

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 3, Redaction, Canonical and Rhetorical Criticism Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 3, Redaction, Canonical and Rhetorical Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Robert Vannoy discusses various approaches to biblical criticism, contrasting older methods like source and form criticism with newer approaches such as redaction, canonical, and rhetorical criticism. The lecture highlights the shift in focus from the historical development of biblical texts to their final form and literary artistry. Concerns are raised regarding the potential for speculation and the impact of these methods on the perceived historical reliability of the Bible. Evangelical perspectives on these critical methods and their implications for biblical inerrancy are also explored. The lecture concludes by emphasizing the lack of consensus among biblical scholars regarding the best approach to textual analysis.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 3 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Deuteronomy).



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3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 3, Redaction, Canonical and Rhetorical Criticism

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture transcript by Dr. Robert Vannoy:

Briefing Document: Analysis of Methodologies in Old Testament Studies

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Vannoy provides a critical review of various methodologies used in Old Testament (OT) studies, moving "Beyond Form Criticism." It focuses on three main approaches: Redaction Criticism, Canonical Criticism, and Rhetorical Criticism. Dr. Vannoy discusses the rise of these approaches as reactions against the fragmenting tendencies of source and form criticism, while also exploring the potential limitations and pitfalls of each. The lecture is particularly concerned with the implications of these methods for the historical trustworthiness and interpretation of the biblical text.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Dissatisfaction with Source and Form Criticism:

- The lecture begins by acknowledging a growing dissatisfaction with source and form criticism due to their tendency to fragment the biblical text into documentary strands or independent literary units. Vannoy states: "The tendency of both source and form criticism is to fragment the text...it becomes a very tedious kind of work with not a lot of positive results."
- This fragmentation, according to the lecture, has led to a reaction in favor of focusing on the final form of the text.

1. Redaction Criticism:

- **Focus on the Redactor:** This approach emphasizes the role of the redactor (editor) in shaping the final form of the text. Rather than solely focusing on the sources, redaction criticism attempts to understand why the redactor arranged the material in a specific way.
- **Shift in Focus:** There's a movement from focusing on the sources (J, D, P etc.) to focusing on the *master* (Rabenu) redactor. Vannoy quotes Rosenswhite: "R... should be regarded as standing for Rabenu, which is a Hebrew term meaning 'our master,' since it is from the redactor that we receive the scriptures."

- **Close Reading:** Redaction criticism is closely aligned with literary criticism and involves a "close reading" of the text, seeking to understand the redactor's purpose and techniques.
- **Danger of Undermining Source Criticism:** Vannoy notes a crucial tension: the more impressive the redactor's work appears (creating a unified, coherent text), the more it undermines the very evidence for the existence of separate sources in the first place.
- **Evangelical Engagement:** While some Evangelicals engage with redaction criticism, Vannoy warns that it often undermines historical trustworthiness when redactors are portrayed as manipulating historical material for theological purposes.
- He cites the example of Robert Gundry who argued that Matthew altered stories for theological purposes and therefore jeopardized historical reliability.
- **Purpose and Arrangement:** Vannoy notes that evangelicals can utilize the approach to understand the "purpose behind the author's selection, arrangement, and presentation of his material."
- **Historical trustworthiness is undermined:** Vannoy points out that "historical trustworthiness is seriously undermined when it is claimed...that the redactor has distorted historical material in order to make a theological point."

1. **Canonical Criticism:**

- **Focus on the Canon:** Canonical criticism views the Bible not just as literature but as Scripture, emphasizing the significance of the canon in understanding the text.
- **Final Form as Norm:** This approach focuses on the final, canonical form of the text, rather than reconstructing its developmental history.
- **Brevard Childs:** Brevard Childs is presented as the most prominent advocate of canonical criticism. He wants to "take seriously the significance of the canon as a crucial element in understanding the Hebrew Scriptures."
- **Synchronistic vs. Diachronistic:** Canonical criticism favors a "synchronistic" approach (focusing on the text in its final form) over a "diachronistic" one (reconstructing the history of the text).
- **Dichotomy Between History and Faith:** Vannoy notes that Childs, although helpful, still falls into the dichotomy between history and faith. Vannoy states:

"He doesn't avoid falling into the dichotomy between history and faith, between scientific analysis and theological significance, much as is the case with von Rad and others before him."

