

An Exploration of Tools for Modern Critical Studies of the New Testament

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ABSTRACT

People in the early times have handled the Bible intently; their keen interaction with the Scripture has spurred the quest to answer certain questions that seem entangling in their pursuit for understanding; this is the beginning of biblical interpretation! Hermeneutics began from the time men sought what biblical texts mean. Although the scripture is the inspired word of God; the truth remains that God used men to pen it down; moving through the trend of man and his environ. The Bible was not written in the heaven's language (if there is any), instead it was written by human through human's language (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic) and human's history. In the real sense, can man's intellectual quotient comprehend what the Bible entails in its entirety? What are the true tools to actually determine the meaning of biblical texts? The central fact that God has revealed himself to men through Jesus Christ is in the last resort based for Christians on faith and experience; nevertheless, biblical scholars in modern times have engage New Testament studies with peculiar attention of critical historical and literary concerns. They do so with variety of interests. Modern study of the New Testament intensively developed into a discipline that envelops different approaches and employs a variety of methods. The purpose of the critical study of the New Testament has been to use available methods of human knowledge to discover the authority of the New Testament, and set the revelation which it contains as far as possible in its original historical context.

Keywords: Analysis, Critical, Interpretation, Method, Modern, New Testament.

INTRODUCTION

Christians agree regarding the New Testament books as possessing a special authority; but differ as to the nature of this authority and in their interpretation of the contents of the books. In the recent times, critical study of the New Testament has been in the process of drastic transformation (Mark, 1997). As countless certainties disappear, fresh generations of scholars evolve studying the New Testament from fortified fresh perspectives and innovative methods. A fundamental shift has taken place over the last few centuries (Tuckett, 1987). The New Testament is an important part of the scriptures often referred to as the New Covenant; it is embedded with several texts; the gospels, epistles, among others (Busch, 1976); sometimes, these texts are almost impossible to understand (Fee; 1993). Several scholars from different angles have come up with different methodology of interpreting the New Testament texts (Donfried, 1995; Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann, 1988;

4); with pertinent attention to the historical and literary concerns. This is because the New Testament books were written and copied by men who are not divulged of their human environs (Robbins, 1996; 1). This study undertakes a lucid assessment of recent tools in modern studies of the New Testament.

WHAT BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION CONNOTES

Although, hermeneutics is a broad discipline; it is used in regards to biblical stance in this research. The importance of this part of the study lies in the fact that modern-critical tools of the New Testament are all hermeneutical approached come by at one point or the other in the course of biblical interaction. Terry defined 'hermeneutics as the science of interpretation of a given text'; a method of scrutiny and pursuit of objectivity (Terry, 1974; 11). Thiselton (1999) posits; hermeneutics explores "how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in another context of life from our own." Therefore, hermeneutics is

the 'science of interpretation of a biblical text' or 'how we read, understand, and handle biblical texts, which was written in another time and context of life (distant in all spheres) from our own'. More so, Resane (2018) sees biblical hermeneutics as the art or technique of interpreting the biblical text in order to understand its original context and then find its contemporary meaning. The aim of biblical hermeneutics is providing the exegete with the tools, techniques, methods or principles needed in order to adequately extract the actual meaning or intention of the original author to the original audience or recipient.

McKim (1986; 112) in his own opinion argues that "no definition of interpretation could be more fundamental than this: to interpret we must in every case reproduce the sense the scriptural writer intended for his own words. He posits that the first step in the interpretive process is to link only those ideas with the author's language that he connected with them. The second step is to express these ideas understandably." The research observes that McKim holds the authorial intention as integral to biblical hermeneutics. This is somewhat congruent with Jeremiah's explanation that the interpretation of the Christian Bible does not go in line with the ethical saying; "the end justifies the means" rather, the means is as important also, as the end (Adelodun, 2019; 1). The methods, principles and approaches used to discover these intentions in the Bible which are farfetched from us now, are referred to as biblical hermeneutics. Thus, a proper biblical hermeneutic provides the philosophical underpinnings which undergird the exegetical task (Vines and Allen, 1987; 307).

