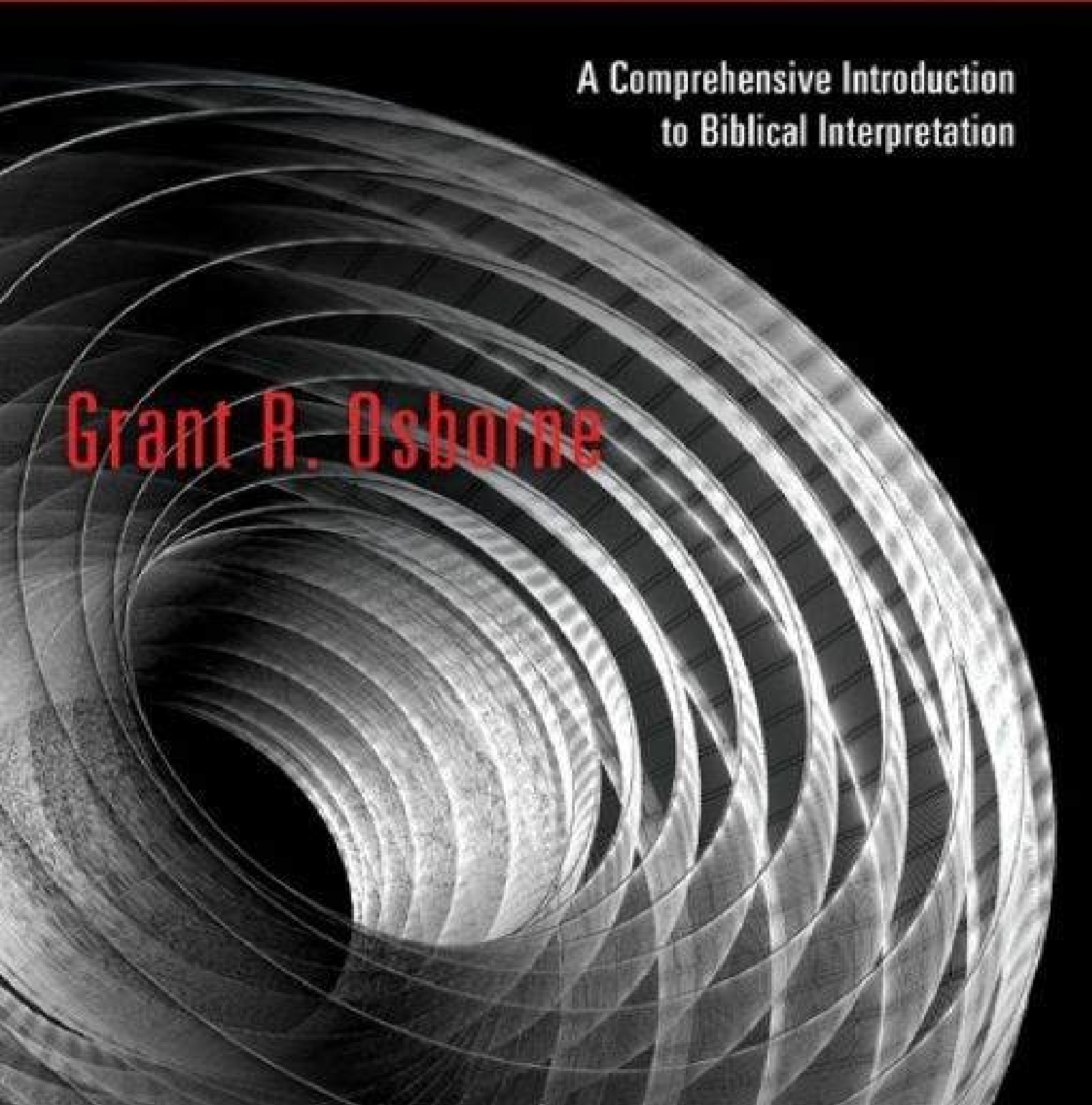
Revised and Expanded

THE HERMENEUTICAL SPIRAL

A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation



Grant R. Osborne

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To Amber and Susanne
Our gift from God
Our reward from him
(Psalm 127:3)

Preface to the Second Edition

There is no greater privilege or joy than studying the Word of God. When we realize that God loved us enough not only to send his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, but also cared enough for us to give us his revealed truths to challenge and guide our lives, we are amazed at how little we deserve and yet how much he has done for us! There is only one set of final truths in this world, not mathematics or science (for all physical laws are invalid in a quasar or a black hole), but only the Word of God. In this the eternal principles intended to direct us through this life are truly found. Therefore it is both a privilege and a responsibility to study God's Word as carefully as possible. To fail as a Christian to study God's inspired revelation is tantamount to refusing to know the laws of the country we live in and breaking those laws with impunity. It is a failure that can and will have catastrophic results, for it means we do not care about the rules we have promised to obey by virtue of being citizens of our country—whether that be the USA or Britain or heaven (cf. Phil 3:21).

The purpose of this volume is to provide a comprehensive overview of the hermeneutical principles for reading any book, but in particular for studying and understanding the Bible, God's Word. The metaphor I like to pursue is that of cooking—I want to teach my students how to prepare a gourmet meal in the Word so that they may provide solid food for those committed to their care (cf. Heb 5:14). The one thing of which I am certain is that Christians want to be fed, and my goal is to enable pastors and teachers in the churches to know how to discover these precious biblical truths and then turn them into sermons and Bible studies for the flock God has given them.

I have been very thrilled and gratified as to how the Lord has used the first edition of *The Hermeneutical Spiral* over these last fifteen years. It is now time to update that edition and add some material that has arisen during that period of time. Any student is always amazed at how much appears in print every year. We are living in the greatest explosion of knowledge in all of history. Anyone with a computer knows that. In biblical and theological studies we have virtually doubled or even tripled our knowledge base in the last couple of decades. Never have so many commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias and articles been published as in recent years. Just in updating this book to account for the last fifteen years of scholarship, I added over three hundred entries to the bibliography.

Let me describe what has been added to this new edition. First, there are two

brand new chapters covering material I felt should be in the book: (1) “Interpreting the Law” (chap. 6) considers how to interpret the Torah passages of the Pentateuch, including the law codes, rules regarding clean and unclean, and the sacrificial system. (2) “The Old Testament in the New Testament” (chap. 14) tries to help the serious student understand the various backgrounds and uses of the Old Testament by New Testament writers, including their use of patterns such as those found in the Septuagint, Targums, Midrash and Qumran. This chapter then traces techniques like typology, allegory and new meanings, as well as offering a method for understanding how New Testament writers used the Old Covenant and providing examples from the major witnesses such as Matthew, John, Acts, Paul, Hebrews and Revelation.

Second, I added new sections within already existing chapters: (1) To the introduction I added sections titled “Interpretation and the Problem of Distance” and “The Place of the Reader in Interpretation.” (2) To chapter two (grammar) I added some significant material to “Grammatical Analysis of the Text” and the conclusion, as well as a new section on aspect theory. (3) To chapter four (syntax) I added a section on “Discourse Analysis and Text-Linguistics” and an “Excursus on the Inclusive Language Debate.” (4) In chapter five (backgrounds) I updated nearly every section with significant recent material. (5) To chapter seven (narrative) I added a section on “Interpreting Narrative Material: Source, Form and Redaction Criticism.” (6) To chapter eight (poetry) I added a section on “The Structure of the Psalms.” (7) To chapter nine (wisdom) I added important material on understanding Ecclesiastes. (8) To chapter ten (prophecy) I added significant material on the development of the prophetic tradition, as well as short sections on the “prophetic dirge” and canonical or synchronic reading. (9) To chapter eleven (apocalyptic) I added material on the “Re-creation of the Cosmos,” the worldview of the book of Revelation and the interpretation of symbols. (10) To chapter twelve (parable) I added significant material on the “History of Interpretation.” (11) To chapter fifteen (biblical theology) I added a great deal to the introduction on the historical development of the discipline, as well as a section on “The Narrative Method.” (12) To chapter sixteen (systematic theology) I added major sections on “The Postmodern Turn” and “Theological Method.” (13) To chapter seventeen (contextualization) I added a section called “Developing a Transformed Church Culture.” (14) To chapter eighteen (homiletical theology) I added a section titled “A Biblical Theology of Preaching.”

Finally, throughout the work I updated and reworked sections from the standpoint of recent material and discoveries in various fields. For instance, although I did not add new sections to either of the two appendixes on the

philosophical issues involved in believing we can discover the original meaning of a text, I did incorporate a significant amount of material from authors like Anthony Thiselton, Kevin Vanhoozer and Nicholas Wolterstorff into these discussions. The amount of material appearing in this area over the last fifteen years is mind-boggling!

As a result of these revisions, updates and expansions, I trust that the second edition will prove to be a significant step forward in the hermeneutical task and will serve the church even more faithfully than the first edition did.

Grant Osborne
June 19, 2006

Acknowledgments

When a book is written over a period of seven years, many of those who helped in the early years unfortunately slip one's memory. Therefore I apologize to any who are not mentioned here due to my human frailty. So many have contributed to this work that I can only hope that most are mentioned. Secretaries who have typed portions of the manuscript are Sherry Kull, Ruth Jones, Ingrid Chitwood and Jessica Langenham. Graduate assistants who have helped with research are Lois Fuller, Bruce Fisk, Dennis Fisher, Gerald Barber, David Palm, Andreas Köstenberger and Justin Fuhrman. Special thanks are due Andreas, who prepared the indexes and went the second mile in terms of meeting deadlines. A further word of thanks is due Mark Hendricksen, whose gift in graphic illustration was the major force in helping me to visualize my material and to prepare many of the charts used in this book. Appreciation is also due my colleagues who have critiqued portions and increased the quality of this work many-fold: Dennis Magary, David Howard, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Feinberg and Dan Block. Any errors in this book are mine and not theirs! Finally, two marvelous sabbaticals greatly aided my research—a year at the University of Marburg in Germany and five months at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England. The excellent libraries at both institutions were a privilege and a joy in which to do research. In addition, my profound gratitude is due Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for granting me the sabbaticals.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*
ABQ	*American Baptist Quarterly*
ATR	*Anglican Theological Review*
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
BA	*Biblical Archeologist*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentaries on the New Testament
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BTZ	*Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
EvJ	*Evangelical Journal*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GNS	Good News Studies
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume
IKaZ	*Internationale katholische Zeitscrift*
Int	*Interpretation*
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentaries
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBR	*Journal of Bible and Religion*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*

JR	Journal of Religion
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JTC	*Journal for Theology and the Church*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
PhRev	*Philosophical Review*
PhTod	*Philosophy Today*
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
PSB	*Princeton Seminary Bulletin*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RSR	*Recherches de science religieuse*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
SEÅ	*Svenk exegetisk årsbok*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
ST	*Studia theologica*
SwJT	*Southwestern Journal of Theology*
ThTo	*Theology Today*
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TS	*Theological Studies*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZST	*Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Introduction

For the true believer there is very little as important as studying God's Word seriously. Let me use an illustration. Suppose someone were to rush into your Bible study and tell you they had discovered gold coins all over your church's back lot, and that in fact soundings had shown that the number of coins got greater every few feet all the way down to two hundred feet. It would take one-tenth of a second to clear the room, and you would not be content just to gather them off the surface of the ground. You would start digging, and soon you would be buying and learning to use the tools (back hoes, etc.) to dig deeper and deeper. That is the reality of Bible study; the deeper you go, the greater the rewards. Yes, you will be blessed at the surface level, but why stay there when you can dig deeper and find ever greater treasures? The purpose of this book is to give you the necessary tools for digging deeper into the Word and to teach you how to use them. The goal is the ultimate treasure of divine truth!

Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word meaning "to interpret." Traditionally it has meant "that science which delineates principles or methods for interpreting an individual author's meaning." However, this is being challenged, and the tendency in many circles today is to restrict the term to an elucidation of a text's present meaning rather than of its original intent. This is the subject of the two appendixes, where I will argue that the original meaning is a legitimate, even necessary, concern and that hermeneutics encompasses both what it meant and what it means. I would oppose even the practice today of using "exegesis" for the study of the text's meaning and "hermeneutics" for its significance in the present. Rather, hermeneutics is the overall term while exegesis and "contextualization" (the crosscultural communication of a text's significance for today) are the two aspects of that larger task.

Three perspectives are critical to a proper understanding of the interpretive task. First, hermeneutics is a science, since it provides a logical, orderly classification of the laws of interpretation. In the first part, which constitutes the bulk of this book, I will seek to rework the "laws" of interpretation in light of the enormous amount of material from related disciplines such as linguistics or literary criticism. Second, hermeneutics is an art, for it is an acquired skill demanding both imagination and an ability to apply the "laws" to selected passages or books. Such can never be merely learned in the classroom but must result from extensive practice in the field. My students normally take about twenty-five hours to complete a sermon for my hermeneutics course. I tell them

that after they have been preaching for three years, they will do a better message in half the time. It is all about learning the fine art of preparing messages. I will try to demonstrate the hermeneutical "art" with numerous examples drawn from Scripture itself. Third and most important, hermeneutics when utilized to interpret Scripture is a spiritual act, depending on the leading of the Holy Spirit. Modern scholars too often ignore the sacred dimension and approach the Bible purely as literature, considering the sacral aspect to be almost a genre.

Yet human efforts can never properly divine the true message of the Word of God. While Karl Barth wrongly taught that Scripture possesses only instrumental authority, he was certainly correct that it speaks to humanity through divinely controlled "flashes of insight." We must depend on God and not just on humanly derived hermeneutical principles when studying the Bible. The doctrine of "illumination" will be explored further in chapter eighteen.

The hermeneutical enterprise also has three levels. I will discuss them from the standpoint of the personal pronoun that defines the thrust. We begin with a third-person approach, asking "what it meant" (exegesis), then passing to a first-person approach, querying "what it means for *me*" (devotional), and finally taking a second-person approach, seeking "how to share with you what it means to me" (sermonic). When we try only one and ignore the others, we end up with a false message. Those who take only a third-person approach are seminary profs with their heads in the clouds, speaking to no one but their own kind. Those who take only a first-person approach are subjective and living in a monastery, with God's Word relative only for themselves. Those who take only a second-person approach are also subjective but use the Bible as a club, always challenging everyone but themselves. We must study Scripture with all three in the order presented, always seeking the passage's meaning then applying it first to ourselves and then sharing it with others.

The major premise of this book is that biblical interpretation entails a "spiral" from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance for the church today. Scholars since the New Hermeneutic have been fond of describing a "hermeneutical circle" within which our interpretation of the text leads to its interpreting us. However, such a closed circle is dangerous because the priority of the text is lost in the shared gestalt of the "language event" (see Packer 1983:325-27). A spiral is a better metaphor because it is not a closed circle but rather an open-ended movement from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader. I am not going round and round a closed circle that can never detect the true meaning but am spiraling nearer and nearer to the text's intended meaning as I refine my hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations, then to guide my

delineation of its significance for my situation today. In this sense it is also critical to note that the spiral is a cone, not twirling upward forever with no ending in sight but moving ever narrower to the meaning of the text and its significance for today. The sacred author's intended meaning is the critical starting point but not an end in itself. The task of hermeneutics must begin with exegesis but is not complete until one notes the contextualization of that meaning for today. These are the two aspects entailing what E. D. Hirsch calls "meaning" and "significance" or the original intended meaning for the author and his readers (called "audience criticism") as well as its significance for the modern reader (1967:103-26).

Hermeneutics is important because it enables one to move from text to context, to allow the God-inspired meaning of the Word to speak today with as fresh and dynamic a relevance as it had in its original setting. Moreover, preachers or teachers must proclaim the Word of God rather than their own subjective religious opinions. Only a carefully defined hermeneutic can keep one wedded to the text. The basic evangelical fallacy of our generation is "proof-texting," that process whereby a person "proves" a doctrine or practice merely by alluding to a text without considering its original inspired meaning. Many memory-verse programs, while valuable in themselves, virtually encourage people to ignore the context and meaning of a passage and apply it on the surface to current needs. Bridging the gap between these two aspects, foundational meaning and contemporary relevance, demands sophistication.

I have adopted a meaning-significance format in this book. The concept builds on Hirsch's distinction between the author's intended meaning of a text, a core that is unvarying, and the multiform significance or implications of a text for individual readers, an application of the original meaning that varies depending on the diverse circumstances (1976:1-13). The issue is highly debated today and challenges widespread assumptions. Walter Brueggemann observes, "The distinction of 'what it meant' and 'what it means' . . . is increasingly disregarded, overlooked or denied" because the preunderstanding, or "hermeneutical self-awareness," of the interpreter makes it so difficult (and to many, so irrelevant) to get back to that original meaning (1984:1). Nevertheless, the arguments in appendixes one and two as well as the entire development of this book, I believe, justify this format as best expressing the task of hermeneutics. Still, Hirsch must be modified with the philosophically stronger technique of "speech-act theory," that movement from Wittgenstein to Searle to Thiselton and Vanhoozer that recognizes that both speech and written communication contain three actions—locutionary (what it says), illocutionary (what it does), and perlocutionary (what it effects) dimensions (see app. 2). The interpreter is studying the movements of

a text and seeking to uncover both meaning and significance in these three dimensions.

The Bible was not revealed via “the tongues of angels.” Though inspired of God, it was written in human language and within human cultures. By the very nature of language the Bible’s univocal truths are couched in analogical language, that is, the absolute truths of Scripture were encased in the human languages and cultures of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, and we must understand those cultures in order to interpret the biblical texts properly. Therefore Scripture does not automatically cross cultural barriers to impart its meaning. Moreover, by the very fact that scholars differ so greatly when interpreting the same passage, we know that God does not miraculously reveal the meaning of passages whenever they are read. While gospel truths are simple, the task of uncovering the original meaning of specific texts is complex and demands hard work. We can fulfill this enormous responsibility only when we develop and apply a consistent hermeneutic. Several issues should be highlighted before we begin our task.

HERMENEUTICS AND INTENDED MEANING

The goal of evangelical hermeneutics is quite simple—to discover the intention of the Author/author (author = inspired human author; Author = God who inspires the text). Modern critics increasingly deny the very possibility of discovering the original or intended meaning of a text. The problem is that while the original authors had a definite meaning in mind when they wrote, that is now lost to us because they are no longer present to clarify and explain what they wrote. The modern reader cannot study the text from the ancient perspective but constantly reads into that passage modern perspectives. Therefore, critics argue, objective interpretation is impossible and the author's intended meaning is forever lost to us. Every community provides traditions to guide the reader in comprehending a text, and these produce the meaning. That "meaning" differs from community to community, so in actuality any passage might have multiple meanings, and each is valid for a particular reading perspective or community (so Stanley Fish).

These problems are indeed very real and complex. Due to the difficult philosophical issues involved, I do not discuss them in detail until the appendixes. In another sense, however, every chapter in this book is a response to this issue, for the very process of interpretation builds a base for discovering the original intended meaning of the biblical text. The appendixes discuss the theoretical answer, while the book as a whole attempts to provide the practical solution to this dilemma.

INTERPRETATION AND THE PROBLEM OF DISTANCE

It is difficult to understand conversation, let alone written texts. I grew up in the city; my wife was raised on a farm just an hour from my home. Yet often we misunderstand each other due to out different (urban/rural) upbringings. This is made more complex when two people are from different parts of the country, and even more complex when they are from different cultures. At my seminary we have students from about forty different nations. For most of the students, English is a second or even third language. The distance of our different cultures is an immense barrier to clear communication. Now multiply that by two thousand years and a culture that ceased to exist in A.D. 70, when the Second Temple Judaism was destroyed and Judaism had to reconstitute itself.

Paul Ricoeur talks about the distanciation gap between the people of the Bible and us (see app. 1). How do we bridge that gap to find out what Zechariah or Luke was trying to say? Many find that an insurmountable obstacle to interpretation. Yet the purpose of this book is not only to argue that it is possible but to give the reader the tools for bridging that gap, namely through grammar and semantics as well as the proper use of Bible backgrounds. William Klein, Craig Blomberg and Robert Hubbard (1993:12-16) discuss four areas of distance —time (both in the recording of the stories [the Gospel writers had to use many sources, Luke 1:1-4] and the words and expressions used), culture (customs and practices mystifying to us), geography (nations and cities about which we have little or no knowledge), language (the Hebrew language changed over the Old Testament period and both Ezra and Daniel used Aramaic in portions of their books; the Greek in the New Testament, resulting in different translations for passages). Yet these are not insurmountable obstacles; the problem is we cannot discover the answers inductively but have to use the best sources we can to explain these factors. That is another purpose of this book—to suggest the best sources for uncovering these mystifying details.

The big problem with Bible study today is that we think it should be easier than other things we do. We study recipes for quality meals, how-to books for all kinds of things—carpentry, plumbing, automobile maintenance and so on—and read vociferously for our hobbies. Why do we think the Bible is the only subject we should not have to study?! Let me challenge you—make the Bible your

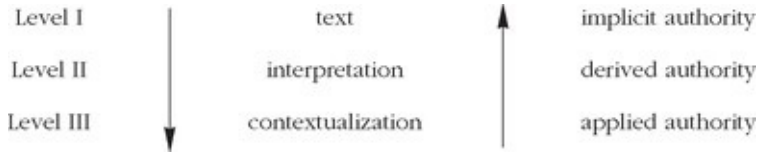
hobby. At one level
I do not like the analogy; the Bible must be so much more than a hobby! But at another level, what if we spent as much time and money on Bible study as we do our hobbies? What if we took the same amount we spend on golf clubs and courses or on skiing equipment and skiing trips, and put it into Bible study? Yes, encyclopedias, commentaries and other reference materials are expensive. But so is everything we do. The question is about priorities: what is important enough for our time and money? I want to encourage you to get and use the tools that enable us to bridge the gap back to Bible times and authorial intention.

THE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible has an inherent sense of authority, seen in the constant use of "Yahweh says" in the Old Testament and the aura of divinely bestowed apostolic authority in the New Testament (see Grudem 1983:19-59). Of course, the exact parameters are widely debated, but I would affirm a carefully nuanced form of inerrancy (see Feinberg 1979) rather than the more dynamic model of Paul Achtemeier, who says that not only are the original events inspired but also the meanings added by later communities are likewise inspired (1980). Moreover, he affirms, we ourselves are inspired as we read it today. The chart below has important implications for hermeneutics, for it means that there is an authority gap the further we remove ourselves from the intended meaning of the Word.

As we can see from the flow chart in figure 0.1, the level of authority moves down as we go from text to reading to application; therefore, we must move upward as we make certain that our contextualization approximates as closely as possible our interpretation, and that this in turn coheres to the original/intended meaning of the text/author. The only means for true authority in preaching and daily Christian living is to utilize hermeneutics to wed our application as closely as possible to our interpretation and to make certain that our interpretation coheres with the thrust of the text. Achtemeier's claim that the historical tradition of the church and contemporary interpretations are also inspired does injustice to the priority of the text, which alone contains the Word of God.

Figure 0.1. Flow chart on authority



MEANING IS GENRE-DEPENDENT

As I will argue in appendix two and in the section on special hermeneutics (see part 2), the genre or type of literature in which a passage is found provides the "rules of the language game" (Wittgenstein), that is, the hermeneutical principles by which one understands it. Obviously, we do not interpret fiction the same way as we understand poetry. Nor will a person look for the same scheme in biblical wisdom as in the prophetic portions. Yet this also occasions great debate, for there is significant overlap. For instance, large portions of the prophetic books contain poetry and other portions contain apocalyptic. There is epistolary material in apocalyptic (such as Rev 2—3) and apocalyptic material in the Gospels (e.g., the Olivet Discourse, Mk 13 and parallels) and Epistles (such as 2 Thess 2).[1] For this reason some doubt the validity of genre as an interpretive device, arguing that the intermixture of genres makes it impossible to identify genres with sufficient clarity to make them useful as hermeneutical tools. However, the very fact that we can identify apocalyptic or poetic portions within other genres demonstrates the viability of the approach (see Osborne 1984 for more detailed argumentation).

The presence of genre is an important point in the debate as to whether one can recover the author's intended meaning (Hirsch calls this "intrinsic genre"). All writers couch their messages in a certain genre in order to give the reader sufficient rules by which to decode that message. These hints guide the reader (or hearer) and provide clues for interpretation. When Mark recorded Jesus' parable of the sower (Mk 4:1-20), he placed it in a context and within a medium that would communicate properly to his readers. We can recover that meaning by understanding how parables function (see chap. 12) and by noting how the symbols function within the Markan context.

THE SIMPLICITY AND CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

Since the late patristic period with its regula fidei (“rule of faith”), the church has wrestled with the “perspicuity (Webster: “plainness” or “clarity”) of Scripture,” that is, whether or not it is actually open or plain to one’s understanding. It is not without reason that the biblical scholar is often charged with removing the Scriptures from the average person. After a text has been dissected and subjected to the myriad theories of academia, the layperson cries plaintively, “Yes, but what does it say to me? Can I study it?” Certainly, the very discovery of the multitudinous options for the interpretation of biblical passages is the greatest single shock to new students in college or seminary. People can hardly be blamed if, after noting the numerous possible interpretations of virtually every biblical statement, they cease to affirm the principle that the Bible is easy to understand! However, this is to confuse hermeneutical principles with the gospel message itself. It is the task of bridging the cultural gap from the original situation to our day that is complex, not the resultant meaning.

Luther (in *The Bondage of the Will*) proclaimed the basic clarity of Scripture in two areas: external clarity, which he called the grammatical aspect, attained by applying the laws of grammar (hermeneutical principles) to the text; and internal clarity, which he called the spiritual aspect, attained when the Holy Spirit illumines the reader in the act of interpretation. It is clear that Luther meant the final product (the gospel message) rather than the process (recovering the meaning of individual texts) when he spoke of clarity. In the last century, however, the application of Scottish Common Sense Realism to Scripture has led many to assume that everyone can understand the Bible for themselves, that the surface of the text is sufficient to produce meaning in and of itself. Therefore, the need for hermeneutical principles to bridge the cultural gap was ignored, and individualistic interpretations abounded. For some reason, no one seemed to notice that this led to multiple meanings, even to heresy at times. The principle of perspicuity was extended to the hermeneutical process as well, leading to misunderstanding in popular interpretation of Scripture and a very difficult situation today. Hermeneutics as a discipline demands a complex interpretive process in order to uncover the original clarity of Scripture. Again, the result is clear but the process is not; this should govern the sermon as well!

Yet this in itself causes confusion, and the average person is again justified in asking whether biblical understanding is increasingly being reserved for the academic elite. I would argue that it is not. First, there are many levels of understanding: devotional, basic Bible study, sermonic, term paper or dissertation. Each level has its own validity and its own process. Furthermore, those who wish to learn the hermeneutical principles that pertain to these various levels may do so. They are not restricted to any “elite” but are available to all who have the interest and energy to learn them. Basic hermeneutics can and should be taught at the level of the local church. I hope to address these various levels throughout this book.

THE UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF SCRIPTURE

A failure to grasp the balance between these two interdependent aspects has caused both evangelicals (stressing the unity) and nonevangelicals (stressing the diversity) to misread the Scriptures. Diversity is demanded by the analogical cast of biblical language. Since few books in Scripture were addressed to similar situations, there is great variety in wording and emphasis. Moreover, the doctrine of inspiration itself demands that we recognize the personalities of the sacred authors behind their works. Each writer expressed himself in different ways, with different emphases and quite different figures of speech. For instance, John used "new birth" language to express the concept of regeneration, while Paul used the image of adoption. Also, Paul stressed the faith that alone could lead to regeneration, while James emphasized the works that alone could point to a valid faith. These are not contradictory but diverse emphases of individual writers.

The issue is whether the differences are irreconcilable or whether a deeper unity underlies the diverse expressions of the various traditions in Israel and the early church. Yet we dare not overstate the unity of Scripture, so as to remove James's or Paul's individual emphases. Such can lead to a misuse of parallels, so that one author (say, Paul) is interpreted on the basis of another (James), resulting in an erroneous interpretation. Nevertheless, behind the different expressions is a critical unity. The concept of diversity is the backbone of biblical theology, which I believe is the necessary link between exegesis and systematic theology (centering on the unity). While it is true that the finite human can never produce a final "system" of biblical truth, it is not true that one can never "systematize" biblical truth. The key is to allow the system to emerge from the text via biblical theology, to seek biblical categories that summarize the unity behind the diverse expressions of Scripture.

THE ANALOGY OF SCRIPTURE

In contrast to the regula fidei (“rule of faith”) of the Roman Catholic Church, Luther propounded the analogia fidei (“analogy of faith”). Luther opposed the centrality of ecclesial tradition and believed that Scripture alone should determine dogma. On the basis of the unity and clarity of Scripture, he proposed that the basic doctrines must cohere with and cannot contradict the holistic teaching of Scripture. However, for Luther the system still had a certain predominance. Calvin took the final step, suggesting the principle of analogia scriptura (“analogy of Scripture”) as an alternative. Milton Terry’s dictum still stands: “No single statement or obscure passage of one book can be allowed to set aside a doctrine which is clearly established by many passages” (1890:579). I would strengthen this by adding that doctrines should not be built on a single passage but rather should summarize all that Scripture says on that topic. If there are no clarifying passages (e.g., on baptism for the dead in 1 Cor 15:29 or a compartmentalized Hades in Lk 16:22-26), we must be careful about seeing a statement of dogma.

Moreover, all such doctrinal statements (for instance, on the lordship of Christ or on eternal security) should be made on the basis of all the texts that speak to the issue rather than on the basis of proof-texts or “favorite” passages. Such an approach results in a “canon within a canon,” a phenomenon in which certain passages are subjectively favored over others because they fit a system that is imposed on Scripture rather than drawn from it. This is a dangerous situation, for it assumes that one’s preconceived ideas are more important than is the text. Also, it misinterprets Scripture. Few biblical statements are theoretical—that is, holistic—descriptions of dogma. Rather, a biblical author’s statements apply a larger doctrine to a particular issue in a specific church setting and stress whatever aspect of the larger teaching applies to that situation. *Analogia scriptura* is the method by which we do this.

THE PLACE OF THE READER IN INTERPRETATION

Hermeneutics, until very recently, has never considered sufficiently the power of the reader in coming to understanding. It has too often been assumed that to read is to understand, especially after Scottish "common sense" reading gave the impression that we all have the capacity to interpret automatically what we read. However, that is not true. Every person brings to the task a set of "preunderstandings," that is, beliefs and ideas inherited from one's background and paradigm community. We rarely read the Bible to discover truth; more often, we wish to harmonize it with our belief system and see its meaning in light of our preconceived theological system (see chap. 16, "Systematic Theology"). Now, this is not all bad. Our preunderstanding is our friend, not our enemy. It provides a set of understandings by which we can make sense of what we read. In this sense we are all "reader response" interpreters. The problem is that our preunderstanding too easily becomes prejudice, a set of a prioris that place a grid over Scripture and make it conform to these preconceived conceptions. So we need to "bracket" these ideas to a degree and allow the text to deepen or at times challenge and even change those already established ideas. As readers, we want to place ourselves in front of the text (and allow it to address us) rather than behind it (and force it to go where we want). The reader's background and ideas are important in the study of biblical truth; however, this must be used to study meaning rather than to create meaning that is not there.

EXPOSITORY PREACHING

It is my contention that the final goal of hermeneutics is not systematic theology but the sermon. The actual purpose of Scripture is not explanation but exposition, not description but proclamation. God's Word speaks to every generation, and the relationship between meaning and significance summarizes the hermeneutical task. It is not enough to recreate the original intended meaning of a passage. We must elucidate its significance for our day. Exposition means a Bible-based message, usually a series taking the congregation through a book like Isaiah or Romans. A topical message can be expository provided it asks, What does the Bible say about this issue? and then takes the congregation through what God's Word says on that issue.

Walter Liefeld says that an expository message has hermeneutical integrity (faithfully reproduces the text), cohesion (a sense of the whole), movement and direction (noting the purpose or goal of a passage) and application (noting the contemporary relevance of the passage) (1984:6-7). Without each of these qualities, a sermon is not truly expository. Some have a false concept of exposition as a mere explanation of the meaning of a passage. Complex overhead transparencies and presentation of the Hebrew or Greek details highlight such sermons. Unfortunately, although the people go away impressed by the learning demonstrated, their lives often remain untouched, and they are convinced they can never study the Bible for themselves but just have to go back every Sunday to hear the "expert." We are back to the Middle Ages! The "horizon" of the listeners must be fused with the "horizon" of the text in true expository preaching (see the discussion of Gadamer in app. 1 on pp. 469-71). The preacher must ask how the biblical writer would have applied the theological truths of the passage if he were addressing them to the modern congregation.

Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as "the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality of the preacher, then through him to his hearers" (1980:30). This is an excellent definition and touches on several issues we have already discussed. Modern expositors must first encounter the text in its original situation and then

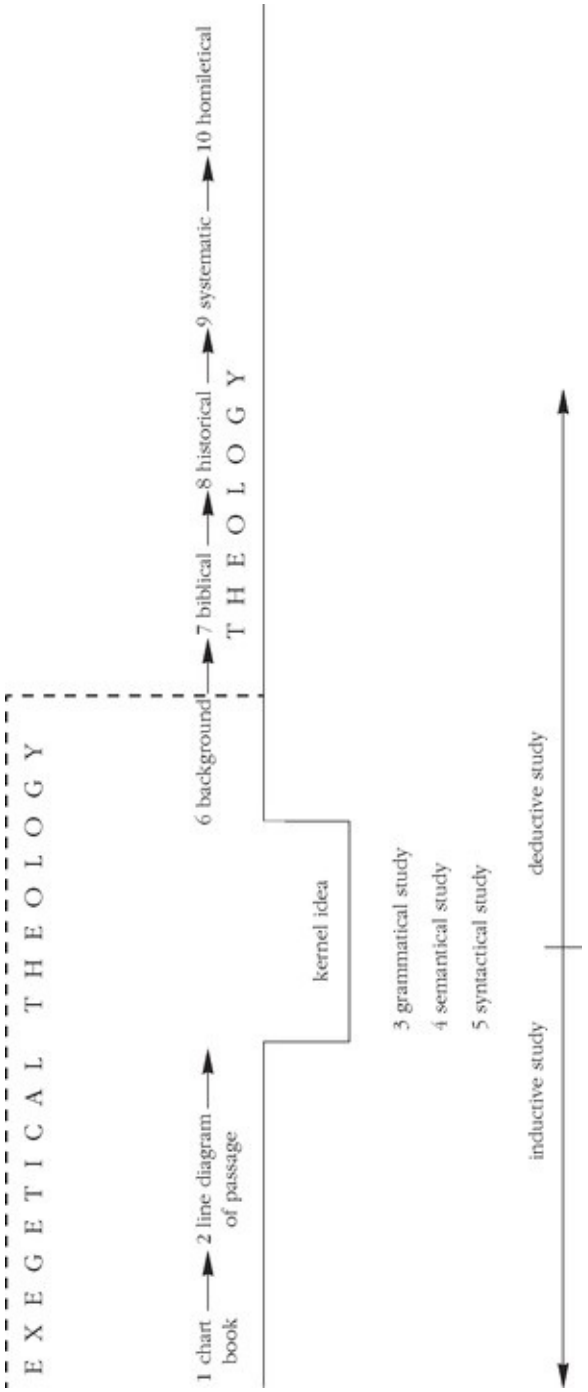
the significance of that original meaning for themselves. They then transmit this to the audience, who should be led first into the biblical context and then into its relevance for their personal needs. Too often preachers stress one side or the other, so that the sermon becomes either dry exposition or dynamic entertainment. Both spheres, the original meaning of the text and the modern significance for our context, are critical in expository preaching, the true goal of the hermeneutical enterprise.

CONCLUSION

The process of interpretation consists of ten stages, all of which are taken up in turn in this book (see fig. 0.2). Exegetical research can be subdivided into inductive study (in which we interact with the text directly to form our own conclusions) and deductive study (in which we interact with other scholars' conclusions and rework our findings). The inductive study of the Bible takes place primarily in the charting of the book and paragraphs in order to determine the structural development of the writer's message at both the macro (book) and micro (paragraph) levels. The result is a preliminary idea regarding the meaning and thought development of the text. This is important so that we interact with exegetical tools (commentaries and so forth) critically rather than uncritically, merely parroting the views of others (an all too common problem in term papers).

Deductive study utilizes stages 3-6 together as separate but interdependent aspects of exegetical research. Here all the tools—grammars, lexicons, dictionaries, word studies, atlases, background studies, periodical articles, commentaries—are consulted in order to deepen our knowledge base regarding the passage and to unlock the in-depth message under the surface of the text. The preliminary understanding derived from the inductive study and the in-depth understanding unlocked through research interact and correct one another as we make final decisions regarding the original intended message of the text.

Figure 0.2. The ten stages of interpretation



One major purpose of deductive study is to take us away from the contemporary meaning of the word symbols in the text, which, because of our preunderstanding and personal experiences, we cannot help but read back into the text. Our effort then is to get back to the meaning the ancient author intended to convey. We could not do this without exegetical tools, for without help we know too little about that ancient period. Therefore we must use the inductive

and deductive sides together to understand the “meaning” of the text.

Finally, the contextual or theological research completes the task of interpretation, moving us from the textual meaning (what the Bible meant) to the contextual meaning (what the Bible means for us today). The “hermeneutical spiral” takes place not only at the level of original intended meaning, as our understanding spirals upward (via the interaction of inductive and deductive research) to the intended meaning of the passage, but also at the level of contextualization, as our application spirals upward (via the movement from biblical to systematic to homiletical theology) to a proper understanding of the significance of the passage for Christian life today. Biblical theology collates the partial theologies of individual passages and books into an archetypal “theology” of Israel and the early church (thus integrating the Testaments). Historical theology studies the way the church throughout history has contextualized biblical theology to meet the challenges and needs of the church at various stages of its historical development. Systematic theology recontextualizes biblical theology to address current problems and to summarize theological truth for the current generation. Finally, homiletical theology (so called to stress that the sermon preparation is part of the hermeneutical task) applies the results of each of these steps to the practical needs of Christians today.

Figure 0.2 is adapted from Eugene Nida and Charles Taber’s study of the process of translation (1974). The theory is based on the belief that the crosscultural communication of ideas is never a straight-line continuum, for no two languages or cultures are linked that closely. A “literal” or unitary approach always leads to miscommunication. Instead, each communication unit must be broken up into “kernel ideas” or basic statements and then reformulated along the lines of the corresponding idioms and thought patterns of the receptor culture. This is necessary not only at the basic level of translation but also at the broader level of interpretation as a whole. It is the exegetical aspect (grammar, semantics, syntax) that uncovers the kernel ideas, and the process of contextualization that reformulates them so that they speak with the same voice to our culture today.

Readers will note that I have placed the discussion of the biblical genres not at the end of the book (many hermeneutical texts place this last as “special hermeneutics”) but after the presentation of the general hermeneutical principles. Since the genres are concerned primarily with “what it meant” (the original intended meaning of the text), the discussion logically belongs at that point. Moreover, each genre provides a “case study,” reapplying the exegetical principles to each separate type of biblical literature.

PART 1

GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

1

Context

The first stage in serious Bible study is to consider the larger context within which a passage is found. Unless we can grasp the whole before attempting to dissect the parts, interpretation is doomed from the start. Statements simply have no meaning apart from their context. If I say, “Give it all you’ve got,” you would rightly query, “What do you mean by ‘it’?” and “How do I do so?” Without a situation to give the command content, it becomes meaningless. In Scripture the context provides the situation behind the text. In fact, there is no meaning apart from context, only several possible meanings. Someone says aloud, “Right.” But how as a hearer do you know what is meant by *right?* Perhaps the speaker meant, “*Write* this down” or “Look to the *right*” or “Let’s perform this *rite*” or “It’s *correct*.” Without a context, any of them is possible.

Two areas must be considered at the beginning of Bible study: the historical context and the logical context. Under the first category we study introductory material on the biblical book in order to determine the situation to which the book was addressed. Under the second category we use an inductive approach in order to trace the thought development of a book. Both aspects are necessary before we begin a detailed analysis of a particular passage. The historical and logical contexts provide the scaffolding on which we can build the in-depth meaning of a passage. Without a strong scaffolding, the edifice of interpretation is bound to collapse.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Information on the historical background of a book is available from several sources. Perhaps the best single source is the introduction to the better commentaries. Many contain quite detailed, up-to-date summaries of the issues. It is important to consult recent, well-researched works because of the explosion of information uncovered in the last few decades. Older works will not have information on the exciting archeological discoveries or the theories coming out of the recent application of background material to a biblical book. Old Testament or New Testament introductions are also a tremendous help, since they interact more broadly than a commentary normally does. A third source would be dictionaries and encyclopedias, with separate articles not only on books but on authors, themes and background issues. Archeological works and atlases enable us to grasp the topography behind a book. With books like Joshua or Judges, indeed all historical narrative, this is a critical consideration. Books on Old Testament or New Testament theology (such as George Ladd's) often aid us in discovering the theology of individual books. Finally, books on customs and culture in the biblical period are invaluable sources to help us grasp the historical background behind particular emphases in the text.

At this stage we are using secondary sources to learn preliminary data for interpreting a text. (We will use them later when we begin the exegetical study.) The information we gather from them is not final truth but rather becomes a blueprint, a basic plan that we can alter later when the edifice of interpretation is actually being erected. These ideas are held by someone else, and our later detailed study may lead us to change many of the ideas. The value of this preliminary reading is that it draws us out of our twenty-first-century perspective and makes us aware of the ancient situation behind the text. We need to consider several aspects here.

1. In one sense the *authorship* is more important for historical-critical research than for grammatical-historical exegesis. However, this aspect still helps us to place a book historically. For example, when studying the minor prophets, we need to know when and to whom Amos or Zechariah

ministered so that we can be aware of the situation behind their actual statements.

2. The *date* when a particular work was written also gives us an interpretive set of tools for unlocking the meaning of a text. Daniel would mean something quite different if it were written during the period of the Maccabees. James would be interpreted differently if it were addressed to a diasporate community of A.D. 110 (as Dibelius theorizes). I would argue for the traditional view in both cases, and it makes a difference in the way I approach the text.
3. The group to which a work is *addressed* plays a major role in the meaning of a passage. Their circumstances determine the content of the book. The situation behind the prophetic books (such as the state of the nation in Isaiah's day) is critical for understanding the message of those works. It does make a difference whether the epistle to the Hebrews was addressed to a Jewish, Gentile or mixed church. In actual fact, the latter is the most likely, although the problem was Jewish.
4. The *purpose* and *themes* are probably the most important of the four areas as an aid to interpretation. We should not study any passage without a basic knowledge of the problems and situation addressed in the book and the themes with which the writer addressed those problems. Only recently have commentaries begun to discuss the biblical theology of individual books. Yet such is immensely helpful as an interpretive tool. By noting the broader perspective of a book, we can more easily interpret correctly the details of particular statements.

The information we glean from the sources becomes a filter through which the individual passages may be passed. This preliminary material is open to later correction during the detailed exegesis or study of the passage. Its purpose is to narrow down the interpretive laws so that we might ask the proper questions, forcing us back to the times and culture of the original writer and the situation behind the text. We will therefore have a control against reading twenty-first-century meaning back into first-century language.

THE LOGICAL CONTEXT

In a very real sense the logical context is the most basic factor in interpretation. I tell my classes that if anyone is half asleep and does not hear a question that I ask, there is a 50 percent chance of being correct if he or she answers “context.” The term itself covers a vast array of influences on a text. These can best be diagrammed as a series of concentric circles moving outward from the passage itself (see fig. 1.1).

As we move nearer the center, the influence on the meaning of the passage increases. Genre, for instance, identifies the type of literature and helps the interpreter to identify parallels, but these are not as influential as the rest of Scripture is on the passage. We can, for example, identify the book of Revelation as apocalyptic, yet although intertestamental and Hellenistic apocalyptic provide important parallels, most of the symbols are taken from the Old Testament. At the other end of the scale the immediate context is the final arbiter for all decisions regarding the meaning of a term or concept. There is no guarantee that Paul uses a term the same way in Philippians 1 as he does in Philippians 2. Language simply does not work that way, for every word has many meanings and a writer’s use depends on the present context rather than his use of it in previous contexts. A good example is the use of *aphiemi* in John 14:27, “Peace I *leave* with you,” and in John 16:28, “I am *leaving* the world and going back to the Father.” We would hardly interpret the one by the other, for their use is exactly opposite. In the first Jesus gives something to the disciples, in the second he takes something (himself!) away from them. Even less would we read into the term its common use (as in 1 Jn 1:9) for “forgiveness.” The other passages help us to determine the semantic range (the different things the word might mean), but only the immediate context can narrow the possibilities to the actual meaning.