1. **Rhetorical Criticism (Literary Approach):**

- **Shift to Literary Interest:** This approach represents a clear shift from a primarily historical to a primarily literary interest in the analysis of the text.
- **Robert Alter:** Robert Alter's work, particularly "The Art of Biblical Narrative," is cited as a major influence on this approach.
- **Literary Analysis:** Rhetorical criticism emphasizes the "artful use of language, the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tones, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint," etc.
- **Bible as Prose Fiction:** Alter views the narrative material of the OT as "historicized prose fiction" - not strict history writing. He says: "What the Bible offers us is an uneven continuum and a constant interweaving of actual historical detail... with purely legendary folk history." He compares the author of the David stories to Shakespeare relating to English History.
- **Omniscient Narrator:** This approach highlights the "omniscient narrator" in the biblical text—a narrator who is all-knowing because they are the creator of the story. Vannoy cautions that this concept is different from an inspired writer as viewed by traditional theology. He quotes Esslinger who speaks of "the omniscient narrator" as the one who even creates Yahweh.
- **Key Literary Techniques:** This approach examines techniques such as key words, dialogue, and shifts in narrative perspective.
- **Evangelical Engagement:** While some Evangelicals utilize this approach, many non-evangelicals use it with a denial of biblical historicity.
- **Unity of the Text:** This approach often supports the unity of the text and challenges source critical divisions.

1. **The Problem of Historical Trustworthiness:**

- Vannoy points out throughout the lecture that these new approaches often undermine a confidence in the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament. He highlights that the emphasis on the redactor as more concerned with

theological points over historical accuracy can erode confidence in a straightforward historical reading.

1. **Lack of Consensus:**

- Vannoy emphasizes the lack of a clear consensus in biblical studies, with many differing directions and debates.
- There is no consensus among scholars regarding the legitimacy and interplay between source criticism and these new approaches.

1. **C.S. Lewis and the Problem of Conjecture:**

- Vannoy uses an anecdote about C.S. Lewis's experience with literary critics to illustrate the danger of making conjectures about the historical context and influences of a text, especially when dealing with ancient texts. He quotes Lewis: "The experience of being reviewed has lowered my estimate of their probability [conjectures]. Because, when you start by knowing the facts, you find that the constructions are very often wholly wrong."
- The point is that if literary critics can't even accurately reconstruct the context of contemporary authors, then how can they do so with ancient texts? Vannoy states that this kind of work "is extremely speculative and hypothetical."

Implications:

- The lecture highlights the ongoing debate in biblical studies regarding the methods of analysis and their impact on understanding the text.
- It emphasizes the need for critical engagement with all methodologies, particularly when considering the implications for the historicity and theological significance of the Bible.
- Vannoy's perspective is generally conservative, cautioning against interpretations that undermine the historical integrity of the biblical narrative while acknowledging some potential value in these methods.
- The lecture invites the listener to exercise caution and discernment when encountering these various approaches to the Old Testament text.

Conclusion:

Dr. Vannoy's lecture provides a nuanced overview of the significant shifts in Old Testament scholarship, particularly the move away from an exclusive focus on source and form criticism. By highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of redaction, canonical, and rhetorical criticism, he equips his audience with the tools to evaluate these methods critically, particularly concerning the historical trustworthiness of Scripture and the role of faith in interpretation.

4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 3, Redaction, Canonical and Rhetorical Criticism

Deuteronomy Lecture 3 Study Guide: Redaction, Canonical, and Rhetorical Criticism

