

**FAITH AMIDST DEPRESSION:
A PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF
PROPHET ELIJAH (1 KINGS 17-19)**

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ABSTRACT

The biblical prophet Elijah is traditionally considered to be one of the greatest prophets of God. The tone set in his presentation in 1 Kings 17-19 is not steady, however, and he appears to be swinging between a high, pompous attitude and low, depressive, even suicidal, thoughts. Though the text is largely silent about Prophet Elijah's internal state of mind, this thesis employs biblical psychopathological criticism, a subcategory of biblical psychological criticism, in an effort to reconstruct the psychological wellbeing of Prophet Elijah through his words and actions. This approach to the biblical text seeks to complement studies on the cultural, sociological, and anthropological influences on the text, keeping in mind of the anthropocentric nature of the scripture. As such, this thesis seeks to employ psychological criticism to exercise an intersection of socio-historical and narrative criticism, a scrutiny of the psychological nature *behind* and *in the text* to understand Prophet Elijah as he is presented in 1 Kings 17-19. With the insights derived from the psychological criticism of Elijah in 1 Kings 17-19, and through a reinterpretation of the modern concept of depression, acknowledged by most psychiatrists in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Elijah is diagnosed with depression. Analyses include Elijah's internal state of mind as expressed through his words, perspective on the circumstances surrounding him, his behaviour in regards to those around him, and the like. Subsequently, the thesis assesses how God approaches him through his depression and how Elijah deals with his depression, whether or how he finds or holds on to faith amidst depression.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 32,235 words in length (excluding the bibliography and front matter), has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Signed:  _____

Date: September 14, 2019

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved grandmothers,
the Late Mrs. Eptha Selvanayagam and Mrs. Packiam Devaraj,
whose dream keeps me going in times when I am down.

To my beloved grandfathers,
Late Rev. Selvanayagam and Mr. Devaraj
whom I have had much prospect to be with,
I know that you reside and rejoice
with me ever in my life.

To all across our global home who rely on God, and
re-ignite their faith amidst depression.

God bless!

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Glory be to God, now and forever more!

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INTRODUCTION

Being a Christian and an emerging physician, my passion to assist people going through depression in understanding and sustaining their faith alive and active enabled me to undertake this endeavour and humble quest on ‘Faith Amidst Depression.’

The chapters, 1 Kings 17-19, as are the other books of the Bible, were inspired by God, but written by human beings. As such, psychology, a set of concepts by which the nature, behaviour, emotions and consequent intentions of human beings are identified and to some extent explained, is an integral key to understand the basic ideas shared in the Bible (Engler 2014, 66).

To understand a passage wholistically, one needs to find an intersection of the three dimensions of the text, the world *behind the text*, *of the text* and *in front of the text*. Psychological biblical criticism attempts to do so by focusing on the psychological dimensions of scripture through the use of the behavioural science, psychology. Unlike many other forms of biblical criticism, psychological biblical criticism does not employ a particular *method* for interpretation, but is rather a *perspective* (Kille 2001, 19). This approach to the biblical text seeks to complement studies on the cultural, sociological, and anthropological influences on the text, keeping in mind of the anthropocentric nature of the scripture. Hence, this perspective focuses on the psychological dimensions of: the authors of the text, the material they wish to communicate to their audience, and the reflections and meditations of the reader. Rollins explains the minute details included in this hermeneutical approach which includes examination of ‘... texts, their origination, authorship, modes of expression, their construction, transmission, translation, reading, interpretation, their transposition into kindred and alien forms, and the history of their personal and cultural effect, as expressions of the structure,

processes, and habits of the human psyche, both in individual and collective manifestations, past and present' (Rollins 1999, 93).

In this thesis, Psychopathological criticism, a branch of Psychological Biblical criticism is utilized to focus on and study the mental wellness of an individual, in this case, Prophet Elijah, particularly as shared in 1 Kings 17-19. Prophet Elijah is considered to be one of the greatest prophets of God. He performed stupendous miracles through the power of God, boldly speaking of God and challenging the priests of Baal and leading even a school of prophets. However, despite his various accomplishments, there are instances where Prophet Elijah seems to be swinging between a high pompous attitude and very low depressive, even suicidal thoughts. As such, in this thesis, psychopathological criticism particularly employs tools from narrative criticism in an effort to understand the psychological well-being of Prophet Elijah through his words and actions. Socio-historical criticism would also assist in analyzing particular behaviour of Prophet Elijah. Hence, as part of the Psychological Biblical criticism perspective, the psychological nature *behind* and *in the text* will be scrutinized to understand Prophet Elijah as he lived and as he is presented.

