

Scripture

Lesson Notes • Deacon Lázaro J. Ulloa

Hermeneutics

Simply put, Hermeneutics means *interpretation*.

How do we interpret the Bible?

Scriptures are more than just literary works. They are also inspired tradition of an ongoing believing community. The literal sense plays a normative role in helping the present-day community come to an understanding of its identity and to an appreciation of the kind of lifestyles that should flow from that identity. This view of Scripture results in a plurality of meanings which require a method of interpretation that can faithfully transmit the inspired tradition.

Historical-Critical Approach

It is an approach that employs every available historical tool in an attempt to reconstruct history and to understand the documents which that history produced. Its goal is historical, and it works toward that goal critically and systematically. It seeks to understand and to interpret but not to judge the findings.

Textual Criticism

This approach has two functions:

1. To reconstruct the original wording of a biblical text.
Impossible since the original copy of every book of the bible has been lost. The best that scholars can do is to reconstruct the text from manuscripts that are available.
2. To trace the transmission of that text down through the centuries.

Literary Criticism

This approach is understood in at least three different ways:

1. In the classical sense it is the critical approach to the study of literature. The structure, form, and language are analyzed. This critique was applied to biblical material, and as early as the time of Origen it led scholars to question the supposed authorship of some of the biblical books.
2. Asking historical questions about literary differences (also called source criticism).
3. Asks questions regarding the relationship of content to form and with the philosophy of language.

Form Criticism

Its function is to get behind the sources identified by literary criticism and to discover the life situations out of which they grew. What were the original settings in the life of the community? How did they express themselves in other forms of literature from the time? What is the genre? Why was it written?

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In short, when trying to interpret Scripture, we must ask the following questions:

1. Who wrote it?
2. Why was it written?
3. Who is the audience?
4. What is the purpose of the writing?
5. What social, economic and political events influenced the writing?