Figure 1.1. The logical context

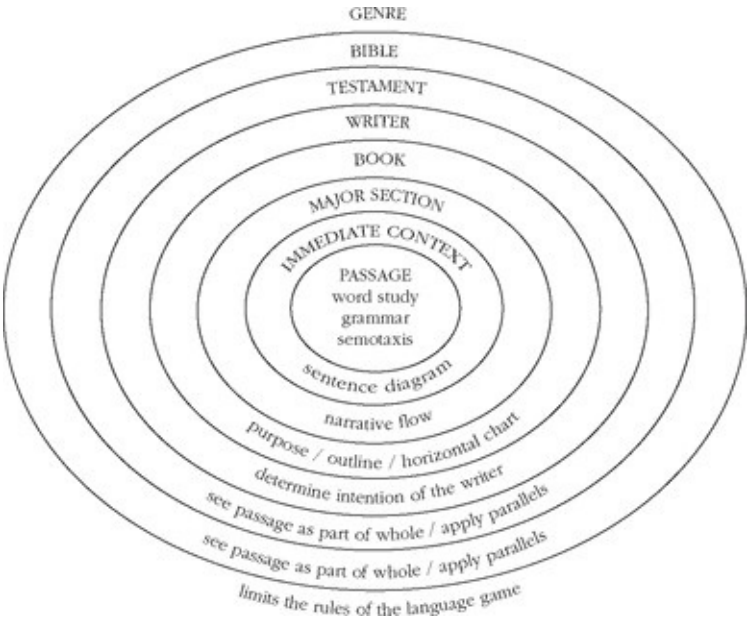


Figure 1.1 also describes the succeeding chapters. Two aspects comprise what is often called “inductive Bible study”; namely, charting the whole of a book and diagramming the paragraph. An inductive approach normally means an intensive, personal study of a text without recourse to other study aids or tools like commentaries. Then I move immediately from the text and make my own conclusions about its meaning rather than use someone else’s conclusions to understand it. This critical control protects me from being overly influenced by the commentaries and other sources as I study the text more deeply. I must first form my own opinions before I can interact with other people’s conclusions. Otherwise, I will simply parrot these other ideas. The introductory material draws me into the ancient situation behind the biblical passage, and my inductive study gives me preliminary data with which I can critically assess the commentaries (it is critical to emphasize “preliminary,” for the study of the tools will deepen and often correct the original decision).[1]

1. Studying the whole: Charting a book. An invaluable service for biblical scholarship has been provided by literary criticism in the last thirty years. Commentaries have encouraged an unbalanced approach due to an overemphasis on word studies that have been strung together with little or no cohesion. Literary critics have pointed out, however, that the parts have no meaning apart from the whole. Only when the message of the whole passage is considered can the parts be studied for details of this central message. In reality, the hermeneutical process can be summarized in this way: first, we chart the whole of a book to analyze its flow of thought in preliminary fashion; next, we study

each part intensively in order to detect the detailed argumentation; finally, we rework the thought development of the whole in relation to the parts. We move from the whole book to its major sections and then to its paragraphs and finally to its individual sentences.

Mortimer Adler and Charles van Doren, in their classic *How to Read a Book*, discuss four levels of reading: (1) elementary reading, which centers on the identity of individual terms and sentences; (2) inspectional reading, which skims a book to discover its basic structure and major ideas; (3) analytical reading, which studies the book in-depth in order to understand its message as completely as possible; (4) syntopical reading, which compares the message with other books of a similar nature in order to construct a detailed and original analysis of the subject matter (1972:16- 20). The first two levels are inductive, the latter two are research-oriented, involving secondary literature (interpretations of the book or subject by others) as well as primary literature (the text itself).

Adler and Van Doren develop inspectional reading, the subject of this section, in two ways (1972:32-44). First, a preread ing examines the introductory sections (preface, table of contents, index) and then skims key chapters and paragraphs in order to ascertain the basic progress and general thread of the work. In a biblical book this would entail the introduction and section headings (if using a study Bible) plus a perusal of particular chapters (such as Rom 1; 3; 6; 9; 12). Second, a superficial reading plows right through the book without pausing to ponder individual paragraphs or difficult concepts. This enables us to chronicle and understand the major ideas before we get lost in the particular details.

I would like to expand this inspectional reading to cover structural development and call this method a “book chart” (Osborne and Woodward 1979:29-32). Here it is critical to use a good paragraph Bible. We must remember that verse and chapter divisions were never inspired. In fact, the Bible was never versified until 1551, when a Parisian publisher, Stephanus, divided the whole Bible into verses over a six-month period as he publicized his latest Greek version. Tradition says Stephanus did it while riding his horse, and the subsequent divisions were the result of the horse jostling his pen! The problem is that Stephanus did it shallowly and quickly, so that many of the decisions were wrong. But Stephanus’s version became so popular that no one dared tamper with the results, and his divisions have continued to this day. Even though Stephanus often chose both verse and chapter divisions poorly, people today tend to assume that his decisions were correct and interpret verses and chapters apart from the context around them. Therefore, we should never depend on verse divisions for meaning. The paragraph is the key to the thought development of biblical books.[2]

When teaching Bible study method seminars to church groups, I have discovered that the most difficult thing for the novice to learn is how to skim each paragraph and summarize its main point. People get bogged down in details and never seem to surface for air. We need an overview here, and the student should try to read the paragraph in just a couple minutes (skim) then write a six- to eight-word summary for each paragraph. When we read the paragraph in too detailed a way, the summary statement often reflects only the first couple of sentences early in the paragraph rather than the paragraph as a whole. Such an error can skew the results of the entire study. So try to summarize the *whole* paragraph. In figures 1.2 and 1.3, I use Jonah and Philippians as examples to demonstrate how the process can work in both testaments.[3]

As the Jonah chart shows, each paragraph is encapsulated briefly in turn, and by perusing the summaries we can gain a very real feel for the flow of thought. Moreover, by looking across the chart the basic contours of the book become visible. For instance, we can see easily that chapter 3 gives the results of the original purpose of chapter 1, namely, the mission to Nineveh and the people's repentance. Thus there are two parallel sections, chapters 1 and 3 and chapters 2 and 4. Further, the emphasis is on the latter pair, so that Jonah is not so much about mission as about Jonah's (and Israel's) attitudes toward God and those on whom God shows compassion. Chapter 4 contains the actual "moral of the story," a lesson about divine compassion.

If we were to label chapter 4 "Jonah's Anger" or "Anger Answered," we would miss the crucial point that Jonah learned the meaning of divine forgiveness. Therefore, each heading must catch the essence of the paragraph. However, we must remember also that this is a preliminary overview and will be subject to correction if the detailed exegesis so warrants. This sort of overview of a book the length of Jonah or Philippians should take forty to forty-five minutes.[4]

Let us now go more deeply into the process and explore the stages by which the chart approach proceeds.

Step 1. The most efficient way to skim the paragraphs is with pen in hand. I try to summarize as I read. This helps enormously with my concentration. The major problem when skimming a text (or reading more carefully, for that matter) is a wandering mind. I often discover after reading a paragraph that my mind has shifted to a current problem or the events of the day, with the result that I must repeat the process (sometimes several times!). If I take notes as I go, stressing first impressions, I am able to concentrate far better. Also, I attempt to catch the progression of thought in a section (for instance, in the series of exhortations in

Phil 4:4-7; see fig. 1.3), whenever a single summary is not possible. Again, taking notes as I skim helps tremendously. The value of the process is that the chart becomes a map tracing the flow of the entire book. When studying individual passages more deeply later, I can at a glance determine the progression of thought surrounding that statement.

Step 2. After charting the book, it is time to return and look for patterns of thought in the progression of the book's paragraphs. We need to look for *breaks of thought* between paragraphs and then indicate them with a single line (see fig. 1.3). Paragraphs with similar material form major sections of the book and greater precision results. Some breaks of thought are quite easy to detect, such as the switch from Paul's personal comments (Phil 1:12-26) to the Philippian situation (Phil 1:27-28) or the further switch from the Philippians to Paul's commendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:19-30). Other changes are not so easy to detect, such as the slight alteration from humility (Phil 2:1-11) to warning (Phil 2:12-18), or placing Philippians 4:1 with Philippians 3:17-21 rather than Philippians 4:2-9. In the latter case, the reader can make only an educated guess at this stage and should wait for later clarification as he or she exegetes the book in detail.

This is why I include both Jonah and Philippians here. Jonah is one of the few biblical books whose outline follows the chapter divisions, thus providing a relatively simple example. The only question in Jonah is whether Jonah 1:17 is the conclusion of chapter 1 or the introduction to chapter 2. Philippians is far more complex and demands more careful thought. It is an example of didactic or teaching material rather than narrative or story (like Jonah). As such the breaks are more discontinuous (such as between Phil 2:25-30 and Phil 3:1-6) and the progression of the book as a whole is not so easy to ascertain. Nevertheless, the process in both cases will help the student to understand the thought progression of the book as a whole.

Figure 1.2. Chart of Jonah

Chap. 1	Chap. 2	Chap. 3	Chap. 4
1-3 Command to preach; rebellion and flight 4-12 God's storm, the sailors' fear 13-16 Sailors obey, throw Jonah overboard 17 Wall-to-wall whale	1-5 Prayer: Jonah's distress 6-9 Prayer: Jonah's faith 10 Jonah expelled	1-3a Command repeated; Jonah obeys 3b-9 Preaching and Nineveh's repentance 10 God's forgiveness	1-4 Jonah resents; God questions 5-8 God's lesson 1: vine withers, Jonah resents 9-11 God's lesson 2: divine compassion

Figure 1.3. Chart of Philippians

Chap. 1	Chap. 2	Chap. 3	Chap. 4
1-2 Salutation 3-8 Thanksgiving for fellowship and sharing 9-11 Prayer for their love and discernment	1-4 Unity and humility rather than conceit 5-11 Christ's example in humiliation and exaltation 12-13 Responsibility and empowering from God 14-18 Witness rather than complain and fight 19-24 Timothy commended for his genuine interest 25-30 Epaphroditus commended for risking his life	1-4a Warning against the Judaizers 4b-6 Paul's greater credentials 7-11 All loss to gain Christ 12-14 Striving for more of Christ 15-16 Call to heed 17-21 Contrast between true and false teachers	1 Stand firm 2-3 Plea for harmony 4-7 Exhortations to rejoice, be gentle, and pray for anxieties 8-9 Think and do the right things 10-13 Joy and contentment in their sharing and Christ's provision 14-19 Joy and contentment explained further 20-23 Doxology and closing greetings
12-14 His imprisonment advances the gospel 15-18a Rejoices when his opponents preach 18b-26 Will rejoice whether freed or executed 27-30 Unity in spite of persecution			

Another difficulty is the method for noting major pattern breaks. While every biblical passage has a meaningful organization, the pattern of thought often is not easy to detect. Douglas Stuart states: “Try to identify the patterns, looking especially for key features such as developments, resumptions, unique forms of phrase, central or pivotal words, parallelisms, chiasms, inclusions, and other repetitions or progressive patterns. The keys to patterns are most often *repetition* and *progression*” (1980:36). Walter Kaiser provides greater detail, listing eight “clues” for discovering such “seams” between units of thought (1981:71-72):

- A repeated term, phrase, clause or sentence may act as the heading to

introduce each part or as the colophon (tailpiece) to conclude each individual section.

- Often there may be grammatical clues such as transitional conjunctions or adverbs; for example, "then, therefore, wherefore, but, nevertheless, meanwhile," and the Greek words *oun, de, kai*, *tote, dio.*
- A rhetorical question could signal a switch to a new theme and section. It may be that there also will be a series of such questions which carries forward the argument or plan of a whole section.
- A change in the time, location or setting is a frequent device, especially in narrative contexts, to indicate a new theme and section.
- A vocative form of address deliberately showing a shift of attention from one group to another constitutes one of the most important devices. It is often used in the epistolary type of literature.
- A change in the tense, mood or aspect of the verb, perhaps even with a change in the subject or object, may be another clue that a new section is beginning.
- Repetition of the same key word, proposition or concept might also indicate the boundaries of a section.
- In a few cases, the theme of each section will be announced as a heading to that section. In those unusual cases, the interpreter need only make sure that all of the contents of the section are judged in light of the stated purpose of the author.
- These basic types of breaks will aid us as we skim the paragraphs and summarize the contents. By being aware of the possibilities, we often can determine a break of thought even while preparing the chart. Even more, these breaks will be of service as we begin the more detailed exegesis.

Step 3. The final step is to subdivide the sections further into major units by virtue of double lines. This will be especially valuable in didactic books like Philippians. The process is the same as the previous stage but now involves larger thought units than paragraphs, building on the results of stage two.

This method, however, will not work with Psalms and Proverbs. (It will work with individual psalms but not the collection as a whole.) Although many have attempted to group the psalms in various ways, a topical organizational pattern is superior. The same is true with Proverbs: those portions which have linear development (such as Prov 1—9 or 31) can be charted, but the collection of proverbs cannot be studied easily as a connected whole (see chaps. 8-9 of this book).

In addition, we might validly ask whether the method will work for longer

books like Isaiah or Jeremiah. While it is more difficult, I earnestly believe that it is quite helpful. Let me illustrate with not only a longer work but one of the most difficult portions of Scripture, the book of Revelation. Rather than take the space for a fulllength chart (which I recommend for the reader), I will discuss the structural implications (steps 2 and 3). As we look for patterns in the text, it becomes obvious that the Apocalypse is organized in cyclical fashion along spatial lines. A careful reading reveals that Revelation 1, 4—5, 7 (10), 14—15 and 19:1-10 take place in heaven while Revelation 2—3, 6, 8—9, 11—13 and 16—18 occur on earth. The concluding section (Rev 19:11—22:2) unites heaven and earth. Moreover, within this alternating pattern, the heavenly scenes are dominated by praise and worship while the earthly scenes are increasingly characterized by chaos, agony and divine judgment. The best proof of this pattern is the relationship between the seals, trumpets and bowls. By using an inductive chart we can see that their organizational pattern is the same. Therefore, the seals, trumpets and bowls are organized in cycles and are characterized by a progressive intensification of judgment and doom (in Rev 6:8 a quarter of the earth is affected, in Rev 7:7-8 a third of the earth, and in Rev 16:3-4 all the earth). The contrast between the heaven and earth scenes points to the unifying theme of the book, divine sovereignty (the vertical dimension), and leads to the horizontal dimension, which asks the church to put its trust in God in spite of present and future sufferings.[5]

Again, I must stress that this is a preliminary rather than a final outline. It represents the reader's viewpoint and not necessarily the original author's (which must await further study). We must recognize the ease with which our own presuppositions affect our view of the text. The reader plays a crucial role in the inductive process, and deeper study is necessary before we can arrive at the writer's intended plan. However, the inductive method still is invaluable for providing perspective in the process of interpretation.

2. Studying the parts: Diagramming the paragraph. When we try to chart the smaller unit (the paragraph) in similar fashion to the larger unit (the book), a vertical chart is better than the horizontal chart used previously, since the unit is smaller. For this type of study I recommend the New American Standard Bible (NASB) or English Standard Version (ESV) for those not familiar with the languages. Though not as fluent as other versions, their literal nature makes them the closest approximation to the Hebrew or Greek. Thus the student can see more closely the original patterns of the biblical authors. Several possible diagramming models are available (we will use Eph 1:5- 7 as our control). Many Greek exegesis courses use a complicated diagramming procedure (see fig. 1.4) in which each term is placed under the word it modifies and the relationship is

explained (see Grassmick). Gordon Fee (1983:60-76) suggests a sentence flow diagram (fig. 1.5) that is similar to but not as complicated as the grammatical chart method. Both place the subject, predicate and object at the top left-hand corner of the page and indent the subordinate terms under the words or phrases that they modify. Fee suggests annotations to explain grammatical decisions and color-coding for repeated words or themes. However, much of that is the task of more detailed deductive study and might wait for a later part of the analysis.

Figure 1.4. Grammatical diagram of Ephesians 1:5-7

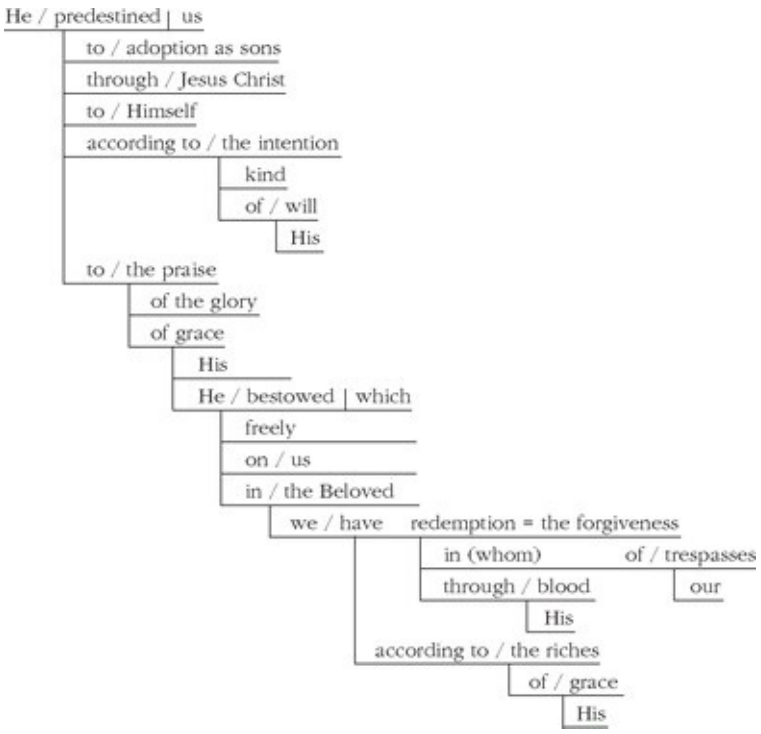
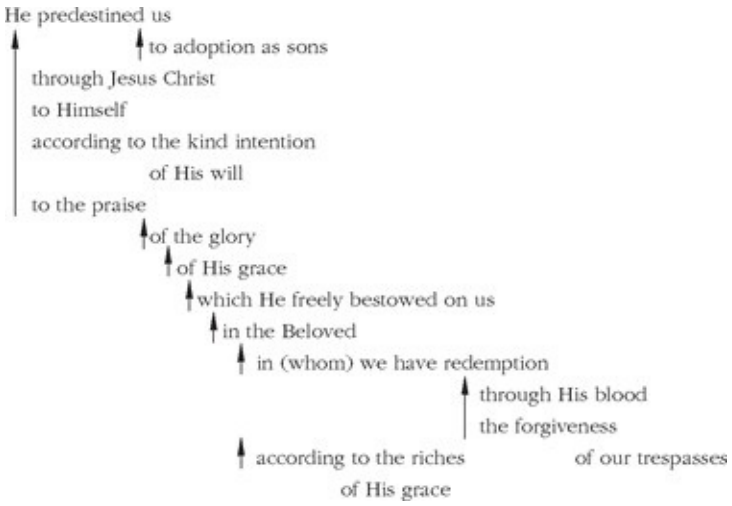


Figure 1.5. Phrase or sentence flow diagram of Ephesians 1:5-7



I prefer the simpler block diagram (fig. 1.6) to word or phrase diagrams (figs. 1.4, 1.5), for it functions at the clause level and provides a better overview.[6] The other two methods diagram every word or phrase, while the block diagram charts only major and minor clauses (or lengthy phrases). These are larger building blocks of speech, and so the three charts function at increasingly broader levels—word, phrase or clause. The block method does have some disadvantages; for instance, it does not demonstrate as many details as the other two. However, three advantages outweigh this weakness: (1) It is simpler and takes less time, thus encouraging the busy pastor or layperson to continue using it.[7] (2) Most of the other relationships (such as adjectives, modifying nouns, adverbs or prepositional phrases modifying verbs) are fairly self-evident from the clause structure. (3) The purpose of the sentence diagram is to visualize as simply as possible the thought flow of a paragraph rather than to decide grammatical details. The other two methods introduce too many visual complexities to do this well. Grammatical details become more evident during the exegetical study (chaps. 2-4), but at this early stage such details may hurt more than help. Grammar is best left for a later stage in the process. Moreover, at the later exegetical stage, diagramming is not as important because we want to clarify details within the sentence rather than to visualize thought flow. Therefore, the sentence diagram will serve our purpose better than the detailed grammatical diagram.

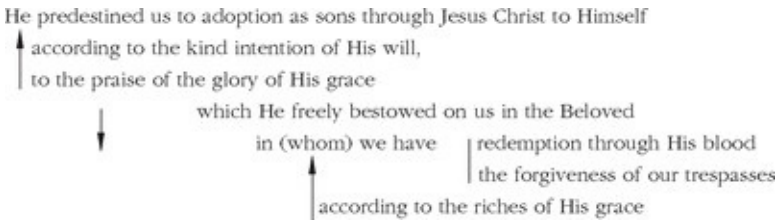
The first thing to do in the sentence diagram is to distinguish between major and minor clauses. It is amazing how little of this is done in our educational system. I normally ask my Greek classes when they last had grammar or diagramming, and the majority have had nothing since junior high school; several English majors have had nothing in their university courses! Therefore, it

is not surprising when we admit that we know little about such things.

Clauses are those portions of the sentence that contain a subject and a predicate, for instance, “I saw the boy” (main clause) or “because I saw the boy” (subordinate or minor clause). The difference between the two is that the first can stand alone as a sentence while the second cannot. When reading through a biblical sentence for the first time, I find the best way to distinguish is to read each clause out loud to myself to see which ones form incomplete sentences and which can indeed stand by themselves. The whole purpose of diagramming is to separate the major and minor clauses and see how the flow of ideas is progressing.

For instance, consider Philippians 2:6 (see fig. 1.7). Again I prefer a literal version like the NASB, since it is closer to the original Greek and Hebrew and so is a better study Bible. (Of course, those who know Greek or Hebrew will use the original languages.) Philippians 2:6 reads, “who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” (NASB). Here the “who” introduces the marvelous incarnational hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 and so should be considered a noun (“Christ Jesus” in v. 5). When we read the verse orally, it becomes evident that “although He existed in the form of God” cannot exist by itself as a sentence and so is subordinate to the main clause, “He . . . did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” For the diagram, we indent minor clauses one-half inch or so and indicate the clause they modify with an arrow: although He existed in the form of God who . . . did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Figure 1.6. Block or line diagram of Ephesians 1:5-7



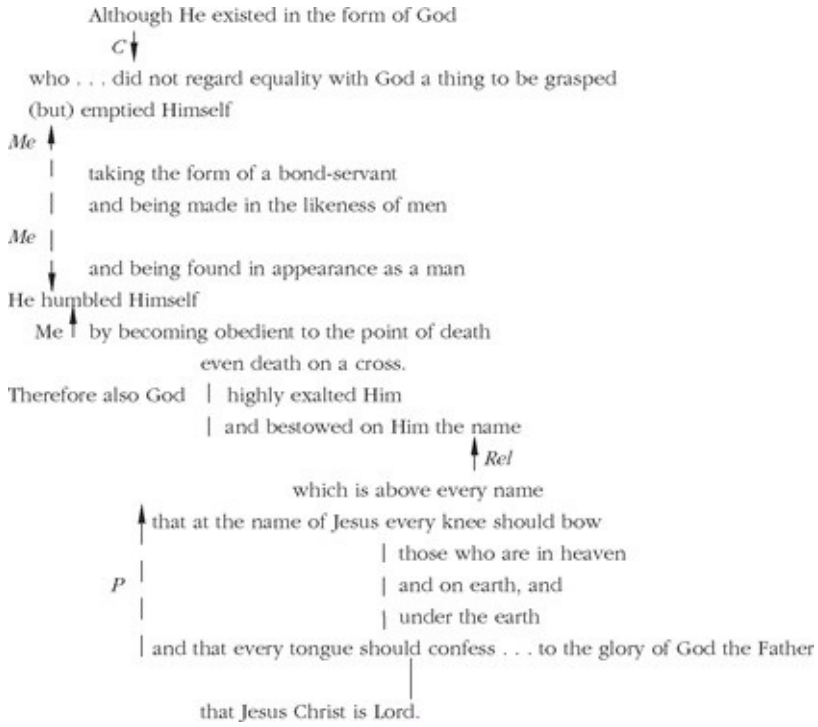
Many like to indent each clause under the term it modifies. While this provides a good visual aid, I find it unwieldy. Many subordinate clauses will modify the last word in a clause, and this takes an inordinate amount of space. Moreover, Paul is famous for his convoluted sentences. For instance, Ephesians 1:3-14 is a single, impossibly complex sentence. To diagram it in this fashion would take a

horizontal scroll eight feet wide rather than a sheet of paper! I find it better to indent a half inch and place the arrow under the clause that it modifies.

There are several aspects to note in a block diagram (fig. 1.7). First, the arrows should point to the term modified, while the subordinate clauses or phrases are indented a half inch past the clause they modify. Second, there is often a series of indented clauses, as minor clauses modify other minor clauses. This is one of the major values of a sentence diagram, for it will visualize such complicated relationships and simplify greatly our understanding of the thought flow. Third, parallel clauses or phrases are linked together either by an arrow (if they are subordinate like the two prepositional phrases of Eph 1:5-6) or by a bar (if they are not subordinate but coordinate, like the two nouns of v. 7). What we find in Ephesians 1:5-7 is a flow of four successive subordinate relationships. If we were to string these out, it would take a great deal of space. It is simpler and more efficient to employ arrows to do the work for us. Arrows also enable us to follow the order of the text and therefore to avoid confusion.[8] Minor clauses that come first have arrows pointing down (see fig. 1.7) and those which come after have arrows pointing up (see fig. 1.6).

Perhaps the best means for detecting clauses in the biblical text is to study the connecting words. This is especially true for biblical study because of the frequent employment of conjunctions in both Hebrew and Greek. We must ask whether it is a coordinating conjunction (and, but, yet, both-and, not only-but also, either-or, therefore, for, so)[9] that indicates a parallel or main clause, or a subordinating conjunction (unless, before, after, while, when, since, because, that, if, although, though, so that, in order that, except, as, then, where) that indicates a modifying clause.

Figure 1.7. Diagram of Philippians 2:6-11 with syntactical codes



We can also state the basic type of subordinating relationship by developing a series of codes for the various syntactical relationships (such as *T* for temporal, *Ca* for causal, *Cn* for concessive, *Cd* for conditional, *R* for result, *Re1* for relative, *P* for purpose, *Me* for means, *Ma* for manner, *I* for instrumental). These codes can be written beside the arrow so that a glance they can show the pattern of subordinate clauses in the paragraph. Let me demonstrate by diagramming the entire incarnational hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 (see fig. 1.7).[10]

This shows at a glance that the two major sections are Jesus' actions and God's actions. Under the former fall three basic ideas: Jesus' subordination, his emptying and his humility. Under the latter there is one major idea, God's act of exaltation, and two subordinate ideas, all knees bowing and all tongues confessing. As we can note immediately, this is the sermon outline in a nutshell. In fact, the block diagram leads directly to a preliminary sermon or Bible study outline. When we look at the pattern of clauses in the diagram, major and minor points suggest themselves immediately (as we saw in Phil 2:6-11 in fig. 1.7).

However, there are two caveats: first, the outline, like the diagram, must remain preliminary, subject to revision as the detailed exegesis unfolds. Second, while the syntactical relationships help greatly to determine major segments of thought, they do not determine them automatically. Often the clauses are parallel (emptying and humbling in vv. 7-8 or bowing and confessing in vv. 10-11) and should be combined into a single point. Just as important, what is subordinate

grammatically at times can have equal or greater stress than the main clause in the writer's actual thought development. Paul is especially known for this. If the subordinate idea is given extensive clarification, it is a sign that the writer considers it to be a major stress. For example, Philippians 2:2 says, "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (NASB). Obviously, the primary emphasis is not the completion of Paul's joy but the harmony of the Philippian church, developed in four successive subordinate phrases telling the means for bringing Paul greater joy. In the sermon outline the point would be harmony, not joy. Likewise, in the Philippians hymn the fact that Paul uses two subordinate clauses to modify emptying (v. 7) and humbling (v. 8) shows that Paul actually is emphasizing the incarnational aspects ("made in the likeness of man").

The preacher should develop the preliminary sermon outline from the line diagram. The best way is to place it alongside the diagram and line up the points. At this stage the sermon outline resembles a Bible study. But as I will argue in chapter seventeen, the text should dictate the organization of an expository sermon. If we manipulate the text to fit our preconceived message, it will no longer be the Word of God proclaimed but rather our ideas shared. Therefore, the outline will fit the organization of the text:

I. State of humiliation (Phil 2:6-8)

a. State of mind (v. 6)

1. His essence
2. His decision

b. State of being (vv. 7-8)

1. His incarnation (v. 7)

a. His essence
b. His likeness

2. His humiliation, v. 8

a. His appearance
b. His obedience

II. State of exaltation (Phil 2:9-11)

a. Exaltation by God (v. 9)

1. His new estate
2. His great name

b. Exaltation by man and creation (vv. 10-11)

1. Exaltation via submission (v. 10)
2. Exaltation via confession (v. 11)

a. Universality of it
b. Contents of it
c. Result of it

Again, this is a preliminary outline awaiting the final reworking after the completion of the exegesis. At that stage the passage can be transformed into a dynamic sermon model (see chap. 18; Liefeld 1984:115-20). However, as a future Bible study or sermon outline, the potential message provided by our study of Philippians 2:6-11 thus far is certainly meaningful. Only John 1:1-18 contains similar depth of theological reflection on the incarnation and exaltation of Christ exhibited in this passage.[11] The moment of incarnation is described in all three of the main clauses in the first half (vv. 6-8). It is described first negatively, as Jesus refuses the prerogatives and glory of deity (v. 6), and then positively as an emptying and a humbling, as Jesus adds to his divine nature ("form of God" [v. 6]) his human nature ("form of a bond-servant" [v. 7], cf. v. 8). This servanthood Christology forms the model or paradigm for Christian attitudes (note v. 5), which makes the exaltation passage (vv. 9-11) all the more exciting. As with Christ, we who "humble ourselves" (cf. v. 3) will be exalted by God and share the glory of Christ. Of course, we do not have "the name which is above every name." When we share Jesus' attitude of humility, we will share his exaltation.

However, Old Testament passages are different. The first thing we notice about them is the lack of subordinate clauses. Diagramming the Old Testament is not nearly as helpful as in the New Testament because Hebrew does not employ

as many conjunctions. Poetic as well as narrative passages primarily contain main clauses. In prose the main conjunction or “and” clause predominates. Therefore, we must look for rhetorical patterns and see where the ideas themselves change. At this point a line diagram is still helpful, as it places the sentences side by side.

RHETORICAL OR COMPOSITIONAL PATTERNS

When diagramming the structural development of ideas in a paragraph, one often comes into contact with rhetorical techniques, that is, stylistic methods for getting across a message. This provides the third and final level of the context within which an idea is found, namely, the macro level of the organizational pattern in the book as a whole and the intermediate levels of the paragraph and the compositional techniques used within those paragraphs. The micro level (the detailed structure of the words themselves) is the subject of the next four chapters.

We may accept as a working hypothesis Aristotle's classic definition of rhetoric as "the art of discovering the best possible means of persuasion in regard to any subject whatever" (Kessler 1982:2). Rhetorical studies often have confused the formal (genre) and the functional (organizational techniques) aspects.[12] The four classical divisions of rhetoric as expounded by Cicero were invention, arrangement, style and memory techniques. Genre is peripheral to this, for rhetorical criticism by definition primarily is concerned with the communication process per se, that is, with the techniques and organizational patterns by which the author's arguments are presented. Martin Kessler argues that the synchronic side—namely, that side dealing with the text itself—should predominate in rhetorical analysis (1982:13-14). I am using this approach in this section, as we look to the structural dimensions of the text and detect the stylistic techniques by which the biblical writers (and others) link their arguments. (See the excursus in chapter four [pp. 144-50] for the other types of rhetorical criticism.)

Literally scores of different types of relationships exist between ideas or thoughts. Classifying these types, however, has been difficult. I have chosen to combine the efforts of B. J. F. Meyer and G. E. Rice and of Eugene Nida, S. P. Louw, A. H. Snuman, and J. v. W. Cronje.[13] Such a classification is important because it will guide our study of individual structures in the Bible; a basic understanding of these types will prove immensely helpful as we study various passages. Therefore, I will illustrate each rhetorical type with examples from Scripture.

1. *Collection relations* (Nida, “repetition”; Liefeld, “continuity”) connect ideas or events on the basis of some common point of agreement. This was a common type of rhetorical feature in the ancient world. The rabbis called it “pearl-stringing” and would often collect messianic texts together. This explains the connected series of proof-texts in Hebrews 1:4-14, taken respectively from Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:17; Psalms 97:7; 104:4; 45:6-7; 102:25-27; 110:1.[14] Similar collections are found in the five discourses of Matthew’s Gospel; for instance, in the apocalyptic section of the mission discourse (cf. Mt 10:16-22 with Mk 13:9-13). Often catchwords will link a seemingly disorganized series. Such is the case in Mark 9:33-50, a collection of sayings on reward and punishment. The section is organized around “in my name” (vv. 37-41), “offend” (vv. 42-47), “salt” and “fire” (vv. 48-50).

   Repetition can be organized around either sound or idea. As Nida shows, Hebrews 1:1 contains five Greek terms beginning with *p*, five occurrences of *l*, and two adverbs ending in *-os*. This was a memory technique that also added emphasis to the statement. Similar patterns can be found in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-13), the explanation of John’s purpose in writing (1 Jn 2:12-14) and the letters to the seven churches (virtually “form letters”) in Revelation 2—3. Repetition of idea is much more predominant. While we will discuss Hebrew poetic parallelism more in chapter eight, it is helpful to note here the predominance of parallelism in prose as well as in poetry, in the New Testament as well as in the Old. It is certainly the most frequent rhetorical pattern in the Bible. A basic error of many exegetes is to emphasize the differences of meaning between synonymous terms found in a list; for instance, the terms for “love” in John 21:15-17, the types of sacrifice in Hebrews 10:8 or the terms for prayer in Philippians 4:6. We must at all times be aware of the possibility that the reason for the employment of different terms or phrases may be stylistic rather than theological; repetition may have been used for emphasis, and the differences between the terms should not be stressed.
2. *Cause-effect* and *problem-solution* relations contain an antecedent action and a resultant consequence.[15] We can choose from numerous illustrations. The denunciation of Israel by the prophets often takes a cause-effect form. For instance, Amos 2:6-16 begins with the cause (“for three transgressions of Israel and for four” [v. 6]), proceeds to an enumeration of those sins (vv. 6b-13) and then concludes with the judgment (or effects [vv. 14-16]). The messianic promises of the prophets

provide examples of problem-solution. The problem was that the righteous remnant of Israel would suffer alongside the apostates. For them God provided a solution: he promised that he would "not totally destroy the house of Jacob" (Amos 9:8). While the sinners would die (Amos 9:10), God himself would "raise up the fallen booth of David" (v. 11, using imagery drawn from the Feast of Tabernacles).

Similar to this is a *question-answer* format, used frequently by Paul as well as by the prophets. This is especially true in the epistle to the Romans, where Paul frequently employs a rhetorical question (which presents the views of his opponents) and then proceeds to answer that erroneous perspective. Similar questions introduce the discussions of justification by faith (Rom 4:1-2), the defeat of sin by union with Christ (Rom 6:1-2), the problem of the law and sin (Rom 7:1-2, 13), God's salvific intent (Rom 8:31-32), and the justification of God (Rom 9:19-24; 11:1-2).

Under this rubric too we could include *purpose* and *result* or *substantiation*. These also answer the question Why? Purpose reverses the order and tells the intended result rather than the result itself. The two (purpose and result) are frequently quite difficult to differentiate, but as Walter Liefeld states, "Often, considering the providence of God, the distinction is not important" (1984:69). Whether we translate "in order that" (future-oriented) or "so that" (past-oriented), the emphasis is on God's sovereign control of the situation. The conjunction "for" often leads into a similar substantiation of a theological statement. For instance, Romans 8:29-31 tells why we can know that "all things work together for good" (v. 28): God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified his people. In other words, God is in control and we can place our trust in him.

3. *Comparison* demonstrates similarities or contrasts between ideas. A famous example is the Adam-Christ contrast of Romans 5:12-21; both figures are corporately identified (note "the one" and "the many" [v. 15]) with sinful humankind and the Christian, respectively. We might also note the debated relationship between Romans 7:7-13 (past tense) and 7:14-25 (present tense). We must decide whether the two sections move from the unregenerate to the regenerate state or from Israel in the past to Israel in the present (Moo 1986). Proverbs employs numerous examples in the wise-foolish contrasts of Proverbs 1:7 and 15:5, and similar patterns (see pp. 242-57 on interpreting Proverbs).

   Several scholars have a separate discussion of *interchange*, but in

reality this is simply a variation of comparison. Instead of straightforward comparison, interchange alternates persons, events or categories in order to produce thematic comparison. A good example is John's alternating of Peter's denial (Jn 18:15-18, 25-27) with Jesus' steadfast courage before Annas (vv. 19-23) and Pilate (vv. 28-40). The contrast between Peter's cowardice and Jesus' courage is obvious. We can also find alternating categories in the Adam-Christ contrast (Rom 5:2-21).

4. *Description* is a broad category entailing clarification of a topic, event or person by means of further information. This might be called *continuation* (see Osborne and Woodward 1979:70-71) and is differentiated from *repetition* in that it "extends" rather than "repeats" the discussion. The technique can be demonstrated in the elaboration of Jonah's flight (Jon 1:3) in Jonah 1:4-17 or in the further description of the divine blessing of Abraham (Gen 13:14-18) in Genesis 14:1-18. Christ's use of two parables in Luke 14:28-32 to clarify the importance of "counting the cost" in discipleship (Lk 14:26-27, 33) is another example. The message is that no one dare enter the process of discipleship until he or she realizes what it entails. The parables provide a graphic description of one who wants to be a disciple without "bearing his cross" (v. 27). Christ demands unconditional surrender of all ties with the world (v. 33).

   The principle of *summation* might be placed under this category, for it usually comes at the end of a lengthy descriptive piece in order to tie the ends together and show the basic theme or result. Needless to say, detecting such a technique is rather helpful in determining the basic thrust of a passage. At times such a summary comes at the beginning and end of the passage, as in Joshua 12:7, 24: "Now these are the kings of the land whom Joshua and the sons of Israel defeated. . . . In all, thirty-one kings" (NASB). Most of the time, it occurs at the end. In historical books such summaries or "seams" help to link material and themes. For instance, the summary sections of Acts contain one of Luke's primary theological emphases, how the Spirit of God triumphs over the church's troubles. Each summary centers on the "increase" of the "word" (a technical term referring both to the proclamation of the gospel and to the successful results in the growth of the church) in spite of internal dissension (Acts 6:1-6 with v. 7), the persecution of the church (Acts 8:1-9:30 with v. 31), persecution by a tyrant (Acts 12:1-23 with v. 24), and the occult (Acts 19:13-19 with v. 20).

   Similar to summation is the Jewish practice of *inclusio*, a technique in

which the author at the end of a discussion returns to the point he made at the beginning. Thus he reiterates the basic point he has been developing and ties together the whole description. One of the best examples is John 1:18, which concludes the Johannine prologue and repeats the themes of John 1:1, such as Jesus as the revealer of God and as always with the Father. Raymond E. Brown also notes inclusio in John with respect to the Cana miracles (Jn 2:11; 4:46, 54), to the Transjordan (Jn 1:28; 10:40), and to the paschal lamb (Jn 1:29; 19:36) (1966:cxxxv). Another Jewish technique that highlights major themes is *chiasm,* which reverses words or events in successive parallel clauses or sections. It is found frequently in the Old Testament, of course, as in the ABC:CBA organization of Isaiah 6:10.

Chiasm is also found frequently in the New Testament. Lund sees it in passages like 1 Corinthians 5:2-6; 9:19-22; 11:8-12 and many others (1942). Raymond Brown makes a cogent argument for chiasm in John 6:36-40 and John 18:28—19:16 (1966:276; 1970:858-59).

5. *Shifts in expectancy* includes many compositional types. As Nida says, "They depend for their significance on the fact that the reader recognizes the unusual word order, syntactic structure, or meaning of a word, phrase, or complete sentence" (1983:36). In some ways this category is too broad, as it could include such other categories as rhetorical questions, inclusio or chiasm. Moreover, it clearly overlaps with figures of speech, which we will discuss in chapter four. However, the rhetorical devices transcend such figures as anacolutha (mentioned by Nida). Nevertheless, such shifts are keys to structural emphases so must be included here as well. Jesus' Farewell Speech (Jn 14—16) contains many such shifts, so many in fact that some scholars see no unity in the section but rather a series of overlapping traditions haphazardly strung together. This results in theories of a Johannine "circle" or series of editors who imposed an artificial unity on the Fourth Gospel, resulting in *aporias,* or structural inconsistencies. In an important recent article, however, Edwin Webster argues that "the Gospel, as a literary whole, is meticulously constructed on the basis of symmetrical design and balanced units" (1982:230). Webster notes two concentric sections in John 13—16, each with three divisions (pp. 243-45).

I. Jesus and the Disciples

a. Jesus washes their feet; his example (13:1-20)

b. Judas' departure (13:21-32)
c. Dialogue on Jesus' departure (13:33—14:31)

II. Disciples and the World

a. Metaphor of vine and branches; example of his love (15:1-16)
b. The world's hatred (15:17-27)
c. Dialogue on Jesus' departure (16:1-33)

Webster argues for a chiastic relationship between the critical sections of John 14 and 16, which could explain the repetitive themes. This type of shift is difficult for the modern reader but easily detectable and understandable in the ancient world. The difficulties disappear when we understand the structural development. In other words, there are no clumsy inconsistencies or repetitions but rather a carefully crafted discourse.

Climax and *cruciality* also belong under this rubric. The former is found in narrative and the latter in epistles, but both have a similar function in that they designate the pivotal or turning point of the writer's basic argument. In the healing of the demon-possessed child (Mk 9:14-29) the climax does not occur with the miracle itself but with the cry of the father, "I do believe; help my unbelief" (NASB). That is a pivotal point in Mark's discipleship theme as a whole and provides an antidote to the disciples' failure in verses 18-19 as well as a precursor to the necessity of faith prayer in verse 29. Liefeld provides an excellent example of climax in the different order of the temptations in Matthew 4:1-10 and Luke 4:1-12 (1984:63). By having his story climax with the temptation regarding the kingdoms of the world, Matthew concluded with an emphasis appropriate to his royal messianic theme. By climaxing with the pinnacle of the temple, Luke on the other hand centers on the temple and in particular on the Jewish origins of Christianity, one of the major themes in his Gospel. In both cases the climax is a key to the basic theological stress.

Finally, I would include here Nida's discussion of *omission* (1983:33-36). When an author deliberately omits a point that the reader is expecting, it provides a "shift in expectancy" that is startling and emphatic. Usually such passages omit particular words (such as *kai* in 1

Cor 13:4-7 or the introductory formula of Heb 1:5, 8, 10). At times, however, the crucial omissions were understandable to the original readers but cause unbelievable difficulties for the modern interpreter; for instance, the deliberate omission of any explanation/identification of the "restrainer" (2 Thess 2:6-7) or of "666" (Rev 13:18). Hundreds of theories have been propounded for the two, and it is likely that we will not know the true meaning for certain until the Lord himself returns.

2

Grammar

E*xegesis* means to “draw out of” a text what it means, in contrast to *eisegesis,* to “read into” a text what one wants it to mean. The process is complex and forms the heart of hermeneutical theory, which seeks first to determine the author’s intended meaning (see appendixes 1 and 2 for the possibility of doing so) and then to apply it to one’s life. This is a single task, and the two aspects—meaning and significance—cannot be separated, since the determination of meaning (what it meant) is already done from the standpoint of modern perspectives or significance (what it means). Nevertheless these are still differing aspects of the larger hermeneutical whole, so I will devote chapters two to five to general hermeneutics (that is, *meaning*—what the biblical text “meant”) and chapters fifteen to eighteen to applied hermeneutics (that is, *significance*—what Scripture “means” to us today). Werner Jeanrond calls these different reading perspectives, that is, different purposes or goals that are not mutually exclusive but work together to produce understanding (1988:126-28).[1] Exegesis proper could be subdivided into linguistic and cultural aspects. The former is concerned with the alignment of terms or concepts that together form the propositional statements. The latter relates to the historical and sociological background behind those statements.

Chapters two through four discuss the three aspects of linguistic study. Grammar, the subject of this chapter, denotes the basic laws of language behind the relationship between the terms in the surface structure. Semantics (chap. 3) looks at the meaning of individual words as each functions in the sentence. Syntax (chap. 4) studies the configuration of the sentence units and the way the message as a whole can speak in differing cultural contexts. In other words, syntax concerns “transformational grammar” (according to Noam Chomsky, the way the developing context transforms the communication process). Another way to put it is that chapters two and three provide the locutionary aspect (the meaning or message), chapter four the illocutionary aspect (what the text does) and chapters seventeen and eighteen the perlocutionary aspect (how the text affects the readers). All three aspects are interdependent and cannot truly exist apart from the others. Nevertheless, we must consider them separately, for the

linguistic rules differ for each. The interpreter, however, will consider all three at the same time when studying the surface structure (the sentences) in order to delineate the original intended meaning.

Naturally, the person who does not know the original languages will have a perceptibly greater difficulty in dealing with grammar and syntax. Most of the material below will assume a basic knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. However, the task is not completely hopeless for those who have never studied the languages. The problem is that they must then depend on secondary sources, mainly translations and the better commentaries. My suggestion is to use the information below to test the commentaries. Many older or less-informed works will make basic errors in the conclusions they draw regarding the significance of tense, mood and so forth. The grammatical information in this chapter can become resource material when commentators argue particular points. Another suggestion is to memorize the Hebrew and Greek alphabets and then purchase an interlinear version that has the Hebrew or Greek side by side with one or more English versions (normally also with the corresponding English word under each Hebrew or Greek term). John Hayes and Carl Holladay suggest a good use of analytical concordances like Strong or Young, which give the Hebrew or Greek words behind the English terms and key them to appendixes or even lexicons that explain the original language (1982:58). Finally, one can compare several English versions to see how different committees have translated the passages. All in all, it is hoped that the ensuing chapter will aid those with little linguistic background as well as those with more training. There will probably not be a more boring “read” than this chapter. Consider it a resource tool when you have questions of grammar.

