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Theological Interpretation of Scripture

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Editorial: Reflecting upon the "Theological Interpretation of Scripture"

Stephen J. Wellum

In the last decade a "movement" known as the "theological interpretation of Scripture" (TIS) has made a lot of waves in academic circles. Whole study groups at the Society of Biblical Literature have debated its merits; Baker Books has published a dictionary devoted to the subject (*Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer [2005]) and is in the process of publishing an entire commentary series devoted to TIS (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible); academic journals have discussed it at length (e.g., *International Journal of Systematic Theology* [2010]); and numerous books and articles have broached the subject from a variety of angles. Numerous names and even schools of thought are associated with the movement—names and schools that represent diverse theological backgrounds and communities: the so-called Yale school associated with Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Brevard Childs, and others; Francis Watson, Stephen Fowl; and evangelicals such as Joel Green, Kevin Vanhoozer, Daniel Treier, and so on. Given the attention TIS has received, we thought it wise to devote an issue of *SBJT* to introducing our readers to TIS by noting what it is and why it has arisen, what it proposes, and its overall value for the church in our study of Scripture and doing theology.

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First, what is it and why has it arisen? All those involved in TIS admit the difficulty in defining precisely what it is. In our articles and *SBJT* Forum a number of definitions are given which attempt to nail down precisely what TIS is. Probably at this point, it is best to characterize TIS as a broad and diverse movement comprised of biblical scholars and theologians who are mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and evangelicals and who are attempting to recover the authority of the Bible and to return it to the church. Obviously this raises the question as to what TIS is recovering the Bible from and the answer to this question helps describe why it has arisen. In a nutshell, TIS

is attempting to recover the authority of the Bible for the church from the debilitating effects of the "assured results of biblical scholarship" identified with the Enlightenment and modern eras which sought to squeeze the Bible within the alien world-view assumptions of methodological naturalism (e.g., Deism, naturalism, process theism) associated with the historical-critical method. That is why, a majority of those in the TIS movement arise out of non-evangelical circles since, like Karl Barth before them (who is often viewed as the "founder" of the movement), they are attempting to recover the Bible's voice by rejecting the liberalism they were taught and raised in.

Second, what is the TIS alternative? Once again, the answer to this question is as diverse as the person you talk to, but there are some common features which unite the movement. In light of the various legitimate criticisms postmodernism has leveled against modernism, TIS is not interested in treating the Bible merely "as any other book" to be dissected under the rules of *general* or philosophical hermeneutics, rather it approaches the Bible theologically in the sense that it takes the divine author seriously and it does not shelve Christian theological assumptions as it reads and applies Scripture. In this way, TIS strongly endorses a *special* or theological hermeneutics rooted in a larger Christian theology. In addition, TIS rejects the historical-critical method of merely reconstructing what is behind the text of Scripture and instead wants to read Scripture theologically, i.e., in its final form and as a unified, canonical whole. Furthermore, TIS does not reject "pre-critical" readings of Scripture as if we are merely the first people to interpret Scripture or better in our doing so. Instead, we must read Scripture in light of the history of the church with the goal of edifying the church. We must interpret Scripture within the "rule of faith," particularly the early Trinitarian and Christological confessions of the church and recapture a spiritual use of Scripture, even at times an allegorical reading, as the church has done throughout the ages. In this sense, Scripture does not have a single meaning limited to the intent of the original author, but multiple complex senses given by God, the author of the whole. In all of these ways, TIS's alternative is to read and apply Scripture as God's Word for the church and not merely as isolated, independent, autonomous interpreters with alien theological assumptions.

Third, what is the overall value of TIS for the church? Anytime a movement encourages the church to take seriously Scripture as God's Word, it has value. But in truth, this emphasis is not new for evangelicals, even though it may seem new for many within the academic guild. However, as much as we applaud TIS in attempting to recapture the Bible's authority, to read Scripture as a unified whole, and to apply it to the church's life, evangelicals must also demonstrate caution. One of the most important outstanding questions which must be addressed honestly is the precise nature of Scripture; not everyone in TIS agrees on this. Many accept the final form of Scripture and its authority not always for the right reasons. The right reason to accept Scriptural authority is because Scripture is nothing less than God's Word written, the product of God's sovereign action in and through human authors, so that what they write is precisely what God wanted written and thus fully authoritative and inerrant in all that it affirms. Rather, specifically in the postliberal and even postconservative camp within TIS, Scripture is received as authoritative because it is the church's book but this does *not* entail its reliability and theological accuracy in all matters. But if this is the case, then within TIS there is still a great divide over the most fundamental question: What is the nature of Scripture and why? It is on this question that evangelicals must not fudge. Scripture in all of its divine authority and reliability must be affirmed; indeed, it must be lived out in every aspect of life.

It is my prayer that the articles in this issue of *SBJT* will not only introduce TIS but also wrestle with other aspects of a proper theological interpretation of Scripture for our good, the health of the church, and the glory of our Triune God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Evangelical Systematic Theology: Iron Sharpening Iron?

Daniel J. Treier and Uche Anizor

Despite the hubbub in academic circles about *theological interpretation of Scripture* (TIS), discerning a succinct definition remains somewhat difficult, and implications for evangelical church life may not be readily apparent. The first goal of this essay is therefore to clarify how TIS as a general perspective seeks to help theology be more biblical, and biblical studies more theological. Secondly and more specifically, we can then address the usefulness of TIS for evangelical systematic theology (ST) in seeking to serve the church(es). Beginning descriptively is appropriate since one of the present authors has already worked to map the relevant terrain.[1] Moreover, since ST is arguably the most theologically integrative disciplinary nexus for both the evangelical academy and church, it serves as a fitting point at which to provide general orientation to TIS. Focused on what we should say about God, God's works and God's will today, ST elicits special reflection on the end results desired by evangelical practitioners of TIS. After all, as evangelical systematic theologians, both of the present authors interact with all other theological disciplines in order to bear coherent, contemporary witness regarding divine self-revelation in Scripture.

Accordingly, the first section of this essay provides an overview, before the second section probes the value of TIS under the rubric of "iron sharpening iron," examining various relationships of concern to evangelical ST. The suggestion here will be that TIS might strengthen the bonds of intellectual friendship between these various spheres—by encouraging their participants to

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offer each other constructively critical, yet loving and supportive, dialogue.

(RE)INTRODUCING THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Because of the confusion noted above, we open our story of TIS by offering a summary definition. The theological interpretation of Scripture is *the reading of biblical texts that consciously seeks to do justice to their nature as the Word of God, embracing the influence of theology on the interpreter's enquiry, context, and methods, not just results*.[2] An expansion of that definition follows as this section tells the story of the recent recovery of TIS, thus detailing the principal aims and internal tensions of this "movement,"[3] which finds initial unity in raising questions about so-called historical criticism.

Responding to Historical Criticism

Under the influence of the Enlightenment and the founding of the modern university, biblical interpretation became newly "critical." For interpretation of the Bible to result in real knowledge, it had to be *wissenschaftlich*, that is, scientific—focusing on the historical cause-and-effect relationships behind human events and actions to the exclusion of the indiscernible divine mystery. This meant that proper biblical interpretation was "objective"—focused on the times and places of the texts' production as well as their historical references, without involving the scholar's personal commitments or perspectives. Yet, in the end, such "objectivity" excluded interpreting the Bible as Scripture, as unified divine self-revelation. Craig Bartholomew describes the disastrous state of affairs well when he writes that

> biblical criticism has been philosophically in the extraordinary position of refusing to allow theological/Christian influence on its enterprise while making room for traditions and ideologies often antithetical to Christian belief. The results are then to be understood as truth falling where it may and theologians being compelled to work with *this* data for their theological constructions.[4]

This was largely the state of affairs in biblical and theological studies as academic guilds during most of the twentieth century.

Karl Barth: Theological Criticism?

Karl Barth (1886–1968) served as a pioneer for theological criticism of the hegemony of this "historical-critical" tradition. During his break from liberalism, he rediscovered the Bible. In 1917 his lecture entitled "Die neue Welt in der Bibel" (The New World in the Bible)[5] challenged the prevailing paradigm of biblical interpretation by asserting that the Bible confronts *us* (not vice versa), providing what we seek yet do not deserve: grace.[6] There are only two responses to the Bible: belief and unbelief. Attempts to read merely historically (or morally or religiously) are sinful pursuits of a third way, to escape the situation in which readers are placed by Scripture.[7] With the publication of his Romans commentary (*Der Römerbrief*), famously labeled a "bombshell dropped on the playground of the theologians," Barth built on the aforementioned lecture, while clarifying his basic commitments vis-à-vis biblical interpretation. First, Barth focused on the subject matter of the text—the being of the eternal God—as having hermeneutical control.[8] Second, he held that we must participate in the meaning of Scripture by responding to divine gift.[9] Third, one must read the Bible with love and attention unlike mere historical critics.[10] And, fourth, he insisted "upon a reading of the Bible that is more in accordance with 'the meaning of the Bible itself.'"[11] In the end, though Barth did not entirely jettison historical criticism, he viewed it as servant, not master—preparatory, but not comprehensive, for interpretation.[12]

Although Barth is not the sole model, he inspired many who are eager to recover theological exegesis for the church and academy. For modern biblical criticism, historical distance is thoroughly problematic, to be overcome, while at the same time critical distance must be main-

tained for the sake of objectivity. For Barth and others who would follow after him, true objectivity comes via God's sovereign gift of freedom received in the church.[13]

"Mainline" Protestants, Evangelicals, and Roman Catholics: Together?

Meanwhile, the battles between evangelicals and "liberals" in the early twentieth century culminated in the relative exclusion of the former from the academy and, thus, from critical biblical scholarship.[14] Since TIS is initially a movement largely within the academy, to a degree its initial relevance concerns "mainline" Protestants more than evangelicals. Its fortunes parallel those of so-called postliberalism, a reaction against liberal neglect of Scripture and tradition, along with a recovery of Christian distinctiveness, which is frequently associated with Yale.[15] Hence some mainline scholars and institutions that have been pervasively affected by historical-critical assumptions and practices are now at the center of discussions about reclaiming the Bible as *Scripture*.

The relationship of evangelicals to TIS is more complicated. Evangelicals have traditionally practiced certain aspects of theological exegesis, such as interpreting Scripture by Scripture, reading the Bible canonically, and using typology or even forms of "spiritual" interpretation—all this in the face of modernity. At the same time, however, the rise of evangelical biblical scholarship has coincided with increasing evangelical acceptance of certain presuppositions of historical criticism. Evangelical scholars, for example, almost unanimously embraced the distinction between a text's "meaning" as single and determinate and its "significance" or "application" as plural and context-specific.[16] Hence the popular wisdom of evangelical biblical hermeneutics accepted that, before arriving at the text's application to a current situation, critical distance must be established in order to achieve the objectivity necessary for discerning the text's meaning. Likewise, with the passing of time many Roman Catholics have embraced, and now ardently defend, certain assumptions and practices that some mainline Protestants have begun to shed. In response, other Catholics and some evangelicals view forms of TIS as both true to their respective heritages and a potential source of renewal in dealing with contemporary trends. Evangelical reviews of TIS literature will therefore continue to be mixed, and given its complex origins that is understandable. Yet evangelicalism has resources for making a serious contribution to TIS, as well as reasons for learning from the conversation. If nothing else, we may applaud the desire among less conservative scholars to recover the Bible as Scripture for the church.

The "Postmodern" Impetus: Theology and Community?

In addition to Barth-inspired post-liberalism and evangelical/Catholic scholarly renewal, a third impetus for TIS involves modest appropriation of certain themes labeled "postmodern." Three recurring ideas highlight this influence, and partially fund the postliberal riffs on Barth's motifs. First, there is suspicion regarding the actual "objectivity" of modern critical methods and assumptions. In this light, some seek to rehabilitate pre-critical approaches to interpretation. Second, and related, postmodern critics highlight the impossibility of neutrality in any inquiry. Every investigation must begin with the acknowledgment that presuppositions are operative. Regarding biblical interpretation, perhaps, rather than simply obscuring the text, Christian doctrine can also help readers to see what is truly present by overcoming tragic elements of historical distance. Thus, third, because an interpreter's perspective is limited, reading Scripture must occur within the church, the community called by God to embody the teaching of the sacred writings over time. These three concerns—critical vs. pre-critical approaches, the presuppositions of Christian doctrine, and the place of the church—occupy us more specifically in the next three subsections.

Recovering Precritical Exegesis

Over the past two decades there has been increasing interest in the ancient church. Of particular interest is how the classic fathers interpreted the Bible. Whole commentary series are now explicitly or implicitly devoted to their interpretative practices, presupposing that this doctrinal tradition can reliably ground and guide contemporary exegesis.[17] For some, recovering theological interpretation demands that we imitate pre-critical Christian exegetes in spiritual reading of Scripture. David Steinmetz presents the case poignantly:

> How was a French parish priest in 1150 to understand Psalm 137, which bemoans captivity in Babylon, makes rude remarks about Edomites, expresses an ineradicable longing for a glimpse of Jerusalem, and pronounces a blessing on anyone who avenges the destruction of the temple by dashing Babylonian children against a rock? The priest lives in Concale, not Babylon, has no personal quarrel with Edomites, cherishes no ambitions to visit Jerusalem (though he might fancy a holiday in Paris), and is expressly forbidden by Jesus to avenge himself on his enemies. Unless Psalm 137 has more than one possible meaning, it cannot be used as a prayer by the church and must be rejected as a lament belonging exclusively to the piety of ancient Israel.[18]

Steinmetz advocates an approach that accords with the nature of the text. Because of divine authorship, the "meaning" of Holy Scripture is not exhausted by the literal or historical sense. Instead, a passage may have multiple "meanings" that come to the surface in light of other interpretative factors, such as (1) whether or not a reading involves Christian piety, (2) how it relates theologically to Christ and his church, and (3) how it informs Christian practice. In Steinmetz's example, then, the question is how Christians can read and pray Psalm 137 in a way that encourages love for God and humanity. He claims that the modern theory of a single, determinate meaning simply cannot handle these issues well, often providing only "spiritually barren" interpretations in comparison with the classic fourfold sense of Scripture.[19] Although one does not need to go as far as Steinmetz or others in the wholesale appropriation of ancient modes of interpretation, our pre-critical forebears offer the challenge of reintegrating Scripture reading with piety—orienting the Bible to Christ and enriching our theology via participation in the realities of which Scripture speaks.[20]

Reading with Doctrinal Rules

Recovering pre-critical exegesis further involves acknowledgment of the positive role Christian doctrine might play in the interpretation of Scripture. A particular version of this theme is the recovery of the Rule of Faith (*Regula Fidei*) as a guide toward properly Christian readings, guarding against those that are not.

In the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and other ante-Nicene fathers, the Rule of Faith refers to "the sum content of the apostolic teaching," formulated as a "confession of faith for public use in worship, in particular for use in baptism."[21] Although the Rule was not fixed in one written form, its basic content can be discerned in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. In countering heretics who used Scripture to pit the OT God of Israel against the NT God revealed in Jesus Christ, for example, Irenaeus posited that the proper reading of Scripture requires a key like a mosaic (or, today, a puzzle) would. This key—the Rule of Faith—enables one to arrange and assess the various pieces of Scripture properly, to obtain an accurate sketch of the gospel narrative and its ontological implications.[22] Such a Rule also invites creative interpretation, within its limits. In a widely cited essay, David Yeago illustrates that Christian dogma can indeed illuminate Scripture and lead to proper exegetical judgments.[23] Against those who argue that dogma distorts biblical Christology, Yeago establishes that in Phil 2:6–11 Nicaea's

homoousion best accords with what Paul is doing in the text. Early Christians worshiped Jesus and included him within the identity of the one true God of Israel identified in Isa 45:21–24. Therefore the very judgments made by Paul and the early Christian community regarding Jesus are made by the Nicene theologians in different conceptual terms addressing challenges of their day. These were challenges the church would inevitably face, and the language of *homoousion*, or indeed much post-biblical theological reflection, alerts us to what is already in the biblical text.

What should follow from discussion of the hermeneutical role of the Rule of Faith is the broader question of how doctrine generally serves biblical interpretation. To a degree, theological concerns are ingredient in any approach to the Bible. If, in fact, it is impossible to read the Bible "objectively" in a purist sense, then by God's design it may also be undesirable in certain ways to try.[24] Doctrine does not preclude careful, critical scholarship or require naively foisting predetermined ideas onto the biblical texts. At issue are the questions we ask, not simply the answers we ensure, for Protestants committed to *sola Scriptura* anyway. Doctrinal questions may turn out to be anachronistic, but critical scholars cannot legitimately rule them out *a priori* in favor of their own subtle presuppositional frameworks, and on many occasions such questions lead to answers in the text that we would otherwise miss. The pragmatically necessary division of labor between biblical studies and theology must not ossify into a fundamental separation of the two. In earlier eras theologians freely exegeted Scripture as an integral part of their dogmatic enterprise. But then "biblical scholars" and "theologians" as such did not exist. Yet a theologian making exegetical claims in today's academic climate frequently incurs the ridicule or even ire of biblical scholars. Against this reality, doctrine challenges readers of Scripture to recognize their assumptions and revise them in light of the church's efforts to understand the Bible as a whole. Moreover, recovering doctrine's ruling function could push theologians toward return engagements with scriptural texts themselves, thus addressing a legitimate concern of biblical scholars regarding the neglect of Scripture by theologians.

Reading Together with the Spirit

A concomitant facet of the recovery of theological exegesis is increased interest in Christian community. With the modern growth of opportunities for lay Scripture reading comes a potential pitfall, that biblical interpretation might become ever more individualistic and idiosyncratic. Medieval exegesis, at worst, sometimes displayed these characteristics even without proliferation of Bibles and democratization of Bible reading. However, if we are to recover theological interpretation, it is necessary to form an understanding of how the Holy Spirit leads members of the Christian community to be believer-priests. Part of that understanding must involve catechesis, as the Rule of Faith suggests and as the Protestant Reformers clearly held. Another part of that understanding involves communal reading practices and formation of virtues.

Virtue Catalysts

George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, though controversial, brought community to the fore in how the church understands Christian doctrine.[25] The book contrasts three basic understandings of doctrine: (1) "cognitive-propositional" (doctrine as truth claims about reality); (2) "experiential-expressivist" (doctrine as expression of religious experience); and (3) "cultural-linguistic" (Lindbeck's proposal). Borrowing from Wittgenstein's concept of "language games," Lindbeck proposes that the Christian religion is like a culture with its own particular symbols and signs. Doctrine provides "second-order" rules, like grammar, for speaking within and inhabiting the faith of the church as a culture. Lindbeck proffers an "intratextual" approach to theology, in which Scripture's language and narrative world provide the categories through which the church inter-

prets its own experience as well as the surrounding culture(s).[26]

The strength of such a proposal, usually seen as seminal and representative for "postliberalism," is its emphasis on the church as a culture with its own distinctive language system. Another important figure with communal concerns is Stanley Hauerwas, who stresses that the story shaping the church's self-understanding should also shape the character of its members.[27] He argues that development of virtue determines our faithfulness in reading Scripture which, in turn, shapes the way we imitate Jesus. These themes have more direct importance for TIS through the work of Stephen Fowl.

The Church as an Interpretative Community: Stephen Fowl

Arguably the most influential contemporary thinker regarding community and biblical interpretation, Fowl argues that interpretation "needs to involve a complex interaction in which Christian convictions, practices, and concerns are brought to bear on scriptural interpretation in ways that both shape that interpretation and are shaped by it. Moreover, Christians need to manifest a certain form of common life if this interaction is to serve faithful life and worship."[28] Fowl presents three ways to understand biblical interpretation and notions of meaning—determinate, antideterminate, and underdetermined. He characterizes the first approach, most characteristic of conservative interpreters, as follows:

> (1) Determinate interpretation aims to "render biblical interpretation redundant."
> (2) "Determinate interpretation views the biblical text as a problem to be mastered."
> (3) "Determinate interpretation sees the biblical text as a relatively stable element in which as author inserts, hides, or dissolves (choose your metaphor) meaning."
> (4) Determinate interpretation assumes "that matters of doctrine and practice are straightforwardly determined by biblical interpretation and never the other way around."
> (5) Determinate interpreters "trump others" by demonstrating that "opponents have allowed theological concerns, prejudices, or preferences to determine their interpretation, rather than rigorously mining the text for its meaning and then letting that meaning shape their theology."
> (6) Determinate interpretation goes hand-in-hand with "method" and this tends to place the Bible in the care of specialists, while taking it out of the hands of laypeople.
> (7) Finally, determinate interpretation always ends in "question-begging" to support its theory of meaning.[29]

Fowl argues that since there is no "general, comprehensive theory of textual meaning that is neither arbitrary nor question-begging," one cannot justify privileging authorial intention or any other construct as fully constitutive of meaning. Since the term "meaning" can be used in so many ways, there is no point in wrangling about which theory trumps all others.[30] In Fowl's "underdetermined" approach, instead of concerning ourselves with "meaning," we acknowledge and pursue various interpretative aims and practices. If one is interested, for example, in the author's communicative intention, that is acceptable as long as this one interpretative interest is not heralded as the only valid theological option.[31] Christians are to bring the moral, doctrinal, political, ecclesial, and social concerns of their everyday lives to the biblical text, to shape and be shaped by biblical interpretation.[32] Within a community that engages in particular Christian practices (or "means of grace"), believers develop the virtue of *phronēsis* (practical reason), enabling them to bring appropriate interests to Scripture and make wise judgments about how Scripture speaks to their circumstances—ultimately for the sake of developing the virtue of charity. Therefore, Fowl is not advocating interpretative anarchy, in which one can do with the biblical text whatever one wishes. Instead, he

believes, if Christian communities are serious about fostering virtues, "violent" interpretations of Scripture will become less likely.[33]

In various ways Lindbeck, Hauerwas, and Fowl reflect the "postmodern" motifs mentioned earlier. Without accepting Fowl's characterization of determinate interpretation or his proposal for underdetermined interpretation, we can acknowledge his insight that often the academy is a more formative context regarding how some Christians read the Bible than is the church. Accordingly, we can learn from this focus on the church as a community of character formation, urging the priority of Christian aims in biblical interpretation and fostering the virtuous practices necessary for pursuing those aims.

Responding to Ongoing Challenges

Despite Fowl's apparent demurrals, questions about general hermeneutics—critical reflection on the nature of human understanding, especially regarding texts—in biblical interpretation are unavoidable, and reflect the first of some important ongoing challenges within the TIS discussion. The triad of author, text, and reader inevitably appears as even the most theologically careful account somehow encounters language from general hermeneutics.

Many evangelicals still see Hirsch's author-centered approach as the most adequate account of textual interpretation. More recently, Kevin Vanhoozer offers an author-centered theological hermeneutics that addresses text and reader more fully, making selective appeal to speech-act philosophy within a Trinitarian framework. His *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* suggests that we can learn from biblical interpretation about the nature of all textual interpretation, while his subsequent work pursues the unique aspects of biblical interpretation even more specifically and theologically.[34]

Yet Fowl objects to large-scale use of speech-act philosophy, believing that this would involve submitting the church's interpretative interests to a general hermeneutical theory. Further, in his view speech-act philosophy originated not as a universal theory of meaning, but rather as a way to solve local problems of interpretation.[35] John Webster offers another thoughtful objection to sustained interaction with general hermeneutics in biblical interpretation, namely, the anthropological presumption of an isolated self who is able to make independent judgments. Thus hermeneutics does not adequately take into account the effects of sin and the necessity of regeneration. This concern leads Webster to stress the priority of divine action in the reading situation.[36]

A second challenge, beyond general hermeneutics, concerns the relationship of TIS with biblical theology (BT), not least because the latter is often seen as a bridge discipline between biblical studies and ST. Among advocates of TIS, there is considerable disagreement about what this relationship entails. These tensions exist primarily because of competing conceptions regarding the nature of BT, whether it is an academic discipline or a churchly practice or somehow both.[37]

Some scholars maintain a basically evangelical understanding of progressive revelation, tied to redemptive history, as the way to engage BT. This approach engages critical claims about diversity in the biblical canon, sometimes concluding that such claims are legitimate regarding the diversity of expression found within overarching scriptural unity, while at other times defending the historical and conceptual integrity of Scripture by demonstrating that influential claims of critical scholarship are in error. Among the potential problems for this tradition are occasions when biblical diversity seems to go farther than complementary variety, and sometimes evangelical scholars appear to be defensive or excessively apologetic if they assume that scriptural coherence must adhere to modern logical standards. A related problem might be that ST in this tradition can appear to be nothing more than rigorously descriptive BT "contextualized," translated into contemporary language. Some within this tradition therefore see TIS largely in terms of such BT, whereas others are

suspicious of TIS. Still, for all this complexity, the value of this scholarly tradition for those holding to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture cannot be gainsaid.[38]

Another approach to BT, putting hermeneutical focus on the text more than the author, is labeled "canonical," associated with Brevard Childs. Historical-critical study of textual production remains, but is oriented toward understanding the theology of the final textual form(s) as offering early trajectories for understanding the material. The final form is canonically authoritative and gives parameters for engaging both the textual prehistory and subsequent theological readings, including selective use of pre-critical exegesis. Church-centered, methodologically flexible, and creedally orthodox, such a reading strategy has important elements to commend it, yet it often accepts—almost as taken for granted—critical results that are inconsistent with most evangelical understandings of Scripture. It is also not always clear by what criteria we should move from the text we now have to a theological pre-history, unless we make certain assumptions about textual clues, which may wind up only recognizing such a pre-history when an editor is clumsy—and, of course, it is tricky to discern what should count as clumsiness in leaving clues.

Still others see a renewed BT as a complex interdisciplinary program by which to accomplish the goals of TIS.[39] For the moment, the larger point is that both general hermeneutics and BT generate mixed reactions among advocates of TIS, and among others regarding TIS itself. Evangelical advocates of TIS will not adopt either general hermeneutics or stances toward BT that deny the unity or historical integrity of Scripture. Nevertheless, TIS literature may challenge evangelicals to consider how these commitments regarding the nature of Scripture generate certain tensions with business-as-usual in the guilds of biblical studies, given how oriented large sectors continue to be toward modern conceptions of "history."

In addition to general hermeneutics and BT, a third challenge likewise highlights the situatedness of academic biblical studies: globalization, both economically and religiously with the rapid acceleration of Christianity in the global South, has not been addressed very much in TIS literature. But if TIS is to serve the church, then its hermeneutical reflection will need to catch up with what God seems to be doing in the world. In the second major section of this essay, we now suggest some ways in which TIS might contribute to ST serving that divine mission. As our introduction proposed, TIS can enhance Christian intellectual friendship by fostering forms of constructively critical, yet loving and supportive, dialogue. Such dialogue, between Western evangelicals and various others among whom God is at work, may increase the church's theological faithfulness.

IRON SHARPENING IRON?

Of course, not just any dialogue will do, if scriptural faithfulness is our aim. Apparently the central challenge facing evangelical ST today concerns simultaneous needs for greater creativity and greater fidelity to core tradition—which may simply mean that we need greater clarity about what our core tradition is, now that evangelical ST is following the lead of evangelical biblical scholarship into broader academic engagement in various forms. With such scholarly enterprises come opportunities and obstacles for faithfulness. Those with whom we come into contact may be shaped by the new interaction, but they will also shape us in return. The importance of academic life stems in part from making obvious—and, Lord willing, subject to rational scrutiny and biblical wisdom—certain differences and processes of change that are at stake all the time.

Proverbs 27:17 can help to guide our response to this challenge: "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." The goal of such friendship, the metaphor suggests, is to retain legitimate differences while reforming each other through constructively critical, charitable interaction. Our suggestion in this essay is that TIS can guide evan-

gelical ST to grapple with issues of creativity and tradition through an iron-sharpening-iron process in four spheres of relationship. The first two relations concern the nature of "evangelical"; the last two concern the nature of "systematic theology."

Evangelicals and Non-evangelicals

First, it was apparent above that much TIS literature arises from mainline Protestant circles, while other contributors are Roman Catholic. This reflects the reality of Christian participation in ST as an academic discipline, a reality with which evangelicals in other disciplines—biblical studies, philosophy, history, and so forth—have already become well acquainted. Certainly it would be unhelpful if intellectual friendship across these theological boundaries simply drove another wedge between various evangelicals in the post-Christian West or further fragmented the already-weakening integrity of our theological traditions. Yet, if on the other hand we gain more accurate understanding of other traditions along with deepened appreciation for the scriptural contours of our own, then such academic encounters with churchly others are a precious gift.

Furthermore, the academy presses upon us issues we would prefer to avoid, but need to feel more poignantly and engage more directly. For instance, evangelicals have undertaken relatively little scholarly work on religious pluralism in general or Judaism in particular. The Scriptural Reasoning project,[40] with which a few who speak of TIS are engaged, highlights the significance of such issues, as do the questions regarding Christian interpretation of the Old Testament and the Rule of Faith that have dominated large segments of TIS discussion.

Evangelicals in the West and Christians in the Global South

Second, as previously noted, evangelical ST must address the ascendancy of Christianity in the global South—or, perhaps better, the recent Western recognition of this phenomenon that had already been transpiring. In one respect TIS literature contributes little direct help regarding these questions. However, the TIS preoccupation with canon, creed, and culture offers important lenses through which to assess what is happening in the global South and how God calls upon Western churches to respond.

For instance, canon and creed highlight the importance of catechesis. Christian believers, whether in America or elsewhere, need basic training regarding how biblical texts should be read within Scripture's overall story-line, and how that story-line is summed up in the Trinitarian economy of salvation to which the Rule of Faith points. Evangelical traditions vary regarding how they do or do not formally appeal to creeds, but to the degree that they are truly "evangelical," they embrace the gospel of the Triune God that the church discerned from Scripture. Nevertheless, as the rise and recurrence of ancient heresies demonstrate, Bible reading without such catechesis may endlessly proliferate unhealthy aberrations.

Meanwhile, attention to culture can restrain Western temptations to confuse catechesis with theological colonization. It is all too easy to maintain a stranglehold on the machinery of "contextualization," in the name of theological integrity insisting that non-Western Christians must become exactly like we are. TIS literature can encourage us to develop and exercise charity in the reading of Scripture so that we foster the healthy growth of the body of Christ rather than the replication of the same body parts in a way that treats ourselves like the church's head.

Church and Academy

Third, turning from the nature of the adjective "evangelical" toward focusing on the noun "systematic theology," we suggest that TIS can assist both the church and the academy in improving their often tense relationship. Whether or not most church members or even pastors will engage the theoretical apparatus of TIS literature, such a hermeneutical framework can support churchly

concerns. If TIS were to foster more explicitly scriptural discourse in contemporary ST, then that discipline would be more accessible to lay Christians who frequently feel alienated from discussions that lack scriptural vocabulary. TIS is concerned to prevent the creation of a "Protestant papacy," resisting the ways in which the guilds of biblical scholars might operate magisterially rather than ministerially. Focusing on how the Holy Spirit works in Christian communities through practices that shape virtuous readers of Scripture, TIS provides an emphasis on lay and pastoral reading of the Bible along with a framework to guide such reading appropriately, via the biblical and creedal catechesis just mentioned.

Yet TIS is concerned for the church without being naively submissive to whatever "the church" wants or cavalierly dismissive of what the academy contributes. Scholars may not be the only contemporary form in which God sends "prophets" to confront his people, but they do serve as one potential corrective. Just as ancient heresies stimulated the church to pursue the necessary work of doctrinal development, so today non-evangelical scholarship provokes valuable Christian study in response. Moreover, evangelical scholars faithfully serve their churches, even despite lack of consistent ecclesial support; these scholars are necessary not only as resources to provide what the church asks for, but also as reformers who sometimes proffer what the church truly needs. In this respect TIS contributes a hermeneutical language with which to develop and defend what evangelical biblical scholars and theologians are already doing. This TIS language can call upon such thinkers to "excel still more," while encouraging the church to listen to its scholars because their orienting voice is to be grounded in Scripture itself.

Biblical Studies and Theology

This brings us to a fourth, and very central, relationship in which TIS ought to foster iron sharpening iron: dialogue between biblical scholars and theologians. Earlier generations of evangelical scholarship tended to reflect an almost pre-modern reality in which the boundaries between these fields were very fuzzy. Relatively few evangelical professors had the title "theologian," while many biblical scholars taught courses in Christian doctrine. Moreover, evangelical ST heavily invested not only in scriptural citation but even in exegetical argument.

The scholarly integrity of modern evangelical biblical scholars, beginning around the 1960s or so, and theologians more recently, required the development of specialist expertise and distinctive forms of discourse. Furthermore, evangelical ST of former generations frequently lapsed into "proof-texting" of an indefensible sort, in which passages or even minor details of passages were yanked out of context in support of theological positions possibly preferred on other grounds.[41] Evangelical biblical scholars are right to be wary of such misuse of Scripture, while evangelical theologians are right to worry that many other elements of theological construction—such as historical or philosophical theology—were neglected or pursued poorly in such a context.

However, at the same time, accompanying increased disciplinary specialization is potential tragedy. At worst, we replace proof-texting ST with new mutual recriminations between biblical scholars and theologians, rather than collaborative expertise. At best, by contrast, TIS offers academic justification and encouragement for offering our respective gifts to each other and thereby to the church(es) via the writings we produce and the students we teach. After all, pre-critical "theological exegetes" sought rightly to prove doctrine from Scripture, and did not necessarily cite biblical texts in the ways that modern people have come to expect when they hear of evil proof-texting. Instead of decontextualized citation, the better instincts of classic exegetical theologians brought forth canonically contextualized doctrinal connections. On this basis we pick up and draw together certain hints already dropped about the

contemporary needs of post-critical evangelical ST.

