

# Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Lecture 15 Redaction Criticism

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Okay, we're going to turn then to redaction criticism. What is redaction criticism? Well, we need to look at some definitions. Redaction, that is the activity of a redactor.

That brings the question of what a redactor is. Well, we could say it's a person who does redaction, but we'll say a synonym for editor, okay? And then redaction criticism is a type of biblical study concerned with the activity of redactors or editors. Norman Perrin, in his little booklet, *What is Redaction Criticism?* on page one says, it is concerned with studying the theological motivation of an author as this is revealed in the collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of traditional material and in the composition of new material or the creation of new forms within the traditions of early Christianity. I'm going to give you a very quick sketch history redaction criticism.

It is a relatively recent development in liberal New Testament criticism for which we give a quick review. We talked earlier about synoptic problems and source criticism. Since the second century, there has been debate and discussion regarding the similarities and differences among the Gospels and how to explain them.

By the late 19th century, a sort of consensus had been reached called the two-document theory, Q and Mark as sources of Matthew and Luke. This type of work is called literary or source criticism. The historical reliability of the Gospels, which was discussed in parallel with that of the Synoptic Problem, became especially sharply debated with the rise of theological liberalism in the 19th century.

By the end of that century, around 1900, most liberals felt Mark was the most reliable gospel, except for its miracles, which were basically historical. Wilhelm Wrede, in his *Messianic Secret* 1901, argued that Mark was not reliable history but theologically motivated to present Jesus as Messiah, though Jesus never claimed to be such. Then, criticism arose in the New Testament studies just after World War II in Germany.

Its pioneers were Carl Schmitt, Martin Debelius, and especially Rudolf Bultmann. They accepted Wrede's claim that Mark made up his own framework, and they tried to go behind the Gospels to study the period of oral transmission. Most form critics claimed that between Jesus' life and the writing of the Gospels, much material was invented, and much was changed.

Well, that brings us to redaction criticism. Redaction criticism seeks to round out the critical analysis of the Gospels by filling in areas overlooked by form criticism and source criticism. It studies the work of the Gospel editors, especially their theological motivation, in compiling oral materials to form written accounts or in combining and editing written materials to form their Gospels.

So, here is a form of criticism about the tradition. Source criticism is down here about Mark and Q and their relationship to Matthew and Luke, and redaction criticism is looking at what Mark does in choosing traditions and modifying them, what Q does in choosing traditions and modifying them, and especially what Matthew and Luke do in selecting material out of Mark, and Q. Redaction criticism was foreshadowed in the work of Wrede and Bultmann, but especially in R. H. Lightfoot's Bampton Lecture 1934. R. H. Lightfoot is to be distinguished from J. B. Lightfoot from the 19th century.

He was a much more conservative man. However, the real flowering of redaction criticism came from Germany just after World War II. Form criticism comes out of Germany just after World War I. Redaction criticism comes out of Germany just after World War II.

The works involved here are Gunther Bornkamm and his work on Matthew in 1948 and following, Hans Konzelmann in his work on Luke in 1954, and Willi Marksson in his work on Mark in 1956. More recently, redaction and criticism have spread to the study of Q and of John. Robert Gundry's work, *Matthew, a Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 1982, represents a spread of the method into evangelical circles, for which Gundry was actually voted out of the Evangelical Theological Society.

Gundry feels that Matthew invented some of the incidences in his gospel to make theological points, namely the visit of the Magi and the killing of the babies. Gundry may be the most radical evangelical here, but he's certainly not alone. Well, let's think a little bit about the methodology of redaction criticism.

How does redaction criticism operate? The following steps give a sketch of the procedures involved. The redaction criticism is concerned with examining the editing work of typically one editor at a time, anyway. So, you carefully compare all differences between a given gospel and its parallels.

So, for instance, say you're going to look at the redacting work of Matthew, let's say, for which you mean the author of the Gospel of Matthew, which Gundry, I think, did think it was Matthew. Check that. Remember that now.

So, you would compare Matthew with Mark and Luke and note where differences occur in each of their accounts. Two, attempt to discover those differences that are the result of the writer's editorial activity under study. Which of these are things that

Matthew did? So, when you're comparing Mark's account with Matthew's account, is this what Matthew did to it or not? That sort of thing.