THE PRELIMINARY TASK: ESTABLISHING THE TEXT

Before we can begin serious exegesis of a scriptural passage, we must establish the text itself. Many different manuscripts of both Old and New Testaments exist, at times having quite dissimilar readings. Two processes enable us to establish the original reading: first, text criticism compares the various readings and decides which one was probably the basis of the others. Second, decisions are made as to whether letters or phrases belong with the previous or following term (more so in Old Testament study). In the ancient world there was neither punctuation nor spaces between words. In addition, Hebrew writing used no vowels. In many instances a letter can be either a suffix of the previous word or a prefix of the succeeding word. Also, phrases like “in love” can belong either with a previous clause (Eph 1:4-5 KJV) or a following clause (Eph 1:4-5 NIV).

Text criticism is necessary when we note wide disparities between the versions on individual passages. For instance, the “longer” ending of Mark is present in the King James Version but missing in recent versions like the Revised Standard, New American Standard, New International and New Living Translation. Determining the correct reading is often an almost impossible task. We must remember that the class of professional scribes did not develop until quite late within both Judaism and the early church. In the New Testament era text copyists were amateurs and made all the errors one would expect in a text.[2] They added or subtracted words, substituted alternate readings, and smoothed out rough grammar. There were sight errors, reversed letters and deliberate changes to add significant theological points or to harmonize seeming contradictions. Indeed, all the errors that modern proofreaders are supposed to find and eliminate in manuscripts are present in the ancient recensions of the Bible.

Moreover, text criticism is certainly an inexact science. Old Testament study before 1947 delineated three major textual traditions:[3] the Masoretic Text (MT) compiled by the Masoretes, a group of Jewish scholars who added the vowel points and codified the oral tradition, from the sixth to the ninth centuries A.D.; the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek Old Testament translated from the third to the first centuries B.C.; and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), the official Bible of the

Samaritan sect at Shechem. Readings from the Targums (Aramaic paraphrases, see chap. 14), the Peshitta (the Syriac version) and the Vulgate (Jerome's Latin version) have been regarded as secondary and as reflecting one of the other traditions (see Klein 1974:59-61). At first the discovery of the Qumran scrolls was thought to strengthen the importance of the Septuagint, since several "LXX readings" were found in the Qumran material. Therefore, there was little shift in the alignment of the evidence. However, several recent challenges to the traditional view have made it necessary to reopen the question of textual "types."

Emanuel Tov has shown that the relationship between the scrolls and the Septuagint is not nearly as persuasive as hitherto thought, since differences in many cases outweigh similarities and there are diverse text types in the readings common to the scrolls and the Septuagint (1980:45-67; 1982a:11-27). Tov argues that these represent not text types but simple texts, and that one must study the external evidence individually passage by passage rather than via external criteria (1981:272-751; 1982b:429-34). However, he admits, "On the whole, the readings of the MT do deserve more respect than readings found in other sources" (1981:287).[4] Moreover, Tov also agrees that the Qumran scrolls do indeed support the Septuagint in many instances. Therefore, Tov goes too far when he states that "there exist *no relevant external considerations* that can be applied to the evaluation of readings," and that "internal criteria are the *only valid criteria* for evaluating retroverted variants" (1981:286, 288). He has probably succeeded in showing the tentative nature of the tripartite division into text types, but he has not disproved the basic validity of external criteria, so long as we recognize the tentative nature of such conclusions.

Textual criticism of the New Testament is usually regarded as much more stable, due to the greater number of manuscripts (over 5,000) and the vast amount of work accomplished by scholars such as B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort at the end of the nineteenth century, or Kurt Aland and Bruce Metzger in more recent times. The manuscripts likewise have been subdivided into text families or types, based on the style of changes but even more on the geographical distributions: Alexandrian, Caesarean and Byzantine. However, while it may seem to have greater stability, several challenges to the eclectic method developed by Westcott and Hart have made it necessary to temper the conclusions. First, proponents of the "majority text" (such as Pickering and Hodges) have argued that the vast majority of the manuscripts are in agreement behind the Textus Receptus (TR) of Erasmus, the version used in the Authorized Version, and that the text-family approach ignores the presence of TR readings in many of the church fathers. Although this challenge must be respected and taken seriously, I agree with D. A. Carson (1979) and Gordon Fee (1978) that a

much stronger case can be made for the eclectic method. Second, many scholars agree that the entire methodological apparatus of text criticism is overdue for an overhaul and that the evidence for the text types is particularly suspect. Most today recognize the tentative and subjective nature of most decisions.[5] We must use the evidence with great care and sophistication.

There are great similarities between the criteria for text-critical decisions in the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, I will present one set of criteria and use examples from both Testaments. The main thing to remember is that no reading is proven by any single criterion. Rather, all the variants must be evaluated on the basis of all the criteria, and the most probable reading will be the one that best fits the whole.

1. ***External criteria.*** External criteria are those rules that relate to the documents themselves. These weigh the distribution of the variant readings, judge the relative merits of the manuscripts within which the readings are found and detect "biases" (tendencies) in the transmission habits of the texts. Many, like Tov, believe these have less merit because of the secondary nature of such judgments, based as they are on prior decisions regarding the date and geographical nature of the various manuscripts. Certainly there is some truth to this, especially in light of the great disparity of patterns in the changes in any given manuscript. Nevertheless, those who have done primary research on manuscripts state that it is indeed possible to give a basic "grade" to the quality of individual readings, so long as one realizes the subjective nature of such decisions.[6] When we study various possibilities for the original text of a particular passage, it is advisable to use the following procedure.

   Determine the relative dates of the textual sources. This is more easily done for the New Testament but still has value for the Old. For instance, the Targumim for the Writings portion of the Old Testament stem from a later period, and there is a considerable amount of text-critical work to be done on the Septuagint itself before it can be compared to other recensions. Ernst Wurthwein (1979:114; cf. 12-27) and Tov (1982b:438) relate the major exception to this rule: the Masoretic Text is the most recent of the major versions of the Old Testament, yet at the same time it is the most trustworthy, that is, it contains the oldest traditions. Many of the oldest extant copies at Qumran (such as 1QpHab) have undergone extensive revision due to the theological proclivities of the community, while others (such as 1QIs^{a}) are very accurate. In other words, transmission procedures have precedence over age (this is true for both

Testaments). Dating for New Testament manuscripts is a fairly exact science, and several manuscripts are dated fairly close to the first century. For instance, Bodmer Papyrus I1 (P66), containing portions of John 14—21, can be dated around A.D. 200, relatively close to the actual writing of that Gospel. The earlier manuscripts are not automatically superior to older ones, as we have seen; nevertheless, they are immensely helpful.

Determine the temporal and geographical distribution of the manuscripts behind each of the variants. If a reading is found in major manuscripts from several sectors of the early church, it is more likely to be original. Of course, this must be combined with the first criterion. For instance, the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20 is omitted in Alexandrian readings (Codexes Sinaiticus, Vaticanus), in the Old Latin codex Bobiensis (it^k), several Armenian manuscripts, as well as in Origen and Eusebius. It is found primarily in the "wilder" (expanded or longer) Codex Bezae or Byzantine (Ephraemi, Alexandrinus) readings. Therefore, most scholars doubt its authenticity (as part of Mark's original Gospel).

Determine the genealogical relationship of the manuscripts behind each reading. This is the most tenuous of the criteria, based as it is on theories of text type. Theoretically, a reading found in several text families is superior to one from a single family. In Old Testament research Wurthwein (1979:114) states that the Masoretic Text should be given greater weight, and decisions against a Masoretic Text reading should be made with great care.[7] Tov takes the opposite pole, stating that no one version should have greater status than another (1982b:435). On the whole a mediating position is best. We should recognize the general weight of the manuscript evidence but not make it the only deciding factor. If the Masoretic Text itself contains a possible reason for a change (such as theological preference or smoothing out a "rough reading"), we will go with the Septuagint or the Samaritan Pentateuch. In some cases it will be fairly conclusive. For instance, all the important ancient New Testament versions omit the story of the woman caught in adultery from John 7:53—8:12; only Codex Bezae and later sources (such as the Byzantine texts) include it. All three of the above criteria strongly support the omission of the story.

Note the relative quality of the manuscripts. Again, we are forced to make a subjective decision. However, by stressing "relative quality," this criterion does have limited value. We look for the degree of divergence in

a text or text family, that is, which ones generally contain shorter readings, fewer theological additions and common errors. We have already noted the general consensus that the Masoretic Text is superior to the others. The same could be said for Codex Vaticanus (B) in the New Testament. This is not conclusive by any means, and we would not go quite so far as Klein or Wurthwein in supporting the Masoretic Text unless forced to do otherwise. However, if all other criteria are equal, the presence of the Masoretic Text or B behind a reading is at least a solid point in its favor.

2. ***Internal criteria.*** Internal criteria are rules that relate to the construction and inner clarity of the text itself. These, of course, also are subjective, depending as they do on the reader's apprehension of the text and what "must" be the case in it. Yet as John Hayes and Carl Holladay state, "In spite of their complexity they are commonly sensible, for they are primarily attempts to reverse the process of composition and transmission" (1982:35). When we are aware of the types of changes that occur, it makes sense to erect criteria that aid in detecting such changes.

   The more difficult reading is more likely. It makes sense to think that later scribes would smooth out difficulties rather than add them. Of course, this too cannot stand by itself, for there are many ways an error could be made in a text, and "smoothing" difficult passages is only one of them. Nevertheless, when one is aware of the ways a scribe could write the wrong form or term in a text (see Metzger 1964:186-206; Klein 1974:76-84) this rule can be helpful. In fact, many have made it the primary criterion for text-critical decisions. For instance, later scribes noted the clumsy wording of Philippians 3:16 (lit., "only unto what we have attained, let us walk in the same") and added "by the same rule, think the same thing" to smooth out the staccato phrase. The clumsier reading is definitely more likely for this verse; it is highly improbable that later scribes would omit the last half of the verse and produce so clumsy a reading.

   The shorter reading is preferred. It was far more common to add material to a text than to reduce it. Therefore, if all else is equal the shorter text has greater likelihood of being correct. Scribes would clarify the subject or explain difficult terms. Often they would harmonize one text with another in order to avoid a seeming contradiction. One of the most common additions occurred when one scribe added a comment in the margin and the next scribe, thinking he had accidentally deleted part of the text, included it. For instance, Codex Bezae on the book of Acts is

one-tenth longer than other manuscripts; nearly all of that is added material that certainly is not part of the original text. Of course, in cases of haplography the longer passage is preferred, and the rule is hardly absolute. Nevertheless, it is a valuable signifier helping the student to note the likely Urtext (original reading).

The reading that best fits the author's style, and especially the immediate context, is more probable. This is often called the criterion of intrinsic probability (the first two are the criteria of transcriptional probability). Tov considers this the one pertinent criterion (1981:288). Yet it too remains problematic, and Fee calls it "the most subjective of all the criteria" (1983:57). An author's "style" is difficult to identify, for the type of statistics scholars often use (e.g., taking the number of times a word is used as an index to an author's preferred choice of terms) seldom applies to works as short as the biblical books. Writers are just not that predictable. Therefore, scholars differ in their evaluation of and use of style as a text-critical criterion. The immediate context is more valuable, but again few readings are settled easily by such considerations. Scribes often would change a reading so it would better fit their ideas regarding the context.

Moreover, this criterion often clashes with the "more difficult reading" criterion, since context often guided the choice or changes by later scribes as well. In virtually every example Tov gives (such as Is 45:1-2; Deut 31:1; 32:8; 1 Sam 17:8; Jon 1:9; see 1981:289-92) the more difficult reading favored one reading while the context favored the other. However, as Fee notes, intrinsic probability still has some limited value, for it can eliminate one or two of the possibilities and strengthen some of the other criteria (1983:57).

Added to the external evidence for the longer ending of Mark, this criterion points to a strong probability against Markan origin. As Metzger points out, the vocabulary and style of Mark 16:9-20 are too unlike the Second Gospel (1971:124-26). Moreover, the immediate context makes it unlikely, because the break is too clumsy, with a change of subject between verses 8 and 9 and the complete neglect of the other women besides Mary in verses 9-10. In short, a later editor probably compiled traditions on the resurrection appearances and the life of the early church to form a better conclusion to Mark's Gospel than that afforded by verse 8.

In conclusion, we must study the various possibilities on the basis of a grid determined by the three criteria discussed. The reading that most

coherently meets these rules is the probable original reading. The New Testament scholar will use the Nestle-Aland text and study in depth both external and internal criteria, utilizing the extensive apparatus (Aland 1987:228-56 provides an excellent discussion). The nonexpert should use the UBS text, which grades the readings, study closely the explanations provided by Metzger (1971), then use the information discussed here and work with, rather than accept wholesale, the arguments of Metzger or the commentators. To be sure, the busy pastor often has little time for text-critical decisions but needs to be aware of the issues and to ascertain the text with as great a precision as possible in the limited time available. I would recommend that those in the pulpit ministry heed Liefeld's caution (although one must interact more deeply in biblical study):

> Unless the Bible used by those in the congregation has a different reading from that used by the preacher, or has a footnote indicating that there is a textual variant, it is probably best not to mention the uncertainty. If it seems necessary to introduce the matter, I would encourage that the preacher affirm every time this happens, that this does not affect the integrity of the original and that no doctrine would be left unsupported if a favorite reading must be abandoned because of a more valid variant. This does not mean, as one sometimes hears, that no doctrine is affected by textual variants. That would not be true. Rather, any doctrinal statements in the Scriptures that are affected by textual variants are adequately supported by other passages. (1984:143)

GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

Grammar is an intimidating subject. Most of us have been afraid of it since junior high school, when our English teacher forced us to consider gerunds and interjections and we were awash in a sea of confusion. Yet at the same time grammar is the architectural blueprint of communication, telling how the various parts of an utterance relate to each other. In fact, grammar is the key to word meaning, and semantic analysis (word study) is dependent on it, since words have meaning only as they relate to the other words in a sentence. I will be giving many examples of this in the ensuing discussion.

The first stage of determining the inner cohesion of the text is to analyze the relationships between the individual units or terms in the text. It is interesting to contrast the emphasis on Hebrew or Greek grammar in seminary exegesis courses with the space actually given to grammar in hermeneutics texts or in commentaries. In recent works like those of Kaiser, Liefeld or David Dockery, Kenneth Matthews and Robert Sloan, grammar is not even discussed in any depth (happily, Berkeley Mickelsen has an excellent discussion)! Hayes and Holladay have a chapter on grammar but never go beyond syntax and semantics in their discussion. I see three reasons for this absence: first, the busy pastor and layperson have little time for such depth and so it is perceived best to give tools that they can and will use; second, grammar is perceived as less important than syntax and so is subsumed under the larger category; third, publishers have space limitations and for the first two reasons grammar is one of the areas omitted.[8]

However, I would argue against these reasons. When one has a good working knowledge of Greek and some fine tools like the Greek reference grammars by F. Blass, A. Debrunner and Robert Funk; Nigel Turner; C. F. D. Moule; Max Zerwick; or Stanley Porter,[9] it does not take an inordinate amount of time to make grammatical decisions. Further, one does not have to study every single grammatical construction but can note the critical points of the passage and study them. The second point contains a degree of truth but not enough to justify the neglect grammar receives.[10] Syntax is rightfully coming to the forefront of exegetical discussions. However, individual grammatical decisions will always provide the foundation for syntactical study. I will never be able to determine the

thought flow of Philippians 2:6-7 until I decide whether *hyparchon* is a concessive (“although he was”), causal (“because he was”), circumstantial (“being”) or temporal (“when he was”) participle. Nor can I decide the theology of Romans 5:12-13 until I determine whether *eph ho* is causal (“because all sinned”) or sequential (“in that all sinned”).

What do you do if you have no knowledge of Greek and Hebrew? That is difficult but not insurmountable. You can memorize the alphabet, get an interlinear Bible and use the deeper commentaries. One of my purposes in this section is to provide a working knowledge of the basics of grammar so you can see how well older commentaries handle the issues. Use this chapter as a resource tool as you use the commentaries. Again, it is best to use more recent commentaries that have access to the latest knowledge. Yet you can still use NASB or ESV as a control and see how other versions have unpacked them. Mainly, think grammatically and ask how the words relate to one another.

I will not attempt to discuss the details of grammar here. Such would be impossible. However, I will summarize the broad contours and select some critical examples in order to illustrate areas where grammar is often misused. Moreover, I will again discuss Hebrew and Greek side by side, for the areas of necessity overlap and a comparison will prove educational.

1. ***The historical development.*** Understanding the historical development of the languages is critical for a proper understanding of grammar. A failure to understand the diachronic or historical dimensions of Hebrew and Greek has led to a misuse of grammar time and again. As Carson says, “It is important to remember that the principle of entropy operates in living languages as well as in physics. Languages ‘break down’ with time: the syntax becomes less structured, the number of exceptions increases, the morphology is simplified, and so forth” (1984:68). Further, the influences of the surrounding languages are formative in their development. Both biblical Hebrew and Greek demonstrate this. Therefore, a basic understanding of these phenomena will prove indispensable.

    1. Biblical Hebrew is part of the Northwest Semitic language group, composed of ancient Amoritic (of the Mari texts) and the Canaanite dialects: Ugaritic (seen in the Ras Shamra tablets), Phoenician (from which all these dialects derived their alphabet), Moabite (found primarily on the Mesha Stone) and Aramaic (seen in Jer 10:11; Dan 2:46—7:28; Ezra 4:8—6:18; 7:12-26). Also

important is East Semitic, spoken in ancient Mesopotamia and the main language of the Near Eastern world from 1700- 700 B.C. This group is composed of Akkadian, the lingua franca of the region in the second millennium; Babylonian, the language of the Code of Hammurabi (Old Babylonian) and of Nebuchadnezzar (New Babylonian); and Assyrian. Due to the political and economic domination of this language group throughout much of the biblical period, it has particular importance. These all share certain linguistic features such as the noun and verb root of one to three consonants utilizing prefixes, suffixes or stem changes to indicate usage in the sentence. The case and tense systems are also quite similar (see Moscati 1969). We should also include Egyptian, traces of which often can be found in the Old Testament.

Therefore, one of the most important tools for serious exegesis of the Old Testament is comparative linguistics. Much work needs to be done, and great care must be taken in using the results. Since the study is still in the formative stages, many have overdone the parallels. One of the best examples of overkill is Michel Dahood's three-volume commentary on the Psalms (Anchor Bible), which found Ugaritic parallels in virtually every verse. Yet this ground-breaking work did demonstrate the potential inherent in a comparative approach (see his index in the back of the commentary). Utilizing the sister language can uncover the potential background and meaning of many obscure Hebrew words and syntactical arrangements. Further, many phrases or terms seem to have been directly borrowed from the surrounding religions, so such an approach becomes doubly valuable. In doing so, however, we must be careful to search all the potential parallels and select the one that *best* answers the problem rather than settle for any possible parallel (too often the one that best suits our purpose!). This principle will recur several times in our survey of hermeneutics, for it is also a problem of semantic research and the use of parallel passages.

The major problem in developing a Hebrew grammar is that our understanding in some ways is still in its infancy. Scholars are still trying to unlock the developmental stages of the language from the Pentateuch to Chronicles and into the New Testament period. This in fact is the primary reason why no major grammar

(at the level of Blass-Debrunner-Funk for biblical Greek) has appeared; most feel that it is too difficult to discover rules that can cover the various levels of Hebrew grammar at the different stages of its development. Nevertheless, it is possible to supply basic rules for interpretation that cover most instances, and I will attempt to summarize those here.

2. The Greek of the New Testament has been very heavily debated. In the last century many believed that the New Testament contained a "Holy Spirit" Greek due to the obvious differences between the New Testament and classical Greek writings. However, Adolf Deissmann, in his monumental study of the papyri, proved that the Greek of the New Testament was actually the common, colloquial (Koine) Greek of the marketplace (1908). Several have challenged this thesis, primarily Nigel Turner, who argues that the New Testament is a unique combination of Greek and Semitic sources (1963:9). However, a nuanced form of Deissmann's theory still best fits the evidence (see Silva 1980:198-219).

   The Koine period began with Alexander's conquests. Prior to Alexander several dialects competed in Greece, with Attic Greek (the dialect of Athens with its poets and philosophers) the language of diplomacy. Alexander made Attic the universal language, though traces of the others, especially Ionic, appear in later Koine Greek. This classical dialect was characterized by great subtlety of expression and a sophisticated but rigid system of particles and prepositions, each of which had a specialized meaning. The vast array of tenses and moods were used with an almost scientific accuracy. However, the masses of conquered peoples had trouble learning all the subtle nuances, and the language gradually lost its precision. Minute differences between prepositions, cases and tenses began to disappear. The movement was away from the sophisticated, synthetic mode of the classical to an analytic style capable of greater emotional expression. To be sure, a movement back to a stylized classical form, called "Atticism" and characterized by the rigid rules of the older period, did occur, but it was restricted to the intelligentsia.

   The New Testament writers followed popular writing styles. Of course there were differences of style. The best Greek is that of Luke, James and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. At

times Paul can approach elegance, and 1 Peter exhibits quite good Koine style. The roughest Greek occurs in 2 Peter, Revelation and the Gospel of John.

Of course, we cannot properly understand the language of the New Testament until we note the influence of Semitic grammar and septuagintal Greek on the writers. It is impossible to discuss this difficult subject in depth, but no survey would be complete without acknowledging the presence of both. The writers for the most part were Jews for whom Greek was the second language, so they often saw Greek through Semitic eyes. So at times grammar and word usage reflects this. Also in the Gospels and Acts the use of primitive traditions may reflect a strong Semitic origin (see Matthew Black 1967), and many translation Semitisms reflect either Semitic originals or the Septuagint. The latter especially would influence the style, as in the hymns of Luke 1:46-55, 68-79 (see Blass-Debrunner 1963:3). On the whole, it is important to recognize such influences and avoid a misuse of grammar (see Zerwick 1963:63-64).

2. ***The verb system.*** 1. Hebrew, unlike many other Indo-European languages, preferred aspect to time sense. There are two tenses: the perfect, stressing completed action, and the imperfect, emphasizing incomplete events. An exception to this is with verbs denoting state of being or mind (such as “I am clean,” “I love”), where the perfect is used for the present state. With regular verbs, however, only context can tell whether it should be translated a past (“I did”), perfect (“I have done”), pluperfect (“I had done”) or future perfect (“I will have done”). Only context can tell whether the imperfect should denote a future (“I will do”), repeated or habitual action in the past (“I used to do”), present (“I do”) or conditional (“if I do”). Again, there is no time sense in the verb; such must be inferred from the context.

The verbal system centers on the seven “stems,” which are named to signify the perfect tense, third person masculine singular form of the verb *pl* in the various stems, such as *niphal* due to the prefix *n-* and *piel* due to the doubling of the middle consonant. Briefly, the grammatical use of each stem indicates the following syntactical functions (taken from Lambdin 1971; Waltke and O’Connor 1990; and van der Merwe et al. 1999). The *Qal* is the basic or simple stem, used for both transitive (“I do”) or stative (“I am old”) statements. The *niphal* is more often passive

(“I am helped”) but at times reflexive (“I help myself”), though some verbs occur only in the niphal for the active force. The *piel* (active) or *pual* (passive) stems change intransitive or stative verbs into transitive verbs (called a “factitive” use, for example, “to be holy” → “to sanctify”; “to learn” → “to teach”), and are also used with verbs whose roots are nouns (such as “word” → “to speak,” or “blessing” → “to bless”) or in a resultative sense (e.g., “to stretch” → “spread out”). Seldom if ever do they intensify (the traditional distinction). The *hithpael* adds a reflexive (“sanctify oneself”) or reciprocal (“bless one another”) force, though with some verbs it becomes virtually an active (“pray for others”). Finally, the *hiphil* (active) or *hophal* (passive) stems are causative (“to make righteous”), and at times permissive (“see” → “allow to see”).

Mood in Hebrew is fairly complex. The imperative is similar in form and function to the imperfect. It is used to designate a simple direct command (such as “do it” or “love God”) while the imperfect is used for strong injunctions (“you must do it” or “you shall love the Lord your God”). The jussive and cohortative resemble the imperfect and imperative in form and function. The jussive is the third person indirect imperative (“let him do it”) and the cohortative is the first person indirect imperative (“let us do it”). When two imperatives (or imperative followed by jussive or cohortative) are found together, often there will be a sense of condition (“If this occurs, you will do . . .” [see Is 36:16]) or purpose/result (“Do this so that I may . . .” [2 Kings 5:10]).

Infinitives and participles are verbal nouns and adjectives, respectively. There are two infinitive forms. The infinitive construct often functions like the English gerund, standing as the subject (“helping the child is good”; cf. Gen 2:18) or object (“I enjoyed helping the child”; cf. Deut 10:10). Most frequently, it is found with prepositions used with *lĕ* for purpose or result (“I worked so that I might feed my family”), with *kĕ* or *bĕ* in a temporal clause (“when he worked . . .”), with *min*, *bal* or *bĕ lî* in a causal clause (“because he worked . . .”) or with *bal* or *kĕ* in a concessive construction (“although he worked . . .”). The infinitive absolute functions as an adverb. Frequently, it is used emphatically to repeat and stress the verbal idea (“killing he will kill,” meaning “he will surely kill”; cf. Gen 2:17; Amos 9:8). The infinitive absolute is sometimes employed to complement the verb and give attendant action (“He heard and *followed* . . .”) and can even stand for the main verb itself, often as an imperative (Is 14:31) but also as a finite verb (“consuming fire” [Num 4:24]) or a noun (“shepherd,” “seer”). With an

article it can function as a relative clause (see “he who touches” [Gen 26:11]) but often also stands by itself as a main verb (such as “he sacrificed and burned incense” [1 Kings 3:3]) with the accent on durative or continuous action.

2. The Greek verbal system is similar to Hebrew in some respects. Greek too is characterized by inflection more than by word order or helping verbs. Like Hebrew, tense does not have time sense but rather stresses kind of action. Yet here a great debate has erupted between the defenders of the traditional view that time sense is found only in the indicative mood and proponents of “aspect theory” who say that there is no time sense in the verb system at all. An excellent short history of Greek grammars is provided by Rodney Decker (2001:5-28). While ancient grammars centered on time sense for tenses, the scene changed at the beginning of the twentieth century with the emergence of *aktionsart* (kind of action) in Germany (Bruggman) and Britain (Moulton). It achieved its highest form in Blass-Debrunner-Funk’s grammar with five “aspects”: punctiliar (aorist), durative and iterative (present), perfective (perfect), and perfectivizing (verbs with prepositional prefixes) (1961: §318, 10th ed.).

   This reigned supreme throughout the twentieth century, but a quiet revolution was taking place in linguistic circles that took an empirical approach, sought a synchronic analysis of actual usage and stressed a descriptive over a prescriptive approach. They thought of language as functional, as a tool for communication rather than a set of rules. Thus they separated aspect (a point of view centering on a verbal situation) from *aktionsart* (an objective type of action) on the basis of modern linguistic theory. Three scholars paved the way in biblical studies. First Kathryn McKay defined *aspect* as the viewpoint an author takes in relation to the action in the context (1974). Then Buist Fanning and Stanley Porter submitted dissertations in 1987 at Oxford and Sheffield respectively. Fanning tries to wed *aktionsart* (which he calls “procedural character”) and aspect into a larger framework. Porter considers aspect theory a paradigm shift that must replace *aktionsart,* not supplement it. For him all time sense is carried by other features (e.g., adverbs like *now* or *then* or the larger context), and the verb simply reflects the author’s perception of

the action. Their argument is that the verbal lexeme at the semantic level (the form) does not carry ideas of time or kind of action (the function) (Decker 2001:29-59).

Under aspect theory, let us see how the tenses operate (following Porter 1994:21- 26). The perfective aspect is seen in the aorist tense, viewing the action "as a complete and undifferentiated process." The imperfective aspect is seen in the present tense (and the imperfect, called an "augmented present form with secondary endings"), viewing the action as ongoing or in progress (whatever the temporal situation). The stative aspect is seen in the perfect (and pluperfect) tense, viewing the action as a "given (often complex) state of affairs." He then adds a pragmatic aspect from discourse analysis, recognizing three "planes of discourse" served by the tenses, with the aorist providing background (the narrative basis of the discourse), the present foreground (introducing key characters and significant events) and the perfect frontground (discrete and complex features in the context).

I believe that Porter and Fanning are largely correct that the lexical forms of the verb tenses do not carry time sense in and of themselves but are given that sense in the larger interaction of the forms within the structural context. However, Porter overstates his case when he calls for a paradigm shift that replaces all the traditional categories. Verbs are indeed used within those parameters and carry those kinds of action within specific contexts. Therefore, the categories from Blass-Debrunner-Funk and others are still viable. In doing my Revelation commentary, I looked at the verbs using both traditional and aspect options and found times when aspect theory provided the best solution, and other times when traditional categories best answered how John was using the verb. My suggestion is to consider aspect theory a valuable supplement to traditional theory and ask all of the questions (from traditional and aspect theories) when studying a context, then see which works best (see Picirilli 2005).

The following kinds of action can be distinguished, either in the form or the function of the verb: (1) continuous or durative force, utilizing the present ("I am doing"), imperfect ("I was doing") or future ("I will be doing") tenses; (2) iterative or repeated action again with the present ("I do often"), imperfect

(“I used to do”) or future (“I will do”) tenses; (3) punctiliar force, perceived either as a single act, utilizing the aoristic or simple present (“I do”) and aorist (“I did”) tenses, or action perceived as a whole, using the global aorist (“the temple was built in forty years”); and (4) action viewed as complete, with the results seen either as existing (perfect tense, “he has done”) or complete (pluperfect tense, “he had done”).

Tense is very misused, and the student must be extremely careful not to read too much rigidity into its use in the New Testament, such as seeing the aorist as a “once-for-all” tense. As Frank Stagg has noted, the aorist never means “once for all” and often has no sense of completed action (1972:222-23). For instance, Paul uses aorists in Philippians 2:12, “as you have always obeyed,” and in Philippians 4:11, “for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances”; in both cases these are culminative, stressing present consequences. At the same time they are background information, carrying the action forward. In the next verse (Phil 4:12) Paul follows with present tenses to clarify (“I know. . . I know”). The present tenses provide the foreground, namely, the key emphasis of the passage. In the other moods this absence of a strong punctiliar force is even more obvious. An aorist is the common form in the imperative, infinitive or participle and often has no force whatsoever. If the present tense is used in these three moods, the stress will be on the progressive nature of the action. However, with the aorist there is no punctiliar thrust, only completed action (aspect theory on the aorist is similar to the “global aorist” in traditional theory).

Voice is equally problematic. No longer can it be said that the middle voice is mainly reflexive. More often than not, the force is more indirect, involving the subject in the results of the action as well as in the process. At times the reflexive idea is strong (such as “he hung himself” [Mt 27:5]) but at other times the middle voice is virtually equivalent to an active (such as Acts 12:4, where Herod “put [Peter] in prison”). Zerwick shows how the middle voice was losing ground to the passive voice (in deponent verbs) and to the active voice (with reflexive pronouns) (1963:72-75). Thus it is wrong, for instance, to read “tongues . . . will cease” (1 Cor 13:8) as a strong middle, that is, “cease in and of themselves” (see Carson 1984:77-79). Consulting a lexicon, we

would find it readily apparent that *pauomai* often appears in the middle with active force (such as “the waves . . . ceased” [Lk 8:24]). In short, it is best to conclude with Moule, “As a rule, it is far from easy to come down from the fence with much decisiveness on either side in an exegetical problem if it depends on the voice” (1959:24).

An adequate discussion of the various moods is impossible given the space restraints of this chapter. Nevertheless, I will mention a few highlights in addition to our previous discussion of tense use in the oblique (nonindicative) moods. In both form and function the subjunctive is related to the future. This is true in *hina* clauses (most frequently = future purpose) and in deliberative questions, where the stress is on potentiality (see Mk 12:4). Yet this must be tempered in conditional sentences. According to Zerwick (1963:109), the so-called third-class condition with *ean* plus the subjunctive is “eventual” or “probable”; he adds that at times it is used in an ironic context to state an impossible situation (such as Mt 21:3). However, James Boyer has challenged this view, showing that this condition relates only to a future event with no assumption of probability or improbability (1983:164-75; cf. Carson 1983:81-82). A similar caution must be made against the assumption that a first-class condition with *ei* is virtually causal (Turner 1963:115) and should be translated “since.” As Zerwick shows, the degree of reality must be inferred from the context (1963:103). The reality of the hypothesis is assumed for the sake of argument, but not the truth of it. The context can give the clause virtually a causal force (e.g., Phil 2:1) but often the statement is in fact untrue (as in Mt 12:26-27 or Mk 3:24-25).

Participles are extraordinarily difficult to interpret. This is true partly because of the encroachment of Semitic influence. Periphrastics (participle + verb “to be”), for instance, are much more common, especially in Semitic portions like Acts 1—12 (seventeen of the twenty-four occurrences in Acts). Here, however, I will restrict my comments to the most difficult type, the adverbial participle. Only the context can tell us whether the participle is circumstantial, causal, resultative, temporal or some such. The decision is often very problematic; it is possible that more than one might fit. I find it helpful to group the possibilities

syntactically. For instance, we can group circumstantial (attendant circumstance), modal (manner), instrumental (means) and causal; these proceed from the weakest to the strongest and are all found quite frequently in the New Testament. Temporal participles are also plentiful, although they were in the process of being replaced by subordinate clauses like a *hote* clause or by infinitival clauses *(en to, meta to).* Concessive participles are found infrequently (e.g., Mt 7:11; Acts 19:37), as are conditional (such as Lk 9:25; Heb 11:32). Purpose and result clauses are also interrelated, and often we cannot differentiate between them clearly (see Lk 7:6; Acts 8:27; for an excellent discussion, see Turner 1963:153- 57). Fee cautions against "overexegeting" here (1983:82). Since the basic purpose of a participle is attendant circumstance, and since there were many unambiguous ways of indicating purpose, condition and so forth, the context must indicate fairly clearly if one of the other adverbial usages should be used.

The infinitive is not quite so difficult, for like Hebrew it is a verbal noun and often functions like the English gerund. The one problematic area occurs when the infinitive is linked to the Greek article (and often a preposition) and functions adverbially like a subordinate clause. Once the basic concept is understood, however, it becomes simple to detect and translate. The causal function is introduced by *dia to* plus the infinitive (Phil 1:7; Lk 2:4); purpose by *tou, pros to,* or *eis to* (Acts 7:19; Jas 1:18); result by *hōste* (Lk 4:29; 20:20); temporal by *en to* ("while," Mt 13:4, 25), *meta to* ("after," Mk 1:14; 14:28) or *pro tou* ("before," Jn 1:49; 13:19). I encourage students to consider these particles vocabulary words and memorize them. Once you understand the basic concept, these infinitive functions are not difficult (see Blass-DeBrunner 1963:205-8).

3. ***The noun system.*** 1. The Hebrew noun is simpler than its Greek counterpart. The case endings (found in Akkadian, Ugaritic and others) disappeared around 1000 B.C. Subject and object are differentiated by word order, context or most often by the presence of *'et* before the object. The genitive is determined by a "construct" or bound relationship between two or more nouns. The second or final noun carries the article for both and has an "of" relationship with the former (e.g., "the wife of the son of the king"). As a general rule the Hebrew construct carries most

of the Greek genitival functions (possession, part-whole, manner, cause, temporal, source, respect, content, subject or object of a verbal idea) plus some of the dative (such as result, means; see Williams 1967:12-13). Dative functions for the most part are expressed by prepositional phrases.

Adjectives are found with the nouns they modify and agree with their antecedent. As in Greek they can function as attribute adjectives, predicate adjectives or nouns, although the predicate adjective is normally anarthrous (without an article). Comparative adjectives utilize *min* before the noun ("than," cf. Gen 36:7); superlatives are designated by the articular adjective (Gen 9:24), a construct relation (2 Chron 21:17) or a suffixed *-am* (Mic 7:4). A type of comparison also is seen in the so-called plural of majesty or respect (as in the *'ĕlōhîm* of Gen 1:1 or the *'adōnîm* of Is 19:4), often found with singular adjectives.

Articles and pronouns are much simpler than their Greek counterparts. Pronouns function similarly to those in English, although the possessive pronouns take the form of a suffix rather than a separate word. Personal pronouns, however, add more emphasis than in English because the verbs themselves carry person and number; thus the pronouns are redundant. The two demonstratives point to something near or relatively present *(zeh)* or far or relatively distant *(hû')*. Interrogative and relative pronouns function as they do in English, but there are no true reflexive or reciprocal pronouns in Hebrew; instead it uses either suffixes (or *nepeš* for the reflexive) or the verb stems (see above) for "themselves" or "one another."

The article also functions in some ways comparable to its use in English. It often refers to someone or something known or previously mentioned, although at times it retains some of its demonstrative force ("that") and can even function in place of the possessive pronoun (see 1 Sam 16:23). With a participle (as in Greek) the article is equivalent to a relative clause, and it can be used generically to refer to a class of items (such as "a dog," Judg 7:5; "a raven," Gen 8:7) or with adjectives to indicate a superlative (2 Kings 10:3). However, it is a mistake to assume that the absence of the article means that the noun is indefinite, for Hebrew omits the article in the first member of a construct, and in other instances. Context alone will tell us whether or not we should have the article in the English translation. For instance, we would translate "a dog" and "a raven" in the generic use of the article (see Williams 1967:19-21).

2. The Greek noun system, as would be expected, is more complex. Unlike Hebrew, inflection determines all case usages in a sentence, and there are three declensions, with the third containing a myriad of separate endings. The case system can be quite confusing. Scholars have debated the proper number of cases. Some older scholars, following the historical development of Greek grammar, have argued for an eight-case system (nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, ablative, dative, locative, instrumental); virtually all recent scholars, following the actual forms themselves, opt for a five-case system by combining the ablative with the genitive and the locative and instrumental with the dative (since in both situations they employ the same endings).

   I have summarized the case uses as follows:

   I. Nominative Case—identify or designate

      a. Subject ("The *Father* loves the Son" [Jn 3:35])
      b. Predicate nominative ("You are *witnesses*" [1 Thess 2:10])
      c. Appellation ("the mountain [called] *Olivet*" [Lk 19:29])
      d. Apposition ("the king [who is] Herod" [Mt 2:3])
      e. Exclamation (replaces the vocative)

   II. Vocative—direct address
   III. Genitive—define or describe

      a. Possession ("the boat which was *Simon's*" [Lk 5:3])
      b. Description ("mammon of *unrighteousness*" [Lk 16:9])
      c. Epexegetical—apposition ("the temple [which is] his body" [Jn 2:21])
      d. With verbal nouns—action implied

         1. Subjective genitive—performs the action implied ("the lust of the flesh" ("the flesh desires") [1 Jn 2:16])

2. Objective genitive—receives the action implied ("the blasphemy of the Spirit" ("they blaspheme the Spirit") [Mt 12:31])

e. Comparison ("greater [than] his Lord" [Jn 13: 16])
f. Ablatival—separation ("alienation from the commonwealth of Israel"—Eph 2:12)
g. Source ("power *from* God"—2 Cor 4:7)
h. Means or agent ("spoken by the shepherds"—Lk 2:18)
i. Partitive ("half *of* my kingdom"—Mk 6:23)
j. Adverbial genitive

1. Time ("he came *during* the night" [Jn 3:2])
2. Place ("dip his finger *in* the water" [Lk 16:24])
3. Reference ("heart evil *with reference* to unbelief" [Heb 3:12])

k. Content ("fill you *with* all joy and peace" [Rom 15:13])

IV. Dative—person or thing more remotely concerned

a. Indirect object ("I will give *to* you all things" [Mt 18:26])
b. Advantage/disadvantage ("treasure *for* yourselves" [Mt 6:19], or "bear witness *against* yourselves" [Mt 23:31])
c. Possession ("no child was *theirs*" [Lk 1:7])
d. Adverbial dative

1. Reference ("we died *with reference* to sin" [Rom 6:2])
2. Cause ("in bondage *because of* fear of death" [Heb 2:15])
3. Association ("he pleads *with* God" [Rom 11:1])
4. Locative—limits "in" which action occurs

a. Place (“they came *in* the boat” [Jn 21:8])
b. Sphere (“strong *in* faith” [Rom 4:20])
c. Time (“*on* the third day he will be raised” [Mt 20:19])

5. Instrumental—means “by” which action occurs

a. Means or agency (“cast out the spirits *with* [by means of] a word” [Mt 8:16])
b. Manner (“prophesying *with* the head unveiled” [Cor 11:5])

6. Cognate (“judged *with the judgment* you judge” [Mt 7:2])

V. Accusative—direction or extent of the action

a. Direct object (“I speak *the truth*” [Jn 8:46])
b. Subject of infinitive (“It is necessary *for* the Son of Man to be lifted up” [Jn 3:14])
c. Adverbial accusative

1. Measure—how long (“separated *about* a stone’s throw” [Lk 22:41])
2. Manner—how (“*freely* you received, *freely* give” [Mt 10:8])
3. Reference (“labored *with reference to* many things” [Rom 16:6])

d. Cognate (“fought the good *fight*” [2 Tim 4:7])
e. Double accusative (“teach *them many things*” [Mk 6:34])

I have provided a much more detailed outline than usual in

order to illustrate a further hermeneutical error often made. I call it “slide-rule exegesis,” that is, the belief that one must always identify exactly the one type of grammatical construction for each syntactical unit and then combine the units to yield the meaning of the passage. Koine grammar cannot yield such information. The major point I have been trying to make in the discussion thus far is the absence of precision in Koine as opposed to classical Greek grammar.

Adjectives and pronouns are fairly straightforward in Greek, and we do not need to spend a great deal of time on them. Moreover, since we are centering on syntactical function rather than on morphology, there is no need to depict the various ways we can find the comparative or superlative in the Koine. Rather, we would notice that here as elsewhere the categories slide together. The simple can be used for the comparative (*kalos*, “better” [Mt 18:8-9]) or for the superlative (*megalē*, “greatest” [Mt 22:36]); the comparative can have simple (*tachion*, “quickly” [Jn 13:27]) or superlative (*meizōn*, “greatest” [Mk 9:34]) meaning, and the superlative, which is normally elative (“very” or “quite,” see Mt 11:20; Acts 19:32), can have a comparative thrust (*protos*, “former” and *eschatos*, “latter” [Mt 27:64]) (see Turner 1963:29-32). The near *(houtos)* and far *(ekeinos)* demonstratives normally maintain their distinction but can be used in a weakened sense as virtually equivalent to the personal pronoun as subject of a sentence (see Jn 10:6). Greek has an abundance of pronouns of every type (see Mickelsen 1963:145), and so interpretation is seldom difficult.

The definite article, however, is another story. Primarily, the presence or absence of the article does not correspond to the English “the” or “a.” Rather, the articular (with the article) noun emphasizes the concrete aspect of the noun (e.g., *hē pistis* in Eph 4:13 is translated “the Christian faith”) while the anarthrous (with the article) noun stresses the abstract or theological aspect (*pistis*, “faith [as trusting God] is being sure of what we hope for,” Heb 11:1). This becomes important, for instance, in John 1:1, where the Jehovah’s Witnesses read, “The Word was *a* God” on the grounds of the anarthrous form in *theos ēn hologos*. Two rules explain the absence of the article. According to “Colwell’s rule,” a predicate noun coming before the verb “to be” lacks the article

(theos) in order to distinguish it from the subject *(hologos).* Furthermore, even if the order were reversed the article would be missing, for *ho theos* would refer to God the Father, and *theos* as it is looks to the "quality" of divinity. In other words, John is saying, "The Word was divine." On the whole the presence or absence of the article is an important interpretive device.

4. ***Prepositions, particles and clauses.*** 1. Hebrew has fewer prepositions (twenty in van der Merwe) than Greek. However, those it does include have an impressive array of uses. According to Ronald Williams, the preposition *bĕ* has fifteen different functions and *lĕ* nineteen. The Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon has over three pages on *bĕ* alone. This makes the exegetical task quite difficult, for we must consider an amazing number of possibilities when prepositions are involved. There are no shortcuts, and we can only try all the options and see which fits best. Prepositional phrases are very important in Hebrew. With very few adverbs, prepositional phrases or adverbial accusatives often take their place. For instance, *l*e*'ĕmet* (Is 42:3) describes the servant of Yahweh as "faithfully" causing justice, and *bĕ edeq* demands (Lev 19:15) that the Israelite judge his neighbor "fairly." Context usually narrows the possibilities, and if the student keeps in mind the basic meaning of each (*bĕ,* "in"; *lĕ,*"to"; *kĕ,*"like"; '*al*-, "upon" and so on), the meaning will not be too difficult to ascertain. For instance, *'al*-indicates spatial positioning "on" an object. It is similar to the Greek dative (the Septuagint often translates it with a dative) and likewise can be used for advantage or disadvantage, indirect object, accompaniment or locative. Yet all these functions are related to its basic force above.