BACKGROUND TO NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION

From the scripture, the tradition of interpretation (spiritual or theological) began with the earliest of Jesus' followers; clarifying the meaning of the Old Testament as well as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This act brought about the books called the 'New Testament' (Zuck, 1991; 7). Ernest (2019) opined that to explain 'how biblical scholarship has changed' is to risk starting a food fight. He further explained that scholarship is not something that happens on its own and evolves according to its own inner logic. Here, the study traces the ignition of Biblical scholarship to the patristic tradition.

Commencing the modern critical tools discourse without appraising the works and contributions of the Early Church fathers (Papias, Origen, Pamphilus, Eusebius, and Jerome) is tantamount to what this study refers to a 'building construction without solid foundation.' This assertion stems from the fact that the early church fathers were generations who are not farfetched from the beginning of the Christian Church (Sproul, 2009; 10). They understood that the Holy Spirit the one, who moved the authors of the New Testament to put in writing the message of salvation, likewise provided the church with continual assistance for the interpretation of its inspired writings (Ibid; 11). They made researches concerning names and places mentioned in the Bible. It is observed that early Church fathers can be referred to as 'pre-modern scholars' because they did not aim to be detached and objective. Their chief concern being to live from the Bible in communion with their brothers and sisters, the fathers were usually content to use the text of the Bible current in their own context.

The Church fathers looked at the Bible above all as the 'Book of God;' the single work of a single author. In fact, they placed a high value on the reading of Scripture and its interpretation. The Early Church fathers felt at liberty to take a sentence out of its context in order to bring out some revealed truth which they found expressed within it. For them, the chief occasion for reading the Bible is in church, in the course of the liturgy. Actually, this does not mean that they reduce the human authors to nothing more than passive instruments. It is noteworthy that the patristic interpretative approach pays trifling attention to the historical development of the acclaimed revelation.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen are two early church fathers who viewed Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, as being symbolic rather than literal. The allegorical school teaches that beneath each verse of scripture (beneath the obvious) is the 'real' meaning of the passage. Hidden in each sentence or statement is a symbolic spiritual meaning. This method of interpretation was rejected by all of the Reformers. Luther called it a scourge. Calvin called it Satanic (Cotterell and Max, 1989; 1). Those holding to the principles of the Reformation generally regard this method of interpretation as undermining

the power and impact of the literal Word (Carson, 1996).

But as decades went by and New Testament writings were accepted as scripture, Christians engaged these texts. From the ancient period into the high Middle Ages, interpreters might give primacy to a text's literal or historical sense, but they also looked for other kinds of meaning: allegorical (for doctrine), tropological (for morals), and anagogical (for ultimate union with God) (Ferguson and David; 1988). The Reformers of the 16th century gawk the New Testament for doctrine, morals, and union with God, but they rejected allegorical reading strategies, preferring to follow the literal sense of the text. Thus, they set in motion a process that, over succeeding centuries, enabled the rise of the critical, academic study of scripture.

The rationalism of the eighteenth century had led to the widespread abandonment of belief in the infallibility of the Bible and to the rejection (Gerhard, 1963); the miraculous elements of the Old Testament narratives (Heard, 2019); the application of scientific methods (form, source, textual criticism, among others) to the writings of Greek and Latin authors begun (Coggins and Houlden, 1990). The philosophical bases of thought are still changing, the life of Jesus and histories of the Early Church which were written under their influence have yielded place in turn to a new interpretation, but in the process of controversy the documents of the New Testament have been subjected to such a continuous and minute scrutiny that their scientific study is now established on firm and stable foundations (Green, 1995). Hyde (1958; 28) commented that the period of enlightenment brought a critical re-think on Christian dogmatism.