First, evangelical ST needs to continue following the trajectory of evangelical biblical studies into robust academic engagement, producing first-rate scholarly articles and monographs. This can be done faithfully in a range of ways, but TIS offers a possible specialty that can keep some evangelical theologians attentive to Scripture in their published scholarship. As a vocational framework TIS can also creatively orient evangelical theologians to Scripture in the rest of their intellectual judgments.

Second, evangelical ST needs to engage non-evangelical theologians and others more accurately and generously, non-Western Christians more intentionally and equally, and churchly concerns more focally yet critically. We have detailed earlier the resources TIS might provide for achieving these ends.

Similarly, third, evangelical ST needs to engage Scripture both more and less—more in terms of truly grounding its conclusions and generating fresh thought, yet less in terms of unhealthy proof-texting. It is tempting to say that evangelical theology would be more scriptural if it cited biblical texts less. Yet that is only partly true; evangelical theologians also need to invest the embarrassment of riches provided by recent generations of biblical scholarship. This must be done while retaining the critical distance to develop and preserve the integrity and norms of their own discipline—a point at which TIS can be useful.

Fourth, therefore, in reflecting on those disciplinary norms, it appears that evangelical theology needs to become more holistically biblical. One simple example concerns the relative dominance of Pauline categories and concerns in the conceptual structures of most evangelical theologies. To varying degrees the Catholic epistles, the Gospels, and the Old Testament are neglected because many of their literary forms do not translate as easily into conceptual structures familiar to Western theological discourse.[42] TIS has no corner on literary methods, but it certainly is one arena in which their broader approaches to exegesis generate interest and have potential to flourish.

CONCLUSION: CREATIVITY AND CORE TRADITION

This reflection on the biblical aspects of ST suggests that evangelicalism needs both greater creativity and greater clarity about core tradition. On the one hand, to integrate a wider range of biblical material and conceptual/literary models, along with the theoretical needs in the academy and the practical needs of the church in the world, requires the synthetic faculty of imagination.[43] On the other hand, as evangelical traditions—especially the non-Reformed—increase their scholarly presence and historical awareness, already-complex evangelical identity becomes even more contested. While the primary concern should not be labeling, the practical reality at stake in "evangelicalism" is biblical faithfulness and thereby a healthy form of Protestant ecumenism. TIS offers resources for enhancing creativity without costing particular traditions their integrity or evangelical theology its integrity as a discourse rooted in biblical language. In other words, we need to get beyond unhealthy proof-texting without getting beyond the commitment to prove theological claims vis-à-vis the Bible; we need *scripturally-formed* imagination. TIS can alert evangelical ST to the latent power of its own resources: it need no longer be merely a passive recipient of material from biblical studies, but neither should it ignore the theological potential of such scholarship; it need no longer justify its existence with respect to history, philosophy, and the like, but instead it should learn how to develop creatively through opportunistic interaction with the problems of such external disciplines. It is sad but true that Karl Barth may model this more distinctively in his engagement with modernity than many evangelicals do; it would be better moving forward if, rather than being either unduly fascinated by Barthianism as such or obsessed with its pitfalls, evangelical theo-

logians would learn the broader lesson about how to engage theological culture with biblical creativity—or, what may amount to the same, engaging contemporary culture with theological creativity.

Evangelical theologians serve the church by being theologians and not something else. It is difficult to cultivate and achieve historical responsibility without being historians, philosophical responsibility without becoming philosophers, pastoral responsibility without remaining full-time pastors—and scriptural responsibility without focusing narrowly on either critical exegesis or contemporary praxis. Or so it initially appears. But this is precisely the mandate of the evangelical theologian and, when it comes to scriptural responsibility in particular, of the pastor and even the lay Christian. TIS arises not to reject the gifts of biblical scholarship, but to receive them within the body of Christ wherein everyone must faithfully contribute their distinctive gifts.

Iron sharpening iron recognizes an element of identity between both sides in each of the aforementioned relationships, as in the friendships built on the common humanity addressed by the proverb. But we must maintain the integrity of differences as well—otherwise we lose the sharpening. To put this in New Testament terms, we are concerned about speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15). TIS can help evangelical ST to develop its own mature voice, in order to fulfill its coordinating intellectual function in the body of Christ (Eph 4:13, 16), so that we may speak truthfully of God today. This voice should be charitable, not shrill, when interacting with various others. Still, if we are to grow to maturity without being tossed to and fro by waves of alternative doctrine (Eph 4:14), then that voice must creatively speak God's Word rather than simply mouthing the latest opinions. Thus we need *theological* interpretation of *Scripture*.

ENDNOTES

[1]Therefore portions of this essay constitute a summary of Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), with use here permitted kindly by the publisher.

[2]This is a modified version of the definition offered by D. Christopher Spinks, *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning: Debates on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 7. See also R. W. L. Moberly, "What Is Theological Interpretation of Scripture?" *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 no. 2 (2009): 161–78.

[3]In an unpublished lecture delivered to the Theological Hermeneutics of Christian Scripture group at the Society of Biblical Literature (Boston, Nov 2008), Markus Bockmuehl raised helpful concerns about the term "movement." The term is not used in a technical sense here, nor should it suggest levels of coherence that internal disagreements (mentioned below) would belie. For further reflection on the history and theological status of TIS language, see Daniel J. Treier, "What is theological interpretation? An ecclesiological reduction," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (2010): 144-61. Bockmuehl's own disciplinary analysis and proposal are insightful, appearing in his *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

[4]Craig G. Bartholomew, "Uncharted Waters: Philosophy, Theology and the Crisis in Biblical Interpretation," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller; Scripture and Hermeneutics, vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 25.

[5]The English translation is published as "The Strange New World within the Bible," in Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (trans. Douglas Horton; London: Pilgrim, 1928).

[6]Donald Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation* (Barth Studies Series; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 7–8.

[7]Ibid., 9.

[8]Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), chap. 3.

[9]Ibid., chap. 4.

[10]Ibid., chap. 5.

[11]Ibid., 221.

[12]On the importance of historical criticism see, e.g., "The Preface to the Second Edition," in Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (6th ed.; Oxford: Oxford University, 1968), 6–7.

[13]Barth attempts to overcome claims of radical historical distance dogmatically—by presenting human history as a unity in which all human beings are closely related, standing under the judgment of God and justified by grace through faith in Christ. Barth's critique of historical critics concerns failure to acknowledge their solidarity with figures of the past. Remaining content to emphasize distance alone is a moral-spiritual failure, not merely or even primarily a methodological one (see Wood, *Barth's Theology*, 12–18).

[14]For a helpful account of this clash and its effect on evangelical scholarship see Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

[15]On these parallels and the tenuous identity of "postliberalism" see Treier, "What is theological interpretation?" which also contains reflection on the ecumenical elements of TIS.

[16]Many align themselves with the views of E. D. Hirsch, Jr., who made such a distinction in his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). A related distinction regarding biblical theology, between "what the text meant" and "what it means," was famously articulated by Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. G. A. Buttrick; 4 vols.; New York: Abingdon, 1962), 1:418–32.

[17]At least three series are of note: The Church's Bible (Eerdmans), the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (InterVarsity), and the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Brazos).

[18]David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (ed. Stephen E. Fowl; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 26–38 (28).

[19]Ibid., 37. Steinmetz clarifies the relationship of literal and spiritual senses: "The literal sense of Scripture is basic to the spiritual and limits the range of possible allegorical meanings in those instances in which the literal meaning of a particular passage is absurd, undercuts the living relationship of the church to the Old Testament, or is spiritually barren" (29).

[20]For fuller evangelical analysis of Steinmetz's claims, see Daniel J. Treier, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis? *Sic et Non*," *Trinity Journal* 24 NS (2003): 77–103. On "participation" see Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2008).

[21]Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Rule of Faith," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 703. The *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation* is the major representative reference work for TIS so far.

[22]See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I.8.1.

[23]David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 87–100.

[24]See Trevor Hart, "Tradition, Authority, and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 183–204 for an extensive argument to this effect.

[25]George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

[26]Ibid., 113–24. For related considerations see Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974).

[27]See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981); idem, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001).

[28]Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Challenges in Contemporary Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 8. For a

brief, more recent introduction to Fowl's thought see his *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009).

[29]See Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 32; 32; 34; 34; 35; 35, for items (1) –(5) and (7); for (6), see e.g., 47, 60, 74.

[30]For a summary of this argument see Stephen E. Fowl, "The Role of Authorial Intention in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," in *Between Two Horizons*, especially 78–82.

[31]Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 56–61.

[32]Ibid., 60.

[33]Ibid., chap. 3.

[34]Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); idem, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); and idem, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

[35]Fowl, "The Role of Authorial Intention," 76.

[36]John Webster, *Word and Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001). See also John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Current Issues in Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), chap. 3; Mark Alan Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics: Mapping Divine and Human Agency* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

[37]Further detail on this subject appears in Daniel J. Treier, "Biblical Theology and/or Theological Interpretation of Scripture? Defining the Relationship," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61 (2008): 16–31.

[38]Probably the most articulate representative of this approach is D. A. Carson, most recently in "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 89–104.

[39]Brian Rosner represents a virtual equation of BT and TIS among evangelicals pursuing a redemptive-historical approach, whereas Francis Watson—an early and important TIS figure along with Fowl and Vanhoozer—presents a more complex and robustly theological version of interdisciplinary BT as TIS; Charles Scobie seems to fit somewhere between these two. See, e.g., B. S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 3–11; Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[40]See David F. Ford and C. C. Pecknold, eds., *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, Directions in Modern Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

[41]For reflection on both the necessary and the negative elements, see Daniel J. Treier, "Proof Text," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, 622–624.

[42]On the array of favored (and non-Pauline!) biblical texts in cultures of the global South, see Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University, 2006).

[43]See briefly Trevor A. Hart, "Imagination," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, 321–323; more extensively, Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, who emphasizes the variety of Scripture's literary forms as maps of different aspects of reality, each helping to foster elements of faithful living.

"A Light in a Dark Place": A Tale of Two Kings and Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament[1]

Stephen Dempster

By your words I can see where I am going; they throw a beam of light on my dark path (Ps 119:105, *The Message*).

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INTRODUCTION

Near the end of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first volume of his magisterial trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, there is a poignant scene. As the motley group of human and non-human characters are about to leave on their fateful mission to save Middle Earth, the elven queen, Galadriel, appears and gives each member a parting gift. None is aware of the horrific dangers ahead. The protagonist, Frodo, who is carrying the burden of the Ring, is given the final gift suited to his particular task. The beautiful queen presents to him an extremely valuable jar of crystal containing the Light of Eärendil. Unknown to Frodo himself, this light is directly descended from the light of Iluvatar, the name of God given by Tolkien in the foundational creation story of his entire mythology, the Ainulindale that opens his *Silmarillion*. "May it be to you a light in dark places," Galadriel remarks, "when all other lights go out."[2] It is this precious gift, one directly (and indirectly) given by God, that will help Frodo navigate his way among the dangers that lurk ahead in the darkest of nights on his momentous mission.

A scene from the real world of 622 B.C. is equally significant in its context. A king of Judah is given a valuable gift during a period when his nation is walking in moral and spiritual darkness, whistling cavalierly, oblivious to the dangers of the times (2 Kings 22). This gift has been recovered from the rubble while repairs are taking place in the Temple of Jerusalem. It is a holy book which

has long been lost, and this fact alone is probably the reason for the darkness. It is brought to the king and his courtiers and when read and interpreted, they rip their clothes in desperation—they see themselves and their dire situation for the first time. It is as if this book shines a light in a very dark place, and immediate measures are taken to use this light to produce changes in themselves and their nation. Indeed, as the historical narrative unfolds, this light saves the nation as long as it uses it to see by. The just king, Josiah, is remembered with an epitaph written by the Lord himself: "He looked after the cause of the poor and needy. Was this not to know me?" (Jer 22:16). His life was mastered by Scripture.

A generation later, a very different picture emerges. The king is dead and one of his sons, Jehoiakim, is on the throne. The ways of his father's reforms have been abandoned and the nation is in darkness again, oblivious to a steep precipice of judgment nearby. Like a generation earlier, a book has been "discovered" and it is brought to the new ruler and his intimate circle, as he warms himself by a fire in his "winter" palace (Jeremiah 36). As the scroll is unraveled and its words read by a scribe to the king, the king does not rip his clothes—he rips up the book instead and tosses its leaves into the fire. The light on the nation's plight flickers momentarily every time the words are read, but the king extinguishes it before anything can be seen distinctly. Unfortunately, judgment is not averted this time. The nation plunges over the precipice. The king is decidedly not like his father, but more like his brother who wanted to live like a celebrity and not a servant (Jer 22:15). His life sought to master Scripture.

These three stories, one fictional, and the other two drawn from the very center of the Hebrew Bible, are noteworthy in helping clarify what is at stake in theological interpretation of the Old Testament. The fictional story indicates the important role that divine light will play in accomplishing the mission to save Middle Earth. The other stories indicate the critical role that "divine light" from the Torah and Prophets plays at the core of the Hebrew canon, and by extension the rest of the Scriptures and the real world.

The Hebrew Bible can be divided into approximately two halves of 150,000 words each.[3] The first half comprises what has been called the Primary History, a history extending from creation (Genesis 1) to exile (2 Kings 25). The second half consists of prophetic texts beginning with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve, followed by the Writings which in many manuscript traditions end with Chronicles.[4] Consequently, the last book of the first half is 2 Kings which contains the story of the king who ripped his garment in response to the discovery of the divine scroll, and the first book of the second half is Jeremiah, which has the account of the king's son who ripped up the divine scroll and threw it into the fire. Both kings saw the divine word as powerful, but one wished to submit to its power and the other wished to manipulate its power, thus becoming a party to perhaps the first book burning in history.[5] It may be instructive that such responses to books which became an integral part of Holy Scripture are found at the mid-point of the Hebrew Bible, for they provide both a positive and negative way to respond to the Scripture. Josiah, although a king, was a servant to an ultimate Authority. In contrast, his son wished to submit to no higher authority than himself. The text can master us, or we can master the text.[6] The text is there to help us "see where [we are] going," to "throw a beam of light on [our] dark path" (Ps 119:105, *The Message*). Or we can choose to remain in darkness.

RECOVERING THE NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of a theological and spiritual crisis in Western Culture not unlike that in ancient Judah.[7] The Bible has been lost as far as its essential message is concerned, or if it has been found, it has been cut up into a thousand pieces and thrown into the fire. An attempt at recovery has been called "theologi-

cal interpretation," and it has arisen because there has been the growing conviction among many Christian scholars and lay people alike that there is a famine for the Word of God throughout the land not unlike the time predicted in Amos's day (Amos 8:11-14). In many churches, the Scripture has been *Left Behind* for *Your Best Life Now* among the many *Purpose Driven* books and popular *Self-Help* manuals. If by chance its words are read, they are often placed in the context of *how to* become a better person, or *how to* have a better marriage, or *how to* improve one's potential, or *how to* live one's dream, or *how to* understand the Bible as a cipher for future events. Frequently bits and pieces of the text are read and one never gets a sense of the entire picture so that the scripture is reduced to a daily series of "devotionals," or a book of quaint quotations, a source for private inspiration or public motivation.

A recent news story told how Bible verses were engraved on the gun sights of rifles by an arms manufacturer to be used in Iraq and Afghanistan. This prompted one wit to ask the question, "Who would Jesus shoot?"[8] The church has become so imbedded into the culture that it has difficulty even understanding the Bible.[9] On the other hand, in the more liberal wing of Christianity, the Bible suffers a different fate, being cut up into a thousand pieces and thrown into the fire to be reduced to ashes by the flames of historical criticism, deconstruction, or other ideological criticisms whether liberationist, feminist, post-colonial or whatever reading strategy has become the current fad.[10] In both contexts, conservative and liberal, the Bible does not set the agenda; the church and the culture do. The Bible is simply a means to an end determined by the church working in lock step with the culture.[11]

A Beginning and an End

Theological interpretation seeks to recover the Scripture for the church so that the Bible sets the agenda, so that God's voice can be truly heard, shedding light on the surrounding darkness.[12] The Bible begins with, "In the Beginning God," and ends with, "In the End God."[13] God is the Great Subject and without Him there is nothing but *töhû wäböhû* and "darkness covering the face of the deep" (Gen 1:2a). Period. Significantly the first word of the divine Subject is, "Let there be light!" With God as the central Subject there will always be light.

This stress on the comprehensive subject of the Bible is set within a comprehensive scope—the beginning and the end—and a comprehensive setting—the heavens and the earth. Thus the Bible is seen as the ultimate Story of cosmic existence within which all other stories fit, whether those stories are the story of the Sumerian Empire of 3000 B.C. or the American Empire of 2000 A.D., whether they are the first individual human stories on the planet or the last stories, and all the billions of individual stories in between. All cultures, all nations, all individuals, all projects, all "isms," everything that there is finds its place within this comprehensive scheme and is addressed by the *comprehensive Subject*. Ultimately, everyone and everything have to do with God. And this God is the Creator, Judge, and Savior of the world bringing his Story to its ultimate end.[14] As humanity was addressed by God in the beginning when God breathed into its nostrils the breath of life (Gen 2:7), as the dry bones of Judah heard the word of Ezekiel on the Babylonian killing fields and became a new Adam (Ezekiel 37), as Jesus addressed his disciples after the resurrection by breathing into them the Holy Spirit and commissioning them with his Word to the nations (John 20:19-23), all of these pivotal texts indicate that to be addressed by the living God constitutes the core of what it means to be human. Without this word, humanity is like the psalmist who cries, "Lord, if you do not speak to me, I am like those going down to the pit" (Ps 28:2). Or "like the animals that perish" (Psalm 49) that "live on bread alone" (Deut 8:3). Each human being is made in the image of God and is a radically referential, totally dependent creature. Every individual

needs the divine word not only to exist but also to flourish.[15] Without it there is only *töhû wäböhû* and "darkness covering the face of the deep." Theological interpretation is first *theological*!

Theological criticism shows the importance of the *comprehensive scope* of this Story. The first three quarters of Christian Scripture—the Old Testament—tell the beginning of the Story, and narrate the fundamental events of creation, fall, and the beginning of God's great reclamation project—redemption before the ultimate restoration of the cosmos. Without the faithful interpretation of this all-inclusive narrative, the world will never find its Story but will manufacture different ones, whether they be varieties of capitalism, communism, or expressive individualism.[16] When Christians do not hear this part of the story, their spirituality drifts into a vapid sentimentalism, which longs for an ahistorical escape from a material prison in the hope of someday going to heaven.

For it is particularly the Old Testament that describes the beginning of the Story where "God creates the world, the world gets lost, [and] God seeks to restore the world to the glory for which he created it."[17] It is the Old Testament which sets the context for this comprehensive Story from the creation of Adam to the greater Son of Adam,[18] from the beginning (*rë´šît*) to the end (*´aHárît*).[19] It sets the historical wheels in motion moving from creation through fall to the call of Abram, to the Exodus, through Sinai and conquest, through the exile and return, and finally to the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of God's Son, which are anticipations of the end when Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father and God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28). In the light of this comprehensive context, the ultimate purposes of God for the cosmos are clear.

The radical significance of the Christian message can also be seen and the place of the church within this context. As Don Garlington has remarked, "It is not as if Christians are now living in the last days before God acts within history to bring everything to an end by finally defeating evil. Because of the significance of the Christ event, we are now living in the first days after the great act of God to defeat sin and death and liberate the whole cosmos."[20] Or to word it somewhat differently, "The one true God had done in Jesus of Nazareth in the middle of time what Jews expected he would do for Israel at the end of time."[21] But this can only be seen when the New Testament is viewed in the context of a grand story begun in the Old Testament. The church is the body of Christ doing the will of God in the world, bringing God's rule to the nations.

Without this context one can never get a sense of the whole, and the Bible will degenerate into an incoherent anthology of literature. This was a major problem for the Judaism of the time of Jesus just as it is a major problem today. Jesus complained to the religious leaders that they would tithe the dill, mint, and cumin—the smallest herbs, but would forget the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith (Matt 23:23-24). They had no sense of the whole.

In a recent study on rabbinic interpretation Alexander Samely remarks that a key feature of early Jewish interpretation was the "proverbialization of Scripture."[22] There was no sense of an overall narrative structure as each verse functioned like an independent proverb. Consequently, the fact that divorce is legalized in Deuteronomy 24 is not seen in the context of its historical development, that it is a concession to human evil, the result of the fall from an originally good creation.[23] The problem with this approach is that the real story controlling the interpreter is not that of the Scriptures but the one determined by the *Zeitgeist* of the interpreter and his times. All the various trees of Scripture thus find their place not within the forest of Scripture (the biblical Story) but the forest of contemporary culture, to be understood accordingly.[24]

RECOVERING THE CONTEXT OF THE BIBLE

Theological interpretation also stresses the importance of the comprehensive Setting of the Story: the heavens and the earth. With its doctrine of creation, the Old Testament grounds believing faith firmly in the soil of this world. It is no wonder that many Gnostic sects in the ancient world wanted nothing to do with the Old Testament, with its material earthiness. They preferred to think of a disembodied, ethereal existence elevated above the world of the five senses. The Old Testament will have nothing of this but describes a God who gets his hands muddy with the creation of Adam and bloody with the creation of Eve. The Hebrew Scripture is rooted firmly in the material world with its concern for sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell in the courtyard of the temple, its passion for sex and the body in Songs, its zest for life *now* in the Proverbs, its fervor for listening to the groans of victims in the Prophets, its celebration of the glory of God in the thunder claps of the storm in the Psalms, and its desire to alleviate coldness at night in Exodus and hunger during the day in Ruth.

It is in the Old Testament where we learn that creation is fractured and broken and in need of radical redemption and that redemption has begun with the call of Israel out from the world. The world is not being abandoned but is being redeemed. Seen in this light, old Abraham holds the clue to the secret of universal restoration: "God so loved the world that he chose Abraham!"[25] Abraham and Sarah are to the world what Frodo and Sam are to Middle Earth. Thus when Jesus appears, he is not an afterthought but as the seed of Abraham, he is the clue to all of creation.[26] His incarnation means that God has finally "moved into the neighborhood" forever (John 1:14, *The Message*). His miracles are a foretaste of the redeemed cosmos; his death is the final judgment on human sin and the beginning of the removal of the curse of creation; his resurrection the beginning of the transformation of the heavens and the earth. The empty tomb means that the great enemy of Death has finally bit the dust and will eventually die!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, languishing in a German prison, emphasized the importance of taking time in the Old Testament before automatically moving to the New Testament:

> My thoughts and feelings seem to be getting more and more like those of the Old Testament and in recent months I have been reading the Old Testament much more than the New. It is only when one knows the unutterability of the name of God that one can pronounce the name of Jesus Christ; it is only when one loves life and the earth so much that without them everything seems to be over that one may believe in a resurrection and a new world; it is only when one submits to God's law, that one may speak of grace; it is only when God's wrath and judgement are hanging over the heads of one's enemies that something of what it means to love and forgive them can touch our hearts. In my opinion it is not Christian to want to take our thoughts and feelings too quickly and too directly from the New Testament.[27]

By seeing the world in the light of the first three quarters of the Christian Bible—the Old Testament—a truncated evangelical gospel is avoided as well as the biblically emasculated version of a liberal church. A thousand watt bulb is infinitely more effective in lighting up one's surroundings than a hundred watt specimen.

Christ the Center

Theological interpretation of the Old Testament also means that the Old Testament is seen in the light of its ultimate goal in Christ. Just as reading through a story the second time means that we read with our eyes more attentive to the development of the story, so the same happens when we read through the Story the second time with Christ as an interpretive guide (Luke 24:13-53).[28] Knowing the end of *The Lord of the Rings*

shows the importance of Gandalf's exhortation to Frodo to have compassion on Gollum since "he may have some part to play yet for good or ill."Correspondingly, as the Bible is read again, "in the face of Adam, who went wrong, are already faintly visible the features of Jesus who went right, was right, lived and died to make all things finally right and whole."[29]

In Cain's rhetorical question to God, "Am I my brother's keeper?", we hear the echoes of the same underlying cynicism in the scribe's query to God's son, "Who is my neighbor?", and the profound answer of Jesus, the ultimate brother's keeper and the ultimate neighbor, when he stumbles down the *Via Dolorosa* under the back breaking weight of a cross (Gen 4:9; Luke 10:29). Lamech's vengeful boast of seventy-seven-fold retribution is answered by Christ's call for seventy-times-seven-fold forgiveness (Gen 4:24; Matt 18:22). Abraham's failure to avert the judgment of Sodom on account of the lack of ten righteous individuals finds its counterpart in the intercession of one righteous man who turns aside judgment for the world (Gen 18:16-33; Rom 5:1-21.)! When the repentant Judah desperately addresses his brother Joseph, begging for the release of his younger brother, Benjamin, his words carry deeper significance in the light of Christ's great commission: "How can I go back to my Father if the boy is not with me?" (Gen 44:34a; Matt 28:18-20). The rape of the helpless Dinah and Tamar (Genesis 34; 2 Samuel 13.), the gang rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19), the murder of Jepthah's daughter (Judges 11)—all of these "texts of terror"[30] in the Old Testament find ultimate expression and resolution in the murder of God's own beloved Son.

RECOVERING THE PAST

Theological interpretation of the Old Testament also underscores the importance of seeing the Word of God in the light of the history of interpretation. I remember studying at seminary and mentioning a recently purchased book to a fellow student, *Commenting and Commentaries* by C. H. Spurgeon.[31] The student remarked, "Why would anyone want to read old commentaries? They have nothing new to offer." I felt embarrassed for even mentioning the book. But the remark and my own personal embarrassment both reflected the dominant modernist mentality with its notion that objective, detached scholarship, taking into consideration all the latest historical research, renders obsolete any understanding of the scriptures before the twentieth century.

A few years ago, a scholar wrote a book which sought to make accessible some of this "obsolete," interpretation. Entitled, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, John Thompson describes how this experience of reading the Bible in company with orthodox, ancient interpreters can keep us from the blind spots that we invariably pick up from our own cultural readings which are often preoccupied with concerns of psychological therapy and consumer comfort.[32] Thus we can be delivered from the tyranny of the present and the self which know a lot more about the last six minutes than the last six centuries. C. S. Lewis once remarked that "a man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and microphone of his own age."[33] One of the few salutary benefits of postmodernity is to highlight these blind spots of the modern age. Thus there will be reading "in good company" by mentors who have gone before us and "who may be more spiritually alive than many who are with us now"[34] and who can help us from going down false hermeneutical trails.[35]

CONCLUSION

Finally, to return to the point of all theological interpretation, it is to confront us with the grand Subject. God speaks, "Let there be light!" We can see where we are and take the right path. We are not to emulate Josiah's son, Jehoiakim, who

sought to master the text by ultimately extinguishing its light and thus removing any possibility of hope for himself and his nation. On the contrary, we need to be like his father, Josiah, who sought to be mastered by the text. Although a king of Judah, he was more importantly a servant to the Word.

At the end of *The Two Towers*, the second volume of Tolkien's trilogy, the dramatic significance of Galadriel's gift to Frodo is revealed. When in the depths of Cirith Ungol and unaware of their terrible peril in "Shelob's Lair," surrounded by impenetrable darkness with a dreadful monster nearby, Frodo's partner, Sam Gangee, remembers the gift and reminds Frodo,

> "The Lady's gift. The star-glass! 'A light to you in dark places,' she said it was to be. The star-glass!"
>
> "Why yes! [Frodo remembers] Why had I forgotten it! *A light when all other lights go out!* And now indeed light alone can help us."[36]

Holy Scripture was such a light in ancient times and is such a light today. As the darkness closes in, it is particularly that light to help us when all other lights go out.

ENDNOTES

[1]I owe thanks to Judy Dempster, Greg Maillet, and Malcolm Elliott-Hogg for reading drafts of this article and for their helpful suggestions.

[2]J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 423.

[3]David Noel Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1993).

[4]The order is that described in a saying from an earlier period (baraita) which is prescribed in the Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, The Twelve (Minor Prophets), Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles. This was probably the oldest Jewish order. See, e.g., Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); S. G. Dempster, "From Many Texts to One: The Formation of the Hebrew Bible," in *The World of the Aramaeans I: Biblical Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugene Dion* (ed. P. Michèle Daviau, John William Wevers, and Michael Weigl (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2001), 19-56.

[5]There were probably many book burnings which happened as the result of the destruction of cities and towns by conquerors before this time but texts were probably not intentionally targeted. E.g., the archive of Ebla escaped for the most part the massive fires which destroyed the city in the late third millennium. Clay tablets were often fire-proof. Other notable burnings of biblical books ("bibliocausts"): the Maccabean times (1 Macc 1:56); the persecution of Christians under Diocletian, and of course the period at the end of the Middle Ages in Europe. Ironically it was the church which was largely responsible for the censuring of Scripture in the last period and during the Inquisition it was responsible for burning Hebrew Bibles! For the use of the term "bibliocaust," see Haig A. Bosmajian, *Burning Books* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006).

[6]Both of these attitudes are shown in the recent movie *The Book of Eli*. The villain wishes to use the Bible for his own selfish ambitions; the hero wishes to let the text use him for its purposes. One is led by sight, the other by faith. Ironically the one who has sight is blind and the one who is blind can see.

[7]See, e.g., for culture, Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992); for scripture see, Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Christopher R. Seitz, "Scripture Becomes Religion(s): The Theological Crisis of Serious Biblical Interpretation in the Twentieth Century," in *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminister John Knox, 2001), 13-34.

[8]Charles E. Peña, "Who Would Jesus Shoot?" [cited

14 May 2010]. Online: http://original.antiwar.com/pena/2010/01/21/who-would-jesus-shoot.

[9]For example, see Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

[10]Jack Miles, citing the contemporary Pope, ironically refers to much of this criticism as the study of the Bible *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God does not exist). See J. Miles, "Between Theology and Exegesis," *Commonweal* 134 (2007): 21.

[11]Ironically, in both environments the locus of authority has moved from the text to the audience.

[12]Kevin Vanhoozer, A. K. Adam, and Francis Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Kevin Vanhoozer, *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

[13]See, e.g., Daniel Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 187-206.

[14]"Scripture truthfully tells the story of God's action of creating, judging, and saving the world. God is the primary agent of the biblical narrative.... This same God is still at work in the world today." Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1.

[15]"To approach the Bible with a theological interest, however, is to read in order to hear what God is saying to the church—to discern the *divine* discourse in the *canonical* work." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imprisoned or Free: Text, Status and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (ed. A. K. M. Adam, et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker), 51-94.

[16]Cf. how the story of modernity has been fragmented into a million pieces in Robert W. Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story," *First Things* 36 (1993): 19-24.

[17]Frederick Buechner, "The Bible as Literature," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 48.

[18]Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 43.

[19]John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL : InterVarsity, 2009), 285.

[20]Don Garlington, personal communication.

[21]This is a slight adaptation of a statement by N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 36.

[22]Alexander Samely, *The Rabbinic Interpretation of Scripture in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002) 48-50.

[23]See the argument of Jesus in Matt 19:1-12.

[24]For the classic statement of how this happened in biblical interpretation see Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University, 1980).

[25]This is an adaptation of Christopher Wright's perceptive statement: "God so loved the world that he chose Israel." See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 329.

[26]Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of our God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 173.

[27]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (updated; Austin: Touchstone, 1997), 156-57.

[28]See also Richard B. Hays, "Reading Scripture in the Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 216-38.

[29]Buechner, "The Bible as Literature," 42.

[30]The phrase is from Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[31]Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commenting & Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1876).

[32]John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible With the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn from Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[33]C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 58-59.

[34]Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco : HarperOne, 1993), 18. This quote is an adaptation of one of Palmer's statements.

[35]It is precisely this type of ignorance of or contempt for the history of interpretation that results in

scholars such as Walter Brueggeman describing the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 as an exceedingly marginal text, or David Robertson and John B. Curtis arguing that the biblical Job totally rejects God at the end. See David Robertson, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study," *Soundings* 56 (1973) 446-469; John B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1979) 497-511. It is a similar mentality that leads scholars to argue that "there is not such a thing as a biblical view on anything, not even God." Cited in Vanhoozer, Adam, and Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 67, n. 38.

[36]J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (New York: Ballantine, 1994), 415.

