READING ANCIENT TEXTS MORE COMPREHENSIVELY:
Assessing a new methodology

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to deal with the problem which faces New Testament scholars in the process of reading and interpreting ancient texts. The point is made that the myriad of methodologies available today makes it very difficult for modern scholars to come to grips with a comprehensive understanding of a text, because the large number of methods available each in its own way is aimed at exploring its own particular aspect relating to the text. A more comprehensive approach, in which account is taken of a fair number of aspects which could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the text has so far been lacking. This article introduces and examines the newly developed comprehensive approach to ancient texts of Vernon Robbins, which he calls socio-rhetorical criticism, and which could hold possibilities for reading and understanding texts from antiquity more comprehensively.

1. Introduction: the need for a more integrated model

New Testament scholars are by definition text scholars, and it is primarily expected of them to read ancient texts, and this is no simple or uncomplicated matter. Anyone attempting to read an ancient text is immediately confronted with an enormous task. This is true because of the nature of ancient texts themselves, and the demands they make on the interpreters in terms of language and language usage, historical, geographical and social and cultural distancing, and so on, but it is also true because in our time any interpreter of ancient texts is also confronted with myriad of methodologies available with which to read and interpret these ancient texts. In this article we will limit ourselves here specifically to problems pertaining to New Testament scholarship, but other disciplines dealing with reading and interpreting ancient texts are confronted by basically the same problems.

New methods are nothing new in New Testament scholarship, and the sheer numbers of approaches are daunting to say the least. With shifts in focus on various aspects involved in the communication process, various methodologies have arisen aimed to deal with and focus on these aspects from the aspect of the author/sender to the message/text through to the receiver/reader. A New Testament scholar in the last decade of the twentieth century is confronted with innumerable methodologies and approaches to choose from in dealing with the text, and each of these methodologies has the same aim: to read and understand the communication of the text a little better. These methodologies include (and we are by no means attempting to give a comprehensive account): historical critical methodologies, deconstruction, literary analyses, literary criticism, semantics, narrative criticism, ideological criticism, social scientific criticism, contextual readings of the texts, rhetorical criticism, reader's response criticisms, structural analysis, grammar of the Greek language, semiotics, ideology, archaeology, mimetic approaches to texts, poetic approaches to texts, stylistic analyses and so on. We have deliberately not grouped the various aspects which can be lumped together, in order to make the point that any New Testament scholar when

approaching a text has to take cognizance of the fact that these approaches are available and that he/she must make a deliberate choice. This choice is of course influenced by the what the scholar wants to achieve of what aspects of the text needs to be highlighted, and this perfectly acceptable, but there are also many reading of the texts aimed at a better understanding of the texts themselves and here in New Testament scholarship we are often confronted by one-sided readings. By this I am not suggesting that New Testament scholars are naive, and tend to emphasize only one aspect. Far from it. Most readings of texts indeed take into account many aspects, because of the nature of the texts we are dealing with and because of the nature of our training, but it is clear that most reading/interpretations are seriously slanted in one or the other direction and thus do not account adequately for many extremely important aspects pertaining to the reading and/or understanding of the texts. A good example from my own work is the way in which I have dealt with John 4:16 (see Botha 1993b). In the study which was basically a literary reading utilizing speech act theory, I have not discarded historical aspects or social aspects, but focused more on literary matters and in a 1994 book review in *Biblical Interpretation* of an anthology compiled by Mark Stibbe (1993), John Ashton (1994:236-237) a historian, levels serious critique against this type of reading. Was this critique justified? Certainly, the approaches critiqued there are indeed slanted to favour of literary readings, and see for instance the different kind of reading Neyrey (1994) presents from a social scientific perspective on the same text, and it is understandable that a historian would react this way against literary readings. But, a overwhelmingly historical approach do not do justice to the text either, since this cannot adequately account for aspects dealing with the actual language performance, structure of the text and facets such as ideology and so on. In addition, it is also very illuminating to follow the current debate in *inter alia* the US between social scientists and literary critics in the SBL guild of biblical scholars, and the various claims made by these groups, in fact, in 1993 a whole section was devoted to this discussion SBL Annual Meeting. A further example can be gleaned from the field of liberation theologies, where often Marxist ideology and an ideological reading of the texts are clearly at issue, and very little else (such as the text structure, rhetoric of the text, literary criticism, and so on) come into play.