Modern methods of criticism can be said to have come into existence at first half of the nineteenth century saw their adoption on a wide scale in the universities of Germany. It explicitly characterizes a detached or an objective study. In the textual field thousands of manuscripts were examined, collated, and classified, and it was the new availability of adequate material that made possible the establishment of the New Testament text on scientific principles. Archaeological findings threw new light on the accuracy of many of the details in Acts and papyri dug up in Egypt helped to elucidate the language of the New

Testament (Soulén, 2001; 78). The knowledge of the New Testament background was immensely increased both by archaeological discoveries and by the scientific assessment of new sources of evidence (Frazmann, 1996). The effect of the accumulation of this knowledge was to make possible a much fuller understanding of the New Testament writers as men of their own time; meanwhile, there is hardly a verse in the New Testament where the application of this knowledge does not bring out some new aspect of the original meaning (Ibid, Soluen, 2001; 79).

Although, the allegorical biblical interpretation of patristic tradition scurry the risk of embarrassment in the contemporary time; the experience of the church expressed in this method of interpretation makes a contribution that cannot be discarded. Patristic mode teaches to read the Bible theologically, within the heart of a living tradition, with an authentic Christian spirit. On this note, the study acknowledges that the Patristic mode of interpretation is the bedrock on which the modern critical study of the New Testament is built.

Gaebelen and Douglas (1979) argues that the paradigm shifts in the world of Biblical scholarship entails that the meaning of biblical text means can be understood 'within the text's context.' However, this exercise requires knowledge of the biblical languages (Vos and Peeifer, 1970); the Jewish, Semitic and Greco-Roman backgrounds (Van, 2000; Ross, 2002). The biblical languages are farfetched from contemporary languages; therefore to understand the the text; modern scholars lay emphasis on the texts itself which was made known through unfamiliar ancient languages. This methodology requires the use of tools like bible dictionaries, lexicons and commentaries; grammatical, literal, historical, synthesis and practical principles.

MODERN TRENDS IN NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

Although questions about the sources and manuscripts of the Bible date back to ancient rabbinical and patristic times, renaissance humanism and the protestant laid the foundations for modern biblical criticism. (Roger, 2000; 270). The scientific revolution changed basic assumptions about how truth is perceived, emphasizing reason and experience over faith and the tradition; and the Reformation opened the way for individuals to

interpret the scriptures with their own consciences as the final authority for the proper interpretation rather than church hierarchies.

In the nineteenth century, Old Testament scholars; Jean Astruc, J.G. Eichhorn and Julius Wellhausen proposed dramatic new theories about the sources and editing of the Pentateuch; and New Testament experts; Adolf von Harnack developed new theories about the historical significance of New Testament texts. Later, theologians like Rudolf Bultmann initiated form criticism, and archaeological discoveries, notably the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi library, revolutionized biblical criticism. Clear enough, it is generally accepted that biblical criticism was in actual fact inspired throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries by the conviction that better critical scrutiny would bring deeper revelation of what lay behind the human writers in the divine mind itself. Goodenough argued that the motive for modern-critical study of New Testament was very clear. He further explained that it was splendidly epitomized in the English title to Schweitzer's classic, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Goodenough, 1952; 1-9).

It is clear that historical criticism seemed plausible if one could appeal from a fallible record to an infallible, an authoritative person behind the record and successfully discover the object of quest; the Historical Jesus. Thus, modern critical tools explicitly yearn for the sense of certainty through historical criticism itself. Goodenough explained that it was this desire that brought him into such studies; he argued that this seems to have been the driving force from Reimarus to Wrede, Schweitzer, Harnack, Bacon, Ropes, and even Bultmann. Goodenough further argued that New Testament criticism has been for a century essentially a means rather than an end, and the end has been the quest of that historical Jesus, in whom men hoped to find the embodiment of their ideals, the basis of their certainty.