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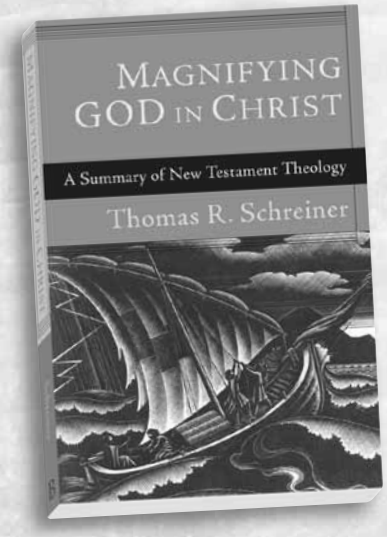

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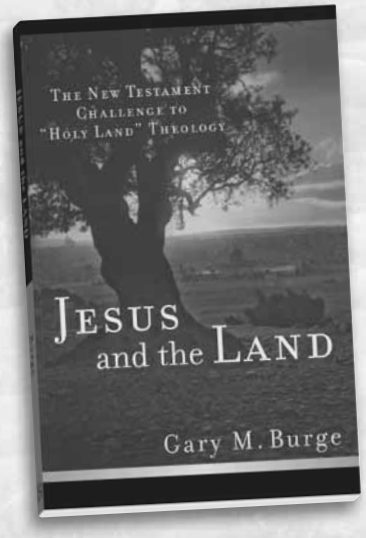

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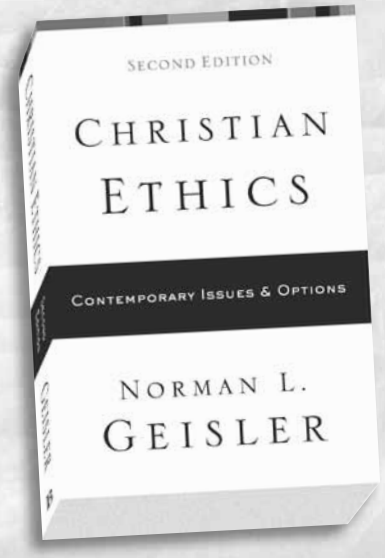

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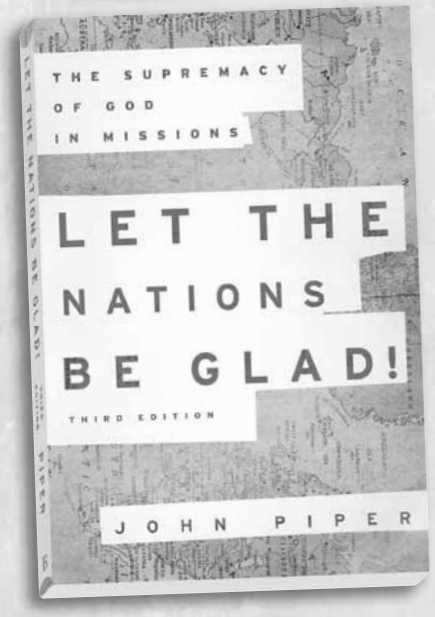

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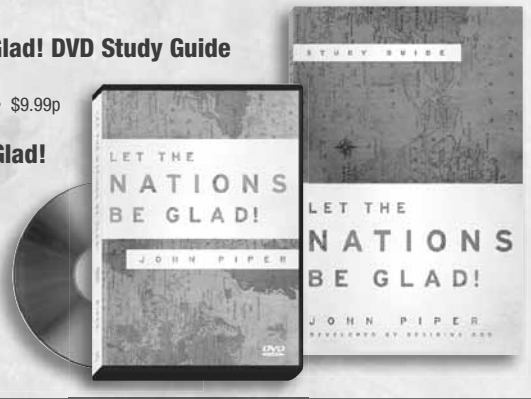

Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation

Gregg R. Allison

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Dr. Allison served many years as a staff member of Campus Crusade, where he worked in campus ministry and as a missionary to Italy and Switzerland. He also serves as the book review editor for theological, historical, and philosophical studies for the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. Dr. Allison is the author of *Getting Deep: Understand What You Believe about God and Why* (B&H, 2002) and *Jesusology: Understand What You Believe About Jesus and Why* (B&H, 2005).

While recently engaged in some careful consideration of my own sanctification, or ongoing maturity in the Christian faith, I turned to the apostle John's affirmation: "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him" (1 John 5:18).[1] I experienced a deep sense of joy as I contemplated the protection promised in this verse, while at the same time I puzzled over the evident discrepancy between the clause "does not keep on sinning" and my own propensity to "keep on sinning." Beyond this unresolved tension in my own personal life, I was drawn to the interesting parallel between Christians, described as the group "who has been born of God," and Christ, described as the one "who was born of God."[2] Reading this parallel as the systematic theologian that I am, I gave attention to the theological truth embedded here that the Son of God is eternally begotten, or generated, of the Father—that is, the Second Person of the Trinity eternally depends on the First Person for his Sonship.[3] Ever since the Creed of Nicea (325 A.D.), the church has formally confessed its belief "in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *begotten of the Father, only-begotten*…."[4] And my theological interpretation of this passage focused my attention on this great biblical truth and creedal confession. This illustration serves as an example of "theological interpretation of Scripture" (henceforth, TIS), the topic of this issue of *SBJT*.

Over the course of the last several decades, a new approach to the interpretation of Scripture has come into vogue.[5] Called "theological interpretation" or "theological exegesis" of Scripture, this movement may be characterized as a matrix of interpretative approaches, all of which bear some familial resemblances while exhibiting important

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differences as well. In this article I will first present a definition of TIS; second, I will discuss several common characteristics of TIS; and third, I will advance some benefits that TIS offers while urging caution with regard to several pitfalls it may entail.

DEFINITION OF TIS

Kevin Vanhoozer, a major contributor to the development of TIS, distances TIS from possible (mis)understandings, noting "it is easier to say what theological interpretation of the Bible is *not* rather than what it is."[6] First, TIS "is not an imposition of a theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text."[7] In other words, TIS is not confessional theology as done by Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, and other theological persuasions. Second, TIS "is not an imposition of a general hermeneutic or theory of interpretation onto the biblical text."[8] That is, TIS stands against reading the Bible "like any other book" and insists instead that it must be read theologically.[9] Indeed, TIS must be theologically grounded and not just a theological veneer painted over an otherwise non-theological exegesis.[10] Third, TIS "is not a form of merely historical, literary, or sociological criticism preoccupied with (respectively) the world 'behind,' 'of,' or 'in front of' the biblical text."[11] While advocates of TIS may profitably use various critical means to ascertain the meaning of biblical texts, they must go beyond these measures to detect divine action as affirmed in and through those texts.

Due to its newness, TIS continues to be rather difficult to define, and while no consensus definition exists, I offer the following: TIS is a family of interpretive approaches that privileges theological readings of the Bible in due recognition of the theological nature of Scripture, its ultimate theological message, and/or the theological interests of its readers. This definition is similar to John Webster's notion of TIS as "interpretation informed by a theological description of the nature of the biblical writings and their reception, setting them in the scope of the progress of the saving divine Word through time."[12]

These definitions acknowledge several key elements for TIS, elements that are thematized alone or in various combinations by different proponents of TIS. One element is the text of Scripture. "Textual-theological" interpretations of Scripture (T-TIS) "consciously seek to do justice to the perceived theological nature of the texts."[13] Foremost in T-TIS is the conviction that "appropriate interpretation of Scripture can only be guided by a correct understanding of what Scripture *is*, as defined by the doctrine of Scripture."[14] Canonical Scripture is inspired by God (and written by human authors), wholly true in all that it affirms, the ultimate authority because of its divine Author, sufficient for all things concerning life and godliness, necessary for salvation, perspicuous, and powerful; therefore, its interpretation is and must be ruled by its nature as the Word of God.[15] For some proponents of TIS, this textual element alone drives their biblical interpretation; others prioritize this textual element while linking it with one or both of the remaining elements.

A second element is the message of Scripture.[16] "Message-theological" interpretations of Scripture (M-TIS) acknowledge the thoroughgoing theological locution of the Bible. Foremost in M-TIS is the predominance of the gospel of redemption wrought by God the Father through the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of the Son of God, which good news is applied savingly by God the Holy Spirit and proclaimed in Scripture.[17] Accordingly, all other readings of Scripture—e.g., liberationist, socio-rhetorical, evolutionary, psychological—while not necessarily illegitimate in and of themselves, must play a secondary role to a theological reading of Scripture.[18] Scripture is *divine* speech-act; therefore, M-TIS gives priority to a theological reading so as to discover the words and works of God as disclosed in Scripture.[19] For some proponents of TIS, this message element alone drives their biblical interpretation; others prioritize this message element while linking it with one or both of the remaining elements.

A third element is the reading of Scripture. "Interest-theological" interpretations of Scripture (I-TIS) "embrace the influence of theology (corporate and personal; past and present) upon the interpreter's inquiry, context, and method."[20] Foremost in I-TIS is the recognition that the interpreter (or interpretative community) brings theological concerns and commitments to the Bible; accordingly, these theological interests strongly influence, and are influenced by, its interpretation. As Fowl underscores, "In this respect, throughout Christian history it has been the norm for Christians to read their scripture theologically. That is, Christians have generally read their scripture to guide, correct, and edify their faith, worship, and practice as part of their ongoing struggle to live faithfully before the triune God."[21] For some proponents of TIS, this reading element alone drives their biblical interpretation;[22] others prioritize this reading element while linking it with one or both of the remaining elements.

Accordingly, TIS a family of interpretive approaches that privileges theological readings of the Bible, and these approaches are in part differentiated by the priority that their proponents assign to the three elements of text, message, and reading.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF TIS

TIS is also a family of interpretive approaches because of other common characteristics. First, TIS is commonly advocated over against, or as an advance beyond, historical-critical approaches to Scripture.[23] As Trier explains, the critical approach to interpreting Scripture

> meant focusing on the historical, exploring the cause-and-effect relationships behind events and actions. The causes that we can explore critically, however, seem to be human—natural or social—not divine. Historical criticism of the Bible, therefore, meant focusing on the times and places of the texts' production as well as their historical references, and doing so objectively: seeking results to share with everyone, unbiased by personal experience or perspective. What would such objectivity exclude? It would rule out interpreting the Bible as Scripture, with a positive reference to beliefs in or encounters with God.[24]

According to Vanhoozer, advocates of TIS "should not abandon scholarly tools and approaches in order to interpret the Bible theologically," as long as they employ these critical methods critically[25] and as a means toward the ultimate end of explicating the meaning of Scripture.[26] Even if TIS deals responsibly with critical approaches, it moves and must move theologically beyond them. Such theological, even doctrinal, orientation is "not a moldering scrim of antique prejudice obscuring the Bible, but instead a clarifying agent, an enduring tradition of theological judgments that amplifies the living voice of Scripture."[27]

Second, and related to the first point, TIS is commonly viewed as a self-conscious effort to take back the interpretation of Scripture from the academy and (re)situate this endeavor in the church. As Francis Watson describes TIS: "It must be 'ecclesial,' ecclesialy responsible exegesis. It must reckon with a context in which the scriptural texts are *not* read like other books, since issues of ultimate concern are uniquely and definitively articulated in them."[28] Fowl concurs, insisting that TIS "will shape and be shaped by the concerns of Christian communities seeking to live faithfully before the triune God rather than by the concerns of a discipline whose primary allegiance is to the academy."[29] While agreeing that "reading Scripture must be ecclesialy located," Joel Green offers a sadly necessary clarification: the ecclesial location must be "a church *that engages the Bible as Christian Scripture*," a specification that is woefully untrue of many churches today.[30]

Third, and one of the chief ways to accomplish the second point, TIS is commonly oriented to a "Rule of Faith" or "Nicene tradition" reading

of Scripture. By the "Rule of Faith" is meant the early church's theological consensus regarding the crucial doctrines of Christianity; besides exercising a catechetical function, the "Rule" was also instrumental in debating with and condemning heretics. While certainly part of the oral tradition of the early church, the "Rule of Faith" was occasionally written down.[31] By "Nicene tradition" is meant the trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy hammered out by the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" church in the context of heretical challenges.[32] Proponents of TIS champion reading Scripture within this theological framework.[33]

Fourth, and building off of David Steinmetz's important proposal, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,"[34] TIS is commonly slanted to "'recovering the past' by imitating elements of pre-critical exegesis."[35] These elements are beliefs in the accessibility of the original intent of the (human) biblical author as that intent is expressed in his text, the applicability of the hermeneutical principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, the unity of Scripture such that its various diverse writings are ultimately non-contradictory, the typological character of (much of) the Old Testament (which is considered Christian Scripture), the self-involving nature of the biblical narrative, the seamless relationship between exegesis and theology, and the like.[36] While proponents of TIS advocate something of a recovery of these pre-critical elements, they do not pine for a past golden age of biblical interpretation; indeed, they hold that such pre-critical exegesis, forever rendered obsolete by historical criticism, cannot be recovered. Thus, the phrase "postcritical doctrinal interpretation" may well represent what is envisioned by TIS.[37]

BENEFITS AND PITFALLS OF TIS

One benefit of TIS is that it makes explicit and takes seriously the theological nature of Scripture. Though its interpreters may take an agnostic stance toward or even ridicule what Scripture claims for itself, they may not doubt that it makes theological claims for itself: to be the Word of God; to narrate the mighty acts of Yahweh on behalf of Israel and the church; to be inspired by the Holy Spirit; to preach the gospel of the once humiliated and crucified but now resurrected/ascended/exalted Son of God made human; to command faith and obedience with divine authority; and the like. Interpretations that dismiss such claims and "that remain on the historical, literary, or sociological levels cannot ultimately do justice to the subject matter of the texts."[38]

Another benefit of TIS is that it elevates what interpreters of Scripture do (often) subconsciously to the level of consciousness and frames what is done instinctually in terms of a principled approach. Specifically, all interpreters come to the Bible with a preunderstanding, a (often subconscious, sometimes conscious) matrix of experience, tradition, religious influence, worldview, and theological persuasion that influence for better or for worse their interpretation of the Bible. As Vanhoozer explains, "If exegesis without presuppositions is impossible, and if some of these presuppositions concern the nature and activity of God, then it would appear to go without saying that biblical interpretation is always/already theological."[39]

A third benefit of TIS is that it may help to bridge the gap between the interpretation of biblical texts (particularly employing critical methods) and theology, especially in academic circles. If theology has been marginalized or banished from university biblical studies departments in order to rescue those studies from the imposition of dogmatic interpretations by confessional theologians and/or for the sake of pursuing (a phantom ideal of) scientific objectivity in those departments, then TIS may offer a way to (re) introduce theology (especially in terms of a faith commitment to the essentials of Christianity) into these programs. Allegedly, "spirituality" is on the rise in our society, and if academic institutions hope to connect with this rising tide of spiritual interest (even if for nothing other than

pragmatic [i.e., tuition money] reasons), some type of theological engagement with the Bible seems necessary.

A fourth benefit of TIS is its articulation of the explicit *telos*, or end, of biblical study: "Christians must remember that they are called to interpret and embody Scripture as a way of advancing toward their true end of ever deeper love of God and neighbor. Scripture is chief among God's providentially offered vehicles that will bring us to our true home."[40] Coupled with this emphasis is TIS's insistence on a "ruled" reading of Scripture. The "Rule of faith" or the Nicene tradition provide biblically warranted and historically tested guardrails or tracks leading Bible readers to their proper end.

While the promise of TIS is apparent, we must also be aware of its potential pitfalls. One problem is its definition. When some of its key proponents falter at offering a clear, succinct definition, a major weakness of TIS is exposed. Some of this weakness may be mitigated by recalling that the movement is fairly young and recognizing that players from many disparate viewpoints are joining in and shaping the game. For TIS to move forward, however, some kind of consensus, even if quite broad, will need to be achieved.

A second problem is the lack of concrete results by which to evaluate TIS. To date, most of the discussion about TIS has been scholarly and theoretical; little has been done in terms of actual theological interpretation of Scripture. Interestingly, John Webster, in the recent *International Journal of Theological Interpretation* (April, 2010), notes that "the most fruitful way of engaging in theological interpretation of Scripture is to do it" and pleads, "We do not need much more by way of prolegomena [preliminary, programmatic work] to exegesis; we do need more exegesis."[41]

The above point should not be taken to mean that no concrete examples of TIS exist. In the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (*DTIB*), a theological interpretation of each book of the Bible does appear. Following the pattern of (1) the history of interpretation, (2) hearing the message, (3) the book in the canon, and (4) its theology or theological significance, these examples of TIS leave one wondering about its payoff. If these are representative samplings of TIS, then one questions how it is different from other, earlier interpretive approaches that to one degree or another incorporated some theological reflection with biblical interpretation. Of course, the extremely short limits placed on these *DTIB* expositions may account in large measure for their weakness; certainly, more substantive TIS works (e.g., Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible) offer greater hope.

A third problem is the generic theological orientation to which TIS may lead. When Joel Green explains that this approach "aims for its readers to embark on a journey of theological formation bounded only by the character and purpose of God," some concern is provoked by wondering to what "the character and purpose of God" may refer.[42] Moreover, while many may be sympathetic to TIS's emphasis on the "Rule of Faith" or Nicene tradition as a theological framework within which to work, evangelicals cannot restrict themselves to that doctrinal formulation. After all, we are heirs not only of the great early church consensus but also of the theological legacy of the Reformation (e.g., justification on the basis of Christ's work alone, by grace alone, through faith alone [the material principle of Protestantism]; Scripture alone [the formal principle of Protestantism]) and of evangelical theological distinctives (e.g., gospel-centeredness, conversionism, and missionality; the inerrancy of Scripture). While the centripetal force toward ecumenical dialog in biblical interpretation is greatly aided by concentration on the "Rule of Faith" or Nicene tradition, evangelicals (must) experience the opposite centrifugal force by concentration on our Protestant and evangelical inheritance. To be true to our theological selves, evangelicals (must) bring a robust theological framework beyond the early church consensus to our TIS.

Finally, the main problem with which the majority of readers of this journal will be concerned is the hesitancy of many proponents of TIS to affirm a traditional, conservative view of Scripture. While TIS is certainly not inimical to a "high view" of Scripture (indeed, one could argue that, if space were accorded it, such a view would be at home in the movement), readers must bear in mind that it is not the domain of traditional conservatives; indeed, the movement does not have its roots in familiar territory. By recognizing that one of the currents contributing to the development of TIS was that of biblical scholars tired of the unsatisfying results of their critical approaches to Scripture, readers may be more able to appreciate what is for them the hesitant affirmation of, or even disconcerting silence regarding, a traditional, conservative view of Scripture.

ENDNOTES

[1]All Bible references are from the English Standard Version.

[2]In Greek, the first participial phrase, *ho gegennēmenos*, is in the perfect tense, while the second participial phrase, *ho gennētheis*, is in the aorist tense. Both phrases refer to being generated by God: In the case of Christians, they are *re*generated; in the case of Christ, he was generated.

[3]Not for his deity, but for his Sonship he is eternally dependent on the Father. Following Calvin, I affirm that the Son of God is *autotheos*, or God of himself; his deity does not derive from the Father. But he is the Son of the Father because the Father eternally begets, or generates, the Son as to his person-of-the-Son. Though Calvin did not employ the term *autotheos* in his *Institutes*, the root idea that the Son (and the Spirit) is God of himself is present there. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.23-25 (Library of Christian Classics; 2 vols.; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:149-154. For example, Calvin explains, "We say that deity in an absolute sense exists of itself; whence likewise we confess that the Son, since he is God, exists of himself, but not in respect of his person; indeed, since he is the Son, we say that he exists from the Father. Thus his essence is without beginning; while the beginning of his person is God himself" (*Institutes*, 1.13.25).

[4]*The Creed of Nicea*, in *Documents of the Christian Church* (ed. Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder; 3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 27.

[5]As evidenced by the recent proliferation of books on this topic: Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) (henceforth, *DTIB*); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997); Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007); Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, ed., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); D. Christopher Spinks, *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning: Debates on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (T & T Clark Theology: London and New York: T & T Clark, 2007). Moreover, two study groups dedicated to TIS currently meet at the Society of Biblical Literature, and two series of biblical commentaries take a theological approach to the interpretation of Scripture: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos) and The Two Horizons Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans). TIS is the topic of the latest volume of the *International*

Journal of Systematic Theology, vol. 12, no. 2 (April, 2010) (henceforth, *IJST*).

[6]Vanhoozer, "What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible," in *DTIB*, 19.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

[9]One of the most significant contributors to the notion that the Bible should be read "just like any other book" was Baruch Spinoza in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Much of modern biblical interpretation followed Spinoza's hermeneutical lead.

[10]For example, Fowl distances himself from his former way of thinking "that a general theory of textual meaning is crucial to interpreting Scripture theologically. If one's exegetical practice is governed by some sort of general hermeneutical theory, then it is very hard to avoid the situation where theological interpretation of Scripture becomes the activity of applying theological concerns to exegesis done on other, nontheological grounds.... [T]he key to interpreting theologically lies in keeping theological concerns primary to all others. In this way, theology becomes a form of exegesis, not its result." Fowl, "Further Thoughts on Theological Interpretation," in *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 125-26.

[11]Vanhoozer, "What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible," 19.

[12]John Webster, "Editorial," *IJST*, 116. Darren Sairsky defines TIS as "a mode of reading whose aim is knowledge of God and which uses theological categories to depict the text, the situation of its readers and the practice of reading." Darren Sarisky, "What is Theological Interpretation?", *IJST*, 202.

[13]Spinks, *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning*, 7.

[14]Francis Watson, "Hermeneutics and the Doctrine of Scripture: Why They Need Each Other," *IJST*, 118.

[15]Of course, this rendition of the doctrine of Scripture is only one of various versions adopted by evangelicals. For a less traditional view of Scripture (especially of its inspiration), see John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Current Issues in Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003).

[16]Some might argue that I should collapse the first two elements into one, but I resist such a move. Even a "high view" of the nature of Scripture (T-TIS) does not necessarily translate into a theological reading of Scripture (e.g., one may engage in a moralistic reading of Scripture that misses its gospel framework); conversely, one may grasp the message of Scripture (M-TIS) while denying that it is the Word of God. Joel Green is helpful here. After noting evangelicalism's doctrine of Scripture, which features such notions as infallibility, inerrancy, and authority, he notes, "I am insisting that, with regard to *the use of Scripture in the life of the church*, such affirmations do not take us very far.... Affirmations of the trustworthiness of the Bible ... entail no guarantees regarding the faithful interpretation of Scripture." Green, *Seized by Truth*, 147 (his emphasis).

[17]Of course, other renditions of the theological message of Scripture may be articulated. For example, many emphasize the metanarrative of creation—fall—redemption—consummation. As another example, the Scripture Project rendered the message as the first of "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture:" "Scripture truthfully tells the story of God's act of creating, judging and saving the world." "Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture:" *The Scripture Project*, in Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 1.

[18]Again, the first thesis of the Scripture Project affirms, "Readers who interpret the biblical story reductively as a symbolic figuration of the human psyche, or merely as a vehicle for codifying social and political power, miss its central message." Ibid.

[19]As Bowald explains in this regard, "we need to recognize that there is an important point of departure as we are considering *divine* communication and speech action. This is the origin of the utter uniqueness of the act of reading Scripture, as compared to listening to other persons or reading other writings. It is also in the purview of divine action that the distinctly modern proposal for reading Scripture 'as any other book' is challenged and corrected." Mark Alan Bowald, "The Character of Theological Interpretation," *IJST*, 178-79.

[20]Spinks, *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning*, 7.

[21]Stephen Fowl, "Introduction," in *The Theological*

Interpretation of Scripture, xiii. This definition of TIS is the one Fowl advocates in this introductory essay: "I take the theological interpretation of scripture to be that practice whereby theological concerns and interest inform and are informed by a reading of Scripture" (Ibid.).

[22]Erik M. Heen seems to limit his conception of TIS to this third element, going so far as to identify it as a type of reader-response approach to Scripture. "The 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture' has emerged as a new discipline within biblical studies. In this approach to the Bible the 'social location' of the contemporary interpreter is taken seriously. 'Theological Interpretation' can, therefore, be understood as kind of 'Reader-Response' criticism. In Theological Interpretation the primary interpretive community of readers is not understood to be a subset of the academy, as it is assumed in many varieties of Reader Response Criticism; rather, the interpretive body is made up of those who self-identify as members of church communities." Erik M. Heen, "The Theological Interpretation of the Bible," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2007): 373. My thanks to Rob Plummer for pointing me to this resource.

[23]Indeed, the massive project Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture underscores this point as one of its motivations: "There is an emerging awareness among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox laity that vital biblical preaching and spiritual formation need deeper grounding beyond the scope of the historical-critical orientations that governed biblical studies in our day." Thomas C. Oden, "General Introduction," in *Acts* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament; ed. Francis Martin; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), xi.

[24]Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 14. The agenda of Benjamin Jowett is often decried by the proponents of TIS. As he advocated for a critical approach to Scripture, Jowett hoped "it would clear away the remains of dogmas, systems, controversies, which are encrusted upon them…. Such a work would enable us to separate the elements of doctrine and tradition with which the meaning of Scripture is encumbered in our own day." Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews* (London: Parker, 1860), 338-39.

[25]Francis Watson offers an idea of what this critical use of critical approaches looks like, arguing that "the claims of modern biblical scholarship are to be resisted insofar as they prove incompatible with the claims of the ecclesial community, its canon, and its interpretive tradition." Francis Watson, "Authors, Readers, Hermeneutics," in *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 120.

[26]Vanhoozer, "What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible," *DTIB*, 22. Accordingly, the project (the Seabury-Western Theological Seminary's Winslow Lectures) that became the book *Reading Scripture with the Church* underscored, "The scholars writing here refuse to trivialize the theological significance of Scripture; they recognize (and practice) the critical reading of Scripture with the conventional repertoire of textual, historical, analytical methods, but their analyses do not omit mention of, and often highlight, the ways that the Bible informs and is expounded by the church's teaching." Adam, Fowl, Vanhoozer, Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 10.

[27]R. R. Reno, "Series Preface" to the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 13.

[28]Watson, "Authors, Readers, Hermeneutics," 119.

[29]Fowl," Introduction," xvi.

[30]Green, *Seized by Truth*," 66, 68 (his emphasis).

[31]An example of this "Rule" comes from Irenaeus: "The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one,' and to raise

up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, 'every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess' to him, and that he should execute just judgment towards all; that he may send 'spiritual wickednesses,' and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of his grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept his commandments, and have persevered in his love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.10.1.

[32]Depending on the proponents' ecclesial persuasion—Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—this "tradition" would include some if not all of the first seven ecumenical councils of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Constantinople II, Constantinople III, and Nicea II.

[33]Indeed, the "Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible advances on the assumption that the Nicene tradition, in all its diversity and controversy, provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian Scripture.... [I]t is the conceit of this series of biblical commentaries that theological training in the Nicene tradition prepares one for biblical interpretation, and thus it is to theologians and not biblical scholars that we have turned." Reno, "Series Preface," 14. An example of using this framework for TIS is "A Rule of Faith Reading of Titus," by Rob Wall, in which he leads with the key affirmations of a "Rule of Faith," each of which is followed by comments relating to that affirmation from the three chapters of Titus. Personal correspondence, April 24, 2010. Keith Johnson traces how Augustine engaged in a "ruled" reading of Scripture: Keith E. Johnson, "Augustine's 'Trinitarian' Reading of John 5: A Model for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* vol. 52, no. 4 (December 2009): 799-810. Keith Goad has an article in this *Journal* examining Gregory of Nazianzus's TIS.

[34]David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today,* vol. 37, no. 1 (1980): 27-38. Reprinted in Fowl, *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 26-38.

[35]Daniel J. Treier, "What is Theological Interpretation?", *IJST*, 148.

[36]Many advocates would add the existence of multiple meanings in Scripture. In this respect, Henri de Lubac argues for a return to the "spiritual meaning" as emphasized by the pre-critical interpretation of Scripture. Henri de Lubac, "Spiritual Understanding," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 3-25.

[37]Reno, "Series Preface," 16.

[38]Ibid., 21.

[39]Ibid., 21. Of course, Vanhoozer's affirmation gives a nod to Rudoph Bultmann's famous 1957 article "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (trans. Schubert M. Ogden; Cleveland: World Publishing, 1960), 289.

[40]Fowl, "Further Thoughts on Theological Interpretation," 126.

[41]Webster, "Editorial," *IJST*, 116.

[42]Green, *Seized by Truth*, 61.

Gregory as a Model of Theological Interpretation

Keith Goad

Dan Treier's *Introducing Theological Interpretation* describes what has become the new emphasis in evangelical hermeneutics. Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) is distinguished by a number of values or characteristics.[1] First, TIS is marked by the text being read as a Word for the church today. Second, TIS is a practice prescribed to all believers and is to be exercised in the life of the church, not just the academy. Third, TIS is reading the text with the purpose of growing in virtue and character. Reading God's Word should change the values, desires, and character of the believer as he is confronted by God. Fourth, TIS prioritizes a theological reading of the text instead of anthropological or man-centered reading. Man should seek to learn about God, what he has said and done, when reading the Bible instead of mere self-discovery. Fifth, TIS recognizes the need for a ruled reading of Scripture. This refers to following the traditions of the church and letting Scripture interpret Scripture. Sixth, TIS is a reaction against a modernistic hermeneutic and a return to premodern principles of interpretation. These last two are part of a retrieval movement that looks to the past interpreters of Scripture to learn from their models and practice.

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My purpose is to contribute to the TIS movement by providing an example of a theological interpreter from the Fathers.[2] Treier's work focuses upon returning to the premodern reading of Scripture, but provides limited interaction with premodern theologians.[3] I will present how Gregory of Nazianzus models a ruled reading of Scripture and how he developed a grammar for how the church could more faithfully worship the God revealed in Scripture.[4] The first half will summarize Gregory's rules for the theologian. These are principles and practices that Gregory prescribed to qualify and regulate the theologian. The second half of the paper will demonstrate how Gregory practiced a ruled-reading of Scripture that is both Trinitarian and Christological.

Gregory of Nazianzus is a model of TIS for reasons other than receiving the title "The Theologian."[5] First, the nature of his writings lends itself to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. They are not diatribes or tracts, but sermons and poems that are meant to lead the church in worship.[6] Second, his

SBJT 14.2 (2010): 38-52.

polemical context makes him an excellent model for theology today. One of his chief opponents, Eunomius, claims to have absolute knowledge of God's nature. Gregory's arguments against Eunomius reveal a careful balance between man's limitations in what he can know about God and the clarity with which God has revealed himself.[7] Third, his theology has stood the test of time, especially his contributions in the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. He models how a pastor can lead his congregation to better understand these difficult doctrines which will lead to a more faithful worship of the Triune God who has saved them. Fourth, he gives equal attention to the subject matter of theology, God, and the theologian. His sermons kept God at the center while also recognizing that God must be approached according to his Word and standards. Finally, and most importantly, he brings Scripture, dogma, tradition, spirituality, and philosophy into a close relation that exemplifies how the classical model of faith seeking understanding should be practiced.[8]

RULES FOR THEOLOGIANS

One of Gregory's fears in the *Theological Orations* is that the great mystery of the faith would become a social accomplishment where religion is reduced to solving conundrums.[9] His conclusion is that any confession of God must be "governed by rules."[10] Brian Daley argues that Gregory's intent is to provide a way for the church to profess God in a way "consistent with Scripture and the Church's tradition of faith."[11] The confession's intent is not to explain God and his salvation, but to guard the paradoxes and mysteries. In order to ensure this he provides a number of rules concerning the nature of God and the capacity of man.

God is Boundless in Being

Only God knows himself perfectly so that the church's confession is always partial. Gregory states, "The Divine, then, is boundless and difficult to contemplate; the only thing completely comprehensible about it is its boundlessness—even though some think that the fact of its simple nature makes it either completely incomprehensible or perfectly comprehensible!"[12] Eunomius taught that God was perfectly knowable and Gregory responds that man comprehending God places boundaries upon God. Gregory upheld the orthodox position that God's essence is incomprehensible and ineffable for man because God is infinite, holy, and greater than anything man can imagine.[13] God is infinite and cannot be comprehended by finite man because the carnal mind cannot comprehend a spiritual nature.[14]

This limitation does not mean that man is not supposed to pursue a true vision of God. Rather, Gregory believes that speaking about God is the primary purpose of a sermon, "for indeed the very best order of beginning every speech and action, is to begin from God, and to end in God."[15] Also, Gregory exhorts his church, "It is more important that we should remember God than that we should breathe: indeed, if one may say so, we should do nothing else besides."[16] Gregory's goal is to mark off what cannot be said about God so that the church can boldly assert what is revealed so that salvation and worship are protected.[17]

Gregory's doctrine of the knowledge of God has two basic parts.[18] The first part is *apophatic* as the theologian can only conclude *that* God is and must guard against *what* he is not. The second is *kataphatic* and asserts what can be known from God's revelation.[19] A proper retrieval of the past must keep the dynamic of *apophatic* and *kataphatic* theology recognizing how they must be related to one another. Gregory models a faith seeking understanding model because he begins with what is revealed and then seeks to articulate what is revealed with confessions or grammars.

Gregory's contrast between *theologia* and *oikonomia* is helpful in distinguishing what can and cannot be known about God. The first relates to the immanent Trinity or God as he is in himself, and the latter his economic Trinity, God as he has revealed himself. Underlying this principle is the belief that God reveals himself truly, but not

exhaustively. He gives the analogy of climbing a mountain to see God and declares "when I looked closer, I saw not the first and unmingled nature, known to itself—to the Trinity I mean; not that which abides within the first veil, and is hidden by the cherubim; but only that nature, which at last reaches us."[20] The nature of God or the immanent Trinity is beyond man, but God has made himself known in his activities of creating, saving, and revealing. The beginning point of theology is the economy of God and from the economy one makes assertions about the immanent, but the immanent is beyond the reach of man's cognitive capacity.

God's Triune nature can be known because he has revealed himself through his relationship with creation. His actions reveal him truly, but do not give a complete knowledge of his nature. Much of Gregory's arguments for the deity of the Son and Spirit derive from the titles they have been given in Scripture and their inseparable actions.[21] These particular arguments are seen at the end of *Oration* 30 and *Oration* 31. In arguing for the deity of the Holy Spirit, Gregory makes his claim clear, "All that God actively performs, he performs."[22] The activities that only God can perform include creating, revealing God, and saving man. The Son and Spirit are clearly divine because they cooperate with the Father in these activities.

