

Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation

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WHILE RECENTLY ENGAGED in some careful consideration of my own sanctification, or ongoing maturity in the Christian faith, I turned

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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

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 critically²⁵ 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,’ ecclesially 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 ecclesially 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

¹All Bible references are from the English Standard Version.

²In 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 regenerated; in the case of Christ, he was generated.

³Not 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.

⁵As 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*).

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

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹One 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.

¹⁰For 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.

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

¹²John 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 Sairsky, "What is Theological Interpretation?," *IJST*, 202.

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

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

¹⁵Of 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).

¹⁶Some 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).

¹⁷Of 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.

¹⁸Again, 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.

¹⁹As 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.

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

²¹Stephen 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.).

²²Erik 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.

²³Indeed, 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.

²⁴Treier, *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.

²⁵Francis 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.

²⁶Vanhooser, “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, Vanhooser, Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 10.

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

²⁸Watson, “Authors, Readers, Hermeneutics,” 119.

²⁹Fowl, “Introduction,” xvi.

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

³¹An 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.

³²Depending 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.

³³Indeed, 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.

³⁴David 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.

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

³⁶Many 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.

³⁷Reno, "Series Preface," 16.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 21. Of course, Vanhoozer's affirmation gives a nod to Rudolph 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.

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

⁴¹Webster, "Editorial," *IJST*, 116.

⁴²Green, *Seized by Truth*, 61.