evangelical and liberal redaction critics.

It is to be hoped that the comments offered here may contribute towards a clarification of the issues that have bedevilled the debate between conservatives and liberals over the redaction critical method, and that future exchanges may be conducted in an atmosphere of informed tolerance and mutual understanding.

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NOTES

1 R.T. France, 'Evangelical Disagreements About the Bible', Churchman, Vol. 96 No. 3, p. 226.

2 In citing France's own words here, I see that, in an end note (p. 239, n. 1), in which he responds to criticism that point 3 does not take account of the fact that Jesus is himself God's word to man, he considers that, on reflection, 'means of apprehending' might have been a more precise substitute for 'locus'.

3 H. Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) p. 81f. *passim*; J.W. Montgomery, 'Why Has God Incarnate Suddenly Become Mythical?', Perspectives on Evangelical Theology (edd. K.S. Kantzer; S.N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 57–65; *idem.*, 'The Fuzzification of Biblical Inerrancy', Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics (Nashville: Nelson, 1978), pp. 220–21; R.L. Thomas, 'The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Redaction Criticism', J.E.T.S., 29 (1986), pp. 447–59.

4 R.H. Gundry, Matthew: *A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982). The book drew extensive criticism from conservative scholars: *cf.* D.A. Carson, 'Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review', Trinity Journal 3 (1982), pp. 71–91; D.L. Turner, 'Evangelicals, Redaction Criticism, and the Current Inerrancy Crisis', Grace Theology Journal, 4 (1983), pp. 271–87; P.B. Payne, 'Midrash and History in the Gospels, with Special Reference to R.H. Gundry's *Matthew*', Gospel Perspectives III: Studies in Midrash and Historiography (edd. R.T. France; D. Wenham; Sheffield: J.S.O.T., 1983), pp. 177–215; D.J. Moo, 'Matthew and Midrash: An Evaluation of Robert H. Gundry's Approach', J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 31–39; *idem*, 'Once Again: "Matthew and Midrash": A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry', J.E.T.S., 26

(1983), pp. 57–70; M.L. Geisler, 'Methodological Unorthodoxy'; J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 87–94; *idem*, 'Is There Madness in the Method? A Rejoinder to Robert H. Gundry', J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 101–08. And *cf.* the various responses made by Gundry—'A Response to "Matthew and Midrash"', J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 41–56; *idem*, 'A Surrejoinder to Douglas J. Moo', J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 71–86; *idem*, 'A Response to "Methodological Unorthodoxy"', J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 95–100; *idem*, 'A Surrejoinder to Norman L. Geisler', J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 109–16.

5 D.A. Carson, 'Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool', Scripture and Truth (edd. D.A. Carson; J. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 119–42; G.R. Osborne, 'The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology', J.E.T.S., 22 (1979), pp. 305–22; *idem*, 'Round Four: The Redaction Debate Continues', J.E.T.S., 28 (1985), pp. 399–410; D.A. Hagner, 'Interpreting the Gospels: The Landscape and the Quest', J.E.T.S., 24 (1981), pp. 23–37; R.A. Guelich, 'The Gospels: Portraits of Jesus and His Ministry', J.E.T.S., 24 (1981), pp. 117–25; D.L. Turner, 'Evangelicals, Redaction Criticism and the Current Inerrancy Crisis', Grace Theology Journal, 4 (1983), pp. 263–88; *idem*, 'Evangelicals, Redaction Criticism and Inerrancy: The Debate Continues', Grace Theology Journal, 5 (1984), pp. 37–45; W.L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (N.I.C.N.T.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977); *idem*, 'Questions About the Gospels', T.S.F.B., 52 (1968), pp. 16–22; *idem*, 53 (1969), pp. 3–9; S.S. Smalley, 'Redaction Criticism', *New Testament Interpretation* (ed. I.H. Marshall; Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 181–95; France, Churchman, Vol. 96 (1982), pp. 226–40.

6 Carson, *Scripture and Truth*, p. 119.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 125, citing H. Palmer, *The Logic of Gospel Criticism* (London: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1968), p. 185.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 130.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

10 At which point, in the wake of his thoroughgoing redaction-critical and midrashic commentary on Matthew, he was asked to resign his membership. For an account of this saga, *cf.* L.R. Keylock, 'Evangelical Scholars Remove Gundry for His Views on Matthew', Christianity Today, 28/2 (1984), pp. 36–38; Turner, Grace Theology Journal, 5 (1984), pp. 37-45.

11 Smalley, '*Redaction Criticism*', p. 192.

12 Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 127; R.M. Frye, 'A Literary Perspective for the Criticism of the Gospels', *Jesus and Man's Hope: Essays from the Pittsburgh Festival on the Gospels* (II; edd. D.G. Miller; D.Y. Hadidian; Pittsburgh: P.T.S., 1971), pp. 212–14.

13 Carson, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–33.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

15 Osborne, J.E.T.S., 22 (1979), pp. 303–22.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 309–10. This question of burden of proof is fully treated by S.C. Goetz, C.L. Blomberg, 'The Burden of Proof', J.S.N.T., 11 (1981), pp. 39–63.