Limiting what can be said about God is important because Gregory's opponents, the Neo-Arians, approach God rationally believing they have comprehended the totality of God. Gregory responded by limiting the theologian's claims because the best he can do is to collect a fragmentary perception of God's nature from his images.[23] The limited revelation should promote a humility concerning what kind of statements can be made about God.[24] This does not mean all confessions should be held loosely because the revelation provided is clear enough for Gregory to claim to be on the "Royal Road."[25] The Royal Road is the way of godliness that avoids the extreme positions of heresies in a proper pursuit of God.[26] Gregory believed Scripture was clear enough when revealing mysteries to separate orthodoxy from heresy**.** His confessions for the full deity of the Son and the Spirit are the strongest in the fourth century while he also recognized that the theologian will go "insane" trying to comprehend the eternal generation and procession.[27]

Thus far the theologian's work is limited by who God is and how he has revealed himself. This is important in relation to TIS because God must be the central focus of theology so that the church is called to worship him who is greater than their greatest thought. The two must be kept in proper tension because the theologian must be bold to proclaim difficult truths such as the Trinity and yet humble enough to be content simply to defend the mystery revealed in Scripture rather than try to describe God in himself.[28] Many have characterized the last century as one dominated by science, and this emphasis has influenced theology as contemporary theology values the ability to explain the mystery so that the church can understand.[29] This is in contrast with the premodern faith exemplified by Gregory that valued the ability to protect the mystery so that the church can worship.

Man is Bound in His Speech

Gregory insists that theological claims must be limited because the human mind is incapable of comprehending God and human language is inadequate to explain God.[30] Knowing God is not a rational discipline nor can the Scriptures be understood by reason alone.[31] Gregory's argument against Eunomius focuses upon how their different theories of language lead to two differing visions of God. Eunomius believed that when he knew the name of an object in nature, he could comprehend the nature. When Eunomius knew the name for God, unbegotten, he had comprehended the divine essence and defined in such a way that the begotten one could not be confessed as God.[32]

Gregory must guard against Eunomius's claim

to have a perfect knowledge of God while also affirming that God has revealed himself for the church to confess the mysterious paradox of the Trinity. In *Oration* 37.2, Gregory explains that the problem Eunomius finds in his doctrine is largely due to the weakness of language.

> I have fallen into human language. For how can so great be said of the absolute, and how can that which is without quantity be called such? But pardon the word, for I am speaking of the greatest things with a limited instrument. And that great and long-suffering and formless and bodiless nature will endure this, namely, my words as if of a body, and weaker than truth. For if he condescended to flesh, he will also endure such language.[33]

Another example shows that Gregory believes language is capable of communicating truths about God if the confessions follow God's revelation of himself. He evaluates the confusion over the East and West using different terms and concludes that both traditions articulate the same orthodox confession. [34] His conclusion is that the language of the West is impoverished and their confession would be laughable if not pious. The terms each tradition used are different, but the meaning of and orthodox doctrine are the same. This conclusion is only possible if one believes God has provided a reliable revelation of his Triune nature. The referential theory allows for various models or formulas as long as the necessary Trinitarian convictions are protected. Nothing can express the mystery of the Trinity perfectly, but each grammar must set up proper boundaries that protect and articulate what is known about God.[35] God has revealed himself enough to be praised properly, but God is too great and man too limited for man to describe him completely.[36]

Gregory's theory of language was referential or what is today considered analogical.[37] The terms the church uses (such as person and essence) cannot fully describe God, but it is necessary for the church to have a clear grammar for articulating the mysteries of God. Gregory criticizes Eunomius for beginning with a concept that is not biblical, the name "unbegotten," and making this the rule for what is known about God. Gregory begins with the revealed names, Father and Son, and what Scripture says about each person in his doctrine of the Trinity. The terms do not give the church an absolute knowledge of God, but a proper way of confessing him according to his revelation. This beginning point exemplifies starting with God's revelation. Confessions can use terms such as nature and person in a limited way to provide clarity, but their purpose is limited to affirming and guarding what is revealed. Gregory follows the traditional method of "faith seeking understanding" and "thinking God's thoughts after him."

God Must be Known according to How He Revealed Himself

Gregory's understanding of God's revelation is also regulated by an eschatological progression. His doctrine of how man sees God is based upon how God has revealed himself progressively through redemptive-history. The Father was manifested as God clearly in the Old Testament, the Son obscurely. The New Testament manifests the Son's deity and suggests the Spirit's, and now the experience of true believers indwelt by the Spirit should clearly demonstrate the Spirit's deity.[38] A more perfect knowledge of the Triune God is the future hope of all believers: "we have the promise that one day we shall know to the degree we are known."[39] The dim vision man possesses will become a perfect vision when he sees the Triune God face to face.[40]

In his explanation of how the church sees God from Psalm 36, "In your light we see light," he argues from each divine person being described as light and revealing the other persons. [41] The conclusion is that it is only in and through the persons of the Trinity that we can ever know the Triune God. The process of the economic Trinity

determines how believers will ascend in knowing the three persons, "knowing the Father in the Son, the Son in the Holy Spirit."[42] Gregory confesses, referring to the Holy Trinity, "which we worship, which we glorify, whose existence is intimately bound up with our own through our worship of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Spirit."[43] The Spirit must renew and adopt the believer to begin what Gregory calls "the golden chain of salvation" that then leads the believer to the Son and then to the Father. Gregory insists that a full confession of the Trinity was necessary for salvation and spirituality. He exemplified the emphasis on how each person has a specific role in revealing the entirety of the Godhead in a prayer opening his *Theological Orations*, "that the Father may approve, the Son aid, and the Holy Spirit inspire it—or rather that the single Godhead's single radiance, by mysterious paradox one in its distinctions and distinct in its connectedness, may enlighten it."[44]

God is Only Known by the Pure in Heart

Similar to TIS promoting a virtue ethic as essential to reading Scripture, Gregory made a Trinitarian spirituality a prerequisite for reading Scripture and discussing God properly.[45] Gregory regulates who should discuss theology because of man's fallen nature.[46]

> Discussion of theology is not for everyone … nor is it for every occasion, or every audience.… It must be reserved for certain occasions, for certain audiences, and certain limits must be observed. It is not for all people, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sound footing in study, and, more importantly, have undergone, or at least are undergoing, purification of body and soul, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun's brightness.[47]

Man's eyes have been darkened by sin and corruption so that they cannot see the light of God perfectly. This is why Gregory limits the conversation about theology to include only those who have purified themselves and are seeking a pure vision of God.[48]

The call to purity began with rightly understanding God according to his revelation and was complete when one casts off his carnal thinking and living. McGuckin argues that Gregory "defines the nature of theology as an invitation to ascent given by God only to the purified and elected souls."[49] God is pure and holy, and only the pure in heart will see him (Mt 5:8).[50] Gregory speaks of approaching God like Moses approached the holy mountain.[51] The more pure the theologian, the closer he is drawn to God, "his place matching his purity."[52] This is important for the pastor because he must be close to God in order to lead others closer to God with him. Before he can teach others about God, he must first purify himself so that he might see the light of God. This means anyone seeking to know God must be "molded and molding others by Holy Scripture."[53]

Purification is essential to spirituality because one cannot see God because God is pure, "where there is *purification*, there is illumination; and illumination is the fulfillment of desire for those eager to share in the greatest things—or in the Greatest Thing, or in that which is beyond the Great."[54] He further explains the importance of illumination as it relates to the theologian needing to purify himself before taking on the task of theology,

> Illumination is the splendor of souls, the conversion of the life, the question put to the Godward conscience. It is the aid of our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light, the dissolution of darkness. It is the carriage to God, the dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of the Faith, the key of the Kingdom of heaven, the

> change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the remodeling of the whole man.[55]

Theology has an experiential aspect because the believer "ascends" closer to God as he casts off sin which then allows him to have better vision of God.

Gregory serves as an extreme example of emphasizing purity by taking a vow of silence until he could first purify himself.[56] The need for purity is seen throughout his sermons on the pastoral ministry and summed up well in the following: "But before we rise above [the world of matter that drags me down] as far as possible and sufficiently purify our ears and minds, I think it is dangerous either to accept the responsibility for other souls or to take up theology."[57] The theologian's purpose is to see God as he is and the more one is purified of false images, the more he is able to see "light with light and the more brighter through the more dim."[58]

Gregory's spirituality includes the concept of virtue that TIS emphasizes. He argues that the pastor "must not only wipe out the traces of vice from his soul, but also inscribe better [virtues]."[59] Gregory exhorts his church, "Seek to keep the commandments, walk in his statutes. Conduct is the stepping stone of contemplation."[60] In contrast with vice which is "easily accessible and the road to corruption wide," virtue is what makes someone a true theologian.[61] He explains the necessity of a virtuous life in relation to worshipping the true God:

> If one has nurtured some good qualities that has molded his character, transgression becomes more difficult than becoming good in the first place, for every virtue that is firmly rooted by time and reason becomes second nature, as does the love within us too, with which we worship the true love and which we have folded to our hearts in love and adopted as the guiding principle for all our existence.[62]

Virtue is a conduct learned from discipline and duty, which not only leads to a pious life, but more importantly, true worship and love for God.

RULED READING OF SCRIPTURE

In the words of Gregory, "Now that we have purified the theologian, come, let us talk a little about God too."[63] Knowing God from his revelation is now possible because the theologian has been prepared. Gregory's contention with Eunomius is that his interpretation "robs the written words of their sense."[64] Gregory states that it his vice that keeps Eunomius from seeing what the literal text of Scripture contains.[65] The contention is not simply a difference of how to read Scripture, but is tied to the hope of salvation. In response to Eunomius's interpretation of texts in which he claim the Son is not fully divine, Gregory argues, "one could easily go through each of these expressions in detail and give a truly religious interpretation."[66] This reference to a religious interpretation is Gregory's method of interpreting all of Scripture together as a whole with the purpose of arriving at a purified vision of God. Gregory must protect both natures of Christ "in order that I might be made God to the same extent that he was made man."[67] Examples from Gregory's *Fourth Theological Oration, On The Son*, will demonstrate how Gregory interpreted Scripture with Scripture and employed a ruled reading of Scripture.

Reading the Words of Scripture

In *Oration* 30.4 Gregory shows the importance of allowing the proper sense of a word to be derived from the text itself. Eunomius argues from 1 Cor 15:25, "He must reign until," and Ps 110:1, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool," to prove that the Son has a temporal reign and that it will end in contrast to the reign of the true God. Eunomius's argument is based upon the term "until" having the same sense regardless of context. This interpretation follows from his theory of language whereas Gregory sees that Eunomius's interpretation misses the differ-

ent contexts and usages of the term. Eunomius's interpretation is based upon the word, "God," being a reference to the Father alone in contrast to the Son in 1 Cor 15:24. The Son is reigning only until he hands the kingdom over to God, which is the Father alone.

Gregory responds by explaining that 1 Corinthians 15 states that he will reign until God is all in all—God being a reference to the Trinity as a whole in contrast to the Father alone.[68] Gregory recognizes that "until" could have reference to an event or have a temporal sense, and opts for the former interpretation. The reign is eternal and does not contradict Psalm 110 because the event that ends that reign is the submission of his enemies, at which point he would no longer reign over them in the same way. He also introduces into the argument Luke 1:33 that provides clarity on the reign of Christ, "there is no end of his royal rule." When all of these texts on Christ's reign are taken into consideration, the conclusion is that "until" is referring to the Son's reign here on earth that will change in the eschaton. The reign is not temporal, but eternal. The "until" simply refers to the event of the Triune God putting the world back into perfect order and thus a different reign begins.

In this argument, Gregory models how to read Scripture properly via both Scripture and the rule of faith. The reference to God cannot be God the Father because this would deny the Son's inclusion into the divine community and eternal reign.[69] He safeguards what has been handed down, but it is not merely repeating a creed. His vision of God is from all of Scripture, and his hermeneutic protects him from losing sight of the forest for the trees, or a pure vision of the Triune God from a single text. Gregory appears to take more care in reading the texts in context and reads all of Scripture as the work of one author. His ability to read all of Scripture together gives him his Archimedean point to defeat the Eunomian reading by taking clearer texts and demanding that all of the passages that speak of Christ's rule must be understood together. G. L. Prestige points out that one of the key distinguishing marks between the orthodox theologians and the heretical is that the former "showed a far profounder sense of the need to interpret the Scriptures as a whole by comparing one passage with another."[70] He argues that the orthodox demonstrated an ability to reason how Scripture interprets Scripture as the heretical theologians tended toward equivocating on technical terms and a "parrot repetition of biblical texts."[71] First Corinthians 15:25-28 is a difficult text for theologians still today, but Gregory is able to reason through its difficulties with simple rules such as how the word "God" can be a reference to the entire Trinity or to the Father alone given the context of the passage.[72]

Reading Scripture with Theological Convictions

One of the key emphases in Gregory's *Fourth Theological Oration* is arguing how Scripture should be read according to the rule that guides the reader to, "allocate the more elevated, the more distinctly divine expressions of Scripture to the Godhead, the humbler and more human to the New Adam, God passible for our sake."[73] The rule is meant to protect the church's confession of Jesus' divine and human natures.[74] It simultaneously determines the content of theology and how Scripture should be interpreted. The rule is a necessary solution to the variety of teachings from Scripture because Eunomius is emphasizing certain texts out of context to argue that Jesus was not fully divine.

Gregory begins explaining how this rule works from one of the most controversial texts for the Trinity during the fourth century, Prov 8:22, "The Lord created me at the beginning of his ways for his work."[75] Gregory applies a further qualification in order to apply the rule above to this passage, "Whatever we come across with a causal implication we will attribute to the humanity; what is absolute and free of cause we will reckon to the Godhead."[76] Gregory proposes that Prov 8:25, "Before the mountains were settled in place,

before the hills, I was given birth," presents the divine nature of the Son. The Son's being begotten refers to his personal existence which simultaneously distinguishes him from the Father and establishes his full deity. He thus concludes that the Son's human generation is being spoken of in verse 22 and his "primal and less comprehensible" generation in verse 25.[77] The section explaining this interpretation elucidates its importance. Speaking of the Son he states, "He was actually subject as a slave to flesh, to birth, and to our human experiences, held captive as we are by sin, he was subject to all he saved."[78] The text was without question Christological. What Gregory supplies is an interpretation that takes into consideration the two natures of Christ and the salvific importance of these two natures being united in the Son.

This interpretation demonstrates Gregory's ability to interpret this controversial text in light of numerous doctrines. He keeps salvation at the forefront of the debate while constantly thinking through the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines in this interpretation. He is careful in his confession of the Son's deity not to make the divinity of the Son dependent on another because the divine nature must be simple and uncaused. The begetting language is left within the realm of mystery as it is a unique begetting (without passion, time, or material). The creating language is easily applied to the humanity of Christ so that Solomon now speaks of both natures in Christ. He does not read the text in isolation, but reads it in light of other texts and doctrines that are more clearly revealed later in redemptive history.

A final example of Gregory applying a ruled reading concerns Eunomius wrongly interpreting the Son calling the Father "greater," and the expression "my God and your God." Gregory argues that the greater cannot simply refer to Christ's human nature declaring God greater because this would be trivial and obvious. Rather, the Son's confession that the Father is greater must be understood within the Trinitarian relationships. Gregory provides another rule concerning causal relations within the Trinitarian relations to protect the distinction of the Father and Son, "The superiority belongs to the cause and the equality to the nature."[79] Causation here is referring to the persons within the Godhead where Gregory is taking the "greater" statement literally, but not according to the nature or Godhead. Rather it would be an explanation of the relationship between the Father and Son that is based upon the latter being eternally begotten. The Father is the first and the cause within the persons, but this language is limited to the personal existence of each, not their divinity.

In both cases Gregory protects the divine nature from having any causal notions. The human nature of Christ certainly has an origin, and thus any reference to the Son's nature that implies causation is attributed to the human nature. The Trinitarian relations have distinguishing characteristics that are unique to each person. One of Gregory's primary ways of distinguishing the Father and Son is the Father's *Monarchia* and begetting of the Son which gives him preeminence among the persons with reference to relationship, not nature. The language of Scripture is complicated, yet clear, concerning the Son because he is spoken of in so many ways. He is the Father's Son, truly God, truly man, and God incarnate. Each of these must be placed within their proper place. A series of rules regulates how the different proclamations describe Christ accurately while defending his true identity in each case. This is a religious reading as Scripture is interpreted with Scripture with the end result of purifying the mind and drawing the heart closer to God.

CONCLUSION

TIS has presented principles that can potentially help evangelicals have a richer interpretation of Scripture that better serves the church. Emphasizing a theocentric interpretation and exercising a robust hermeneutic that takes all of Scripture and every doctrine into consideration will be an

improvement over the typical modernistic hermeneutic that tended to be myopic in scope. One of the concerns with TIS is how its principles will be defined and exercised. I fear that there is a potential danger in the principles remaining vague and loosely defined which, in the end, leads to a corresponding vague theology, which will ultimately not help the church. I have presented Gregory of Nazianzus as a model for what TIS has proposed because he models a clarity in his interpretation and doctrine that focuses upon leading the church into worship. His theology and interpretation avoids overly simplistic approaches by wrestling with God's revelation and man's limited capacity. The objective of this article is modest in that I have only demonstrated Gregory's method of "religious interpretation" with regard to what can be said about God and how he interprets Scripture with Scripture in light of all other doctrines understood from Scripture. His ability to reason through Scripture and doctrine together makes him a model for TIS.

Gregory models how Scripture must be interpreted in light of Scripture. Gregory recognizes that the study and confession of God must be based upon how God has revealed himself. Gregory has confidence in God and his ability to speak in Scripture. Scripture was the primary source for doctrine and had to be considered as a whole. His ability to interpret the numerous parts of Scripture together led to his ability to lead the church in confessing the most important and controversial doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, and salvation. These three doctrines were interrelated within Scripture and had to be confessed in light of one another. His doctrine and grammar was careful, precise, and only added clarifying terms to help the church boldly confess the God of their salvation.

TIS has adopted the rule of faith as a hermeneutical principle. No doubt, the rule of faith has been defined and functioned differently over its long history, but at its most basic level it means reading Scripture in light of the doctrines that have been handed down through the tradition, particularly the tradition associated with Trinitarian and Christological confession. Gregory declares that he must "guard the truth that he has received from his fathers."[80] There were certain doctrines that were being challenged in his day that he understood to be essential for Christian belief and practice. The foremost being the doctrine of the Trinity being tied to the practice of baptism. When arguing for these doctrines that had been handed down, Gregory never appeals to tradition or creeds. His arguments are always from Scripture and he primarily emphasizes scriptural language only using other grammatical safeguards when necessary.[81] Interpretation cannot be an exercise in isolation so that the wheel is always reinvented. He exercises a clear restraint in being clever and novel in his doctrine while also providing a fresh interpretation of the primary texts of Scripture.

Gregory recognizes that doctrine functions grammatically so that the confessions do not become primary sources. Gregory is clear that human minds and language are incapable of comprehending God. Man is too finite, sinful, and weak to ever grasp the infinite power and majesty of God. This restrained his confessions from moving farther than what was revealed in Scripture. He employed extra-biblical terms, but made their function clear. They were there to safeguard what was revealed. They were necessary because of heresy but did not add anything to the doctrine itself. Man must strive to confess and communicate God according to his revelation as closely as possible, but the grammars, metaphors, and analogies were always limited. This is why *kataphatic* and *apophatic* theology must go hand-in-hand. What is revealed must be positively affirmed, and what cannot be said about God based upon what is revealed must be denied so that the infinite, spiritual nature of God is protected and not treated like hard science.

A particular example of separating the grammar of doctrine from the content of doctrine is

found in Gregory's argument against Eunomius where he does not allow the term "unbegotten" to become a primary source in forming the doctrine of God. A similar problem is becoming more prevalent among evangelicals where the grammatical term "person" is sometimes treated as a primary source. "Person" is a grammar established by the church and is only a term used to keep the three persons of the Godhead distinct. The definition of "person" does not inform doctrine; it only safeguards what is revealed. Theologians must be careful not to let the organizers and safeguards of doctrine become primary over the content of Scripture. When forming confessions of the one "person" and two "natures" of the Son or the three "persons" and one "nature" of the Trinity, scriptural terminology must define what "person" and "nature" mean rather than the modern use of the terms defining the Godhead and the incarnate God.

Gregory's sermons focused upon God for the benefit of the church. His arguments for the deity of the Son and Spirit are based upon what they have done for believers and how believers can experience their work. He continually reminds his church that a denial of their deity is a denial of hope and salvation. Since the persons of the Godhead work inseparably, the believer must depend upon them together. His theology started with the economy and attempted to say what must be said about the immanent Trinity based upon what the "persons" do in creating, revealing, and saving. This approach provides appropriate humility and generosity in theology while also giving the church clear, definite doctrine that must be believed for salvation.

A practical way this study could help pastors lead their churches is to help them value the clarity of Scripture on the most importance doctrines. The doctrines of the Trinity and Christology are often assumed and not taught well in the church. If doing expositional preaching, pastors should highlight these doctrines when in passages such as Matthew 4, Galatians 4, Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 8, and many others. All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned together working toward the same end. Reciting the confession in the service will help them think about the Triune God they are worshipping, but seeing the text reveal the three will give them confidence in God and his Word. A confession that these doctrines are mysterious while clear will help the church worship with more clarity, honesty, and humility. Gregory is just one of many men that could be used to help lead a church to worship the Triune God more intentionally.

Another aspect of the study that I hope will challenge pastors is Gregory being a model of emphasizing spirituality. Pastors should read his *Oration* 2, *A Defense for his Flight from the Pastorate*. It is a challenging portrait of spirituality and pastoral ministry. Pastors should lead the church by modeling virtue and godliness and making God great, so the church is drawn closer to him. Knowing God is not a purely intellectual discipline. Doctrines must be tied to a change in desires, beliefs, and actions. The two natures of Christ are necessary in the confession because they must be combined in the Son in order to accomplish our salvation. It is necessary for hope, perseverance, and loving other believers with grace and humility. The three persons are necessary in the confession because the Father has sent his Son to die for us and the Spirit to convict and lead us. An emphasis on spirituality that is grounded in the Holy Spirit being the indwelling power of the Triune God protects discipleship from being moralism and self-righteousness. A better vision of God leads to a desire for more purity, and more purity should lead to a better vision of God.

ENDNOTES

[1]Found in Dan Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) and Kevin Vanhoozer, "Introduction: What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin

Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

[2]Gregory's father was the bishop at Nazianzus and was sent away to receive rhetorical education In Athens and Alexandria. He tried to escape the call to ministry numerous times because he was afraid of its high demands. He replaced his father as bishop in Nazianzus but spent considerable time pursuing the monastic life of meditation. It appears he was most happy at a monastery in Seleucia and served as bishop only out of duty to God, family, and friends. The most significant works of Gregory for our concern are his theological orations given while bishop in Constantinople. Here he oversaw the preceding of the Constantinople Counsel and set the standard for Orthodoxy. He shares the title "the theologian" only with the apostle John for his contributions to the orthodox faith. Christopher Beeley declares, "Gregory of Nazianzus stands out among Christian theologians of every generation for the clarity, the power, and the spiritual depth of his teaching on the Trinity. More than any theologian before him, he understands the Trinity to be the content, the structure, and standard of the Christian faith." Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (New York: Oxford University, 2008). He states that "for Gregory the doctrine of the Trinity is not only the essential expression of the Christian life; in an important sense it is that life" (187).

[3]He uses the example of how the *imago dei* has been interpreted by Augustine, Calvin, and Barth to demonstrate the practice of TIS.

[4]Ayres defines grammatical doctrine as the "matrix of principles and rules for theological discourse … so that one runs the least amount of risk of speaking unworthily of God" (Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* [New York: Oxford University, 2004], 52). Ayres argues that grammar "does not function as a sufficient description, but rather as a tool for articulating the basic statements of Trinitarian belief that Augustine takes to be a matter of revelation" (69). For a contemporary proposal of how doctrine functions grammatically see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). The grammatical rules constitute a model when they collaborate and are consistent with one another. A model, therefore, is judged by how well its grammar or rules avoid heresy and present a unified doctrine of the Trinity.

[5]Other titles include virtuous ascetic, exalted contemplative, brilliant orator, mystic poet, fierce apologist, holy bishop, divine theologian. These come from the Menaion. Rufinus described Gregory as "a man incomparable in all things … who offered to the church the most radiant light of the knowledge of Christ." See J. A. McGuckin, "The Vision of God in St Gregory of Nazianzus," *Studia Patristica* 33 (1996): 145. Rogich provides a helpful look into the nature of theology that Gregory exemplified. It was one of experience, humility, contemplation and service. He provides a rich study of why Gregory has been exalted as "the Theologian." Daniel Rogich, "The Development of a Theologian according to Saint Gregory the Theologian," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994): 63-81.

[6]John A. McGuckin points out that his richest theology is found in his confessions and hymns of praise ("'Perceiving Light from Light in Light' [*Oration* 31.3]: The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Gregory the Theologian" *GOTR* 39 [1994]: 17). He goes on to describe Gregory's theology as "wholly confessional, that is, doxological, in character and soteriological in its import" (Ibid., 18). "For Gregory, the Trinity is a dynamic and soteriological experience, the beauty of God experienced in the liturgy of prayer and expressed in the church's confession of praise" (ibid.). Norris comments that his orations are all liturgical, "He breathes in worship and breathes out theology." Frederick Norris, "Gregory the Theologian," *Pro Ecclessia* 4 (1993): 474. Norris comments on his theology being "for and from the church." "Wonder, Worship, and Writ: Christological Exegesis," *Ex Audit* 7 (1991): 64. His autobiographical poem, *On His Own Life*, is a unique contribution as he contemplates his life in view of God. It is similar to Augustine's *Confessions* in this way.

[7]Beyond having a contribution to the contemporary debate over the nature of language, esp. theological

language, Gregory serves as a mediator in many of the early church's debates. McGuckin calls Gregory a "synthesizing theological midwife" that reconciles the church in the times of some of its deepest need. See John A. McGuckin, *Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2001), 111.

[8]Frederick Norris says his main concern is "what Scripture itself says and what the church in its worship has been doing." Norris has also called Gregory a model of how to meditate on variety of scripture and bring it together ("Wonder, Worship, and Writ: Patristic Christology,"59, 65). Hanson calls Gregory a common sense exegete and Norris comments that his exegesis is "grammatical and theological." See R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988): 846.

[9]*Orations* 27.1-5. All translations of the *Theological Orations* (27-31) are from *On God and Christ* (trans. Frederick Willism and Lionel Wickham; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2002). *Orations* 6, 19, 20, 23, 24 are from The *Father of the Early Church: A New Translation* (trans. Martha Vinson in *Fathers of The Church* 107; Washington: Catholic University of America, 2003). *Orations* 38, 39, and 42 are from Brian Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (New York: Routledge, 2006). *Orations* 2, 21, 34, and 40 are from *S. Gregory of Nazianzus, Archbishop of Constantinople* (Select Orations and Select Letters, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series [NPNF2], vol. 7; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

[10]*Or.* 27.5.

[11]Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 41.

[12]*Or.* 38.7.

[13]"No one has yet discovered or ever shall discover what God is in his nature and essence" (*Or.* 28.17), and "Meaning by this that even a vision of God is too much for men let alone God's nature" (*Or.* 28.19). McGuckin states that Gregory "begins the theological task quite decidedly from the perspective that God is unknowable; that is inconceivable and incomprehensible in his nature" (*Gregory of Nazianzus*, 12).

[14]*Or.* 29.13.

[15]*Or.* 2.1.

[16]*Or.* 27.4.

[17]*Or.* 27.3-5.

[18]The point of this is that comprehension of the object of knowledge should be effected both by negation of what the thing is not and also by positive assertion of what it is (*Or.* 28.9). There is a great difference in being able to know something exists and knowing what something is (Or. 28.5). Frederick Norris recognizes this balance between God being ineffable while truly revealing himself, "because God in his nature is incomprehensible and yet is revealed sufficiently, theology will never be amenable to tight syllogistic systems. Its subject is not open to that kind of investigation," ("Gregory the Theologian," 478).

McGuckin explains that the apophatic and kataphatic are leftover from Athanasius' doctrine, "a fundamental legacy of Christianity, and widely apparent in the Scripture themselves ("The Vision of God in St Gregory of Nazianzus" 146)." "Gregory is insisting that the Unknowable can be known by creatures without thereby ceasing to the Unknowable"—this supposed "Cappadocian achievement" is really an "otherwise unremarkable re-statement of the basic axiom of the Alexandrian theological tradition" (ibid., 148).

[19]Donald Winslow explains this distinction well and applies it to Gregory's Christology in "Christology and Exegesis in the Cappadocians" *Church History* 40 (1971): 394ff.

[20]*Or.* 28.3. This type of knowledge is distinguished today by the terms immanent and economic. There is a clear difference between the two that guards against the second half of Rahner's Rule, but a clear affirmation of the first, "the economic is the immanent." The economic accurately reveals the immanent, but only partially. Gregory explains that when we try to look at the Deity absolutely we must procede, "as best we can collecting fragmentary perception of it from its images?" In *Or.* 28.21, Gregory cites David proclaiming God's judgments too wonderful for him, too excellent for him to grasp, and Paul when he claims, "We know in part what we prophecy in

part" (Or. 28.20).

[21]*Or.* 31. 29-30 and 29.19. For a full treatment of the significance of inseparable actions as a key to a Trinitarian reading of Scripture, see Lewis Ayers, "Remember That You are Catholic" (serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8.1 (2000): 39-82.

[22]*Or.* 31.29.

[23]*Or.* 28.13. He also argues this from Paul's declaration, "We know in part what we prophecy in part," (*Or.* 28.20).

[24]A complete revelation is compared to looking at the sun. Our eyes are too weak and sinful to look directly into the sun. The rays are even more than we can ever hope to apprehend.

[25]*Or.* 42.16, "But we walk the middle, royal road, where the experts tell us the pursuit of virtue is to be found."

[26]The heresies were Eunomianism or Neo-Arianism and Sabellianism.

[27]His confession was eventually adopted, but he argued that Constantinople should declare the Spirit *homoousios*, but they threw him out as the head of the council for this strong position.

[28]*Or.* 2.38. Daley states, "The reason for this title [The Theologian] is clearly Gregory's urgent championing of a Trinitarian conception of God and his insistent care to articulate a theological terminology—indeed a theological grammar—for speaking of God in a way consistent with Scripture and the Church's tradition of faith" (Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 41).

[29]Bertrand Russell observes that Modernity is marked by "the diminishing authority of the church, and the increasing authority of science" (Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* [Touchstone, 1967], 491).

[30]*Or.* 28.3. See Norris "Wonder, Worship and Writ: Patristic Exegesis," 64.

[31]*Or.* 28.11, "that the divine nature cannot be apprehended by human reason, and that we cannot even represent to ourselves all its greatness." McGuckin observes that the first principle of the *Theological Orations* is, "theology proper is radically restricted as far as human beings are concerned, and cannot be accessed by logic or illumined by material analogies" (*St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 305). Frederick Norris argues that, for Gregory, "Faith is what leads us, faith gives fullness to our reasoning…Human minds are too small to ferret our the inner recesses of God." "Theological argument is enthymematic. It takes claims and knows that they can be organized to make compelling appeals" ("Gregory the Theologian," 474).

[32]Eunomius, "Since the names are different, the essences are different as well" (Apol. 1.12, 24). See R. A. Norris Jr., *Father Gives Fullness to Reasoning* (Leiden: Ball, 1991), 149. See also *Or.* 28.4 where Gregory argues "for language may show the known if not adequately, at least faintly, to a person not total deaf and dull of mind." Eunomius has a Platonic theory of language "that names determine essence" so that when Eunomius knows the name of God, unbegotten and simple, anything that does not share this name does not belong to the community. See also Socrates Scholasticus, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates* (London: S. Bagster, 1844, IV.7).

[33]*Or.* 37.2.

[34]"For we use in a godly manner the terms one *ousia* and three hypostases, the one to denote the nature of the Godhead, the other the unique characteristics of the three; the Italians mean the same, but owing to the scantiness of their vocabulary, and its poverty of terms, they are unable to distinguish between Essence and hypostasis, and therefore introduce the term Persons, to avoid being understood to assert three Essences. The result, were it not pious, would be laughable" (*Or.* 21.35).

[35]McGuckin observes that this insistence on silence for what cannot be spoken of is even stronger than Wiggenstein. The most important difference is that for Gregory is not caused by ignorance or inarticulation, but it is rooted in "religious wonder" and the mystery of God (*St Gregory of Nazianzus*, 305).

[36]See *Or.* 28.17 where Gregory states "no one has yet discovered or even shall discover what God is in his nature and essence" One cannot define the undefinable, but the church knows enough from his revelation to continually have his praise on their lips.

[37]Gregory follows the Aristotelian theory of language

that affirms that "reality is prior and language follows" (Norris, *Father Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 149). G. L. Prestige recognizes that for Gregory "the transcendence of the Godhead surpasses the powers of ordinary discourse" (*God in Patristic Thought* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008], 237). Gregory also tightens up the way language can be used so that it can not be used in theological discourse outside of how it is used in the secular world.

[38]*Or.* 31.26. An interesting aspect of this progression is the experiential as a basis for proof of the Spirit's deity. The perfect Trinity is seen in this dispensation of God's progressive revelation because the church experiences its power.

[39]"But of God himself the knowledge we shall have in this life will be little, though soon after it will perhaps be more perfect, in the same Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever amen." Gregory explains this progression from 1 Corinthians, "[Paul] says that he sees in a mirror dimly, but that there is a time when he will see face to face" (*Or.* 20.12).

[40]*Or.* 29.21. See also *Or.* 31.25. There is another aspect of his eschatological progression where the theologian must be able to distinguish the difference between the two covenants of salvation history, the law and grace. The believer who lives in the covenant of grace is waiting for the unshakeable kingdom where he will see God face to face. See McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 308-09.

[41]"This is the meaning of David's prophetic vision: "In your light we shall see light." We receive the Son's light from the Father's light in the light of the Spirit. That is what we ourselves have seen and what we now proclaim—it is the plain and simple explanation of the Trinity" (*Or.* 31.3).