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the primary focus of the newer methodologies like redaction and canonical criticism, in contrast to source and form criticism?
2. Define redaction criticism, and explain the role of the "redactor."
3. How does Barton describe the potential "danger" of redaction criticism, and what does this imply about source criticism?
4. According to Vannoy, what is a way that evangelicals can legitimately utilize redaction criticism?
5. In what way does canonical criticism differ from other literary approaches, and what does it emphasize about the Bible?
6. Explain the difference between "diachronistic reconstruction" and a "synchronistic" approach to scripture.
7. How does Robert Alter view the Old Testament historical narratives?
8. What does Alter mean when he describes the biblical narrator as "omniscient"?
9. How do the views of an "omniscient narrator" differ between secular literary criticism and an evangelical view of inspiration?
10. How do rhetorical or literary critics such as Longacre and Wenham challenge source criticism, and what do they emphasize instead?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The newer methodologies focus on the *final form* of the biblical text and its unity, rather than on the historical development and fragmentation of the text that was the focus of source and form criticism. They are interested in how the text functions in its current state rather than how it was formed.
2. Redaction criticism studies how the redactors (editors) combined and shaped various source materials into the final form of the biblical text. The redactor is

viewed as a significant figure who has intentionally arranged the text to convey certain meanings or purposes.

3. Barton suggests that if redaction criticism emphasizes the redactor's work so much that the final text appears seamless and unified, it undermines the very basis for identifying separate sources. This implies that source criticism, which relies on perceived inconsistencies and breaks in the text, is potentially unreliable.
4. Evangelicals can legitimately use redaction criticism to discern the purposes behind an author's (or redactor's) selection, arrangement, and presentation of material. In other words, they can ask why certain events are recorded in specific ways in the final form of a text.
5. Canonical criticism treats the Bible not merely as literature, but as Scripture. It emphasizes the theological significance of the final, canonical form of the text as authoritative for the community of faith, rather than focusing on its literary or historical development.
6. Diachronistic reconstruction refers to the historical analysis of a text attempting to trace the stages of its development, focusing on its various sources over time. In contrast, a synchronistic approach focuses on the final, present form of the text without necessarily denying its previous historical development.
7. Robert Alter views the Old Testament historical narratives as "historicized prose fiction," meaning that while these stories may have some basis in actual events, they are more like a literary reconstruction of history by gifted writers who use fictional narrative to communicate their message.
8. For Alter, the "omniscient" biblical narrator is not inspired but rather the one who created the story. The narrator is thus all-knowing about what the characters are thinking and the story's details because he made up the narrative.
9. In secular literary criticism, the omniscient narrator is the author who created the story with his own perspectives and biases. Evangelicals, however, believe that an inspired writer has insight into things by the direction of the Holy Spirit, which is a fundamentally different interpretation.
10. Rhetorical critics like Longacre and Wenham use analysis of the final form to argue for unity in biblical texts. They show that there is a coherence that undermines the divisions posited by source criticism which viewed the text as compiled from several sources rather than an intentionally unified whole.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast source criticism with redaction criticism. How do these two approaches differ in their goals, methods, and assumptions about biblical texts? How might they be used together?
2. Discuss the implications of canonical criticism for understanding the Bible. How does this method of interpretation differ from traditional historical-critical methods, and what are some of the challenges and benefits of using a canonical approach?
3. Analyze Robert Alter's view of the Old Testament as "historicized prose fiction." How does his perspective impact the way we understand the historical reliability of biblical narratives, and what are some potential problems or advantages of this approach?
4. Explore the concept of the "omniscient narrator" in both secular literary criticism and evangelical approaches to the Bible. How do these two perspectives differ, and what do these differences reveal about their underlying assumptions?
5. Assess the tensions between historical analysis and literary/theological interpretation. How might they be reconciled? Is one approach inherently more valid than the other, or is a balance possible? Explain your reasoning, and give specific examples of how these tensions manifest.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Canonical Criticism:** A method of biblical interpretation that emphasizes the theological significance of the final, canonical form of the biblical text rather than its historical development. It treats the Bible as Scripture for the community of faith.
- **Diachronistic Reconstruction:** The historical analysis of a text that attempts to trace its development over time, examining the stages of its composition and compilation.
- **Form Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that analyzes the various genres, structures, settings, and purposes of biblical stories to determine their original historical context and forms.
- **Historicity:** The degree to which an event or account is considered to have actually taken place in history, rather than being fictional or symbolic.
- **Omniscient Narrator:** In literary criticism, a narrator who knows everything about the characters, events, and setting of a story, including their thoughts and feelings.
- **Redaction Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that examines how the redactors (editors) of the biblical text have combined, shaped, and modified source materials to communicate particular theological or literary themes in the final text.
- **Rhetorical Criticism:** A literary approach to biblical analysis that focuses on the devices, techniques, and purposes of the writers of the text, similar to how one studies any piece of literature.
- **Source Criticism:** A method of biblical criticism that attempts to identify the original documentary sources behind the final form of a text, often by looking for inconsistencies and stylistic differences.
- **Synchronistic Analysis:** The analysis of a text in its final, present form, without focusing on the history of its development.

