

THE BIBLE
AND
MODERN LITERARY
CRITICISM

*A Critical Assessment
and Annotated Bibliography*

Compiled by
MARK ALLAN POWELL

*with the assistance of
Cecile G. Gray and Melissa C. Curtis*

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FOREWORD

Sometimes a traditional view of the authority of the Bible is still kept; it is the divinely inspired, authoritative guide to Christian conduct and belief, containing a timeless oracle from God . . .

-John Bowden, *Who Is a Christian?*

The English Bible, a book which if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power . . .

-Thomas Macaulay, *Essays*

These two statements exemplify the commonly held, traditional misconception that the Bible is *either* scripture *or* literature. Those who view the Bible solely as scripture treat the literary equation as nothing less than heresy, while proponents of the literary approach regard scripturalists as idolatrous worshippers of a mere book. We see evidence of this polarity almost daily--one of the most startling manifestations in Australia having been public reaction to a Lenten television program on the Sydney University academic, Barbara Thiering, and her interpretation of the content and meaning of the New Testament. A biblical scholar in the liberal Protestant tradition, Dr. Thiering attracted an unprecedented backlash from the viewing public, who contacted the broadcaster in significant numbers to complain of its callousness in scheduling such a "destructive" program during the holiest season of the Christian calendar. For them, the Bible is a sacred document not to be tampered with, while for Dr. Thiering it is a literary document susceptible to the same kind of analysis as any other ancient collection.

To the "faithful," literary critics of the Bible ought to be classified as pariahs, misguided scholars with a penchant for "stirring the possum"--they undermine faith, introduce doubt and confusion among honest believers. In this respect little seems to have changed since the foundation of modern biblical criticism in the seventeenth century by Richard Simon (d. 1712). Upon publication of his *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* in 1678, the book was suppressed and he was ejected from the Oratory in Paris. Today, many modern opponents of literary criticism of the Bible

wish the same fate on its more outspoken advocates.

Despite such continuing opposition, there is emerging, in some sectors at least, a gradual convergence of these two poles. Until relatively recently, study of the Bible as scripture has been confined to the seminary, while study of the Bible as literature has been the preserve of the university. As Mark Allan Powell states in his Preface to the present work, "the new convergence of biblical and literary studies destroys this dichotomy. The most recent studies attempt to examine the Bible as literature and as scripture at the same time." Particularly satisfying is the ecumenicity of the growing awareness that literary content, analysis and criticism are crucial to genuine understanding of the meaning of biblical texts. Thus Protestantism's James Barr asserts with typical vigour that "... story is an absolutely essential aspect of the Old Testament; it cannot, however, be too simply identified, indeed it cannot be identified at all, with history. Story belongs to literary form and cannot be removed from it without danger."¹ Almost simultaneously, Catholicism's Hans Küng reminds us that "the Bible in the metaphors and analogies of its time answers questions that are infinitely important also for people today--in metaphors and analogies, it must be noted. The language of the Bible is not a specific language of facts, but a metaphorical language of images."²

If we thus recognize that the testaments are story at least as much as history and scripture, and that this story employs metaphor, analogy, and other literary devices, it is essential that we now heed the insights of literary critics. In their various guises and from without their various schools these critics are able to help us understand the literary forms, imagery and language of the biblical texts. Concerned as it is with qualities of language, structure of plot, use of symbolism, and the author as poet, literary criticism of the Bible has at least as much to contribute to biblical understanding as the long established areas of form criticism and redaction criticism. From the standpoint of belief this contribution may be especially important, not least because of the apparent trend among some movements and denominations to arrange and interpret the biblical story to suit their particular needs. For example, one group may wish to emphasize God's punishing wrath rather than his liberating love: "It may be possible to clothe such stories in doctrinal propositions which keep them within the bounds of theological orthodoxy. Yet, such stories are hardly compatible with what appears to be the central or privileged story of implacable, death-defying love, which is the privileged story of the Christian heritage."³ In such an instance literary criticism may have a role to perform in helping believers to understand the real meaning of the story and thereby avoid grotesque misinterpretations. Perhaps this is an as yet unarticulated function of biblical literary criticism?

Whatever its functions, literary criticism of the Bible is a growing force in theological circles, just as it is a field of increasing activity among secular scholars of literature. As Powell rightly indicates, "exegetes and critics . . . are producing, at an astonishing rate, study after study that applies methods derived from modern literary theory to biblical texts." To the extent that this is occurring, biblical literary criticism has become part of the fabric of scholarship and therefore warrants study in its own right.