[42]*Or.* 6.22.

[43]*Or.* 24.19.

[44]*Or.* 28.1.

[45]Gregory makes a clear connection for seeing God rightly and attaining the final vision with being pure in *Or.* 29.12. He prays that Eunomius will be inspired by the Spirit to see Christ rightly and that the Nicene party will be saved by the Trinity, "abiding pure and blameless until the more complete revelation of what we long for in Christ himself, our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

[46]"For language may show the known if not adequately, at least faintly, to a person not totally deaf and dull of mind" (*Or.* 28.4).

[47]*Or.* 27.3.

[48]*Or.* 27.3. The crowds in Constantinople had been discussing the controversy over the Trinity as casually as amusement and entertaining small-talk.

[49]McGuckin, "In Your Light," 13. See McGuckin on how this ascent demands man overcoming his "materially based consciousness" in order to "transcend material limitations, when the soul is invited back to God to its true spiritual nature and destiny in communion with God." This is in contrast with Horton who dismisses the idea of ascent as a modernistic concept (Michael Horton, *Lord and Servant* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 11-13).

[50]*Or.* 28.2-3.

[51]"It was truly a great thing for them simply to hear God's voice, and this only after they had been thoroughly purified" (*Or.* 20.2).

[52]*Or.* 28.2.

[53]*Or.* 2.1.

[54]*Or.* 39.8. Daley's translation has "cleansing" and I have replaced it with "purification." See also Or. 23. 11, "Our minds and our human condition are such that a knowledge of the relationship and disposition of these members with regard to one another is reserved for the Holy Trinity itself alone and those purified souls to whom the Trinity may make revelation either now or in the future."

[55]*Or.* 40. 2.

[56]*Or.* 6.1: "It was then I set a bridle on my lips , which were not in any case inclined to speak , because I thought that the priorities of the Sprit were first to purify myself through the philosophy that resides in action; next, to open the mouth of my mind and draw in the Spirit; then to utter a godly theme and to speak of God's perfect wisdom among them that are perfect." See also *Or.* 19.1-3. "When I realized that nothing I said was able to curb popular talk or the current all-pervasive passion to speak and lecture on the things of the Spirit without the inspiration of the

Spirit, I embarked on another course—a better one." Gregory says that theology properly done spurs the theologian to listen more than speak (*Or.* 32.21).

[57]*Or.* 20.1. His desire was "to block out his senses, severing all ties with the flesh and the world … to live the life that transcends visible nature … and be and ever come to be a spotless mirror, as it were, of God and the divine, capturing light with light … and finally attain the blessed goal, our mirrors shattered by the reality of the truth." Gregory goes on to state, "In fact, this is why one must purify oneself and then enter into converse with the pure if we are not to share the same fate as Monoah" (*Or.* 6.4).

[58]*Or.* 20.1.

[59]*Or.* 2.14.

[60]*Or.* 20.12.

[61]*Or.* 23.1.

[62]Ibid.

[63]*Or.* 20.5.

[64]*Or.* 30.1.

[65]*Or.* 29.18.

[66]*Or.* 29.18.

[67]*Or.* 29.19.

[68]*Or.* 30.6.

[69]*Or.* 30.6.

[70]Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought,* 147. See also Thomas Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 434.

[71]Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought,* 153. According to Prestige, the Orthodox "showed a far profounder sense of the need to interpret the Scriptures as a whole by comparing one passage with another" (ibid., 147).

[72]See Paul Russell, "St. Gregory's Exegeses Against the Arians, Still a Viable Christian Tool" *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994): 123-30, for a more thorough explanation of how Gregory interprets this text.

[73]*Or.* 30.1. See also 29.18, "You must predicate the more sublime expressions of the Godhead, of the nature which transcends bodily experiences, and the lower ones of the compound, of him who because of you was emptied, became incarnate and (to use valid language) was "made man.'"

[74]There is similarity between what Gregory is accomplishing with this rule and what the earliest creeds were seeking to accomplish. The Nicene and Apostle's Creeds stated what the church believes concerning Jesus' historic birth and death while also protecting his divine nature. There is no direct connection to the wording of these creeds, but Gregory was an adamant defender of the Nicene Creed, and it is probable that the Creed helped inform this rule.

[75]*Or.* 30.2. "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old" (ESV).

[76]*Or.* 30.2.

[77]This particular passage is an excellent test case for theological interpretation. The modernistic hermeneutic would have denied any Christological implications because it would not have been the author's intent and the genre does not lend itself to a theological reading. There should be some question concerning if Gregory is creating rules to read Scripture according to his paradigm or if this is a ruled reading derived from a broader Christological reading of all of Scripture. The justification for Gregory's reading would be the unity of Scripture and Paul declaring Christ to be the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). Origen explained that Christ is the Creator and source of all existence in virtue of his being Wisdom. As Wisdom Jesus is the Logos and "constructive system of knowledge and ideas concerning the universe" (*On St John* 1.19). See Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought,* 118.

[78]*Or.* 30.3.

[79]*Or.* 30.7.

[80]*Or.* 6.22.

[81]This differs from Basil who argued for the deity of the Spirit from tradition because he did not think Scripture was abundantly clear on the position. Basil was more of a political leader, Gregory more of a dogmatic leader. Thankfully, for the tradition, Gregory's practice and doctrine became the norm.

Righteousness and Peace Kiss: The Reconciliation of Authorial Intent and Biblical Typology[1]

Robert L. Plummer

While I was working on this article in my office, I received an urgent call from my wife and three young daughters. They were at the Louisville Zoo, and they had an important question: What is the plural form of "rhinoceros?" Of course, as a professional theologian, I am skilled in the art of appearing competent while at the same time sidestepping difficult questions. I suggested the obvious: "rhinos." But, the question remains. To persons familiar with the English language, there are two likely answers: rhinoceroses and rhinoceri. If I were to take a poll of the readers of this essay, opinions would be divided. A quick look at the Merriam-Webster online dictionary confirms that both spellings are, in fact, permissible.

This short anecdote illustrates my objectives in this paper. As we approach some difficult Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, we can ask, "Is the use of this Old Testament text by a New Testament author best explained by author-oriented hermeneutics?" Many will answer yes. We can ask of the same text then, "Is this text best explained by typological interpretation?" And others will answer, "Yes, typology, is the best approach."

I am proposing that maybe we can answer yes to both of those questions and end up being more faithful interpreters in the process.

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INTRODUCTION

Listen to good evangelical sermons, and you will hear statements such as, "The Bible says," or "The Apostle Paul tells us here," or "The inspired Scripture reads." Similarly, in less colloquial fashion, most evangelical commentaries and hermeneutics texts seek to root the meaning of Scripture in the conscious intent of the inspired human author.[2] In other words, we must know what a text *meant* to its original author before we can know

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what a text *means* for us today. The conscious intent of the divinely-inspired human author is the channel of meaning in which all other implications and applications must flow.

Most of us would affirm this statement, I imagine, but then an evangelical hermeneutical schizophrenia often develops. What do we do about those Old Testament texts which are quoted in the New Testament in such a way that they seem to go beyond and in some cases completely ignore the meaning of the Old Testament authors? One approach is to hold doggedly that the Old Testament prophets were in fact conscious of all Messianic sense that the New Testament ascribes to their writings.[3] Such unrelenting author-oriented hermeneutics, while appealingly consistent, is beyond the bounds of most scholars' credulity. For example, let's consider a text: In Hos 11:1 and following, the prophet speaks of Israel's redemption out of Egypt and subsequent tragic unfaithfulness. Hosea writes,

> When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images (Hos 11:1-2).[4]

The author of the first Gospel, Matthew, picks up part of verse 1 and applies it to Jesus' return from Egypt after Joseph and Mary fled with the Christ child from the Bethlehem massacre. Matthew writes with reference to Joseph,

> So he [Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matt 2:14-15).

If Hosea consciously had in mind the fulfillment of this text as the Messiah's return from Egypt, there is no indication in the Old Testament of that fact. So, like Melchizedek, without lineage or precursor, Matthew's hermeneutical affirmation appears suddenly on the scene.

Looking at the context of Hos 11:1, it's not surprising that some thoughtful readers flee to *sensus plenior* as an explanation for Matthew's use of this text.[5] *Sensus plenior* is a fuller, secret meaning of the text, unknown to prior human authors until the Holy Spirit revealed it through inspired New Testament writers. It's difficult to argue with this interpretive trump card, but most scholars also find it an intellectually unsatisfying way of dealing with intertexuality. Case in point: imagine an early Jew who has just read Matthew's Gospel for the first time now interviewing him for the local synagogue gazette:

> **Interviewer:** "Matthew, please explain to me how this quotation from the book of Hosea respects the context in which it originally occurred."
> **Matthew:** "Oh, it doesn't respect the context at all."
> **Interviewer:** "What do you mean, Matthew?"
> **Matthew:** "I am a divinely-inspired author of Scripture. I have access to secret meanings of Hosea's text of which he and no one else prior to me was aware."
> **Interviewer:** "Well, what can make such idiosyncratic interpretation valid or persuasive to others?"
> **Matthew:** "Well, of course, by the fact that I am divinely-inspired. That makes it true."
> **Interviewer:** "It is hard to argue with that."
> **Matthew:** "Yes, it is."

A sort of middle road between unwavering author-oriented hermeneutics and *sensus plenior* is biblical typology. According to a biblical typological approach, the authors of the New Testament shared a number of assumptions that justify their Messianic reading of Old Testament texts—which, on face value, did not have obvious Messianic implications. The main assumption deals

with God's divine sovereignty and intentionality in history. God has intervened in history in ever-increasing but corresponding ways. Thus, later saving interventions can be seen as fulfillments (i.e., divinely-orchestrated correspondences) of earlier ones. This typological pattern is especially pronounced when dealing with God's *climactic* intervention in the sending of the Messiah. Previous deliverances, saving events, saving persons, cultic and royal establishments find their fulfillment in the final saving event, final saving person, final saving sacrifice and final Davidic King.[6]

In my assessment, biblical typology is undeniably what the New Testament authors are doing. To deny biblical typology is to deny that the sun is shining and that the grass is green. Yet, must we simply embrace an interpretive schizophrenia at this point—applying a strict author-oriented hermeneutic to most texts but unpredictably swerving into biblical typology in those rare instances of necessity? Does a dually-authored text (i.e., written by humans, yet at the same time fully inspired by God) demand this unique sort of dual hermeneutic? Admittedly, the meaning of biblical typological texts *can* be rooted in the conscious authorial intent of the *New Testament* human author. But, what of the *Old Testament* author (the author of the quoted text as it originally appeared)? Do we simply cut the Gordian knot of the original author's intent by drawing our sharpened saber of biblical typology? Is there no way to reconcile the Old Testament human author's conscious meaning of his text with later New Testament usage?

In the remainder of this article, I am not going to argue that all typological prophetic quotations in the New Testament can be rooted in the conscious interpretive intent of Old Testament authors. Such an argument would need to be supported by hundreds of pages of discussion of specific texts. My scope is more limited. I would like to propose, in a very preliminary fashion that the Old Testament authors' conscious intent and any later usage in the New Testament can and should be more closely related. I am saying that this closer relationship seems to be a promising and neglected line of inquiry. I would like to explore this thesis with one significant New Testament example in light the entire Old Testament book from which the text is quoted. As we have already been looking at Hos 11:1 and Matt 2:15, we will continue that line of inquiry.

HOSEA: A TEST CASE

As we have already seen, in the immediate context of Hosea 11:1, the Old Testament prophet gives no indication that his text has future Messianic significance. That is, the text does *not* read like this:

> I, Hosea the prophet tell you this: in the future the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. People will try to kill him, but his mother (his virgin mother) and his father (his adopted father, of the line of King David) will flee with him to Egypt. Yes, and then after that evil king trying to kill him dies (whose name is Herod, by the way), he will come back to the Promised Land and it will then be said, "Out of Egypt I called my Son."[7]

Frankly, most Christians in the pew (and possibly many pastors too!) assume that if they looked up the Old Testament reference it would read something like this.

We're going to have to look a little more broadly in Hosea if we are going to find authorial *permission* to use his text in the fashion that Matthew has. Possibly that is a better idea than conscious intent—*genuine authorial permission* based on Hosea's reference to prior events and texts and the unfinished lines he draws out in the direction of the future.

In essence, I am asserting that Hosea quite consciously sees himself mid-way on the dimly lit stairsteps of revelation. He looks down the stairs which are lit well (the previous revelation) and sees the prior interventions of God and sees correspondences to them in his own day—a repetition

of steps in parallel fashion. Similarly, Hosea looks up the stairs—again quite consciously—seeing the stair steps of future revelation repeated in ever climactic pattern. Hosea also recognizes that there is a *top* to the stairs—a final climactic saving intervention of God, at which point, all the stairway will be illumined—and the line of successive saving steps will be unmistakably visible. So, though Hosea does not apparently consciously know of the Messiah's coming flight into Egypt, *he gives implicit permission for later readers who witness subsequent divine revelation to find that correspondence in his text*.

Let's have another fictitious interview and then look at specific texts in Hosea that support my assertion.

> **Plummer:** "Pardon me, Hosea. I am from the distant future, and I've come back to chat with you. I was peeking over your shoulder, and I just noticed that you wrote about God calling his Son out of Egypt. Is that passage about Jesus?"
> **Hosea:** "Who is Jesus?"
> **Plummer:** "Jesus is the Messiah who conquers sin and death forever."
> **Hosea:** "Hallelujah! I did not know his name, but I knew he was coming. But, what do you mean by asking, 'Is this text about Jesus?'"
> **Plummer:** "Well, in the future, when the Messiah is born, the evil king reigning at that time tries to kill him, so his virgin mother and adoptive father flee with him to Egypt. When all is safe, they come back to the Promised Land. Matthew, one of God's spokesmen in Jesus' day, says that this text of yours is pointing to this very flight of the Messiah into Egypt."
> **Hosea:** "Yes, I see. In my text, I explicitly note that in the Jewish nation's sojourn in Egypt, it looked like God's promises had failed—that the descendents of Abraham would be enslaved forever outside of the Promised Land—yet, God intervened to deliver them. His promises did not fail. So, in the final climactic intervention of God—in the sending of his Son—not just the nation, but his true, unique Son—it also appeared that God's promises were in question. Indeed, if the Son had to flee from the Promised Land, how would the Messiah rescue the lost sheep of Israel while living as a refugee in Egypt? Yet, just as before, God miraculously intervenes to save and return his chosen one.[8] And, though the prior son Israel (son with a lower case) failed, this unique Son (Son with an upper case) —succeeded. Amazing! The historical parallels show God's consistent intentions! Of course, not knowing exactly how God would repeat his deliverance, I was not fully conscious of this typological correspondence until you told me. But, *I knew later deliverances were coming. I wrote this text, consciously knowing it might be reiterated in a later, parallel, heightened saving event*. Yes, yes, of course that is a valid use. I give implicit permission for the events in my text to be seen as forerunners to future events, *just as I myself draw out lines of correspondence to the prior interventions of God*. Certainly, I give future inspired authors permission to employ the very hermeneutic I myself follow."
> **Plummer:** "Thanks for talking with us, Hosea."
> **Hosea:** "Shalom."

So, in what specific ways, then, does Hosea demonstrate that he knows the provisional nature of his work and give *permission* for later inspired writers to point to divinely-commissioned historical anticipations in earlier times. We now overview three hermeneutical methods that Hosea himself employs—methods, we assume he would permit if found in the later revelatory writings of others.

Hermeneutical Method #1

Hosea draws lines of correspondence between God's prior interventions and God's interventions in his own day. Repeatedly, God's prior acts of judgment and salvation are seen as mirror images or anticipations of God's acts of judgment and salvation in Hosea's day. In 6:7, for example, Hosea

refers to the fall of the first man, Adam, as a type of the future rebellion of Israel.[9] The wickedness of the Benjamites reported in Judges 19-21 is taken up as a graphic depiction of the nation's current iniquity (Hos 9:9).[10] Israel's unfaithfulness at Baal Peor is determinative of their condition hundreds of years later (Hos 9:10).[11] Just as God raised up David to deliver and establish his people Israel, so again he will raise up a Davidic savior (Hos 3:5).[12]

This pattern of correspondence is seen most strikingly, I believe in Hos 2:13-15. In this text, language from the initial entry of the ancient Israelites into the Promised Land is picked up to describe their prophesied return from Assyrian exile.[13] Just as Matthew in his Gospel is dependent on the geographical parallel of both ancient Israel and Jesus being brought back from Egypt, so Hosea's parallel is dependent on a geographic specificity. It is through the valley of Achor that both the ancient Israelites and future returnees from Assyria will make their way into Israel. Is this parallel due simply to happenstances of historical geography? Not according to Hosea. The prophet sees not only divinely-ordained parallels, but a heightening of the God's saving work in the second instance.

Hermeneutical Method #2

Hosea points to a succession of future saving events, climaxing in the coming Messianic king and eschatological age. In Hos 2:13-15, we see that God's saving guidance of the exiles through the valley of Achor will far surpass their initial entry into the land. Hosea delivers this word of the Lord:

> "I will punish her [i.e., Israel] for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD. "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. [*Nota Bene*: much better than 40 years of wandering in the desert!] There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt."

The Valley of Achor (meaning valley of trouble) is a valley near Jericho that was of some significance during Israel's first entry into the Promised Land. It was here, Joshua 7 tells us, that Achan and his family and his livestock were stoned and burned after he kept for himself a robe from Babylon, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold—items from Jericho that had been devoted to destruction (Josh 7:21). Only after the community's stoning of Achan, do we read, "Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger" (Josh 7:26).

Hosea tells us that when Israel streams back into the Promised Land from their coming Assyrian exile, she will again pass through the valley of Achor, but it will not be a valley of trouble, but, "a door of hope" (Hos 2:15). The Israelites had sung songs of joy when they came out of Egypt, but by the time they got to the valley of Achor, we find Joshua tearing his clothes, falling facedown on the ground before the ark of God, and the elders of Israel sprinkling dust on their heads" (Josh 7:6). Joshua cries out, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?" (Josh 7:7) There will be no weeping and rending of clothing this next time, says Hosea. There will be re-entry into the land with singing. So, Hosea points out for us *heightened* historical correspondences of God's saving interventions—correspondences based on a geographic location near Jericho—a location common to both the initial conquest of the land and Israel's coming return from Assyrian exile. Arguably, Matthew employs the same hermeneutic as Hosea– citing Egypt as a common geographic marker in God's heightened saving interventions. Does not Hosea give implicit permission for Matthew to employ his same interpretive method?

Even more striking in Hosea is the intersection of interpretive method and the eschatological tra-

jectory that the Old Testament prophet lays out for his hearers. We read in Hosea 3:4-5,

> For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and *seek the LORD their God and David their king.* They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings *in the last days* (my emphasis).

It is difficult to be more escatologically explicit than a promise of a Davidic king, though elsewhere Hosea even speaks of the final destruction of death itself—language that Paul picks up to describe the Christian's resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Indeed, we read in Hos 13:14 (the Lord speaking in the first person): "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? " To draw upon our earlier analogy, Hosea clearly knows the top of the staircase is coming—the final, end-times, saving intervention of God through his coming Messiah. Surely Hosea implies that when that day dawns, the purveyors of divine revelation are authorized to look back and cite God's earlier saving works—whatever they be—as leading to this final, decisive work.

Hermeneutical Method #3

Hosea vacillates between individual and corporate entities in the lines of correspondence that he draws out in both the past and the future. That is, the individual is often representative of the community and vice versa.[14] Of course, it is widely recognized that Matthew traffics within these categories—so that he is able to think of both the nation and the historical person Jesus as the Son of God.[15] Jesus as the *final* and unique Son both serves and represents the broader nation. What is significant for this study, however, is that Hosea embraces the same concept of corporate solidarity. At numerous places he vacillates between a key historical person who represents or stands in for the nation and the broader mass of Israelites. These comparisons include: Adam, Jacob, Ephraim, David, etc. (And, though we won't pursue the topic now, Hosea also recognizes realities of corporate solidarity outside Israel as well, such as the king of Assyria and the nation of Assyria). Hosea 12:2-6 is a representative text:

> The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah [the nation]; he will punish Jacob [the nation] according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he [the historical individual] grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He [again, the historical individual] struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there—the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown! But you [back to the nation, now addressed in the second person] must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

Without a doubt, in Hosea's interpretive grid there is a fluctuation between key historical figures and the broader Israelite nation. Does Hosea not imply, then, that later divine spokesmen may employ that same concept of corporate solidarity while interacting with the individual and corporate references in Hosea's prophetic text?

CONCLUSION

In Psalm 85, the psalmist celebrates God's saving love towards his people. In verse 9 and 10 we read, "Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Love and faithfulness meet together; *righteousness and peace kiss each other*" (my emphasis). Righteousness and peace kiss each other—a beautiful metaphorical picture of how God's distinct blessings upon his people complement rather than compete with each other. I have argued that in analogous fashion, we should re-think the relationship of biblical typology and author-oriented

hermeneutics. These are not two systems that are in competition with each other—with one winning and one losing in the game of hermeneutics. Rather, given the Old Testament authors' implicit authorial permission to interpret their texts typologically in light of later revelation, we should view biblical typology and author-oriented hermeneutics as essential and complementary elements of interpretation. They are like love and faithfulness meeting together, like righteousness and peace kissing each other.

ENDNOTES

[1]This paper was originally given as an oral address at the November 2009 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Though I revised the essay slightly, I chose to maintain the informal tone. For more detailed discussion on interpreting prophetic texts, the reader is referred to my book, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 197-212.

[2]Robert H. Stein comments, "The more traditional approach to the study of the Bible has been to see the meaning as being controlled by the author. According to this view, the meaning of a text is what the author consciously intended to say by the text" (*A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 20-21).

[3]E.g., Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. writes, "[T]he whole revelation of God as revelation hangs in jeopardy if we, an apostle, or an angel from heaven try to add to, delete, rearrange, or reassign the sense or meaning that a prophet himself received" ("Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy* [ed. Norman L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], 135).

[4]English Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

[5]Broadus seems to suggest this possibility: "It is not necessary to suppose that this [interpretation expounded by Matthew] was present to the prophet's consciousness. Exalted by inspiration, a prophet may well have said things having deeper meanings than he was distinctly aware of, and which only a later inspiration, coming when the occasion arose, could fully unfold" (John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886], 23).

[6]Douglas J. Moo explains, "Basic to typology, it is generally agreed, is the belief that God acts in similar ways in both Testaments; hence, there can be a real correspondence between the Old Testament and the New. That typology works from the narratives of God's activity in history is also a matter of general consensus—although whether the type must always be a *historical* figure, event, or institution is debated" ("The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* [ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 195).

[7]Craig L. Blomberg notes, "The exodus event was regularly seen in the rabbinic literature as a type of the salvation of the messianic age to come (see Str-B 1:85-88). However, there are no extant Jewish uses, before or after the first century, that explicitly link Hos. 11:1 with this typology or suggest that it was ever understood as explicitly messianic" ("Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 7).

[8]Blomberg writes, "That Israel had been delivered from Egypt, that Israel would again be exiled there but again restored, and that the child believed to be the Messiah also had to return to Israel from Egypt formed too striking a set of parallels for Matthew to attribute them to chance. God clearly was at work orchestrating the entire series of events" (ibid., 8).

[9]See Duane A. Garrett's helpful discussion of the debated referent for "Adam." He concludes, "It appears that Hosea singled out the shrine at Adam not because of some peculiarity about the town, but because of its namesake. The prophet has made a pun on the name of the town and the name of the original transgressor. His meaning is, 'Like Adam (the man) they break covenants; they are faithless to me there (in the town of Adam)'" (*Hosea, Joel* [New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997], 162-63).

[10]See James Luther Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster,

1969), 131; Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 196.

[11]Mays, *Hosea*, 132-33.

[12]Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 104.

[13]Ibid., 91.

[14]Klyne Snodgrass writes, "[The expression 'corporate solidarity'] refers to the oscillation or reciprocal relation between the individual and the community that existed in the Semitic mind. The act of the individual is not merely an individual act, for it affects the community and vice versa. The individual is often representative of the community and vice versa. Achan sinned and the whole nation suffered [Josh 7]" ("The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* [ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 416).

[15]William Hendriksen writes, "When Matthew quotes Hos. 11:1 and applies it to Christ, it is evident that he regards Israel as a type of the Messiah. Jesus Christ, too, is God's Son. This is true in the deepest, trinitarian sense of the term (cf. John 1:14). Just as Pharaoh, that cruel king, had tried to destroy Israel, so another king, namely Herod, at least equally cruel, was attempting to destroy Christ. But just as on the way to Egypt, during their stay in that house of bondage, and in their exodus, Jehovah had protected his people, so God had protected his Son, not only on the way to Egypt and during his temporary residence there but also on the way back. The Messiah was, as it were, recapitulating the history of his people Israel" (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], 178-79).

John Sailhamer's *The Meaning of the Pentateuch:* A Review Essay

James M. Hamilton Jr.

1. INTRODUCTION

This book received significant electronic attention. Mark Driscoll and John Piper went back and forth over it on Twitter, then Piper blogged on it, followed by a Collin Hansen *Christianity Today* interview, all linked on Justin Taylor's *Between Two Worlds* blog. Even before the generation of this digital excitement, I had been looking forward to this book for several years. If asked to identify the major influences on my thinking about the Old Testament, Sailhamer is on the short list with T. Desmond Alexander, Stephen Dempster, William J. Dumbrell, and Paul House.

Sailhamer's Presidential Address to the ETS, later published as "The Messiah in the Hebrew Bible," was a watershed moment in my thinking about the Old Testament.[1] That address gripped and fascinated me, as did an essay Sailhamer wrote on the connections between Genesis 49, Numbers 22–24, and other texts.[2] I say all this to preface the following points of appreciation, puzzlement, and disagreement.

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2. POINTS OF APPRECIATION

2.1 Impressive Research in Latin and German

A few years ago I had the opportunity to meet Sailhamer and visit with him for a few moments. When I asked him who he read and who influenced his thinking, he explained that he had given himself to reading mainly German and Latin works, which meant that he did not spend much time with contemporary work being done in English. That decision is evident in this volume. Sailhamer quotes freely from the Latin of Augustine, Jerome, Coccejus, and others. He ranges widely through an array of German authors as well.

This exposes Sailhamer to streams of influence that are not available in English, and it puts him in position, for example, to critique Moses

SBJT 14.2 (2010): 62-76.

Stuart's translation of Johann Augusti Ernesti's work on Hermeneutics (106, 111 n. 14, passim). This remarkable strength of Sailhamer's opens him up, however, to a corresponding weakness. The decision to focus on older works in Latin and contemporary German authors has given Sailhamer unique abilities and perspectives, but it also has implications about his awareness of what his contemporaries are writing, as will be seen in §3.4 below.

2.2 Focus on the Messiah

Sailhamer has a salutary focus on the Messiah in the Old Testament, and he seeks to show how this theme rises from the text of the Old Testament and develops as the texts unfold rather than reading it back in from the New Testament. For instance, Sailhamer convincingly shows how Genesis 49 is interpreted in Numbers 24, such that "The messianic hope begins to emerge from these poems along with the eternal reign of God as king" (36–37). Sailhamer rightly sees that one of the major unifying themes in the OT is the hope for a coming deliverer that springs from Gen 3:15 and grows into a mighty rushing river as the tributaries of other promises feed into the stream of messianic hope across the pages of the Old Testament.

2.3 Focus on the Final Form of the Text

Too much Old Testament study is hampered by flat out rejections of what the texts claim in favor of the fictions invented by modern scholars. Many of these theories fall under the label of "historical-critical," but they are neither historical nor critical. These theories are actually unhistorical because the reconstructions are simply not plausible, and they are uncritical because authoritative secondary literature has taken precedence over primary sources. The evidence that "counts" fits with what critical orthodoxy recognizes as a legitimate conclusion. The claims of the primary texts have to be filtered through critical orthodoxy. Sailhamer's confessional stance, embracing the Bible as the inerrant word of God, and his canonical perspective moves him past so many of these impasses.

Sailhamer rightly focuses on the text as revelation (see the first word of the book's subtitle: *Revelation*) rather than seeing the events that the texts describe as the revelatory moment. The text is a revelatory work of literary art. He writes, "We do not understand a Rembrandt painting by taking a photograph of the 'thing' that Rembrandt painted and comparing it with the painting itself" (19). And again, "in this book, the focus falls on final texts, the OT as we have it today in our Bibles. *OT theology is the study and presentation of what is revealed in the OT*" (63). Sailhamer argues, "This is what is meant by the grammatical-historical approach" (73).

3. PUZZLING FEATURES OF THE BOOK

I want to be clear that I am not out to bash Sailhamer. I was eager to see this book appear, excited to read it, and went through it carefully. Many things struck me as puzzling. Some are incidental questions, others have to do with structural features of the book involving a high degree of repetition and redundancy. Still other questions have to do with more substantive questions about the relationship between the text and events that lay behind it, the dialogue partners Sailhamer has chosen, and a lack of clarity on the question of typology.

3.1 Incidental Questions

Some of the printing conventions used in the book are not explained.[3] What does note 64 on p. 321 mean?[4] Where is "figure 5," to which the reader is directed on p. 368? It seems that figure 4.1 is intended. What is the point of the list of quotations on pages 456–59? It almost looks as though Sailhamer has gathered quotations he intended to marshal in support of an argument, but all the reader finds is the list of quotations under the subheading "History of Interpretation" with no word from Sailhamer on why he cites them here or how

they serve his argument. After the last quotation the chapter ends. This list of quotations hardly exhausts the history of interpretation, so perhaps this section was unfinished.

3.2 Repetitions and Redundancies

Making my way through the book, at several points I got the strange impression that I had already read the passage in front of me. That was because I had. In some cases whole pages and series of pages, footnotes and all, are repeated later in the book. See these examples:

> A comment about Berkhof's critique of Coccejus (41–42) is substantially repeated (354).
>
> A paragraph on two altars (43) is substantially repeated, divided into two paragraphs when it reappears (358).
>
> A roughly four page discussion of "A Compositional Approach to the Old Testament Canon" on pages 48–51 reappears, footnotes and all (cf., e.g., 50 n. 35 and 202 n. 75), on pages 200–03.
>
> The discussion of the "compositional approach" on pages 53–54 reappears on page 206.
>
> The answer to the question "How did Moses 'make' the Pentateuch?" on pages 54–56 is given again, footnotes and all (cf., e.g., 56 n. 46 and 208 n. 88), on pages 206–08.
>
> The footnote just mentioned, note 46 on page 56, is surprising not only because it is repeated verbatim as note 88 on page 208, but also because in both places we read this: "see also, in chap. 2 below, 'The Coming Eschatological King' . . ." Page 208 is in chapter 4, so the discussion referenced is no longer "below," but the reference is problematic even in its first occurrence in the introductory chapter since there is no section on "The Coming Eschatological King" in chapter 2. We do find a section with that subtitle in chapter 5, beginning on page 244.
>
> Footnote 11 on page 574 refers to Sailhamer's discussion of Matthias Millard "in chapter 5," but the discussion of Millard is actually in chapter 9.
>
> Sailhamer repeatedly gives the same quotation from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (see pages 54–55, 196, 207, 280, 356 n. 4, and 464 n. 5). This quote is often accompanied by one from Campegius Vitringa (55, 207, 280–81, and 464 n. 5). Unfortunately, these quotations are used in basically the same way every time they appear. Material from pages 277–78 appears again on pages 323–24.
>
> There is a nine line quotation from Frank Crüsemann in footnote 20 on page 294, and three of these nine lines are quoted again in footnote 23 on page 295.
>
> The discussion of the big idea of the Pentateuch that first appears on pages 155–61 reappears almost word for word in the conclusion of the volume on pages 607–11.

Sailhamer repeatedly discusses the composition of the Pentateuch and its importance, pushing me to the conclusion that this is a book long on method and short on actual exegesis of the text: so many discussions of the significance of the Pentateuch's composition, and by comparison, so little discussion of the *contents* of that composition.[5]

Another repeated discussion in this book is that of the relationship between Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 33. I noted my appreciation of an article Sailhamer wrote on these texts above, and I would not have been surprised to find the ideas from that article restated in this volume. I was surprised that these ideas seemed to be restated again and again (see pages 335–46, 468–81, 518–20, 553, etc.). I was hoping for more examples of this kind of inner-biblical interpretation from this book, not the same examples over and over again.

Sailhamer's emphasis on compositional strategy and his focus on intertextuality actually prompted me to wonder whether he was imitating the Bible itself in the composition of his own book. He writes regarding the collections of laws in the Pentateuch: "no attempt was made to avoid duplication or repetition" (292), and he takes this as a cue to seek intelligent design behind the Penta-

teuch's structure. So it may be that Sailhamer has intentionally repeated himself in all these places to pursue some elaborate literary agenda, but I think a simpler explanation is more likely. My guess is that this book was put together from a series of articles (and in various footnotes Sailhamer acknowledges substantial drawing from earlier articles). Sailhamer does not identify the volume as a collection of essays, but he does refer to "the studies in this book" in the opening words of the conclusion (602).

The repetitions and restatements look to me like they originated from the need to address related ideas in a series of articles over the years. Rather than find a new quote to make the same point made in an earlier essay, the one cited in the earlier piece is reused. Rather than rewrite a new section on the big idea of the Pentateuch, an earlier one is touched up and incorporated into a new context, and so forth. Perhaps a note in the preface or introduction acknowledging the composite character of the volume as a collection of essays, declaring up front that no effort has been made to eliminate repetition, would prepare readers and make them more tolerant of this sort of thing.