The paucity of conjunctions in Hebrew is related to the basic construction of the language. As it does with prepositions and adverbs, Hebrew relies on flexibility rather than on precision of language to make its meaning known. Every term has a multiplicity of purposes, and context must tell the reader the intended meaning of the words, phrases and clauses. Hebrew is dominated by coordinate constructions, especially by the *waw* conjunction, which simply means "and," yet can introduce purpose, cause, adversative or any other type of coordinate or subordinate clause (see Gesenius 1910: par. 154). This causes great consternation for the beginning student, but for the ancient Hebrew it added a richness of meaning to the statements. The only simple conjunctions in Hebrew are *'o,* which always means "or," and *pen*, which

usually means “lest” and leads into the reason for a warning or precaution. *kî* and *⊂im* are multicausal but can also be concessive, recitative, conditional, temporal or resultative. The difference between them is that *kî* normally connotes a general condition and *⊂im* the details of those conditions (van der Merwe 1999:300). The latter normally is conditional but also can be concessive, optative, privative or pleonastic. *lō’* is either conditional or optative and ăš*er,* while usually relative, also can lead into result, purpose, causal, recitative, substantival or conditional clauses (though these are rare). As we can see, conjunctions are multipurpose at the core.

As a result, clause construction can be difficult, since one has to decide whether the conjunctions are coordinate or subordinate. Only the logical development of the context can tell the reader which is correct. It is always helpful to compare versions and consult commentaries or grammars, but in the final analysis we must come to a somewhat subjective decision. It is not my purpose to describe all the different types of clauses. Mickelsen (1963:153-57) describes two basic types: the noun or verbless clause, emphasizing a state of being, and the verbal clause with both subject and predicate, stressing movement and action. Each clause is grammatically independent or coordinate and only logically subordinate.

Thomas Lambdin describes three types of clause sequences: (1) the present-future narrative, which contains a series of *waw*-conversives that build on a leading clause and refine its ideas; (2) a conjunctive nonconverting sequence, which has clauses that do not build on one another grammatically but simply add further information, for instance, two imperatival clauses with the second supplying the purpose or result (1 Kings 1:12 is translated with consecutive imperatives in NASB but in NIV reads, “Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon”); (3) punctual, habitual sequences, which contain temporally prior action that is disjunctive but leads into a resumption of the narrative (such as 1 Sam 17:34-35, with two such temporal subordinations: “when a lion or a bear came” and “when [the lion] turned on me,” NIV) (1971:279-81). These are all *waw* or coordinating sequences. When the text utilizes the other conjunctions, we must translate accordingly.

2. Greek particles are more numerous but just as complex as those in Hebrew. The tendency to misuse them in exegesis is greater,

again because of false feedback from classical Greek. Prepositions, for instance, originally were adverbs added to the cases for more specific expression. By the Koine period they were grammatical units in their own right. Five aspects summarize the change from the classical to the Hellenistic periods: (1) In increasingly frequent instances, prepositions were replacing the cases as part of the general tendency toward greater explicitness. (2) On the other hand, the number of prepositions was decreasing as part of the historical development from nineteen in the classical period to seven in the modern period; in the New Testament period *hos* and *amoi* have disappeared, while *ana* and *anti* are used much less frequently. (3) The use of several cases with prepositions was being curtailed. The dative was in process of disappearing with all except *en*, and only *epi*, *para*, and *pros* (only once with the genitive) still take all three cases (genitive, dative, accusative). In modern Greek only the accusative is used with prepositions. (4) The use of adverbs or nouns for prepositions was increasing, and they tend to replace the older prepositions for greater richness and expression, such as *emprosthen* for *pro* or *epanō*for *epi*. (5) The classical distinctions between prepositions was becoming blurred, with *apo* for instance encroaching on *ek*, *para* and *hypo; eis* being confused with *en* and *pros;* and *hyper* overlapping *anti* and *peri* (see Zerwick 1963:27-37; Blass-DeBrunner 1961:110; and for numerous examples, see Turner 1963:249-57).

As Moule correctly observes, “It is a mistake to build exegetical conclusions on the notion that classical accuracy in the use of prepositions was maintained in the *Koine* period” (1959:49). Yet this is just what many of the older commentators do. The student of the Word must be careful to check the accuracy of such conclusions, for prepositions are exceedingly important exegetical tools with far-reaching theological implications.[11]

Hellenistic Greek also employs many more particles and conjunctions than Hebrew but fewer than in the classical period. Each of the particles has a very wide use, and only context can tell us exactly how a particular preposition or conjunction is used.

Interrogative particles are fairly straightforward, especially expecting an affirmative response. However, *mē*(or *mēti*) can be difficult, for while it normally presupposes a negative answer, it

also can be employed to indicate strong doubt. Such is certainly the case in John 4:29, where the Samaritan woman could hardly be saying, “This is not the Christ, is it?” (NASB) In the context the statement provides a bridge to the virtual evangelization of the town. Therefore it is certainly indicative of doubt, and the New International translation is correct, “Could this be the Christ?”

In a very real sense most of this chapter relates to clause construction, for all the verb moods (such as participles, conditionals) apply to the clause as well. Greek clauses are easier to distinguish than are their Hebrew counterparts, due to the greater variety and specificity of conjunctions and particles. Certain writers (Mark, Luke at times) follow the Semitic habit of overusing the coordinating conjunction “and” *(kai)*, so that the reader has to supply subordination from the logical context. Paul, on the other hand, often subordinates in so complex a fashion that it becomes almost impossible to understand his train of thought (e.g., Eph 1:3-14, a single sentence).

One final aspect that should be discussed is the order of clauses in the Greek New Testament. Often the organization of clauses does not quite fit our modern thinking, and misunderstanding can result. John Beekman and John Callow discuss three major problems (1974:222-28), arguing that “the order of the original must not be slavishly followed (in the translation) for it may not convey the original message faithfully in the RL” (the receptor language; for instance, English). The first problem occurs when the linguistic order (the actual order of the clauses or sentences in the text) does not fit the chronological order (the way it is worked out in experience). This is found often in a “flashback” scene like the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Mk 6:17-18), where the final events are first. If a culture does not understand flashbacks, it can be misleading, even to the extent of seeming to say it was John who had the immoral relations with Herod’s wife. Another example would be Hebrews 10:22, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” In actual experience the order is reversed and each statement depends on the one following. First, we experience the washing and cleansing; then as a result have the full assurance that only faith provides that God is near. Only

then can we go before the throne with a sincere heart. This descending series is seen frequently in the New Testament and must be recognized to be understood; Semitic thought often moved from effect to cause, the opposite of modern thinking.

A second problem occurs when the linguistic order does not follow the logical order. Such a distinction is seen often in passages where a reason is given for an action, such as Mark 6:31. The NASB translates it in the literal order of the Greek: "And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.' (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)" The NIV, however, places it in its proper logical order: "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' " The "by this" passages of 1 John are a special problem, for the commentators are divided as to whether *this* refers backward (1 Jn 2:5; 3:19; 4:6) or forward (1 Jn 2:3; 3:16, 24; 4:2-3, 13; 5:2). In each instance context must decide. In the latter instance, however, there is a logical disorder, for the "this" clause ("By this we know that we have known him" [Jn 2:3a]) is the logical result and follows the experience of the "if" or "when" clause ("if we keep his commands" [Jn 2:3b]). Beekman and Callow call this a "grounds-conclusion" relationship (1974:225); the conclusion that we are assured we have known him is based on the grounds that we have obeyed his commands. We could (and must in certain cultures) rewrite the sentence, "when we obey God's commands, we realize that we really have known him."

A third type of clause structure could be called "negative-affirmative statements." Often the negative element of a pair is first in the text, and this too can cause difficulty in some cultures. For instance, some may find misleading "not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (Jn 6:38) or the Gethsemane cry, "not what I will, but what you will" (Mk 14:36). The interpreter must be aware of such ancient idioms. Other Semitic types of clause structure (such as chiasm, inclusio) were discussed in chapter one (see pp. 54-55). Here I would add only that in some cases the preacher (or translator) may need to take them out of the textual order for the sake of clarity. In many instances a detailed

explanation of the Semitic style may be counterproductive. The level of the audience and the purpose of the message will be the deciding factors.

In conclusion, it has been common in the past to link grammatical structure with the basic make-up of the society. Thorleif Boman (1960) and others concluded that the following differences characterized the two languages (see the excellent summary in Barr 1961:10-13):

- *Dynamic versus static.* The Hebrews were action-oriented and stressed God's acts in linear history; the Greeks emphasized contemplation and the true, unchanging ideal behind movement, that is, the world of appearances.
- *Concrete versus abstract.* Hebraic thought stressed the reality of the object perceived while Greek philosophy abstracted it, separating the object from the subject and thinking through to the idea behind it.
- *Concept of the human.* Greek anthropology teaches a dualism with the immortal soul imprisoned in a mortal body; Hebraic concepts stress the unity between the outward, visible manifestation and the soul within. The Greeks also stressed the individual while the Hebrews emphasized the corporate group.

These scholars taught that Greek forms an analytical thought pattern that makes distinctions between being and becoming, reality and appearance, time and eternity, body and soul, spirit and manner, group and individual. Hebrew is a "totality type" of language and refuses to note such differences.

James Barr proceeds to criticize severely the linguistic basis for these distinctions (1961:chap. 3). At the outset, he argues that it is an artificial comparison, since two linguistic groups are isolated from the broad spectrum of ancient languages without considering the others. More important, their semantic method is faulty, for these scholars use circular reasoning to determine the differences and then read the data accordingly. The true issue is to determine the interrelationship between philosophy and language in a culture. In other words, which has influenced the other? The two, he believes, cannot be brought together so easily. The

problem is the lack of a proper linguistic approach. The relative absence of abstract nouns in Hebrew, for instance, does not demand a stress on concreteness, nor does the presence of two Greek words for "body" (Hebrew has only one) mean that Hellenists saw greater distinctions. Such differences relate only to the development of the language and have no bearing on the ways the two groups perceived reality.[12]

Roy Harris provides an excellent synopsis of the difficulties of modern grammar in his *The Language Myth* (1981:54-85). He argues that the entire process has defaulted because of its faulty methodology, restricting itself to categories derived from Latin and removing itself from morphology, syntax and lexicology. The result is a series of "fixed codes" that rigidly define parameters of speech without consulting the ways people are actually speaking. It is an artificial, unrealistic system that forces older categories on correct usage. This is exactly what is done often in biblical exegesis, transferring classical categories into Koine passages. Moreover, it ignores the major truth: The immediate context alone can decide how we define a grammatical relationship. The grammatical list or examples from elsewhere in the book or Testament can provide nothing more than possibilities, and the reader must be as flexible as the text. Harris calls for an "internalised linguistic knowledge" that allows the dynamic "use" of language by its speakers (in other words, the synchronic or current rather than diachronic or historical use) to provide the key to the development of grammatical "rules" (p. 75). This is quite important, for it allows the individual authors of Scripture the right to pursue their own grammatical modes. It is no longer adequate to say that in the book of Revelation John "broke grammatical rules" or that it was the "least literary of the NT books" (Zerwick 1963:6). Rather, the book of Revelation deliberately employed the grammar of apocalyptic literature (see chap. 10), which was completely valid within its own context. In every case the reader must allow the context to make the final grammatical decision.

EXEGETICAL PROCEDURES

I recommend a “study sheet” for exegesis, divided into five or six columns. In the first will go the text itself, with the words flowing as they are discussed in the other columns. In the second will be a grammatical identification (e.g., imperfect or instrumental dative) and in the third the grammatical-syntactical information (e.g., stress on the durative, “keep on saying”). The fourth column should be reserved for lexical study and the fifth for historical-cultural backgrounds. A final column may be used for application (see chap. 18). As you proceed through the text, it is important to highlight certain key points for special study. While you need to be aware of the whole text, only a few require specific, in-depth analysis (see Fee 1983:77-78 for a more detailed list of the types of things to include). On these points you will wish to consult grammars and commentaries, working through the types of possibilities mentioned above. Fee mentions four steps in making grammatical decisions: (1) be aware of the options; (2) consult the grammars; (3) check out the author’s usage elsewhere (use a concordance); (4) determine which option makes best sense in the context (1984:92). I would add a fifth: (5) keep your emphasis on the total syntactical development and never isolate grammatical units.

At all times it is necessary to keep in mind the total syntactical context (i.e., the relationships of all the terms to each other). In fact, this demonstrates the artificial nature of our discussion. We cannot make grammatical decisions without syntax or make syntactical decisions without the results of grammar. I have separated grammar, semantics and syntax into distinct chapters not because they are unrelated but because each has distinct problems and criteria. In the exegetical spiral there will be an interdependent circularity as the reader studies them simultaneously, continuing to work upward to the whole of the statement. These are three aspects of a larger whole: first, we note the particular use of the tense, voice and mood of the verbs and place them in their total syntactical context. Next, we study the function of the cases and of prepositions and other particles within the sentence as a whole. Finally, we put the sentence together, noting emphases on the basis of word order, and trace the interrelationship of the parts for the total meaning of the sentence within its paragraph. For instance, in

terms of the Greek tense, present and aorist provide the greatest problems; and in terms of case, genitive and dative yield the greatest difficulties. In Hebrew the construct and *waw*-conversives are the most complex.

Let me use an example all can put into practice. Suppose you have a genitive (an "of" phrase—love *of* God). You should try all the possibilities and see which best fits the context. Remember, grammatical decisions are actually translation decisions, and you need to ask which translation best fits the context: possessive ("God's love"), description ("divine love"), epexegetical ("love, namely, God"), subjective ("God loves me"), objective ("I love God"), comparison ("love greater than God"), separation ("love apart from God"), source ("love from God"), means ("love by God"), adverbial ("godly love"), reference ("love with reference to God"). Not all will be equally possible (in fact, a couple of these are close to heretical!). But the context will have to decide which is best. Also use the translations. When you see an "of" phrase in your literal NASB or ESV, see how the other translations handle it. That will tell you what type of genitive those translation committees chose. For instance, consider Philippians 2:1 and the two genitives, "If you have any encouragement in Christ, and comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit . . ." First, consult the broader structure, with the three conditions of fact, "If you have (and the truth is, you have!)," and then note the relationships between them. Since the first and third are Christ and the Spirit, it is likely that the second refers to "God's love," therefore a Trinitarian flavor (see Fee, 1995: 180-81). Therefore, the "in Christ" motif probably guides the other two, which are probably genitives of source, "comfort in (from) love," and "fellowship in (from) the Spirit." So the spiritual experiences of the Philippian Christians originate in the triune Godhead.

3

Semantics

Meaning is at the heart of communication. Words provide the building blocks of meaning, grammar and syntax the design. However, until recently semantics (determining word meaning) was more an art than a science. Johannes Louw (1982:1-4) says that it is only since the 1950s that the study of words and their meaning has come to the forefront of academic concerns (for an excellent historical survey, see Black, 2001:230-52). Moreover, only since the twentieth century has it been truly recognized as a linguistic science in its own right. James Barr's epochal work *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961) first applied linguistic principles scientifically to biblical study. The results were startling, to say the least. Previously, scholars thought that the meaning of a word could be found in its historical development (the thesis of the first volume on semantics ever published, by Michel Bréal in 1897). We now know how much more complex is the true discovery of word meaning. Moisés Silva mentions the frustration of attempting to cover this field, "a task that cannot be executed in one volume without oversimplifying the material" (1983:9). How much more difficult is it to cover the issue in a single chapter! At the same time Max Turner says that in spite of Barr's warning, "modern linguistics has had relatively little influence on NT exegesis," because it is still dominated by the prescientific understanding seen in older commentaries and grammars (1995:147). It is my hope that this chapter will help redress the situation.

Word studies have certainly become the most popular aspect of exegesis. A glance at the standard commentaries, with their structure organized as a word-by-word walk through the text, will demonstrate this. So will the average college or seminary classroom, where exegesis courses often spend an inordinate amount of time on word studies. This is especially true of many Old Testament courses, where the seeming lack of a strong return from Hebrew grammar leads the professor to center on word studies as the most important factor in exegesis. Of course, as I stated in chapter two, grammar can contribute a great deal, and I would argue here that we cannot actually separate the two. Without grammatical relationships with other words, there is no meaning. If I utter the term *counter,* the hearer has no idea what I mean. Without a context in a grammatical sentence,

a word is meaningless. Only as I say “Look on the counter” or “Counter his argument” does the term have a connotation.

Most modern linguists recognize the centrality of the literary and historical context, that is, the linguistic and extralinguistic dimensions, to the whole issue of meaning (see Thiselton 1977:75). In other words, the semantic analysis of a concept involves not only syntax but also the historical-cultural background behind the statements. Analysis is part of and yet presupposes the total hermeneutical package. One does not perform these steps one at a time on a passage. Rather, there is a constant spiraling action as one aspect (such as grammar or backgrounds) informs another aspect (such as semantics) and then itself is transformed by the result.

Yet as critical as an understanding of semantics actually is, it is amazing how little emphasis has been given to the subject. D. A. Carson presents basic linguistic fallacies of many contemporary works (1984c:25-66), and Silva laments:

> How does one . . . explain the fact that even reputable scholars have attempted to shed light on the biblical languages while working in isolation from the results of contemporary linguistics? One could just as easily try to describe Jewish sects in the first century without a knowledge of the Dead Sea Scrolls. (1983:10)

The problem of course is that we have been taught several erroneous assumptions. That is the subject of the first section of this chapter, “Semantic Fallacies.”

I want to make clear at the outset that I am not merely trying to establish “rules” for semantic analysis. W. P. Alston demonstrates the error of what he calls “the rule theory of linguistic meaning” (1974:17-48). Alston argues that such rules should meet four requirements: (1) distinctiveness, with conditions specified for the correctness or inadequacy of an utterance, (2) a translinguistic connection, relating to the referential content behind an utterance, (3) noncircularity, going beyond definitions to determine the valid structure within which meaning can be incorporated, and (4) scope, covering all types of speech behavior (such as assertions, questions, promises) and not just the meaning of particular terms. Thus any such rule at the outset must be *descriptive* (stating how speech functions, that is, what “is”) rather than *prescriptive* (determining artificial standards for what “must be”).

Following J. L. Austin, Alston calls for an “illocutionary act” approach, that is, the determination of the actual conditions that communicate meaning. These

conditions must be culture specific; they must be aligned with the way the individual culture communicates. This means that at every stage of biblical study the speech patterns of the ancient culture (biblical Hebrew or Greek) must determine the semantic principles (notice I deliberately say *principles* rather than *rules*). In this chapter I will then discuss previously held ideas that do not work and then elucidate several that I trust will enable the reader to determine the probable meaning of the utterances (not just the terms) in a given context.

SEMANTIC FALLACIES

I will not merely discuss semantic errors but try to work through the topics to a proper delineation of principles under each category that will enable you to use the tool correctly. In other words, the discussion will provide a topical bridge to the more systematic presentation of methodology in the second half of this chapter. Naturally, I cannot be exhaustive in my coverage. However, the more important problems will, I trust, be considered.

1. ***The lexical fallacy.*** It has become common, especially since the appearance of Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (*TDNT*, 1932-1977) and to a lesser extent its Old Testament counterpart (1970-), to assume that word studies can settle theological arguments. For instance, some seem to assume that a decision as to whether *kephalē* means "source" or "authority" in 1 Corinthians 11:2 or Ephesians 5:23-24 will solve the issue of the woman's role in church and home. While none will state it quite so starkly, an inordinate amount of time is spent tracing the term(s) through extant Greek literature and too little time is spent in noting the context. This is not to argue against establishing the semantic field but rather for recognizing the centrality of the immediate context. This error can occur in works of the highest quality. Silva (1983:23) notes the overemphasis on word studies in George Knight's *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Letters* (1968), citing A. T. Hanson's review that "in his scrupulous examination of the lexicography of the sayings, Mr. Knight has all too often missed the wood for the trees" (in *Journal of Theological Studies* 1969:719).

   This overemphasis on words to the detriment of context leads to one of the most serious of Barr's criticisms, "illegitimate totality transfer" (1961:218). After going to so much trouble to find multitudinous meanings and uses for a word, it is hard for the scholar to select just one for the passage. The tendency is to read all or most of them (that is, to transfer the "totality" of the meanings) into the single passage. Such is "illegitimate," for no one ever has in mind all or even several of the

possible meanings for a term when using it in a particular context. Consider the term *grill.* We hardly think of the connotation "grill a hamburger" when speaking of a fence "grill," let alone the idea of "grilling," or questioning, a person. These are rather obvious examples, but at times similar errors can be made when interpreting a language with which we are not so familiar, like biblical Hebrew or Greek. This in fact leads to Barr's criticisms of Kittel. In seeking the theological concept behind the terms, the articles repeatedly stress breadth over specifics.

Anthony Thiselton (1978:84) notes Nida's contention that "the correct meaning of a term is that which contributes least to the total context" (1972:86). Nida means that the narrowest possible meaning is usually correct in individual contexts. The defining terms surrounding it limit the usage quite radically. Thiselton uses the term *greenhouse* as an example. The various meanings of "green" and "house" hardly have much bearing on the combination of the two either in "green house" (itself open to differing meanings in various contexts) or in "greenhouse." The same must be true of *ekklē sia* in Matthew 16:18; Acts 7:38 or Ephesians 1:22-23.

2. ***The root fallacy.*** The root fallacy, a common error, assumes that the root of a term and its cognates carries a basic meaning that is reflected in every subordinate use of the word(s).

> It seems to be commonly believed that in Hebrew there is a "root meaning" which is effective throughout all the variations given to the root by affixes and formative elements, and that therefore the "root meaning" can confidently be taken to be part of the actual semantic value of any word or form which can be assigned to an identifiable root; and likewise that any word may be taken to give some kind of suggestion of other words formed from the same root. (Barr 1961:100)

This fallacy is closely related to etymology, and many scholars in fact equate the two. However, it has two aspects that I would like to separate: the belief that a basic root meaning is to be found in all subsets (root fallacy), and the belief that the historical development of a term determines its current meaning (lexical fallacy). *Etymology* would be a cover term that encompasses both aspects.

Arthur Gibson notes the misuse of comparative philology in Old Testament research (1981:20-34). On the basis of similar roots scholars

cross time lines and apply a particular meaning to a difficult term or concept from a document belonging to a related language but from a different era. One example he mentions (pp. 24-28) is equating *lotan* in the Baal texts (Ugaritic) with "leviathan" *(lwytn)* in Isaiah 27:1, although little evidence connects the Ugaritic texts of the late second millennium with the Hebrew of Isaiah's time. Barr provides an even better example: "bread" *(lehem)* and "war" *(milhāmâ;* they obviously come from the same root but could hardly have a shared meaning, "as if battles were fought for bread or bread a necessary provision for battles" (1961:102; for further Old Testament examples, see Kedar 1981:82-98). The problem is to define exactly what constitutes a universal meaning that can be transferred across time and language barriers. Most doubt whether any such universal aspect exists in semantic domains. However, many of the older lexicons (such as Thayer's Greek lexicon) and word study books (such as Vincent, Vine or Wuest) assumed such. This can lead to many misinterpretations. Thiselton notes the linguistic connection between "hussy" and "housewife" and asks whether one would wish to equate the two (1977:81).

Similarly, it is erroneous to take a compound word, break it into its component parts and read the resultant meanings in that light. Louw states unequivocally, "It is a basic principle of modern semantic theory that we cannot progress from the form of a word to its meaning" (1982:29). Two well-known examples may help: *ekklēsia* and *paraklētos.* The first is often said to mean "the called out" believers, while in reality nowhere in extant Greek literature does *ekklēsia* have this connotation. The other is the major title for the Holy Spirit in John 14—16 and contains the roots *para* ("beside'") and *kaleō*("call"). At one time the term did have a meaning similar to its root, "one called alongside to help," and was used in Hellenistic circles for a "helper" or "advocate." However, this is inadequate for John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7-8, 13 because that sense is never used in the context. Moreover, the semantic field does not build on that root. Raymond Brown distinguishes two forensic or legal meanings (advocate, mediator) and two nonforensic meanings (comforter, exhorter) (1970:1136-37). However, he finds none of them adequate for John and posits that the major thrust is continuity of person and ministry. The Spirit as "another Paraclete" is "another Jesus," that is, continuing his ministry.

The main point is that the root meaning, although closer to the semantic range of the term, is not a "universal meaning" that permeates

the whole. All who have studied Greek are aware that a prepositional prefix can affect a stem in three ways (see Wenham 1965:55): (1) The force of both preposition and verb continues (*epagō,* "I lead away"; *ekballō,* "I throw out"). (2) The preposition intensifies the thrust of the verb (*lyo,* "I loose"; *apolyo,*"I release"). (3) The preposition changes the meaning of the verb (*ginosko,* "I know"; *anaginosko,*"I read"). The student can never assume that a prepositional prefix affects a compound in any one of the three ways. Only the context and word usage can decide.

Most students assume that the root or basic meaning of a term is the definition memorized as vocabulary in the basic language course. However, what they memorize is the usual or normal meaning rather than the root of a word. For instance, *ballo* means to "throw," but the standard lexicon (Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker) also defines it as to "put," "place" or "bring." These obviously do not derive from "throw" but are other linguistic usages. Similarly, *praxis* means "act" or "deed" but can also be translated "undertaking," "business," "state" or "situation," depending on the context.

For this reason the basic tool for serious word study is not a theological word book but a lexicon. The best for Old Testament study is Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) and for New Testament study is Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker (BAGD). Both can function as concordances as well, for many terms have all their occurrences listed. For more serious students there is also Liddell and Scott for classical Greek, Moulton and Milligan for the papyri. In addition are the excellent concordances, Mandelkern or Lisowsky for the Old Testament, Moulton and Geden or Aland's computer concordance for the New Testament, Hatch and Redpath for the Septuagint, Rengstorf for Josephus. Those engaged in detailed research have no end of tools to guide their study. Similar works on the intertestamental literature and the rabbis are currently in progress. For the student without knowledge of the languages, Strong's, Young's or Cruden's concordances are available.

At times a study of roots can be highly illuminating. As I already mentioned, some compounds do maintain their root meaning. In 1 John 2:1, *paraklētos* does follow its root meaning of "advocate": "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (NASB). On these occasions, the root meaning adds richness to the exegesis. The point I made previously is that we dare not assume any type of universal meaning for a root. Louw discusses the general or most

common meaning of a word and points out that while it never yields a universal meaning, it does have linguistic value in what is called "unmarked meaning" (1982:33-37). He defines this as "that meaning which would be readily applied in a minimum context where there is little or nothing to help the receptor in determining the meaning" (p. 34). For instance, farmers and stockbrokers would interpret the sentence "They had a large amount of stock" in different ways. However, add specifics like "The stock died" or "The stock averages fell" and all would understand the sentences.

Finally, I might mention Gibson's extensive discussion of roots in a Semitic context (1981:176-206). He shows that no "common sense-bearing" transfer takes place between an original root and its later descendants. However, at a lesser level, there is semantic transfer between cognate languages and so a limited value to comparative linguistics at the semantic level. Louw describes this as the "functional referent." There is no "genetic" relationship between roots, but if obvious parallels exist between terms in two languages, then there is semantic overlap between the two terms. Silva (1983:42-43; cf. Kedar 1981:98-105) points out that this is especially valuable in Old Testament study, since there are 1,300 hapax legomena (once-only words) and 500 others that occur only twice (out of a total vocabulary of 8,000!). While many can be known from other sources, several hundred obscure terms have no Hebrew cognates and are not found in extrabiblical literature. In these instances root transfer, although it can yield only possible meaning, is invaluable. For instance, Silva points to Job 40:12, "Look at every proud man and humble him, *hadok* the wicked where they stand." The Arabic *hadaka* "conforms to the established phonological correspondences between Arabic and Hebrew, and its meaning 'tear down' fits the context perfectly" (p. 43). The key is linguistic and functional parallels between the terms.

3. ***Misuse of etymology.*** Misuse of etymology actually includes the first two fallacies as subsets, but for convenience I have separated them. Etymology per se is the study of the history of a term. Louw traces the problem back to the ancient Greek belief that the meaning of a word stemmed from its very nature rather than from convention (1982:23-25). Thus until recently scholars believed that the key to a word's meaning lay in its origin and history. This assumption of linear development lay behind the misuse of etymology, wherein any past use of a word could be read into its current meaning.

Ferdinand de Saussure, in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1915), pioneered the distinction between "diachrony" (the history of a term) and "synchrony" (the current use of a term). He argued that "the linguist who wishes to understand a state must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony . . . by suppressing the past. The intervention of history can only falsify his judgment" (1915:81, in Silva 1983:36). Of course, Saussure did not deny the validity of etymology altogether; rather, he restricted it to its proper sphere, the history of words. Therefore, current usage rather than history alone could define a word's meaning. The example that appears most frequently in the literature is the word *nice*, which stems from the Latin *nescius*, "ignorant." Thus, it is not the background or evolution of a term but its present usage that has relevance for its meaning.

Scholars have long been guilty of errors in this area. An oft-cited example is the misunderstanding with respect to *hypēretēs* ("servant"). William Barclay followed Richard Trench in arguing that the concept derived from the Homeric *eressē*, "to row," then went further and said the *hypo* added the idea of "under," therefore designating "a rower on the lower bank of a trireme." *Hypēretēs* thereby became a "lowly servant." This derivation combines root fallacy with etymology fallacy, for according to Louw this meaning cannot be found in Greek literature current to the New Testament. It is highly dubious at best. The problem is that it makes great preaching and so is difficult to resist. Yet if it is not *true*, dare we risk the danger?

Silva notes the frequent danger of equating Greek words in the New Testament with their Hebrew counterparts (1983:56-73). Since Edwin Hatch in the nineteenth century, many have assumed that the Septuagint had such an enormous impact on New Testament lexicography that much of its language was transformed into a type of semitized Greek. Some have taken this to the extent that terms in biblical Greek often are assigned the same meaning as the Hebrew word they translate (Turner 1980 is criticized for this error). To do so, however, is to misunderstand the true state of New Testament Greek. The consensus is that the New Testament is written in colloquial Greek. Therefore, the link between the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint and the New Testament is complex rather than simple. We dare not assume that any particular word is influenced primarily by its Hebrew counterpart. To be sure, there may be influence, but the degree of continuity can be established only after detailed study. As Silva points out, this is true of the Septuagint itself; how much more

true of the New Testament, a further step removed from the Masoretic Text (p. 72).

Thiselton discusses the further danger of “dead metaphor” (1977:81). This occurs when the imagery behind a word in its past no longer has meaning. For instance, *splanchnizomai* (“to show compassion”) is given the connotation of involving one’s innermost being, due to the presence of *splanchna* (“internal organs”). However, this metaphorical thrust was no longer present in the first century. One should never refer to the use of a term in Homer or Aristotle to “prove” or “demonstrate” a meaning in New Testament times. This error can become anachronistic, for example, reading *dynamis* (“power”) as “dynamite.” As Carson explains, dynamite blows things up and destroys while the Word makes whole and heals (1984:33). More important, a modern metaphor can never be used to define but only to illustrate.

Perhaps the best statement of the problem is that of J. Vendryes’s *Language: A Linguistic Introduction to History* (in Barr 1961:109; Silva 1983:46-47):

> Etymology, however, gives a false idea of the nature of a vocabulary for it is concerned only in showing how a vocabulary has been formed. Words are not used according to their historical value. The mind forgets—assuming that it ever knew—the semantic evolutions through which the words have passed. Words always have a *current* value, that is to say, limited to the moment when they are employed, and a *particular* value relative to the momentary use made of them.

This does not mean, however, that etymology has no place in word studies, only that it must be employed with care. The key is to discover whether or not there is a conscious allusion to background meaning in the text. One example would be the use of *pararyōmen* (“drift away”) in Hebrews 2:1. Two metaphors are possible, both attested to in current Greek literature of the day: (1) A ring that “slips off” the finger and is lost (Plutarch), or (2) a ship that slips downstream past the point of safety. Since the author used a nautical metaphor in the similar context of Hebrews 6:19 (“anchor of the soul”), the second becomes somewhat more likely. The important point is that both synchronic or current usage and the context itself have made the etymological metaphor possible.

Another word that also has been under much discussion is *hamartano,*one of the basic words for “sin.” Louw points out the

inadequacy of utilizing the Homeric idea of "miss the mark" or "purpose" as the "hidden meaning" of the term (1982:29-30), but Silva correctly points out that this may indeed be the connotation in a specific text, Romans 3:23, with the idea of sin "as a failing to obtain God's glory" (1983:50). We cannot make a general assumption based on this, but an individual instance can draw on an etymological distinction. This is especially true of biblical puns or plays on words (see Gibson 1981:180-81), as in the preceding example.

At all times the synchronic dimension has priority, and diachronic considerations are utilized only if current usage makes such possible and if the context itself makes historical allusions probable. This is often the case in the biblical writings due to the importance of tradition and canon. The prophetic works of the Old Testament contain many deliberate allusions to the Torah, and the New Testament often uses a term in the sense of its Old Testament or Septuagint background. This is the basis of Leon Morris's argument for the forensic use of the passive *dikaiousthai* in Romans 3:24 (and elsewhere) for "justify" rather than "make righteous" (1965:233-35, 259-60). He grounds his position partly on the direct influence of the Septuagint on Paul's technical language. The context makes it probable that Morris is correct. Of course, this is even more true of direct quotes or allusions to Septuagint passages. The best clue to the symbolism of the book of Revelation lies in its background (much of it from the Old Testament).

In studying the history of a word we must consider the strong possibility of semantic change, when a word alters its meaning over the course of years. This is a basic fact of language. The New King James Version was necessitated because the average layperson no longer understood many of the terms in the 1611 version. As John Sawyer states, "What is quite inadmissible . . . is the assumption that because a word has a particular meaning in one context, it automatically has the same meaning in another quite different context a couple of thousand years earlier" (or later! 1972:9).

4. ***Misuse of subsequent meaning.*** The opposite problem from etymology occurs when we read later meanings back into the biblical material. This occurs, for instance, when *martys* ("witness") is interpreted in terms of its second-century meaning of "martyrdom," or when the "fish" of John 21:11-14 is made a symbol of the Eucharist because of its presence in the sacrament in the later church. Walter Kaiser coined the phrase "the analogy of antecedent Scripture" to cover the process of interpreting the

theology behind a text (1981:134-40). This means that we must interpret a theological term not on the basis of what it came to mean later but rather on the basis of what it meant in the past, especially as that past meaning affected the current use of the term. While that is broader than the topic here, Kaiser applies it first to "the use of certain terms which have already acquired a special meaning in the history of salvation and have begun to take on a technical status (e.g. 'seed,' 'servant, ' 'rest,' 'inheritance')" (p. 137).

This principle is even more applicable to word study. One of the basic problems of modern popular interpretation is the tendency to read twenty-first-century meanings into the ancient terms of Scripture. All of us have attended Sunday school classes where great theological points were drawn from Webster's Dictionary or from particular phrases in the Amplified Bible. A similar problem is the tendency to read New Testament meaning into Old Testament concepts like salvation, grace, mercy and truth. At all times current usage and the context must determine the meaning. Future meaning does have a place, of course. Canon criticism (such as Child's commentary on Exodus) has demonstrated the value of an awareness of later interpretation on a text. However, it dare not influence the meaning of the current text but can only show how a text or term was later applied to the life of God's people.

5. ***The one-meaning fallacy.*** At times we encounter the view that every appearance of a Hebrew or Greek term should be translated by the same English word. This of course is closely related to the root fallacy described previously (see pp. 84- 87). The Concordant Version has attempted this with disastrous results. The problem is a distorted view of language. The average person has, say, a vocabulary of twenty thousand words; yet linguists have shown that in that person's lifetime he or she will express four to five million different ideas. Simple mathematics demands that the words must be used in many different combinations with many different meanings in order to meet the need. Naturally, some highly technical terms (such as those in the sciences) will approximate a single meaning, but not words in everyday language. This is complicated even further when one crosses language barriers to communicate, as is the case when studying the Bible. No two languages express themselves or use words the same way. To say a simple phrase such as "I will get it" in German, for instance, one must ask which of the many possible German words for "get" will express that particular idea. Cassells'

Wörterbuch has two columns with scores of word combinations for the simple English word *get.*

The same is true when translating from the Hebrew or the Greek. Louw uses the excellent example of *sarx*, "flesh," a word often translated literally in the versions (1982:39-40). However, note the following widely different semantic uses: Matthew 24:22, "no flesh will be saved" (no person); John 1:14, "the Word became flesh" (became a human being); Romans 9:8, "children of the flesh" (children of natural birth); Hebrews 5:7, "days of his flesh" (his earthly life); Romans 8:13, "live according to the flesh" (sinful nature); Jude 7, "went after strange flesh" (sexual immorality). The point is obvious: the English term *flesh* cannot adequately express all these divergent connotations, and a translation would be wrong to use "flesh" in all these instances. As Louw concludes, "one can never say what *sarx* means, but only what it means in this or that context" (pp. 39-40).

Later I will discuss the linguistic concept of "primary" and "secondary" meanings (see pp. 100-101), but this is a quite different phenomenon from "one meaning." The "primary" meaning relates to the "thread of meaning" that ties together the semantic field of a word (Beekman and Callow 1974:96-97). However, even that definition is debated, and most linguists agree that many associated meanings are related only peripherally. The technical term for the multiple senses an individual word can have is *polysemy,* literally "multiple meaning." This is an extremely important linguistic principle, for it forces us once again to the semantic field and the context as the two factors in determining the meaning of a term.

6. ***Misuse of parallels.*** The misuse of parallels provides another of the most frequent sources of error. An excellent article by Robert Kysar (1970:250-55) shows that Rudolf Bultmann and C. H. Dodd in their commentaries on John (specifically the prologue) used entirely different sources of evidence to "prove" their respective theories. Rarely did either consider the parallels adduced by the other. In other words, they chose only those parallels that would support their preconceived notions. This happens all too often in scholarly circles. Instead of a comprehensive study of all possible parallels in order to discover which best fits the context, scholars will select only those most favorable to the thesis and ignore the others. Further, they will often accumulate numerous examples in order to overwhelm the reader with volume. Carson calls this "verbal parallelomania, . . . the listing of verbal parallels in some body of

literature as if those bare phenomena demonstrate conceptual links or even dependency" (1984c:43-44). Such occurs frequently with some practitioners in the history of religions school. In their desire to show the Hellenistic rather than Jewish origin of a concept or term, they virtually ignore evidence from Jewish circles. Martin Hengel in his many writings has done a brilliant job of overturning many of the invalid assumptions of this school.

It is critical to recognize the relative value of parallels. For instance, when studying Paul's use of *dikaiousthai* ("justify") in Romans 3:24, we must consider several levels. First, the passive voice verb rather than the noun or adjective is truly relevant. Second, Paul's use elsewhere *in Romans* is more important than his use elsewhere. Third, the use of *dikaioun* and cognates elsewhere in the New Testament does not tell us how it is used in Romans. All the latter can do is expand the semantic field and provide possible meanings from the use of the term in the early church. Fourth, we must ask whether there is a direct allusion or indirect influence from the Septuagint or the Old Testament. Fifth, we must study extant Greek literature for other possible semantic parallels.

Most important, we must search for true parallels rather than be satisfied with seeming or potential parallels. The difference is not always so simple to detect. We must consider the whole semantic range and compare the contexts behind the possible parallels before deciding. Then we must chart each occurrence and see which uses of the term elsewhere have the greatest degree of overlap with the use of the term in the particular context we are studying. Any individual occurrence is no more than a possible parallel until it has been shown to have a higher degree of semantic overlap (that is, it corresponds to the biblical term at several levels) than the other possibilities, even if the parallel is found elsewhere in the same book or section. We need to remember that we often use the same word with slightly different nuances only a couple sentences apart and think nothing of it. Paul, for example, uses *nomos* ("law") in several different ways in Romans 5—7 (see the chart in Moo 1983:76). It is not the nearest parallel but the best one that counts, and the immediate context is the final arbiter in deciding the proper parallel.

7. ***The disjunctive fallacy.*** Often two options are presented as either-or, forcing the reader to make a choice when one is not necessitated. Carson connects this with "a prejudicial use of evidence," which presents the data in such a way that the reader is influenced in a direction not actually demanded by the evidence (1984c:54-56). We have already seen this in

the chapter two with grammar, for instance, when one is asked to choose between an objective and subjective genitive when a general genitive is indicated. This error is often made with word studies as well. One example is the use of institutional language by proponents of Early Catholicism, which assumes that the early church was charismatic and free and only at the last part of the first century developed church government. Therefore, all mention of "elders" or "bishops" (such as Acts 14:23; Phil 1:1) had to be late, while language of Spirit-led activity (e.g., 1 Cor 14:26-28) stems from the primitive church. This is an unwarranted disjunction, however, for charismatic freedom and institutionalism are not dichotomous. A good parallel was the Jewish synagogue, which had freedom and yet regimen within its programs.

8. ***The word fallacy.*** Another major problem is a failure to consider the concept as well as the word, that is, the other ways the biblical writers could say the same thing. This naturally includes synonyms; one of the purposes of the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* was to correct that basic error in *TDNT.* However, as Moisés Silva has said, even in *NIDNTT* "the grouping of semantically related terms does not really evince sensitivity to linguistic theory; it appears to be only a matter of convenience (cf. my review in *WTJ* 43 [1980-81], 395- 99" [1983:21n]). We dare never study only occurrences of the particular term if our purpose is to trace the theology behind a word or phrase. Such will help in determining the semantic range of that particular term but will not recapitulate the range of the author's thought or of biblical teaching.

   None of us ever uses the exact same words to describe our thoughts. Rather, we use synonyms and other phrases to depict our ideas. Therefore, a truly complete picture must cluster semantically related terms and phrases. The method for this will be discussed in the next section, "Basic Semantic Theory"; at this stage I want to note the danger of neglecting the procedure. For example, to discuss the spiritual realm and center only on *pneuma* is fraught with danger. Thiselton (1977:91) charts the concept and notes the related terms under "wind" (such as *anemos, lailaps*), "spirit" *(soma, sarx, psychē*, "seat of emotion or insight" *(kardia, etarachthē*, "the whole person" *(to emon, me)* and several other categories. We would do an injustice to the topic by ignoring passages dealing with the same theme but using other related terms. Here a semantic field approach (see pp. 103-6) is needed to determine all the terms and phrases which express a concept.

9. ***Ignoring the context.*** In one sense ignoring the context is the basic error that encompasses the others and makes them possible. For instance, etymology is misused as formative of meaning when the diachronic history of a term is given priority over the context. I have already noted that context and the current semantic range of a word are the two aspects of the synchronic dimension. The failure to note context may be the most frequently occurring error, since the majority of commentaries are organized around a word-by-word approach that usually isolates each word from the other terms surrounding it and as a result fails to put the message of the text together as a coherent whole.

   For instance, in Philippians 2:7 *heauton ekenōsen* ("emptied himself") has become the focus of widespread debate centering on the kenotic theory, namely, whether Christ "emptied himself" of his deity. The traditional evangelical approach has been to respond that Christ emptied himself of the prerogatives and glory of deity but not of his divine nature (cf. v. 6; see J. B. Lightfoot). However, as Gerald Hawthorne has noted, this ignores the context (1983:25-86). There is no (genitive of) content given for the "emptying," and it is better in this light to recognize the intransitive nature of the verb. In the semantic range another use fits the context better, to "pour out" or "make himself nothing." This fits the transition from "did not consider equality a thing to be grasped" to "took on the form of a servant" as well as the parallelism with "humbled" in verse 8. A proper regard for context removes the necessity of debating the kenotic school on their own grounds.

BASIC SEMANTIC THEORY

1. ***Meaning.*** In a very real sense this chapter is the heart of the entire book. Everyone who studies this work has one basic question: What procedure can I follow to discover more precisely what the Bible means? Yet there are several issues involved, as we have already seen. For one thing, what is "meaning"? Kevin Vanhoozer (1998:252-53) provides an extended definition of "meaning" as an author's "embodied intention" (i.e., not the mental state but the directed act of writing) that is then "embodied . . . in a stable verbal structure" and "enacted" to be shared with the readers. Earlier (p. 29-30) I distinguished between the author's intended meaning, which is singular in essence, and what the text "means" for each of us, which is multiple, depending on its significance for us at given times. Yet we still have not defined "meaning." One major area of agreement on the part of semanticists is that meaning is not an inherent property of words. Contrary to popular assumptions, terms really do not carry meaning by themselves. It is true that some terms do produce a word picture in the mind, like "apple" or "house." However, they confer this meaning as part of sentences or "speech acts," and often they do not carry that particular meaning at all, as the term "pineapple" or the sentence "His suggestion housed several different ideas" illustrates.

   Thus, there is no inherent meaning in a word. As Stephen Ullmann has noted, dictionaries give us the impression that words carry abstract content by their very nature (1964:39). Yet in reality words are arbitrary symbols that have meaning only in a context. They function on the basis of convention and practical use in any language system, and they must be studied descriptively (how they are actually employed) rather than prescriptively (according to preconceived rules). Nida provides a working definition of meaning as "a set of relations for which a verbal symbol is a sign" and adds that a word should be understood as "a token or a symbol for this or that meaning" (1975:14). Similarly, Benjamin Kedar begins his discussion by noting that speech is primarily a "symbol

system" (1981:9). In other words, the individual term is not the basic unit of meaning. "As Saussure has shown decisively in one way, and Wittgenstein decisively in another, the meaning of a word depends not on what it is in itself but on its relation to other words and to other sentences which form its context" (Thiselton 1977:78-79). As Max Turner brings out, this does not mean anything goes (1995:149). The root of a word will give a "rough guide to the possible sense of unfamiliar words"; for example, *bapt-* generally meaning to "dip," thus, "I dip (into something), baptize."