5. FAQs on Vannoy, Deuteronomy, Session 3, Redaction, Canonical and Rhetorical Criticism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Okay, here's an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source, formatted with markdown:

FAQ on Biblical Criticism

- **What is the main problem with source and form criticism that has led to the rise of new approaches?** Source and form criticism tend to fragment the biblical text, breaking it down into documentary strands or independent literary units. This fragmentation can make the study of scripture tedious and may not yield significant positive results. This has led to a shift towards focusing on the final form of the text, rather than its historical development.
- **What is "redaction criticism," and what does it focus on?** Redaction criticism focuses on the final form of the biblical text and examines the work of the "redactors" or editors who combined various sources and literary units. It aims to understand how these redactors arranged and modified their sources to convey particular meanings and achieve specific effects. Redaction critics analyze why an author selected, arranged, and presented material as they did, considering factors such as audience and theological purpose. This goes beyond earlier literary and form criticism to focus on the *final* form, not the history of the text.
- **What is the potential "danger" of redaction criticism according to some scholars, and how could this be viewed by more conservative readers?** Some scholars worry that when redaction critics emphasize the skill and unity created by the redactors too much, it diminishes the evidence for the existence of the original sources themselves. This leads to the possibility that the redactor might as well be considered the sole author, undermining the very basis of source criticism. More conservative readers may view this as a way to show that the idea of multiple sources is unnecessary and that the Bible could be more simply regarded as a unified whole. The source text and the redactor, then, can both "vanish" and leave just a single, freely composed narrative.

- **How do evangelicals approach redaction criticism, and what is the primary concern that some have?** Evangelicals often acknowledge the legitimacy of using redaction criticism to discern the author's purpose behind the selection, arrangement, and presentation of material. However, they are concerned that some practitioners use the method to argue that redactors altered historical material to serve a theological point, which would undermine the historical trustworthiness of the Bible. This can mean, in practice, that historical accuracy is jeopardized to make a theological point.
- **What is "canonical criticism," and how does it differ from other forms of biblical criticism?** Canonical criticism focuses on the final, canonical form of the biblical text as it exists in Scripture. Unlike source or form criticism, it does not treat the Bible as just literature, but as Scripture that has theological significance. Canonical criticism does not focus on the diachronic development of the text; it rather seeks to understand the meaning and purpose of the final, complete text as it was received by the religious community.
- **What is "rhetorical criticism" (also sometimes called "literary approach") and what does it emphasize?** Rhetorical criticism emphasizes a primarily literary interest in analyzing the final form of the text and the way the author uses language and various literary devices to convey meaning. This involves a close reading of the text, noting the use of techniques like repetition, reticence, and the perspective of an omniscient narrator. It analyzes techniques of the author to achieve literary effects, in the tradition of analyzing works like Shakespeare. However, it often downplays the historical aspect of the biblical narratives.
- **How is the concept of an "omniscient narrator" used in rhetorical criticism and how does it contrast with the idea of an inspired writer?** In rhetorical criticism, the "omniscient narrator" is seen as the author who created the story, knows the thoughts and motivations of characters, and is all-knowing within the context of the narrative they've created. This differs from the concept of an inspired writer, who is believed to have an insight and knowledge from the Holy Spirit, not from being the creator of the story. Rhetorical critics emphasize that the narrator has an omniscient viewpoint because they are the author of the literary work, not necessarily because they're reporting on historical facts.

- **According to the lecture, what is the current state of biblical criticism, and what issues are being debated?** There is no consensus, with many different directions and approaches to the Bible, and especially biblical narrative. There's a strong emphasis on rhetorical criticism, especially among non-Evangelical scholars, but this approach is often combined with a denial of historicity. There's also a debate about whether to maintain the legitimacy of source and form criticism while working with the final form of the text, or to completely reject those earlier approaches.