Research Problem and Significance:

Depression is prevalent throughout the world, in various dimensions of ages and work field. Medically, depression is defined as a major depressive disorder characterized by 'discrete episodes of low mood, general loss of interest in things, of at least two weeks duration, involving clear-cut changes in behaviour, cognition, and neuro-vegetative functions and inter-episode remissions.' It is a serious mental health condition that affects one's thoughts, behaviour, tendencies, feelings and daily activities, such as eating, drinking and sleeping (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, 155). Depression is more than just feeling sad upset or unmotivated at times. As

such, careful consideration needs to be given to the delineation of normal sadness, grief and lament from a major depressive episode.

It is with this background that a Psychopathological Biblical analysis of Prophet Elijah, as shared in 1 Kings 17-19, is undertaken in this thesis. This analysis's foundation rests on whether Prophet Elijah could be diagnosed with depression. If so, subsequently, it will also analyze how Prophet Elijah dealt with his depression, whether and how he could find and hold on to faith amidst depression. Through such analysis, it is my hope that readers would find a similar companion in Prophet Elijah, one who listens, comforts and counsels, in their own paths in life.

Research Questions

Performing a psychopathological analysis of Prophet Elijah raises questions such as: 'Can Prophet Elijah be diagnosed with depression as we understand it today medically?' 'What, in his speech, behaviour, references serve to diagnose him as such?' 'How did Prophet Elijah deal with his depression?' 'Are there elements of faith he could find and hold on to amidst his depression?'

Methodology

Qualitative methodologies will be used in this research work. For the analysis of the Biblical chapters, 1 Kings 17-19, a Psychological Biblical criticism approach would be utilized together with literary and socio-historical criticism. Ethical principles will be considered and followed accordingly during the Biblical analysis.

Limitations and Scope

Initially, it appeared that one of the main limitations would be resource materials for analysis of 1 Kings 17-19 from a psychopathological perspective as this

methodology is still a relatively new field. Nevertheless, with further gradual research, I could access and obtain more writings, specifically journal articles.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Background of 1 Kings 17-19 and Prophet Elijah

This chapter will focus on presenting the background information on the passage of 1 Kings 17-19 as a whole. The various arguments regarding its construction will be discussed. A short introduction into Prophet Elijah and the socio-economic and political setting he challenged will be shared.

Chapter 2: Psychopathological Analysis of a Biblical Text

The methodology or ‘perspective’ used to analyze Prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17-19 will be presented in detail. Particularly, the pros and cons of utilizing modern psychological diagnostic criteria on an ancient Biblical text will be shared and analyzed.

Chapter 3: A psychopathological Analysis of Prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17-19)

This chapter will include a psychopathological analysis of Prophet Elijah as presented in 1 Kings 17-19. It will contain literature and socio-historical analysis of the mentioned chapters in the Old Testament. Psychological Biblical criticism perspective, will be interconnected with literary and socio-historical criticism to identify with the psychological nature *behind* and *in front of the text* in order to understand Prophet Elijah as he lived, as he is presented and as he is interpreted in 1 Kings 17-19.

Chapter 4: Diagnosing Prophet Elijah

This chapter focuses on discussion on the provisional diagnosis following the analysis done in the previous chapter. The provisional and differential diagnosis are

discussed according to the criteria of *DSM-V*. Subsequently, the prevalence, significance, and common perspectives regarding the diagnosis, as it is understood today are shared.

Chapter 5: God's Intervention: Faith amidst Depression

Chapter five is the crown and concluding section of the thesis. It will particularly discuss God's intervention and the renewal of Prophet Elijah's life and faith. This will also present reflections on how the psychopathological analysis and diagnose of Prophet Elijah in the previous chapters could present Elijah as a companion and counsellor for those living with depression today.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF 1 KINGS 17-19 AND PROPHET ELIJAH

1.1. The construction of 1 Kings 17-19

There have been continuous discussions in regards to the time of the construction of the passage, 1 Kings 17-19. Various arguments have been made to view this passage as a pre-Deuteronomic composition included in the Deuteronomic history by the Deuteronomists themselves, another form of Deuteronomic composition, and as a post-Deuteronomic incorporation (Otto 2003, 496).

