

## **AO1. Examine the major types of scriptural scholarship in one religion.**

In NT scholarship, most aspects of scriptural scholarship are designed to address the 'great ugly ditch' (Lessing) that stretches out between modern rational readers and ancient superstitious civilizations. Hence, the problem of historical distance is seen as the greatest hurdle.

Historical Criticism is an umbrella term, attempting to use various methods including textual and archaeological analysis. The first method is Source criticism, which considers how different original sources have been woven into the final form of the text. Wellhausen, for instance, recognised four separate sources (JEDP) forming the Pentateuch. His findings have been questioned because they are based largely upon conjecture (many scholars conflict over which portions of the Pentateuch belong to which sources.) However, in certain aspects Wellhausen does prove helpful. An example is the Genesis 1-2, where two creation accounts (P and J) are woven together. Understanding the background of the P source (written while in Babylonian captivity) illuminates the unique claims made by the text. Namely, it was written by a humiliated people whose captors had gods more powerful than Yahweh, temples more impressive than Jerusalem's, and a culture more sophisticated than Israel's. In this context, to claim 'in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' is a dangerous and subversive claim (Perry). Hence, Source criticism helps interpret the Biblical text.

This leads to a second method, which can be examined from a NT perspective. Source critics (such as Bornkamm and Conzelmann) showed how the Synoptic Gospels similarly are thought to be comprised of oral tradition, written periscope and eye witness testimony (see Lk 1:1-4). With the authorship of the Gospels, each writer used their sources differently to make different points. Sometimes they will edit 'or redact' their sources, and the study of this process is Redaction Criticism. For instance, Matthew and Luke sometimes omit Mark's descriptions of Jesus' emotion, as for instance, when he is angry in his interaction with the leper he cleansed (Mk1:40-45). This helps to show why Mark's Jesus often seems more 'human' than other Gospels. However, Bornkamm's work rests heavily on the theory of Markan priority – a view not universally accepted. Nevertheless, Redaction Criticism remains influential. It reveals editorial decisions, and sheds light upon the particular emphases and approaches of different Gospels by examining their use of sources.

Thirdly, these different sources were comprised of different 'Pericopae', including parables, healing stories, exorcisms and sayings. The study of how these pericopae are woven into the narrative is called 'Form Criticism'. Its most influential proponent was Bultmann, who argued that the pericopae revealed more about the Sitz im Leben of the early church than about the historical Jesus himself. He thus described pericopae as 'myths,' that is, stories which have theological significance but which lack historical foundations. This was because in the context of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, liberal theologians thought miracles could not be accepted in a scientific age. They therefore rejected any component of the gospel that was deemed

supernatural. Bultmann proposed that instead of rejecting miracles they should be 'interpreted'. An example is Bultmann's claim that the feeding of the 5000 is a 'nature miracle,' a popular legend (with no historical basis) but used to illustrate that God's nature is to be generous (when compared with other contemporary gods indifferent to the fate of mortals). This process of breaking through the historical mythological component was called 'demythologisation'.

These types of historical scholarship presuppose that ancient cultures are separated from modern readers. However, other approaches take a different view. The Biblical Theology movement, for instance, emphasizes the Holy Spirit's role in Salvation History (Heilsgeschichte). The modern church is part of that same 'history' and led by the same Holy Spirit. The same spirit that inspired the texts also enables modern readers to interpret them. Hence the spirit enables readers to span historical distance. The problem with this view, is how modern readers know they have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Though he agreed with this movement, Barth highlighted how hard it was to distinguish between the 'Spirit of the Age' and the 'Holy Spirit'.

More contemporary approaches to scriptural scholarship make use of contemporary literary studies and philosophy. One example is Liberation Theology, which reads the text from the perspective of oppressed minorities. This approach originated in South America where scholars found in scripture, what they call 'God's preferential option for the poor' (Gutierrez) and employing Marxist philosophy to portray Jesus as a revolutionary. An example is in the Beatitudes, (Mt 5) Jesus says 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. Gutierrez argued that this does not mean 'spiritually poor', but so poor that it crushes your spirit. This view has drawn much criticism for imposing Marxist ideology onto scripture and emphasizing the political at the expense of the spiritual.

Other contemporary approaches to scriptural scholarship have focussed upon literary criticism of the Biblical Text, drawing insights from philosophy and Literary Studies. An example is Stanley Fish's focus upon the 'interpretive community', a postmodern approach which claims that meaning resides not in text but in the community reading the text. Some NT scholars have used this to emphasize the importance of the church's role (as an interpretive community) in interpreting the text under the guidance of the Spirit (Jn 16:13). Others, however, criticize this approach because – on this view – the text has no meaning of its own. All meaning is created by the person reading the text, and as such they would be unable to hear the voice of author.