This theory of meaning can be illustrated in many ways. Note the use of *peirasmos* in James 1:2 and James 1:12-13. In itself the word has no single meaning but only meaning potential. It is a symbol waiting for a context, when its meaning will be decided by interaction in a sentence. In these three passages there is a definite shift of meaning. In 1:2 *peirasmos* clearly means a "trial," defined further as a "testing of your faith" (v. 3) that comes in a myriad of forms (v. 2). After the discussion of prayer and doubting (vv. 5-8) and poverty and wealth (vv. 9-10), James returns to his topic in verse 12, specifically renewing the idea of "enduring trials" (cf. vv. 3-4). In verse 13, however, the meaning changes to another aspect of the semantic range, that of "temptation." This subtle shift is necessitated by the statement "God is tempting me" and leads into a discussion of the source and progress of temptation-sin-death (vv. 14-15). Meaning was not inherent in *peirasmos* but was given to it by its context; without a context the term has only potential meaning.

2. ***Sense and reference.*** Most of us have grown up with some form of the reference theory of meaning.[1] This theory posits a direct relationship between a word as symbol and the thing to which it refers. But the problem is that words do not always "name" the reality behind them. As Gilbert Ryle has said:

> If every single word were a name, then a sentence composed of five words, say "three is a prime number" should be a list of five objects named by those five words. But a list like "Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, Berkeley" is not a sentence. . . . What a sentence means is not decomposable into the set of things which the word in it stands for, if they do stand for things. So the notion of "having meaning" is at least partly different from the notion of "standing for." (1963:133; in Silva 1983:106)

Silva modified this functional view of language by noting the fact that some words do indeed have a direct link with physical entities (or in the case of biblical study, with theological concepts). This is true of proper names, as Ryle suggests, and is sometimes true of technical or semitechnical terms like *nomos* (“law”) or *hamartia* (“sin”). However, we have already noted the flexibility of *nomos*. Walther Günther points out that in the Septuagint “two words, *hamartia* and *adikia*, represent between them almost the whole range of Hebrew words for guilt and sin” and that in the New Testament the term and its cognates are used “as the most comprehensive expression of everything opposed to God” (1978:577, 579). In short, even these semitechnical expressions have a certain flexibility in their use. Silva correctly notes that we must distinguish between technical and nontechnical terms, but I must add one caveat: there is no absolute or clear-cut distinction.[2] Semitechnical terms like *nomos* can be used in a nonreferential way, for example as “legal principles” in general. Silva’s diagram (1983:107) is helpful (see fig. 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Silva’s diagram of degrees of reference



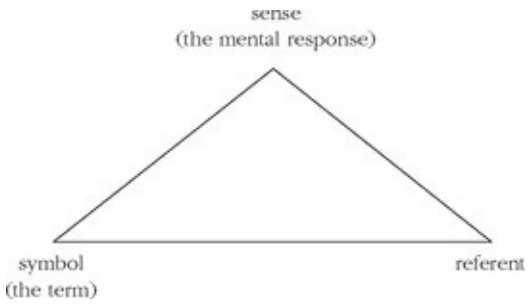
We can study a term that is completely or mostly referential (i.e., a technical term) by what linguists call the “word and thing” approach (as utilized in *TDNT*). This method assumes the identity between the word and the “thing” to which it refers and proceeds to define the referent in exact terms. However, not many words can be studied this way, and the method is open to many pitfalls. Carson, for instance, cautions against “false assumptions about technical meaning,” in which a person presupposes the content of a technical term like *sanctification* without letting the text define it (1984c:45-48). In the case of *sanctification*, passages like Romans 6 or 1 Corinthians 1:2 equate it with the moment of justification rather than with the process of spiritual growth. In other words, even with technical terms the context has priority.

The well-known triangle of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (1945:11; in Silva 1983:103) illustrates the basic distinctions in defining words (see

fig. 3.2).

It is not easy to establish the link between a symbol and its referent. The major point is to note the difference between the sense of a word and its reference. The latter is an extralinguistic factor, the specific object denoted by the statement. The "sense" is the picture built in the mind by the term, that image which is connoted. For instance, if we say "The ship is at the docks," we have a symbol (ship), a sense (a large boat) and a referent (the Queen Mary). Let us consider Peter's confession at Philippi, "You are the Christ" (Mk 8:29). The symbol "Christ" actually refers to Jesus (as we know from the context) but its sense is that of the Jewish expectation of the Messiah. In most other cases we must deal with sense more than reference. Abstract terms like *faith*, *hope*, *love* fit only this former category. In tracing salvific terms in the Old Testament (see Sawyer 1972), we are dealing with sense relations. Therefore, I will center on sense in the ensuing discussions.

Figure 3.2. Ogden and Richards triangle



3. ***Structural linguistics.*** The sense of a term depends on its function in the larger linguistic unit, the sentence. This realization is at the heart of a structural (not structuralist; see chap. 5) view of language. Saussure recognized three fundamental principles behind modern linguistics. Two we have already seen (the arbitrary nature of words as symbols, and the centrality of the synchronic study of language). The third is the centrality of structure for discovering meaning (Turner, 1995:149). He grounded his system in the difference between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. The former is linear and defines a word's relationship with the other terms that surround it in the speech act, such as the interrelationship of concepts in "God is love." A paradigmatic relation is vertical or

associative, noting other terms that could replace it, such as words that are synonymous. Rather than “love” one could say “kind,” “merciful” or “gracious.” Both aspects are connected to the key exegetical question, Why? Why did the writer choose this series of relationships by which to express his thoughts? This leads to a series of “what” questions: What limiting relationships do the series of terms develop with one another? What other terms could have been chosen to describe the writer’s thoughts? What is the larger semantic domain (range of meanings) of which these terms are a part, and what does it add to the thought? In biblical study this takes us straight into the theological domain.

Both aspects must be considered in a proper word study. For instance, “love of God” in Romans 8:39 is part of a much larger structure, the statement of the inseparability of the child of God from his love (Rom 8:38-39). We cannot understand it without considering the whole statement of which it is a part. Further, we must note that it stands in deliberate parallel with “love of Christ” in verse 35. Here we see the syntagmatic combined with the paradigmatic, as the entire Godhead (cf. Rom 8:26- 27) is involved in our security. On the concept of love, we would want to study parallel concepts like *hesed* (lovingkindness) and omnipotence (due to the stress on in-separability). These latter are sister concepts that will both inform and place in bold relief the concept elucidated here. More on this later.

My purpose here is to note that the terms have meaning only as part of the larger structure. Naturally, “love of God” does have meaning as a technical phrase; however, a better label is “meaning potential.” Remember our use of this very concept in our discussion of the genitive in chapter two (see pp. 71-73). It *could* mean many things—“God loves me,” “I love God,” “God is love” and so forth. I can only know what it *does* mean when I see it as part of a larger context like Romans 8:39. Moreover, the meaning of a statement is not the sum of the meanings of its individual words (the impression given by many commentaries) but the total message produced by the words in relation to one another. Consider the difference between “I help the boy” and “The boy helps me.” There is never an accumulation of separate meanings but only a single message. Each term is a part of a whole, and to change any term or its relationship to other terms is to change the whole.

4. ***Context.*** I have stressed context throughout this book; I want here to explore its relationship to semantics. Silva summarizes the universally accepted axiom regarding its importance when he assigns “a

determinative function to context; that is, the context does not merely help us understand meaning; it virtually *makes* meaning" (1983:139). In chapter one I used two aspects of context—the historical and the logical—to describe the prolegomena to serious Bible study. Here I note a similar breakdown and, following linguistic convention, will label them literary and situational.

Sawyer calls the literary context the "linguistic environment" that relates semantics to several concerns that will be covered later, such as syntax and genre (1972:10- 28). In his study Sawyer centers on stylistics, that is, on grouping semantic units on the basis of similar types of expression. This is indeed a critical area of linguistic investigation, for it recognizes that every writer (as well as every genre [see chaps. 6- 12]) uses language differently. At the same time, every language has certain stylistic preferences (idioms, ways of saying things) that often determine word selection. These two forces work in opposite directions: individual style produces variety of expression, cultural norms produce conformity of expression. The student of the Word must be aware of both and ask what stylistic factors are at work in the context.

This is especially valuable in studying the question of synonyms (see pp. 103-5). Without presupposing the data to follow, consider Paul's use of *ginōskein* and *eidenai,* the two basic words for "to know." Donald Burdick examines the Pauline occurrences and believes that in the majority of cases (90 of 103 for *eidenai* and 32 of 50 for *ginōskein)* Paul follows the classical distinction between *eidenai* as denoting knowledge already possessed (characterized by assurance) and *ginōskein* as the process of gaining knowledge (1974:344-56). Silva, however, challenges the results, arguing that *eidenai hoti* is conventional language and should not be pressed (1983:164-69). Paul's usage is dictated more by stylistic concerns (Silva 1980 calls this "lexical choice") than by classical distinctions, and therefore the two are often synonyms in Paul's letters.

E. D. Hirsch challenges the importance of style and syntax for meaning, arguing that synonymous ideas can be stated in varying stylistic forms, such as active ("I hit the ball") or passive ("The ball was hit by me") (1976:50-73). However, his arguments are not conclusive for two reasons. First, he has carefully selected an example that might prove his point, but in reality linguists have taken that into consideration. We must consider the context and ask whether the passive gives greater stress to the "ball" and the active to the act of hitting. However, in other stylistic choices, the influence of style is more direct. Second, Hirsch is attacking

a deterministic view that assumes that style is the creative force in meaning. I am saying that style is *a* key rather than *the* key to meaning, one among many factors that we must consider when investigating the contribution of a word within a sentence structure. Therefore, Hirsch's objection is a valuable caution against an exaggerated view of the importance of style, but it is not applicable to a more nuanced understanding.

The situational context is more difficult to determine, for it involves the reconstruction of the historical situation behind the surface context of the passage. This looks forward to the discussion of historical-cultural exegesis (chap. 5) but needs also to be addressed in relation to semantic research. I will discuss the difficulty of understanding something uttered in the past (see app. 1-2), but linguists at least do not consider this to be an impossible task. Historical documents help recreate not only the meaning of words but also the events and situations behind most ancient documents. Moreover, these situations themselves are determinative of meaning. Thiselton correctly observes, "To try to cut loose 'propositions' in the New Testament [or Old Testament!] from the specific situation in which they were uttered and to try thereby to treat them 'timelessly' is not only bad theology; it is also bad linguistics. For it leads to a distortion of what the text *means*" (1977:79). Alan Brehm (1995:180-99) provides a valuable study of the term *Hellenists* in Acts 6:1, asking whether it refers to Jewish Christians speaking the Greek language or following the Greek culture. Scholars have been divided. A diachronic study is inconclusive, since both aspects are found. Only a synchronic study of its use in Acts (it only appears here in the New Testament) and especially Acts 6 can solve the issue. Yet in Acts 6:1, 9:29, and 11:20 it refers respectively to Jewish Christians, opponents of Paul, and Syrian converts, so that too is ambiguous. The key is its relation to the "Hebrews" in 6:1, and here it seems best to see the major difference being they spoke Greek rather than Aramaic (they were probably diasporate Jews who had moved back to Jerusalem).

5. ***Deep structure.*** Louw speaks of the surface and deep levels of an utterance (1982:75-89). By this he does not identify with the psychologistic approach of the structuralists but rather speaks purely from the linguistic perspective. The surface structure deals with the basic grammatical and semantic relationships of a sentence. It is akin to a modern translation like the New International Version, paraphrastic when it needs to be but faithfully reproducing the original. The deep structure,

however, looks to the underlying message behind the words. For biblical study this is the theological truth embedded in the statement. This is based on the transformational grammar of Noam Chomsky, a topic I will explore further in chapter four. Yet it has implications for semantics, and I wish to explore these. Chomsky taught that behind the surface grammar of every statement lay linguistic transformations, that is, the deeper message of the utterance. There is a very real danger to this, for some, like the structuralists, have been led to denigrate and virtually ignore the surface text. Many semanticists, however, have recognized this pitfall and rightly seen that the surface grammar controls the transformations. The two are interdependent parts of a larger whole.

Louw uses Ephesians 1:7 as an example (1982:75-76). The surface statement is "by whom we have redemption through his blood." The deep structure says "God sets us free because Christ died for us." This considers not only syntax but also deep-level semantics. Both halves, "redemption" and "blood," are analyzed in terms of syntagm and paradigm, then transformed into their underlying theological statements. Behind this there must also be serious exegetical study. One byproduct of the method is the elimination of ambiguities (Thiselton 1977:96). We must work through the interpretive options before we can identify the deeper message.

This works at grammatical as well as at semantic levels. For instance, "God loves us" and "we love God" are two possible deep structures (in chap. 4 I will call these "kernel sentences") for the surface statement "the love of God." In semantic investigation let us consider *parakaleite* in Hebrews 3:13. Most translate it "encourage one another daily," partly on the basis of its parallel in Hebrews 10:25, "encourage one another, especially since you see the day drawing near." However, as I stated earlier in this chapter, we must use parallels carefully, examining whether the contexts match sufficiently. There are two possible deep meanings for *parakaleite* in this context, the positive "encourage" and the negative "admonish." In this case the context (different from the positive context of Heb 10:24-25) "so that none of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (NASB) makes the latter definite. The deep structure would be, "It is necessary to keep examining one another for sin, because if you don't, it will deceive and then harden you."

6. ***Syntax and semantics.*** Eugene Nida and Charles Taber discuss the two basic factors that influence meaning (1974:56-63), and this will provide a good summary for the first half of the discussion of structural semantics.

It is amazing that with the millions of idea possibilities and our limited vocabulary, ambiguity is not a constant result. Yet a remarkable degree of precision is achieved through the wide range of meanings and uses attached to words in different contexts. The first factor that leads to meaning is syntax, the subject of chapter four. Whether a word is used as a noun, a verb or an adjective makes a great deal of difference. Consider: "he threw the stones," "he was stoned" (with several possible meanings depending on context), and "he had a stony countenance." The meaning can change radically with each syntactical usage. The same is often true of biblical words. We must always ask what the term contributes to the meaning of the whole statement, not just inquire as to what it "means" in the context. Thiselton uses Wittgenstein's concept of the "language game" (1977:1130-32; 1980:373-79) to express this truth. Each word used in an utterance is not an entity in itself but is part of a larger activity grounded in everyday life. Thus speech-acts have no uniform pattern; hermeneutical rules above all must be flexible enough to allow the syntax to speak for itself, to allow the language to play its own game.

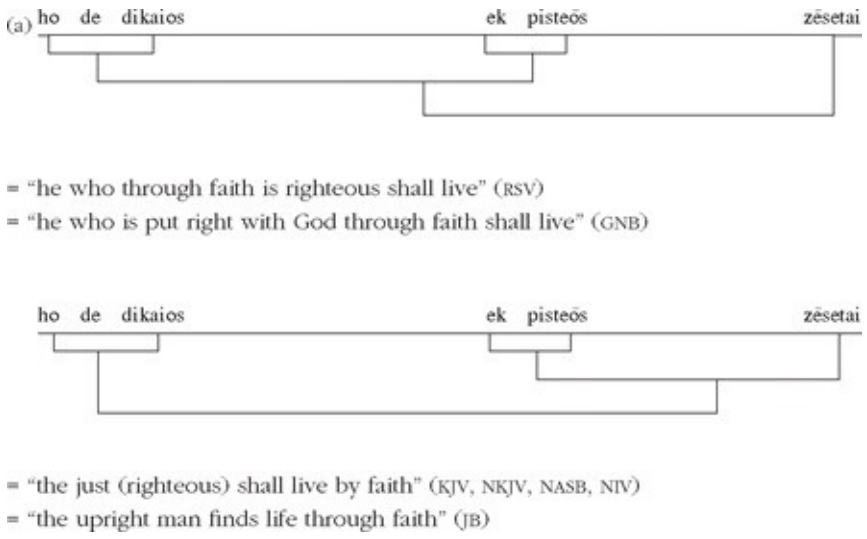
"Semotaxis" is the second factor and refers to the influence of the surrounding words. This of course can be exceedingly complex, since all the given elements in a surface structure interact with each other. One of the critical aspects concerns the modifiers (adjectives, subordinate clauses and so forth). As modifiers increase, the specificity of the statement increases proportionately, for example, "his father," "the father of the blond fellow," "the father of the blond fellow standing there." Yet in many cases ambiguity abounds. Louw (1982:75) provides an excellent illustration by diagramming the two semotactic ways of understanding Romans 1:17 (see fig. 3.3).

These two interpretations are quite different but each is based on viable semotactic relationships. On the basis of the larger context the interpreter must choose, but the principle of semotaxis helps us to realize that we are dealing with whole statements and not just individual phrases.

7. ***Semantic range.*** As we turn from the structural aspects of language to the actual tools of semantics, we must begin with the basic task of establishing the parameters of word meaning in individual cases. The semantic range of a word is the result of the synchronic study, a list of the ways the word was used in the era when the work was written. For Old Testament study, apart from comparative linguistics (such as Ugaritic or Akkadian texts) the terms can be traced in Jewish inscriptions and rabbinic literature. Lexicons (Koehler-Baumgartner, Holladay, Brown-

Driver-Briggs) and concordances (Mandelkern, Lisowsky, Wikgram) are the primary source for such statistics. The person doing frontline semantic research will trace the occurrences, note the distribution (such as special uses in wisdom or prophetic literature), check syntactical groupings (such as preference for a certain preposition) and organize the data into primary, secondary, and metaphorical meanings. Above all, we must study each context in detail, for many have made mistakes by assuming a primary meaning in a passage that actually favors one of the secondary uses of the term. Extrabiblical sources must be employed with care, since the use of the cognate languages can

Figure 3.3. Louw's diagrams of Romans 1:17



easily lead to the etymological fallacy (see pp. 87-89) but parallels proper adduced can be highly illuminating (see Stuart 1980:120-26; Kedar, 1981:70-82).

In New Testament word study we need to trace the word carefully in both Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts, noting its use in Philo and Josephus as well as in the papyri. Again for serious research we will want to consult the primary sources and both trace and collate the usages of the word in different contexts. Next we will do the same in the New Testament (using a concordance like Moulton-Geden or Aland's computer concordances), noting the proclivities of certain authors (for instance, John's preference for the verb form of *believe* and *know*).

Etymology can be very helpful since many passages deliberately allude to Septuagint or Old Testament meanings. Moreover, some Greek words are more transparent, continuing the past uses of the term.

The major lexicon, Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker (BAGD, 1979), is a valuable tool because it traces the origins and distribution of the term as well as its basic semantic range. However, it is important to remember that BAGD is descriptive and interpretive. When it places a passage behind a certain meaning it is an opinion and not an established fact. Fee notes the handling of *archontes* (rulers) in 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 (1983:537-89 and 1987:103-4). BAGD places it under the rubric of the evil spirits. However, a closer look at the evidence yields several interesting facts: only the singular is used in the New Testament for Satan; the plural always refers to human rulers; the first use of the plural for demonic forces in Greek literature appears in the second century. While the demonic remains a possible interpretation, I personally follow those who favor human rulers as the meaning of *archontes* here. My point is that we should not assume BAGD's decisions to be irrefutable.

Beekman and Callow discuss the "multiple senses" of a word from the standpoint of translation procedures (1974:94-103). They recommend that the student consider three levels of word meaning. The primary level is the common meaning that the word carries when it stands without a context and in most cognate terms. For example, the primary meanings of *lytroun* are to "free" or "ransom."

Secondary meanings are specific meanings that often share an aspect of the primary sense but occur only in some contexts. Beekman and Callow speak of a "thread of meaning," but such is not always true. A good example of the latter is *rûah/ pneuma*, which can mean "wind" or "spirit" or "breath" or the person. The various uses cover a broad band of semantic categories and cannot be restricted to a common thread (see pp. 84-87 on the root fallacy). Therefore these meanings are used infrequently. For *lytroun* these would be the idea of a ransom payment, redemption, the liberation of a prisoner of war or the manumission of a slave. The first two of course are found frequently in the New Testament, but still the context must decide whether or not a ransom payment ("blood") is stressed or whether the freedom won is the emphasis.

Finally, figurative meanings are based on "associative relations with the primary Sense" (Beekman and Callow 1974:94). (I will consider this in chapter four under "Figures of Speech.") Under this category the term is used metaphorically to depict a word picture. For *lytroun* BAGD lists

its use in prayer ("save me from . . .") as a figurative sense. These categories will prove helpful in organizing the data one has collected on the semantic range of a term.

The majority of us will never be engaged in the type of detailed research described herein. We will not have the time to retrace each use in its original context and reorganize the results on the basis of recent semantic theory (as did Barr, Sawyer or Kedar). We will have to be satisfied with secondary sources like BDB or BAGD, or, for those who do not know the languages, the better commentaries. However, we can still use them knowledgeably, and when commentaries or monographs employ semantic research and argumentation, we can be aware of the level of sophistication with which the data is utilized. Certainly those of us who are pastors, missionaries and scholars in related fields will not have the time to do primary research. Yet if we know the theory, we can use the secondary tools with far greater understanding and awareness. This chapter will be used on many different levels, from serious devotional reading to writing major monographs. I do not want to give the impression that this is only for serious scholars. If we know what is involved in developing a semantic range, we can properly use those semantic studies which have been developed for us. We can also avoid misusing tools like *TDNT, TDOT* or *NIDNTT,* which have not been intended for detailed lexical study. They are certainly invaluable exegetical resources but are not exhaustive on semantic range (*TDOT* and *EDNT* come the closest) since they deal more with theological usage.

8. ***Connotative meaning.*** Nida and Taber present the four basic components of the dynamic employment of words in a context: the object element (O), the event connoted (E), the abstract nature acquired (A) and a relationship implied (R) (1969:37-39). Wycliffe Bible translators as well as others use this OEAR complex to identify more precisely the exact way a particular word is used in its context and to provide a guide to select a dynamic equivalence term or phrase in the receptor language into which the passage is being translated. This does add time to the exegetical task and by the average student will of necessity (due to time) be used sparingly, but on key words that deserve detailed word study it is a worthy tool that will enable the student to think through the surface structure of a text much more carefully.

   For instance, "justify" has an E-A complex of meanings ("declare righteous"), "justifier" an O-E-A thrust (the object "declares righteous"), and "reconcile" an E-R emphasis (a new relationship is mediated). An

"object" or "thing" word constitutes an animate entity and emphasizes the person or thing concerned in a statement. An "event" word connotes action and stresses the movement aspect of a statement. An "abstract" term is theoretical in essence and centers on the qualitative aspect of the word. A "relational" term looks at the concept in its association with other people or ideas and emphasizes the correlation between the terms. In Romans 1:17 ("The righteous will live by faith"), *just* or *righteous* is an O-A-R term because the person is seen in "right" relationship with God. *Live* is an E-A term because it is the action word in the sentence and a key idea for the new life with God in the epistle to the Romans (see Rom 2:7; 4:17; 5:17-18). *Faith* is also an E-A term because it is the basis of right "living" and stresses the abstract aspect of "faith" in God.

9. ***Semantic field/paradigmatic research: Synonymy, antonymy and componential analysis.*** This section concerns the semantic field of a concept, not just the various meanings the term itself might have in different contexts but other terms that relate to it. This is the opposite of the "semantic range" (the number of meanings a particular term carried in ancient Judaism or in the first century) and refers to the number of words and phrases used in the first century for a certain concept. The work that does this is Louw and Nida (1988, 1989). For instance, some years ago I wrote an article on the place of the mind in spiritual growth (1984:55-70), and in it I did a semantic field study of the concept of mind in Scripture. I found fifteen different words or phrases that carried the idea of thinking, understanding, knowing and the like. One surprising (to me at the time) result was the term *heart.* Both in Hebrew and Greek the "heart" did not just refer to the feelings but to the whole thinking person. One cannot do a biblical theology of a topic without developing the semantic field.

   This paradigmatic approach increasingly is recognized as having great value in serious word study. The technical term for the former is polysemy (a term with more than one meaning) and the term for the latter is polymorphy (several symbols with the same meaning) or synonymy. Nida calls this paradigmatic method "field semantics" and goes so far as to say that "critical studies of meaning must be based primarily on the analysis of related meanings of different words not on the different meanings of single words" (1972:85, pp. 85-86). Certainly this is an overstatement, but it is true that synonyms are very neglected in semantic investigation and can be quite helpful in broadening the thrust of the actual term chosen in the syntagmatic or surface structure. The difficulty

of course is avoiding overexegesis of the actual term found; for instance, overstating the differences between the word and its synonyms on the one hand or illegitimately reading the others into it on the other hand. A nuanced use of the method will nevertheless enrich the meaning of the passage, leading to the biblical theology behind the concept embedded in the term.

Silva notes three types of synonyms (1983:120-29).[3] The predominant category is that of overlapping relations, so called because synonyms meet at the level of sense rather than reference. This means that some of the various senses of the terms overlap or cohere. There are few if any absolute synonyms, terms that agree with one another at every level. However, we can say that terms are synonymous in particular contexts, such as *pneuma* (“spirit”) and *psychē* (“soul”) in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 or *agapao* and *phileō* (“love”) in John 21:15-17.

There are two uses of synonyms in Bible study. If we are looking to the larger theological pattern behind the use of a certain term, we will study similar terms for the same concept in order to find the larger semantic field, which can enrich a particular study. For instance, in a study of *proseuchomai* (“pray”) in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we could look up similar terms for prayer like *aiteō,deomai*, *eucharistia*, *enteuxis* and *iketoria* and see how they expand and clarify the biblical concept.

Second, we can study synonyms used in the same passage and ask the extent to which they overlap. This is often quite difficult. Using the prayer language just noted as an illustration, four of the terms occur in Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by *prayer* and *petition*, with *thanksgiving*, present your *requests* to God.” Most likely Paul is deliberately stockpiling prayer terms synonymously in order to present prayer in its most comprehensive form rather than speaking of different aspects of prayer. In other situations, however, the language is more akin to step parallelism (see chap. 7 on poetry), that is, the accent is more on the development of ideas. Gibson gives two examples of pseudosynonymy, a false claim of synonymy (1981:199-206): (1) Lindar’s assumption (1968:117-26) that terms for the law in Deuteronomy (“judgments,” “statutes,” “commandments”) are synonymous, and (2) Bultmann’s statement that “see the kingdom of God” and “enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3, 5) are synonymous. Neither assumption is proven, and the latter is based on theology rather than on language. It is likely that neither example is synonymous. Nida and Taber (1974:66) illustrate the method of overlapping relations by

comparing repentance, remorse and conversion (see fig. 3.4).

Silva calls the second type of synonym "contiguous relations" or "improper synonymy." These terms share some similarity of reference but could never be interchanged. For instance, the "upper garment" *(himation)* and the "under garment" *(chiton)* obviously are quite similar, but they could never be true synonyms. The same is true of *man* and *woman, boy* and *girl.* The key question is whether the two could replace one another in a statement without changing the meaning.

Figure 3.4. Nida and Taber's illustration of overlapping relations

repentance	remorse	conversion
1. bad behavior	1. bad behavior	1. bad behavior
2. sorrow	2. sorrow	2. _____
3. change of behavior	3. _____	3. change of behavior

The third category is labeled "inclusive relations" and is technically called "hyponymy" or "semantic domain." This relates to a hierarchical relationship between words (see Nida and Taber 1974:68-70) from the generic to the specific; for instance, creature-animal-mammal-dog-terrier-"Bozo." Semantic domains are seldom used with accuracy; people frequently use "that dog" to refer to a specific pet. Since individuals do not use the components of a domain in the same way, it is critical to note the particular speaker's or author's use and not to read greater specificity into a term than is there. The context is the final arbiter. Further, substitution is not as simple in hyponymy. As Silva states, " 'Flower' can take the place of 'rose' in many sentences, . . . whereas 'rose' can take the place of 'flower' only in sentences where another type of flower is not meant" (1983:127).

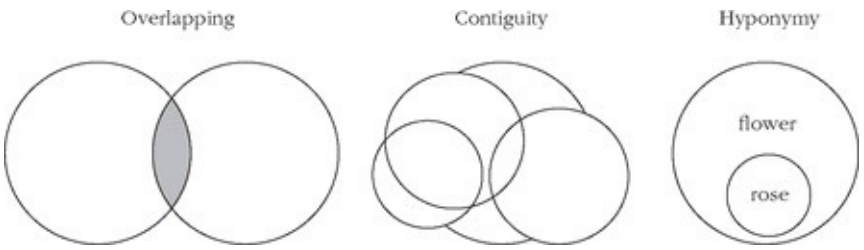
Mistakes in this category are quite similar to Barr's warning against "illegitimate totality transfer" (see p. 84). Scholars are constantly reading the whole of a doctrine into isolated statements. This is especially true of theologically loaded passages like John 6:37-40, where many scholars see the full-fledged doctrine of predestination, or Acts 2:38, where others read a developed view of baptismal regeneration. We must remember that the biblical authors normally stressed one aspect of a larger dogma to fit

individual situations. Doctrines must be based on an accumulation of all biblical passages on a topic. Individual terms or passages relate only to aspects of the larger whole.

Finally, let us note Nida's diagram of the three types of synonyms (from Silva; see fig. 3.5).

Antonyms belong to the semantic category of opposition. This is also quite common in biblical language and is similar to the Hebrew poetic pattern of antithetical parallelism. Scholars are quite divided on subcategories of opposition, but we might note three types (combining Lyons 1977:1:322ff.; Thiselton 1977:90-92; Silva 1983:129-32). The strongest type is the binary opposite, a black-and-white structure in which the assertion of the one entails the denial of the other. To be single is not to be married, to receive is not to give. Paul establishes such a contrast in Romans 11:6 and Ephesians 2:8-9, *tōchariti* ("by grace") . . . *ouk ex ergōn* ("not of works"). The hymn of 1 Peter 3:18 has a similar twofold contrast: *thanatōtheis men sarki* ("died in the flesh"), *zōopoiētheis de pneumati* ("made alive in the spirit"). Another example is the so-called dualism of the Gospel of John, seen in light-darkness, ascend-descend, above-below and so forth.

Figure 3.5. Nida's diagram of three types of synonyms



Less stark in its contrast is relative or gradable antonymy, a hierarchical opposition that compares but does not establish mutual exclusion. Such examples as tall-short, happy-sad, good-bad are comparative: George is taller/happier/better than John. Thiselton mentions Paul's use of spirit-flesh, which at times is a binary opposite (Rom 8:9, 12) and at other times is not. "On the one hand, whilst the Corinthian believers are in some sense men of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:6-16; 12-14) in another sense Paul refuses to accept their inference that therefore they are 'not fleshly' (3:1-4)" (1977:92).

A third opposition is converse. For instance, *buy* is the converse of *sell.* To say the one is to imply the other; if George buys from John, obviously John sells to George. German sometimes indicates this with the prefix *ver-*: "buy" is *kaufen;* "sell" is *verkaufen.* This can also be a matter of perspective; from one viewpoint you "go" to the house, from the other you "come" to the house.

The whole process of paradigmatic analysis is complex, and those who have the time to compile such statistics would do well to chart the results by means of what Nida (1974) and others call "componential analysis." The purpose is to compare synonyms and antonyms by a chart of what semanticists call the "components of meaning," the various categories that define the content of the terms. We used such a chart above to compare repentance, remorse and conversion (see fig. 3.4). Another frequently used example is found in figure 3.6.

The vertical columns relate to members of the semantic field, the horizontal categories are the components by which they are graded. However, this method has some basic problems (see Carson 1984:50-51; Silva 1983:134-35). Nida himself admits that the method is restricted primarily to referential or extralinguistic categories. This limits its use because it does not apply to structural meanings and demands an encyclopedic listing of categories. Further, it is open to subjective misuse, and indeed scholars using the method have come up with widely differing conclusions. In other words, it is not as "scientific" as it appears on paper, for it demands exhaustive coverage to be precise. Nevertheless, it is a helpful way to visualize the results of one's study and to use the tools with greater precision.

Figure 3.6. Chart of Components of Meaning.

	man	woman	boy	girl
human	+	+	+	+
adult	+	+	–	–
male	+	–	+	–

10. ***Ambiguity and double meaning.*** In studying both syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects of words (see pp. 103-5), it is important to note the many types of vagueness, at times intended and at other times seemingly accidental, probably due to the fact that we do not have enough data to

interpret the author's meaning. It is important to recognize this and not to read into the text greater precision than it has, a problem especially apt to occur in overexegeting synonymy or antonymy (overstating the similarities or differences). At all times the context must tell us the extent to which terms cohere or differ. "Context" is broader than the immediate context and refers also to the writer's emphases and style elsewhere. Earlier I alluded to the synonymous use of *agapan* and *philein* in John 21:15-17. What makes this interpretation conclusive is the congruence of the immediate context (the two words for "know," the two words for "tend" and "sheep" also used synonymously) and the wider context (John's tendency to use terms synonymously and the extensive number of times he does so with *agapan* and *philein* in his Gospel).

Ambiguity is the most difficult aspect of exegesis. Often the phenomenon occurs with *hapax legomena* or obscure, infrequent aspects of the semantic range. The interpreter is mystified because none of the usual meanings works or, even worse, more than one makes sense in the context. Ambiguity is the reason why many Old Testament scholars so frequently suggest emendations in the text, often without any textual evidence. On the surface the Masoretic Text does not make good sense in the context. In reality very few emendations are actually needed, and with new knowledge from the cognate languages the trend is away from such drastic and subjective measures. Nevertheless the problem of ambiguity is greater in the Old Testament.

The semanticist Martin Joos has formulated an important principle in such situations: when faced with a *hapax legomena* or problem of multiple meanings, "The best meaning is the least meaning. . . . He [the lexicographer] defines it in such fashion as to make it contribute least to the total message derivable from the passage where it is at home" (1972:257; in Silva 1983:153-54). While this is expressed negatively, it is meant positively: the meaning that is most likely is that one which causes the least change in the context. Silva applies this to the difficult use of *pascho* ("suffer") in Galatians 3:4, "Did you suffer so many things in vain?" (NASB). Everywhere else in the New Testament the verb has its normal meaning, but a variant use, attested infrequently elsewhere, is "experience"; thus the text would read "Did you experience so much [that is, blessings from the Spirit] in vain?" The context in many ways favors the latter, for persecution is never mentioned in the epistle; however, the vastly predominant New Testament usage favors the former. Using Joos's principle, Silva argues that "the neutral sense 'experience'

creates less disturbance in the passage than does ‘suffer’ because the former is more redundant—it is more supportive of, and more clearly supported by, the context” (p. 155). Clearly this principle is a valuable exegetical tool supportive of the structural approach already taken in this chapter.

A good example of deliberate ambiguity in Scripture is the oft-discussed phenomenon of “double meaning.” These expressions are notoriously difficult to interpret, for the contextual framework itself is often ambiguous. The famous word play on wind/spirit in Genesis 1:2 is a fairly simple example, but others are not so easy. The Gospel of John is justly famed for its widespread use of double meaning. Note for instance *anōthen gennēthēnai,* “born from above/again” in John 3:3, 7; *hydor zon,* “living/flowing water” in John 4:10-11; and *hypsotho,* “lifted up (to the cross/the Father)” in John 12:32. However, should we read double meaning into the interchange between Jesus and the disciples in John 1:38-39, specifically in *menō,* which occurs three times in these verses and may mean “live” on the physical plane but “remain” on the spiritual plane? The theological use of the term (which occurs forty times in the Gospel and twenty-seven times in the Johannine Epistles but only twelve times total in the Synoptics) in John, where it binds together Father-Son-believer in mutual cohabitation (cf. Jn 15:4-10), would favor the possibility, but the context itself gives no actual hint of such. However, John’s preference for dramatic development along salvific lines (cf. Jn 1:35-51 with Jn 3:1-15; 4:1-42; 9:1-34) may favor a soteriological double meaning. On the whole, it is a difficult decision, but I cautiously do find double meaning in John 1:38-39.

CONCLUSION: A METHODOLOGY FOR LEXICAL STUDY

At the outset allow me to provide a simple three-step process for word study. When you have chosen a term in a verse that needs semantic analysis (1) determine the semantic range (the possible meanings the word could have carried in the ancient world), then (2) allow the context to determine the meaning that best fits the other intended message of the whole. Finally, (3) if you wish to do a deeper study of the theology behind the word, do a semantic field search for related terms or phrases that carried that meaning and trace it through the book, author or testament. All the complexity simply enables the student to follow this simple process with precision and balance.

When scholars write about method, they too easily climb their ivory towers and speak only to each other. I don't wish to do this; therefore, at the outset I want to make it clear that the methodology will be developed on several levels. At the top level, of course, is the scholar who deals with the primary evidence, takes nothing for granted and works intensively, dealing with every occurrence of the term in order to derive its range of meaning and its particular meaning in the context. However, few readers of this book will be working on such a level, which would require as much as several weeks of steady research for key terms. Most of us will be working on a much lower level. The busy pastor cannot spend more than an hour on any individual word study, and for the most part will be forced to spend less time than that. The average layperson as well as the pastor or missionary will certainly depend on the secondary tools (commentaries, word-study books and the like) and will want to be aware of the ensuing methodology even though they will hardly ever pursue these various steps.

Nevertheless, the knowledge of a proper methodology is critical because the student of the Word will want to note whether or not the commentator has indeed done a proper word study or only a cursory background study before coming to any conclusions. It is crucial to understand at all levels of Bible study how to determine the semantic range of a word and to narrow that range down to the probable meaning of that particular term in an individual context. Therefore, those working with the secondary tools can note whether or not the commentator has done his homework; if not, they can use lexicons and other word-study

books to delineate the true meaning of the word in that context. Above all, the method that follows will provide a perspective for understanding how one determines word meaning in individual cases and therefore will be a valuable corrective to a misuse of words in sermons and Bible studies.

1. *Determine the key words in the context.* As we work at the structure of the passage (see chap. 1) we should note those terms that stand out in the context as demanding extra study. Naturally, it is not always simple to discover which words deserve extra work. Most of us would make those decisions on the basis of personal preference; Mortimer Adler and Charles van Doren state that "the most important words are those that give you trouble" (1972:102). To an extent this is true. We would wish to study more deeply those aspects that we ourselves do not quite perceive. However, in studying Scripture we certainly want to probe more deeply and choose the significant words in the passage. Fee gives us four valuable steps in isolating the key words (1983:84-85):

    - Note those terms in the context which are "theologically loaded." If you see terms that state basic New Testament truths (such as "grace," "Lord" or "salvation"), these terms will certainly deserve extra study. It is quite common to read too much meaning into them in individual contexts on the basis of their use elsewhere. Therefore, it is particularly important to locate precisely the way they are used in the individual context.
    - Note those terms that are crucial to the meaning of the passage but may be ambiguous in their context. Fee notes the use of "virgins" in 1 Corinthians 7:25-38 and of "vessel" in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 as examples. Many more could be mentioned. When a term is critical to the meaning of a passage but is unclear, the passage will hinge on your interpretation. Therefore, that particular term will become an important clue to the meaning of the whole, and must be studied more deeply.
    - Those words that are repeated in a context or become themes within the paragraph must be investigated. A good example would be the use of "rejoice" in Philippians 1:18. In the first half of the verse Paul uses "because of this I rejoice" to conclude the paragraph. The last portion of the verse, "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice," begins the new paragraph of verses 19-26. Paul's emphasis on rejoicing in the midst of the two trials in the

succeeding paragraphs makes it worthy of special attention. Another example where “joy” becomes the key theme for the context is James 1:2-4. In both cases the concept of joy demands extra study.

- We must look for those terms that may be more critical to the context than might seem to be at first glance. Naturally, this can be done only after more detailed research. However, we must always be aware that our research will uncover other terms that will be far more worthy of research than we had at first suspected. Fee notes the use of *ataktos* in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, which might mean “lazy” in a passive sense or “disorderly” in an active sense. Also in this category are words used in a semitechnical sense but not appearing to be so at first. For instance, at first glance one might pass across *faith* in Ephesians 4:13 when reading “unity in the faith.” However, *faith* is probably used in a semitechnical sense for the Christian faith and is critical for understanding the whole statement. During detailed exegesis these types of things will need to be uncovered and probed.

2. *Study carefully the context in which the word occurs.* It is very important to keep the context firmly in mind at every stage because the time-consuming process of gathering the semantic range causes one to become so immersed in the word itself that illegitimate totality transfer becomes quite easy. It is difficult to spend a great amount of time gathering material and then use it only briefly in the context. In order to control this tendency, context must at all times be uppermost in the process of data gathering. Note how the word fits into the total statement of the passage and try to elucidate the influence of the surrounding terms on it.
3. *Determine the semantic range of the term.* As I have already argued, this means the synchronic more than the diachronic dimension of meaning. That is, the student will want to investigate how the word was used at the time of writing rather than how the word had developed in earlier times. This does not mean that etymology has no value, for if the context indicates, one might discover that a past meaning was consciously in the mind of the author at the time of writing. This occurs especially with an allusion to an Old Testament passage or when the word is “transparent” and still carries its past meaning. Therefore, etymology has limited value but on occasion can add a great deal to the context. As we gather the various uses of the word we will want to collate and organize the

meanings into related sets, always keeping in mind the various contexts in which the word was used. This is important because we will want to select that meaning that is used in a context similar to the passage we are studying. We must try to be as complete as possible in gathering the semantic range because even an obsolete or rare meaning of a term is a possibility for the use of that term in the biblical context. It is also critical to remember that the use of the term in the New Testament is as important as its use in parallel literature. Many New Testament words had a semitechnical force that derived its meaning from the life of the early church as much as from Hellenistic usage. In those cases we must at all times be aware of the Christian meaning inherent in terms like *love* or *faith.*

4. *Note whether the word is used primarily in terms of sense or reference.* This combines the previous categories of context and semantic range. Silva makes this the first step, stating that a semitechnical or referential term is not susceptible to structural analysis but rather needs a conceptual approach similar to that of *TDNT* (1983:176). While this is true, few words in the New Testament are used so technically that the semantic range becomes an invalid tool. I believe that a conceptual approach must still consider the semantic range and that the latter is essential to word meaning in terms of both sense and reference. Therefore, this will determine *how* one uses the semantic range rather than whether or not one utilizes it.
5. *If the term is referential, study it conceptually.* This will involve the further collection of synonyms and antonyms in order to derive the theological deep structure underneath the use of the particular term. Of course, we must avoid reading more into the term than the context will allow, but this is controlled by the previous decision as to the extent to which the word is used referentially in the context. The theological background behind the word becomes an important factor in determining the overall message of the passage, and a referential term is elevated automatically to a position of extreme importance in the context. Therefore, we must be extremely careful in determining exactly the extent to which the technical or theological sense is being stressed. The methodology of biblical theology will be paramount in this approach (see chap. 13) and will guide the student in his or her study. Above all, we must consider the theology of the individual book and then of the writer before broadening it to the New Testament as a whole. Here we must recognize the danger of misusing parallels (see pp. 91-92), for scholars

frequently read more into the passage than is warranted.

6. *If the word is used in terms of sense, study it structurally in its environment.* We will utilize the paradigmatic dimension here differently than we would for a referential term. In this case we will want to study synonyms and antonyms in order to determine the exact parameters for the use of the term that the author actually chose. Again, we must proceed with extreme caution, for similarity and opposition to related terms can be subjectively misused to read more into the passage than the context will allow. Therefore, the syntagmatic or contextual investigation will at all times have priority over the paradigmatic.
7. *Rework the semantic range in terms of the writer's proclivity and immediate context.* On the basis of related context choose that aspect from the semantic range which most closely parallels the use of the term in the passage you are studying. Note the connotative aspect, whether the term is used in terms of object, event, abstract meaning or relationship. This will help you to see dynamically exactly how the term relates to its context and will enable you to choose more precisely the set of meanings from the semantic range that most closely parallels its use in the passage. Above all, as Mickelsen cautions, be aware at all times of the tendency on the part of both you and your listeners or readers to read modern meanings into ancient meanings (1963:128-29). It is the author's intended meaning that is paramount at this stage. We cannot transform the context crossculturally until we have determined first of all its meaning in its original context. This becomes the basis for the dynamic transference of that meaning into our modern context. Good expository preaching will always blend what it meant with what it means and will seek to unite the hearer with the message of God in the text.

4

Syntax

The semantic range of the term *syntax* has both a narrow and a broad connotation. In its narrow sense it refers to the relationship between the words of a sentence and is virtually equivalent to grammar. Some grammars (such as Williams) include *syntax* in their title. In its broad sense syntax refers to all the interrelationships within the sentence as a means of determining the meaning of the unit as a whole. In this broader sense, syntax includes compositional patterns, grammar and semantics, and so forms a valid conclusion to the previous three chapters.