The debate referred to above and the various readings, the various interpretations of New Testament documents which tend to focus on a specific field, and the apparent inability of New Testament scholars to deal with a majority of issues rather than a few selected aspects in reading texts, can probably be accounted for by the absence of a more integrated approach to biblical exegesis which in addition to traditional matters, can also account for aspects which have come to light in more recent approaches to texts. It must be emphasized again that the import of this is not that New Testament exegetes so far have just followed single approaches. This was not the case, most exegetes have indeed tried to take into account many aspects, but the absence of a methodology which can integrate most aspects involved in reading & understanding ancient texts was so far lacking and this resulted in reading while trying to be comprehensive, in fact focused more on a number of specific issues, and did not attain anything approaching a comprehensive reading. Of course there are a number of attempts to do this such as the approach by Tate (1991), and while this approach is indeed more integrated two major aspects of New Testament scholarship today are not accounted for: social scientific criticism is not dealt with to any extent and rhetorical criticism is similarly absent.

Before we turn to a suggestion for such a more integrated and comprehensive methodology, we must first deal with some criteria against which we can begin to evaluate

such a method or approach. We can but do this in broad outlines here, and deal only with the most basic prerequisites we would like to see in such an approach.

- *First and foremost* there must be agreement that New Testament exegesis and interpretation entail the reading of literary artefacts. We are thus busy with a literary endeavour and as such any methodology which has as its aim understanding the communication of a literary document must of necessity deal with aspects pertaining to exactly this. Here things such as language usage, the structure of the text, narrative structure, voices in the text, implied authors and readers, and so on, that is, literary aspects, are important facets which must be incorporated in any analysis. But in addition to this discourse analyses, it is also clear that literary analyses are not adequate in themselves, and that cognizance must also be taken of rhetorical aspects since texts persuade and argue, and devices to get at this do exist and must be reckoned with.

- *Secondly*, it must at all times be kept in mind that ancient language communication did not take place in a vacuum and that 'all ancient *texts*, that is, all ancient wordings, once did realize meanings from a social system' (Malina 1994:168). In fact, 'language is essentially a form of social interaction. People direct language at each other in order to mean in some social context' (Malina 1994:167). It exactly this insight that will be of cardinal importance in arriving at a more integrated reading of texts, since many literary and linguistic approaches in the past have neglected this aspect and have treated texts as 'language without social context' (Malina 1994:168). The advent of various social scientific methodologies in New Testament scholarship necessitates the inclusion of social and cultural concerns in the study of the communication of ancient texts.

- *In the third place*, another related but distinguishable aspect, which permeates our discipline, must still be accounted for, that is, historical concerns. Most New Testament scholars are steeped in the historical critical method and all it implies. This method has not be rendered obsolete by the advent of other newer methodologies, and still plays an important role in understanding ancient texts, but its limitations must be realized, for a more comprehensive reading aspects pertaining to social values and systems, socioliguistics and so on must be combined with this in order to arrive a more integrated view of the society and times in which the texts were produced.

- *Fourthly*, a long neglected facet in our dealings with texts is the question of ideology. With the advent in the late twentieth century of a number of contextual readings of the Bible by a number of interest groups or contextualists, such as feminists, liberationists, and so on. This has resulted in a renewed interest in ideologies that governs not only Biblical interpretation by modern day readers, but also ideologies in the Biblical texts themselves (see Botha 1993a: 69-87). Thus, for any integrated approach, the whole, question of ideology must be accounted for in some way.

- *In the fifth place*, we as readers of the early Christian documents know very well that our documents do not exist in isolation, and that they are related to other prior texts, traditions, and so on. In addition to more traditional views of relationships between texts, post modernist notions of how texts interrelate and the boundaries or rather lack of boundaries for that matter, have changed our perceptions of intertextuality significantly, and this also needs to be accounted for in the study of ancient texts.

What then are the bottom lines of what we must do in order to arrive at a comprehensive reading of an ancient text? As we argued above, we must take into account the literary nature of texts, their rhetorical nature, the fact that they form part of a whole tradition of

texts, literary artefacts, traditions and so on. In addition we must also not treat these documents as isolated and timeless documents but they must be treated as ancient chunks of communication which emerged from concrete social and historical conditions very alien to our own world, and in order to do justice to them historical social cultural and anthropological tools at our disposal must be utilized to the full. We have also argued that all texts represent some kind of interest and that an integrated approach to texts can not do without some kind of ideological analysis.