Typically, you have to assume some particular order and relationship of the Gospels. And almost invariably, this is the two-document theory, which among actual researchers in the gospel, in that kind of questions, is certainly the majority view, but it's not a vast majority view. But when you get down to redaction criticism, that's the vast majority that goes with that particular model.

That two-document model holds that Matthew used Mark and Q. Second, you assume the writer has no other sources or at least that his own contribution can be distinguished by style. Then, you compare statistics on style to recognize the author's contribution in areas where it would otherwise be uncertain. So you've looked at the differences, and now you're trying to distinguish which are, say, in our particular example, we're thinking of Matthew's work, etc.

Thirdly, you study these detailed differences to determine the author's theological motivation for introducing these differences. Once you've figured out what those are, you locate texts that express these motivations, and then you interpret the whole gospel in terms of these texts and motivations. Fourthly, you reconstruct the author's outlook, his circumstances, his group, and his audience.

That is what the Germans call *Sitz und Leben*, the life situation of the author, etc. Markson, in working with the redaction criticism in Mark, is typical in seeing three *Sitz und Leben*, or three life situations, in a given gospel passage. There's, first of all, the ministry of Jesus.

Markson and these others would admit Jesus existed and that he really did things. Okay, so some of the *Sitz und Leben*, one *Sitz im Leben* is the ministry of Jesus. But then there's the background of the sources, and those would be Mark and Q, or Proto Mark, or various sorts of things of that sort.

What is their *Sitz und Leben*? And then you got the redactor, the background of the gospel writer, the *Sitz und Leben* of that person. So, for Markson, that would be Mark. For Gundry, that would be Matthew, etc.

Well, we're not going to go through that in detail. This is just a short presentation at the end of the course, but some results of redaction criticism. In liberal circles, we know very little about the life of Jesus, but we can reconstruct lots of diverse theological groups in early Christianity.

In conservative circles, redaction criticism is much more restrained among evangelicals, but with the work of Gundry and others, it's beginning to introduce the idea that not all narratives describe events that really occurred. Matthew, for

Gundry, becomes a kind of midrash, a term borne from rabbinic literature, an imaginative retelling or invention of events to make various theological points. Well, an evaluation of redaction criticism.

I start out with a few favorable comments, because we're going to talk about some serious problems further on. First of all, favorable, the gospel writers did select incidents and materials about Jesus, which they chose to record. Presumably, they also condensed this material.

So, John 20 and 31 and John 21:25 tell us, you know, there's lots of material out there, and I've selected this to help you see the Jesus of the Messiah and that you might have life in his name. And Luke 1-1 refers to compiling an account. Secondly, any detailed study of the gospel is bound to produce some valuable insights. The approach does study the Gospels in great detail.

Thirdly, the gospel writers apparently emphasized various features of Jesus' ministry in their selection and presentation, as we can see by comparing their Gospels. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the King Messiah, coming in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy to set up a kingdom, to set up a kingdom of heaven, and makes these parallels between Jesus and Israel, and preserves for us these substantial discourses of Jesus.

Mark emphasizes Jesus' actions and brief words to answer the question, who is this man? Which, in fact, is asked by several different people in the front half of the Gospel, Mark. And his answer is, he's the Messiah, he's the Son of God. Luke has an emphasis on historicity, as you see in his prologue, and on eyewitness testimony to Jesus, an interest in social relationships in Gentiles and the women and the poor, and has these illustrative parables.

John emphasizes Jesus' significance, both individual and cosmic, and his person, as revealed in his words and miracles. John has more symbolism more allegorical parallelism, but still the same Jesus. These emphases do give us insight into the theological concerns of the writers.

So those favorable comments. They did select materials, and any detailed study will produce some valuable insights. The Gospel writers apparently emphasized various features of Jesus' ministry, etc., and these emphases give us insight into the theological concerns of the Gospel writers—some serious problems.

Well, some of the results that form critics get, even evangelical form critics like Gundry, are alarming. First of all, we get a rejection of recorded historical details. Freda said Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah.