I am using syntax in this broader sense and therefore want to describe in this chapter how these three aspects of exegesis (structure, grammar, lexical study) can be used together rather than separately. Rhetorical patterns deal with the relationship between sentence units and so provide the foundation for syntactical study. Grammar is concerned with the relationship between individual terms and phrases and therefore provides the second stage of syntactical analysis. Semantics investigates the semotactic relationships between the meanings of the terms in the larger surface structure and thus provides the final building block of syntactical analysis. A common thread in all of these aspects of exegesis has been structure. In the study of compositional techniques I noted the fact that they form a pattern that weaves together the larger whole of the paragraph. Individual grammatical decisions likewise are based on the structural development of the whole statement. Finally, we took a structural approach to semantics, noting that words have meaning only as part of the larger context.[1]

Therefore, syntax is structural at the core. None of the elements of the surface structure dare become an end in itself. We are not looking primarily for chiasm or climax. We are not searching only for subjective genitives or circumstantial participles. We do not wish to center on word studies of individual terms as if the meaning of the whole paragraph could be narrowed down to a particular key term. Rather we want to elucidate the thought development and meaning of the whole statement. In communication none of us ever isolates words or particular statements as the meaning of the whole. We seldom dwell on one portion of a sentence or paragraph and neglect the rest. Rather we intend for meaning to be

communicated primarily by the entire utterance taken as a whole.

Recent investigation into communication theory has dealt with the problem of information interference, those aspects of communication that conceal rather than aid the transference of meaning. Ambiguous or unknown terms, grammatical errors or hidden agendas within the communication process often restrict rather than aid meaning. This is why human beings so very often fail to communicate with one another. They define terms differently, unintentionally (or intentionally) mislead or simply speak from a perspective completely different from that of the hearer or reader. The task of exegesis is to uncover such communication lapses in a text and to try to recover the original intended meaning of the author. Syntax puts together the various aspects of the hermeneutical task and enables us to search deeply into the biblical text in an effort to recover the God-given message.

BIBLICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Many have attempted to apply transformational techniques to biblical study (see “Excursus on Transformational Grammar” on pp. 140-44). The structuralists go to extremes when they virtually replace the surface structure (the text) with the deep structure (ideas underlying the text). Gerhardt Güttgemanns has developed “generative poetics,” which uses “poetics” in its broadest sense to consider a text both as a historical production of meaning and in terms of contemporary interpretation (1976:1-21). However, he defines *history* not in its normal sense but rather by means of transformational rules; for Güttgemanns the meaning of a historical statement is found not in its sociocultural background but in the deep structure underlying the surface statement. Perhaps the most helpful aspect of his theory is his restructuring of transformational rules along the lines of Wittgenstein’s game theory. Güttgemanns visualizes the deep structure as a “game tree,” a range of functional alternatives for the grammatical basis of the surface text. When one recognizes these possible choices, it becomes much easier to allow the structural context to determine the best choice (pp. 8-11). For instance, when we see the phrase “the faith of Christ,” we must posit several possible transformations, such as “faith in Christ,” “the faith which Christ gives” and “the faithfulness of Christ.” Individual context then decides which is the best alternative. Güttgemann’s application of his method to specific texts is closer to structuralist exegesis than I would like, but it is a healthy step in the right direction (pp. 127-74).

Much better for our definition of *syntax* is the work of Eugene Nida and Charles Taber (1969), who develop a three-stage system of translation from the original language (OL: Hebrew or Greek) to the receptor language (RL: twenty-first century American or British English, for example). The first step is analysis, in which the surface structure is studied in terms of its grammatical relationships and word meaning. This would conform to our use of syntax or exegetical methodology. The second step, transfer, mediates from the original to the receptor language. That is, the results of the analysis are transferred to the receptor language. Finally, the material is restructured to be completely understandable to the new language. In other words, we seek to rephrase the

idioms and surface grammar of the biblical text so that the resultant meaning will be understandable in the modern context. These latter two steps primarily refer to the process of contextualization and therefore will be covered in later chapters.

More important, Nida and Taber integrate grammatical and semantic components in the larger syntactical task. I have already noted in chapter three the importance of the context in determining which of the possible meanings from the semantic range is intended in a particular statement. Indeed, grammar and semantics are completely interdependent, for meaning depends on the play between these two aspects. This is where Nida and Taber find the true value of transformational rules. As figure 4.1 indicates, the more complex surface structure is broken down into "kernel sentences" by means of "back transformation." Nida and Taber theorize that all language is made up of six to twelve basic structures that are "transformed" into more complex "surface structures." All languages are similar at the "kernel level," where the transference of meaning can occur. This is an overstatement of the reality, however, for it is debatable whether such universal meanings can indeed be transferred automatically from language to language. Nevertheless, the concept of "kernel sentences" is immensely helpful in enabling the interpreter to break down the statements of a text into explicit and implicit propositions. I prefer not to think of "kernel sentences" as universal meanings but as basic decisions as to the meaning of each component of the sentence. Each decision (e.g., "God loves him" or "he loves God") is made a kernel sentence.

The kernel sentence denotes the basic individual affirmations of the sentence. Sentences can be broken up into simple and complex types; the simple sentence contains only one basic affirmation (such as "the ball is hit") while a complex sentence contains more than one affirmation ("the ball belonging to the boy is hit"). The latter sentence has two kernels, "the ball belongs to the boy" and "the ball is hit." The back transformation of a complex sentence involves the determination of each individual affirmation within the larger surface structure. Nida and Taber illustrate this (1969:53-54) by alluding to Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." They reduce this surface statement to seven kernel sentences: (1) God showed you grace. (2) God saved you. (3) You believed. (4) You did not save yourselves. (5) God gave salvation. (6) You did not work for it. (7) This is done so that no man may boast. This differs from Chomsky's deep grammar in its combination of grammar and lexical meaning, yet makes it all the more relevant for our purposes.

Indeed back transformation involves the deepest level of semantic

investigation. Louw provides a transformational translation of Ephesians 1:5-7:

> Because God had already decided to make us his children through Jesus Christ. He did this because He wanted to and it gave him pleasure to do so. Let us praise the wonderful favor He gave us. This favor was that He gave us His son, whom He loved. Yes, it is because Jesus died for us that God set us free. With this I mean that God forgives our sins. How abundant is the favor He showed us. (1982:87-88)

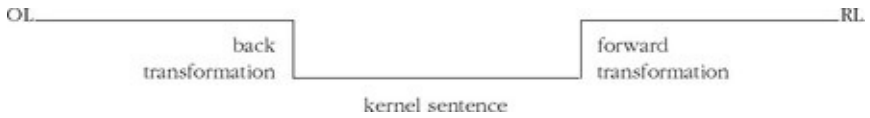
Louw notes eight transformations in the passage: (1) “adoption” (E) = “God makes us His children”; (2) “good pleasure” (E) = “God is glad about it”; (3) “good pleasure of His will” (E + E) = “God wants to do it and therefore is glad about it”; (4) “to the praise” (R + E) = “It serves as praise”; (5) “glory of His grace” (A + E) = “The favor He gives is wonderful”; (6) “redemption” (E) = “God redeems us”; (7) “through His blood” (R + E) = “Because Christ died for us”; (8) “forgiveness of sins” (E + E) = “God forgives us our sins/sins we commit”; (9) “riches of His grace” (A + E) = “He gives an abundant favor.” This excellent example of connotative meaning (see p. 84) demonstrates the definite value of detailed word study for syntactical exegesis.

John Sawyer provides a different example, this time of paradigmatic (semantic field, see pp. 84-87) research in syntactical study (1972:62-63). He studied related transformations dealing with Old Testament language for salvation and notes four sentences that proceed from the same basic kernel: “The LORD saves his anointed” (Ps 20:6); “save me” (Jer 17:14); “I shall be saved” (2 Sam 22:4 KJV); “You have given your servant this great victory” (Judg 15:18b). The first three are similar since they deal basically with the idea of Yahweh saving. The fourth example contains a “nominalization.” This occurs when the verbal element (“save”) is replaced by a noun phrase (“great victory”). Sawyer notes that such a transformation usually involves the deletion of the subject (Yahweh) or object (Israel) as well as the absence of the tense marker (cf. “the chastisement of our peace” (KJV) in Is 53:5, which could be past, present or future). Often more than one kernel lies under the surface, for instance, “You have helped your servant win,” “your servant has won,” and “the victory is great” in Judges 15:18b. When comparing the verbs for “salvation” that describe the underlying kernel, we find nuances of meaning that occur in differing contexts and can thereby determine with greater precision and depth both individual meanings and the broader theological overtones.

The second stage of syntactical investigation is forward transformation (see fig. 4.1), as the individual kernels are collated in order to determine the inner

connections between the statements. Of course, here we utilize the same rhetorical techniques discussed in chapter three, but now the decisions are finalized. In inductive study a preliminary chart is developed and functions as a control and guide for the detailed exegesis, where the parts are intensely studied grammatically and semantically. This results in kernel sentences, that are now recombined on the basis of compositional patterns into a final delineation of the thought development of the whole passage or paragraph.[2] In other words, we reconstruct the message of the passage thought for thought and ask the question, If Isaiah/John were saying this very point in the language and idioms of our day, how would he say that? Each kernel sentence forms part of the translated sentence to express in the receptor language the exact message the biblical author is delivering. John Beekman and John Callow provide an excellent display of the propositions in Philemon 4-7.

Figure 4.1. Surface structures and kernel sentences



PROPOSITIONAL DISPLAY OF PHILEMON 4-7

Philemon 4-7: "I was moved because you love all the saints."

4a	I always thank God	
b	whom I (worship)	COMMENT about God in 4a
c	when I pray for you	TIME of 4a
5a	because I hear	5a-c give the REASON (objective) for 4a
b	that you love all the saints	CONTENT of *hear* in 5a
c	and that you believe/trust the Lord Jesus	CONTENT of *hear* in 5a
6a	(I pray)	implied from 4c
b	that (you may) fellowship more and more fully (with those)	6b-f give the CONTENT of *pray* in 6a
c	who also believe/trust (the Lord Jesus) with you	IDENTIFICATION of those in 6b
d	by means of (your) coming to know all the good (things)	MEANS of 6b
e	which we (incl.) (can do)	COMMENT about things in 6d
f	in order that Christ may be honored by us (incl.).	PURPOSE of 6e
7a	Moreover, I rejoiced greatly	
b	and I was greatly encouraged/ comforted	
c	because you love (the saints)	REASON (objective) for 7a-b
d	specifically, because you are the one who refreshed the saints in spirit, brother.	SPECIFIC restatement of 7c

Of course, when one has isolated the kernels, the display becomes even more exact. For instance, let us note Philippians 2:6.

(Though) He partook of the divine essence	concession
He was equal with God	comparison
He did not demand equality	concession-contraexpectation
He did not have to seize equality	clarification

Beekman and Callow then summarize the relations between propositions that can supplement the discussion of compositional techniques in chapter three above (1974:287-312):

Additional Relations (those which develop the idea)

1. Chronological sequence (such as Mk 4:28: “first the stock, then the head, then the full kernel”)
2. Simultaneity (such as Mt 24:29: “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall”)
3. Alternation (such as Mt 6:31: “ ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”)
4. Conversational exchanges or dialogue (such as Jn 3)
5. Matched support (such as Gal 3:29: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”)

Associative Relations (those which support or clarify the idea)

1. Support by distinct clarification

    a. Manner (how the event occurs, such as Phil 2:8: “found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself ”)
    b. Comparison (such as Jas 1:6: “he who doubts is like a wave of the sea”)
    c. Contrast (such as Mt 10:28: “Do not be afraid of those. . . . Rather be afraid of the One . . .”)

2. Support by similar clarification (overlapping content)

    a. Equivalence (such as Rom 12:19: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” [NASB])
    b. Generic-specific (from the class to a particular instance, such as Mk 6:48: “he came . . . walking on the sea” [NASB])
    c. Amplification-contraction (summary or rhetorical question, such as the summaries in Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; Rom 6:12: “should we continue to sin? God forbid . . .”)

3. Support by argument (cause-effect propositions)

    a. Reason-result (such as Jas 4:2: “You do not have because you do not ask”)

b. Means-result (such as Phil 2:7: “he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant”)
c. Means-purpose (the desired result might not take place, such as Mk 14:38: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation”)
d. Condition-consequence (such as Jn 3:3: “Unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God” [NASB])
e. Concession-contraexpectation (a reversal of expectancy, such as Phil 2:6)
f. Grounds-conclusion (either in argument form, such as Rom 5:9: “being justified . . . we shall be saved” [NASB] or imperative, such as Mt 9:37-38: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, . . .”)

4. Support by orientation (background or setting)

a. Time (such as Mk 1:32: “after sunset the people brought . . .”)
b. Location (such as Mk 1:39: “He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching . . .”)
c. Circumstance (attendant action [such as Jn 19:5, “Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns”])

PERFORMATIVE AND EMOTIVE LANGUAGE

The discussion thus far has primarily centered on descriptive or cognitive propositions, statements whose purpose is to argue or to provide information. However, this by no means exhausts the type of utterances found in speech acts. Frequently in Scripture the language does not merely convey observations or increase knowledge but also performs an act. J. L. Austin labels this "performative language" because it describes what actually happens rather than what should or should not be the case (1962). When Paul says "I am sending [Tychicus] to you" (Col 4:8), he is telling the Colossians what he is actually in process of doing. When Pharaoh gave Joseph control over Egypt (Gen 41:41), that authority descended on Joseph. As Caird observes, "Performatives commit the speaker to stand by his words" (1980:21). When Jephthah vowed to sacrifice whatever came out of his house as a burned offering to Yahweh on behalf of his victory over the Ammonites (Judg 11:30-31), he had to do so even though that sacrifice turned out to be his only child (Judg 11:34-39). When Ananias and Sapphira tried to renege on a vow to God, Peter became Yahweh's avenging angel in striking them down (Acts 5:1-11). John differs from Paul in making such terms as *believe* or *love* performatives by using only the verb (Paul prefers the noun). Indeed, words throughout Scripture are viewed as living organisms that bind the speaker to act on them. This is why there are constant admonitions against careless language (such as Eph 5:4).

Two other aspects of performative language must be understood. Austin argues strongly that any performative utterance depends on the presence of a commonly accepted or true environment (1962:45). Today one could not state, "I will sacrifice two turtle doves in the temple," because such is no longer possible. In the same way, the test of a prophet is simple: if the prophecy comes to pass it is of the Lord (Deut 18:21-22). Thiselton uses this to accuse the New Hermeneutic of what is near to "word magic," since its adherents make biblical language a word event in itself when in actuality Scripture's effectiveness depends on the reader's acceptance of a wide range of dogmatic assertions (1980:337, 354-55). This has critical repercussions for hermeneutics in general, for behind many performative statements in Scripture lies a deep structure of

theological affirmations that must be understood before the surface contents can be properly exegeted. In other words, part of the exegetical task is to recover the biblical theology (what I call the "deep structure"; see chap. 15) behind biblical statements. For instance, when Mark begins his Gospel with a combined citation from Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3 (Mk 1:2-3), several concepts form major themes in his Gospel—the messenger/herald, the way, the Lord, the wilderness. Each must be seen in light of his entire work in order for his purpose and message to be understood in its fullness.

Austin also differentiates between illocutionary and perlocutionary force (1962:99-131). Illocutionary language performs an action, but perlocutionary speech actually causes the effect it seeks to produce. There is no guaranteed result with the former. For instance, the Hebrew imperative is illocutionary, asking for action, but the prophetic future (imperfect) is perlocutionary, since the "Thou shalt" is accompanied by blessings (if it is kept) or cursings (if it is not). G. B. Caird provides an interesting addendum when he connects the latter with the biblical doctrine of predestination but notes that this never descends to determinism because response is always essential to the divine call (1980:23-24). For instance, while Paul alludes to Jeremiah's call when he describes himself as "set apart from birth" (Gal 1:15-16; cf. Jer 1:5), it is clear that the commission was not actualized until he later decided to accept that call.

In addition to performative language we must also recognize the important place of emotive or expressive speech in the Bible. Certainly the emotional feeling within an epistle is an important aspect of its total meaning. In fact, it could be argued that the true meaning is lost without the portrayal of the emotions to guide the interpreter. There is no depth without the personal element, no grasp or feel for a passage without the underlying tone. This is especially essential for the preacher, who wants to lead first himself and then the congregation into the intensity of the text, to awaken those slumbering passions for God and his will that were so essential to early Christian experience but often have been set aside by the pressures of modern life.

The determination of emotional patterns is easy when the author uses highly emotive language, as Paul does when he argues that the Corinthian women's refusal to have their heads covered was "dishonor" (1 Cor 11:5), "a disgrace" (11:6), improper (11:13), and unnatural (11:14-15), and concludes that no church anywhere follows such a practice (11:16). Paul's deep-felt emotions rise to the surface in such a passage. In many others, however, it is not so easy to detect. Nida speaks technically: "Emotive meanings consist of polar contrasts separated by a graded series with a high percentage of usages for most words clustering around the neutral position" (1964:113). He means that most words are part of a

larger matrix between poles like good-bad, beautiful-ugly, love-hate, rejoicing-miserable or desired-rejected. Most of us choose terms in the middle, and it is helpful to note where on the line between those poles an author's choice of language falls. The closer to the poles a writer comes, the more emotion-laden his message is.

The interpreter must perform a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic study of emotional coloring. Paradigmatically, he must investigate where the word fits in such a graded scale. For instance, *happy* is less than *overjoyed* but clearly more than *calm*, which itself is above *sad* and *miserable.* Of course, there is no automatic scale and writers do not always use such language with precision. One writer may use *happy* in a very positive sense while for another it could have an almost neutral tone. Therefore we must always see how a writer tends to use language. Jeremiah and Paul, for instance, are very emotional writers and wear their feelings on the surface. One can expect highly charged terms from them. They tend to choose words at the top and bottom ends of the scale.

The final arbiter is always the total context of the passage. For instance, while *makarios* in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-13) can be translated "happy," the eschatological tone of the context makes it unlikely that this is the actual meaning. More likely, it refers to the outpouring of divine "blessing" on those who sacrifice for the kingdom. The delineation of those very blessings in each beatitude makes this the likely meaning. Nevertheless, an emotional tone exists under the surface, for those who experience such blessings will indeed know joy. In many contexts the presence of emotionally charged language colors the whole. This is especially true in the prophetic works. One cannot read very far in Amos before encountering "The LORD roars from Zion / and thunders from Jerusalem. . . . / I will not turn back my wrath" (Amos 1:2-3). Every paragraph is filled with such language, and it is impossible not to feel the terrible anger of Yahweh against social injustice. The formula of judgment ("for three sins . . . even for four, I will not turn back my wrath" [Amos 1:3, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4]) is first addressed to the surrounding nations, and Israel may well have felt secure, even smug, at God's wrath kindled against her traditional enemies. How much more devastating then when in Amos 2:6 the awesome eyes of Yahweh blaze against Israel herself. The emotional language at that time becomes all the more powerful.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

Figurative expressions traditionally have been discussed in a topical section labeled “special hermeneutics,” which included such diverse topics as language (metaphor, simile), genre (prophecy, parable) and theology. I believe, however, that this is artificial and prefer to deal with these linguistic elements logically in accordance with the developing structure of hermeneutical criteria. Figures of speech contain both grammatical and semantic aspects and so are properly discussed as a specific section of syntactical analysis. The topic, in fact, is so important that an entire dictionary is devoted to “biblical imagery” and figures of speech (see *DBI*). The dictionary begins by explaining how the Bible presents truth via dynamic figurative language, that is, by “imaging truth.” The task is to both picture the literal image and to ask what the picture evokes (*DBI*, xiii-xiv).

Figures of speech form the third level of the “multiple senses” of meaning, following the primary or most common meaning and the secondary or less common uses of the semantic range. Figurative expressions associate a concept with a pictorial or analogous representation of its meaning in order to add richness to the statement. Literal meaning comprises the first two levels and identifies the basic thrust of a term. A roof, for instance, is the cover over a house or other structure. A figure of speech concerns an associative relation between senses, such as the “roof” of one’s mouth.

The Bible constantly employs colorful imagery drawn from a multitude of experiences. Business terminology is used to depict discipleship (steward, servant, husbandman), and domestic affairs describe the relationship between God and his people (groom-bride, father-child).[3] In fact, a knowledge of customs and culture (see chap. 5) is necessary in order to understand many of the images adduced. For instance, the “scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals” (Rev 5:1) is built on either the Roman last will and testament (which was sealed with seven seals) containing the inheritance of the saints or the Roman doubly inscribed contract deed containing blessings and curses (my preference). Either will fit the word picture, but the modern reader could not possibly know the options without a knowledge of ancient customs. Yet the symbolism behind Revelation 5—6 is greatly enhanced by uncovering such

background information.

Beekman and Callow describe two major groups of figurative or associative senses (1974:97-101). Contiguous relationships between words are built on proximity or nearness of meaning. This group has three types: (1) In temporal associations, a time note replaces an event, as in the technical "day of the Lord," which refers not just to the parousia itself but to all the events of the "last days." In another sense Jesus said "Abraham rejoiced to see My day" (Jn 8:56 [NASB]), referring to the incarnation. (2) Spatial relations utilize local ideas, as when "heaven" is used for God (Mt 21:25: "Was [the baptism of John] from heaven or men?"). In Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) "the heavenly realms" speaks of the spiritual realm where the cosmic conflict is fought.[4] (3) Logical or cause-effect relations substitute the cause for the effect or vice versa. For instance, the "hand of the Lord" (cause) refers to judgment and the "sword" to persecution and division (Mt 10:34), to discipline (Rom 13:4) or to conviction (Heb 4:12).

There are also three types of part-whole associations: (1) In member-class relations, a specific member stands for the generic whole. One of the best-known examples is "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt 6:11), where the "bread" refers to all the believer's needs, physical and spiritual. The beatitude on those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Mt 5:6) represents the class of intense desires by the single metaphor of hunger-thirst. (2) In constituent-whole relations, a single part of a larger structure stands for the whole, such as "roof" for house (Mt 8:8) or "three thousand souls" (NASB) for people converted to Christianity (Acts 2:41). (3) Attribute-whole relations occur when the traits or purposes of a thing are used for the thing itself. An interesting example is "serpent," which is used negatively in "You serpents, you brood of vipers" (Mt 23:33) but positively in "shrewd as serpents" (Mt 10:16 NASB). Two different traits associated with snakes are obviously intended in the disparate passages.

The major difficulty in interpreting figures of speech is that languages develop their associative relations independently; therefore, metaphorical language in Hebrew or Greek often does not correspond at all to English expressions. Of course this is similar to differences between modern languages (see Beekman and Callow 1974:104-7). It is a problem in semantics and must be investigated at that level (see chap. 3). When the original language employs an idiom or figurative expression, it can be translated in three possible ways: (1) If the figure of speech is paralleled in the receptor language, we can translate directly. This situation occurs more frequently in Western languages due to the impact of Christianity on our culture and thus on the development of our languages (e.g., the influence of Luther's translation of the Bible on modern German).

Expressions like “the LORD saves his anointed” (Ps 20:6) or “they . . . began to speak in other tongues” (Acts 2:4) are easily understood (though in many other languages this may not be true). (2) If the transfer of meaning is not automatic, but there is still a slight correspondence, the term itself may be retained but a clarification added to clear up any ambiguity. At times Scripture itself does this, such as “dead in your transgressions and sins” (Eph 2:1; cf. Rom 6:11: “dead to sin”). However, we will often have to add the clarification ourselves, such as “the hour is at hand” (Mt 26:45 NASB) = “the time when I must die is near.” (3) If there is no correspondence at all between the original and the receptor language, the figure of speech will be replaced by a corresponding idiom. Beekman and Callow specifically mention euphemistic expressions for death, sex, God and the Gentiles here. An obvious example would be the frequent use of “he knew his wife,” which must be translated “he had sexual relations with his wife.” This idiom in Matthew 1:25 is translated “did not know her” in the New King James Version and “he had no union with her” in the New International Version.

The solution is to back transform the biblical figure of speech into the appropriate “kernel” and then to forward transform it into the proper equivalent in the receptor language, allowing the needs of the audience to decide which of the three is best in a given situation. Indeed, this is why there cannot be any final or universal translation of the Scriptures into English or any other language. Not only does the language change from year to year; it differs radically from locality to locality. In England or Germany a person’s home can be pinpointed to the very village or town by the dialect spoken. Every hamlet favors its own set of idiomatic expressions. The preacher must be sensitive to translate the Word afresh for each audience.

There is enormous tensive power in figurative language to evoke fresh images in the mind of the learner. Ricoeur’s discussion of metaphor (which includes all figures of speech) is helpful here.[5] He argues that figurative expressions operate not so much at the level of semantics but in the broader sphere of discourse or communication. A metaphor sets up a state of tension between the literal and figurative meanings of the word, which causes the former to “self-destruct” “in a significant contradiction” (1976:50). Ricoeur means that a figurative expression is a deliberate choice on the part of an author who uses it to force the readers into a new awareness of the message. At first, the readers are jarred by the incongruity of the thought, for normal literal meanings do not fit. They are led to a new word picture of reality and forced to rethink the categories of the proposition stated (1975a:83-84). A new world of discourse is fashioned, and the reader is drawn into it.

Of course, the value of this new vision of reality depends entirely on a correspondence between the author's and the reader's worlds of experience. This could not be assumed even in biblical times. Paul was frequently misunderstood and he made cultural gaffes (the Lycaonians in Acts 14:8-18). The problem becomes even greater with the passing of the centuries; if metaphors are as central to the process of speech communication as Ricoeur argues, the necessity of translating them properly for our audiences becomes even greater. This sense of the importance of our topic will guide our discussion in the ensuing pages.

While some have attempted a new linguistic organization of the various figures of speech (see Nida et al. 1983:172-87), I feel that the traditional pattern (Bullinger, Mickelsen, Kaiser and others) still makes the best sense. There are six basic types—comparison, addition, incompleteness, contrast, personal figures, and association or relation. It is helpful to note the specific type of figurative expression used in a context because that will provide important hermeneutical data for interpreting the statement more precisely. Many passages remain obscure until the figurative language is isolated and understood.

1. ***Figures of comparison.*** Two figures, metaphor and simile, deal with direct comparisons between items. A simile establishes a formal comparison employing connective terms such as *like* or *as.* Similes are used often in Proverbs; for instance, "When your calamity overtakes you like a storm, / when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind" (Prov 1:27), or "Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of a hunter, / like a bird from the snares of the fowler" (Prov 6:5). Jesus also used similes constantly, and they function in much the same way as his parables, which have rightfully been called extended similes ("the kingdom of God is like . . .") or metaphors. They add poignant meaning to his statements, as in "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Mt 23:37). The interpreter should not hurry past such vivid images, for they are built on the very patterns of life experienced in ancient times and had great power in their original settings. Jesus could hardly have conveyed better the contrast between his living concern and Jewish obduracy than in the Matthew 23:37 simile.

   A metaphor is an implied, but in many ways even more direct, comparison because the reader is expected to identify the comparison without the "like" or "as"; for instance, "You are a shield around me, O LORD" (Ps 3:3). There are two types of comparison (see Beekman and Callow 1974:124-26). A full or complete comparison states both items

and the similarity between them. The two may be contrasted directly ("I am weak but he is strong") or by degree ("he is stronger than I"). The resemblance may be relative ("I am strong and so is he") or absolute ("I am as strong as he"). An abbreviated comparison leaves the similarity implicit and the reader has to supply it, as in "You are the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13, metaphor) or "His eyes were like blazing fire" (Rev 1:14, simile). At other times the object of the image is unstated, as in "the sheep will be scattered" (Mk 14:27).

A metaphor or simile has three parts: the topic or item illustrated by the image, the image itself and the point of similarity or comparison (the actual meaning of the metaphor or simile in the passage). Often all three are present in a comparison; for example, "The heavens [topic] shall vanish [point of comparison] like smoke [image]" (Is 51:6) or "Go rather to the lost (point of comparison) sheep (image) of Israel (topic)" (Mt 10:6). As Beekman and Callow point out, one or more of these can be missing and therefore must be supplied by the interpreter (1974:128-31). The topic may be implied, as in "sheep among wolves" (Lk 10:3), where the "wolves" are the persecutors of the disciples. The point of similarity may be unstated, such as "and he is the head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18), where the ruling function of Christ (the head) and the directed function of the church (the body) are assumed. Further, both topic and point of similarity may be omitted; for instance, in "beware the leaven of the Pharisees," which implies both the topic (their teachings) and the point of similarity (their permeating effect). Finally, the image and point of similarity can be missing, as in "it is hard for you to struggle against the goads," which assumes the ox and the point of similarity, namely, the struggle against guidance and control. The reader must be alert enough in such instances to supply the missing information; this demands a knowledge of the cultural background.

Above all, we must be careful not to overexegete figures of speech. Unlike modern metaphors, ancient figures of speech were inexact. They overlapped only at one point, and the modern reader often has trouble understanding that point. Caird provides an informative example:

> When the psalmist tells us that a united family is like oil dripping down Aaron's beard on to the skirts of his robe, he is not trying to persuade us that family unity is messy, greasy or volatile; he is thinking of the all-pervasive fragrance which has so deeply impressed itself on his memory at the anointing of the high priest

(Ps. 133:2). (1980:145)

We need help in unlocking such language, and for this the nonspecialist must turn to the better commentaries and background books. This is especially true when the biblical writers pile image on image, as in Psalm 92:10 (combining the "glory" of the strength of the ox with that of anointing the head) or Ephesians 4:14 (from infants to a helpless boat to a helpless bird to cheating at dice). Mixed metaphors were highly prized in ancient literature; rather than stress the ambiguity of the resultant statement (as we do today), classical writers emphasized the richness of the literary expression. We today must work behind the imagery to uncover the exact point accented in the compilation of metaphors. Often the image behind a metaphor is unknown. Numerous articles have been written on the "whitewashed tombs" of Matthew 23:27 or the "restrainer" of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7. The actual thrust may never be known for certain before we get to heaven itself. The image also can be ambiguous, as in the many possible meanings of the "water" metaphor in John 3:5.

Finally, we should note the presence of live and dead metaphors in the biblical text. In a dead metaphor the image has become an idiom, understood directly by the hearer without producing a word picture in the mind. A live metaphor is constructed on the occasion to teach a fresh point and force the hearer to recall both primary and associative meanings in order to understand the image. This distinction is critical because the interpreter can read too much into a dead metaphor by erroneously stressing its picture value.

The difficulty is that we have not grown up in the ancient culture and cannot easily identify such differences. Two criteria will help us understand the distinction. Etymologically, if the figurative thrust has been in existence for some time, it could well be a dead metaphor. According to BAGD, *sarx* ("flesh") was already used figuratively in the time of Epicurus, three centuries before Christ. When Paul contrasts "flesh" and "spirit," he is not trying to build a picture as an illustration of a truth but to use a semitechnical concept for the natural person. The same is true of *karpos* ("fruit"), also present in the time of Epicurus (BAGD). In passages on the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23) or "the fruit of lips which confess his name" (Heb 13:15), the term has become an idiom and should simply be interpreted as "result." However, if the metaphor is elaborated in a series of pictures or its fresh image stressed

in the context, it is more likely a live metaphor. This is true of *karpos* in several passages: Matthew 7:16-20, where "by their fruit you will recognize them" is expanded by successive images regarding grapes and thorns, figs and thistles, trees and the fire; John 15:1-8, where *karpos* is part of the vine-and-branches parable (a very live metaphor) and leads into the teaching on bearing fruit (vv. 4, 8); Jude 17, where it is part of the larger figure of "autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead." The context is the final arbiter in all such decisions.

2. ***Figures of addition or fullness of expression.*** 1. *Pleonasm* refers to the redundant addition of synonyms to emphasize a point. This was a favorite stylistic trait of ancient writers for clarification or emphasis, similar to the poetic device of synonymous parallelism. A major example is the constant use of "he answered and said" in the Gospels; others include "he did not remember but forgot" (Gen 40:23), "the earthly house of this tent" (2 Cor 5:1) and "the household master of the house" (Lk 22:11). The tendency of modern translations is to omit such phrases, as in the New International Version, on Luke 22:11, "the owner of the house." The reader must be careful not to read too much into such repetitive phrases; they are usually stylistic.

    2. *Paronomasia* refers to words that are similar in sound and placed side-by-side in the text for emphasis. Often words are chosen to catch the original readers' attention and drive home the point. For instance, *tohuwabohu* ("waste and void" [Gen 1:2]) or *panti pantote pasan* ("all sufficiency in all things" [2 Cor 9:8]) have a dramatic flair. Many times important theology is presented by means of paronomasia. Barry Beitzel argues cogently that paronomasia was often used in the ancient Near East for solemn pronouncements and often in terms of divine names (1980:5-20). Rather than link *yhwh* (KJV "Jehovah"; Hebrew "Yahweh") with the verb "to be" *(hyh),* Beitzel argues that it is linked with the use of *yw* in Ugaritic, *yahwe/yiha* in Egyptian and *Ieuw* in Babylonian, all three instances of divine names. Therefore, *Yahweh* is connected with those and as a term has an "unknown lexicographic and ethnic origin" (p. 19). It derives its meaning not from etymology but from its paronomastic relation with *haya* in Exodus 3:14, thus "He who causes to be [what is]" or "The Performer of the Promise."

    3 *Epizeuxis* or *epanadiplosis* occurs when a crucial word is repeated

for emphasis. John tends to employ this with the *amēn* (“truly, truly”) formula; the Synoptic writers use only one. The use of the *amēn* formula has enormous implications for Christology, for it replaced the prophetic formula “thus says the LORD” and became a divine self-authentication by which Jesus was taking on himself the authority of Yahweh. By using *epizeuxis* John (1:51; 3:3,5; twenty-five times in all) gives this solemn aspect special stress. Similar would be the threefold “holy, holy, holy” in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 to highlight the holiness of God. When a term was repeated three times it became ultimately significant. Thus this means that God is absolutely holy, that holiness defines his character. Greek Orthodoxy is correct in making this the center of worship (calling it the “trisagion,” the “three holies”). The same occurred when Jesus said to Peter three times (John 21:15-17), “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.” The message was not the two levels of love but the threefold commission to ministry, showing it was Peter’s ultimate marching orders.

4. *Hyperbole* is a conscious exaggeration or overstatement in order to drive home a truth. Jesus adopted this rabbinic ploy as one of his main teaching methods. Understanding it is critical to a proper interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:29: “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out”). Many serious errors have been made by interpreting literally such statements as “turn the other cheek” or “if someone wants . . . your tunic, let him have your cloak as well” (Mt 5:39-40), as if those teachings defined the limits of a servant attitude. Jesus was talking generally of forgiveness and service rather than specifically, using these as hyperbolic examples. Similarly, when Jesus said the mustard seed was “the smallest seed” (Mk 4:31), he was not making a scientific statement but using a hyperbolic contrast (smallest-greatest); the mustard seed was the smallest seed that produced such a large plant (v. 32). The same was true when Jesus talked of a camel going through a needle’s eye (Mk 10:25). This was the largest animal in Palestine through the smallest hole, to stress the incredible difficulty of converting the wealthy.
5. *Hendiadys* occurs when two or three terms are added to one another to express the same thing, such as “fire and brimstone” (Gen 19:24), “blessed hope and glorious appearing” (Tit 2:13) or “kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12). The difficulty is deciding

when there is one thought and when they express different aspects. For instance, “full of grace and truth” in John 1:17 may be hendiadys but more likely reflects the Jewish concepts of *hesed* (covenant love) and *’ĕmet* (covenant faithfulness). The context and background of the terms must determine in individual cases.

3. ***Incomplete figures of speech.*** This reverses the previous category, considering figures of speech that involve omission rather than addition.

    1. *Ellipsis* is a grammatically incomplete expression requiring the reader to add concepts in order to finish the thought. Berkeley Mickelsen mentions two types (1963:189-90). In repetitional ellipsis the idea to be supplied is expressed earlier in the context or is clearly related to that which has been explicitly discussed; for example, “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or . . .” (Gal 3:5). The reader supplies the idea, “Did he do it?” (see also Rom 11:22). In nonrepetitional ellipsis the concept to be supplied is not in the larger context. This is the more difficult, for the reader must speculate from the total message of the context. For instance, “Don’t we have the right to food and drink?” (1 Cor 9:4). Nothing has been mentioned previously and only later statements about the apostle’s right to be supported by the congregation help us to understand it. In Acts 18:6, “Your blood upon your head” could be “Your blood *be* upon your heads” (the traditional interpretation) or “May your blood *come* upon your head” (BDF par. 480[5]).
    2. *Zeugma* is a special form of ellipsis in which two terms are combined that do not belong together and have to be separated by an added verb, as in 1 Timothy 4:3: “who forbid marriage [and order people] to abstain from certain foods.” The statement has been abbreviated in order to give it greater effect, and the reader must catch the intervening idea.
    3. *Aposiopesis* occurs when a portion of the sentence is consciously omitted for reasons of emphasis. In John 1:22 the Jewish delegation to the Baptist queries, “Who are you? [We ask] so that we may give an answer to those who sent us.” Mickelsen (1963:191) mentions an interesting example from the parable of

the fig tree (Lk 13:9). The caretaker, trying to save the tree, pleas for one more chance: “If indeed it bears fruit for the future [it should be allowed to grow]. Otherwise [if it does not produce fruit] then cut it down.” Both clauses omit information for rhetorical effect.

4. ***Figures involving contrast or understatement.*** 1. *Irony* is an important rhetorical device that consists of stating one thing while meaning the direct opposite. It is most frequently employed in polemical contexts and is accompanied by sarcasm or ridicule, as in Michal’s retort to David, “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today” (2 Sam 6:20), with open contempt for his dancing before the ark. Matthew 23 is filled with irony, as in Jesus’ blistering denunciation of the Pharisees, “You fill up the measure of your fathers,” referring to the murder of the prophets (v. 31). Many also see irony in the statement “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So obey them and do everything they tell you” (Mt 23:1-2). In such cases irony becomes biting sarcasm.

    2. *Litotes* are phrases that understate or lessen one thing in order to magnify another. As Caird notes, the Old Testament contains few examples because Hebrew did not develop the form of understatement (1980:134). Two examples would be Genesis 18:27, “I am . . . but dust and ashes” to demonstrate God’s overwhelming greatness, or “a drop of water” in Genesis 18:4 to wash the feet of the angels. More are found in the New Testament due to Hellenistic influence, such as Acts 21:39 (“a citizen of no ordinary city”) or 1 Peter 2:10 (“you were not a people”).
    3. *Euphemism* substitutes a cultured or less offensive term for a harsh one. This is especially true with taboo or sexual items. For instance, Judges 3:24 (cf. 1 Sam 24:3) has “surely he covers his feet,” a euphemism for “goes to the bathroom.” Several euphemisms describe sexual intercourse, such as “to know” and “to uncover nakedness.” To “come near” is to entice sexually. Further, in Acts 2:39 “all who are far off” refers to the Gentiles.
    4. *Antithesis* is a direct contrast in which two sets of figures are set in opposition to one another. We see this in the Adam-Christ antithesis of Romans 5:12-21 and in the flesh/law versus Spirit opposition of Romans 7—8. In fact Jesus’ teachings about the differences between the “laws” of the new kingdom and of the

Torah in Matthew 5:21-48 have been labeled “the Antitheses.” The so-called dualism of the Gospel of John (light-darkness, above-below, death-life) also belongs to this category. We must interpret such oppositions carefully, for many have read later Gnostic teaching into John or Paul by overstating the contrasts. In actual fact the Johannine dualism is not Gnostic, for it is built on Jewish-Christian rather than Gnostic patterns.

5. ***Figures centering on association or relation.*** 1. *Metonymy* occurs when one noun is substituted for another that is closely associated with it. Modern examples include Jell-o for gelatin, saltines for crackers, the White House for the presidency, or the bottle for drunkenness. In the Old Testament *throne* (1 Chron 17:12) stood for the kingship, *sword* (Is 51:19) for judgment or war, and *key* (Is 22:22) for authority. In the New Testament *rulers* and *authorities* (Eph 3:10; 6:12) refers to the demonic realm (some would say the demonic in government), *circumcision* (Gal 2:7-9) to the Jews, and *Moses* (Lk 16:29) to the Torah.

    2. *Synecdoche* is a figure of speech in which a part is substituted for the whole or vice versa. Since I have already dealt with this in some detail previously, on part-whole relations, I will simply mention it here for the sake of completeness.

6. ***Figures stressing the personal dimension.*** 1. *Personification* occurs when a thing or idea is represented as a person.[6] The most widely recognized example is “wisdom” in Proverbs, personified as a herald (Prov 1:20-21; 8:1- 2), a creative force (Prov 3:19-20) and a hostess (Prov 9:1-2). In Proverbs 9:13-18 wisdom is contrasted with “folly,” itself personified as a hostess of a house of ill repute. We could note also logos (“Word”) in John 1:1-18. Similarly, the book of Revelation contains many personified symbols like the eagle (Rev 8:13), the locusts (Rev 9:3-11), the dragon (Rev 12:3-17) and the two beasts (Rev 13:1-17).

    2. *Apostrophe* is a rhetorical device in which a statement is addressed to an imaginary object or person for effect; for instance, “Why gaze with envy, O rugged mountains, / at the mountain where God chooses to reign” (Ps 68:16), or “Sing, O barren woman, / . . . [for] your descendants will dispossess nations” (Is 54:1-3). In Psalm 114:5-6 the seas, the mountains and

the hills are successively addressed. As we can see, most instances also involve personification, and the final result is a powerful and poignant message to God's people.

Conclusion. Figures of speech are especially rich sources of imagery. While the discussion primarily has centered on the hermeneutical aspects, I want to note also their value for the sermon. It is my contention that some of the best illustrations come not just from cute stories or clever repartee but from the text itself and specifically from the background behind figurative language. Ricoeur's view of the world-referential value of metaphor is helpful in reminding us that our task is to immerse the audience not merely in entertaining anecdotes but in the Word itself. We are to help our congregation to live anew the message God has revealed in the text and to feel its power to change their situation as well. The startling reverberations of meaning inherent in the Bible's figurative language is the best place to start, for it is alive with powerful, colorful ideas. In recapturing the vitality and forceful presentation of the language, we will help our listeners to place themselves in the shoes of the original hearers and both to relive and to apply anew that eternal message. Every figure of speech is an illustration waiting to be unlocked. All we have to do is contextualize the metaphor for our day, and it will be an exciting illustration. For instance, "since we are surrounded by such a great a cloud of witnesses" pictures the Old Testament "heroes of the faith" in an ancient arena, but they are not witnessing us; we are witnessing them. Turn it into a modern equivalent, and you have the Christian in the spiritual Super Bowl, with Joe Montana, Jim Brown, Dick Butkus and Reggie White sitting there giving not only the thumbs-up but advice as to how to win the victory. That can become a great illustration (at least for the sports fans in the congregation!).

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

In order to illustrate the exegetical methodology of the previous chapters we will study two passages, one from each Testament. It is necessary to point out once more that the steps of structure, grammar, semantics and syntax are not exclusive, to be done one at a time, but are interdependent, to be done together. We first study a text inductively, taking a preliminary look at the passage in order to provide a control against a naive dependence on others' opinions. Then we use the tools (lexicons, commentaries, word study volumes and the like) to study the passage in depth, asking grammatical, semantic and syntactical questions as they arise in the text. In using the tools, the most valuable thing is not the conclusions that the authors make but the evidence they utilize. As R. T. France says, "no serious exegete should be content merely to follow where some revered commentary or version leads. He should satisfy himself whether the job has been properly done" (1977:253). This is the mistake of many term papers, which become little more than glorified lists of other peoples' opinions. When I study a text, I want to consider the material discovered by other scholars but come to my own opinion as to the original meaning of the text. The conclusions of the commentaries are not as important as the data and information they contain. Only after assembling the data and considering the options on the basis of the immediate context (which best fits the passage itself) do I make up my mind. Then it becomes *my* interpretation.

The two examples cited below are chosen deliberately. They are quite different in style and format in order to provide a broader demonstration of the techniques. I am assuming the inductive and preliminary notes in order to provide a more polished sample; the reader must be aware that the original notes will not have this look.

Zephaniah 3:14-17. Zephaniah prophesied just prior to the reform of Josiah (621 B.C.). His strong denunciation of the pagan practices of Baal worship and child sacrifice (Zeph 1:4-9, 11-12; 3:1-4) that typified the previous reign of Manasseh helped prepare for the Josianic reform. After proclaiming judgment on the world and on Judah (Zeph 1:2-6), the book prophecies the imminent coming of the Day of Yahweh (Zeph 1:7—2:3) and the outpouring of wrath against the

nations (Zeph 2:4-15; 3:6-8) as well as against Judah herself (Zeph 3:1-5). However, God's mercy would be experienced by the righteous remnant, who would inherit the land of their enemies (Zeph 2:7, 9) and bask humbly in the worship of their God (Zeph 3:9-13). The section we consider here forms a fitting conclusion to the book, as it details what Yahweh will do and why.

1. *The joyful response of Israel (Zeph 3:14-15).* The three commands of this verse provide the perfect conclusion to the enumerated blessings of verses 9-13.[7] The worship scene of verses 9-10 is now explicated fully. The three successive verbal units, *ranni* ("sing"), *harî'u* ("shout"), *śimhî w⊂olzî*("rejoice and exult") are used synonymously here to describe this worship. All have strong emotive content. The accumulation of such terms is a common device in Semitic poetry to stress the extent of the jubilation experienced when Yahweh's saving presence is felt. We see the worshipers singing then erupting into shouts of joy as they feel the renewal of God's covenant with his people. This prepares us for God's similar shouts of joy in v. 17.