Goodenough (Ibid, 1952; 1), trying to guide against odds concludes that the drive behind the New Testament modern scholarship has a sense of its immediate and contemporary importance; the hope that man would know better how to live in the present if he could understand the secret of early Christianity (because a man would have a base of certainty for his judgments and hopes); and that the new

methods of philology and historical criticism would reveal this secret to him. A clear conception of Goodenough's stance among others; brings about the question of sufficiency and adequacy of these methods. It is logical to say that Goodenough in his own assessment view these methodologies as out-rightly positive in leading the reading to understand the scripture. Suffice to this, the study affirms that modern tools in New Testament scholarship follows the rules of Enlightenment intellectual disciplines such as; history, anthropology, or literary criticism in order to produce plausible and non-supernatural explanations of how the biblical texts came to be written.

The study posits that the paradigm shift experienced in the course of biblical scholarship is significant; but in the quest for the ultimate engagement of the methodologies, the research hypothesizes the iota of slight indictment. Thus, in critical engagement of the biblical text, Thiselton (1992; xvii) gave a caution when he stated that;

The Bible is given not primarily as an encyclopedia of information on all subjects, but as a source of transformation, to shape readers in accordance with God's purpose for them...Yet...readers can transform texts, sometimes on ways that God does not intend them to be transformed. Ignorance, blindness and misunderstanding need to be cleared away by prayer, by listening and by hermeneutics. Biblical texts deliver us from self-preoccupation or self-centredness, as we open ourselves to what is 'Other', 'Beyond' or to 'the voice of God.' Readers constantly try to 'tame' the Bible so that it will accord to their own prior wishes, concerns and expectations. Thereby the process of reader transformation becomes reversed into text-transformation; the vision of God is instead replaced by treating the Bible as a mirror to the self.

The research observes Thiselton's opinion as that which validates the study's assertion that scholars might end up viewing the scripture as a mere literature which should be criticized and scrutinized; instead of seeing the scripture as a source of transformation, to shape readers in accordance with God's purpose. On this note, the study opines that the background understanding concerning the emergence of modern methodologies in biblical scholarship informs several tools to be discussed in the

succeeding part of this research. However, modern methodologies to be explored in this study are applicable to Biblical Studies generally (the Old and New Testament alike) (Richard, 2016; 6, Freke and Gandy, 1999). The dual applicability of modern critical tools has given credence to its usage in modern scholarship; bringing about a whole systematic methodological approach which does not exclude any part of the Christian Canon. On this note, the research states that the scope of this work is basically the New Testament; therefore the explored modern-critical tools are explicitly explored, engaged and analyzed in direct relation to the New Testament texts.

MODERN-CRITICAL TOOLS FOR NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION

In the recent times, biblical interpretation is a hot-ongoing affair with which several schools of interpretation have been developed in view of their own methods of interpretation. The study acknowledges that fact that this great progress and development is one of the incentives that spurred this research. Historical-Critical method is popularly mentioned and commonly known sometimes as the only approach when a discourse is made on subject matter of this sort.

The research states that Historical-Critical method (though prominent and encompassing) is one among many approaches which focuses on concerns of history, historical authenticity, historical circumstances and writer's intended meaning of the text. It is important to note that the categorization of the research here entails the modern development which started as far back as late 18th century previously discussed in the preceding part of this research. They are;

1. Historical-Critical Method
2. Fundamentalist Approach
3. Tradition Approach
4. Contextual Approaches

The study notes that the arrangement of the approaches does not suggest any chronological or hierarchical form; the approaches are presented in the form with which they are explored here.

HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

This is an indispensable means for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts. The necessity for this methodology is

enshrined on the fact that the word of God is in human language. It is observed that certain elements of this method of interpretation are very ancient (used in antiquity by Greek commentators of classical literature and the patristic period by authors such as Origen, Jerome and Augustine), but less developed. This method began through the works of scholars like Benedict Spinoza, Johann Semler, Richard Simon, Welhausen, Jean Astruc, Ferdinand Baur, Hermann Gunkel, Griesbach, Streeter, Martin Dibelius, Rudolf Bultmann, among others. This methodology is historical in nature because it applies to an ancient historical text as the Bible and that these texts are products of historical processes (At the different stages of production, the texts of the Bible were addressed to various categories of audience or readers living in different places and times). The methods under this approach are explained below;