As we have already indicated there have been a number of attempts at a more integrated or comprehensive approaches, and the approach we are about to discuss does not pretend to be any better than any others before it, but its significance lies in the fact it attempts to be a comprehensive one in which a large number of aspects pertaining to the rhetoric of texts are accounted for. In addition, this particular approach also takes into consideration some of the more recent and significant development in New Testament studies such as rhetorical criticism and social scientific criticism and is for this reason also noteworthy. This approach, which we will be following here was developed in the course of the last few years by Vernon Robbins (see Robbins 1994) and his so-called *'Socio-Rhetorical Criticism'*. This method is not altogether new and was developed over a number of years (see Robbins 1996:3), but he now has for the first a time a fully developed methodology in which the results of his prior work have now been integrated. In addition we must emphasize that Robbins' method is different from other literary and sociological methodologies because it actively aims to consciously utilize rhetorical theory as its organizing and application principle. 'Basic to rhetorical theory is the presupposition that speaker, speech and audience are primary constituents of a situation of communication. This threefold emphasis calls for significant attention to all three, in contrast to the kind of singular focus characteristic of one or other literary method' (Robbins 1996:45). Again we must emphasize that although we will briefly discuss some of the more important aspects of the 'new' approach, we will not be able to do so to any significant extent. The bibliography however, does give some suggestions for further reading with regard to this approach. We have also decided to explore Robbins' model because the communication of texts is the result of many contributing aspects, and Robbins' model offer us the opportunity to examine a significant number of these facets in a more comprehensive approach where many interrelated aspects, from formal syntactic structures to the ideology underlying the communication, can be examined. Furthermore, Robbins' decision to design an integrated approach, was made exactly because of the proliferation of various methodologies since the 1960s. He argues that he has 'viewed this situation as a challenge to integrate major strategies of the new movements and methods through a rhetorical approach that focuses on literary, social, cultural and ideological issues in texts. From my perspective, the issues exhibit the common ground among these movements and methods -- namely a growing perception that texts are performances of language, and language is a part of the inner fabric of society, culture, ideology and religion' (Robbins 1996:1). There is a serious need for dialogue between interpreters of the New Testament, and many of these interpreters have a different focus. Robbins (1996:2-3) indicates that there may be two broad categories of interpreters: those who 'focus on literary and rhetorical phenomena and interpreters who focus on historical, cultural, ideological and theological phenomena'. It is from within this dialogue that Robbins attempts to make a contribution, since 'one of the goals of a socio-rhetorical approach is to set specialized areas of analysis in conversation with one another' (Robbins 1996:3)

2.   Robbins' model: socio-rhetorical criticism

The term socio-rhetorical criticism is used by Robbins to describe a set of integrated strategies to move coherently through inner literary and rhetorical features into social and cultural interpretation of discourse, and was developed to explore the dynamics of language, literature, culture, society and ideology in texts. As such it is a programmatic and interdisciplinary approach which 'asks the interpreter to develop a conscious strategy of reading and rereading a text from different angles... one of the goals of a socio-rhetorical approach is to set specialized areas of analysis in conversation with one another (Robbins 1996:3) He also argues that this methodology thus approaches language as a social, cultural and ideological phenomenon, and it operates by reading and rereading texts a number of times, each time approaching the text with a different set of questions, depending on the different perspective with which the text is approached. Each one of these sets of questions generates a number perspectives, and illuminates specific aspects and relationships between these aspects in the text. The new data and the new relationships continue to show additional aspects of the thick texture of a text, and the result is the interpreter's perception that a text has texture. Robbins bases his metaphor of 'texture' in texts on Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thickness' in culture (see Geertz 1973: 5,9). For Robbins four basic arenas of texture in texts emerge: *inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture* and *ideological texture*.