Perrin, who is more strictly a redaction critic, says, Once we know little about Jesus, here's what his statement looks like, that redaction criticism makes life of Jesus' research very much more difficult, is of course, immediately obvious, with the recognition that so much of the material in the Gospels must be ascribed to the theological motivation of the evangelist, or of an editor of the tradition, or of a prophet or preacher in the early church, we must come to recognize that the words of R. H. Lightfoot were fully and absolutely justified. The Gospels do indeed yield us only a whisper of Jesus' voice. This means, in practice, that we must take as our starting point the assumption that the Gospels offer us direct information about the theology of the early church and not about the teaching of the historical Jesus.

All of that is on page 69 of *What is Redaction Criticism*. And then, just a few pages further on, the conclusion: don't base faith on him. The real cutting edge of the impact of redaction criticism is the fact that it raises very serious questions, indeed, about what normally motivates the life of Jesus' research, the life of Jesus theology.

It raises, above all, the question as to whether the view of the historical Jesus as the locus of revelation and the central concern of the Christian faith is, in fact, justifiable. Page 72. That's Norman Perrin, who would be very much a mainline liberal.

Gundry, Robert Gundry, is somewhat radical evangelical. The visit of the wise men and the flight to Egypt never happened—pages 26, 32, 34, 35 of his commentary.

I'll read out these. Matthew now turns the visit of the local Jewish shepherds, Luke 2, 8 through 20, into the adoration by Gentile magi from foreign parts. Just as the four women, besides Mary in the genealogy, pointed forward to the bringing of the Gentiles into the church, so also the coming of the magi previews the entrance of disciples from all nations into the circle of those who acknowledge Jesus as the King of the Jews and worship him as God.

All that on page 26. Then, when he's coming in chapter 2, verse 13, to carry on the motif of flight from persecution, Matthew changes the going up to Jerusalem by the Holy Family, Luke 2, 22, into a flight to Egypt, page 32, and then jumping on to page 34 and 35. 2, 16.

Matthew pursues Mosaic typology further with an episode corresponding to Pharaoh's slaughtering of the male babies of the Israelites at the time of Moses' birth. To do so, he changes the sacrificial slaying of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, which took place at the presentation of the baby Jesus in a temple, Luke 2:24. Compare Leviticus 12, 6 through 8, to Herod's slaughtering of the babies in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The sorrow of the baby's mothers corresponds to the sword that was going to pierce the heart of Mary, according to Simeon's prediction at the presentation at the

temple, Luke 1:35. Compare Matthew 2:18. Herod's massive crimes made it easy for Matthew to manipulate the Dominical tradition in this way, pages 34, 35.

So that's the rejection of recorded historical detail. The other alarming feature we see is the generation of hypothetical historical details. Villey Markson, on Mark's setting, is described by Perrin on pages 38 and 39.

In thus carrying redaction criticism to its furthest limit, Markson perhaps points the way to a still future day in work. This new departure is his conception that the Markan theology reflects the situation in Galilee in the year 66 AD, at the beginning of the Jewish war against Rome. Markson believes that the Christian community of Jerusalem had fled from Jerusalem to Galilee at the beginning of the war, that there they were waiting for the parousias, which they believed to be imminent.

The Gospel of Mark claims Markson reflects this situation in its theology. So for example, the present ending of the Gospel at 16 AD is the true ending. Mark did not intend to go on to report resurrection appearances in Galilee.

The references to Galilee in 14:25 and 16:7 are not references to the resurrection at all but to the parousia. Mark expects this event to take place immediately in his own day. It is not our purpose here to defend or to debate with Markson the correctness of his insight with regard to the place and time of the composition of Mark's Gospel.

Our concern is to point out that here we are moving beyond redaction criticism itself to a still newer stage, a stage in which we work from a theological insight we have been able to determine the historical situation in which that insight arose.

Generation of hypothetical historical details. Gundry on the background of the Gospel of Matthew verses page five and six of Gundry.

By noting Matthew's emphases, we can infer the situation in which he wrote and the purposes for which he wrote. This will also reveal the theology characteristic of his Gospel. Matthew shows great concern over the problem of a mixed church.

The church has grown large through the influx of converts from all nations, Matthew 28:18 through 20, but these converts include false as well as true disciples, and he quotes a bunch of passages and cites a bunch of passages in various chapters there. The distinction between them is coming to light through the persecution of the church. Matthew 5:10 through 12.