Textual Criticism

This method is concerned with the quest for the original wording. In New Testament studies, textual critics are mainly concerned with Greek manuscripts and traditionally with trying to establish, and publish, the earliest recoverable writings (Wurthwein, 1994). Text critics analyze the various manuscripts of the New Testament that have been preserved over the centuries, comparing them, dating them, and employing various techniques to determine which are the most reliable. Their goal is to reconstruct what the original manuscripts probably said; noting also variant readings when one or more of the copies that have been made over the years say something different. A text critic asks what variations exist in the manuscripts of the gospel texts, and which has the greatest claim to be correct (Metzger, 1992). This method explore different types of variants; variation among manuscripts in the original language, variation among manuscripts in early translation, variation between ancient manuscripts in the original language and manuscript of early translations and variant quotations in early Jewish and Christian writings (Hayes, 1987: 35).

Historical Criticism

Scholars view the New Testament primarily as an ancient resource for learning about history (McKenzie, 1966). This method reconstructs the lives and beliefs of significant people (such as Jesus and Paul) and understands the origins

of Christianity. It is observed that history here is in two spheres; “history in the text” and “history of the text”. The former has to do with what the text itself narrates, while the latter deals with the story of the text; how, why, when, where, by whom, to whom and in what circumstances did the text itself originate (Ibid, Hayes: 47). Thus, historical critics apply criteria of historical analysis as a resource for understanding the lives and circumstances of biblical characters and for reconstructing the events that transpired.

Source Criticism

This tool attempts to move behind the New Testament texts to suggest hypotheses regarding materials that the biblical authors might have used in composing their documents (Weinfed, 1972). For example, Paul quotes from an early Christian liturgy in 1Cor 11:23-26, Luke (1:1) indicated that he drew from some other materials about Jesus in composing his Gospel. Source critics try to identify these materials, and sometimes they even attempt to reconstruct them (Powell, nd).

Form Criticism

This method classifies units of scripture by literary pattern and attempts to trace each type to its period of oral transmission. Form criticism seeks to determine a unit’s original form and the historical context of the literary tradition (Kirsopp and Lake, 1937: 19). It goes on to seek the sociological setting for each text’s genre, its “situation in life” (*Sitz im Leben*). Genre is a literary term having to do with the category or genus of literature under consideration. A form critic asks the question; what genre of material were available to the evangelists (authors), and how were they used in the earliest church (Black and Rowley, 1967).

The literary classifications of prose and poetry were subdivided into history, legends, and myths; and hymns, psalms, and prophetic oracles. Form criticism allows interpreters to gain insights into a text based on what they can learn about its formal characteristics; this offer ideas about its probable social setting and function. Hayes (1987) explained that this approach uncovered numerous smaller genres; miracle stories, pronouncement stories, parables and birth stories. In the past, parables have been read as if they belonged to one genre allegory, but with this tool, the parables

of Jesus have extensively investigated with diverse forms.

Literary Criticism

The tool seek to understand the text as literature by employing traditional or more recent models of literary criticism that are employed in the study of literature (Gorman: 13). Narrative criticism is a sub-set of literary criticism; it is a quest to understand the formal and material features of narrative texts. Hayes (Ibid: 73) argued that literary criticism deals with the composition and rhetorical style of the text; this makes rhetorical criticism a cardinal part of this tool (Funk, 1966). Thus, literary criticism is the task of separating out sources or layers, describing their content and characteristics features and relating them to one another (Barr, 1973). In other words, this tool explicitly focuses on the world of the text, its composition, structure and mood.