2.1   Inner Texture

Inner texture in Robbins' model (1996:44-95) deals with aspects of linguistic structure such as grammar and syntax, it also deals with repetition, progression, levels of narration (implied author/reader) and phenomena of opening, middle and closure. Thus from a rhetorical perspective this is the arena that pays attention to arrangement (*taxis, dispositio*). Here there is a deliberate effort to refrain from comparison of the phenomena in the text with data that lies outside the text. Thus for Robbins inner texture examines 'the relationships among word-phrase and narratological patterns that produce argumentative and aesthetic patterns in a text' (:46). Robbins then goes on to identify five kinds of inner texture which can be discovered by utilizing rhetorical resources. (The authors mentioned in brackets here is an indication of the sources Robbins has found most useful in establishing the various textures see also Robbins 1996:46-65):

repetitive-progressive texture which deals with various kinds of restatement and progression (Tannehill 1975, Trible 1978, Alter 1981)

1) opening middle-closing texture (Petersen 1978;1990, Smith 1991, Kennedy 1984))

2) narrational texture (Rhoads & Michie 1983, Culpepper 1983, Staley 1988)

3) argumentative texture (Burke 1931, Robbins 1984, Mack & Robbins 1989)

4) sensory-aesthetic texture (Wilder 1956; 1964, Via 1967, Crossan 1973; 1976; 1979; 1980, Tannehill 1975)

In this regard it must also be noted that Robbins, in addition to utilizing traditional rhetorical categories, here also makes elaborate use of modern literary critical tools such as narrative criticism to work with the text on this level. It is extremely important to work with texts on this level since it introduces the reader to the world within the text, but this concern is not the only one and there is clearly a need to address other issues beyond the inner nature of texts which must be examined systematically (see also 1996:92,95).

2.2   Intertexture

Intertexture in Robbins' model (1996:95-143) is concerned with aspects such as finding, selecting and making arguments and is also conscious that all texts stand in relation with other and prior texts. Here the focus is on the interaction of the inner text with segments of other texts to which the text implicitly or explicitly refers or alludes, and the various strategies of abbreviation, modification, recontextualization, and selection are important here (see also 1996:33, 97). In terms of the spectrum covered by intertexture, Robbins identifies the following:

1) Oral-scribal intertexture. Here the focus is on aspects ranging from formal verbatim recitation of texts to recontextualization and reconfiguration (both oral and scribal (see Robbins 1996:102).

2) *Cultural intertexture*, then, concerns symbolic worlds that particular communities of discourse nurture with special nuances and emphases. The special challenge with analysis of the cultural intertexture of New Testament texts lies in the interaction among Jewish and Greco-Roman topics, codes and generic conceptions in New Testament discourse' (Robbins 1996:115).

3) *Social intertexture* deals with social aspects where the analysis does not remain at cultural level only but begins to focus various social activities and conventional practices in certain kinds of social settings (Robbins 1996:115-118), and Robbins uses Gerd Theissen's work as an example here.

4) *historical intertexture* (Robbins 1996:118-120) deals with discourse which itself has the form of historical rhetoric (Robbins 1996:118), and this kind of intertexture focuses on 'a particular historical event or period of time' (:118), rather than 'social practices that occur regularly as events in one's life (:118).

2.3   Social and Cultural Texture

According to Robbins *the arena of social and cultural texture* is the arena where 'the social and cultural nature of the voices in the text' being analyzed, is investigated (Robbins 1996:144). Here various appropriate social and anthropological theories are utilized to elucidate these aspects in the text. Robbins (1996:147; 159; 167) distinguishes between *specific social topics in religious literature, common social and cultural topics* and *final social and cultural categories*.

Robbins analyzes the former aspect by identifying various social responses to the world and follows Brian Wilson's (1969; 1973) sociological definitions of religious sects and adapts it to Wilde's (1974; 1978) social responses to the world to arrive at *seven* major types of religious discourse based on seven major responses to the world. In this regard he mentions '*conversionist argumentation*' where the world is considered 'to be corrupted because humans are corrupted' (:147), and the way to effect change is to effect change in people by means of argumentation aimed at changing them. Examples he provides are revivalism and preaching at mass meetings and the like, and is usually moralizing. In addition 'it takes no interest in programs of social reform or in the political solution of social problem and may even be actively hostile towards them' (Robbins 1996:147). A second form of religious discourse is called '*revolutionary argumentation*' and is aimed at getting 'rid of the present social order when the time is ripe' (:147), even by force and violence, and awaits a new social order and structures 'under God's direction when the people who use this argumentation will become the holders of the power as the friends and representatives of God.' Robbins 1996:147-148). '*Introversionist argumentation*' focuses on personal and individual experience in isolation from the world. There is thus no effort to