One of the perspectives regarding 1 Kings 17-19 is that it is a piece of work from pre-Deuteronomic times included in the Deuteronomic history by a redactor. This redactor is generally understood by Biblical scholar Holloway to be a single individual due to 'theological coherence and repetitive phraseology.' Following linguistic analysis of the terminology used in the series of speeches, he understands this individual to be neither a member of the clergy nor a member of a circle of the 'official intelligentsia' (Steenkamp 2006, 14-15). A redactor and an author of his own, he is viewed as the one to collect pre-existing pieces of work such as these and link them together for coherence.

On the other hand, Biblical scholar, Otto, argues that the whole passage of 1 Kings 17-19 is inconsistent with the Deuteronomists' view of Elijah itself. He points out the complex relationship between King Ahab and Prophet Elijah, particularly the points of 'contradiction' as they straddle the line between enemies and comradeship (2003, 494-497). In 1 Kings 18, King Ahab works hand in hand with Prophet Elijah, following his instruction without hesitation to gather the priests of Baal. After the rain fall begins, he runs in front of the chariot as a show of his service to the king. Yet, in the latter

chapters 1 Kings 21 and 2 Kings 1, he is revealed to have been a steadfast opponent of the Baal worshipping kings Ahab and Ahaziah. In addition to the unique language and style in 1 Kings 17-19, Otto views these discrepancies to be indicative of its post-Deuteronomistic incorporation in the Deuteronomic history. He argues that it cannot be pre-Deuteronomistic composition nor another Deuteronomistic work since such would be a destroying of their 'own clear scheme of history' (Otto 2003, 496). It is more likely a secondary text injected into the original Elijah tradition (Steenkamp 2005, 39). In addition, Otto argues that 1 Kings 17-19 is not the only passage that differs in structure and thought from the common Deuteronomistic view. He and an increasing number of scholars assert that in conjunction with the Elijah story in 1 Kings 17-19, the narratives about the Omride wars and the Elisha stories are also post-Deuteronomistic additions (2003, 496-497).

Despite these varying arguments, it is needful to remember that the whole concept of a Deuteronomic history is a working hypothesis. Though it is widely regarded as the 'Ur-document of the Hebrew Bible,' manuscript evidence to justify its wide extent of influence has not been found. To note is also the lack of consensus among Biblical scholars regarding this hypothesis of Deuteronomic history (Noll 2007, 311). As such, Biblical scholar Schearing, as shared by Steenkamp, cautions us of the 'fever of this pan-Deuteronomism' and encourages us to proceed with care during hermeneutical analysis (2005, 14). In light of this on-going debate, it would be unwise to disregard 1 Kings 17-19, particularly chapter 18-19, as a separate passage inconsistent with Deuteronomic history. There is growing consensus that 1 Kings 17-19 is a composite text. Nevertheless, while the presentation and variations in Prophet Elijah's behaviour can be seen as contradictions, it is also viewed as a 'carefully crafted chiasm' (Epp-Teissen 2006,33). Despite the 'awkward interpolations and repetitions' in this

composite text, the narrative, as a whole, offers a clear purpose of the story. In its final form, the chiasms serve to encourage the readers into a critical analysis that ultimately bring to focus the significance of these 'awkward elements' (Epp-Teissen 2006, 33-34). To diminish the significance of a section would mean to diminish the significance of a puzzle piece that may be essential for a holistic understanding.

1.2. Who is Prophet Elijah?

Prophet Elijah appears without much introduction in 1 Kings 17:1. In fact, his entrance begins with a brief introduction of his origin saying, "And said Elijah the Tishbite of Tishbe in Gilead to Ahab . . ." and with his speech, continuing on to confront the king vehemently regarding the permeating idolatry in Israel.