None of the approaches described here are mutually exclusive, and New Testament scholars today tend to employ all of them in the course of their work. That is, to engage most fully with the text requires them to learn the language, literature and history of Scripture and to consider the political, spiritual and ethical dimensions of the text itself and the lifestyle of contemporary readers.

**AO2. 'Scriptural scholarship has only confused people's understanding of scripture, and thus has made no contribution to the understanding of scripture.'**

**Evaluate this claim.**

Even before the writing of the NT, scriptural scholarship has confused people's understanding of scripture. This is demonstrated by Jesus' own rebuke to the Biblical scholars of his own day, when he says, "you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering" (Lk 11:52).

This criticism of scholarship is still found both within and beyond the Christian community. The most influential NT scholar of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century was Rudold Bultmann, who assumed that people can know nothing about the historical Jesus because his world is too far removed from ours. His claim that the Gospels were based on 'myths' created enormous confusion amongst those unable to distinguish between myths and fairy tales. Other NT scholars, however, (G.B.Caird) objected that Christianity depends not on myth but on the physical resurrection of Christ (quote from paul). Caird claims "Christianity appeals to history and to history it must go."

This shows two points in which scholarship causes confusion. Firstly, it obscures the historical foundations of Christianity. It was for this reason that Barth criticised scholars like Bultmann when he said, "historical criticism has not been historical enough." Secondly, it shows that there is no consensus among NT scholars. This means that there are no agreed truths that scholarship can prove. Again, this demonstrates that scholarship confuses people's understanding, because it does not have a single view on the NT. Hence, many Christians may claim that they are better off without scholars, because Jesus promised "the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth" (Jn 16:13).

However, the weakness with the above claim is that scholars have "only" created confusion. This is clearly not the case, because without the work of scholars in translating the Bible from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, few in the English speaking world today would be able to read the Scriptures in the first place. Anyone reading scripture in English is thereby the beneficiary of scriptural scholarship.

Secondly, without any scholarly training, readers of scripture will often commit 'eisegesis', reading their own meanings onto the pages of scripture, whilst believing themselves to have heard the voice of God. What Keynes said of economists is no less true of biblical scholars: "practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist." An example of this in the world of Biblical interpretation is given by Christopher Hitchens of the New Atheist movement.

Hitchens reads the parable of the Good Samaritan as a call to show generosity to one's neighbour, just as the liberal scholars of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century might have interpreted it. This portrays a docile Jesus offering

harmless, timeless (and pointless) moral aphorisms. However, recent scholarship has revealed that this parable is an “ideological explosive device” (Perry), shattering convictions about Jewish supremacy, racial xenophobia and offering a dangerous challenge to the religious authorities of his day. The radical, subversive elements of Jesus’ message are unlikely to be understood without the aid of scholarship. In this light, scholarship clearly has contributed to modern understanding of scripture.

Thus we may conclude that while scholarship often does have the effect of confusing people’s understanding of scripture. This will always be the case, since scholarship proceeds by peer review – where different scholars argue about different views. However, it is clearly wrong to claim biblical scholarship has ‘only’ caused confusion. This is because all scriptural understanding in the modern world, is ultimately the fruit of scriptural scholarship – since without it no one could read scripture in their own language.

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**Examine different types of literature found in the scriptures of one religion. (54 minutes)**

Christianity accepts as Canonical the writings of OT and NT, both of which comprise different types of literature. Each of these reveal different aspects of Christian identity, belief and hope.

The Hebrew Bible (adopted by Christians as the Old Testament) is traditionally comprised of three major genres: the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nebi'im) and the Writings (Kethuvim).

The Law (Torah in Hebrew, and Pentateuch in Greek), comprises the first five books of the Bible. In general they outline the formation of the Noahic, Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Like other ancient treaties, these books contain promises from the Suzerain (or in this case, Yahweh) and responsibilities or 'laws' of vassals (in this case, Israel). Hence, these books outline ethical codes for communal and individual behaviour. The central example is the Decalogue, or 'ten commandments.' These include both religious codes (blasphemy, Sabbath celebration etc) and ethical codes (prohibition of murder, theft). Most scholars (e.g., Thompson) outline a striking structural similarity between these codes and those of other ancient treaties. However, others (e.g. Alt) claim that such commands are distinctive because they are 'apodictic', applicable to people in all times as they relate to God rather than a human sovereign. This type of literature outlines the identity of the covenant people, their reliance upon Yahweh and their responsibilities.

