

Unit 6

Postcritical Interpretation

Not the only but certainly the most prominent among postcritical thinkers and practitioners is Jacques Derrida. He challenges Western logocentrism and with it the foundations of a tradition which for centuries has dominated Western European discourse. He perceives it as a pattern of thinking which to a vast extent is responsible for all kinds of oppressionist ideologies and he goes as far as to attribute to it responsibility for oppression in Western thinking and culture generally. Derrida's thinking is subsumed under the label of 'deconstruction' or 'deconstructions' whereby he himself emphasizes that 'deconstructions' is not a project, or a method or system. It is rather one of the possible names for designating a certain practice of dislocating texts of classical philosophy in the first instance – but also of texts of other disciplines, and of every 'text' in the general sense Derrida uses this term. It could also be described as a set of practices by which formalising and totalising tendencies in philosophical as well as other discourses of European tradition, including theology, are not opposed (since to oppose something implies to think in the categories of traditional dualistic patterns of logic) but maybe one could say – set aside. In setting aside a perspective different from the dominant one, the totalitarian character of an approach which claims to have found the one and only true meaning is revealed.

This implies that no reading/interpretation of any text is final as no neutral or objective readings are ever possible in postcritical perspective. Thus even deconstructivist or postcritical readings are themselves again subject to deconstruction.

This process can be described by the term 'negotiations'. Meaning emerges in an ongoing process of negotiations, requiring an ongoing questioning of the origins of one's own concepts and their political implications. Interpretation always takes place in a process of negotiation and thus has to ask these very same questions. There is no stopping in this project, no settling down in one ever stable and unquestioned position, as there is no final and unquestioned true essence to be found in a text.

A number of approaches have been influenced by such thinking. Among them are scholars like Peter Ochs and Stanley Hauweras who in the wake of the critique of the hegemony of Western rationalistic discourse propose a return to scriptural traditions, 'with the hope of retrieving resources long ignored, depreciated, and in many cases ideologically suppressed by modern habits of thought.' (Radical Traditions', Series cover description, in P.Ochs, N.Levine (eds.), *Textual Reasonings*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2002) It is in the first instance a movement that began as an offshoot of the study of Judaism but parallel to this movement of Jewish thinkers there has now developed a movement that invites Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologians back to the texts of their respective traditions, recovering and rearticulating modes of 'scriptural reasoning'. The movement is driven by questions concerning the place of theology and, more specifically, of scriptural faith in contemporary life. Significantly, the participants of this discourse locate themselves at home both within their respective faith communities as well as in Western universities. Thus far from being a threat to Biblical Interpretation postcritical approaches open up innovative ways of reading the Bible.

Essential Readings:

- **A.K.M Adam 'Textures of Postmodernism', in A.K.M.Adam *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism ?* Minneapolis,MN: Fortress Press 1995, pp. 1-25
- **Peter Ochs 'An Introduction to Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation' in Peter Ochs,ed., *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*. New York: Paulist Press 1993, pp.3-51
- **William Stacy Johnson 'Reading the Scriptures Faithfully in a Postmodern Age' in Ellen F. Davies, Richard B.Hays eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2003, pp. 109-124
- ** Cristina Grenholm, Daniel Patte 'Overture: Receptions, Critical Interpretation and Scriptural Criticism' in C. Grenholm, D. Patte (eds.), *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations*. Harrisburg,PA: Trinity Press International 2000, pp.1-54
- Robert P. Carroll 'Poststructuralist Approaches, New Historicism and Postmodernism' in Barton J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 50-67

Further Readings:

- William A. Beardslee 'Poststructuralist Criticism' , in S.L.McKenzie, S.R.Haynes eds.,*To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox 1999, pp.253-267
- Walter Brueggemann 'Biblical Authority in the Postcritical Period' In Walter Brueggemann, *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology*.Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2005.

A.K.M Adam

What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism ? Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1995.

The Bible and
Culture Collective

The Postmodern Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press 1995.