Scholars share varying perspectives regarding the background of Elijah. According to some, Elijah was a descendant of Rachel, of Benjamin since the name of Elijah is mentioned in a list of the tribe of Benjamin (I Chr. 8: 27). Some others consider Elijah to have been a citizen of Jerusalem, part of which belonged to the tribe of Judah and the other part to the tribe of Benjamin. They postulate that he may have been a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest religious authority. Another opinion is that Elijah was a Levite. This assumption is emphasized by the Aggadists¹ due to the many parallels between Elijah and Moses, the first prophet and redeemer of the Israelites (Weiner 1978, 45-46). Despite the different views on his background, scholars generally agree that Elijah was historical figure, believed to be a prophet in Israel, around 800-900 BC (Cline 2019).

¹ An aggadist is a writer, teacher and scholar of Aggadah or Haaggadah, a traditional Jewish literature. It contains the story of the Exodus and the ritual of the Seder, read at the Passover Seder.

Prophet Elijah is viewed through lens of varying spectrum by many. Commonly, known for his courage and many miracles, Prophet Elijah is regarded to be one of the greatest prophets, underlined frequently by various references from thereafter in the Bible. Elijah is particularly repeatedly glorified in Aggadic literature; he is one of the few who are called 'a man of God,' numbered among the *Zaddikim*² who can perform the same miracles as God or 'command' God. The phrase, 'May his memory be blessed,' is added to his name in the Talmud. Some even consider Elijah free of sin and compare him with Adam before the Fall (Weiner 1978, 45-46).

Not all share the same perspective however. Subsequent interpretations of Elijah in 1 Kings present a more critical view. According to Hadjiev, scholars such as Hauser and Gregory argue that despite his early praise-worthy introduction, in the course of the narrative in 1 Kings 17-19, Elijah is gradually 'unmasked' as a prophet plagued by his own ego. He is portrayed as 'a faithless and, therefore, fearful man,' known for his exaggerated importance. He is 'a mixture of faith and doubt, pride and conceit' (2015, 434).

1.2.1. Prophet

Throughout the history of Israel, prophets arose during specific situations of injustice in their societies. This injustice was either bombarded on the people themselves by their own or a foreign monarchy, or perpetuated towards God by the people's practice of idolatry. It is in both such situations that Prophet Elijah was called to serve the Lord and lead the people towards the Lord. It was a vocation Prophet Elijah took up boldly in a land wrought at the core with conflicting religious claims (Todd 1992, 1-10). A man of powerful prayer, Prophet Elijah stood in contest with apostasy;

2 'Zaddikim' is a person of outstanding virtue, righteousness and piety.

repeatedly, he brought forth monumental challenges having full confidence in God's providence (Devries 1992, 206-239).

Of course, like other prophets, Prophet Elijah had various roles other than being a mediator between God and the people. Most prominently seen in 1 Kings 17-19 is his role as 'the voice of resistance to injustice and the abuse of power in the name of Yahwism. Furthermore, he was a 'cultural resource' himself, encouraging the integrity of a particular way of life (Renteria 1992, 111, 126).

1.2.2. Hero of the Hill Country

To truly understand the significance of Prophet Elijah's actions, it is important to have an understanding of his socio-cultural and historical context. Prophets were generally praised as 'heroes of the hill country' in the Old Testament. While there are narratives of prophets supporting various efforts of the monarchy, there were also viewed as alternative sources to the monarchy. This was more so when a monarchy failed to follow the will of God and oppressed their subjects. In such circumstances of powerlessness and injustice, it was usually the groups of peasants who earned for alternative 'power sources' in prophets, 'heroes of the hill country,' who very often like Prophet Elijah boldly challenged the monarchy when needed. Such is the reason for the origin of the narrative of Elijah in oral story-telling, a humble and bold beginning that reflected 'a social world outside the monarchic circle and in fundamental conflict with it' (Renteria 1992, 76-78; 117).

There have been varying understandings in regards to the setting of the Elijah story. While some understand it as having been constructed during the Omri dynasty, others understand it to have been the original setting itself. Despite the varying perspectives, what is common is that the narrative of Prophet Elijah focuses on the setting of the Omri dynasty.

1.2.2.1. The Political Structure of the World

The political situation of all of the monarchs in Israel has been intertwined with religion. Married to Ahab, Jezebel, a devout worshipper of baal entered the monarchy of the Israelites and made significant efforts to promote her religion in the land of Israel. Such efforts permeated steadily due to the reality that in maintaining diplomacy, the kings often shaped their personal and communal ideologies with intertwining threads of nearby foreign areas. Of course, this extended beyond political ideologies to that of religious practices and cultural forms. Foreign culture of Baalism was often melded with the local Israelite Yahwism. It is in such a similar setting confounded with conflicting religious claims that Prophet Elijah was called to challenge by God (Todd 1992, 10).