This persecution did not originate from the Roman government but was primarily spread among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Matthew constantly exposes and heightens their guilt—two citations in chapters 27:28.

True disciples are suffering with endurance. Some of them had to flee for their lives. False disciples, on the other hand, are making public disclaimers of Jesus in order to avoid persecution.

At their head, the false disciples have false prophets who appear to be settled ecclesiastics, i.e., church officials whose easygoing attitudes and policies of accommodation have preserved them from the hardships of itinerant ministry. These false prophets seem to have come into the church from the Pharisaical sect and the scribal occupations. Well, look at all that information about Matthew's background.

Where'd he get it? By assuming that various remarks in Jesus' mouth are allusions to these things. And a third alarming feature is the addition of the genre of historical fiction to Scripture. Perrin says, on page 75, that the gospel mark is the prototype that others follow and is a mixture of historical reminiscence, interpreted tradition, and the free creativity of prophets and the evangelist.

It is, in other words, a strange mixture of history, legend, and myth. It is this fact that redaction criticism makes unmistakably clear. Gundry.

Gundry calls it Midrash or Haggadah but compares it to modern historical novels that combine truth and fiction. Pages 630-632 in his commentary. Well, those are the examples of some alarming phenomena that are occurring.

But behind them, some methods are suspect. We categorize these under various headings, which we'll call fallacies. They're not a fallacy in the typical logical sense.

The terminology is my own, but the methodological problems have also been noted by many others, of whom Macias Lewis, a professional literary critic, is a prominent example, and I will quote from him on a number of occasions. I call the first fallacy in the methodology redaction criticism the sand foundation fallacy. Redaction criticism builds an elaborate methodology on questionable assumptions, which should be carefully reexamined when they produce such results.

One of these assumptions is to document the theory of the Gospels. A second one is, for Gundry, the total dependence of Matthew on Mark and Q. So, he assumes that Matthew has no sources but Mark and Q, and so then he has to generate the wise men visit out of the material that he thinks Luke has preserved from Q regarding the shepherds and the visit of the temple, etc. A second problem is what I call the explanation fallacy, and in this, we have the assumption that any explanation is to be favored over ignorance.

This is a problem both for redaction criticism on the liberal side and sometimes harmonization on the conservative side. Sometimes we just don't know the answer, so we can say, well, here are the, you know, problem passages and we think these

can be harmonized by this way or perhaps by this way or this way, but we don't have time machines. We don't know for sure.

You might say, I favor this one, but I wasn't there, all right? Well, you're getting that same kind of phenomenon going on with redaction criticism, though they don't always tell you that there are other alternatives there. Lewis has this comment in his essay on criticism in the book on stories, pages 132-133. Nearly all critics, he says, are prone to imagine that they know a great many facets of many facts relevant to a book which, in reality, they don't know.

The author, Lewis, had been an author, okay, and had his books reviewed, inevitably perceives their ignorance because he, often alone, knows the real facts. Lately, there has been a very good instance of this in the reviews of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Most critics assumed that it must be a political allegory, and many thought that the master ring must be the atomic bomb.

Anyone who knew the real history of the composition knew that this was not only erroneous but also chronologically impossible. That is Tolkien had already gotten into the ring before any civilians knew about the atomic bomb, huh? Others assumed that the mythology of his romance had grown out of his children's story, The Hobbit. Now, of course, nobody blames the critics for not knowing these things.

How should they? The trouble is they don't know that they don't know. A guess leaps into their minds, and they write it down without even noticing that it is a guess. Here, certainly, the warning to all of us as critics is very clear and alarming.

Critics of Piers Plowman and the Fairy Queen make gigantic constructions about the history of these compositions. Of course, we should all admit that such constructions are conjectural, and as conjectures, you may ask, are they not some of them probable? Perhaps they are, but the experience of being reviewed has lowered my estimate of their probability because when you start by knowing the facts, you find that the constructions are very often totally wrong. Apparently, the chances they're being right are low, even when they're made along very sensible lines.