Redaction Criticism

This tool seeks to determine the particular intentions of New Testament authors by analyzing how they organized and edited their source materials. Thus, the primary focus of redaction criticism is editorial stages. Scholars look at how various textual units are arranged within a particular text and they look at alterations that each author is believed to have made in his source material (Ibid, Hayes; 105). They are especially attentive to additions, omissions, and organizational patterns that might indicate an author’s priorities and preferences. Thus, Matthew’s reference to Jesus’ disciples having “little faith” (Matt 8:26) rather than “no faith” (Mark 4:40) could reflect growing respect for these people as foundational leaders of the church; the placement of a passage on church discipline (Matt 18:15-17) directly after a parable concerning recovery of the lost (Matt 18:12-14) could reflect a view that the goal of church discipline is to effect repentance, not to preserve community purity (Ibid, Powell).

Originally, redaction criticism was restricted to the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but later applied to other areas of scripture (Lightfoot, 1935). Perrin (1969) states that the prime requisite of redaction criticism is the ability to trace the form and content of material used by the author concerned or in some way to determine the nature and extent of his activity in collecting and creating, as well as in arranging, editing,

and composing. In view of this, redaction critics ask; what theological and sociological purposes lay behind the evangelists' selection and expression of Jesus' material in the gospels? For what purpose is the editorial work?

Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism draws upon the insights of modern literary analysis to determine the particular effects that the biblical stories were expected to have on their readers. Narrative critics pay attention to how the plot of a story is advanced, how characters are developed, how conflict is introduced or resolved, and how rhetorical features like symbolism and irony affect the reader's perception of what is happening. Narrative critics are concerned primarily with the qualities that make New Testaments literature (Resseguie, 2019).

Grammatical Criticism

This tool is concerned not only with how individual words function as carriers of meaning but how those words are arranged in phrases and sentences to form meaning sense units (Rienecker, 1980). This type of critical is often thought of as the set of skills and discipline through which critics re-create and enter the original thought-world of the author (or text) through the language of the text (Ibid; Hayes, 69). In other words, this method is explicitly concerned with the questions of language syntax and grammar.

FUNDAMENTALIST APPROACH

According to Laurence (2005; 27), the term 'fundamentalist' is connected directly with the American Biblical Congress held at Niagara, N.Y., in 1895. At this meeting, conservative Protestant exegetes defined "five points of fundamentalism:" the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, his virginal birth, the doctrine of vicarious expiation and the bodily resurrection at the time of the second coming of Christ (Pope John Paul, 1993: 1-3). This approach starts from the principle that the Bible, being the word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally. It does not recognize that the 'word of God' was formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods (Ryrie, 1995: 81).

Fundamentalists refuse to admit that the word of God has been expressed in human language

under divine inspiration, by human authors possessed of limited capacities and resources (Reid, Linder, Shelley & Stout, 1990). They often show a tendency to ignore or deny the problems presented by the biblical text in its original Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek form. They biblical text as if it had been dictated word for word by the Spirit (Dein, 2014: 5). Also, they do not take into account the development of the Gospel tradition, but confuses the final stage of this tradition (what the evangelists have written) with the initial (the words and deeds of the historical Jesus). They accept the literal reality of an ancient cosmology simply because it is found expressed in the Bible; meanwhile, this blocks any dialogue with a broader way of seeing the relationship between culture and faith (Zuck, 2002: 26).

It is clear that this methodology is opposed to historical - critical method, or the use of any other scientific method for the interpretation of Scripture. Bernard (1970: 48) argued that one of the things that spurred this methodology is a contrary opinion to the historical - critical method. This is rooted in the fact that fundamentalism advocates non-critical reading of biblical texts (Smith 2012; 163). Since fundamentalism presents itself as a form of private interpretation without acknowledging that the church is founded on the Bible and draws its life and inspiration from Scripture; it seems logical to view it as anti-church (Diarmaid, 2009), 151. Although, this method of interpretation is capable of injecting life with a false certitude, for its unwittingly confusion the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations; the study posits that the methodology viably maintains the lens of the Bible as the 'inspired word of God.'