It is especially for this reason that we approached Dr. Mark Allan Powell, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Ohio, to prepare a volume that would document the development and trends in biblical literary criticism. While his particular expertise lies in literary criticism of the Gospels, Dr. Powell is also widely read and thoroughly knowledgeable (how often these two attributes fail to appear together!) in all aspects of literary criticism as applied to the entire Bible. The validity of this assessment lies in the following pages, which I am pleased to commend for a number of reasons. First, the introductory essay, "The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment," maps in a most

interesting and clearly written manner the geography of this largely uncharted field; any student seeking to understand the subject will find this discussion of benefit. Second, the bibliography succeeds in covering, in an unusually logical manner, all key components of biblical literary criticism--the development of modern literary theory, methods for literary study of the Bible, literary studies of specific biblical texts, and evaluation of biblical literary studies. Third, Powell has tenaciously and objectively annotated a fully representative range of the most important works in this field of study. More than that, in his listing of literary criticism of particular books of the Bible (Part Four) he has come close to achieving comprehensive coverage; this feature will be of special value to scholars.

Putting all of these attributes together in a single volume has been no mean feat, yet Dr. Powell has done so without hesitation. The result is a careful and judicious survey that is both accessible to the student and useful to the scholar. It is commendable not only for its broad treatment of all aspects of biblical literary criticism but also for its logical arrangement and clear-headed assessment of the most important publications in the field. In short, this work establishes a high standard for future bibliographic treatment of biblical literary criticism. As such, it is a worthy companion to Arland Hultgren's 1988 contribution to *Bibliographies and Indexes in Religious Studies*, *New Testament Christology*.

1. James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 11.
2. Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*. Trans. by Edward Quinn (London: William Collins Sons, 1980), p. 639.
3. Andrew M. Greeley, *Religion: A Secular Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1982), p. 90.

The Revd Dr. G. E. Gorman FLA FRSA
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PREFACE

The focus of this book is on the convergence of two fields, biblical studies and modern literary criticism. In the last quarter of a century, these two fields have come together in a manner that has caught many by surprise. The validity of using literary criticism as an approach to Holy Scripture is still debated in theological circles, and the merit of the Bible as a work of literature is still questioned in literary ones. Exegetes and critics, however, are not waiting for their respective academies to resolve these questions. They are producing, at an astonishing rate, study after study that applies methods derived from modern literary theory to biblical texts.

One purpose of this present volume, then, is simply to document this phenomenon. We have assembled here the most comprehensive list ever published of works that draw on modern literary criticism for a scholarly study of the Bible. The number of the works listed and the diversity of the authors represented are indications that biblical literary criticism must be accorded a significant place in the history of scholarship.

We also hope that this work will assist both theological and literary communities in their ongoing assessment of these interdisciplinary developments. A truly critical assessment should avoid simplistic generalizations regarding either field, but should remain cognizant of the inevitable contradictory impulses that occur when such complex and varied disciplines are brought together. Knowledge of the literature included in this bibliography will provide the best foundation for making such an assessment.

A final purpose is more practical: We hope to provide interested persons with a useful reference tool that will enable them to find particular works on fairly specific subjects. The following explanatory notes regarding the bibliography's organization, scope, and special features should help to facilitate its use in this regard.

Organization. The bibliography is organized into six major sections and the logic of this presentation is explained at length in the introductory essay. Basically, the subject matter of each section forms the logical foundation for that of the section that follows.

Part One ("Basis") lists works that have been instrumental in laying the foundations for the development of modern literary theory. These works present insights from other fields (philosophy, sociology, anthropology, linguistics) that have helped to establish the intellectual framework within which literary theorists work.

Part Two ("Theory") lists works representative of the several different schools

of literary theory that are most influential today. The items included here are not by and large the work of theologians or biblical scholars but, rather, are the work of scholars whose primary interest is general or secular literature.

Part Three ("Method") lists works that represent an intentional effort to devise methods for a literary study of the Bible. Most of these works are written by biblical scholars, though they draw heavily on the insights of their secular colleagues listed in Part Two.

Part Four ("Criticism") lists studies in which methods such as those described in Part Three have actually been applied to biblical texts. This section is really the heart of the bibliography, encompassing more than half of the total listings. Studies on any particular book of the Bible are grouped together, and these groups are then listed according to the order in which books appear in the English Bible. This format should make it easy for readers to pursue research on the particular biblical writing that interests them.

Part Five ("Evaluation") lists works that offer critical evaluation of the kinds of studies found throughout Part Four. In fact, many of the items here are reviews of studies listed elsewhere in the bibliography. Others offer more generalized comments concerning the literary-critical enterprise as a whole.

Part Six ("Implications") lists a few works that point out the impact that this new approach to the Bible is having on other, related fields, such as homiletics and theology. Finally, the bibliography comes full circle by citing a few examples of how biblical literary criticism affects a theological apprehension of literature in general.

Scope. The listings in Part Four ("Criticism") are the only ones intended to be comprehensive. In the other sections, I have selected representative works that appear to be the most important and accessible, but I have tried not to allow my own prejudices to govern that selection process. For the most part, the works listed in these sections are the ones included most often in the footnotes and bibliographies of the items included in Part Four.