3.3 *Text or Event?*

As noted above (§2.3), I very much appreciate Sailhamer's call to interpret the text as it now stands. Sailhamer argues against the interpretive approach that pursues or is based on historical reconstructions (e.g., 102–05). That is, in keeping with his words quoted above, we should interpret Rembrandt's painting rather than comparing it to a photograph of the thing painted. He explains,

> [A] focus on the biblical text necessitates the identification of the meaning of the text with the "author's" intent. This means not what the author may have been thinking or feeling when he wrote the biblical text, but rather what his words actually say.… First, we seek to know the words that the author has written.… Next, we need to know the lexical meaning of each of his words and how they fit together in the written text. . . .
>
> The second question that we may use to discover the verbal meaning or the author's intent is the compositional strategy of the author who "made" the text (604).

Can we divorce what the words say from what the author was thinking or feeling when he wrote? For instance, in Deuteronomy, as Israel is about to take the land, Moses reminds Israel of their conquest of Sihon and Og (Deut 2:26–3:11). The passage closes in Deuteronomy 3:11 with a note on the size of Og's bed and the observation that he "was left of the remnant of the Rephaim." Can we not posit that Moses gives this information because he is *thinking* of the way Israel refused to enter the land because of the size of its inhabitants back in Numbers 13–14? Are we not on the right track if we suggest that Moses *feels* a desire to teach Israel to trust Yahweh as he relates how large Og was? Can we not suggest that this is what Moses was *thinking* and *feeling* even though the text does not say so explicitly?[6] How do we distinguish between the author's *intent* and what he was *thinking or feeling*? Our assessment of what an author is thinking or feeling will directly affect our assessment of his intent.

Sailhamer wants to interpret the text, not the event behind the text. Sailhamer is not interested in the event behind the text that is described in the text, but he is interested in another event behind the text—the author's process of composition. That is to say, while Sailhamer is not interested in reconstructing the parting of the Red Sea, for instance, he is interested in the actions of the author of the Pentateuch. Rather than interpreting the text as it now stands, drawing out the meaning of the author's intended message, Sailhamer is looking for hidden clues about the author's purpose that are revealed in what he calls "authorial commentary." He explains,

> The unity of a book's plan, its design and scope, betray a singularity of purpose that can only be described as that of an author (*mens auctoris*).

> The aim of a theology of the Pentateuch lies in the discovery of that purpose through careful examination of the author's compositional strategy. Ultimately, our aim is not to deconstruct the Pentateuch, but to let it remain intact and attempt to sort out its various parts, assigning some weight of importance to their pattern of distribution within his book. The goal must always be guided by the hope of catching a glimpse of the author at work (282).

I voice a hearty "Amen" to Sailhamer's recognition that there will be an overarching purpose driving the author of the Pentateuch. He is essentially declaring that there will be a center of the Pentateuch's theology.[7] I also agree with his view that understanding a text's literary structure is crucial for understanding an author's message (29). But I disagree with what he says in the statement just quoted about "catching a glimpse of the author at work" (282). Do we want to be affected by Rembrandt's painting, or are we prying into the process of the making of the work of art? Can we get behind the final product? Thus it seems, at least in part, that for Sailhamer the question is not really: text or event? Rather, the question is: text or event-of-authorial-activity/compositional process? This event-of-authorial-activity can be seen, according to Sailhamer, in "the commentary … inserted into the poetry by the author in the final stages of composition" (573–74). How does he know that parts of the poetry were inserted later? Because similar phrases appear elsewhere? Does that prove the case?

Sailhamer is very interested in this "authorial commentary," and as an instance of it he identifies the final phrase of Gen 49:18, which he translates, "I will wait, O Lord, for your salvation," as falling into this category of material (327 n. 68; cf. also 573–74). But what evidence leads him to the view that this is a comment from the author of the Pentateuch rather than a comment from Jacob, who is depicted as speaking through this whole section (Gen 49:1)?

This is a significant question in view of Sailhamer's method. In response to a question from Collin Hansen, Sailhamer writes of later OT authors,

> They had essentially the same Pentateuch we have today, plus a number of comments that they passed along as their explanatory notes. Being for the most part prophets, their comments and explanations ultimately found their way into the later versions of the Old Testament text. It is in those notes that we can see most clearly their longing for the coming of a Savior foretold by Moses in the poems of the Pentateuch.[8]

These are momentous assertions! First, Sailhamer is claiming that there are interpretive comments in the Pentateuch from later biblical authors. Second, he claims that this "authorial commentary" provides the clearest window into the developing messianic hope. In view of the significance these comments play in Sailhamer's interpretive scheme, a more specific discussion of criteria for distinguishing between comments from Moses and comments that supposedly come from later authors is needed.

The Meaning of the Pentateuch is a long book with many discussions of these issues, but the nature of the book is such that each return to the issue of compositional strategy has the feel of another set of introductory comments that are only scratching the surface. These comments never seem to go beyond what can be said within the confines of an article that stands by itself, and it is unfortunate that we do not get an examination of the issues that probes new depths each time a topic discussed earlier is resumed.

Sailhamer writes, "The goal of the interpretation of the OT is its author's intent" (68). But this goal is complicated in Sailhamer's program because he is not only interested in the text as it now stands, but pursues the question of "whether and to what extent a biblical book may have been interpreted after its initial composition" (265).

This is a good question, but Sailhamer is not merely referring to interpretations of earlier texts *in later texts*, but later interpretations that are now *part of* the earlier text. So he speaks, for instance, of "commentary" that has been "inserted into the poetry by the author in the final stages of composition. As such, [these comments] reflect the central interests of the final shape of the Pentateuch and the Tanak" (573–74). The author, here, is not Moses, but someone who stands at the end of the line of prophets and is now issuing what Sailhamer refers to as "Pentateuch 2.0" (e.g., 48, see §4.1 below). But again, how does Sailhamer know these are later insertions? And if we are to follow him, how do we distinguish between the earlier text and the later commentary? Is this a method that has constraints or is it dependent upon Sailhamer's ability to catch glimpses of authors at work? If we follow him in trying to catch such glimpses, are we still seeking to interpret the text as it now stands?

It seems that we are not looking at Rembrandt's painting and interpreting it. Instead, we are looking at Rembrandt's painting, and Sailhamer is pointing to what he sees as evidence that some later artist has highlighted colors or darkened hues to add interpretive nuance. I will have more to say below (§4.3) on the "text or event" question. In this section I have tried to capture the way that Sailhamer argues for interpreting the "text" but moves from the text to the "event" of later "authorial" activity. Color me unconvinced.

3.4 Sailhamer's Dialogue Partners

It is surprising to me that there is no mention—not a single reference—to prominent recent evangelical Old Testament theologians. Sailhamer never once references Paul House's *Old Testament Theology*. Neither T. Desmond Alexander's *From Paradise to the Promised Land* nor his *The Servant King* appear, nor does either Stephen Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty* or William J. Dumbrell's *The Faith of Israel*.[9] And Sailhamer neither refers to nor interacts with the recent Old Testament theologies by Bruce Waltke and Eugene Merrill.[10]

Sailhamer is of course free to ignore these contributions to evangelical Old Testament theology, but if he is going to do so he is not in position to make assertions about what evangelical Old Testament theology has overlooked, downplayed, or must deal with in the future. If he is not going to interact with evangelicals who are writing on Old Testament theology, he should not make statements like these:

> Page 72: "evangelicals have much to ponder about their approaches to biblical narrative.... a basic lack of clarity among evangelicals ..."
> Page 102: "Given its commitment to the Bible as the necessary starting point of a biblical theology, evangelicalism must continue to rethink itself in light of its starting point ..."
> Page 110: "it is equally important for evangelicals to look at these same events . . ."
> Page 122: "If, today, evangelicals desire to reclaim their focus on an inspired text ..."

How does he know that these things are not being done? At many points Alexander, Dempster, Dumbrell, House, and others[11] have agreed with Sailhamer. Unfortunately, Sailhamer limits his interaction to Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Geerhardus Vos, figures from church history (in Latin), a smattering of German authors, and various higher critical scholars—many of whom cannot really be expected to agree with him. The historical figures were operating with different categories, and the higher critics start from a different set of presuppositions.

Since he does not interact with recent evangelical Old Testament theology, to say nothing of New Testament theology and biblical theology (no mention of Beale, Goldsworthy, Leithart, Martens, McConville, Motyer, Schreiner, or Scobie), Sailhamer's discussion of "Evangelical approaches to biblical theology" (178–82) rings hollow. What evangelicals take these approaches? Nor does Sailhamer inspire confidence that he is in position to say things like, "Contemporary evangelical bib-

lical theologians have taken three approaches" (551)—he cites no one as he describes what they have done.

Let me say again that I would have no problem with Sailhamer never citing the main stream of Old Testament theologians who are writing in English right now (Alexander, Dempster, Dumbrell, House, Merrill, Waltke, etc.) if he were not constantly making comments about evangelical scholarship.[12] An author is free to choose his dialogue partners, and he can limit his conversation to as few as he pleases. The problem arises when so many assertions are made about the state of evangelical scholarship. For instance, Sailhamer writes, "As we have noted often in this book, contemporary evangelical biblical theology has focused not so much on the text of the OT as on the historical events pointed to in that text" (550). Sailhamer gives the impression that Kaiser and Vos[13] are representative of evangelical Old Testament theology at large, and that is simply not the case. He typically refers to "evangelical attitudes" and "evangelical approaches" (three times on page 566) but cites no one in particular.

In view of Sailhamer's lack of interaction with evangelical biblical theologians writing in English in the last two decades, it is startling that he would write, "My treatment of evangelical theologians and biblical scholars, and their views of history and the Bible, stands at the center of the argument of this book. Simply put, real (historical) biblical events ... came to replace the biblical version of that history found on the pages of the OT" (604). This statement may have been true of the situation in 1975, perhaps even 1990, but it is no longer the case in these days of a renewed interest in typology and biblical theology, narrative theology, and even "theological interpretation of Scripture." This comment of Sailhamer's is reminiscent of the argument made by Hans Frei in his 1977 book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, which has had widespread influence. The mention of Frei's *Eclipse* provides a natural transition to the question of typology.

3.5 Typology?

It does not seem to me that Sailhamer's treatment of typology in this book will bring clarity to the discussion of the issue. Summarizing Frei's description of precritical biblical interpretation, Sailhamer speaks positively of "figuration," but he appears to distinguish between "figuration" and "typology." He writes,

> In figuration, each individual story is cast as a figure, or similarity [*sic*], of other stories. OT stories thus can be figures of NT stories, and biblical stories in general can be figures of events in the life of individual readers. Discovering connections through meditation on Scripture thus becomes the central means of spiritual enlightenment and understanding (cf. Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2). This does not mean that OT stories can be read as "types" or "symbols" of NT stories. It means that "in reality," real events recounted in the OT have a basic similarity to real events recounted in the NT and events in the "real life" of individual readers of both. For there to be figuration, the events of both Testaments must be real. Only in that way can a real (historical) connection exist between the two events (91).

This quote gives the impression that figuration is different from typology, and that whereas figuration depends on real events having taken place, since figuration is different from typology, that might not be the case with typology. Sailhamer is summarizing Frei approvingly, but Frei made no such distinction between typology and figuration. That Frei equated the two is apparent from the way he uses the terms interchangeably, for instance: "... to make earlier biblical stories figures or types of later stories and of their events and patterns of meaning." And again a few pages later, Frei writes, "Typology or figuration," and again, "figural or typological interpretation."[14]

My complaint is that Sailhamer is not sufficiently clear on this point. I am not sure he is defining typology in a way that would be accepted

by those who write on the issue. Earle Ellis has helpfully contrasted typology with other interpretive methods:

> Unlike allegorical exposition, the typology of the NT writers represents the OT not as a book of metaphors hiding a deeper meaning but as an account of historical events and teachings from which the meaning of the text arises. Unlike a Judaizing hermeneutic, typology views the relationship of OT events to those in the new dispensation not as a "one-to-one" equation or correspondence, in which the old is repeated or continued, but rather in terms of two principles, historical correspondence and escalation.[15]

Sailhamer may not intend to distinguish typology from figuration, and he may not intend to suggest that typology deals with "unreal" events while figuration deals with "real" events. His words seem to indicate that he does mean to do just that, and if so he is alone in using the terms this way. Beale writes, "[M]ost scholars today agree that typology is not allegory because it is based on the actual historical events of the Old Testament passage being dealt with and because it essentially consists of a real, historical correspondence between the Old Testament and New Testament event."[16]

Sailhamer later says that another word for "'spiritual' interpretation" is typology (228), and in his unpersuasive explanation of the use of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15 he writes, "When Matthew quoted Hosea 11:1 as fulfilled in the life of Christ, he was not resorting to typological interpretation of OT events. He was, rather, drawing the *sensus literalis* of the OT description of the exodus from the book of Hosea" (513).[17] In the conclusion of his book he alleges, "The church has reversed the order by reading the OT in light of the NT (typology and allegory)" (606).

If Sailhamer is embracing Frei's description of precritical interpretation, along with figuration, that is a good thing (but see his description of his own approach as "neither 'critical' or 'precritical' but noncritical" [7]). There is no warrant for distinguishing between typology and figural interpretation. If someone is going to distinguish between the two, characteristics peculiar to each should be clearly stated. Equating typology with "spiritual interpretation" muddies the waters, as does lumping typology in with allegory. Sailhamer claims that the New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament just as later Old Testament authors interpreted earlier Old Testament texts. With this I agree, and I have argued that the interpretations of Old and New Testament authors are often typological.[18]

4. POINTS OF DISAGREEMENT

4.1 Pentateuch 2.0

Sailhamer translates Deuteronomy 34:10 to mean "A prophet like Moses never did arise in Israel, one who knew God face to face," then writes, "Clearly, the author who made this statement knows about the entire line of prophets who followed Moses.... All of them have come and gone, and Moses had no equal. A huge jump is made here at the end of the Pentateuch, taking us from the last days of Moses to the last days of the prophets" (31).[19] This is a massive claim, one that we might expect to find supported in great detail. Surely other ways of interpreting the phrase will be discussed and eliminated, and ample evidence in support of the far reaching claims presented, defended, with alternative explanations shown to be implausible. Instead, Sailhamer only makes the assertion, then moves on as though the case is closed.

Sailhamer's view is a possible understanding of the meaning of Deut 34:10, but it is not the only possibility. Is there evidence in the Old Testament that other figures are described with similar statements? Consider the description of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 18:5 (ESV): "He trusted in the Lord the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him." I doubt that the author of 2 Kings wants his audience to think that Hezekiah

really was greater than even David, and there is evidence that he is speaking hyperbolically in 2 Kgs 23:25 (ESV) when he uses similar language about Josiah: "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him." Wait a minute. The author said in 2 Kgs 18:5 there was none like Hezekiah after him, and now 2 Kgs 23:25 says that there was no king like Josiah before or after him—and he was after Hezekiah. We could take these statements very literally and claim they are contradicting each other. Or we could understand these two statements as hyperbolic ways of emphasizing the greatness of Hezekiah and Josiah. I am inclined to think, against Sailhamer, that Deut 34:10 is speaking of Moses hyperbolically, similar to the ways Hezekiah and Josiah are described. If that is the case, then Deut 34:10 does not demand that the whole line of prophets has come and gone.

4.2 Abraham and Moses

Sailhamer repeatedly contrasts Abraham and Moses:

> The Pentateuch is a lesson drawn from the lives of its two leading men, Abraham and Moses. The Pentateuch lays out two fundamentally dissimilar ways of "walking with God" (Deut 29:1): one is to be like Moses under the Sinai law, and is called the "Sinai covenant"; the other, like that of Abraham (Gen 15:6), is by faith and apart from the law, and is called the "new covenant" (14).

And again:

> Simply put, we will argue that the authors of the OT Scriptures were prophets, not priests. Their heroes were not like Moses, who focused on keeping the law, but like Abraham, who focused on a life of faith and was reckoned as one who kept the law (Gen 15:6) (66).

Small problem: at least Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests (Sailhamer does not discuss these facts). Are there not similarities between, for instance, the way the nation rejected and opposed Moses and their later treatment of Jeremiah? Could Jeremiah have seen these similarities and presented himself as an installment in a life of "prophets like Moses" (cf. Deut 18:15–18), who were opposed by the wicked in Israel just as Moses was, and could this typological pattern be fulfilled in Jesus (cf. Acts 3:22–23 and 7:37)?[20] Ezra, too, may be presented as a kind of new Moses.

A third example:

> The author of the Pentateuch understood this well. That is why he, like the apostle Paul, illustrates the nature of faith with stories from the life of Abraham (Gen 26:5) rather than Moses (Num 20:12) (556).

This is bizarre and absurd, and I think Sailhamer owes Moses an apology and should probably (at least) offer one to the author of Hebrews as well. Moses is clearly presented as a man of faith in Heb 11:23–29. Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt and left Egypt by faith (11:26–27). And this is not to impose the New Testament's interpretation of Moses onto the Old Testament. The Old Testament authors who celebrate Moses as a hero were not doing something wrong (advocating legalism or clinging to the old covenant rather than the new) but holding Moses up as the man of faith that he was. Yahweh calls Moses "my servant" (Josh 1:2). First Chronicles 6:49 calls Moses "the servant of God." Ezra 3:2 calls him "the man of God." And there are many other examples along these lines. Sailhamer's over-interpretation of Num 20:12 pushes a maverick conclusion that is out of step with the broader context of the Pentateuch, the rest of the Old Testament, and the New. Moses does not enter the promised land, a tragic consequence of a sinful failure, but there is no indication that he was not a man of faith. He knew the LORD

face to face (Num 12:8; Deut 34:10).

These kinds of false dichotomies do not help us understand what the Pentateuch actually teaches. The law of Moses is a law that must be kept by faith. The only thing that is going to cause an Israelite to take an expensive, flawless animal and sacrifice it is faith in what Moses has said. The only thing that is going to cause an Israelite to leave home and goods unprotected to go to Jerusalem thrice yearly is faith. The only thing that will prompt them to release debts in the seventh year is faith, and so forth. They had to believe that God had spoken through Moses (cf. Exod 24:7), believe that it was more dangerous to disobey this God than to obey him (cf. Lev 10), and believe that if they did what Moses said, Yahweh would be pleased with them. The law of Moses had to be kept by faith. And this also strikes against Sailhamer's view of the purpose of the law, which is related to his view of what happened at Sinai.

4.3 The Event at Sinai and the Purpose of the Law

Sailhamer's understanding of what happened at Sinai goes against his own program of interpreting the text as it now stands. Rather than interpreting the canonical text, Sailhamer seems to go behind the text to get at what really happened at Sinai. He argues that Exod 19:13 calls both Moses *and* the people to ascend the mountain to worship God. According to Sailhamer, there are different versions of what happened at Sinai. In the first (Exod 19:1–16a), the whole nation is to be a kingdom of priests. In the second (Exod 19:16b–25), there is a distinction between the people and the priests (378–79). Sailhamer explains that the nation was commanded to ascend the mountain in Exod 19:13, sinned by refusing to do so because they were afraid, and as a result God gave them the law:

> In light of these compositional clarifications in Exodus 20:18–21, what we learn about Exodus 19 is that God's original intention to meet with the people on the mountain (Ex 19:13b; cf. Ex 3:12) was fundamentally altered by the people's fear of approaching God (Ex 19:16b). In their fear, the people traded a personal, face-to-face relationship with God for a priesthood (392).

This is not at all the picture we arrive at if we interpret the canonical text as it stands. Exodus 19:12 calls for boundaries to be set up around the mountain so that the people will not even touch it, and the relevant verb in 19:13b (יעלו) can easily be understood to mean "they shall come up to the mountain" (ESV) or "they shall come near the mountain" (NKJV). Only if the context were disregarded and we looked behind the text would we take this verb, as Sailhamer does, to call the people to ascend the mountain with Moses. The context is clear that if they so much as touch the mountain they will be stoned (Exod 19:12b). Yahweh calls Moses up the mountain (19:20), and then he sends him back down to warn the people again that they are to keep a safe distance from the mountain (19:21–25). The text does not tell Sailhamer's story.

It seems to me that Sailhamer here is not interpreting the text but going behind it to the event, against his own hermeneutical protestation. He writes, "These are important biblical-theological questions that lie behind the present shape of the Sinai narrative" (389). Against this, I would argue with Sailhamer against Sailhamer that biblical theology should be driven by the final form of the canonical text.

It seems to me that Sailhamer has invented a fictional event that never happened, and then on this he builds a false theology. Rather than interpret the contents of the Pentateuch that consist of legal material, he identifies collections of laws and explains,

> If we look at the various sets of laws edited into the Pentateuch, we can see that there were several "transgressions." Throughout the narratives of Exodus 19–Deuteronomy there are numerous examples of Israel's failure to follow God's will.

> Here we can see the hand of the author at work. After each episode of disobedience we see that God gave Israel a new and more complete set of laws. As Israel continued to transgress the laws given to them, God continued to give them more. God did not give up on his people. When they sinned, he added laws to keep them from sinning further. The laws were not added to keep them from sinning; the laws were added to keep them from disappearing into the world of sin around them (561).

So according to Sailhamer, Israel failed at Mount Sinai by not ascending the mountain. Then after Israel sinned again with the golden calf, Sailhamer argues that "the episode of the golden calf is intended to signal a fundamental change in the nature of the Sinai covenant" (362). He explains,

> What began as a covenant between God and Israel, fashioned after that of the patriarchs (the Decalogue and the Covenant Code), had quickly become an increasingly more complex set of restrictions and laws primarily aimed at the priesthood (the Priestly Code) (363).

None of this, in my judgment, matches what we find in the final form of the canonical text of the Pentateuch, nor is it reflected by the way that the rest of the Old Testament deals with what happened at Sinai and the Law God gave through Moses. Sailhamer interprets Gal 3:19 to support this strange view of his, but Paul's statement that the law "was added because of transgressions" (Gal 3:19 ESV) could be taken in a number of ways. Thomas Schreiner says that four views predominate: that the law was given to (1) restrain sin; (2) define sin; (3) deal with sin; and (4) increase sin, and Schreiner opts for the last.[21] From this summary we can see that Sailhamer's view is not a prominent option among those who comment on Gal 3:19.

Nor does it match the Pentateuch itself. In Deuteronomy the law is God's good gift to his people (e.g., Deut 4:5–8; 6:24–25). After the Ten Commandments are rehearsed (Deut 5:1–21), Deuteronomy 6–26 exposits, interprets, and applies the ten commandments to a variety of situations and circumstances.[22] The narratives in Joshua–Kings employ the language of Deuteronomy to interpret Israel's history, and the prophets from Isaiah through the Twelve indict Israel for breaking the covenant. The prophets also warn that the consequences of the covenant are coming on Israel, culminating in exile, but the prophets point beyond exile to a glorious restoration. After exile, back in the land, Malachi calls the people to remember the law of Moses (Mal 4:6). Texts in the writings such as Psalm 1, 119, and Proverbs 3 present the law of Moses as the path to blessedness (cf. also Eccl 12:9–14). Ezra set his heart to study, teach, and do the law (Ezra 7:10), and with Nehemiah's aid he taught it to the people (Neh 8).

Never does the Old Testament indicate that the nature of the mosaic covenant was altered because the people sinned. Rather, the narratives in the former Prophets, the message of the latter Prophets, and the songs and narratives of the Writings all relate the fulfillment of what Moses prophesied in texts such as Leviticus 26, Deut 4:25–31, and 28–32. These texts point forward to a new covenant beyond the curses of the mosaic covenant, beyond the exile, but they do not indicate that God changed the character of the mosaic covenant in response to Israel's sin.

4.4 Other Disagreements

There are other problems with this book, such as the unjustified statements about the MT of Jeremiah (165–67)[23] and the way this influences his reading of Daniel 9 (214–15), the mistaken perspective that "According to the version of the Tanak that ends with Ezra-Nehemiah, there are no significant events to be expected in Israel's subsequent history" (214),[24] the way that Sailhamer plays the "two altars" against each other (357–63), and the suggestion that the covenant in Deuteronomy 29 is to be distinguished from the

Sinai covenant (400, 403–15, 553). Rather than explain Sailhamer's positions and offer alternative proposals, I will simply say that I find Sailhamer's treatments of these issues unsatisfying both for reasons of methodology and for their lack of explanatory power.

5. CONCLUSION

We noted above that Sailhamer argues for an interpretation of the text as it stands. He likens this to interpreting a painting by Rembrandt rather than comparing the painting to a photograph of the thing painted. As I read Sailhamer's *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, it looks to me like he moves away from the interpretation of the text itself in at least two ways. First, he moves from the text to the event of the text's composition, seeking to catch a glimpse of the author at work (§3.3 above). Second, he moves from the text to the events behind the text at Sinai (§4.3 above).

I submit that Sailhamer makes these moves away from the text itself because interpreting the text demands that we examine more than the text itself. Knowing how Rembrandt worked, what materials he used, who influenced him, and what was happening beyond his canvas helps us understand the painting before us. In addition, Rembrandt probably sought to deepen, enrich, and teach through his art. He sought to do this by capturing what his contemporaries experienced in real life, and his artistic depiction of it was intended to help them see what was there in real life. The biblical authors expect their audiences to read their works in a wider context of shared assumptions and given realities. Can all of that be communicated in a text? Experts on Rembrandt do not interpret the paintings without reference to what is beyond the painting itself. Sailhamer's emphasis on the text is salutary, but that emphasis must be balanced with the reality that in order to understand the text, at many points we must do some historical reconstruction.[25] I am not rejecting Sailhamer's point, only seeking to balance it, fully aware that he might take that as a rejection of his point.

Here at the end of this review let me say that though I have catalogued many points that puzzled me and many others with which I disagreed, John Sailhamer is a fascinating and stimulating author. It was a joy to read this book and engage its arguments. Ultimately our interpretations and proposals must be measured against the text itself, as Sailhamer writes,

> Continual rereading may also suggest that one's idea of the meaning of the Pentateuch is basically wrong and in need of being replaced.... Obviously, such a process requires a great deal of time in reading the Pentateuch. Commentaries and books about the Pentateuch may be helpful, but ultimately it is reading and rereading that tell us what the Pentateuch is about and what it intends to say (152).

ENDNOTES

[1]John Sailhamer, "The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 5–23.

[2]John Sailhamer, "Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10 (2000): 89–106.

[3]For instance, what do the dots mean in note 76 on page 273? There are also numbers in this footnote, and it is not clear what they signify—here is an example from the list: "1 <1> Genesis ·". In this footnote Sailhamer refers to nineteen instances of the word "book" in the Pentateuch, but then one of the sets of numbers only adds up to 18. Is this intentional?

[4]Footnoting a reference to the "author" of the book of Isaiah, the note reads, "This is not to say that Isaiah was not the author of the book of Isaiah, but rather to say that although there is a real distinction in status between a prophet, such as Isaiah, and the author of a book about a prophet, such as the book of Isaiah, it is important to distinguish the two kinds of tasks that one person would be called upon to perform" (321 n. 64). Does Sailhamer mean to suggest that the book of Isaiah is a book about the prophet? The book seems

to claim to be the vision of the prophet, not an autobiography (cf. Isaiah 1:1, "The vision of Isaiah . . ."). This footnote seems to reflect a sensitivity about the authorship of Isaiah, which is unnecessary given Sailhamer's confessional stance and canonical approach.

[5]For discussions of the composition of the Pentateuch, see 22–29 ("The Composition of the Pentateuch"), chapter 4 ("Finding the Big Idea in the Final Composition of the Text"), 200–06 ("Compositional Approach"), 225–26 ("Part Two: Rediscovering the Composition of the Pentateuch within the Tanak"), 253–56 ("Exegesis and composition"), 265ff ("Composition, Canonization and Consolidation"), chapter 6 ("The Composition of the Pentateuch"), 323 ("The compositional strategy of the major poems"), 349 ("Legal Strategies . . .: A Compositional Approach"), chapter 7 ("Exploring the Composition of Legal Material in the Pentateuch").

[6]For discussion of the many things that are not stated in texts but must be known to interpret them correctly, see Peter Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco: Baylor, 2009).

[7]For my argument that the center of the Pentateuch's theology, as well as the center of the whole Bible's theology, is the glory of God in salvation through judgment, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

[8]John Sailhamer, "Finding Meaning in the Pentateuch," interview by Collin Hansen [cited 11 January 2010]. Online: http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/januaryweb-only/12-11.0.html?start=1.

[9]Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998); T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's portrait of the Messiah* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1998); Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003); William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

[10]Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006).

[11]Including myself. In James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Glory of God in Salvation Through Judgment: The Centre of Biblical Theology?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 57 (2006): 57–84, I state in note 7 on page 58 that I am following Sailhamer, among others, in pursuing canonical biblical theology; and in "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58 (2007): 253–73, I rely very much on the insights in Sailhamer, "Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon."

[12]For example: page 295 refers to a "consensus" but cites no one; page 303 refers to "Some recent studies" but cites none; page 419 refers to "NT scholars" but cites none; page 513, "It is axiomatic among most OT scholars," citing only Leon Wood; page 548, "Most covenant theologians today," citing none; page 563, "Although evangelicals often have understood the question of salvation in the OT in terms of the beliefs of particular individuals in the OT, such an aim is not the focus of a textually based biblical theology," citing no one.

[13]Discussing Vos on page 569, Sailhamer writes, "This view of OT salvation has enjoyed a continuing influence in the thinking of evangelical biblical theologians," but he cites no one. Nor does he refer to discussions of Vos's thinking and those who have followed him in, e.g., Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Kinds of Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 129–42.

[14]Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974), 2, 6, 19.

[15]E. Earle Ellis, "Foreword," in Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (trans. Donald H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), x.

[16]G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method," in *The Right Doctrine from the*

Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New (ed. G. K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 395.

[17]It seems to me that part of the problem in this instance is that Sailhamer is understanding Matthew's use of Hosea as an instance of typology even as he insists it is not typology and calls it instead the *sensus literalis*. When he writes, "Hosea himself may have actually understood his reference to the historical exodus as a metaphor or symbol of the coming messianic kingdom" (514), he is not far from saying that the historical exodus has become a type of a new exodus. If that is what he means, then he is also a short step from saying that Matthew has read Hosea to be citing the first exodus in order to point forward to the new exodus, which Matthew claims to be fulfilled in Jesus. See also the way that Sailhamer speaks of the magi being "patterned after Balaam," Herod slaying the children being "modeled after the story of Pharaoh," and of Christ as "a 'new Moses'" (521 n. 100). All of this is moving in the direction of typological interpretation. For my typological interpretation of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15, see James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Virgin Will Conceive: Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–23," in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. John Nolland and Dan Gurtner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 243.

[18]James M. Hamilton Jr., "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12 (2008): 52–77; idem, "The Lord's Supper in Paul," in *The Lord's Supper* (ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matt Crawford; Nashville: B&H, forthcoming); idem, "The Virgin Will Conceive: Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–23"; and at many places in idem, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*.

[19]Cf. also note 19 on page 19: "If Deuteronomy 34 also tells us that the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18 "never came" (rather than "has not yet come"), then the former chapter likely was written at a time when there were no more prophets. Prophecy had ceased." The ESV renders Deut 34:10, "And there has not arisen ..."; the NAS, "Since then no prophet has risen ..."; the NIV, "Since then, no prophet has risen...." It seems that the Hebrew phrase in question, ולא־קם נביא עוד, could mean "And there *still* has not arisen" or "And a prophet did not arise *again*," with "still," "yet," and "again" all possible meanings of עוד. Thus, Sailhamer does not present us with all the possibilities, nor does he argue for the one he chooses.

[20]See further Hamilton, "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah?"

[21]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).

[22]See esp. Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

[23]I say these statements are unjustified because I see no evidence of the kind of exhaustive study of the translation technique of the Greek Jeremiah that would put someone in position to make the kinds of claims Sailhamer makes. See esp. Peter J. Gentry, "The Septuagint and the Text of the Old Testament," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 16 (2006): 217–18, n. 66; and Peter J. Gentry, "The Text of the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 (2009): 43–44, n. 84.

[24]For a stimulating study, see J. G. McConville, "Ezra–Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 205–24.

[25]I have described the task of biblical theology as follows: "When we do biblical theology we are trying to lay hold of the perspective from which the biblical authors have interpreted earlier biblical texts and from which they write. We are looking for the matrix of assumptions and conclusions that necessitate the statements made by the biblical authors. We are trying to get at the world view that gives rise to the assertions the biblical authors make. The only access we have to their beliefs and assumptions is what they actually wrote, so biblical theology seeks to understand the literary features that the biblical authors used to: (1) structure their message, (2) connect it to earlier Biblical passages, (3) locate it in the grand story, and thus (4) encourage their audience by showing them God's glory in his displays of jus-

tice, all of which highlight his mercy and love for his people. Biblical theology is the attempt to understand the Bible in its own terms" (James M. Hamilton Jr., "Biblical Theology and Preaching," in *Text Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Allen, and Ned L. Mathews [Nashville: B&H, forthcoming]).

The SBJT Forum

Editor's Note: Readers should be aware of the forum's format. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Keith E. Johnson, Graham Cole, and Everett Berry have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

SBJT: As one who has written on the theological interpretation of Scripture, can you summarize what people are saying about it and why it is important for the church?

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Kevin J. Vanhoozer: Philip Schaff began his 1844 inaugural lecture on "The Principle of Protestantism" with the intriguing suggestion that every period of the church and of theology has its own particular problem to solve, and that every biblical book and doctrine has its special time when it first comes into its own. According to Schaff, the Reformation was the time when the principle of *sola scriptura* first came into its own. In the same Protestant spirit, and principle, I wonder whether ours is the time when the theological interpretation of Scripture might come into, or perhaps *return* to, its own.