become part of a struggle or initiative in the world but rather to retire from it (:148). A fourth form of religious discourse can be called '*Gnostic manipulationist argumentation*' does not reject the outside world, but lays claim to a special knowledge the specific group has access to and the application of this knowledge to reinterpret reality and to attain certain ends such as 'health, wealth, happiness and social prestige' (:149) without rejecting current structures. '*Thaumaturgical argumentation*' calls upon supernatural entities such as spirits and powers to effect certain oracles and miracles (:149). In this argumentation there is the insistence that 'it is possible for people to experience the extraordinary effect of the supernatural on their lives' (:149). Thus it is in line with the belief that the usual order can temporarily be suspended for the benefit of the group. A sixth form of religious discourse is called '*reformist argumentation*' and is aimed at changing a present social system by being involved in various actions that will bring about a better organization or system in the world (:149). A '*utopian argumentation*' is actually a more radical form of reformist argumentation (:150) in that it is also aimed at producing a better form of social organization, but it is more radical in the sense that it is aimed at replacing the older system with a new one where evil is totally absent (:150).

Robbins (1996:159-166) deals also with '*Common social and cultural topics*'. This analysis of social responses to the world Robbins follows by examining the various social and cultural systems the text represents, presupposes and evokes. In this regard Robbins follows Malina (1981, 1986a, 1986b, 1994), Elliott (1986, 1993) in his analysis of the first century Mediterranean world and focuses on aspects such as *Dyadic personality*, *Honour culture*, *Challenge-response*, *Pre-industrial economic exchange systems*, *Peasants*, *Limited good*, and so on.

This is followed by an explanation of various cultural alliances and conflicts in New Testament texts under the heading of '*Final cultural categories*' (Robbins 1996:167-174). In this regard various kinds of groupings within culture provides invaluable insights in how various kinds of discourse relates to a specific position and perception of a group in a culture. Robbins follows Roberts (1978:112ff) in this and give a typology of different cultures, with a kind of rhetoric to them. He identifies: *Dominant culture*, *Subculture*, *Counter-culture*, *Contraculture*, and *Liminal culture*.

2.4   Ideological Texture

The final arena in this model deals with *ideological texture* (:192-236), and in this regard Robbins (1996:193) observes that in terms of religious documents 'the spectrum of ideology for socio-rhetorical criticism occurs in special locations':

1) in texts;
2) in authoritative traditions of interpretation;
3) in intellectual discourse ; and
4) in individuals and groups

With regard to *ideology in texts* Robbins relies heavily on the work of John Elliott (1990) on 1 Peter who with Davis (1975:14) defines ideology as 'an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values, not necessarily true or false, which reflects the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time in history.' He also introduces Castelli's summary of Foucault's guidelines for analyzing power relations in a text (see Castelli 1991, Robbins 199:195ff). Ideology does not only resides in texts but also in *authoritative traditions of interpretation*. Here Robbins follows Schüssler-Fiorenza (1985, 1987),

Jonathan Z Smith (1990) and Wordelman (1994) to introduce the challenge of examining ancient texts while being conscious of the ideologies that governs the use and interpretations of these texts (:200-207). Robbins then takes his analysis one step further and focuses on *ideology in intellectual discourse* (1996:207-215) where he relies on the work by Stephen D Moore (1989; 1992; and 1994) who follows the work of Derrida and de Man. Robbins (1996:215-220) also shows that ideology is also present in individuals and in groups, because it does not function in vacuum, but is 'part of a particular location in the 'historical web of power relationships'' (:215). With regard to ideology in individuals and groups, Robbins again follows the lead of Schüssler-Fiorenza (1983, 1992), and also his own work *Jesus the Teacher* (1992) to show that individual interpreters also reflect 'presuppositions, interests, commitments, desires, privileges and constraints' which are of cardinal importance in analyzing power relationships and ideology (:215).

This brief introduction to Robbins' model of socio-rhetorical criticism cannot, of course, do justice to the enormous detail Robbins incorporated in it, but should be adequate to illustrate the main issues involved in the methodology.