In Part Four itself, I have included practically everything that I could find, and any omissions here must be credited to my own lack of resourcefulness. In general, a 1990 cut-off date was enforced, though occasionally I was able to get advance copies of material published later than that. The majority of the listings are in English, but several other languages are represented as well. To increase foreign language listings still further than what I have been able to provide, German readers may wish to consult the journal *Linguistics Biblica* on a regular basis; French readers should do the same with *Sémiotique et Bible*; and readers of modern Hebrew, with *Beth Mikra*.

Finally, a number of the works listed contain bibliographies of their own that may be more expansive in a specific area than what is included here. See especially items, 0117, 0244, 0265, 0280, 0343, 0353, 0438, 0480, 0490, 0503, 0509, 0523, 0526-0527, 0530, 0551, 0561, 0565, 0574-0575, 0588.

Special Features. Two special features should help to make the bibliography useful: cross-references and indexes.

The cross-references are of two types. First the annotations themselves make extensive use of cross-references to other items in the bibliography. Works about a particular author are cross-referenced to works by that person, and so on. These references will be especially useful when a work discusses or comments on a study that is listed elsewhere.

Second, lists of cross-references are included under many of the headings and subheadings of the various sections. These references will lead the reader to works that might conceivably have been placed in that section but that, for some prevailing reason, are found elsewhere. For example, the reader who is interested in literary studies on the Gospel of Mark might be directed via the cross references under that heading to a book on the method of structural exegesis that includes a chapter on the

Gospel of Mark as a case study.

Three indexes are included. The first two are alphabetical listings of the authors and titles of all the works included here. The Author Index includes references to authors of forewords or prefaces, and to authors of individual chapters of works that are otherwise referenced by their editors. The Subject Index is also quite extensive, providing lists of the most significant references to over 1000 topics.

Corrections, additions, and inquiries concerning supplemental updates should be sent to Mark Allan Powell, c/o Trinity Lutheran Seminary, 2199 East Main Street, Columbus, OH 43209-2334.

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I could not have completed this work without the two assistants named on the title page. Cecile Gray, English Professor at Capital University, helped immensely with the research, writing approximately 500 of the annotations. Melissa Curtis, computer specialist and secretary to the faculty at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, did all of the work of preparing the camera-ready manuscript, including production of the indexes.

In addition, Joyce Klayman and the library staff at Trinity Lutheran Seminary were invaluable in obtaining materials for our review. Douglas Gray typed and edited many annotations and offered his spouse patient support as she became completely absorbed with the project. Kristin Gallagher, Karen Jewell-van Buskirk, and Amy Kroninger served as research assistants and proofreaders.

We believe the work has been worthwhile. We are grateful to Trinity Lutheran Seminary for providing us with the resources and the atmosphere necessary to complete the project, and to G. E. Gorman and Greenwood Press for bringing it to publication.

Finally, I wish to thank my own family--my wife, Charlotte, and my sons, David and Michael--for their love and affection. I treasure the joy that you bring me every day of my life.

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**THE BIBLE AND
MODERN LITERARY
CRITICISM:
A CRITICAL
ASSESSMENT**

One of the most significant developments in biblical studies in recent years has been the appropriation of insights drawn from various schools of modern literary criticism. It has become commonplace to speak of the *plot* of Ruth or to identify David as a *character* in 1 Samuel. The voice that comments on the life of Jesus in the Gospel of John is now more likely to be called "the *narrator* of the Fourth Gospel" than "the Fourth Evangelist."

In some cases, such borrowing of terms may be merely cosmetic, but an increasing number of biblical scholars are employing literary-critical methods and concepts in ways that demonstrate a secure grasp of the discipline. This dexterity is all the more impressive when one remembers that most of these scholars are primarily students of religion or theology and have had to learn literary criticism as a "second language." The secular field of literary criticism, however, has been accommodating: A number of literary critics have themselves gotten in on the act of biblical interpretation.

In short, Bible scholars are turning to literary criticism, and literary critics are turning to the Bible. Such a convergence should not seem strange. The Bible, after all, *is* literature and, in some sense, has always been studied as such. No method of exegesis bypasses the essential act of reading (or hearing) the text. Until recently, however, professors of religion have not been primarily interested in the Bible's literary qualities *per se*. They have shown more interest in the Bible as a compendium of theological insight or as a record of significant history. Many colleges and universities have offered classes on "The Bible as Literature," but such a title usually implies that the Bible is to be examined as literature *instead of* as scripture. Aesthetic evaluation is emphasized as distinct from theological interpretation. The new convergence of biblical and literary studies destroys this dichotomy. The recent studies attempt to examine the Bible as literature and as scripture at the same time. Literary criticism becomes the means but theological interpretation remains the end.

Thus, the trend toward literary criticism of the Bible is in some sense revolutionary. Some observers have even described the trend as a "paradigm shift," comparable in importance to the development of the historical-critical method. In future years, they say, Bible scholars will by definition be persons trained in literary, not historical, modes of analysis. Is this an exaggeration? Perhaps. But the bibliography contained in this book shows that scholars need to take literary criticism