

UNIT INTRODUCTION 7

Aim: The aim of this unit is to examine critical issues and questions surrounding the formation of the Synoptic Gospels (including source criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism).

Overview: You are advised to start work on this unit by reading my handouts entitled 'Stages in the Formation of the Gospels', 'The Literary Relationship of the Gospels' and 'Redaction Criticism'. These handouts map out some of the central issues in the study of oral traditions about Jesus, their transmission into written traditions, and ultimately the formation (and relationship) of the four canonical gospels.

It is then recommended that you read the book chapters or articles listed below under 'Essential Reading'; this will help you familiarise yourself with matters relating to the history of scholarship and the importance of different methods (especially form criticism, source criticism and redaction criticism) for the study of the formation of the Gospels (especially the Synoptic Gospels = Mark, Matthew and Luke). The publications listed under 'Recommended Reading' focus on particular aspects of the topic for this unit.

Essential Reading: You will find a particularly helpful outline of the topic in Johannes Floss's essay (on Form, Source and Redaction Criticism), that is, Chapter 34 in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (available as an e-resource). This chapter usefully summarizes the three 'criticisms' that are subjected to more in-depth treatment in the literature cited under 'Recommended Reading' (sections 1-3 below). A particularly accessible introduction to these critical methods (with reference to particular passages) can be found in Steve Moyise's *Introduction to Biblical Studies* (Chapter 4).

Recommended: Reading

1. Form Criticism: The scholarly study of the early (oral) stages of the transmission of traditions about Jesus is known as 'form criticism' (German: *Formgeschichte*), a topic on which you are advised to read Samuel Byrskog's article on the transmission of the Jesus tradition. This article offers a brief outline of the history of scholarship on form criticism, the presuppositions of this method, and attempts at identifying different oral forms of tradition (pronouncement stories, dominical sayings, similitudes, miracle stories, parables); the chapter then offers an up-to-date survey of scholarly responses to form criticism and to future possible directions.

2. Source Criticism (particularly the 'Synoptic Problem')

The next step is to consider how Gospel scholars have attempted to determine the nature of the (literary) relationship between the three Synoptic Gospels. One of the most recent – and accessible – summary of the discussion on this topic can be found in Mark Goodacre's chapter 'Entering the Maze: Studying the Synoptic Problem', which is the initial chapter of his book *The Synoptic Problem: A Way Through the Maze* (2001). You can access this volume directly through Mark Goodacre's personal webpage (link provided on Moodle).

3. Redaction Criticism

A particularly reader-friendly and illuminating analysis of redaction criticism can be found in Adela Yarbro Collins's recent contribution entitled 'Redaction Criticism in Theory and Practice'. As well as noting the distinct character of redaction criticism as a critical method of studying the Gospels, she deals with a particularly interesting but often overlooked issue: evidence of redaction criticism where no earlier sources survive (as in the case of Mark's Gospel).

Reading List

Byrskog, Samuel, 'The Transmission of the Jesus Tradition: Old and New Insights', *Early Christianity* 1 (2010), 441-68.

Floss, Johannes, 'Form, Source and Redaction Criticism', in John Rogerson and Judith Lieu (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Goodacre, Mark, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way Through the Maze* (London: T&TClark, 2001), 13-32.

Moyise, Steve, 'Historical Approaches: The Search for Intention', *Introduction to Biblical Studies* (3rd edition; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), Chapter 4.

Yarbro Collins, Adela, 'Redaction Criticism in Theory and Practice', in A.B. McGowan and H.K. Richards (eds.), *Method and Meaning: Essays on New Testament Interpretation in Honor of Harold W. Attridge* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 59-77.