TRADITION APPROACH

Under this approach, the study observes one of the common methods which is called 'Canonical Criticism.' This methodology is a way of interpreting the Bible that focuses on the text of the biblical canon itself as a finished product. Childs (1979; 82) centers his interest on the final canonical form of the text, the form accepted by the community as an authoritative expression of its faith and rule of life. But Sanders (1972), rather than looking to the final and fixed form of the text, devotes his attention to the canonical process or progressive development of the Bible which

the believing community has accepted as a normative authority.

The canonical approach is synchronic and text-reader oriented. Here, the reading of a text will vary upon which believing community is doing the reading. This method is theological in nature and it separates the meaning of the texts from dependence from their historical or original use; thus, it avoids atomization of biblical texts (Hayes, 1987: 123).

In view of this, the study observes that the canonical approach finds itself grappling with more than one problem when it seeks to define the 'canonical process;' at what point in time precisely does a text become canonical? Should the interpretive process which led to the formation of the canon be recognized as the guiding principle for the interpretation of Scripture today? Can the chronological order in which the Canon of the Scriptures exists be followed in exegesis? In fact, the complex relationships that exist between the Jewish and Christian canons of Scripture raise many problems of interpretation.

CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

The interpretation of a text is often dependent on the mindset and concerns of bookworm (Oderinde, 2013; 10). Tate (2013; 10) supports this stance when he argued that "once the text leaves the hands of the author, the author's intention and entire matrix of originating circumstances lose any claim of being constitutive of meaning." Thus, it is possible for readers to give attention to certain portions and unconsciously neglect others. Nevertheless, this methodology does not mean the interpreter is bias; because there is no individual interpreter who is completely detached from his or her environment, experience and culture (Baker, 1930; 21). It is inevitable that some biblical interpreters bring to their work points of view that are new and receptive to contemporary currents of thought which have not up till now been taken sufficiently into consideration. It is important to note that scholars do so with critical perspicacity. The methodologies are; Liberation theology, Feminism and African Biblical Hermeneutics.

The Liberationist Approach

The theology of liberation is a complex phenomenon, which began to establish itself as a theological movement in the early 1970s (Gyapong, 2014). Liberation theology is not content with an objectifying interpretation

which concentrates on what the text said in its original context. It seeks a reading drawn from the situation of people as it is lived here and now. If a people lives in circumstances of oppression, one must go to the Bible to find there nourishment capable of sustaining the people in its struggles and its hopes (Ibid). It is precisely participation in this struggle that allows those interpretations to surface which are discovered only when the biblical texts are read in a context of solidarity with the oppressed.

A reading of the Bible from a stance of such commitment also involves some risks. Since liberation theology is tied to a movement that is still in a process of development, the remarks which follow can only be provisional. This kind of reading is centered on narrative and prophetic texts which highlight situations of oppression and which inspire a praxis leading to social change. At times such a reading can be limited, not giving enough attention to other texts of the Bible. It is true that exegesis cannot be neutral, but it must also take care not to become one-sided. Moreover, social and political action is not the direct task of the exegete

The Feminist Approach

The methodology had its origin in the United States toward the end of the 19th century. In the socio-cultural context of the struggle for the rights of women, the editorial board of a committee charged with the revision of the Bible produced "The Woman's Bible" in two volumes (New York 1885, 1898). Feminism did not developed a new methodology (Elaine, 1996), instead it employs the current methods of exegesis, especially the historical-critical method, but add two criteria of investigation; first, a hermeneutic of suspicion: Since history was normally written by the victors, establishing the full truth requires that one does not simply trust texts as they stand but look for signs which may reveal something quite different.

The second criterion is sociological; it is based on the study of societies in the biblical times, their social stratification and the position they accorded to women. Feminist exegesis often raises questions of power within the church, questions which, as is obvious, are matters of discussion and even of confrontation. In this area, feminist exegesis can be useful to the church only to the degree that it does not fall into the very traps it denounces and that it does not lose sight of the evangelical teaching

concerning power as service, a teaching addressed by Jesus to all disciples, men and women.