Hence, I cannot resist the conviction that similar guesses about the dead seem plausible only because the dead are not there to refute them. Five minutes, conversation with the real Spencer or the real Langland, as the authors of Fairy Queen and Piers Plowman, might blow the whole laborious fabric into smithereens. That's pages 132, 133.

So, it's better not to know the answer, and no, we don't know, than to know the wrong answer. A third problem is what I call the dissertation fallacy. PhD industry drives this problem.



The need of PhD candidates to write their dissertation on something new and academic can lead to rejecting a straightforward explanation for an involved one, rejecting recorded history for reconstructed history, rejecting direct evidence for indirect evidence. The result is a new sort of allegorizing. You remember the remark of Perrin, here's Perrin's remark on page 42.

The questions, answers, and teachings are on the lips of Jesus and Peter, but the titles involved are from the Christological vocabulary of the early church. Although the characters in the pericope bear names and designations derived from the circumstances of the ministry, Jesus, Peter, and the multitude, they also equally represent the circumstances of the early church. Jesus is the Lord addressing the church, Peter represents fallible believers who confess correctly yet go on to interpret their confession incorrectly, and the multitude is a whole church membership for whom the general teaching which follows is designed.

So, we come to the all-important point so far as the redaction critical view of the narrative is concerned. It has the form of a story about historical Jesus and his disciples, but a purpose in terms of the risen Lord and the church. 42.

Note the response of Lewis, who wrote the same article on criticism in his book on stories. Where the critic seems to me most often to go wrong is the hasty assumption of an allegorical sense, and as reviewers make this mistake about contemporary works, so in my opinion scholars often make it about the old ones. I would recommend to both, and I would try to observe in my own critical practice, these principles.

First, no story can be devised by the wit of man, which cannot be interpreted allegorically by the wit of some other man. The Stoic interpretation of primitive interpretations of primitive mythology, the Christian interpretations of the Old Testament, and the medieval interpretations of the classics all prove this. Therefore, too, the mere fact that you can allegorize the work before you is of itself no proof that it is an allegory.

We ought not to proceed to allegorize any work until we have plainly set out the reasons for regarding it as an allegory at all. That's page 140, 141. A fourth problem I see is what I call the argument from the silence fallacy.

If a particular incident or detail appears only in one gospel, the writer must have invented it rather than having additional information. Compare this to a Lewis remark in page 131. Negative statements are of course particularly dangerous for the lazy or harried reviewer, and here at once is a lesson for us all as critics.

One passage out of the whole Fairy Queen will justify you in saying that Spencer sometimes does so-and-so. Only an exhaustive reading and an unerring memory will justify the statement that he never does so. This everyone sees.

What more easily escapes one is the concealed negative in statements that are apparently positive. For example, in any statement that contains the predicate new, one says lightly that something which Dunn or Stern or Hopkins did was new, thus committing himself to the negative that no one had done it before. But this is beyond one's knowledge.

Taken rigorously, it's beyond anyone's knowledge. Again, things we are all apt to say about the growth or development of a poet may often imply the negative that he wrote nothing except what has come down to us, which no one knows. If we had what now looks like an abrupt change in his manner from poem A to poem B, it might turn out not to have been abrupt at all.

So, the fact that a given gospel, excuse me, the given gospel writer does not mention some detail, is no guarantee that he does not know it. A fifth problem is what I call the psychoanalytic fallacy. The critic can infer the author's motivation from his writing.

Differences between the Gospels are tendentious rather than accidental or matters of emphasis. Here, Lewis makes a good remark on page 134. Another type of critic who speculates about the genesis of your book is the amateur psychologist.

He has a Freudian theory of literature and claims to know all about your inhibitions. He knows what unacknowledged wishes you are gratifying. And here, of course, one cannot, in the same sense as before, claim to start by knowing all the facts.

By definition, you, the author, are unconscious of the things he professes to discover. Therefore, the louder you disclaim them, the more right they must be. Though, oddly enough, if you admitted them, that would prove him right too.

And there is a further difficulty. One is not here so free from bias, for this procedure is almost entirely confined to hostile reviewers. And now that I come to think of it, I have seldom seen it practiced on a dead author, except by a scholar who intended in some measure to debunk him.