The second major genre in the Hebrew Bible is the Prophets. Whilst there had been prophets in Israel at least since the time of the Monarchy around 1000BCE, the first literary prophet was Amos (mid 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE). These texts are often highly critical of Israel and its leaders, warn of judgement (in accordance with the covenant promises) and provide hope beyond judgement (restoration after judgement). Amos, for instance, predicted judgement not only for foreign nations (Amos 1:1-2:5) but for Judah and Israel (Amos 2:6-5:17); that the Day of the Lord would bring judgement rather than blessing (Amos 5:18-25); and visions of judgement that God would inflict (Amos 7:1 - 9:10). Bright notes, however that the book has a hopeful conclusion (Amos 9:11-15). Hayes, on the other hand, regards this conclusion as a "post-exilic addition," designed to bring the text into conformity with later prophetic literature. This type of literature provides Israel with an "ethical thermometer," encouraging both leaders and people to remain faithful to the covenant.

The third Jewish genre was called simply 'the writings'. This includes Historical books and Wisdom literature, such as proverbs and psalms. These offer a window into the worshipping life of ancient Israel, as worshippers express their gratitude and grievances to Yahweh in the course of their worship. For instance, a psalm attributed to David asks "Why do you stand far off in times of trouble?" Psalm 137 similarly shows how Israel tried to

worship God even after their temple was destroyed and they were in captivity in Babylon where they 'sat down and wept'. This type of literature provides a liturgical resource for subsequent generations that enables even those in the worst kind of crisis to worship God despite their circumstances.

Jesus of Nazareth was described as the messianic fulfilment of the law and the prophets, as the disciples discovered on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24). The New Testament comprises three major genres: Gospels, history (the book of Acts) and letters or 'epistles' (mostly attributed to Paul and John).

The Gospels are notoriously difficult to define as a genre. For Hooker they are written in the style of a Greek biography, though there are many biographical details missing from the narrative, with few details other than Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. This led Kahler to define Mark's Gospel as a "passion narrative with an extended introduction." Within their pages, as form critics point out, are miracle stories, teaching, parables, apocalyptic accounts, prayers and conflict accounts. All of these constitute different types of literature and serve different functions. The Evangelists, then, in using all literary means at their disposal, are Kerygmatic accounts (Wright). Kerygma is the Greek word for proclamation, and the Gospels are a literary proclamation about Jesus of Nazareth. Different evangelists have different emphases, so the four Gospels together proclaim Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament (Mt), the Son of God (Mk) and the Saviour of the World (Lk), and the Eternal Word made flesh (Jn). This is demonstrated by a key text from Luke's Gospel, the Nazareth Manifesto, in which Jesus claims to be the Spirit-filled fulfilment of Isaianic prophecy, and outlines his ministry as one of healing, liberating, "preaching good news" – the word 'euangelisthai' being the Greek verbal root of the English "Gospel." Thus, this literary type heralds the central importance of Jesus of Nazareth, his death and resurrection, and his mission on earth.

That mission is unpacked further by the historical book of Acts, written by Luke. Some of the conflicts outlined are addressed in the letters. The most confusing genre to modern readers is 'Apocalyptic', one that dominates the final book of the Bible, Revelation (but see also Mk 13 and synoptic parallels). Most critics of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century (including Bultmann and Dibelius) regarded Apocalyptic material as picture language referring to the end of the world. Images such as the Beast and the Whore were interpreted as horrors facing the world at the end of time. More recent scholars however, show how apocalyptic imagery was used to smuggle the counter-imperial Christian message "beneath the radar of Roman censorship" (Perry). For Bauckham the Beast represents Roman military might, and the Whore represents Rome's economic ideology. John uses these images to criticise the brutality and injustice of Roman rule. According to Bauckham, this makes the book of Revelation the strongest "political resistance literature" of the early empire. Hence, apocalyptic (Greek for 'unveiling') literature reveals to Christians how Jesus is Lord, even in a world where it appears Caesar is Lord.

In sum, the multiple types of literature in the Bible enable modern Christians to understand their own history, their identity as covenant people, and their

covenant responsibilities. In addition, they provide resources for worship (psalms and prayers), a picture of who God is (in the image of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels), a manual for Christian ethics (in the NT letters) and a source of encouragement when persecuted (apocalyptic).