During the 9th century, the relationship of northern Israel to wider Near East was strained. Of course, the strain already existed from years ago; tensions have always been present between the Israelites and Canaanites from the beginning of the Israelites return back to Canaan, and made more prominent during the time of the judges and early monarchy. At the core, the strain was due to basic and fundamental differences in socio-economic and value systems, both of which were heavily rooted in their corresponding religious thoughts and practices (Todd 1992, 1-10).

1.2.2.2. The Social Structure of the World

A broad use of both social and cultural anthropology is helpful in understanding to an extent the social dimensions of the 9th century northern Israelite life.

The Omri-dynasty of the 9th century was mainly structured as an ‘advanced agrarian’ system. The system consisted of a ‘rural-based agricultural sector and an urban-based commercial and industrial sector.’ However, the social stratification maintained an asymmetrical relationship between those at the top, the elite, and near the

bottom, the peasants. The monarchy often robbed the people of not only their collective autonomy but also their individual autonomy. In addition to the stress of seasonal drought, the peasant also had to endure the load of warfare and heavy taxes from land owners. When they were not able to accustom to these stressors, which was very often the case, their lands were robbed by the monarchy. In such distressing conditions, the peasant Israelites not only lost their livelihood but they were also forced to become servants (Renteria 1992, 116-118). The Biblical scholar Lenskis paint such a form of agrarian society as a 'tree with roots spreading in every direction, constantly drawing in new resources' (Todd 1992, 1-10).

This agrarian land tenure system in itself was significantly different from the life style of the early Israelites. The strict hierarchy of elites, urban land holders, peasants and slaves were a stark difference from the 'more diffuse and egalitarian system' of earlier times. The Israelites' traditional land tenure was based on the core ideology that God was the owner of the land and all families had a right to economically equal portions in land allotment. Once given to a family, since they did not technically own the land themselves, neither could they sell it. During the time of the Omri dynasty however, with increasing economic pressure on the peasants from those higher in the hierarchy forced many to sell not only their lands to the elites but also themselves as servants and slaves when they could not manage to do so. Many others were also forced to take loans, which inevitably led to more debt and consequently, slavery. It is important to remember that the traditional Israelite laws prohibited such acts. Yet, these acts were propagated by the hierarchy (Todd 1992, 1-10).

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, it is also important to remember that religion was deeply intertwined with politics in Israel. As such, in addition to the increasing stresses of the asymmetrical socio-economic structure within the society, there was a growing

syncretism between worship of Yahweh and Baal. After all, Yahweh or Baal also represented the grains of the social system to live in. While followers of traditional values represented in pre-monarchial Israel of an egalitarian societal configuration where Yahweh owned the land and the people were in equal relationship to their god and to each other. The Baal party, on the other hand, fostered the traditional city-state configuration where the gods legitimated the hierarchical structure of king, ruling elite and a highly developed social stratification. Thus, the question became not merely which god to serve, but in which social configuration to live. Elijah became the spokesman for the re-emphasis of the sacral legitimation of an anti-status, anti-elitist society. He called the king and the people to choose Yahweh over Baal and thus to reaffirm their commitment to a more egalitarian social structure (Todd 1992, 1-10).

It is in such a context that Prophet Elijah boldly called for a severe famine in Israel. In challenging Baal, the god of fertility, he not only issues a challenge against the encroaching idolatry religious practices but against the core of the life-diminishing socio-economic structure of the whole land itself. Through his boldness, he was instrumental in re-enabling the Israelites to recognize their covenant with the God of justice. He delivered the message of resistance against the exploits of the monarchy repeatedly in 1 Kings 17-19. Moreover, through Prophet Elijah, the people could strengthen their personal relationship with God as opposed to ‘the impersonal, hierarchical religion offered by a state monarchy’ (Renteria 1992, 116-118). It is in such a time of conflicting forces that Prophet Elijah ‘gave voice to the traditional values’ that were buried under the socio-economic policies of the land (Todd 1992, 1).