17 Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

18 This is among the criticisms levelled at R.H. Gundry by D.J. Moo, J.E.T.S., 26 (1983), pp. 32–33.

19 Carson, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–24; Osborne, J.E.T.S., 28 (1985), pp. 401–02.

20 Osborne, J.E.T.S., 22 (1979), p. 319.

21 G.N. Stanton, 'Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism', *New Testament Interpretation* (ed. I.H. Marshall; Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), p. 67.

22 Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, pp. 174–76.

23 Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 313; also Carson, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-37.

24 D.A. Carson *et al.*, 'Redaction Criticism: Is it Worth the Risk?', Christianity Today, 29/15 (1985), pp. 55–64.

25 D.M. Scholer, R.L. Thomas, Christianity Today, 29/15 (1985), pp. 56, 62.

26 H.W. Hoehner, Christianity Today, 29/15 (1985), p. 59.

27 Carson, Christianity Today, 29/15 (1985), p. 57.
28 R. Bultmann, 'Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?', *Existence and Faith* (ed., trans. S. Ogden; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961), pp. 289–96.
29 *Cf.* Stanton, 'Presuppositions', pp. 61–62; Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, p. 290.
30 V. Poythress, Christianity Today, 29/15 (1985), p. 59.
31 Hoehner, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
32 *Cf.* W. Marxsen, 'Redaktionsgeschichtliche Erklärung der sogenannten Parabeltheorie des Markus', Z.T.K., 52 (1955), pp. 255–71.
33 So S.R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. &. T. Clark, 1891), pp. 19–20; O.C. Whitehouse, 'Hammel's "Ancient Hebrew Tradition"', *Exp.*, 5th ser., VI (1897), p. 167; also B.W. Bacon, 'The Redaction of Matthew 12', J.B.L., 46 (1927), p. 20.
34 Carson, Christianity Today, 29/15 (1985), p. 57.
35 C. Clifton Black, The Disciples According to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate (J.S.N.T.S. 27; Sheffield: J.S.O.T., 1989).
36 *Cf.* A. Richardson, *History—Sacred and Profane* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964), p. 154ff.; G. Turner, 'Pre-understanding and New Testament Interpretation', S.L.T., 28 (1975), pp. 227–42, esp. pp. 236–38; R.T. France, 'The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus', *History, Criticism and Faith* (ed. C. Brown; Leicester: I.V.P., 1976), p. 101 ff.
37 See again Stanton, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–62; also, E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 258–64. Hirsch questions Gadamer's view (*Truth and Method* [New York: Seabury, E.T., 1975], pp. 245ff.) that presuppositions and prejudices are identical; rather, a presupposition, as used in the interpretation of a text, is a preliminary grasp of the author's meaning, given an understanding of his cultural world and conventions, whereas a prejudice is merely a preferred or habitual stance.
38 Harnack's approach exudes from his *corpus* of works as a whole. *Cf.* H. Ott, 'The Historical Jesus and the Ontology of History', *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (edd. C. Braaten, R.A. Harrisville; New York: Abingdon, 1964), pp. 142–71. Ott is even more extreme than Bultmann in his desire to reduce *Historie* to *Geschichte*.
39 W. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* (Vol. I; London: S.C.M. Press, 1970), pp. 81–181.
40 On which, see G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1963); E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964); *idem*, 'The Hermeneutical Problem', *The Future of Our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolf Bultmann* (ed. J.M. Robinson; London: S.C.M. Press, 1971), pp. 267–78; R.W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutics and Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); edd. J.M. Robinson, J.B. Cobb, *The New Hermeneutic* (New Testament Frontiers in Theology, 2; New York: Harper & Row, 1964); N. Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1976); A.C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), pp. 327–56. A useful survey and critique of the New Hermeneutic may be found in Thiselton, 'The New Hermeneutic', *New Testament Interpretation* (ed. I.H. Marshall; Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 308–33.
41 On which, see W. Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1974); S.E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard, 1980); W.C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987); S. Mailloux, 'Reader-Response Criticism?', Genre, 10 (1977), pp. 413–31; R.M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes* (S.B.L.D.S. 54; Chico, Ca.: Scholars, 1981), pp. 149–79; *idem*, 'Who is the "Reader" in Reader-Response Criticism?', Semeia, 31 (1985), pp. 5–23; N.R. Petersen, 'The Reader in the Gospel', Neotestamentica, 18 (1984), pp. 38–52. Two short surveys of this approach as applied to the New Testament are: J.L. Resseguie, 'Reader-Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels', J.A.A.R., 52 (1984), pp. 307–24; E.P. Sanders, M. Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: S.C.M. Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International,

1989), pp. 240–51.

42 Turner, S.J.T., 28 (1975), p. 227.

43 *Cf.* Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 30; Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, p. 125.

44 Thiselton, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

45 J.W. Montgomery, 'Toward a Christian Philosophy of History', *Jesus of Nazareth, Saviour and Lord* (ed. C.F.H. Henry; London: Tyndale, 1966), pp. 231–36.