African Biblical Hermeneutics

Africans are human beings who seem unable to explain life without reference to what is religious and spiritual. An African person finds his or her being and its meaning in communal living; in fact, they perceive reality in holistic terms (Pobee, 1976; 121). The African world was illuminated of the Good News through the Western world. This suggests a huge dependence of Africans on the Western knowledge, understanding and methods of interpreting biblical texts (Daper, 2015; 19). But in the recent time, Africans are vehemently arguing for African Biblical Hermeneutics; also called African Biblical Studies or African Biblical Interpretation.

Mbiti (1983; 73) sketched the history of biblical studies in Africa to the conference in Ibadan, Nigeria; “Consultation of African Theologians” in 1966. The need for African biblical interpretation in the soil of Africa has led many African scholars to do contextual biblical studies in Africa (Ottuh, 2014; 28). African Biblical Hermeneutics is not only done for African audience alone but also for the Western audience as well because some Western scholars who became aware of African biblical scholarship after the African Hermeneutics conference that followed the 1996 *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (SNTS) meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, became interested in African biblical critical scholarship (Ibid; Ottuh; 28).

Scholars in this stance argued that the worldviews and settings with which the popular modern-critical methodologies erupt are in reality outlying Africa. The need for African biblical interpretation has remained a strong position of African scholars who are actually part of the African setting witnessing the inherent necessity for it. The publication of “*The Bible in Africa*,” a culmination of a project that started in 1995, seems to have marked a major turning point for biblical exegesis in Africa (West and Dube, 2000). This collective book with more than thirty essays has shown not only the vitality of African biblical scholarship, but also its idiosyncrasy as ‘a variety of ways that link the biblical text to the African context.’

In Adamoh’s (1999; 60) opinion, African hermeneutics is the biblical interpretation that

makes “African social-cultural context” a subject of interpretation. Adamoh further explained that this methodology has several distinctiveness; communal reading and interpretation, Bible as power, Africa and Africans in the Bible, African comparative, African evaluative, using Africa to interpret the Bible and using the Bible to interpret Africa, the promotion of distinctive life interest and African identity (Ibid; 53). Therefore, it will be an understatement to say this method of interpretation is myopic, fetish, irrelevant, local or primitive (Adamo, 2001; 51).

African biblical hermeneutics is rooted in African realities and is accountable to ordinary African interpreters of the Bible. The study opines that several tools which serve as methods of African Biblical Hermeneutics were results of African scholars in their interactions with the varying existing so called ‘Euro-centric hermeneutical methodologies.’ These methodologies are discussed as follows: Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics (Quarshie, 2002; Jean-Claude, 2008: 28; Kuwornu-Ajaottor, 2010), Cultural Hermeneutics (Winter, 1966: 24; Aylward, 1992; 5; Manus 2003: 3; Mbuvi, 2017: 163), Reconstruction Hermeneutics (Mugambi, 1991; Mbuvi, 2017: 163), Liberation Hermeneutics (Mosala, 1989; West, 2009) and Feminist/Womanist Theology (Musimbi Kanyoro, 1996: 51-70; Anum, 1993: 73; Oduyoye, 1994: 38-53; Ayanga, 1999: 90; Dube, 2001; Dube, 2005; Farisani, 2007: 1).

CONCLUSION

The study observes that the modern tools for critical studies of the New Testament aids understanding of the revelation which it contains; logically, the resources of human knowledge can be fitly employed, because the books of the New Testament were written and copied by men who were fallible and under the influence of human environ. The research sees the possibility for the diverse discussed methodologies to yield conflicting results in interpretation; in view of their possible considerable overlap in their application. However, scholars can use a collection of disciplines in interrelated ways. These methods function as tools for understanding different aspects of the New Testament. Most New Testament scholars should try to approach the writings with an adequate tool box; prepared to use whichever method is called for at the time.

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Citation: KOLAWOLE Oladotun Paul. "An Exploration of Tools for Modern Critical Studies of the New Testament", *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*. 2022; 9(1): 23-35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22259/2694-6296.0901004>

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