Some examples. Lewis on the origin of his novel *Paralandra*, in Owen's stories, page 144. Lewis is talking to some other writers of his time.

Brian Aldiss, I think, is the one that shows up here. Lewis says the starting point of the second novel, *Paralandra*, which is in his science fiction trilogy, was my mental

picture of the floating islands. The whole rest of my labors, in a sense, consisted of building up a world in which floating islands could exist.

And then, of course, the story about an averted fall developed. This is because, you know, having got your people to this exciting country, something must happen. Aldiss says, but I'm surprised that you put it this way around.

I would have thought that you constructed Paralandra for the didactic purpose. Lewis, yes, everyone thinks that. They're quite wrong.

The intellectual snobbery fallacy. We all tend to envy those with more prestige than we have. Here, usually, university liberals, and tend to look down on those with less conservatives of some sort.

Well, those are my six fallacies, if you like, problems with the methodology of redaction criticism. Conclusions on redaction criticism. The comments above should not be taken as an argument for anti-intellectualism.

Rather, it's a call for a sober assessment of our own abilities and for a fear of God, who, according to 1 Corinthians 3:19, takes the wise in their craftiness. And against whom, according to Proverbs 21:30, there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel. Well, that's our discussion of redaction criticism.

Now we want, rather briefly, to pull together some conclusions about gospel history as a whole about this whole course. We've looked at several topics relevant to the matter of the historical accuracy of the gospel, in particular the synoptic Gospels. We've looked at modern views about Jesus, and we have seen that people have all kinds of views about Jesus.

The Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus is not God. The Mormons say Jesus was God, but you can be too. The old liberals say Jesus was divine, like all men are, like Harry Emerson Fosdick's mother was, etc.

All these views have only tangential connections with the Bible. All are new forms of idolatry, which may be comfortable but are not any good to help you in a jam since the gods made to endorse these views do not actually exist. We also looked at various historical views, of which the Jesus Seminar is the current fad.

They claim to use historical data, but in fact, they pick and choose the points they like from it. Brings us to historical data about Jesus. In your reading, I had assigned my students to read Gregory Boyd, Cynic Sage, or Son of God, or Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ.

You may have noticed that early pagan sources tell us rather little about Jesus. We do see them admitting as historical some things that liberals would not like to admit. Messianic claims, miracle workings, and such.

Jewish materials reflect a negative reaction against Christ, just as the New Testament says. The New Testament says Jewish opponents of Jesus responded, just as the Old Testament predicted they would. They were not able to deny his existence and profound impact, and still cannot explain away the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Jesus.

Why is there so little about Jesus and non-Christian sources? We don't know for sure. Perhaps it is like the media situation today. We frequently see the media avoiding reports on things that they don't like, particularly when it's difficult to give them a negative spin.

As regards the New Testament testimony about Jesus, Paul is writing in the mid-50s, and it's very tough to get around. His testimony provides fine details about Christ in places within a general picture that is consistent with the gospel pictures. That brings us to 3. The Gospels are principal sources of Jesus.

The Gospels contain over 100 pages of details about Jesus. By size, age, and provenance, they are our principal sources for any kind of historical study about him. The external evidence is quite firm regarding their authors, matching the names we find on the titles of each, with no evidence for any other suggestions.

Except for John, these are not the names one would have chosen if names were being invented. The external evidence for the dates and order of writing of the Gospels must be discarded by liberals in order to maintain the two-document theory. Even so, the theory does not really do a better job of explaining the internal evidence than the suggestion we have proposed, which anchors the gospel content in the apostolic teaching.

At nearly 2,000 years apart, we cannot answer all alleged contradictions in the gospel material, but we can make suggestions for them that are consistent with historical reliability. We should not let concerns over such matters lead us to adopt views with far more problems, thus becoming like those who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. These matters are not just academic.

They have influenced all liberal pastors, most large denominations, the secular media, and many of the people you will try to reach for Christ, especially those who have received a university education. They have caused many Christians who have been exposed to such material to live in doubt of the gospel data about Jesus. They have led many people to reject Christianity altogether and are used by most religions in opposition to Christianity.

We must press the evidence and call people to live in responsibility, live responsibly in light of it.

Well, that's the synoptic Gospels for this course. Thank you for your attention.