3. Evaluation of Robbins' model

We have given some indication above of what we would consider an integrated and comprehensive approach to be. If we were to evaluate Robbins' approach against this we come up with a remarkable positive result, for Robbins' model indeed addresses most or all of the criteria we set out initially. The model does utilize insights from modern literary theory such as narrative criticism and reader response criticism. It also deals with texts in terms of narrated time, and so on. Various rhetorical categories are also used, especially with regard to inner texture, and this does indeed brings to light the rhetorical character of texts. The method is also very conscious of the necessity taking into consideration social and cultural aspects and the reading of texts in the light of the various social and cultural textures is an exciting step forward in utilizing material gleaned form social scientific methodologies in the integrated reading of ancient texts. Similarly, the way in which Robbins introduces a methodology for approaching the ideological texture of texts provides New Testament scholars with a very useful way of dealing with something such as fluid as ideology in ancient texts. In this regard it is of importance to note that in order to fully grasp the full force of the ideology in ancient texts it is of cardinal importance that a reader is also fully aware of the social and cultural aspects involved, and this Robbins' model does admirably. In addition the fact that Robbins' model also accommodates the fact that texts are in conversation with other and prior texts allows for a very comprehensive understanding of a particular text, and makes room for dealing with the history of the development of the text. All in all one can say that Robbins' mode allows for a very comprehensive understanding of texts exactly because one has to deal with the texts on many levels and with various approaches to texts. Furthermore, Robbins' approach is deliberately aimed at promoting interdisciplinary dialogue, and in this regard the model indeed shows much promise.

There can, of course, some criticism be levelled against Robbins' model, and further use of the model should take some of these aspects into consideration:

- In the first place the model he represents is a conglomeration of various methodologies which are basically appropriated, and the question immediately arises whether some of these methodologies are not in some ways incompatible. For instance, much of what is propagated in reader response criticism, excludes a historical reading of texts, but

Robbins allows for both in his methodology. Can the mere lumping together of various, often very divergent approaches provide us with an integrated approach? In addition, Robbins' in his dealing with inner texture also uses structuralist notions, which are diametrically opposed to post modern notions such as intertextuality which also features strongly in the model. Is it possible to have these notion in the same model? Are they not mutually exclusive?

- Another aspect about which the model is not too clear is the notion of 'text'. Robbins tend to describe text as 'a thick matrix of interwoven networks of meanings and meaning effects' (Robbins 1996:20). One implication of the way in which Robbins describe 'text', is that 'text' is a fixed entity, and that the networks and textures in the text are there, merely waiting to be discovered, and this could be indicative of a rather essentialist approach to texts. On this point Robbins' model should actually be clearer. It must be stressed however, that in some ways Robbins indeed moves beyond this, and do describe 'text' also in terms of what is being done to and by the text, such as in the section on ideology. Nevertheless, Robbins' model is not altogether clear on how exactly one is to understand the notion of 'text', and this should be spelled out more clearly.

- In addition, the way in which Robbins makes allowance for social and cultural issues can also be questioned in some ways. Are these matters merely aspects which like some others one have to reckon with at a certain stage, or are these aspects central to the reading of ancient texts? Can any aspect pertaining to the reading of ancient texts be understood without incorporating matter of culture and society? Probably not, but Robbins' model is not clear on this.

- Furthermore, Robbins, while indeed stressing social and cultural matters does not make adequate allowance for historical matters which can also have a bearing on the reading of a text, here the adequacy of the model/method needs to be tested again. Thus while Robbins' model does result in quite a comprehensive reading of a particular passage, one still has the impression that the various strategies followed can possibly be better related to each other. The way in which language and rhetorical strategies and so on are embedded in social and cultural contexts and the relationships between them can possibly established much more precisely.

- In the fifth place it must be stressed that Robbins' model is so comprehensive that it would be very difficult to utilize this model for any text of a any length. The model developed here requires so many repeated readings of the particular text that it would just not be feasible to analyze a lengthy text in this comprehensive way. However, it must also be taken into consideration that to analyze a text with a particular aim in mind with this model as working model, would be extremely fruitful. For instance, to analyze a text with a view of establishing how power relationships work, would require one to focus the various aspects of Robbins' model from the inner texture through to the ideological texture on a specific issue and this would result in an extremely comprehensive understanding of the text, and the various aspects pertaining to the relevant issue.

4. Conclusion

When all is said and done, this new methodology by Robbins is a welcome development is New Testament Studies. Despite the criticism that can be levelled against socio-rhetorical criticism, it is still and exciting and integrated method of dealing with ancient texts and hold

much promise for New Testament scholars to really come to grips with the communication and strategies of ancient documents, and through this some important aspects which so far have not received adequate attention and the relationships between various aspects which were equally neglected will now receive at least some attention. The critical dialogue between various approaches in New Testament studies will indeed be fostered by this development, and while this methodology is not without some problems it is certainly important enough to act as a catalyst for sustained dialogue in this direction.

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