

laws which govern the text.

This post-structuralist stage of literary theory has been called the stage of "reader-response" theory. It is associated especially with the French critic Jacques Derrida, who rejects the equation of meaning with the mental states of authors before or during the act of composition. Meaning is conferred not by authors but by readers, a work's meaning is therefore constantly subject to change. Derrida's post-structuralist critique threatens to "deconstruct" any laws or patterns that the critic might want to regard as irreducible. The system is also called "deconstructionism" and "indeterminism."

Theoretically, it still remains true that the text has its own laws and the "reader-response" critic will respect these, advancing only those meanings which the text "permits." But it is understandable that "reader-response" critics can easily be carried away. Berkeley Professor Frederick Crews has written recently that the record of theorizing by critics who hope to *break the authority* of meaning is singularly unimpressive. The dismissal of authorial purpose tends also to be a dismissal of scholarly prudence. "When the critic is guided by intentionality he forgets to be a structuralist, but when he liberates himself from intentionality he seems to become a crackpot," (Crews:67-68).

What are the Results of the HC Method?

Unquestionably the professional exegete has profited enormously from the HC method. On the other hand, the method has made study of the scriptures so vast and complex that it has led to departmentalization and specialization. The literature has become so vast that the exegete runs the risk of becoming a commentator on commentaries. And when he has finished his commentary he usually thinks that his work is finished and he leaves theological reflection and the discovery of the existential meaning to the theologian. The theologian has even less chance of mastering the whole than the exegete and he sometimes finds himself attacked by exegetes who discern weakness in the biblical part of his work.

The pastor and the catechist is in an even more difficult position. Which of the welter of ever-changing opinions is he to choose and how to get it across to his people? A survey in Germany shows that less than half of Protestant pastors make use of the HC approach, although they were trained in it, and that it has made very little impact on the homilies of Catholic preachers. As for the faithful, they often end up in either fundamentalism or as proponents of a spontaneous approach.

Put more briefly and by way of caricature (and therefore unjustly), W. Vogels writes at the conclusion of his survey, "we can say that the HC method has eliminated the text by cutting it into bits and pieces. It has gone in search of the

author only to find that he is undiscoverable, since he remains uncertain and dead. Finally it has declared the reader to be incompetent whenever he seeks direct access to the text, bypassing the expert," (194). Can the method be improved, supplemented by other methods, or replaced by a better. Is there a method that anyone could apply to any text whatever without falling into the excesses of "criticism without constraint."

SOURCE MATERIAL

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