1.3. Psychiatric Understanding of Prophet Elijah

Numerous writings have been made with inference into Prophet Elijah’s character. Though many other writings do not explicitly utilize psychiatric labels on the

characteristics exhibited by Prophet Elijah, analysis of his behavior and words have been a source of argument within the Biblical community.

Prophet Elijah's behavior and words from the event on Mount Carmel to his conversation with God in Mount Horeb have been a source of discussion. Kissling, in his discussion of Prophet Elijah as an 'alter ego' of Prophet Elisha from the latter chapters of 1 Kings, shares that Elijah was largely motivated by his ego to serve his own interests (1996, 165-167). Hauser and Gregory also gradually 'unmask' Prophet Elijah as a 'faithless and, therefore, fearful man,' plagued by his own ego and exaggerated self-importance (1990, 91-92). Their analysis reveals him to be exhibiting megalomania (Hadjiev 2015, 434). Similarly, Griffith, in his discussions of the ameliorating effects of psychiatric drugs, alludes to Allen's perspective of Prophet Elijah having underwent episodes of mania (2010, 216). In addition, Hadjiev shares Olley's view of Prophet Elijah expressing repeated 'problematic' overzealousness (2015, 434). Weiner also speaks of Isaac Arama's, analysis of Prophet Elijah's overzealousness which ultimately led him to exceed 'his competence as a prophet' (1978, 20).

Referring to the background understanding of 1 Kings 17-19 as a composite text, other Biblical scholars defend otherwise. They argue that the passage is largely filled with inconsistencies due to the post-Deuteronomistic insertion of the passages 1 Kings 18-19 and as such, the latter part of these passages should not be considered earnestly (Otto 2003, 496-49; Hadjiev 2015, 445-448). However, despite the difference in authorship and timeline of inclusion, it would be ignorance to totally disregard the latter scenes. After all, each piece of a puzzle is necessary to derive a complete picture.

CHAPTER 2

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

The Greek word, 'psyche' means human 'mind' or 'soul' or 'spirit' or 'inner self.' 'Psyche' may mean one's life force or personality or identity. Accordingly, psychology is a multi-faceted discipline that explores various aspects of human life and development including the functions of the human mind and social behavior (Engler 2014, 66). Green in his review essay on *Guides to Biblical Scholarship: Old Testament series* argues that in the context of Biblical theology, 'Psychological Biblical criticism,' is a step beyond acquiring knowledge about the sequence of events to striving to understand the 'minds and hearts of the leading characters' (2001, 250).

However, as expressed earlier, psychological criticism is not a concrete method but rather a fluid 'way of reading.' It is a dynamic yet critical reading that requires the reader to be sensitive to the psychological interactions both in and beyond the text. The various components of this form of reading- the historical struggle of Psychological Biblical criticism, the various dimensions of this methodology, including the advantages and the cautions of each are discussed in the following.

2.1. Historical Movement of Psychological Biblical Criticism

Traditionally and even today, socio-historical criticism is preferred by many scholars over other methodologies. While scholars from biblical studies have moved away from the taboo of reader intrusion into an exegesis of a text, it is only gradually that 'psychological biblical criticism' has managed to construct its own place alongside other interpretive approaches (Green 2001, 250). Paving the way is the perspective that no one single reading of a text can present the full meaning. Meaning has various dimensions, all of which have an important and rightful place in the table of biblical

interpretation. Understanding this reality, new methodologies such as the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) and anthropological criticism, are finding their place along cultural, feminist, ecological criticisms to provide different scopes of interpretation for scholars to gain novel insights about ancient texts (Chachesz 2008, 102). Rising among these is the psychological Biblical criticism that is 'uniquely qualified to bring to expression those conscious and unconscious dimensions of human experience and behaviour that other critical methods have not identified or exhausted' as Green cites from Kille (2001, 247).

The movement of the Psychological Biblical Criticism is not a recent effort. The roots of 'biblical psychology' extend as far back into church history as the writings of Tertulian and Augustine, both of whom discussed extensively about dimensions of personality, and habits, nature and shaping of the soul. Needless to say, the Bible itself can be inferred as a collection of texts on psychology itself. With psychological reflections on the 'workings of the heart, purposes of the mind, the intent of an action, love, hate or anger,' the Bible makes psychological statements on 'centuries of observation and interpretation of human living' (Kille 2001, 1). However, despite the deep root of history, Psychology itself was recognized as a subject only in the sixteenth century as a sub-discipline of theology, along with natural theology, angelography, demonology and pneumatology. Gradually, it became side-lined in Biblical studies as psychology's relation with anthropology strengthened. Psychology, science of the mind, along with its counterpart, somatology, science of the body, then became referred as a subdivision of anthropology, science of people. Contemporary psychology has now secured its own place in science as the study of behaviour, actions, mental processes and experiences of humans and others (Luccio 2013, 5).