   Many scholars have called this an enthronement hymn due to the presence of such common themes as the call to singing, victory over enemies and Yahweh as King (see R. L. Smith 1984:144). However, I believe it more likely that Zephaniah uses an enthronement pattern because it fits the prophetic call to rejoicing rather than this being an enthronement hymn. Once again Yahweh sits on his throne vindicating his people. The prophetic rejoicing is paramount.

   The titles used to designate the remnant are also important. We must remember that the apostate nation symbolized in her holy city (Zeph 3:1-5) had forfeited the right to be called God's children. The proud and the haughty had been removed (Zeph 3:11) and only the righteous remained. Therefore the covenant names—"Zion," "Israel," the figurative "daughter of Jerusalem"—are reinstated in this passage. The name "Jerusalem" was carefully omitted in Zephaniah 3:1-5, and only the description (with "prophets" and "priests," v. 4) showed her identity. Only with the remnant is the name worthy to be uttered, and the significance would not be lost on the original readers.

   The reason for the rejoicing (syntactically v. 15 is related causally to v. 14) is twofold, external and internal. At the outset it is difficult to know the progression of thought. In the first line *mišpātayik* could mean "adversaries" (NEB, taking it as a piel participle) rather than "judgments," thus producing synonymous parallelism in the first two

lines. However, the more common meaning of "ordinance" or "judgment" fits the context, and step parallelism would sum up the previous emphases of the book. The "judgments" against Israel (Zeph 3:1-5) have been removed, and the "enemies" of Israel (those listed in Zeph 2: Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, Assyria) turned back. This makes more sense here. Internally, the remnant is promised that they need never again fear danger because "Yahweh, King of Israel, is in your midst." It would be helpful to note the kernel sentences of verse 15b:

- The King of Israel is Yahweh (*melek yiśrā'ēl* is first for emphasis)
- Yahweh is in your midst
- You will not experience evil (*rā'āh*, "see," as an idiom for "experience")
- Evil will never appear again (emphatic use of *lō'* "never . . . again")
- Each of these ideas is an essential element of the others. Their covenant God has once more become their King and sits again on the throne. In fact, all four elements (Yahweh on the throne, divine presence, protection, eternal promise) are essential components of the message. Yahweh functions as Israel's protector and shields them with finality from their oppressors. So many Old Testament themes coalesce around this promise that it becomes impossible to discuss them all (such as the exodus motif, Yahweh as Savior of Israel, messianic promises of vindication). Moreover, in the highly eschatological atmosphere of prophecy it is not "illegitimate totality transfer" (see p. 84) to note such themes, for the reader is supposed to recall these covenant motifs in the atmosphere of this powerful prophetic promise.

2. *The message of hope (Zeph 3:16-17).* The third plural "they will say" interrupts the train of thought and undoubtedly refers to the surrounding nations. All who observe Israel will be forced to note her strange fearlessness, made all the more startling in light of her complete domination by her enemies.[8] For nearly a century Israel had had little control over her own destiny, and this must have been devastating to her self-image and concept of God. In the ancient world when a nation was conquered, its gods were also conquered and shown to be ineffective. This undoubtedly played a part in the prevalence of apostasy in Israel and Judah. The promise here would be doubly startling because it is based on

the premise that God was on the throne all along. The “day” of course is the Day of Yahweh, already proclaimed as that coming of Yahweh in apocalyptic judgment against his enemies (Zeph 1:7, 10, esp. Zeph 1:14—2:3). Here the positive side of the Day is stressed, the vindication of the remnant, entailing the final removal of any grounds for fear.

The message of verse 16 builds on the tone of verses 14-15. There is a chiastic effect in the passage, with the AB:BA pattern stressing the new relationship between Yahweh and his people (A: vv. 14, 17) and its result, the cessation of fear (B: vv. 15- 16). This compositional pattern places great stress on both elements. In this verse, the absence of fear is seen in the colorful imagery of the last clause, “Do not let your hands hang limp.” In the ancient world the metaphor pictured the depths of numbing despair and terror (cf. Is 13:7; Jer 6:24). God’s chosen will never again experience the paralyzing grip of terrible anguish. He will vindicate them against their enemies.

The high point of the book is verse 17, and indeed it is one of the truly exciting passages of Scripture. Few biblical statements approach the depths of its imagery or the evocative force of its presentation of Yahweh’s love and redemptive power on behalf of his people. It begins by repeating the critical premise of verse 15b, “Yahweh is in your midst,” but adds a further title, *yhwh ’ĕlōhayik* (“LORD your God”), with the emphasis on the relational “your.” The contrast between this new relationship and the angry tone of the denunciation against Judah in Zephaniah 1:4-13 would have been obvious to the ancient reader. Indeed, the relational tone accented in the title provides the basic atmosphere for the whole statement in verse 17.

Yahweh is further described as the warrior-hero who delivers *(gibbor yôšîaʿ).* Each term is important. In Zephaniah 1:14 the “warrior” cries bitterly because the Day of Yahweh has wrought his utter defeat. Here the effect is completely the opposite. Yahweh is the warrior, and he “saves” his people from their enemies. In this context *hero* is an E-R term, with the semotactic aura of the passage making it an event word (E) that pictures Yahweh fighting on behalf of his elect and establishing a new relationship (R) as the “deliverer” of true Israel. The picture of God as “warrior” is important to the Old Testament (especially crucial to the prophets) and is emphasized in the New Testament (see Longman 1982:290-307). The strong overtones of Yahweh in conflict with the enemies of his people justifies our noting them as opposed to the weaker translation “hero who helps.” The mixture of military metaphor

(“warrior”) with exodus imagery (“delivers”) is particularly meaningful.

Further, this hero-warrior returns after his victory to claim his bride. While we cannot identify this extended metaphor with certainty, the picture of love described in the last half of verse 17 may be best paralleled by other passages depicting Yahweh as the groom of Israel (such as Is 49:18; 61:10; 62:5). Few statements in all of Scripture so powerfully depict the divine love. Three successive clauses give the impression of the inability of human language to plumb its depth adequately. We can graph the progression of these clauses in three possible ways: (1) They could be synonymous, expressing the same basic idea of Yahweh loving his people; this is unlikely because the second (“be quiet”) does not sufficiently overlap the other two. (2) The first could establish the basic theme (exultation) and the others express the two concomitant aspects (silence, rejoicing). This is a viable possibility, but the question is whether the first verb is sufficiently broad to encompass the other two. (3) There could be an ABA pattern, with the two verbs, *yāśîś* and *yag.îl* synonymous. The decision depends on the degree of synonymy between the two verbs. A perusal of the lexicons demonstrates that indeed a strong semantic overlap exists between the verbs, and the context here favors the synonymy of the first and third, that they speak of the “joyful exultation” of a deeply felt love. Thus the third option is the more likely rhetorical pattern.

The second verb *(yahărîś)* is the most debated. Many have objected to the translation “be quiet” since it could hint that Yahweh is overlooking their sin. The actual term has a wide range of meaning, from “plow” to “engrave” to “be silent” (see BDB, Smith). Some even propose emendations (RSV, “to renew,” from hā*dāš)* or reverse the flow of thought (NIV, “he will quiet you with his love,” based on parallelism with the “over you” of the other two clauses). Yet neither of these other options is necessary. The stress is on the extent of the divine love, and the contrast pictures the two sides of love, in the second clause denoting “love deeply felt, which is absorbed in its object with thoughtfulness and admiration” (Keil and Delitsch 1971:161) and in the first and third clauses having to break out with “shouts of joy” (one meaning of *yag.îl*).

The final three verses of the book (Zeph 3:18-20 again in an ABA pattern) summarize the two emphases: Yahweh’s vindication (v. 18) and restoration (v. 20) of his people as well as his judgment of their oppressors (v. 19). The conclusion of Zephaniah is another of those marvelous promises to the righteous remnant that set the stage for the

New Covenant age of grace and prepared for the eschaton.[9]

Ephesians 3:16-19. Paul has given us two intercessory prayers in his circular letter to the Ephesians, 1:17-19 and this one. Recent studies of Paul's intercessory prayers have demonstrated that they are essential to the message of the epistle and usually encapsulate its basic purpose. This is certainly true of these two prayers, for they incorporate key terms central to the basic thrust of the epistle. The prayer of chapter 3 concludes the doctrinal section of the epistle and prepares for the practical or ethical section of chapters 4—6. It forms an inclusio with the prayer of 1:17-19, which itself introduces the section on the unity of the church (Eph 1:15—2:22). In the immediately preceding context (Eph 3:1-13) Paul uses his own apostolic commission as an example of the centrality of the Gentile mission in the church. Indeed the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church is part of the mystery revealed by God (v. 6) and a bold witness to the demonic realm regarding the divine wisdom (v. 10). As Peter O'Brien says (1999:245), "this variegated wisdom has particular reference to God's richly diverse ways of working which led to a multi-racial, multi-cultural community being united as fellow-members in the body of Christ."

The prayer of verses 14-21 petitions God to cement this unity by sharing his very presence and power with the Ephesian saints. Paul introduces the prayer with an uncharacteristically lengthy address to the Father as the one "by whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." This stresses the authority of God over all his creation. As in Genesis 2:19-20 (the naming of the animals by Adam) the act of naming implies dominion or authority. Here God is the one naming, so the authority is absolute: every earthly and heavenly family derives its identity from God. Especially in mind would be the Jewish-Gentile conflict of chapters 1—3. Since both groups have been "named" by God, they are equal before him. The prayer applies the relationship between God and his people to the Ephesian situation. Three *hina* ("that") clauses provide the organizational pattern for verses 16-19. These are the three petitions of the prayer introduced in verse 14 ("I bow my knees [i.e., pray] . . . that . . .").

1. *Prayer for power (Eph 3:16-17a).* The basis of the first petition is "the wealth of his glory." Both terms are major emphases in Ephesians, with *ploutos* occurring five times.[10] In each instance (Eph 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16) it refers to God's unfathomable bounty as he shares his gifts and blessings with his people. The emphasis is always on realized eschatology: these gifts belong to us now. Interestingly the other place where "riches of glory" occurs is in the prayer of Ephesians 1:17-19,

where it refers to that future "glory" which God will share as our "inheritance" (lit., "his glorious inheritance among the saints"). Here that "glory" could be descriptive ("his glorious riches," NIV) but more likely is a Hebraism, "rich as he is in glory" (Barth 1974:368). The whole emphasis is on the character of God poured out on his church.

The "gift" for which Paul petitions the God of glory is "power." The word Paul chooses is the basic word for power or strength, *dynamis.* While it can at times refer to "ability," "meaning," "miracle," "resources" or a personal supernatural being (BAGD), it here almost certainly has its basic thrust of "might" or "strength." In Ephesians 1:19 Paul sets it alongside its sister terms *energeia* ("working"), *kratos* ("strength"), *ischys* ("might") in order to describe the omnipotence of God available to his people. It would be erroneous to stress the differences between the terms in that context; Paul is piling synonyms one on another to describe God's marvelous strength because human language is inadequate to express it properly. A similar compilation of terms surrounding *dynamis* occurs in the striking use of superlatives in the doxology of Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to him who has the power *[dynamai]* to do incomparably more than we can ask or think on the basis of that power *[dynamis]* which is operative *[energeo]* in us . . ." Both passages are encapsulated in Paul's prayer for "power" here. In the context this divine "power" is now bestowed on the believer. It is an A-E term because the emphasis is on the qualitative "power" given to the saints so that they might exercise it (the "event" aspect) in order to gain spiritual "strength."

This empowering activity has two specific purposes or results (seen in the infinitive of vv. 16b and 17). First, the believer receives power "in order to be strengthened [*krataithēnai,* an E term; cf. the noun in Eph 1:19] through his Spirit in the inner being." In Ephesians 1:18-19 Paul had prayed that the Ephesians might "know . . . his incomparably great power," obviously a reference to experiential and not merely intellectual knowledge. Here that earlier prayer is repeated and clarified. The same power operative in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ (Eph 1:20-21) has been given to the believer (see Eph 2:6-7, building on 1:20), and here both the means (the active side) and the operative sphere (the passive side) are explicated. The first kernel sentence would be "may the Spirit empower you" and the second "may your inner being be empowered."

Throughout his writings (Rom 8:1-27; 1 Cor 2:9-16; 12:1-26) Paul stresses the Spirit as the operative power behind spiritual growth and

gifts. The presence of the Spirit has been implicit in the earlier passages (cf. Eph 1:13-14 with vv. 15-23) and here is explicitly the force of the triune Godhead behind the scenes of spiritual development. The sphere within which he works is the "inner being." Only Paul uses the concept (Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16), and it cannot be understood without a paradigmatic (concept study, involving the semantic field) comparison with such other Pauline terms as *nous* or *dianoia* ("mind"), *kardia* ("heart") or *kainos anthropos* ("new self"). While the use of "inner being" in Romans 7:22 and 2 Corinthians 4:16 clearly overlaps the first two, the concept here includes also that of the "new self," which has been created in the believer as a result of the death of the "old self" (Eph 4:22-24; cf. Col 3:9-10; 2 Cor 5:17). There are also parallels with the "transformation of the mind" (*noos*, Eph 4:23; cf. Rom 12:2). "The heart" is explicitly mentioned in the next clause (Eph 3:17). In other words, Paul is praying that God's power might be abundantly poured out so that it might transform the understanding of every Ephesian Christian through the inner activity of the Holy Spirit.

The second purpose for the divine power is the indwelling of Christ. The two ideas in Ephesians 3:16b-17 are interdependent: we receive strength when Christ indwells our hearts. The organization of the two clauses is remarkably similar. The Spirit is paralleled by "faith" (both introduced by *dia*) and the "inner man" by "heart," *'eiŝ en.* The figurative use of "inhabit" for the indwelling presence of Christ does not occur elsewhere in Paul (cf. Col 1:19; 2:9, in which Christ indwells with "all the fullness of God"), although it is paralleled by the "in Christ" theme so predominant in the Prison Epistles. The means by which we put this presence to work "in our hearts" or lives is "faith." It is clear both in Ephesians 2:8 and in this passage that "faith" is God's (here the Spirit's) gift and that only the divine "grace" (2:8) makes faith possible. Yet that personal trust in God still is the force within that allows us to discover the empowering presence of the Spirit and to depend on his strength in our daily struggles. It does not function automatically or guarantee spiritual victory. (If it did Paul would not have needed to petition God for this power on behalf of the Ephesians!) Faith is an appropriating mechanism within us, the means by which our "hearts" can know his indwelling presence.

"In love" may be taken with the following ("rooted and grounded in love") as indeed in most modern versions (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NASB, NIV), but I agree with Robinson (1904:85, 175) that it is better with the

preceding “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith in love” (cf. Eph 1:4; 4:2, 16). “Faith” thus is the vertical dimension and “love” the horizontal dimension of the indwelling presence of Christ. As believers learn to put into practice the empowering work of the Spirit through faith, that strength will bind together all factions (here Jew and Gentile) in a spirit of “love.” There are two kernel sentences in this concept. First, “faith appropriates the indwelling presence of Christ”; second, “love is the sphere within which Christ’s presence works in the church.”

2. *Prayer for insight (Eph 3:17b-19a).* “Rooted and grounded” could be either a nominative absolute detailing the results of the indwelling presence of Christ or an anacoluthon modifying the understood “you” in the following clause. The strange placement of the participles before the *hina* clause makes it likely that these participles provide a transition from the first to the second prayer requests and as such function in both ways. The result of Christ’s presence is a strong spiritual foundation, which makes it possible to grow in spiritual insight. The two verbs combine agricultural (“rooted”) and construction (“grounded”) metaphors and function synonymously to emphasize the strong foundation that Christ provides for one’s life. Here they are not intended to add separate meanings to the context but work synonymously to emphasize the importance of Christ as the foundation stone of spiritual growth. The believer must at all times remain aware of the true basis of spiritual knowledge. We can spend hours immersed in the academic pursuit of exegetical knowledge and yet fail to truly “know,” because knowledge rather than Christ is on the throne of our lives.

   Therefore, Paul goes on to pray that the Ephesians might “have power to grasp” spiritual truth. Both terms used here connote the depths of Paul’s desire. The first means “to have sufficient strength” to attain an ideal. It is a military or athletic term used often of power exerted to attain a goal. The second term is also military and often is used of “overtaking” and “seizing” an objective; here it is metaphorical and means to “comprehend” or “grasp” a truth. In this passage both aspects are present; the prayer is for “strength” to grasp actively the truths of Christ. This “power” is not achieved by one’s self but is a corporate act attained “with all the saints.” We cannot assimilate the “mystery” (Eph 3:9) or “manifold wisdom” (Eph 3:10) or “unsearchable riches” (Eph 3:8) apart from our brothers and sisters in Christ. The importance of the church as a whole in spiritual growth is stressed throughout the epistle (Eph 1:12, 15;

2:18; 4:3) and too often is ignored in the church today. Indeed Ephesians has with good reason been called the "body life" epistle, for the vertical aspect of the spiritual life is inseparable from horizontal fellowship. As we study the Word, we must continually dialogue with our fellow saints in order to come to grips with its implications. In a very real sense hermeneutics demands this, for the community of believers (both in the church and via commentaries) challenges and at times corrects our understanding.

The goal of community study is "the width and length and height and depth" of "the love of Christ." Literally scores of interpretations of these nouns have been made throughout church history (see Barth 1974:395-97), from a delineation of the mystery of God (Chrysostom) to the extent of Christ's love (Origen). The latter is more correct, although in itself the fourfold idea is used in Jewish wisdom writings to emphasize the incomprehensibility of divine wisdom. The four aspects are not separate but form a hendiadys (meant to be taken together) to indicate that one can never plumb the true depths of divine love exemplified in Christ. Paul is asking God to give the Ephesian Christians strength to begin the lifelong process of delving into the unfathomable depths (Barth: the "four dimensions") of divine truth.

Not only are they to "grasp" the depths of divine realities; they also need power to "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." Again the idea is to know the unknowable. As the mysteries of God are unfathomable in the preceding phrase (the first infinitive object of "have power") so the love of Christ is beyond comprehension here (the second infinitival complement). Obviously Paul wants his readers to understand the human impossibility of comprehending spiritual truths apart from the indwelling presence of Christ and the Spirit. In one sense Paul is asking the impossible; we can never understand the things of the Spirit. Yet with God all things are possible, and Paul is aware that divine strength is available to attain the unattainable. As God infuses the saints with his strength, the believers together begin the spiritual odyssey of growing in knowledge. The goal of that knowledge is not cognitive learning (such as theology) but experiential, to "know the love of Christ." In Ephesians 3:17 Paul prays for the "love" of the Ephesian saints; here the basis of that love, the love of Christ, is the focus of the prayer. The Ephesians had not experienced unity because the depths of the divine love had not been realized by the saints. They lacked the spiritual power to "seize" or "grasp" that understanding. *Love* here is an E term, emphasizing the act

of loving; the genitive “of Christ” is probably not objective, “our love of Christ,” but subjective, “his love for us.” As we begin to understand the depths of his love, that fact begins to transform our love for one another.

3. *Prayer for fullness (Eph 3:19b).* Paul climaxes his prayer by summarizing the earlier requests in his petition that the Ephesians might experience “all the fullness of God.” The use of the cognates “filled . . . unto fullness” (a pleonasm) builds on the concept of divine fullness already stressed in Ephesians 1:23, the church as “His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (NASB, NKJV). The meaning of *plērēma* (“fullness”) is strongly debated. The word can have active force (“that which fills,” “contents,” as in 1 Cor 10:16, “the earth and all in it”), passive force (“that which is filled or completed,” as in Rom 15:29, “the fullness of Christ’s blessing”) or stative force (“the state of being full,” as in Gal 4:4, “fullness of time”). It also can be used in a fulfillment sense (Rom 13:10, “love is the fulfillment of the law”). In Gnostic circles the term was used of the total number of manifestations emanating from God and also of the spiritual force uniting God and humanity. While some see Gnostic ideas in Ephesians (primarily on the basis of the use in Col 1:19; 2:9; Eph 4:13), I would argue that there is a closer connection to Old Testament and wisdom ideas where it speaks of the Shekinah or Spirit of God that fills (such as Prov 15:4 LXX; Wisdom 1:7; Ps 72:19).

   In Ephesians 1:23 the church is “being filled” (passive thrust of the noun) by God who “fills” (active force of the verb) all things completely (idiomatic thrust of “all in all”). In the context of the prayer the thrust in Ephesians 3:19b is similar. The church is “filled” with the “fullness” of God. With the preposition *eis,* the “fullness of God” is the perfect goal for which we strive and in which each believer becomes a Christlike individual (cf. Eph 4:13, “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”), filled totally by the presence of God so that God alone is seen in the person. The divine “fullness” is that completeness, that experience of the totality of God, toward which the church strives. It is both individual (as each saint grows in him) and corporate (the church grows together in him). The goal toward which we strive is nothing more than the fulfillment of all that God has set aside for his people, and to attain that goal the church must open herself to the complete presence of the divine Godhead.

CONCLUSION

As is the case with grammatical and semantic analysis, syntactical research will occur at several levels. The researcher producing a major monograph or commentary on a biblical text will take a great deal of time working through the primary materials and charting the syntactical development of the ideas. Each unit of the surface structure will be analyzed in detail, tracing themes through all the extant parallel passages and noting the deep structure underlying it with its effect on the total message of the surface structure. The result will be a continuous spiral upward toward the intended meaning of the text in terms of both the parts and the whole. The separate units can be understood only from the standpoint of the immediate context, for the possible interpretations of a unit like "warrior who delivers"/"hero who helps" (Zeph 3:17) will be narrowed down only on the basis of semotaxis, the influence of the surrounding ideas. Therefore, there is a continuing spiral as the interpreter moves in a circular motion from the parts to the whole and back to the parts, then in a spiral upward to the most likely interpretation—not just of the "warrior" imagery but of the entire message unit in Zephaniah 3:14-17.

The pastor does not have the unlimited time necessary for such detailed research. The scholar can take years, if necessary, to prepare a commentary. The average Ph.D. dissertation takes three years of solid research on a single project. Ernest Best, former professor at the University of Glasgow, several years ago was given the opportunity to do the New International Critical Commentary on both Ephesians and Mark but demurred, saying he would not live long enough to do both. Pastors do not have this kind of time to do a monograph on the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 or the hymn in Philippians 2:6-11. They preach such passages in one to two Sundays with approximately seven to ten hours of preparation time (if they preach or teach two to three times each week). Of course there are exceptions. Some who pastor large congregations have staffs to handle the daily work of the church and opt to spend as much as thirty to forty hours per week in the study. However, the majority of these pastors opt to spend much of that time on packaging rather than research, that is, on the homiletical rather than the exegetical side. The sermon is much more complex than the

commentary, for it must blend exegesis with contextualization (see chap. 18). A pragmatic approach to hermeneutics must recognize this practical problem and seek solutions. One solution is the decision of some (Donald Grey Barnhouse, Martin Lloyd-Jones, James Montgomery Boice) to take many years preaching through smaller segments of Scripture like Romans (Barnhouse), the Sermon on the Mount (Lloyd-Jones) or John (Boice). I must admit that this would not be my personal choice, for I would rather bring my congregation through more of Scripture. However, I prefer this to the commonly accepted theory on the other side that one should never preach a series longer than six to eight weeks. Most congregations will enjoy a series of a year or more on a major book like Genesis or Matthew.

Nevertheless, the pastor must work on a "lower" exegetical level than will the scholar. This does not mean that what we have been discussing in this chapter does not apply, for there are two ways this material will be useful. The pastor who is acquainted with the techniques can utilize the secondary tools with greater expertise (commentaries, background books, lexicons and so forth), noting when the commentator has done his homework or has made a shallow decision. Also, on the critical portions of the text, when a key word study or syntactical unit demands more detailed study, the pastor can take the time for a more intense investigation, using some of the syntactical techniques elucidated in this chapter (and books like *TDNT*, *NIDNTT*, encyclopedias). Key figures of speech, for instance, provide exciting illustrations and cross over into homiletics. The potential rewards for the sermon in such instances justify a deeper study, for biblical metaphors are sermon illustrations in embryo and will save immense time in the search for good examples.

Those doing a devotional study of a passage will probably spend more time on the inductive side, working through the text themselves. Yet there are several levels of devotional study, and I recommend all be utilized from time to time to maintain variety and freshness. Sometimes we will read through large chunks of Scripture to get a sense of the whole, as in the "read through the Bible in one year" programs. At other times we may read more carefully a paragraph (or chapter) at a time, following inductive Bible study methods. Or we may read a devotional book or use a devotional guide (such as *Daily Bread*). In this case we can still keep basic exegetical procedures in mind to make as certain as we can that the passages are not misinterpreted or manipulated. Finally (and I must admit this is my favorite method), we can go through the text with one or two commentaries but with a devotional goal in mind (what does it say to me?).[11] The problem with many devotional commentaries is that they at times play fast and loose with the text, so we need hermeneutical rules to help us see when they

are worth using.[12] In this latter type of devotional experience I recommend taking notes (for future reference) with three columns: one for the text, a second for the insights we garner (as we interact with the text and commentary) and a third for prayer thoughts coming out of the study. This can guide our prayer time as well.

EXCURSUS ON TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR

Although transformational grammar is analogous to structuralism, the actual theory and techniques were developed by Noam Chomsky, particularly in his *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965). The basic concept of transformational syntax is part of a larger theory that Chomsky developed by watching the startling ability of children to integrate syntactical rules into their own speech patterns. Chomsky named his comprehensive theory for the structure of language "generative grammar." John Lyons calls this movement "the Chomskyan Revolution," asserting that it is "the most influential theory of syntax so far developed in any period of linguistics, ancient or modern" (1981:108). Certainly this can be called an overstatement, especially by Saussure's followers. However, Chomsky's ideas have certainly had a profound effect on all linguistic theoreticians in the last forty years.

It is important at the outset to realize that Chomsky is a rationalist (one who believes that knowledge is derived through reason) rather than an empiricist (one who believes that knowledge is derived through the senses). Like other rationalists (such as Descartes or Leibniz), Chomsky believes that the mind is not a "tabula rasa" but rather has an *innate* ability to learn. The importance of this for generative grammar can best be exemplified in the 1975 colloquium in which Jean Piaget and Chomsky discussed the differences between Piaget's developmental views of learning and Chomsky's theory of a preprogrammed native mind (see Piattelli-Palmarini 1980). As the debate developed between what could arguably be called the two most influential systems of cognitive learning today, the discussion again and again returned to the subject of a child's development. Chomsky argued that a child learns on the basis of genetically endowed linguistic categories that enable the child to learn abstractly in spite of very inadequate learning opportunities. With respect to the debate whether genetics or environment shapes human learning and personality, Chomsky clearly sides with the former.

On the basis of his view of innate knowledge, Chomsky developed his foundational theory regarding language as competence and as performance. Competence refers to the set of linguistic categories in the mind that makes

possible the infinite series of linguistic utterances that constitute speech. In other words, generative grammar refers to a system of grammatical rules that generates actual speech and that according to Chomsky is based on one's genetic capacity for language learning. A child very quickly learns how to speak in complex sentences, and Chomsky believes that this could not be merely the product of environment but must depend on an inner capacity for language acquisition that is inherent in the mind itself. Performance, on the other hand, refers to the actual speech patterns as they develop. These, of course, are influenced by the linguistic environment, by the cultural idiosyncrasies and linguistic habits that surround the individual. A child thus already contains a mental store of grammatical rules (competence); these are universal laws common to all human beings. The individual child fills in these categories with the actual speech patterns of the culture within which he or she develops (performance). In other words, every human being has the capacity to understand the relationship between the subject, the verb and the object, but the actual way these are presented in individual languages will differ from group to group. The competence is the same for everyone, but the performance, the actual surface grammar of an individual language, will differ markedly from culture to culture. The syntactical competence is universal and innate, but the actual performance is infinitely varied and arbitrary.

Nevertheless, the infinite arbitrariness of individual syntactical utterances is still, for Chomsky, a rule-governed activity. Here we are at the very heart of generative grammar. Again, Chomsky draws much of his evidence from the speech patterns of children. He asks how it is possible that the syntactically correct statements of small children could merely have been acquired by parroting adult speech. Rather, Chomsky argues that an inherent ability must have guided their competence patterns. The creative use of language by children could not have been merely the product of environmental stimuli; instead this creativity is controlled by underlying syntactical laws that are a part of a child's mental capacity.

Generative grammar seeks to determine these linguistic universal laws that govern language acquisition. Chomsky wants to go behind individual language syntax to those universal rules that govern all speech and are common to all language systems. In actuality, Chomsky finds several levels of grammar. It is not my purpose to go into detail on this point, but it is important to understand exactly what Chomsky is saying. He believes that each level has greater influence than the one before in terms of generating surface statements. For instance, he argues that finite-state grammar leads to phrase-structure grammar and then finally to transformational grammar. Finite-state grammar deals with

individual surface grammars that work in some languages but not all. Phrase-structure grammar deals with underlying matrices or rules that govern a group of languages. Transformational grammar, on the other hand, deals with the universal laws that underlie all linguistic performance. Transformational grammar, therefore, is the final goal of generative grammar, because it deals with the deeper structure that determines the individual statement.

Chomsky's *Rules and Representations* (1980) refines many of the generative rules but demonstrates clearly that the underlying assumptions already discussed have not been changed in recent years. The first three chapters deal successively with the mind, the capacities for learning and the innate knowledge of grammar. This leads into his updated discussion of transformational grammar. There he argues that two distinct types of rules are in operation: the base rules that determine the abstract representations of the surface structure; and transformational rules that determine the basic arrangement of those structures.

Transformations convert the deep (D-) structures into surface (S-) structures by means of the generative rules. Here it is important to understand that Chomsky is not asserting that the deep structure contains the actual meaning and that the surface structure is irrelevant (as many structuralists do). Rather, he is saying that the deep structure generates the surface structure and therefore contains the basic meaning.

Chomsky, in fact, in this more recent work, argues that the surface structure more than the deep structure is relevant for semantic interpretation, because it is the surface structure that determines the syntactical relationships that produce meaning. He illustrates this by comparing two sentences: "I didn't have a good time in France or England" (which means in neither place) and "In France or England, I didn't have a good time" (which connotes the idea "I do not recall"). The deep surface of the two is the same but the surface structure actually yields two separate meanings. Chomsky explains, "Properties of surface structure . . . determine the interaction of negation and disjunction" (1980:156). In short, the deep structure embodies the rules that transform the meaning into the representations of surface structure (pp. 141-81).

Generative grammar has important repercussions for biblical research (as we saw under "Biblical Transformations," pp. 115-16). It is important to realize that Chomsky is speaking primarily at the linguistic level. In fact, his basic theory deals far more with syntax than with semantics and has great promise for syntactical interpretation. [13] However, several cautions must be lodged.

First, it is far from clear the extent to which the underlying theory of universal grammar is valid. I already noted in chapter three (pp. 84-87) that theories of universal semantic meaning are invalid. The extent to which this is also true for

syntax is currently heavily debated. Anthony Thiselton points out the similarities between universal grammar and Ludwig Wittgenstein's notions about elementary propositions in his *Tractatus,* which he later rejected in favor of language-game theory (1978:98). Certainly one could argue that Chomsky's theories would fit language-game theory. However, it is not so clear that the notion of a universal grammar can avoid these criticisms. Lyons points out that the actual transformational rules since the mid 1950s have been progressively modified and restricted in the decades following and states that "the future of transformational grammar as such (though not of generative grammar) is currently in doubt" (1981:128). In other words, while we can discover deep structural syntax underneath a surface statement, it is not at all clear that this provides a universal meaning that automatically crosses between language systems. We must be exceedingly cautious about such generalizations.

Second, as Thiselton states, there is a very real danger in placing the cognitive element above the emotive, cultural or religious deep structures that also underlie a surface statement (1978:98). Indeed, deep structure properly considered certainly goes beyond the categories Chomsky elucidated. For biblical study it demands a recognition of the many areas of nonlinguistic realities behind the actual statements of a passage.

Third, Piaget is certainly correct in stating that Chomsky overlooks the important factor of empirical development on the part of the child. As Gardner's forward intimates, Chomsky and Piaget were speaking somewhat at cross-purposes, since both dealt with different aspects of the larger question of learning (Piatelli-Palmarini 1980:xxx-xxxiv). Indeed, Chomsky's stress on native intelligence must be balanced by Piaget's stress on the actual stages of learning. For the process of exegeting a text this means that we dare not neglect any of the factors that have led from the deep structure to the surface structure. Therefore, generative grammar provides a matrix for deepening our understanding of biblical statements but dares never degenerate into an end in itself. Syntactical research must recognize that it is only a part of the larger whole, and that only in looking at every aspect of meaning in an utterance can we discover its relevance for our time.

EXCURSUS ON RHETORICAL CRITICISM

An introduction to rhetoric in terms of style has already been given in chapter one, and indeed this has been the general approach to rhetoric since Augustine first introduced biblical studies to it in book four of his *On Christian Doctrine.* (Augustine had taught rhetoric before his conversion and applied that knowledge to a delineation of rhetorical or stylistic patterns in Scripture.) Yet over the centuries there were only a few works published on biblical rhetoric, and these were primarily studies of figures of speech or tropes (e.g., the Venerable Bede, Bullinger, Norden) and chapters in the major grammars (e.g., Blass-DeBrunner-Funk, Turner, Moule). Rhetorical criticism as a discipline did not really develop until after the 1968 Society of Biblical Literature presidential address by James Muilenberg, "Form Criticism and Beyond" (1969). In it Muilenberg challenged scholars to move beyond form criticism by noting the aesthetic dimensions of literary style and structural patterns. He labeled this "rhetorical criticism," and his address led to an avalanche of articles and books exploring this discipline, primarily in Old Testament studies (the focus of Muilenberg's remarks). The New Testament counterpart developed more under the influence of Amos Wilder's *Early Christian Rhetoric* (1964). Both of these movements centered on stylistic and poetic dimensions of texts.

Yet there is another aspect of rhetorical analysis, rhetoric as the study of persuasion or the means of argumentation. This has been the primary function in literary studies since the time of Aristotle and is the focus of this excursus. Rhetoric developed in ancient Greece in the fifth century when Corax of Syracuse produced a treatise called *The Art of Rhetoric* to help property owners engaged in legal disputes over land.[14] When his pupil Tisias introduced this to mainland Greece, a class of rhetorical teachers called "sophists" arose. These were itinerant, professional teachers who offended the Greeks by charging for their services. Plato (427-347 B.C.) himself was opposed to the sophists for stressing technique over art and persuasive speech over truth. His pupil Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), however, did not reject the discipline of rhetoric. Rather, he grounded it in philosophy and logic, producing his master work, *The Art of Rhetoric.*

For Aristotle rhetoric was primarily the art of persuasion, and he sought to wed it with philosophical reasoning by classifying rhetoric in terms of its various facets. He noted three types of speech—judicial (legal), deliberative (political or religious debates) and epideictic (praise or blame)[15]—and developed eight aims or values for proper speech—that which is right, lawful, advantageous, honorable, pleasant, easy, feasible and necessary. Aristotle and the classical handbooks (e.g., Cicero's *De inventione*) also developed the five "canons" or laws of rhetorical persuasion: *invention,* delineating the topic and developing the argumentation; *arrangement,* organizing the material into an outline and determining the best sequence for the argumentation; *style,* selecting the proper words and figures of speech to achieve clarity and heighten the argument; *memory,* seeking a natural and forceful presentation; and *delivery,* adding vocal inflection, gestures and facial features.

Finally, for Aristotle the concept of "judgment" *(krisis)* is predominant. Rhetoric in this sense centers on the development of "proofs" or arguments that are convincing enough to persuade. He found three types of proofs—*ethos,* the authority or credibility that a speaker or writer develops in the work; *pathos,* the emotions stirred in the audience by the speech; and *logos,* the logical arguments produced in behalf of the thesis. In each of these areas Aristotle set the tone for subsequent rhetorical study (see also the brief historical survey in Black, 1995:257-58).

It is difficult to know whether or not most (or any) of the New Testament writers were trained in ancient rhetoric. As George Kennedy points out (1984:8-10), rhetoric was universally a part of Hellenistic training at "the level of high school education today and was, indeed, the exclusive subject of secondary education" (p. 9). Several ancient rhetoricians came from Palestine, like Theodorus of Gadara (the teacher of the emperor Tiberias), or were of Jewish descent, like the Sicilian Jew Caecilius or Hermogenes of Tarsus. Whether or not there was formal training involved in the case of Jesus, Paul or Luke, their works certainly demonstrate a good knowledge of rhetorical technique, and a rhetorical approach to the patterns of persuasion in New Testament works is justified.[16] Melick (1994:441) points out three assumptions made by this approach: (1) the authors employed these techniques consciously, meaning many of them were trained in it; (2) the New Testament writings were basically formal, utilizing the classic Hellenistic styles; (3) the original readers were comfortable with this and understood it.

Classical rhetorical patterns. It will be helpful to establish the ancient patterns of rhetorical argumentation (discussed in Cicero and Quintilian), for

these form a control with which one can compare the patterns of New Testament writings. This in fact is the method employed by works like Hans Dieter Betz's study of Galatians or Duane Watson's study of Jude and 2 Peter.[17] It was debated (see Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 3.9.1-5) whether there were four (the method presented in Mack) or six (the method presented in Kennedy) parts in a proper speech. The outline itself originated in judicial rhetoric but was employed in the other types as well. I will provide the more complete list and leave the debate to others, for all six are helpful for New Testament study.

1. The *exordium* is the introduction that establishes rapport between the speaker and audience and creates interest and goodwill toward the subject matter.
2. The *narratio* states the proposition being discussed and provides background information and a rationale or reason for the point to be made. Often, for the sake of effect, the proposition would be given in figurative language and the reason would restate it in straightforward language.
3. The *partitio* (often made a part of the *narratio*) is the enumeration of the particular points to be made, often in the form of the opponent's arguments as well as one's own.
4. The *probatio* or *confirmatio* is the presentation of the logical arguments for the case. The speaker marshals the evidence on behalf of the proposition, quoting authorities and citing parallels that enhance the case being made. Proofs take two forms, an analogy or comparison with something the audience finds favorable and an example that demonstrates the value of the speaker's position.
5. The *refutatio* (often made a part of the *probatio*) seeks to disprove opposing views, usually by similar means to the *probatio.* In a judicial speech this would involve the refutation of an opponent. In declarative speech this would involve a rhetorical presentation of the opposite perspective so as to enhance the argument. At times this could include a digression (often seen in Paul) that provides added information.
6. The *peroratio* or *conclusio* is the conclusion, which summarizes the major points and appeals to both reason and the emotions on behalf of the thesis.

This of course was only the basic outline, and practitioners were encouraged to be creative in the arrangement and composition of the actual speech or treatise. The task for the rhetorical critic is to study the ancient unit (e.g., a

particular speech of Jesus or an epistle) and to trace the developing argument in order to determine the patterns of persuasion. This is a valuable addendum to the exegetical task, for it enables the student to note more accurately the formal type of passage being investigated.

In the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-13) are the *encomium* and establish the ethical parameters for the speech as well as draw the audience into the topic.[18] The *narratio* begins with the proposition in Matthew 5:17- 20, which states the relationship of both Jesus (fulfills the law) and his hearers (their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees) to the law. The reasons are then enunciated in the antitheses of Matthew 5:21-48, which demonstrates Jesus' own view of our relation to the law. The *partitio* is Matthew 6:1-18, which applies the thesis (note the presence of *dikaiosynē* in Mt 5:20; 6:1) and addresses the three specific practices of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. These are more than examples; they relate to the false "piety"/"righteousness" of many of Jesus' hearers.[19] The Lord's Prayer (vv. 9-15) is the centerpiece of this section and possesses great rhetorical power, forming as it does an early climax to the sermon.

The *probatio* consists of Matthew 6:19—7:20 and forms a series of commandments addressing specific issues (material possessions, anxiety, judging others, giving holy things to unworthy people, asking and receiving, the narrow and the wide gates, false prophets).[20] Here Jesus uses analogies and examples which anchor the theme of the radical ethic required of Jesus' followers.[21] The *conclusio* is Matthew 7:21-27, with vv. 21-23 recapitulating the theme in a new way (anchoring "entering the kingdom" in "doing the will of the Father") and vv. 24-27 demanding immediate action from the hearers ("hearing" must lead to "doing"). These formed the two parts (recapitulation and the appeal to the emotions) of a good conclusion. Again, this does not mean that Jesus and Matthew were trained in Hellenistic rhetoric; rather, they are using a pattern found throughout the Mediterranean world of that day.

Of course, all such delineations are simple deductions and will seldom satisfy everyone. However, as each one studies the pattern of reasoning, the meaning of the whole as well as the parts will become more clear. The many studies of the rhetorical pattern in Galatians will demonstrate how widespread the disagreement can be. Betz in his commentary (1979) argues that Galatians is a judicial or apologetic letter centering on justification by faith rather than the works of the law. Kennedy on the other hand (1984:144-52) believes it is a deliberative work urging the Galatians to endure in the Christian faith rather than to turn to Judaism. Mack (1990:66-73) believes that both are too narrow and

argues that Galatians is too complex an epistle to be classified by any one rhetorical type. Rather, four issues (refuting the "other gospel," showing that his simple gospel was enough without circumcision and the like establishing his credentials, and urging the Galatians not to give away their faith or their unity) are forged together in a passionate and powerful letter. Mack's thesis is certainly closer to the truth and demonstrates how carefully rhetorical study must proceed. As one might guess, the corresponding outlines of the three scholars differ markedly as well. This demonstrates one important fact: rhetorical criticism is no more precise than any other hermeneutical tool. It still depends on the subjective decisions of the interpreter. Nevertheless, when done in concert with the other exegetical tools, it will help deepen one's understanding of the forces at play in a particular passage (the micro level) or book (the macro level).

A Method for rhetorical criticism. In any method, the goal is to minimize the dangers and maximize the potential of the critical tool. The dangers must be recognized—subjectivism (reading one's own theories into the text); the application of the wrong tool (for instance, reading Greek patterns into Jewish rhetoric, as possibly in the Sermon on the Mount above); reductionism (overly simplifying a complex pattern, as Kennedy did with Galatians); delusions of grandeur (thinking we know more about ancient rhetoric than we do); and a further erosion of the propositional aspect of biblical truth.[22] When dealing with the outline of a book, it is a simple fact that there are nearly as many outlines as there are scholars.[23] Therefore, rhetorical studies must be aware of their own finiteness and must be done with extreme care.

The best method for accomplishing this has been developed by Kennedy (1984:33-38) and Watson (1988:8-28). As will be demonstrated later, these build on all the exegetical steps enumerated in chapters two through four (hence the placement of this excursus here). However, this does not mean that rhetorical criticism is the final step of the process, for the rhetorical strategy decided on will have hermeneutical implications for the interpretation of the passage. For instance, if the predestinarian passages of Romans 9 are part of a diatribe against Jewish-Christian misunderstandings regarding the nature of God (due to the divine judgment against Israel), this may mean that the statements regarding divine election there do not comprise dogmatic assertions regarding the process by which God saves people (the traditional Calvinist interpretation) but may instead comprise metaphors describing one aspect of the process (that is, God's sovereign choice [the emphasis in Rom 9] working with the individual's decision [the emphasis elsewhere]). Paul would be stressing one aspect of a larger whole to make his point. In short, rhetorical criticism must be utilized as part of the

holistic process of exegesis rather than as an end in itself.

1. *Determine the rhetorical unit.* This is based on the final outline rather than the preliminary one discussed in chapter two. It can only be determined with extreme care, for it is important to decide whether a transitional passage belongs with the preceding or following section. Such decisions can radically alter the final product and therefore demand exegetical depth. The rhetorical unit has an introduction, a developed point and a conclusion. Wilhelm Wuellner (1987:455) calls this "a text unit as an argumentative unit affecting the reader's reasoning or the reader's imagination . . . either a convincing or a persuasive unit." It may be a macro-unit (major section [i.e., Mt 5—7 or Rom 9—11] or book) or a micro-unit (single pericope, i.e., Mt 6:1- 18 or Rom 9:6-18). If the latter, it will be studied first in itself and then as part of a larger rhetorical strategy.
2. *Analyze the rhetorical situation.* This is akin to determining the purpose (or with form criticism, the *Sitz im Leben*) of the passage/book. It is objective when that situation is described in the passage itself (usually in the introduction). It is subjective and debatable if it is simply surmised from the themes themselves. For example, there have been several articles examining the social situation behind Luke's Gospel, often seeing an upper-class audience due to the emphasis on social concern. This is far too subjective to be likely. Nevertheless, to the extent that the social situation can be determined, it is extremely helpful. In fact, in literary theory, the identification of the original situation is an essential component, for that situation dictated the rhetorical strategy employed. The determination of the audience's situation adds hermeneutical precision to the task of interpretation. Watson (1988:9) speaks of three constituents of the rhetorical situation: the problem or obstacle that needs to be corrected, the audience to which the rhetorical solution is directed, and the constraints brought by the speaker's/writer's analysis of the situation. Each aspect should be investigated as part of the critical process.
3. *Determine the type of rhetoric employed and the question behind it.* We have already discussed the three major types—judicial, deliberative and epideictic. Judicial passages render judgment on a past situation; deliberative passages offer advice regarding potential situations in the near future; and epideictic passages either celebrate or condemn someone in order to seek assent from the audience regarding a particular value.

Speakers or writers would often interweave such patterns into their larger work. Philippians could be called primarily a judicial work in that it castigates many arrogant individuals in the church (Phil 2:1-18; 4:2-3) and the Judaizers (Phil 3:1—4:1), but it contains epideictic material in Philippians 2:19-30 and deliberative passages in Philippians 1:27-30 and 4:4-9.