**'The different types of literature in scripture all have the same status.' Evaluate this claim.  
(36 minutes)**

If "all scripture is God breathed" (2 Tim 3:16), does it necessarily follow that every verse in scripture has the same status? This essay will focus upon Christian scriptures universally recognised as Scripture, thereby excluding the Apocrypha which today is recognised only by Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions. Even when focussing on undisputed texts, the question is complex.

The main strength of the above claim is its simple logic. If Scripture is the "Word of God," then humans are not at liberty to pick and choose which types of literature have authoritative status and which do not. For example, a Christian might want to recognise that the Jesus of the Gospels represents a God who is a loving Father, offering forgiveness to all, and full of grace. An example of this are the 'Beatitudes' (Mt 5.). Most Christians who recognise the authority of the Bible are happy to recognise the divine status of this teaching. But what of the God of the Torah, a different type of literature, written many centuries earlier and whose teaching is less acceptable to many Christians. An example of this is the law on executing any who have committed homosexual acts (Lev 20:13). More conservative Christians demand that, since "all scripture is God-breathed," this unpopular teaching is the Word of God.

However, this issue highlights the difficulty of Biblical interpretation. Even within the same Mosaic literature (Lev 19:19) those who wear clothing of two types of material are to be executed. In practice virtually no Western Christian recognises the authoritative status of this text. From this, we must conclude that all Scripture does not have the same status. It is for this reason that Dunn points out, many Christians unwittingly recognise a 'canon within the canon', that is, an unstated belief that some texts are more authoritative than others.

This weakens the credibility of Scripture. It is for this reason that atheists keen to criticise the apparently self-contradictory teaching of Scripture demand that if it is the word of God, it must all have equal status. As Richard Dawkins points out,

"The God of the OT is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

This highlights how some 'New Atheists' and some conservative Christians share the same hermeneutical approach to the texts. According to Perry, this is largely because of the medieval invention of chapters and verses that were not part of the original scriptural texts. This enabled isolated verses to be removed from their context and quoted as timeless truths, without any



reference to the type of literature they were. As Perry points out, “a text without a context is a con.”

For Perry, all scripture has the same status as the Word of God, but Christians must recognise that different genres require different interpretations. For instance, Hebrew Poetry is interpreted differently to Greek travel journal. Hence, trees of the field clapping their hands (Isa 55:12) is not to be read literally, whereas ‘from there we travelled to Phillipi (Acts 16:12) is literal. Both texts may have the same status, but they are interpreted differently because they are different types of literature.

The most scholarly defence of this view is offered by N.T. Wright in his book, *New Testament and the People of God*. He identifies four sequences in the wider scriptural narrative: Creation; Fall; the time of Israel; Jesus. The fifth sequence, the New Testament, is the unfinished story of the church. He then likens scripture to a newly discovered Shakespeare play, with the final part of the fifth act missing. In order to perform the play, says Wright, the actors would have to immerse themselves in the first four acts in order to improvise an ending in tune with the rest of the play.

Wright’s analogy recognises that, for modern readers, to interpret scripture is to perform it. This, however, does not mean that modern readers simply obey all the commandments of scripture. Instead, Christians should know the narrative of Scripture as a whole and the purpose of different types of literature. As an example, modern readers recognise the high status of commands such as wearing different cloth (Lev 19:19), not by obeying them literally, but by understanding their narrative and historical purpose. Modern readers learn the story of scripture (within the first four acts) in order for them to be faithful to the God who leads his people over the centuries. Only then, says Wright, may they be able to live out the ‘fifth act’.

Thus, we may fully accept the statement that all types of literature have the same status as the Word of God. However, that does not mean all types of literature must be interpreted in the same way. The collections of literature within the corpus of Christian scripture portray a narrative, and when understood this way there is no need for a ‘canon within a canon’

## **Examine the use of religious scriptures in worship and their role in people's personal lives.**

### **'Scripture can never be irrelevant.' How far do you agree?**

Throughout history, religious scriptures have been used in both the worshipping and the personal lives of devotees. This essay will focus upon Christian use of Scripture. If we are to distinguish between the worshipping and personal lives of Christians, we will define worship as the corporate attempt to honour God in a church or communal setting.