Vitz, as cited by Kille, reports that the relationship between the two, Psychology and Theology, has been problematic for a number of reasons. This is not surprising, given that, in a sense, psychology and theology are generally considered to be reinforcing competing worldviews, each with its own answers to questions of human life, purpose and salvation or wholeness. One of the factors that led to such a stereotype was its trace back to its origins to Wilhelm Wundt's foundation of a school for experimental psychology at Leipzig in 1879. As a result, the core meaning of psychology, wrested from its roots in theology and replanted in the soil of rationalist positivist science, became more known by the adjectives, 'scientific and experimental' (Kille 2001, 5). However, as mentioned earlier, over the years, the field of psychology has reached out to engage and dialogue with other branches such as anthropology, sociology, and other social sciences. The result of such dialogue is now a multi-disciplinary approach of psychological criticism that has now secured its own foothold along reader-response, structuralist, rhetorical, feminist, womanist and ideological criticism as an approach offering different world-views for biblical study (Kille, 2001, 21).

2.2. The Dimensions of Biblical Psychology

Biblical studies bring a reader into contact with human behaviour in many ways. From the authors of texts to people presented in the text and the readers of the text, the Bible contains an amalgamation of human thought and behaviour. The texts are filled with descriptions of actions, conversations, experiences, personalities and relationships. As such, it is undeniable that Psychological Biblical criticism would surely bring forth new insights from a text. One can even legitimately argue that all critical methods have psychological dimensions, as all involve perception and interpretation of thought and behaviour. As such, psychological biblical criticism is not something to be viewed as

foreign. This leads us to the question of what exactly characterizes the psychological approach and of its uniqueness from other methods that might share its concerns.

2.2.1. Diffuse Boundaries of Biblical Psychological Criticism

The moment psychology and Bible are brought into an equation together, the answer becomes complex. This is made more so, particularly as contemporary psychology meets ancient Biblical texts. Questions arise of which form of psychology is to be employed, what dimensions of the bible are to be considered, their relation with one another and the like. The struggle to answer these questions shines light on the ‘lack of coherence, continuity and visibility’ on this methodology so far (Kille 2001, 2).

One of the main criticisms on the field of psychology of religion Kille finds in his research is that it is ‘hopelessly diffuse.’ He reminds the readers of David Wulff a bible scholar and psychologist who aptly speaks of the main difficulty in the scope brought on by the intersection of Psychology and the Bible: ‘Psychologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, historians of religion, theologians and religious educator, among others, bring with them widely varying backgrounds, assumptions and interests.’ Furthermore, each makes more than a single incidental incursion into the field, ‘commonly without a guiding theory or hypothesis (Kille 2001, 2).’ Since each scholar is rarely familiar with more than a single area of research, the resulting analysis often lacks dimensions and depth of insight. Wayne Rollins shares a similar thought:

‘the goal of a psychological-critical approach is to examine texts, their origination, authorship, modes of expression, their construction, transmission, translation, reading, interpretation, their transposition into kindred and alien art forms and the history of their personal and cultural effect, as expressions of the structure, process and habits of the human psyche, both in individual and collective manifestations, past and present.’ (2007, 17-18).

2.2.2. Psychologism, the Problem of Reinforcing the Concrete Boundaries of Psychology

While it is problematic to approach a text with an approach too ‘diffuse,’ other problems also arise when psychology is restricted from dialogue with other approaches. Applying purely scientific new perspectives to interpretations of the biblical text needs to be done with much caution and reflection. However, even with much caution, using a purely reductionistic, scientific view of psychological criticism introduces the problem of psychologism, a tendency to exaggerate the relevance of psychological factors. This often leads one to the danger of not only interpreting events purely in subjective terms but also reducing the various texts in the Bible to secular, materialistic principles (Loughlin 2010, 305-306).

