

TYPICAL ISSUES IN CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Virgil Warren, PhD

Critical introduction addresses several issues related to the study of documents. In this setting, “introduction” does not mean getting acquainted with a book’s contents for the first time. “Critical” introduction does not “criticize” the book as if to degrade it. Critical introduction evaluates the nature of a book and matters surrounding its origin.

Two classifications of information critics draw on in this endeavor are internal evidence and external evidence. Internal evidence refers to data in the writing; external evidence refers to information from elsewhere. In critical introduction to the New Testament, **(a)** extant early Christian literature provides most of the external evidence. **(b)** Other resources related to the origins of Christianity help evaluate the records of early Christianity. They have been assembled in writings like F. F. Bruce’s *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974) or Gary R. Habermas’ *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus: Historical Records of His Death and Resurrection* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984). A final, more distant source of introductory information comes from extra-biblical records that preserve **(c)** the historical background in the contemporary biblical world.

The items below are major subjects in critical studies. They tend to have a bearing on one another.

I. Author

- A. Genuineness: the book comes from the person it is attributed to.
- B. Whether an amanuensis (scribe) was used

II. Date

- A. *A quo* and *ad quem* in cases where an exact date cannot be determined (the earliest and latest time)
- B. Sequence of books with a common destination (1 and 2 Thessalonians, *e.g.*)

III. Destination

- A. Origin of the church(es)
- B. Constituency of the church(es)
- C. Problems in the church, including doctrinal heresies

IV. Place of Writing

V. Purpose (different from theme)

VI. Occasion: occasion differs from purpose in that it speaks about an “opportunity” for accomplishing a purpose. The occasion for writing Romans, for example, may

have been Phoebe's trip from Cenchrea to Rome. Philippians may have been occasioned by the return of Epaphroditus to Philippi after he delivered the Philippians' "care package" to Paul in Rome. Philemon was occasioned by Onesimus' decision to return from Rome to his master Philemon.

VII. Bearer (manner of getting the book to its destination)

VIII. Unity of the Document

IX. Structure

- A. Outline
- B. Pattern
- C. Form criticism
- D. Structuralism

X. Style, including the original language of the writing

XI. Content

- A. Credibility
- B. Main themes (Occasion, theme, purpose may differ in that themes are used to accomplish purpose while occasions call forth the writing, make its delivery possible, and the like.)
- C. Interpretation schemes (Revelation, particularly as to whether chronological or cyclical)

XII. Distinctives of Each Writing

XIII. Sources used: Old Testament, direct revelation, creative thought, early Christian hymns, early Christian sayings, Christian tradition, catechisms, confessions, apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, pagan sources; backgrounds of imagery used such as Gnostic thought or geographical and historical allusions (Revelation **2-3**, *e.g.*), preliminary histories (Luke **1:1-4**).

XIV. Literary History (redaction criticism, recensions)

XV. Genre: history, including "gospels," epistles, treatises (Hebrews), apocalyptic, prophecy, didactic, wisdom literature, sermons/speeches. Genre is not only at the level of the whole writing, but at the level of elements within it.

XVI. Textual Questions

XVII. Canonicity

XVIII. Relationships Between New Testament Writings: synoptic gospels, Luke-Acts,

John and the synoptics, Acts and the Pauline corpus, Ephesians and Colossians, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude, John and the epistles of John, Revelation and the other Johannine literature, James and the Sermon on the Mount, 1 Peter and 2 Peter, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians and the Letter to the Laodécians

XIX. Groupings: gospels (synoptics within the gospels), history (gospels and Acts), epistles (prison/captivity letters), pastoral epistles, general epistles, wisdom literature (Sermon on the Mount/James/Jude), apocalyptic, Pauline corpus, Johannine literature, Petrine letters)

XX. New Testament Personnel: apostles, Pauline circle, Johns (John of Jerusalem, John the apostle, John the Elder), the women who assisted Jesus and the apostles

XXI. Manner of Interpreting Old Testament Texts (cp. XIII)