Defining the individual terms "theological," "interpretation," and "Scripture" presents no special difficulty. However, to paraphrase Augustine on time: if no one asks me what they mean when put together — as in "theological interpretation of Scripture" (TIS) — I know what it is; however, if you ask me, I do not know. While that may be something of an overstatement, it is no exaggeration to say that as many people are confused about the meaning of TIS as are enthusiastic about it. Many are talking; few are cohesive. What are they saying about TIS, and what does it all mean?

A first observation: TIS is presently more a conversation about the nature and function of reading the Bible in and for the church than a unified approach or finished method. One of the first things children learn is how to read. Yet proponents of TIS wonder whether and to what extent general rules of reading apply to the Bible as well. Should we read the Bible "like any other book" (Benjamin Jowett)?

Almost everyone involved with TIS agrees on the inadequacy of reading the Bible merely as a

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document to be picked apart, perchance to be put together again, with the tools of historical criticism. There is a widespread sense that the attempt to reconstruct historical backgrounds, "what actually happened," and the history of the text's composition has more or less played itself out. How much more background do we need to hear the Bible as the word of God and respond accordingly?

The unease is not because the Bible has a historical context or recounts history. No, if TIS has a problem with modern biblical studies, it is rather with the "thin" notion of history assumed by most critics. TIS requires "thick" (i.e., theological) descriptions that plumb the height and depth of history, not only its length. In short: there is a deficiency of theology in modern attempts to read the Bible as a document of the university, like other historically conditioned and ideologically driven classics. The origins of TIS lie in its reaction against those who would let non-Christian concerns and presuppositions (e.g., Deism, naturalism) set the agenda for biblical interpretation.

What, then, does it mean to be biblical? Everything depends on what the Bible *is*. To this query, TIS responds in three broad ways, using theological categories (and doctrines) to describe author, text, and reading process alike. The overarching concern is to let the theological subject matter (God; the gospel) and aims (knowing God; godliness) of the biblical text determine the interpretive method rather than the other way around.

First and foremost, then, TIS views the Bible as an ingredient in the economies of triune revelation and redemption. The Bible is ultimately a medium of God's communicative activity oriented to facilitating the knowledge and love of God. As such, Scripture is both transcript of the drama of redemption and an operative element that advances the action. The Bible is a word spoken by God, about God, and accompanied by God. If we are to approach the Bible as Scripture, then we must not abstract it from the Father who authors it, the Son to whom it witnesses, and the Spirit who inspired and illumines it. The Bible is a word in and through which the triune God has spoken and continues to speak. Hence TIS rejects the methodological atheism of approaches that assume the text to have a "natural history" only.

Second, because TIS views the various books as ultimately the work of a single author, it reads the Bible, Old and New Testaments, as a unified narrative, story, or drama. In this, it resembles earlier biblical interpreters who tended to (1) *focus* on the Bible's final form (2) *figure* (typologically) the parts to the whole and (3) *find* what lies at the center, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Third, TIS holds that the most important context in which to interpret the Bible is the church. For the Bible most properly serves as God's means of revelation and reconciliation, the covenant charter of the believing community. The church is a creature of the word and fellowship of the Spirit: these are some of the properly theological categories with which to describe the community of readers for whom the Bible is not simply a text but authoritative Scripture.

TIS furthermore assumes that the Spirit has been active in the history of the church: that the same Spirit who speaks with magisterial authority in the Scriptures speaks with ministerial authority through church tradition. TIS urges exegetes not to dismiss but respect the catholic consensus (e.g., the Rule of Faith and the Nicene Creed). Finally, describing the process of reading the Bible in theological terms calls attention to the Bible's God-given purpose: forming readers unto godliness and cultivating communion with God. TIS therefore concerns the whole pattern of theological authority by which God rules and edifies the church via the Scriptures and the history of their reception.

In sum: the nature, function, and aim of the Bible are all properly theological. TIS is no idle investigation into this or that aspect of the biblical text but an earnest straining to hear and respond to the "gospel of God" (1 Thess 2:2). It would therefore be wrong to see TIS as merely one more methodological plaything, one more interpretive interest to add to the hermeneutical basket,

or one more attempt to impose a foreign ideological agenda onto the text. On the contrary, TIS acknowledges the Bible for what it is: the word of God at work in believers (1 Thess 2:13).

Who started it? I am less interested in the movement's genesis (some say "I am of Karl [Barth]" others "I am of Paul") as its exodus: where might biblical interpretation be headed after its liberation from bondage in the academy and wandering in the desert of criticisms?

It is best to view the new interest in TIS in relation to the old task of training ministers of the gospel. If TIS is to have a future, it must stop clearing its throat and preach what it is practicing. The church ultimately needs theological interpreters of Scripture in the pulpit, not just behind the lectern, though education is of course essential to this end. Pastors may well be the ones to show us the way past the debilitating dichotomy of biblical exegesis and doctrinal theology. If the chief end of biblical studies and theology is to minister understanding of God's word, then the pastor-theologian should be evangelicalism's default public intellectual, with preaching the preferred public mode of TIS. The health, not only of TIS but also of the church itself, depends on it.

SBJT: What's new about "theological interpretation" for evangelicals already committed to reading Scripture in light of its ultimate subject matter?

Keith E. Johnson: Although the "theological interpretation" movement represents a welcome development in biblical studies, the call for interpreting Scripture "theologically" may sound no more novel than learning that the Pope is Catholic. What's all the fuss? Haven't evangelicals always read Scripture theologically (i.e., with reference to its ultimate subject matter: the triune God)?

While the theological interpretation movement is diverse, several recurring themes can be found among its proponents: (1) a desire to attend to the subject matter of Scripture (the triune God); (2) a desire to read Scripture canonically as a coherent dramatic narrative; (3) a desire to read Scripture both in and for the church; and (4) a desire to read Scripture under the guidance of the creeds. It is this fourth component—intentionally reading Scripture in light of the Rule of Faith—that merits greater consideration.

"Ruled" readings, of course, are not new. They represent a central feature of Patristic exegesis. Among second and third-century writers, the Rule of Faith represented a concise summary of Christian belief that provided direction for proper reading of Scripture. Thus, if one wonders, "What might a ruled reading look like?" one only need turn to the Church Fathers.

One of the premier theological interpreters in the early church was Augustine. As a test case for a ruled reading, I want to examine his exposition of John 5:19-27 found in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*. This passage is significant both because it offers insight in key elements of his trinitarian doctrine (both divine relations and trinitarian agency) and because the Rule of Faith explicitly shapes his reading. I explore Augustine's exposition of this passage at length in a recent essay (Keith E. Johnson, "Augustine's 'Trinitarian' Reading of John 5: A Model for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 4 [2009]: 799-810). Here I can only briefly summarize my findings.

Augustine's exposition of John 5 is clearly governed by the Rule of Faith. At several points, he identifies interpretive "rules" that must inform a "Catholic" reading of Scripture in its witness to Christ. For example, at the beginning of *Tractate* 18 he explains that the "sound rule of faith" must govern our reading of Scripture. Similarly, in his discussion of John 5:19 he appeals to a "sound Catholic rule" with which his readers would be familiar.

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Before summarizing these "rules," I want to offer several observations. First, the primary focus of Augustine's discussion is the subject matter rendered in the text—namely, the triune God and God's actions in the economy of salvation. Second, although much of his discussion focuses upon what might be described as the "literal sense" of the text, Augustine does not limit himself to the latter. Third, his exposition assumes the unity of Scripture. Fourth, false teaching provides an important backdrop for his discussion. Finally, his reading of John 5 might be described as "redemptive" in the sense that it aims at drawing readers more deeply into the life of the triune God. It should be evident that significant overlap exists between Augustine's concerns and the concerns of those who advocate "theological" readings of Scripture.

At least three "rules" shape Augustine's reading of John 5. The first "rule" concerns a distinction between the Son in the "form of a servant" and the Son in the "form of God." When reading Scripture, we must distinguish between the Son in the "form of God" (i.e., in his deity) and the Son in the "form of a servant" (i.e., in his humanity).

A second rule concerns the inseparable action of the three divine persons (a fundamental axiom of Latin and Greek pro-Nicene theology): "The Catholic faith, made firm by the Spirit of God in its saints, holds this against every heretical depravity: The works of the Father and the Son are inseparable" (*Tract.* 20.3). The Father does not do one thing while the Son does something else. Whatever the Father does, the Son does as well. This is why the Son can do nothing on his own (5:19).

A third rule is brought to bear on passages that speak about the Son as coming "from" the Father: "This then is the rule which governs many scriptural texts, intended to show not that one person is less than the other, but only that one is from the other" (*De trin.*, II.3). Augustine explicitly cites John 5:19 and 5:26 as examples of this second rule: "So the reason for these statements can only be that the life of the Son is unchanging like the Father's, and yet is from the Father [5:26]; and that the work of Father and Son is indivisible, and yet the Son's working is from the Father just as he himself is from the Father [5:19]" (*De trin.*, II.3). Why does the Son's power to work come from the Father (5:19)? Simply because the Son himself is from the Father.

These rules serve important hermeneutical functions: they help the faithful rightly read Scripture in its witness to Christ and protect the church from falling into heresy. For Augustine, these rules do not constitute an independent authority alongside Scripture but ultimately derive from Scripture itself.

One contemporary attempt to read the Gospel of John in light of the Rule of Faith can be found in *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (InterVarsity, 2008) by Andreas Köstenberger and Scott Swain. Köstenberger and Swain appeal to the Rule of Faith on the assumption that the creedal affirmations of the church do not represent a corruption of Scripture but rather "constitute mature, exegetically trustworthy pathways into Holy Scripture." For example, Augustine's third rule provides the hermeneutical key to their constructive account of the sonship and divine agency of Jesus (chapter 7). Their work bears witness to the exegetical fruit to be gleaned from reading Scripture in light of the Rule of Faith. While there are pitfalls to be avoided, the theological interpretation movement may stimulate us to consider the benefits that accompany "ruled" readings of Scripture. Augustine's exposition of John 5 not only provides a model for a "ruled" reading of Scripture but it also highlights the benefits of such a reading for those who are committed to wedding biblical exegesis with theological orthodoxy.

SBJT: What is the relationship between the disciplines of biblical theology, systematic theology, and the theological interpretation of scripture?

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Graham Cole: My wife is a fashion designer and college teacher of fashion. To be a good designer you need to listen to the fabric, she tells me. You need to engage the fabric on its terms. You can't stitch leather the way you stitch knits. Biblical theology (BT) likewise is a discipline that seeks to listen to its fabric. The fabric is the Word of God written. In practice this means placing a biblical text or passage in its context in its literary unit or argument in its book in the canon within the flow of revealed redemptive history. Presuppositions are always at work, of course. For a start, evangelical BT presupposes the living God who speaks and acts, the unity of Scripture, inspiration and the canon. Scripture then is not reducible to an anthology of ancient Near East and early church texts but is the inspired—in the strong Pauline *theopneustos* sense (2 Tim 3:16)—Word of God, albeit in human words (*concursus*). Put another way, we try to be good phenomenologists of the text. I like the way the Jewish thinker, Abraham Heschel summed up phenomenology: knowing what you see rather than seeing what you know. I once worked with a Bible teacher who found the same meaning in every text whether in Genesis or Isaiah or Mark: read your Bible, say your prayers, share your faith, have fellowship with other Christians, and give to the work. He saw what he knew rather knew what he saw. Happily what he knew had good biblical warrant, but often not in the texts he was expounding. So as much as lies within us, we seek to see what is actually there in the text before us.

Evangelical systematic theology also appeals to what is there but goes further than the descriptive. It is a normative or prescriptive discipline. Systematic theology (ST) wants to find out what we ought to believe (our head), what we ought to value (our heart) and how we ought to live (our hands and feet) as the sacred text is brought to bear on the broken world in which we live and are to serve. However, to do so responsibly ST needs to know how to listen to the fabric. This is where BT is vital to ST. The traditional way to do ST is to make a claim and supply proof texts (*dicta probantia*) to back it up. For example, take the claim that Christ is God incarnate. The classic proof text is John 1:14: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." It might appear like this: "Christ is God incarnate" (John 1:14). I am sure many a reader has had the experience of looking up the string of proof texts in a standard ST text and being mystified as to the relevance of some of them to the claim. Now proof texts are needed, since you can't say everything at once. I remember a student in England who had been warned off ST by his pastor who only valued BT. The student was having problems of a practical kind. If he was asked after church about an issue, people simply didn't have the time to take the tour with him from Genesis to Revelation to find out the relevant texts. Some kind of synthesis, some kind of theological shorthand was needed. ST supplies that shorthand.

ST proof texts, however, need to be derived from the application of a sound BT method. Let's return to John 1:14. If I am challenged on appealing to that text as a systematic theologian I would seek to show that it is part of an argument beginning with John 1:1 in eternity, as it were, and ending in time with John 1:14-18. In other words our text is integral to the prologue of John and is the climax of the story of how God seeks to dwell in the midst of his people. This story started in the garden (Eden), continued with Israel (especially tabernacle and temple) and climaxed in Jesus Christ. Incarnation is the zenith of divine presence. To use Brian Rosner's way of expressing it—I am appealing to John 1:14 in the light of the Bible's "overarching narrative and Christocentric focus." BT serves ST another way. Here my example is that great gospel benefit of the forgive-

ness of our sins. Read your standard ST texts and you would not know how important as a biblical motif the forgiveness of our sins is, but Luke-Acts, which constitutes about a third of the NT, is clear. The risen Christ thematizes the forgiveness of sins as the great gospel benefit in Luke 24 (the Great Commission Lukan style), and in Acts we see it held out both to Jews (Acts 2-Pentecost) and Gentiles (Acts 10-Cornelius). In the light of the overarching narrative of Scripture which identifies the God to whom we pray, we can see why this benefit is so important. God is not only love (1 John 4), God is also light (1 John 1). How can a holy God dwell with an unholy people? Sin needs to be addressed. The Word become flesh is the linchpin to that address: his coming, his cross, and his coming to life again. In other words, BT helps ST get the proportions right in its accents. In my opinion there is crying need for an ST text to be written that does just that.

A final question to consider—what has all the above to do with the theological interpretation of Scripture (TIS)? Are BT and the TIS synonymous? I like to distinguish the two tasks. Other theologians appear to treat them more as synonymous (e.g., Brian Rosner and Kevin Vanhoozer). BT on the one hand helps me to know what I see, whereas TIS helps me to know how to serve the church with what I see as I endeavor to bring the text and today together through TIS. For example, John 1:14 viewed through the TIS lens can't merely be described as the climax of a biblical theology of presence, true though that is. TIS also wants to say that John 1:14 tells of a God who so loved the world that he came himself and tabernacled among us. We do not live in a divinely abandoned landscape, adrift in space. The disciplines of BT and TIS are complementary. Both disciplines are indispensible. Put yet another way, when ST uses BT to connect the text and today, ST is engaged in the theological interpretation of Scripture.

SBJT: What are some of the basic benefits that the current academic interest in the theological interpretation of Scripture can offer for the spiritual development of the church?

Everett Berry: Today theologians and biblical scholars openly acknowledge the significant lack of continuity that exists between their disciplines. Reasons for this divide are numerous including the post-Enlightenment disdain for doctrinal constructs, the methodological impact of historical-criticism, the skepticism toward dogmatics fostered by the biblical-theology movement, the postmodern suspicion of authoritative truth-claims, and the fact that biblical and theological studies are so polarized by extreme levels of specialization. However, in recent days these sources of division have resulted in such academic exhaustion because of so many interpretive extremes that many are now expressing interest in the possibility of what is being labeled a "theological interpretation of Scripture." Herein, the dialogue pertains to whether Scripture can be interpreted holistically as a unified canon while maintaining sensitivity to its historical and literary diversity. And if so, can it be done in ways that give proper due to the roles of tradition, reason, and contextualization so as to move beyond the standard criticisms posed by modern and postmodern skepticism.

Indeed such an objective is vast and will take time to flesh itself out as those involved in its development hone their own perspectives. Up to the present though, this discussion has led to many sources of engagement. Books, articles, several new commentary series, and even a journal devoted to the subject have been produced in order to highlight the implications of such an endeavor. Thus far, the criteria and structure(s) of this approach are in the preliminary stages. But one question that needs to be asked by evangelicals who desire to engage this project as it continues to

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evolve is this: how it can possibly aid the church in its mission and calling as God's people. For any discussion that we entertain about hermeneutics and theological method must eventually lead to its ecclesiological ramifications. Consequently, I am inclined to briefly mention two potential benefits and one cautionary observation.

To begin, one tremendous help that this newly forming approach can offer if properly utilized is a means of re-emphasizing the unity of the Bible. For instance when a pastor stands to preach in an evangelical church and asks the congregation to turn to a particular passage, there are at least two general assumptions which typically go unchallenged. One is that the passage is a part of a given book which supernaturally derives from God himself. But in conjunction with this, those who are reading a biblical text and awaiting its exposition also assume the book in which the passage is found is part of a larger BOOK, namely the Bible itself. In other words, the church is aware of an underlying conviction as God's people, which is the canonical symmetry of all of Scripture. And if this general vein of interpretation among evangelical scholars can in some way enforce or undergird this essential part of what it means to be truly "biblical" in one's hermeneutic, then these believers in the academy can discover a new way to serve believers in the churches.

This leads to a second benefit that could possibly come from this emerging methodology which is a means of building bridges between exegesis, theological formulation, and confessional identity. Unfortunately today in many academic settings, these three topics are seen as mutually exclusive. It is perceived as being intellectually dishonest to concede that one can be involved in interpreting biblical texts in their original contexts and at the same time, believe that one's conclusions will align with what a given tradition confesses about those texts. This is why some biblical scholars bemoan the sight of a theologian carrying a Greek New Testament. But be this as it may, the group that loses the most because of this impasse is the church, not the seminary or academy. Nevertheless, if evangelicals can utilize this trend in ways to fashion approaches that bring theological cohesion and exegetical precision together in new innovative ways, then perhaps the church can begin to glean fresh insights both through the pulpit and accessible literature.

Finally in addition to these possible benefits, one caveat should be added regarding a concern with this subject—namely, that in the long run it will prove to offer simply little if any help at all for the church. More specifically, my concern, which is also being expressed by others as well, is that this movement could remain mired in droning about prolegomena and methodology to the point that it never provides any "so what" content for the church to apply. This problem is in no way new. There have been many views that took initial form in academic guilds but became stagnant in debates about theory and praxis. And much of the literature that is being produced on the theological interpretation of Scripture up to this point seems to be creating the climate for another perfect storm of activity which creates a flurry of interest among academics but ultimately dissipates before it reaches the real-world terrain of the church. Yet to be fair, the theological interpretation of Scripture as a source of engagement is in its early stages. So hopefully in time, it will prove to be different.

Book Reviews

Between Allah and Jesus: What Christians Can Learn from Muslims. By Peter Kreeft. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010, 184 pp., $16.00 paper.

What would Socrates look like if he reincarnated himself as a Muslim and lived in the West in 2010? Though no one could know for sure, he would have to look something like 'Isa, the primary character in Peter Kreeft's, *Between Allah and Jesus: What Christians Can Learn from Muslims.* Writing in the Platonic dialogical style for which he has become famous, Kreeft presents a series of discussions between 'Isa, an articulate, orthodox-though-slightly-Westernized Muslim; Evan, a conservative, evangelical Christian; Libby, a left-leaning Christian; and a handful of articulate professors and priests on the campus of a university in the northeast. Throughout the book we follow 'Isa as he queries, respectfully but ruthlessly, Christians and Westerners on topics pertaining to life, morality, and religion.

Kreeft admits he stacks the deck in 'Isa's favor. 'Isa ben Adam (whose name means "Jesus, the Son of Adam" in Arabic) has a keen mind and sharp wit, and he skillfully exposes the inconsistencies of both his conservative and liberal friends. He disabuses them of their misconceptions of Islam, showing them how Islam embodies many of the very things orthodox Christianity holds most dear. Along the way, 'Isa learns a few things himself about the nature of true Christianity and is confronted with his own misconceptions about the gospel.

For those looking for a robust apologetic response to Islam, this book will disappoint. But that is not why Kreeft wrote the book. As the subtitle indicates, the burden of this book is to help Christians see what they can learn from Muslims. This is not to say that Kreeft does not engage in the occasional polemic against Islam. There are some very pointed defenses of the Trinity, the logic of the cross, the advantages of grace over the law, and Gospel paradoxes such as God's power shown in weakness. These are fresh and penetrating, even for those well versed in Christian apologetics. Kreeft's primary purpose, however, is to help Christians understand Muslims. His goal in this is threefold: (1) he wants to show Christians that there is much more commonality between Muslims and Christians than most Christians realize (much more commonality, in his view, than there is difference!); (2) he wants Christians properly to understand Muslims so that when they present the gospel to Muslims they can show them that the gospel upholds many of the things most cherished by Islam; and (3) he wants Christians to learn from and be sharpened in their own faith by observing the practices of another faith community.

In the introductory chapter, Kreeft lists four

things he believes Westerners should learn from Muslims (after, I must note, giving the reader a list of twelve things they should *not* learn from Muslims):

> (1) Faithfulness in prayer, fasting and almsgiving
> (2) The sacredness of family and children and hospitality
> (3) The absoluteness of moral laws and of the demand to be just and charitable
> (4) The absoluteness of God and the need for absolute submission, surrender, and obedience ("islam") to him.

Kreeft's hope is that through greater understanding and appreciation, Christians and Muslims can also work together to see God's peace reign on earth. In the last chapter, a wise Catholic "mother" explains to Libby and 'Isa: "I don't know all the pieces to this puzzle, but I know one very big piece for sure: the more we soften our hearts to the one God we all say we believe in, the closer we'll get to understanding each other. He's only one God, and he's big on peace and harmony. So the more we submit to the Conductor's baton, the more we'll start to play in harmony, because that's the theme of the music he's conducting" (181).

To those ends, anywhere Kreeft can give Muslims the benefit of the doubt (for example, about war, morality, freedom of speech, the equality of women, etc.), he does so. Some readers will think he is entirely too gracious, but his point is understanding and sharpening, not debate.

The real "enemy" in Kreeft's book is the wimpy, weak-minded secular humanism that dominates today's Western college campuses. More often than not, 'Isa teams up with Evan (the conservative Christian) and one of several Catholic authorities (professors, priests, etc.) against Libby, the liberal. Kreeft uses 'Isa's Islam to confront the morally-lax, logically-muddled relativism of Western culture.

The best chapter in the book, I believe, is chapter fourteen, "On Jihad and Enemies." In this chapter, Kreeft contends that *jihad,* properly understood, is more an inner struggle for righteousness and truth than it is a military conflagration. Christians must learn from Muslims, Kreeft says, that truth is important and worth "fighting" for in their culture (and, by fighting, he means "contend," not "take up arms"). Kreeft shows how relativism, unchecked, ultimately will devolve into a game of power. Fr. Heerema, a Catholic professor, says to Libby, "But if we lose faith in *the* truth, what do we have left? Only 'my' truth and 'your' truth. And then you get a power struggle instead of a truth struggle because there's no longer any common playing field, no objective truth that all of us can measure ourselves against. Why argue if there's no real truth? So then the spiritual struggle for truth turns into the physical struggle for power. The inner *jihad* turns into the outer *jihad*. You start using swords instead of pens" (169).

I disagree that *jihad* in the Qur'an is primarily an "inner struggle." *Jihad* in the Qur'an and hadith (the authorized collection of Mohammad's sayings) primarily refers to violent warfare, though it is occasionally used as a metaphor for the believer's inner struggle. That having been said, Kreeft's use of *jihad* is wonderfully prophetic for a Western culture awash in the weak-mindedness of relativism, and some of his most poignant use of logic anywhere in the book.

Though I enjoyed reading this book immensely, I found two very significant omissions from it.

The first is that Kreeft gives no clear call for Muslims to repent and believe the gospel, and no clear mandate for Christians to present Jesus to Muslims as God's only way of salvation. This is not to say that Kreeft equates Islam and Christianity. In fact, in several places he shows that Christianity and Islam say quite opposite things and contends that Christianity is right and Islam is wrong. For example, Kreeft notes that Jesus either is the Son of God who died on a cross for our sins or he wasn't and didn't; in this case, Mohammad either corrected apostolic teaching or he didn't. Both alternatives can't be right. But Kreeft never goes beyond that to make clear that Muslims, if

they are to be saved and give proper glory to God, must repent and believe the gospel, or that it is the Christian's duty to work to that end for them.

Those familiar with Kreeft will likely not find that surprising, for in several of his previous works Kreeft openly allows for the possibility that sincere Muslims will make it into heaven as "anonymous Christians" (i.e., non-Christians who had Christian faith in God though they did not call God by the right names), much like the worshipper of Tash who makes it into heaven in the last volume of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia.* (In Lewis's account, Aslan—the lion who represents Jesus—tells the follower of Tash that in worshipping Tash sincerely he was actually worshipping Aslan, even though he didn't know it at the time.) Kreeft is a committed Roman Catholic, and in numerous places has expressed his appreciation for Vatican II, which allowed for the possibility that people from other religions might still be saved by Christ even though they never knew him by that name.

Unfortunately, this omission undercuts the apostolic, missionary spirit of the New Testament. Kreeft's book lacks the urgency of Paul: "How can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14-15). One does not leave this book with a burning zeal to see Muslims repent and put faith in Jesus.

The second omission is that Kreeft never distinguishes "religion" from the "gospel." As I noted above, Islam is more often than not presented as the ally of Christianity against secular humanism. This is all well and good, but the gospel confronts not only secular humanism, it also confronts religion. It was not just the "secular" Romans that crucified Jesus; it was the religious Jews. In fact, if anything, religious people were more the enemies of Jesus in the New Testament than were the secularists! The secular man has too low a view of God and does not submit to his rule; but the religious man has too high a view of himself and does not throw himself on God's mercy. Jesus' fiercest opposition came from those zealous in religion who trusted in themselves and boasted in their own righteousness.

This is certainly not to imply that Jesus did not confront secular humanism, only that any treatment of Christianity that does not take seriously the distinction between works-righteousness and justification by grace through faith alone is woefully incomplete. Islam is, in every way, a religion of works-righteousness. Though Muslims pay lip service to the merciful nature of God, at the end of the day each man and woman stands or falls according to his own righteousness. Every Muslim I've ever known is familiar with the image of believers having to walk a tightrope over hell on the last day, carrying the load of his sins on his back. Those with a greater load of sins are more likely to fall into hell.

Islam provides no salvation for sinners—certainly no salvation entirely at God's expense. Islam offers no "covenant relationship" whereby God unites himself inexorably to believers and assures them of his love. In fact, Muslims find Christian beliefs about God on that regard not only objectionable but illogical and even blasphemous, and the Qur'an flatly rejects them.

Furthermore, Mohammad cannot be compared to Moses, except in the narrowest of senses. Moses' law prepared the people of Israel for Christ in that it (a) prefigured Christ through ceremonial rites and given promises and (b) was given in the context of the covenant of grace. Moses' law flowed out of the assurance of God's promises (Exod 19:4-6; 20:1-2), not toward them. Islamic laws are exactly the opposite. The Muslim obeys God in order to be accepted by him, and not because he has been accepted by him. Christian obedience flows from security; Muslim obedience flows toward it. Unfortunately, Kreeft never makes this monumental distinction clear.

On this account, it is also interesting to me that Kreeft rarely extends the same "benefit of the doubt" to secular humanists that he extends to Muslims. He occasionally extols a virtue of

secular humanists, though not nearly to the extent he does to Muslims. I can only suppose that he does that because Muslims *deserve* the benefit of the doubt—after all, they believe in God, and secular humanists do not—because, of course, deep down they don't. Evidently, for Kreeft the dividing line is between those who are fervent in religion and those who aren't—whereas Jesus seems to have placed that line between the gospel and everything else.

Those two significant weaknesses aside, this book is a must read for those who want to understand and reach Muslims for Jesus. The book is irenic, poignant, and truly a delight. It conveys academic depth with pleasure-reading readability. Kreeft's genius is taking complex topics laden with nuance and unpacking them naturally in the kind of conversation you might overhear at a coffee shop.

After you read this book, you'll understand the angst of that Muslim with whom you work or go to school, the one who always seems to be trying to defend Islam. Though I have also written on how to understand Muslims (*Breaking the Islam Code: Understanding the Soul Questions of Every Muslim*), I found myself deeply enriched by this book and captivated throughout. It made me love Muslims, as individuals, more, and helped me see places God has prepared them to hear and understand Jesus' revolutionary gospel.

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The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom. By Mark Durie. Melbourne: Deror, 2010, 288 pp., $23.95.

According to Osama Bin Ladin, "There are only three choices in Islam: either willing submission; or payment of the *jizya*, through physical though not spiritual, submission to the authority of Islam; or the sword" (230). In other words, conversion, subjugation (through special taxation), or annihilation.

Pastor-scholar Mark Durie focuses on Islamic subjugation in this book. (In most lists, this comes third, not second; hence the book's title.) He's well-qualified by his work on the Muslim Acehnese people of northern Sumatra, which earned him a Ph.D. from the Australian National University, a Harkness Research Fellowship for study at MIT, UCLA, and Stanford, appointment at the University of Melbourne, and election as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities. (In the late 1990s, he moved from academia to the ministry, in which he now serves as an Anglican vicar in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield.)

Lest one imagine that Bin Ladin's three-part standard is the product of extremist fantasy, Durie demonstrates that it is classic Islam. To do so, he cites, for instance, (1) the Qur'an at Sura 9:29, which stipulates that tribute be paid by conquered peoples (123); (2) the Sunna (the example and teaching of Mohammed) in *The Book of Jihad and Expedition*, where Mohammed lays out three options for non-believers (120); Ibn Hisham's ninth century redaction of Ibn Ishaq's eighth century *Life of Mohammed*, which describes the prophet's dealings with conquered Jewish farmers at Khaybar (122); and (4) Al-Jazeera's coverage of a *fatwa* instructing Algerian Al-Qaeda to impose the *jizya* on Christians there (193).

Non-believers who submit to Muslim rule are called *dhimmis*, from *dhimma* (*"pact of liability"*), derived from *dhamma* (*"to blame or censure"*) (123). The premise is that these non-Muslims are the enemy, allowed to exist only on the condition that they accept demeaning and debilitating strictures. When the *dhimma* collapses because rulers find the non-Muslim populace too "uppity," *jihad* resumes—thus the massacre of 3,000 Jews in Grenada in 1066, of 5,000 Christians in Damascus in 1860, and the Armenian genocide in Turkey before and during WWI (157-59).

In the past, the *jizya* has amounted to as much as three month's wages (168), and has proven to

be an enormous source of income for Muslim rulers. Adding insult to injury for over a millennium, a "ritual of humiliation" often accompanied this annual collection. Typically, the official struck the back of the payer's neck with his fist, representing potential decapitation for those "being permitted to wear their heads that year" (127, 131). Sometimes authorities dragged the "infidel" to the table by a rope around his neck, shook him, pulled his beard, and then cast him aside in the dust once the payment was made (135). And, again, this is not purely ancient history; as late as the mid-twentieth century, such protocols were in effect in portions of Yemen, Iran, and Afghanistan (139).

Over the centuries, dhimmitude has extended well beyond the *jizya*—to strictures on marriage, church repair, the wearing of crosses, travel, and the holding of public office. Dhimmis have had to build smaller homes and then quarter Muslim troops in them, ride donkeys side-saddle, surrender their seats, move out of the way on streets and sidewalks, and wear special neck rings and bells for identification. They have been radically disadvantaged in court and often consigned to "humiliating professions, such as cleaning sewers, removing dead animals, and salting the heads of executed criminals" (143-46). In nineteenth century Egypt, school children were taught how to curse *dhimmis* (152). And the Nazis were not original in designing special patches for Jews to wear; Muslims had already implemented this policy, sometimes using pictures of monkeys for Jews and pigs for Christians (146), imagery taken from the Qur'an, as in 5:60.

Durie grants that maximum dhimmitude is not, at present, the official policy of any predominantly-Muslim nation, for history has not been kind to unbridled Islam; restoration of an overweening caliphate is only a Muslim dream. But gradations are everywhere to be found where elements of *sharia* (Qur'an-based) law are entrenched or ascendant—as in Pakistan, where the children of Muslim women and non-Muslim men are counted illegitimate (196); in Malaysia, where conversion from Islam must get court approval (197); in Egypt, where Christians are barred from Arabic studies in public universities because the Qur'an is part of the curriculum (200); and in Gaza, where church bells have fallen silent (210). And, sad to say, a form of dhimmitude has fallen on the West, as, for instance, publishers and politicians have succumbed to Muslim intimidation, offering silence, enforcing speech codes (216, 219), and even paying a form of "protection money" (213).

In exposing dhimmitude, Durie has his work cut out for him. He has to contend with the varied forms of *taqiyah* (sanctioned, strategic deception to protect or advance the cause of Islam), a flurry of myths meant to conceal the abuse (169-71) and romanticize the rule of Muslims in Spain (206), the efforts of academic enablers such as Edward Said (201-02) and a group of dialoguing, Yale theologians (221), the declarations of naïve or craven politicians eager to proclaim Islam a magnificent "religion of peace" (211-13), the testimony of "dhimmi clergy" hoping to ingratiate themselves to their Muslim overseers (203-05), and the assurances or silence of *dhimmis* suffering from "battered-wife" or "Stockholm" syndrome (184, 214).