A few of the early psychologists slipped into such a pitfall, as inferred by the many books that appeared during the first decade of the 20th century frankly pronouncing Jesus as an ecstatic, insane man with psychopathic symptoms. Schweitzer, as cited by Capps, criticized these books for their lack of dialogue with the other fields of criticism such as textual, source and socio-historical approaches (2003, 624-625). In addition to the problems of the lack of source validity, these writings were engorged by thoughts from a single discipline. Largely, the lack of critical dialogue from perspectives of others disciplines presented a faulty analysis. As a result, their efforts earned scorn and were often ignored by other interpreters. These psychological studies were called a ‘patchwork of opinions produced by mediocre minds’ and ‘clumsy and reductionist’ (Capps 2003, 623). The criticism against the theories and methodologies of such early work consequently fuelled the rising prevalent antagonism against the association between theology and psychology further. However, it is needful to say that psychology as a whole was not condemned, but rather only the amateur approach used. Nevertheless, one can infer how uncritical usage of psychological criticism with no

dialogue with other fields can only produce a close-minded and faulty analysis on a Biblical text.

As mentioned above, another danger to be wary of in an analysis of a Biblical text is making fallacious inferences for over-psychologism, the over-exaggeration or over-diagnosis of an individual's behaviour. Psychologism, derived from the philosophy of mathematics and logic, is an attempt to scientifically, logically, offer a reason for a behaviour. The problem brought on by psychologism has been brought to light and criticized by many psychologists such as Russel, Frege and Husserl over the years (Loughlin 2010, 306). Rather than observing behaviour simply as it is, when making inferences, psychologism scrutinizes an individual's actions under an umbrella of criteria and classifies them most often either as normal, symptom or disorder. The problem of oversimplifying and categorizing behaviours by imposing a theory on them is made more prominent when dealing with analyzing a written text. Slipping into the temptation of psychologism the various corners or dimensions of the text may be re-modeled by a psychological theory or perspective to fit the exegete's pet perceptions, more prominently so particularly if the reader fails to recognize historical or literary factors. This calls us to be more attentive, understanding that 'the language of action, decision, commitment, and responsibility' does not translate easily (without some loss of meaning) into the language of events and processes, causes and effects (Kille2001, 14). Without the opportunity to personally enquire of the subject for the reasons behind their actions, the probability of distorting an observed behaviour, observed from our worldview, no matter the effort to maintain objectivity, is high.

Human thought and behaviour is complex. Any decision made arises as a climax of the interaction among many causes, not just one. When utilizing psychological analysis on a person, there is the reality of either making their character too flat, not

identifying the various factors involved, or too round, positing thoughts that may not be true (Smythe 2012, 151). These possibilities of over-reductionism and over-exaggeration are to be kept in mind during a psychological analysis.

2.3. Redefining the Field of Biblical Psychological Criticism

Nevertheless, Kille brings to our attention the following insights that are important while redefining the field of Biblical Psychological Criticism. In his view, even amidst the various arguments, psychological criticism is emerging as a branch of biblical studies in its own right. It has given its own share of insights for and interacted often with other biblical approaches. Over the years, there have been renewed efforts to redefine the field. G. Standley Hall and F. C. Grand proposed ‘psychological criticism.’ Gerd Theissen (1987) described it as ‘psychological exegesis,’ or a ‘hermeneutically oriented psychology of religion’ while others have suggested ‘psychoanalytic reading of the Bible.’ All these efforts seek to not only establish, legitimate and clarify the role of psychological criticism within biblical studies. Keeping in mind the danger of its diffuse mentality, the years have seen efforts to confine the scope of the approach, either by limiting it to one aspect of biblical interpretation such as exegesis or hermeneutics or to one category of psychological theory such as psychoanalysis. Kille further cites Rollins who confirms that what remains the foundation among these various efforts, nevertheless, is the intersection of psychology, Bible, and the tradition of rigorous, critical reading of the Biblical text. Striving towards a balance among the three while engaging in dialogue with other methodologies remains the challenge (2001, 1-2)

Furthermore, while the shadow of psychologism is a legitimate concern for psychological criticism, the term has become a leeway to disregard any effort in this area of biblical study. Since Bible is an amalgamation of human thoughts and actions, dismissing the psychological dynamics of a text would only offer an incomplete picture.