Firstly, a foundational text for the Hebrew people is known as the 'Shema' (from the Hebrew verb, to listen.) This is the first word of a longer text drawn from Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God." Barth notes that at the very root of Hebrew and Christian identity is the capacity to 'Hear' God's voice through Scripture. In synagogue worship even today, this text is often the first prayer cited, as it situates the worshippers so that they are ready to hear God. It's importance is recognised by Jesus in the NT, where he uses it to summarize the law and the prophets (Mk 12:29-31). Barth claims this is important because listening is not simply the capacity to remain silent or passive while another person speaks. Instead, he claims, 'hearing' is the God-given ability to be genuinely transformed by one's encounter with the other. For Barth, no one is more 'wholly other' than God himself. Hence, the use of this Scripture is to highlight the importance of worship as a place where the church is transformed by its encounter with God.

Secondly, the most obvious worship resource found in Scripture is the book of Psalms. These are ancient hymns, written for communal use, and often set to music. (The psalms are often accompanied by introductory notes for musicians.) However, these are not simply psalms that celebrate God's goodness or human gratitude. Often they are written in and for contexts of great trauma. One example is psalm 137, which closes with the beatitude, "blessed is the one who takes your (the Babylonians') babies and smashes them against the rocks" (Ps 137: 9). This is a difficult text to use in worship, but most modern commentators agree that it voices the pain, anguish and trauma of people who had witnessed their own babies smashed on rocks. By using it in worship, the church identifies as fully as possible with others who have suffered grotesque trauma. This one example shows how the psalms allow a much more holistic approach to worship than is often imagined, since the psalms voice not only adoration, praise and thanksgiving, but also lament, suffering and pain.

Thirdly, the church uses prayers drawn from scripture, not only from psalms but also prayers of the NT. Many Anglican and Catholic churches, for example, use canticles. That is, short passages known as the Magnificat (Lk 1) and the Nunc Dimmitus (Luke 2). These are the prayers of Mary and Simeon respectively, in which the church joins their voices in responding to God's presence and blessing. Similarly, the prayers of Paul (e.g. Eph 1:18-23) are often cited in Christian worship.

The entirety of Scriptural literature provides a resource for worship. Both Martin Luther, in Reformation times, and Charles Wesley in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, believed that hymns were the most important means of conveying scriptural teaching. As Morna Hooker (a Methodist NT scholar) has argued, virtually every single line of Wesley's 6500 hymns contains an allusion to scripture. This shows how the scriptures provide the basis of the church's theology and self understanding as they participate in worship.

The role of Christian scripture in the personal lives of worshippers is difficult to distinguish its role in worship, as worship is a deeply personal activity. As Kreider says, "worship is all that we are responding to all that God is."

Nevertheless, Scripture does inform people at a personal level. Firstly, this is done through individual reading of Scripture. Since the scriptures have been made available in multiple languages, many Christians can read the bible for themselves. However, this practice has been criticised by Hauerwas, a leading US theologian. Hauerwas argues that 'the Bible should be taken out of the hands of individual Christians in North America.' This, he claims, is because Western ideologies are likely to be read into scripture (a practice called eisegesis). Hauerwas claims that in order to hear the voice of scripture, Christians must belong to a 'truthful community' where their individualistic interpretations can be challenged. Being part of a community enables readers to have their 'blind spots' challenged. An example of this is 19<sup>th</sup> century slave traders, who saw no contradiction between reading the bible and owning slaves. Had those slavers listened more fully to slaves working on their plantations, they may have been led to a different way of reading the Bible. Hence, to read the Bible well, is to read in community, or as Barth said, the Christian community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (cf Jn 16:13).

Secondly, individuals may meditate upon Scripture (Psalm 1). This is not simply to study scripture to unpack its meaning, but to repeat biblical psalms or other verses, in order to absorb as fully as possible what God might be wanting to say. Barth claims that although God can speak "through a flute concerto, a blossoming flood or a dead dog", he has promised to speak to those who meditate upon the scriptures in search of his voice.

Thirdly, Wannewetsch claims that 'to interpret scripture is to live it.' Understanding scripture does not simply mean learning the meaning of a particular text, but living out that meaning. History's most famous example is Albert Schweitzer, an influential NT scholar who, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, retrained as a medical doctor. Having studied the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he gave up his comfortable life to go and live with impoverished third world communities where he could make a practical difference. This is an extreme example, but it shows how scripture's role in someone's personal life can have a dramatic impact.

In all of these cases, as Barth has argued at length, Christian Scripture is not simply the record of what God said when he decided to speak so much as a channel through which he speaks today. For Barth, as each example of

scripture's use in worship and in personal lives suggests, the voice of the living God speaks 'through' the text of scripture.