Nevertheless, he makes his case eloquently, and with grace, as he laments the way in which Muslim cultures have injured themselves by suppressing the contribution of non-Muslims (and, of course, Muslim women). His basic introduction to Mohammed and Islam, the first half of the book, is unblinking and worth alone the price of the book. Above all, one could want no better commentary on the splendor of the Bible's instructions concerning "non-believers": "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34 NIV).

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A Reader's Hebrew and Greek Bible. By A. Philip Brown II, Bryan W. Smith, Richard J. Goodrich, and Albert L. Lukaszewski. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010, 2,256 pp., $74.99 leather.

In 1524, Martin Luther avowed, "We will not long preserve the gospel without the languages!" This conviction stresses the importance of a helpful tool like *RHGB*. Targeted toward those who have a limited Hebrew and Greek vocabulary but who are convinced in the need to maintain use of the biblical languages in devotions and in preaching and teaching, this tool seeks to enable more time in reading and understanding without the hassle of looking up every other word or of staring at a computer screen.

The volume helpfully combines an updated and corrected version of *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* (2008) with *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (2nd ed., 2003, 2007). The size is comparable to a large study Bible but provides very little room for note taking (half-inch margins). The leather cover is tagged "European," which is stiffer than the "Italian Duo-tone" of the previous volumes. The fonts are easily readable, and the weight of the paper is thick enough to allow very little "bleed" from the opposite side.

The OT portion was put together by Brown and Smith and employs the Hebrew text from the Westminster Leningrad Codex 4.10 (updated from version 4.4 in the previous four printings). This text is found in software like Bible Works and Accordance and is identical in all but forty-two known instances to the critical text of *BHS* and *BHQ*. (The differences are all listed in an appendix and highlighted in the text by a raised black circle.) The formatting follows the standard critical editions in applying open and closed paragraphs and in distinguishing prose and poetry. No space at all is given to text critical matters, but Kethib-Qere distinctions are noted. The key contribution of this volume is the meaning approximations or "glosses" that are footnoted for every Hebrew word (except proper nouns) occurring less than 100 times (i.e., approximately all words not covered in a first-year Hebrew course); a glossary at the end of the TaNaK overviews all words used 100 times or more.

The glosses themselves are principally drawn from *HALOT* and BDB in consultation with the context and other standard lexicons. As for proper nouns, those occurring less than 100 times are screened in gray, whereas those showing up more than 100 times are not marked in any way. While the gray is light, this implementation is helpful, for valuable moments can easily be wasted trying to parse a form that is actually a proper name! After an assessment of Brown's own review of the 2008 edition of *RHB*—a review that Brown posted on his Web site (http://exegeticalthoughts.blogspot.com/2008/01/readers-hebrew-bible-review-by-its.html)—my own examination found every one of his catalogued errors corrected in this new edition. (One type-setting mistake led to 322 errors in Genesis alone!)

For the NT portion, Goodrich and Lukaszewski utilized the eclectic text established under the guidance of The Committee for Bible Translation. This text, which served as the base for the TNIV, differs from the standard UBS text at 285 places, but an apparatus at the bottom of the page catalogs variants from UBS4/NA27, along with providing source citations for the OT and Apocryphal quotations. Because the NT is considerably smaller than the OT, the volume footnotes glosses for every word occurring less than thirty times, including in a glossary all words used thirty times or more. Most glosses are taken from Trenchard's *Vocabulary Guide* in consultation with context and the major Greek lexicons. Compared to the Hebrew portion, the Greek font appears a little light, but it is still very legible. The regular Greek font is continued here from the 2007 edition, which stands in contrast to the italics format of the 2003 edition.

Jesus stressed that every iota and dot in the biblical text bears lasting significance (Matt 5:18). As such, this combined Hebrew and Greek Bible

in its particular format is most welcome, for it provides in one volume the whole counsel of God and should help enable a new generation of men and women to maintain the biblical languages with greater ease, convenience, and joy. While in no way replacing the need for critical editions or for rigorous lexical study, it does remove the hindrance of unknown vocabulary, thus allowing for more time to read the text, wrestle with its message, and encounter God through it. This task can provide the necessary foundation for right living and accurate proclamation in this needy world (Ezra 7:10).

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Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study. By James Leo Garrett, Jr. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009, xviii + 744 pp., $55.00.

John Albert Broadus, calling for the advancement of Baptist theological distinctives in a nineteenth century address, told the story of a United States senator visiting with a friend who casually remarked that he was a Baptist. Curious, the senator asked, "By the way, what kind of Baptists are the Paedobaptists?"

Broadus acknowledged that this account was an exception, even in his day, "but it exemplif[ies] what is really a widespread and very great ignorance as to Baptists." If such was the case in 1881, how much more so at the start of Baptists' fifth century, an era in which the rejection of theological heritage is increasingly the norm and few realize that Baptist theology has more to do historically with biblical fidelity than it does with the latest denominational stereotype. Indeed, the aim of reasserting Baptist doctrine for correcting ignorance is a fitting description of James Leo Garrett, Jr.'s, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study*.

Garrett's six-decade contribution to Baptist theological education is well documented and well known. His methodological approach is a descriptive and even-handed encyclopedic assembly of both primary and secondary sources, providing the reader an opportunity to form his own opinions. Garrett has often been critiqued as many readers fail to glean the author's own opinion on any given issue. While in a broad sense understandable, this critique is not absolute and, even in *Baptist Theology,* is not consistently the case. To learn what Garrett believes, one must (1) adapt to Garrett's style of restrained subtlety and (2) read each and every footnote. Consequently, this review, in part, will seek to underscore some of the unique areas where Garrett makes his views known, while summarizing how Garrett's work helps to correct the lack of Baptist theological understanding.

The volume's subtitle recognizes the quadricentennial (1609-2009) existence of Baptists. However, all centuries are not treated equally. Within thirteen chapters of varying lengths, five address the first two centuries, while eight focus on the last two centuries with a predominant emphasis on the twentieth century. The word "study" is central to Garrett's thesis, for he describes the volume as a "study of the doctrinal beliefs of the people called Baptists" and thereby "attempts to treat responsibly each of the four centuries and the Baptists of the world" (xxv).

Garrett begins with an overview of the roots of Baptist beliefs influenced by the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines of the early Councils and Creeds. He then answers the revealing question, "Are Baptists Protestants?" in the affirmative, favoring the key doctrines of the Magisterial Reformers and the Anabaptist kinship approach for any ecclesiological connection between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Garrett's treatment and categorization of the "soundly biblical" Anabaptists in Switzerland and South Germany are especially helpful when these are today often overlooked or deemphasized.

For Garrett's study of Baptists' first and second centuries, he examines the theology of Gen-

eral and Particular Baptists in England and of early Baptists in America. Garrett makes a point to disclaim the open membership view of John Bunyan (67, n. 83), provides a correction that the first Baptist to write a complete systematic theology was Thomas Grantham not John Gill (94, n. 249), and reclassifies Gill as either a three-fifths or four-fifths Hyper-Calvinist (100). Garrett also shows the intentional role church discipline played among Philadelphia and Charleston Baptists (118). While Garrett's work is commendably thorough, *Baptist Theology* would have been strengthened by one or two chapters devoted to this understudied era of formative doctrinal advancement—perhaps in lieu of some of the later chapters that parse the twentieth century.

Baptists' third century provides Garrett the opportunity to explore the role and development of confessions of faith among Baptists as well as their differing views of soteriology as expressed in Calvinism and Arminianism. Garrett reminds readers that in addition to John Eliot and David Brainerd, William Carey was first influenced by Robert Hall, Jr.'s, *Help to Zion's Travellers* (168). Garrett's balanced and extensive treatment of nineteenth century Landmarkism functions as a readable clarification not only of the negative excesses of the movement but also of some of the misread characters, such as J. M. Pendleton.

Garrett's study of Baptists' fourth century appears in several chapters under a variety of emphases including biblical theologians, Southern Baptist theologians, global Baptist theologians, and new theologians. For all of Garrett's deftness at navigating theological nuance amid infinitesimal detail, at times in this era his description fails to deliver. For example, when speaking of Frank Stagg's denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, Garrett concludes only that Stagg "mistakenly interpreted" and "mistakenly thought" (371). Garrett tracks the development of theology across all the centuries and notes that with the work of Dale Moody, "Southern Baptist theology came to the espousal of all five tenets of original Arminianism" (382), and that several Southern Baptist theologians increasingly rejected the penal substitution view of the atonement. Garrett's overview of the "Inerrancy Controversy" in the Southern Baptist Convention is fascinating to read, and as with all items of recent historical occurrence, the reader will no doubt wish Garrett had provided more. Two puzzling items include the four-page treatment of Walter Shurden and his freedom motif of Baptist identity (499-502) located in the middle of the controversy survey and the failure to mention the far more influential work of Russ Bush and Tom Nettles (which does appear in a section on Nettles in a later chapter; Russ Bush, as a Baptist theologian, receives no treatment). Also, in a work this exhaustive one might expect to find interaction with the theological works of Paige Patterson and the leadership role of Cecil Sherman or at least a mention of their 1981 debate.

As a member of the first generation who has benefited from the return of the Southern Baptist Convention to conservative theology, this reviewer was disappointed to find that more was not presented regarding the restoration of theological integrity in the SBC seminaries and agencies. Furthermore, Garrett's survey of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) fails to mention the widespread endorsement and adoption of the capstone confession of the Inerrancy Controversy by all SBC agencies and many state conventions and churches.

Also, in Garrett's treatment of global Baptists, the absence of a survey of the work of the Baptist World Alliance is notable. Garrett cites the lack of historical evidence to substantiate the rising interest in baptismal sacramentalism (543). He traces the development and influence of dispensationalism but concludes that it is "less destructive to the Baptists" than the modernist movement (580). Perhaps the volume's greatest omission is the lack of attention paid to the theological contribution of James Leo Garrett, Jr. While one would not expect Garrett to include himself in a book he has written, the publisher could have employed an outside author like the ones used in writing the sections

on Brazil and South Korea.

Garrett concludes the volume with a statement of uncertainty about the future, asking whether Baptists today "hold to and clearly affirm and practice their distinctives" in an era where Baptist ecclesiology has "come into a state of comparative neglect or assumed irrelevance" (725-26). Such describes the state of Baptists at the start of their fifth century. However, with the arrival of a work like *Baptist Theology*, professors, pastors, missionaries, and students now have a tool to combat what Broadus termed a "very great ignorance as to Baptists." May this volume's vastness and clarity serve to provide a rising generation with a working knowledge and regular discourse of the history of Baptist thought.

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From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology. By T. Desmond Alexander. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009, 208 pp., $19.99 paper.

T. Desmond Alexander is well known to those interested in biblical theology. Among his publications are key books on the Messiah in the OT (*The Servant King*) and a theological introduction to the Pentateuch (*From Paradise to the Promised Land*), along with significant essays on the genealogies, on royal ideology, and on the seed theme in Genesis. Together with Brian Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, he edited the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. The book under review here is the best brief survey of biblical theology to be found anywhere. In 200 pages Alexander instructively presents the major themes in and contours of the Bible's plot.

He sets out to probe God's revelation of the world's meta-story in the Bible for answers to two questions: why does the earth exist and what is the purpose of human life? Alexander shows that the earth is God's cosmic temple, and humanity's purpose is to rule in God's stead and minister in his temple. We are priest-kings in a cosmic temple.

Alexander first examines the gardens that frame the Bible's big story in the matching portraits of Genesis 1–3 and Revelation 21–22. He contends, with Beale and others, that the earth was designed as a divine residence, and that the tabernacle and temple are literally "microcosms"—depictions of the universe in miniature. As such the tabernacle and temple are symbols of what the world is to be, matching the depiction of the new Jerusalem as a temple-city in Revelation 21–22 and the Garden of Eden as a divine sanctuary in Genesis 2–3. Adam's role, and Israel's, was to broaden the boundaries of the dwelling place of God, and that task has been given to the church, which is now God's temple where the Spirit dwells. Everyone interested in understanding the Bible will want to study the compelling evidence presented for these concepts.

Alexander then explores the role of Adam and Eve as God's viceroys, priest-kings whose duty it was to "extend God's temple and kingdom throughout the earth" (78). Instead they betrayed God, sided with his enemy, forfeited their priestly status, and gave the serpent control over the earth. God sets up the theocracy of Israel and later the kingdom of God in the church to reestablish his sovereignty in the world. From Abraham and Melchizedek through the nation of Israel on to Jesus, Alexander traces the depiction of God's priest-king. The exodus from Egypt is a picture of rescue from the consequences of sin and the establishment of God's rule and presence, which amounts to a transfer of God's people from one kingdom to another. Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations for a priest-king, and he accomplishes a new and greater exodus.

This new exodus involves the defeat of the ancient serpent, cursed in Gen 3:15. The conquest is accomplished by the slaying of the new Pass-

over Lamb, Jesus, who was then raised from the dead. He crushed the serpent's head, accomplishing atonement, purification, and sanctification. God's people are set right before him (justified), cleansed of their sin (purified), and set apart for him (sanctified). We look forward to the harmonious relationships between creatures and creation in the glorious eschatological future promised in the Bible. This hope, based on our understanding of the plot and purpose inherent in the Bible's big story, guards us against the new epidemic of "affluenza," which rests like a spell cast by the sorceress-harlot Babylon on Western society.

This is a remarkable book. In short compass Alexander is wide-ranging and thorough, detailed and stimulating. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* is a book on biblical theology that will benefit pastors and students, and it deserves a wide reading in the academy as well, especially for the ways it balances prevailing atomistic approaches with a big picture overview. The smaller episodes and characters within the big story cannot be understood apart from whole, and I know of no better brief sketch of the whole picture than this one.

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John Knox: An Introduction to His Life and Works. By Richard G. Kyle and Dale W. Johnson. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009, xii + 208 pp., $24.00 paper.

This new study of John Knox (1514-72) and his published works is a passionate and convincing response to revisionist historians who would recount the history of the Scottish Reformation with almost nary a mention of the Scottish Reformer (196-97). Though at times a man of contradictions, as Kyle and Johnson readily admit, Knox must be seen as the key figure behind the Scottish Reformation. And while a man of action, the authors clearly demonstrate the vital importance of ideas to Knox's campaign of reform (21).

Central to Knox's thought and the program of reform was Deut 12:32—"All that the Lord thy God commands thee to do, that do thou to the Lord thy God: add nothing to it; diminish nothing from it!"—and his determination to measure all religious thought and practice by this principle (27). Tied to this text was also a strong conception of divine immutability that ruled the entirety of his thinking (28). Armed with such a text and such a theological perspective, Knox was unsparing in his criticism of the mass—the centerpiece of medieval Roman Catholic worship—as an act of idolatry (32-33, 47-50). And, in Knox's opinion, where a state supported such idolatry, biblical Christians had a right to actively resist state authorities, engage in armed revolt, and even slay idolatrous monarchs (35-39). The religious tumult of the seventeenth century in the British Isles certainly has some roots in Knox's political philosophy.

Knox was deeply influenced by John Calvin (22-23), but he clashed with the Genevan Reformer when he published his *The First Trumpet Blast Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* secretly in Geneva during the spring of 1558 (96-101). Although Calvin did not agree with Knox in his attitude towards female rulers, due to the fact that the work came out in Geneva, Calvin's name was linked to it and in one instance, that of Elizabeth I of England, Calvin's attempts to apologize for the work came to nought—and Elizabeth, though theologically Reformed, refused to trust the Frenchman. Knox, conscious of the problems he had caused Calvin, admitted to him on one occasion, "I am a continual trouble to you" (167-68). Part of the problem of this work, as well as some of Knox's other pieces, was the vehemence of their language (56). On one occasion, for example, he called Stephen Gardiner, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Winchester and cousin to Queen Mary I of England, a "dissembling hypocrite," "son of Satan . . . brother to Cain, and fellow to

Judas the traitor" (83). Knox could give as good to Protestants as well. William Cecil, Elizabeth I's Protestant Secretary of State, was bluntly told by the Scottish Reformer, "You are worthy of hell" (166-67). Though it needs to be admitted that vehemence seems to have been Knox's familiar ambience, for those he loved he loved with deep passion (56).

A final chapter very helpfully outlines how Knoxian scholarship has treated the Reformer since Victorian times (182-97). It is a potent reminder that written history is always conditioned by the clime and time of the historian and his subjectivity. All in all this is an excellent and balanced introduction to Knox and his books.

In a second printing two errors need correcting: Buckinghamshire is not a town (81), and the first edition of Calvin's *Institutes* appeared in 1536, not 1530 (125).

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From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church. Revised and expanded edition. By Harry L. Reeder, III with David Swavely. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008, 234 pp., $12.99 paper.

With most of the churches in North America in plateau or decline, this book is a timely one, written by the veteran pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL. *From Embers to a Flame* offers guidance from a shepherd whose ministry reflects his effectiveness as a revitalizing leader.

Paul's writings to Timothy serve as the primary biblical basis for Reeder's revitalization strategy, summarized simply as *remember* the past, *repent* from sin, and *recover* the first things. The first "things" begin with the gospel and include grace, prayer, and the Word. The church that longs for revitalization is amazed by grace, commits itself to prayer, and preaches the good news of salvation.

The strengths of this book are numerous. First, Reeder rightly emphasizes the significance of church leaders, while also understanding that God alone revitalizes the church. Preachers will be especially challenged by his description of the "man preaching" based on 2 Tim 4:1-5. Leaders are to educate believers, embody gospel truth, empower others to serve, and evaluate the work of leaders trained. Moreover, revitalization demands that pastoral leaders model repentance by turning from their own sin.

Second, Reeder emphasizes the task of evangelism, even challenging those churches that focus on growing deeper in reaction to the "superficiality of the day" (30). Noting that churches that are "a mile wide and an inch deep" are problematic, he also takes issue with churches that are "a mile deep and an inch wide" at the expense of evangelizing the lost. True believers will seek the lost, says Reeder, but evangelism must still be intentional. In fact, his description of intentional evangelistic approaches is one of the strongest components of this work.

Third, this book is principle driven, but it does not ignore the practical. Indeed, this work is at times surprisingly practical given Reeder's occasional criticisms of pragmatic church growth. His focus on church health echoes Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* concept. His calls for mission statements, vision statements, and numerical goals are commonly found in other writings. The interested pastor will also find here ideas for celebrating a church's history, suggestions for a leadership development curriculum, a list of leadership principles and practices, and guidelines for starting a small group discipleship ministry. Regrettably, only brief attention is given to the necessity and practice of church discipline—a most important topic in church revitalization.

Additionally, Reeder's interest in military history and sports is evident in illustrations throughout this work. These illustrations not only will

appeal to men, but they also subtly remind the reader that church revitalization is not easy; revitalization will not occur without spiritual warfare and struggle. On the other hand, Reeder writes, "you and Jesus Christ make an invincible team, and evil can never win as long as He is with you" (81).

This book is not, however, without weaknesses. The repetitive use of alliteration reveals the author as first a preacher, but its usage is at times overdone. Statistics and illustrations are sometimes outdated, as is often the case in a revision. An appendix, "Revisiting the Prayer of Jabez," is a balanced discussion of this popular prayer, but its connection to the remainder of the book is a bit forced.

Nevertheless, this book is a worthy read for any church leader who longs for church revitalization. I will utilize it as a supplemental text in future evangelism and church growth classes.

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BibleWorks 8. Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks LLC, 2008, $349.00.

As a New Testament professor, I am regularly asked by my students for advice about what Bible software to obtain. Having thoroughly investigated this question myself, I do not hesitate to recommend *BibleWorks 8* as the best Bible software available. The program is both powerful and accessible. It provides an enormous selection of Bible translations in many languages. More importantly, the program delivers a stellar line-up of original language morphologically-tagged texts (Hebrew Bible, Greek New Testament, Greek Septuagint, Greek Apostolic Fathers, etc.), as well as the best grammatical and lexical tools linked to the primary texts.

When I demonstrate *BibleWorks* in class, students are amazed at how easy it is to navigate the program. For example, when I have the Greek New Testament text up on the screen, I use the mouse to "right click" on a Greek word and immediately pull up every instance of the word in the Septuagint and New Testament. Then, with another click, I open a series of Greek lexicons—all opening at exactly the word I am studying. Then, with another click, I can open a grammatical diagram of the New Testament text we are considering or access Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*.

During the course of the semester, I am usually too busy teaching to learn the many new features that *BibleWorks* programmers continue to add. Thankfully, the base program allows one to coast on autopilot without constantly having to learn a new interface. When I do have time to investigate new features, I am always kicking myself for not having previously taken more time to learn the amazing possibilities of the program. Most recently, I discovered the "classroom tips" section of the *BibleWorks* webpage, which provides ongoing updates on how best to maximize the program's use in the classroom. Even as I am writing this review, I am thinking about how to investigate some of the program's new features in coming weeks.

Previous generations of scholars probably never could have imagined having this many essential Bible language texts and reference materials so easily accessible. Sometimes students tell me they are currently unable to afford *BibleWorks*. In such cases, I recommend that as soon as they enter full-time ministry and receive a resource allowance as part of a church staff that they consider purchasing this unparalleled software program. I cannot recommend it too highly.

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Sin: A History. By Gary A. Anderson. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, xv + 253 pp., $30.00.

In this fascinating and in many ways insightful book, Gary Anderson (Professor of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible at Notre Dame University) explores the remarkable shift that takes place in the conception of sin within Second Temple Judaism, and with it, the New Testament and earliest Christianity. His study started early in his teaching career, when he noticed that the language about sin in the Qumran writing, the *Damascus Covenant*, differed significantly from the Hebrew Scriptures. The predominance of the description of sin as a debt to be repaid caught his attention. The same phenomenon appears in other early Jewish writings, in the rabbinic literature, and, as we all know, in the New Testament: "Forgive us our *debts*, as we forgive our *debtors*" (Mt 6:12). As Anderson's study remarkably demonstrates, the understanding of sin as debt was not, as Aulén claimed, a product of the Latin West, but deeply and thoroughly Jewish.

This metaphor for sin did not arise of itself, of course. It has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures. The first parts of his study trace the development and usage of the economic conception of sin within the Old Testament and beyond. His linguistic insights are generally persuasive and fruitful, especially his judgments on the Hebrew idiom *nāśā' `ăwōn*, which, depending on context, may mean either "to bear sin" or to "bear sin away." It is this early image of sin as a burden that, especially in the rabbinic literature, is displaced by the economic metaphor of debt. Anderson explores the precedents in such passages as Isa 40:2, Lev 26:43, Gen 15:16, and elsewhere. Here one would simply want to note that the roots of the metaphor go historically deeper than Anderson might be ready to concede.

The second part of Anderson's study concludes with brief but useful reflections on rabbinic imagery of God as the giver of "loans" and the accountant of human debt. He quite rightly and easily shows that God appears here not merely as a strict loan officer, but as one who is soft hearted, ready to forget a debt owed. God is both severe and mild, just and merciful. The rabbis in their own way preserve a biblical tension—which, it may be argued, cannot be resolved, except in the event of Christ's cross and resurrection.

Anderson likewise considers early Christian reflection on the atonement in economic terms, taking up Luke 7:36-50 and Col 2:14 as the passages were interpreted by early Syriac fathers. Ephrem's interpretation of the former, according to which the sinful woman won forgiveness by her expression of love, leaves much to be desired in the face of Jesus' own, parabolic interpretation of the event in the text (Luke 7:42-43). Jacob of Serug and Narsai interpret the latter, and the "bond that was against us" in differing ways that have occupied theologians since: Was the "bond" owed to Satan, who then overreached himself with Christ? Or was the "bond" owed to God himself, who was satisfied by Christ's death?

The third and final part of the book takes up two related themes. In his last chapter, Anderson makes a fair appeal for the reconsideration of Anselm's theology of satisfaction, dispelling the common caricature of his position, that Christ was forced by God to make payment on behalf of humanity for the injury to the divine honor. It is an appeal that runs against the grain of modern theology, and yet remains worth hearing.

Prior to that appeal, Anderson considers the virtues of "balancing debts with virtue," particularly the function of "almsgiving" as funding a treasury for oneself in heaven. As he rightly observes, to think of salvation in this way need not ultimately entail a salvation by human works. God can be regarded as having "gamed the system" for grace, rewarding far, far beyond our deeds in covering the debt of our sins with them. But the question then arises as to whether this conception of grace, which is dependent on the tiniest of human contributions, matches the bib-

lical understanding in which a grace that is conditioned by works is no longer grace (Rom 11:6). A condition leaves no room for the justification of the ungodly. It seems questionable to Anderson, along with St. Ephrem before him and now many evangelicals with him, that a "one-time declaration" (of forgiveness) could be sufficient (154). A new "bond" has to be written to repair our corrupt state. But that perspective fails to take into account that the divine declaration is nothing other than the Creator's word of promise in Christ, that "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which is not" (Rom 4:17). Anderson quite rightly observes that the theses that Luther nailed to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517 were well within a "reforming Catholicism" (162-63). It was, however, Luther's discovery of God's word of promise in the following spring that made all the difference, for Luther realized that his salvation—including the repair of his corruption—was taken out of his hands entirely, and placed in Another. In biblical terms, faith is always determined by its object. It makes a world of difference whether faith rests in a divine recompense based on my benevolence toward the poor, or purely and simply upon God's work for me, a poor, miserable sinner. Indeed, it is hard to see how one can truly be benevolent toward those in need, when one's goodness toward them is the means by which one deals with one's own debts before God. My neighbor does not remain my neighbor, but becomes the instrument by which I gain heaven. Derrida's suspicion of gift giving is not without warrant. Only if my salvation is already sure is my hand free to serve my neighbor. These are standard arguments. But they are good ones, and cannot be avoided.

Despite this parting of the way with Anderson's theology, his book remains richly provocative, and calls for further reflection on the biblical understanding of sin as "debt." For this we are all indebted to Professor Anderson.

—Mark A. Seifrid

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Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions. Third edition. By John Piper. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010, 280 pp., $14.99 paper; DVD Set, 2010, $19.79; *DVD Study Guide*, 2010, 107 pp., $9.99 paper.

Since its original publication in 1993, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* has become a classic in missions literature. Author John Piper maintains that making God's glory known should be the highest motivating factor in the Christian life. Piper's passion and vision for ministry is evident throughout each chapter of the book and saturates the whole as the dominant theme. Piper declares,

> My passion is to see people, churches, mission agencies, and social ministries become God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-powered, soul-satisfied, Bible-saturated, missions-mobilizing, soul-winning, and justice-pursuing. The supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all people through Jesus Christ is the central, driving, all-unifying commitment of my life (9).

Piper's emphasis is that glorifying God is manifest in the worship of God and should be the motivating factor of the Christian life. It is from this perspective that he sees the role of missions. He exhorts pastors, church members, and missionaries in the introduction to this third edition to embrace the vision of all the nations worshiping and glorifying God. Piper declares in his foundational argument,

> Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the

> redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. So worship is the fuel and goal of missions (15).

Piper develops his thesis and arguments in a passionate writing style that mirrors his preaching.

The third edition begins with a strongly worded appeal to prosperity preachers in the Global South to beware of teaching false doctrines. Then, Part One consists of three chapters establishing biblically that missions should focus on the supremacy of God through worship, prayer, and suffering. This section is peppered with phrases familiar to loyal Piper listeners such as, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him" (50). In Part Two, he explains the biblical basis of exclusivism, methodically demonstrating that Jesus is the only Savior. He establishes that those who have never heard the gospel are lost and defends the doctrine of a literal, eternal hell. Piper patiently addresses specific arguments to the contrary and is a veritable model for treating proponents of opposing views with Christian courtesy and respect. He introduces the *people groups* concept to enlighten readers who may have assumed that Jesus' instruction in Matthew 28:19 to "make disciples among all nations" referred to geopolitical entities, ultimately emphasizing that Christ has sent us to reach and teach all the people groups and ethnicities of the world. Part Three was a new and welcome addition to the second edition, released in 2003, introducing readers to Jonathan Edwards's perspective on the unity of motives for world missions. Piper draws on Edwards to stress that missions seeks to rescue the perishing and also to glorify God. The final chapter of Part Three is especially relevant for missionaries concerned about regulative and normative principles, simple church, and worship wars. Piper lays to rest many concerns about the forms that church takes around the world, and the places where churches meet, challenging missionaries to rethink their ethnocentric ecclesiastic and liturgical forms when and where the Bible gives freedom.

I highly recommend this book to pastors who want to study the biblical basis of missions without a lot of the hype and rhetoric that sometimes accompanies missionary appeals. John Piper is pastor of preaching and vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he has served for thirty years. He is both a vision caster and a Bible teacher, having written more than forty books, all of which are passionate appeals for believers to glorify God. As such he is a kindred spirit and is able to teach about missions as a pastor to pastors.

I also highly recommend this book to ministers of missions, missions professors, and missionaries. The third edition presents two new components that make this latest Piper release both necessary and practical. The first new component is a much-needed alarm to warn missionaries, missiologists, and the church at large of the great danger of prosperity preachers. In an extended introduction to the third edition, Piper presents new realities regarding world Christianity such as the exponential church growth throughout the Global South in the years since the book's original release. While Piper celebrates this growth, he is painfully aware of a concomitant growth of aberrant doctrine due to the widespread prevalence of prosperity preaching. After recognizing the phenomenal growth in the numbers of Christians and missionaries in the Southern Church, Piper demonstrates that the doctrine held by many is deficient due to false teachers. He strongly appeals to prosperity preachers in twelve biblically based admonitions not to preach a gospel that is marked by the following characteristics (21-31):

> (1) Puts unnecessary obstacles in the way of people getting into heaven.
> (2) Kindles suicidal desires in people.
> (3) Encourages vulnerability to moth and rust.
> (4) Makes good work a means of getting rich.
> (5) Promotes less faith in God's promise and diminishes the glory of God's help.

(6) Contributes to people being choked to death.
(7) Takes the seasoning out of the salt and puts the light under a basket.
(8) Conceals the necessity of suffering the Christian life.
(9) Obscures the God-ordained purposes of suffering in the Christian life.
(10) Ignores the shift from a come-see religion in the Old Testament to a go-tell religion in the New Testament.
(11) Minimizes the sin of making godliness a means of gain.
(12) Obscures the biblical truth that God himself is the greatest treasure.

The second new component of the third edition is a very practical DVD set and *DVD Study Guide* that will undoubtedly help local churches make *Let the Nations Be Glad!* more accessible to their church members, guiding them through the biblical basis for the book's assertions. These two complementary resources promise even greater acceptance and usefulness of the latest edition of the book. The DVD set consists of eight thirty-minute lessons and a *DVD Study Guide* for use in small groups settings. The *DVD Study Guide* requires individual study and preparation for a one-hour weekly class meeting. The accompanying DVDs are to be viewed during the class session with a class facilitator to guide the discussion. A final section in each week's lesson includes participant reflection and application reflecting a desire that they do not just learn the material but apply it for the glory of God among all the nations. As Tom Steller, pastor of leadership development at Bethlehem Baptist Church, states in the Afterword, "The purpose of this book has not been merely to inform you of the supremacy of God in missions. Rather, from start to finish we have sought to invite you to become more personally engaged in the cause of missions with a heartfelt, God-centered passion" (263). As was true with the first two editions of *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, I feel certain that the third edition, both with the unchanging foundational message as well as the new components, will incite the heartfelt, God-centered, missions engaging passion that Piper has sought to encourage and promote.

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Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience. By M. David Sills. Chicago, IL: Moody, 2010, 251 pp., $16.99 paper.

The last half-century has seen a phenomenal increase in the study of Christian missions—its theology, history, strategy, and effectiveness. Even as we rejoice in the ways that God is touching the nations, the rapid growth of missions activity has sometimes led to well intended strategies based more on pragmatism, speed, and urgency than on sound biblical foundations. In *Reaching and Teaching*, missions professor David Sills of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary argues that the church must address the Great Commission in its entirety. Not only must missionaries proclaim the gospel where it has not been heard and received, but they must also follow through by teaching all that Christ commanded (Matt 28:18-20).

Sills supports his argument with solid biblical and missiological research, case studies from the mission field, and input from field practitioners. He confronts contemporary missions strategies that emphasize rapid reproduction ("the need for speed") and extreme pragmatism ("the greater good mentality"). While Sills understands the urgency of evangelism, he also traces difficulties that come when new believers and churches do not have a solid base of biblical and theological teaching. Missions strategies must have a twofold goal: share the gospel and equip future leaders of healthy national churches.

Within the larger issue of teaching new believers and training leaders, Sills deals with three specific matters. First, he contends that theological education is a vital but neglected facet of twenty-first century missions. Both national pastors and missionaries need a solid foundation. A disturbing contemporary trend is the number of missionary church planters who go to the field with no biblical understanding of ecclesiology.

Another difficulty related to teaching believers is orality. Only twenty to thirty percent of the global population is highly literate, but the majority of missionary teaching and materials is designed for that minority. Throughout most of the world, orality is a cultural issue rather than an educational one; that is, many oral cultures have no desire to become literate. Missionaries must develop and utilize methodologies that work within cultural orality. As Sills contends, "you cannot reach and teach people where you wish they were, only where they actually are" (190).

Finally, in one of the most valuable chapters of the book, Sills deals with the issue of contextualization. In recent years, some North American pastors have criticized the notion of contextualization, but Sills develops a clear definition of the term that maintains a high regard for both Scripture and culture. He presents a fourfold method (based on that of Paul Hiebert) for presenting a culturally relevant understanding of the gospel while avoiding syncretism.

Reaching and Teaching is an important contribution to current missiological literature. Sills served as a missionary and educator in South America, and the book reflects that experience. The work would benefit, however, from a broader range of examples and cases from some regions. Academics will miss fuller information on sources and background. Sills has nonetheless provided an excellent corrective to well intentioned but overzealous missionary strategies that address only part of the Great Commission command to reach *and* teach.

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