The question is not simply the situation or problem behind the passage. It is the rhetorical statement of that issue and controls the development of the text. Watson (1988:11-13) speaks of "stasis theory" (stemming from Quintilian) as the means of defining the question more closely. There are three stases: fact (whether a thing is), definition (what a thing is) and quality (what kind of thing it is). One must determine how many questions are addressed in a passage and what type of questions are involved. In the case of the Judaizers of Philippians 3:1—4:1, the student will note Paul's queries regarding the fact of their teaching and its quality (that it constituted false teaching).

4. *Analyze arrangement, technique and style.* The arrangement of the material in the macro structure is the next important aspect. How do the various rhetorical segments achieve their desired effect? What persuasive purpose is seen as the writer creatively weaves the various parts together? The task is not only to determine the structural configuration of the text but also the writer's strategy behind that configuration. The rhetorical effect is created not only by the proofs utilized but by the way they are arranged. This is an essential component of the techniques used by the author. The basics of arrangement have already been discussed, and here the goal is to see what creative patterns have been used and what intended effect is envisioned. Style refers to the artistic arrangement of linguistic devices in order to enhance the intended effect. The goal of style is to induce pleasure, attract interest and persuade the reader. This includes not only the literary devices in chapter one or the figures of speech in chapter four, but also the disposition of these in the whole structure of the developing argument. The choice of words, the metaphors and syllogisms artfully arranged, the examples and allusions presented, all figure in the style of the author. It is the task of the rhetorical critic to determine not only the what but the why of the individual style of a passage, not only what is said but why it is said, that is, the goal of the whole.
5. *Evaluate rhetorical effectiveness.* This does not mean simply to judge whether the argument was good or bad. Kennedy (1984:38) means by

this that the critic must reexamine each step of the process and see if the critical study properly evaluated the audience, the problem and the rhetorical means used by the author in accomplishing his goal. Note how the author moved from the statement of the problem to the rhetorical solution. What implications did the passage have for the author and the audience? What is the overall impact of the passage not only on the original readers but also on the modern reader? In this latter sense one moves from meaning to significance, for rhetoric has a timeless quality which speaks crossculturally in many different situations.[24]

In closing, Black (1995:273-76) proposes four questions regarding rhetorical criticism: (1) Is there such a method? There is no unity among its practitioners, and it bridges from classical to postmodern approaches. (2) Is it compatible with historical criticism? In its classical form, it supplements and enhances historical analysis. (3) What are its drawbacks? For some, the method takes over the text and guides it rather than analyzing it. (4) What is gained by this method? It brings together historical and literary approaches and encourages a lively dialogue. Also, it helps to clarify the ethos and form of early church proclamation.

Discourse analysis and text linguistics. This is another recent development, having its origin in the 1950s (see the historical survey in Reed 1997:18-24) but not intersecting biblical studies until the last two decades. George Guthrie (2001:255) provides an excellent definition: “a process of investigation by which one examines the form and function of all the parts and levels of a written discourse, with the aim of better understanding both the parts and the whole of that discourse.” As such, this is the perfect conclusion for this first part of hermeneutics, called exegetical analysis, for every aspect of the task, from the syntax and meaning of individual words to the contribution of the sentence and the paragraph to the macrostructure of the whole discourse, is involved in discourse analysis. Each level of the enterprise provides an aspect of the task. The assumption is that the text is the only valid place to discover meaning, for it both embeds the author’s message and is the source of inquiry for the reader. The purpose is to analyze the contribution of the individual words and sentences to the whole of the discourse. Yet the emphasis here is not the parts but the whole. Look at it this way: words come together to produce sentences, sentences unite to produce paragraphs, and paragraphs flow together to produce the discourse as a whole. (Jeffrey Reed [1997:43] notes five levels—word, clause, sentence, paragraph, discourse). In addition, there are the extralinguistic levels of culture and situation. Discourse analysis studies the interrelationships at each level.

Text linguistics is sometimes held to be a separate analysis, that is, how the text fits together linguistically, but most consider the two to be virtual synonyms (see Porter 1995:17n). Joel Green (1995:175-76) points out that discourse analysis centers not on the way people are supposed to produce texts (i.e., grammatical rules) but the way they actually do write texts by noting the linguistic features they use (text linguistics). He notes three levels of relationships: the structure within the narrative itself; the discourse between the author and his original readers, that is, the message delivered to the addressees; and the discourse between the text and the modern reader. Green sees a distinct relationship between discourse analysis and semiotics, so that the third level involves pragmatics as well as text linguistics, namely, the communicative act between text and reader as cut off from historical concerns (i.e., the intentions behind the text) and containing the multiple possible readings a text can have (pp. 177-79). This is certainly true of many who use text linguistics, as in some of the essays collected by Wolfgang Dressler (1978). But I do not believe such assumptions are necessary (see the apps.). I would rather restrict discourse analysis to the process of determining the structure and meaning inherent in texts and intended by the author. (This is similar to the evangelical use of redaction criticism, discussed in chap. 7, "Narrative.") Peter McDonald (1992:153) says that while at one time discourse analysis was unconcerned about meaning, there are now new approaches "specifically designed to accommodate meaning." So code words like *transformation* and *deep structure* are being replaced by *context* and *function.* Thus at the third level, I will argue for the modern reader's appropriation of the original meaning of the text and his or her contextualization of that meaning and its significance for the individual's life and community.

Following speech-act theory, these scholars search for the linguistic signs that tell what the author intends in his or her discourse. The goal is to discover how the writer has produced the text, that is, what inner textual devices guide the reader in discovering the plot or development of the text. So there are two aspects—the writer's production and the reader's response. What techniques has the writer utilized to guide the reader in deciphering the intended message? Moreover, the assumption is that one must go beyond the level of the sentence to ascertain how sentences become paragraphs and how paragraphs become major sections. The sentence has no more meaning than a word without a context. Further, language has a social function and must be examined within a sociohistorical and sociolinguistic framework, that is, the cultural framework within which the discourse originated. So within both the linguistic and the cultural dimensions, a discourse must be analyzed for its cohesive character as a whole communication and its coherence as meaningful discourse (see Reed

1997:244-33). George Guthrie (2001:257-59) gives three presuppositions: (1) we must work with the development of the whole discourse, not just the isolated sentence, (2) identify the constituents that work at various discourse levels (i.e., the relationship of the parts to the whole), and (3) note the dynamics in the text that give it cohesion, namely, bring about unity at the level of communication. A good example is William Lane's use of discourse analysis to determine the three embedded discourses within Hebrews: Hebrews 1:1—4:13 (God speaking in his Son), Hebrews 4:14—10:18 (Jesus the high priest offering himself as the once for all sacrifice), and Hebrews 10:19—13:21 (we must draw near to God) (Lane 1991:1xxxlxxxiv, from Guthrie 1991 [1994]).

The purpose of discourse analysis is to understand how the movement of the ideas in the communication progresses. Guthrie (2001:260) suggests a five-stage process for accomplishing this (see fig. 4.2).

In working at Guthrie's five levels, one of the purposes is to separate the "background" (the supporting material that carries the narrative) from the foreground (the main point or story of the discourse). One does this by observing tense aspect, voice, mood, introductory particles, word order, and noticing what carries the major argument and what functions as supplementary material (Bodine 1995:8). For instance, an introductory *idou* ("behold, look") or *amēn* ("truly") often points to a particularly important point. This is also called "prominence" and refers to "those semantic and grammatical elements of discourse that serve to set aside certain subjects, ideas or motifs of the author as more or less semantically and pragmatically significant than others" (Reed 1995:76). This is done at all three levels—sentence, paragraph and discourse—and often what is significant at the microlevel may be part of the background at the macrolevel, leading to the delineation of the theme(s) for the discourse (Reed 1995:80-82). So one must work at all these levels to distinguish how a discourse is communicating its message.

Figure 4.2. Guthrie's five-stage process for understanding communication progress

1. (microlevel): Translate the text and begin a basic grammatical analysis.
2. (macrolevel): Identify the unit boundaries within the discourse by
   a. identifying a change in genre
   b. identifying transition devices in the text (e.g., movements of introduction or conclusion)
   c. identifying the uses of linguistic devices such as *inclusio*
   d. tracking shifts in cohesion dynamics such as time, frame, topic and so forth
3. (microlevel): Analyze the internal structure of each discourse unit, and perform a detailed study of the material in that unit.
4. (macrolevel): Analyze the interrelationship between the various units of the discourse and identify the types of progression in the discourse.
5. (microlevel): Consider further the interpretation of elements within each discourse unit.

Let me use Matthew 11—12 as a test case. This is strictly narrative material that occurs between the two major discourses of chapters 10 (the mission discourse) and 13 (the parable discourse). All agree that this is a turning point in Matthew. There has been sporadic opposition (mainly Mt 9:3-4, 11, 14, 34) but primarily a positive atmosphere as Jesus showed his authority and called for faith. The success of Jesus' ministry caused astonishment (Mt 7:28; 8:27; 9:8, 33), and the news went everywhere (Mt 4:24-25; 8:34; 9:26, 31). In the mission discourse he prophesied great trouble for future missions (Mt 10:14, 17-22, 25, 28, 35-36), and that opposition intensifies in chapters 11—12. Of the nine episodes in Matthew 11:1—12:50, six deal with rejection and judgment (Mt 11:2-19, 20-24; 12:1-8, 9-14, 22-37, 38-42), and the section begins with the doubt even of John the Baptist (Mt 11:3). From the doubts of the Baptist to the rejection of both the Baptist and Jesus (Mt 11:18-19) and to the refusal of the Galilean towns to repent (Mt 11:20-24), the theme of Jewish obduracy begins to develop, following the pattern of Israel in the Old Testament. We arrive at nine episodes by deciding that the two controversy stories of Matthew 12:1-8, 9-14 are separate rather than a single episode, and then deciding that Jesus' saying about the return of the evil spirit (Mt 12:43-45) goes with Matthew 12:38-42 rather than being a separate story (actually, there are three separate parts of that episode: Mt 12:38-40, 41-42, 43-45). In the nine episodes, there is a clear 2 + 1 structure in each, with the first two being rejection stories and the third a christological saying in which Jesus brings salvation and hope to his followers (Mt 11:25-30; 12:15-21, 46-50) (see Davies and Allison 1991:2, 233-34). So just as chapters 8—9 featured three triads of miracle stories, so also this section contains three triads (Mt 11:1-30; 12:1-21, 22-50) that contrast opposition to Jesus with Jesus as the one sent to provide healing and salvation. Emerging from this discourse analysis are the two competing themes, obduracy and rejection contrasted with the offer of rest (Mt 11:28-30) and hope (Mt 12:20b-21) in salvation.

EXCURSUS ON THE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE DEBATE

Every decade or so an issue arises that threatens to split the church. In the 1960s it was the rapture debate; in the 1970s, the charismatic issue; in the 1980s and 1990s, women in the church, and now the feminist issue has metamorphosed into the debate over inclusive language.[25] The issue is whether all masculine-oriented language in Scripture should be translated literally or in accordance with the larger intentions (e.g., "God is treating you as his children" rather than "as sons" [Heb 12:7]). Let us begin with a definition: Inclusive language translation replaces male pronouns or terms that refer to more than men in the context with inclusive substitutes like *one, you, they, people* and such, unless the context is describing the ancient cultural setting. For instance, when Paul begins his Areopagus speech in Acts 17 with "men of Athens," we would keep *men* if we believe the council was composed only of men (NLT) but translate "people of Athens" if we believe women were present as well (TNIV).

This has caused a furor in the church. A brief historical survey will help. D. A. Carson goes so far as to call the reaction "Bible rage" because of the animosity the issue has engendered.[26] It began in 1996 when Zondervan published The New International Version, The Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI) in England, intending to publish it in the United States as well.[27] This produced a strong backlash by *World* magazine, that called the NIVI "the stealth Bible" (March 29, 1997), and scholars like Wayne Grudem and R. C. Sproul began attacking it. On May 27, 1997, the presidents of the International Bible Society (the parent controllers of the NIV) and of Zondervan met with Grudem, James Dobson, Sproul, John Piper and several Southern Baptist leaders and agreed to a set of guidelines for avoiding inclusive language (see Poythress and Grudem 2000:299-319). However, neither the IBS nor Zondervan agreed with the decision, and they went ahead with plans for Today's New International Version (TNIV), publishing the New Testament in 2001 and the whole Bible in 2005. This has produced a firestorm of disapproval, with some encouraging people to send back their TNIV or NLT Bibles to the publishers and demand their money back.

Yet exactly what is at stake? Is it feminism or accuracy or inerrancy or all of

these? On the whole, the debate is between two different translation theories. The literal or formal-equivalence theory is a "word-for-word" approach in which the wording, grammar and syntax are retained as intact as possible. Dynamic or functional equivalence is a "thought-for-thought" approach in which the translator tries to communicate the exact *meaning* of the original, often involving different phrasing. For instance, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3) in the NLT becomes "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him." Carson (1998:69) has provided a sliding scale from the more formal to the more functional translations (I've added ESV, TNIV, NLT and *The Message*): ASV—NASB—KJV—NKJV—RSV/ESV—NRSV—NJB—NIV—TNIV—NLT—CEV—*Message*—LB.

There are two questions about these translations: Which approach yields the more accurate translation? Is one superior to the other in its faithfulness to the revealed Scriptures? My frank opinion is that we need both types of translations. In fact, I tell people in Bible study seminars that if they don't know Hebrew or Greek, the best thing they can do is take a literal version like NASB or ESV as their control, then compare them to five or six others and ask why the TNIV or NLT translate the text differently. Then they get a feel for how to understand the passages better.

The basic problem with a literal approach is that no two languages communicate their meanings alike. What is a single word in one language will need to be translated by an entire phrase in another. Hebrew vocabulary is half as large as Greek, and both are much smaller than English. This means that a single word in Greek or Hebrew will have to stand for many different terms in English. There can be as many as thirty to forty different possible translations of a biblical term in English. The choice of the correct option depends on both the context of the sentence and the idiom in the receptor language that best communicates that idea. The goal is to find which terms or phrases best communicate that original intention. A classic error is the belief that the individual Hebrew or Greek term should always be translated by the same English word. In reality this would be a huge fallacy and twist the meaning of the text again and again. Rarely if ever does a term in any language always mean the same thing (e.g., "She snowed the teacher in her essay"). Context is everything, and the choice of a term or phrase affects the meaning of the whole.

The truth is that we do not think in terms of individual words but in terms of communication utterances, and the meaning comes from the whole statement in its context. The key is accurate interpretation of the original utterance, and that combines grammar, semantics, and syntax in a holistic way. When translating from English to German, we do not worry about the individual terms but about

the meaning conveyed by the whole unit. Then we translate to convey that meaning the best way possible in the receptor language.[28] For instance, Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem (2000:246-48) argue that Psalm 1:1 ("Blessed is the *man* who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" [RSV]) portrays the "individual righteous man" and is obscured by translations like the TNIV, "Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked." Yet most scholars say it describes people who refuse to follow the wicked, and it is difficult to see the difference between the two. Both are equally faithful to the original. Is changing John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will obey" to "If you love me, you will obey" or "Those who love me will obey" introducing inaccuracy? Changing from the individual to the group or from the inclusive "he" to a plural does not change the meaning in any way. The goal in all three is clarity and accuracy, and I would argue that inclusive "he" no longer has clarity for growing numbers of people.

Let us consider the reasons for the switch to inclusive language. The removal of inclusive "he" from the English language did indeed begin as a feminist attack on male-dominated language, but it is now common usage. Public schools have avoided male-inclusive language for years. It is true that opponents of inclusive language can point to many examples from papers or magazines (see Poythress and Grudem 2000:203-10), but linguists disagree, pointing to a major switch in the use of gender. A good friend of mine told me that he supported the opposition group until his daughter came home from church asking, "Daddy, why are we excluded at church and in the Bible? They keep saying 'he' all the time." He then realized that the current youth and young adult culture was raised in inclusive language.

The use of the plural for *you* and *he* has actually existed since Chaucer and Middle English without distortion of meaning (see Webster's Dictionary). Linguists point out that we must understand how the gender system functions in both the original and receptor systems and then translate accordingly. In languages it is not formal equivalence but meaning equivalence. For instance, *Spirit* is feminine in Hebrew and neuter in Greek—should we translate "she" in the Old Testament and "it" in the New Testament? No one does so. Linguists point out that people understand the implied individual behind *they* or *you.* William Tyndale and KJV translated Matthew 5:9, "they shall be called sons of God" as "children of God," and only the NKJV and NIV changed it back. Paul himself translates Psalm 32:1—"blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven"—as "they whose transgression . . ." (Rom 4:7, cf. also 3:18, 10:15).[29]

Let us consider the male pronouns in Hebrew *('ādām* and *îsh)* and Greek

(anthropos and *anēr).* It is recognized by both sides that the first of each can be used generically to refer to people in contexts where women are included as well as with *sons* or *brothers* or inclusive particles like *someone, everyone/all* or the participle, translated "he who" (see Blomberg 2003:14-15). Yet the argument is made that *îsh* and *anēr* refer to "male" or "husband" exclusively. However, lexicons recognize for these two as well an inclusive use, as in Exodus 16:16, Deuteronomy 24:16, 1 Samuel 5:9 or Psalm 62:12 for *îsh* (Carson 1998:122), or Matthew 14:35; Luke 5:8; John 6:10 or Acts 4:4, 24:19 for *anēr* (*EDNT,* 1, 99). In all cases context must decide whether men and women are intended.[30]

The principle is found in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "all things to all people." This is a missionary mandate to be culturally sensitive and relevant in communicating the gospel. It has often been stated that male-dominated language and translations will never work in ministry on high school or college campuses. The question is whether the Word of God is meant for the church (where literal translations are acceptable) or for the unsaved world (where the male-dominated language is a barrier to the gospel). Again, I am not arguing that only functional equivalence is viable, but that both types of translations are needed. But I am arguing that in reality functional equivalence is more accurate, for it communicates the meaning of the Word in such a way that the original intentions are communicated with greater clarity for the reader. This issue is a good test case for the preceding chapters on grammar, semantics and syntax. The whole movement from original context to receptor context in this chapter favors a functional translation. When I originally wrote these chapters (in the first edition), this was not an issue. But now I see how hermeneutical theory in reality supports functional equivalence, for the goal of all interpretation is clarity and accuracy rather than the preservation of form. I can honestly say that when we did the NLT, every verse translated was the result of massive commentary work on the meaning of every word and phrase in its context. I kept track and estimate that over a thousand hours was spent on each biblical book by the teams. Do we "change God's words" when we translate *he* as "they" (so Grudem 1997:30-32)? If that were true, it would entail retaining every original word and syntax from the Hebrew or Greek, and the translation would be unreadable.

Grudem has argued that the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration demands a literal translation, since in a functional translation words are left out and changed.[31] Strauss answers this from several vantage points (2005:2-7). First, he points out that in translation work, the goal is meaning and not just form. In terms of lexical correspondence, we must realize that words do not have individual meaning but collocational meaning, that is, they draw meaning from

their relationship to other words in the sentence (e.g., make pancakes, make sense, make friends, make a plane). The Greek word *poiein* could only be used for a couple of them, and different phrases would be needed in Greek. Going the other way, *poiein* would have to be translated in many different ways in English, at times with phrases. In terms of syntactical correspondence, we must recognize that it is not the presence of participles or infinitives but the meaning those grammatical units convey, so one must change to relative or adverbial clauses. No two languages have the same grammatical way of expressing ideas. So the meaning of a passage "is not transferred by retaining formal equivalence, but by reproducing the function of its various parts" (Strauss 2005:6-7). Again, it is not form but meaning that matters. If one catches the exact meaning of the biblical text, then that is plenary verbal inspiration. The words of the original are present and perform their intended function in a more dynamic translation, in fact better than they would in a formal translation.

Strauss then responds to some of Grudem's examples of missing words in functional translations (2005:30-45), for example, Proverbs 13:24, "spare the rod" (called by him "the disappearing rod of discipline"—"If you refuse to discipline your children" [NLT]) or 1 Corinthians 13:12, "now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (called by him "the lost faces"—"then we will see everything with perfect clarity" [NLT]). Strauss answers (2005:8-9) first that functional equivalence aims at clarifying the meaning of the idioms, and that we would best use a literal (for the idiom) and a dynamic (for its understanding) translation side by side. Second, he points out that the original readers, like modern readers, would go to the meaning of such metaphors rather than dwelling on the words themselves (e.g., for us such idioms as "he drove the point home" or "she lost face"), so the functional translation is actually doing what the original readers would have done, go straight to the meaning. In fact, most functional versions place the literal reading in the footnotes so the reader has both.

In conclusion, neither formal nor functional translations are wrong. In fact, they should be used together in studying the Word, the one for the form and words used in the original, the other for the intended meaning of that language. Moreover, inclusive language is important for those (gradually becoming a majority) who have not been trained to differentiate when male pronouns and terms in the Bible are inclusive; that is, they refer to men and women together. In fact, inclusive language is better because it makes the meaning clear when a passage is intended inclusively.[32]

5

Historical and Cultural Backgrounds

Background knowledge will turn a sermon from a two-dimensional study to a three-dimensional cinematic event. The stories and discourses of the Bible were never meant to be merely two-dimensional treatises divorced from real life. Every one was written within a concrete cultural milieu and written to a concrete situation. It is socioscientific background studies that unlock the original situation that otherwise would be lost to the modern reader. De Silva says it well (2004:118):

> The NT is not just about the "Word of God" in the sense of the divine principles and ideas. It is also about the "Word" of God "made flesh" as Christian leaders used words, symbols, and rituals—each having meaning only because it resonated with the social and cultural contexts of their authors and hearers—to create and give shape to the distinctive social group that we now call the church. It is, moreover, about responding to and living out that Word in the midst of real, everyday social interactions, and in the face of real, everyday challenges conditioned by social and cultural factors.

Historical-cultural exegesis differs from historico-critical study in that it applies background data to a passage in order to understand better its meaning, but it does not use it in order to determine the authenticity or editorial expansion of that text. Since Christianity is a historical religion, the interpreter must recognize that an understanding of the history and culture within which the passage was produced is an indispensable tool for uncovering the meaning of that passage. "History" is the diachronic aspect, relating to the milieu within which the sacred writers produced their works; it refers to the events and times within which God's sacred revelation is couched. "Culture" is the synchronic aspect, referring to the manners, customs, institutions and principles that characterize any particular age and form the environment within which people conduct their lives.

Biblical literature has two dimensions: historical intentionality, in which the author assumes certain shared information with the original readers; and literary

intentionality, in which he encodes a message in his text. Authors either address (prophetic and epistolary literature with a present historical thrust) or describe (historical narrative with a past historical thrust) background situations. In both of these cases there are "shared assumptions" between the author and the original readers, information not found in the text, data that they knew but we do not. While semantic research and syntactical analysis can unlock the literary dimension, background study is necessary in order to uncover that deeper level of meaning behind the text as well as within it. John Elliott (1993:7) says the task in social-scientific approaches is to study "(1) not only the social aspects of the form and content of texts but also the conditioning factors and intended consequences of the communication process . . . ; (2) the correlation of the text's linguistic, literary, theological (ideological), and social dimensions; and (3) the manner in which this textual communication was both a reflection of and a response to a specific social and cultural context."

The primary tool for uncovering this data is archaeology. However, its relevance for hermeneutics has been debated. It is quite common to use it primarily for apologetic purposes to "prove" the authenticity of the biblical account. Indeed, there is some value in the use of archaeology for confirming the veracity of the biblical record. The classic example is of W. M. Ramsay *(St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen),* the great historian and agnostic whose study of the archaeological evidence behind Luke-Acts led to his conversion. For instance, recently acquired knowledge of the history of the second millennium B.C. and of seminomadic movements in the ancient Near East has lent greater authenticity to the patriarchal narratives. William LaSor, David Hubbard and Frederic Bush (1982:102-7) summarize the evidence: (1) the names of the patriarchs fit the late second millennium but not the first millennium; (2) Abraham's journey from Ur to Haran to Canaan fits the geographical and political conditions of the period; (3) the pastoral nomadic lifestyle of the patriarchs fits the cultural and topographical features of the period; (4) social and legal customs described in the biblical text accurately reflect the period in which the Bible sets them; (5) the portrait of patriarchal religion is authentic, especially the relationship between the patriarchs and local shrines and the portrayal of God as the personal God of the clan and not just as the God of the sanctuaries (as among the Canaanites).

Nevertheless, there is great danger in using archaeology for apologetics. It is a two-edged sword. Jericho provides an excellent example. On the basis of John Garstang's excavations of 1930-1936 evangelicals have argued that archaeological evidence indicates that the walls did indeed fall outward. Yet some today seem still unaware that Kathleen Kenyon's work of 1952-1958

demonstrated that Garstang's fortifications actually stemmed from an earlier period, namely, an early Bronze Age city destroyed by an earthquake and fire about 2300 B.C. (rather than the 1400 B.C. date of Garstang). To date, there is an absence of evidence for the biblical story regarding the walls of Jericho. This does not disprove the biblical data (see Dumbrell 1985:130-39) but does exemplify the serious problems in an apologetic use of archaeology. We dare not reach too hasty conclusions as to the relevance of archaeological discoveries. Often the problems outweigh the solutions, and it is dishonest to use a tool only when it supports us and to neglect it when it does not.

Edwin Yamauchi discusses the "fragmentary nature" of archaeological evidence (1972:146-58). In a series of descending spirals, he studies the extent of the evidence that is available to us.

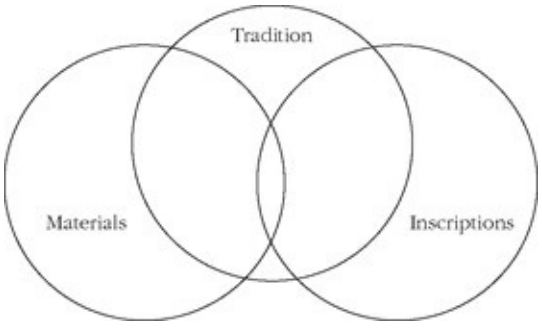
1. Only a very small fraction of what was made or written has survived, due to the erosion of the material by natural forces (wind, rain, soil) and the destructive nature of humans. In addition, site after site has been denuded when inhabitants have stolen priceless artifacts.
2. Only a fraction of available sites have been surveyed. Mound on mound lies unnoticed in Greece or Syria. For instance, in Palestine alone the number of sites rose from 300 in 1944 to 5,000 in 1963 to 7,000 by 1970.
3. Of those surveyed only a fraction have been excavated. Of the 5,000 in Palestine in 1963 only 150 had been excavated in part and only 26 had become major sites.
4. Only a fraction of an excavated site is ever examined, due to the unbelievable costs involved and the amount of time required. Yigael Yadin estimated it would take eight hundred years to clear Hazor, a site of 175 acres. Some cities are small (Jericho comprises seven acres and Megiddo thirteen) but many others are quite large. Babylon, with 2,500 acres, would take eight thousand years to excavate entirely! This can lead to skewed results. For instance, from 1894 to 1963 there was no evidence for a Bronze Age existence at Ephesus. Then in 1963 Turkish engineers building a parking lot found a Mycenaean burial ground. Few archaeologists are willing to make categorical judgments on the basis of an absence of data.
5. Only a fraction of the discovered material has been published. Important finds may languish in the basement of a museum for fifty to seventy-five years. For instance, 25,000 cuneiforms have been unearthed at Mari but to date only 3,500 to 4,000 have been published. Too many scholars have rushed new discoveries into print only to be embarrassed when later

studies have proved them wrong. Caution is the watchword!

Yamauchi estimates that being supremely optimistic we could have one-tenth of the material in existence, six-tenths of that surveyed, one-fiftieth of that excavated, one-tenth of that examined, and one-half of that published. This means that we have only .006 percent of the evidence. One could become extremely pessimistic about the value of archaeology were it not for several compensating factors. We do not need complete evidence when studying customs. The more evidence we have, the more certain the conclusions, but even a few pottery shards depicting, for instance, the dress of the Egyptians will suffice to demonstrate such domestic customs. Yamauchi gives us a helpful discussion on methodology (1972:158). He divides evidence into three categories: traditions (written or oral evidence from Herodotus, Homer, the Old Testament and other sources), material remains (pottery, debris and so forth) and inscriptional evidence. Conclusions are stronger when there is overlapping evidence from more than one source (see fig. 5.1).

This also means that the primary value of archaeology is descriptive (providing background material) rather than polemical (apologetics). It is too uncertain in its re-sults to be used primarily in the latter. Certainly I do not mean that it is useless in apologetics, for it can affirm the basic veracity of John's or Luke's historical and geographical references (for the historical veracity of John, see Blomberg 2001). However, its major contribution is in sociological information so that the modern reader can better understand the milieu within which the biblical passage or event developed.

Figure 5.1. Overlapping sources of archaeological evidence



AREAS FOR RESEARCH

1. ***Geography.*** The movements of peoples and topography of the land can add marvelous insights to the study of a passage. As Barry Beitzel points out, "history itself in many respects is inseparably bound by and subject to the limitations of geography. Geography is an impelling force that both initiates and limits the nature and extent of political history, what we might call geopolitics" (1985:2). For instance, it is of inestimable value to have a detailed knowledge of the towns and cities where Jesus or Paul ministered (see Schnabel 2004) or of the cities behind the seven churches in Revelation 2—3 (see Osborne 2002).

   Beitzel mentions two biblical examples (1985:102, 170): First, an analysis of the conquest of Canaan shows that all the cities overrun lay in the highlands, while the plains and valleys, where Canaanite chariots could turn the tide of any battle, remained outside its control. Interestingly, in the 1967 Six-Day War Israel reconquered almost exactly the same territory (see Beitzel's map on p. 103, which visualizes and traces the modern conquest in 1967 alongside the ancient conquest under Joshua). Even with the millennia in between and immense technological changes, geography still dictates military conquest. Second, Jesus' choice of Capernaum for his Galilean headquarters may well have been due partly to geographical factors. The city lay on the northwest side of the "Sea of Galilee" and on the "Great Trunk Road," or major trade artery, that linked Egypt and Mesopotamia. The cosmopolitan nature and international flavor of Capernaum made it a natural center for Jesus' forays into Galilee and Trans-Jordan as well as a place of preparation for the universal mission.
2. ***Politics.*** It is very helpful when studying the historical accounts (such as the history of Israel or the life of Jesus) to know something of the political developments behind the accounts. For instance, the prophets wrote within the context of the larger political arena, and much of what they said can be understood better when interpreted in light of those

developments. The fact that Israel was a buffer state between the Assyrians, Babylonians and then the Persians created many of the religious and social problems. For instance, Ahab followed Solomon's practice of syncretism and political treaties, and under him Israel adopted many of the practices of the pagan nations. The governmental structure had increasingly changed to a semi-feudal system, and by the time of Ahab the monarchy had been replaced by an absolutistic dictatorship. Under this system the social justice of the Torah and the early years of Israel had disappeared, and the upper classes exploited the poor. For an excellent overview of social-scientific theories regarding issues like the origins of Israel, the development of the monarchy, the prophetic tradition, the exile and the place of women in ancient Israel, see Charles Carter (1999:29-40).

3. ***Economics.*** Every culture may be defined somewhat on the basis of its socio-economic situation. There are several difficulties, however, in tracing the economic background of any given era. One must study long periods of time and generalize when specific practices probably differed slightly from period to period. It is too easy to apply practices seen at Mari or Ugarit, for instance, to Israel or Canaan. Moreover, it is quite difficult to make a qualitative analysis of the trade situation during the time of Solomon or of Christ when one does not possess specific quantitative data on the movement of materials or artifacts. Since the evidence (wood, textiles, dyes, spices) did not survive and since few accounts have been found (Yamauchi estimates there were twenty-four *million* meters of papyri used for temple records but only twenty-five meters have survived), this is very difficult to trace. However, the evidence we do possess is highly illuminating.

   The development from the seminomadic economy of the patriarchs to the agrarian economy of early Israel to the mercantile economy of Solomon and the cosmopolitan situation during the Greco-Roman period helps us to understand details in the text. For instance, Beitzel theorizes that Egypt did not intervene while Israel was conquering the highlands of Canaan because her trade routes through the Canaanite plains were never threatened (1985:102). As a further example, John Elliott argues that the recipients of 1 Peter were resident "aliens" (1 Pet 1:17; 2:11) who were not allowed to own land and were restricted to tilling the land or working in local trades (1981:677-73). Rome's urbanization program had succeeded in the province of Asia (the seven churches of Revelation) but failed in the provinces behind 1 Peter (north of Galatia), and the area was

predominantly rural. This was an economically depressed area, and the economic factors probably contributed to the oppression of the saints, the focal point of the epistle. Since their conversion had forced a further break with previous alliances, the situation of the Christians was doubly difficult (see also McKnight 1996 for an excellent use of sociological theory on 1 Peter). While I would question the extent to which *paroikos* ("alien") and *parepidēmos* ("stranger," 1:1) are intended to be socioeconomic descriptions rather than spiritual metaphors (for those who are spiritually alienated from society), the material Elliott provides adds depth to an understanding of 1 Peter. As Oakman brings out (1996:131-39) social stratification was a major problem and led to the constant emphasis in both Testaments on helping the poor. There was a fine line between subsistence and starvation, and capitalism was unheard of, so social lines were rarely crossed. In an honor-shame society, the emphasis was not on accumulation of goods but on maintaining the honor of the family name.

4. ***Military and war.*** The term *war* is found over three hundred times in the Old Testament alone, and a good part of the imagery dealing with divine succor (God as our "refuge," "strength" or "present help") stems from military metaphors. Palestine's position as the sole land bridge between Africa and Eurasia meant that for reasons of trade routes and strategic military position it was essential for powerful nations to control it. No other portion of real estate in the world has been so embattled.

   It is interesting to trace the history of Israel from a military standpoint. For instance, Abraham's defeat of the four kings with only 318 men (Gen 14) has been called impossible from a military standpoint. However, Abraham chose to fight in the canyons of Mount Hermon near Damascus ("Dan" in Gen 14:14 is probably the Dan Jaan of 2 Sam 24:6 in northern Peraea), and in the narrow confines of the gorges a small but well-trained and mobile force has a distinct advantage. Another interesting fact is that Israel did not become a technically competent military force until Solomon. When David defeated a sizable Syrian force with a thousand chariots (2 Sam 10:15-19) he did not keep the chariots, probably because he felt they would do his forces little good. This is startling in light of the fact that for centuries chariots had been the prime military weapon. However, it was not until Solomon that chariots became common in Israel (1 Kings 10:26). Israel still controlled the highlands rather than the plains and this dictated their strategy. They won victories on the basis of superior tactics and primarily through divine intervention.

5. ***Cultural practices.*** *1. Family customs.* Family customs such as marriage ritual or educational practices are critical. For instance, Israel practiced *endogamy,* with marriage to non-Israelites excluded. This was true even in the patriarchal period (Gen 24:4; 28:1-2). Great stress was placed on ancestry, for it became crucial to ensure the purity of family lines. Ancient education too was geared to preserving the scribal and ruling classes, with the emphasis on rote memory and imitation. For the Hebrews, however, this was a religious duty required of all, and the daily life of the family was conceived as an instrument of religious education. Parents gave their children religious, moral and vocational training. The home was the focus until the postexilic period when synagogues took on an educational function. Elementary schools began in the first century B.C., with children (that is, sons) beginning between the ages of five and seven.

    2. Material customs. Material customs (homes, dress) can also provide valuable information. For instance, Israelite villages throughout the Old Testament period were constructed of inferior materials and workmanship. The architectural master-pieces of Solomon, Omri or Ahab were all constructed by Phoenicians. Otherwise, a rough rural architecture predominated. Most homes were simple one-story affairs, small rectangular or square buildings with dirt floors and with mud-brick walls sealed by layers of mortar and whitewash. They were restricted to a size of about ten-feet square because they had not learned to “vault” (laying stones side by side in a diagonal direction); the ability of the Canaanites to do this intimidated the spies in Numbers 13:28. They had few lamps; since oil was expensive the average family would have one, usually set in a niche in the wall or on a “bushel” or grain measure turned upside down to use as a table (see Mt 5:15). Roofs consisted of beams over which were laid branches or reeds and then packed dirt. Grass often grew on it (Ps 129:6; Is 37:27). Wealthier homes had Hellenistic tile roofs (Lk 5:19) and, since they were flat, families would often rest there or entertain friends there.

    3. Everyday customs. Everyday customs affect far more passages in Scripture than one would think. Even daily hygiene was more a religious custom than a personal one. As described in Mark 7:3-4 the Jews would dip their hands if remaining home but immerse

and wash them thoroughly if they had been to the marketplace (where they could have come in contact with Gentiles). While the Romans were clean-shaven, the Jews let their beards grow but had to keep them trimmed. Young men liked to wear them long and curled, with special pride in thick, abundant hair (Song 5:11; 2 Sam 14:25-26). In fact the cry to Elisha, “Go on up, you bald head” (2 Kings 2:23), may have been a curse rather than just mockery, since baldness led to suspicion of leprosy. The problem of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 most likely centered on social mores at Corinth, especially the dichotomy between rich and poor, and between those without a wealthy patron and those with one. The wealthy refused to participate with the poor but ate before them and refused to share their sumptuous meal and plentiful wine with the have-nots, thereby shaming them (1 Cor 11:21-22, 33). They treated those without resources or patrons as second-class citizens, thereby rejecting the Lord’s teaching that the church celebrate as “one body” (1 Cor 10:16-17) (Thiselton 2000:850; Barton 1995:83-84).

4. *Athletics and recreation.* Athletics and recreation form an important part of the leisure time of any people, and this is true in biblical times as well. Athletic prowess in the ancient world was closely tied to the military. The “mighty men” of Israel were famed for their swiftness (1 Chron 12:8) and strength (Samson). While there are no Old Testament references to games, archaeology has uncovered several; for instance, a game with pegs and a board similar to cribbage (one such with fifty-eight holes has been found at Megiddo). A game with dice played at Sumer has actually been reproduced and sold in stores under that name. Games in the ancient world were closely tied to religious festivals, and the four great Greek games originated as festivals to the gods—the Olympics and Nemean games for Zeus, the Pythian games for Apollo, and the Isthmian games for Poseidon (two- to four-year intervals). At the same time the Jews were opposed to such contests, due both to the pagan origins of such and the fact that the athletes competed naked. A gymnasium had been built in Jerusalem by Antiochus IV around 200 B.C., and even some priests participated, but it was condemned in 2 Maccabees 4:17. Herod the Great also endowed such contests, but pious Jews were opposed (Couslan 2000:141). Still, Paul is the sacred writer who

uses the imagery most consistently. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 he juxtaposes two events: the foot race with an emphasis on the goal and prize (vv. 24-26a), and boxing with a defensive emphasis on avoiding blows (vv. 26b-27a). Paul demands rigorous discipline and training so as to win the laurel wreath (v. 25) and avoid defeat (v. 27b), and Hebrews 12:1-13 uses the imagery of a race for the Christian life.

5. *Music and art.* Music and art are among the noblest of human endeavors, expressing the deep sensibilities of the soul. It is obvious why worship became one of the primary functions of music. However, this is one of the more difficult aspects to trace, for musical scores have not survived the ravages of time (indeed, music was taught orally without actual "scores"), and we have to divine from bas-reliefs and lyrics the actual melodies used. Werner mentions four types of music in the ancient world: social merrymaking (Gen 31:27), military (Judg 7:18-20), magical incantation (pagan) and worship (1962:457-58). I would add a fifth—work or harvest songs (Num 21:17; Is 16:10). The flute and horn existed early in seminomadic tribes, and tambourines were used at the song of Miriam on crossing the Red Sea (Ex 15:20). In 1 Samuel 10:5 the prophetic band ministered with harps, tambourines, lyres and flutes. With David's influence a great choral and orchestral tradition soon developed (2 Sam 6:5, 10), which predominated throughout Israel's history.

   Many have called Israel a "nation without art" due to the prohibition of Exodus 20:4 (Deut 5:8), "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below." However, this censured idolatrous art and a genuine artistic tradition did develop, centered on the tabernacle and the temple. To be sure, foreign artisans did most of the work on the temple (1 Kings 7:13-14), but the tradition was Israel's. The sculptured panels of wood inlaid with gold; the pomegranates, grapes, gourds, lilies and palm trees embroidered on curtains (but note that there were no animals); and the cherubim sculptured in the holy of holies demonstrate a love for religious art that rivals that of the surrounding nations. In the New Testament period Herod was famed for his artistic and architectural achievements, not only in terms of the temple; he also erected many structures employing

Hellenistic style and statues—gymnasiums, theaters, amphitheaters and the entire city of Caesarea Philippi. The Hillel school apparently allowed such buildings and artwork so long as they were not used for religious purposes. Gamaliel himself wore a signet ring engraved with a human head to demonstrate this attitude of tolerance.

6. *Cultural anthropology.* David deSilva shows how the cultural matrix for biblical ideas is essential for understanding what is behind the text, especially in ideas of honor-shame or purity-pollution in the ancient world that are so foreign to Western ways (2004:124-26). Issues of rural and urban life in the Mediterranean, purity requirements in Greco-Roman as well as Jewish worlds, family customs and the like are critical for understanding what is actually going on in certain texts. His own work on Hebrews in light of honor and shame (1995) is illuminating.

6. ***Religious customs.*** Religious customs controlled every aspect of the daily life of the people. Every activity carried religious overtones, and the modern dichotomy between religious and secular simply did not exist. As Henri Daniel-Rops says, "Since the civil authority identified itself with the religious authority, secular law was merely the application of the law of God" (1962:341). What people wore, how they spent their free time and related to one another, even the very type of home they lived in had an essentially spiritual dimension. Many passages cannot be understood without relating the religious situation behind them. For instance, tracing the pagan-Jewish syncretism in the Lycus Valley is quite helpful when studying the heresy addressed in Colossians. Moreover, knowing the actual purpose behind the oral tradition and the Pharisaic injunctions is necessary before studying the encounters on the part of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament.

A brief perusal of prayer practices may demonstrate the value of this. In the first century the Jews prayed three times a day and recited the Shema (Deut 6:4, 5-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41) in the morning and evening. Jews normally prayed standing, and knelt or prostrated themselves only at solemn times. It was common to pray aloud with upraised hands (1 Tim 2:8; folding the hands did not originate until the fifth century A.D.) and downcast eyes (Lk 18:13). It was also customary to don the prayer shawl (the *tallith*) and the phylacteries or amulets (the

tefillin). The prayer *(tefilah)* consisted of a series of liturgical blessings, codified by the end of the first century in the "Eighteen Benedictions." After this liturgical portion the individual would present personal petitions to God. Jesus participated in this (Mk 1:35, morning prayer; Mk 6:46, evening prayer) but transcended it by beginning often "a long time before daybreak" (Mk 1:35) and praying at times through the night (Lk 6:12). Luke especially stresses Jesus' prayer life (see Lk 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28). Jesus transformed earlier prayer teaching in his "Abba" theology, which introduced a new intimacy into the communion between the person and God (see Jeremias 1967 contra Barr).

7. ***Summary.*** Berkeley Mickelsen follows Eugene Nida *(Message and Mission)* in noting the influence of cultural diversity on communication (1963:170-72). Any communication takes place when a "source" gives a "message" to a "receptor." God, the ultimate source, speaks through the human writers of Scripture (the immediate source) within the diverse cultures of their day. The receptors or recipients of that message interpret it from within other cultures. Therefore, the task of the receptor in the modern cultural framework is to recapture the total framework within which the sacred writer communicated and to transfer that message to our own day. The cultural aspects presupposed in the passage help interpreters get behind the words to the underlying message, understood by the original readers but hidden to the modern reader. This becomes a necessary prelude to the application of the text to current situations (see fig. 5.2). Moreover, within the last forty years an enormous explosion of knowledge has taken place in virtually every area of background analysis. In works such as IVP's *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (2000) and in recent dictionaries like *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992) and the multivolume set of IVP (four on New Testament and the first two on Old Testament with others to come) as well as in recent in-depth commentaries, this data is readily available to the public.

Figure 5.2. Steps from original text to contemporary application



The cultural background not only deepens our understanding of the original text but also provides a bridge to the current significance of the text (see chap. 17). A delineation of the customs presupposed or addressed in the text enable us to separate the underlying principles (the doctrines used to address the original context) from the surface commands (the contextualization of the deeper principles from the original situation). Next, we can identify similar situations today and allow those deep principles to address us anew.

SPECIFIC SOURCES FOR BACKGROUND MATERIAL

1. ***Old Testament allusions.*** There are more Old Testament allusions than outright quotes (see chap. 14, "The Old Testament in the New Testament"). Yet most books on the use of the Old Testament in the New focus on the quotes. As Douglas Moo states, the allusions may actually have had greater emphasis because the writer was presupposing his readers' knowledge (1983:169). This means that the source and significance of these allusions must be discovered if the original meaning of the passage is to be recaptured. I would note five principles for finding and evaluating allusions:

    1. Does the wording and the style point to an Old Testament passage? This could well demonstrate a deliberate allusion. Style, however, is difficult to evaluate. There are Semitisms (Hebrew or Aramaic style rather than Greek) and Septuagintalisms (due to the influence of the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament), but they may be unconscious rather than conscious reflections of the Old Testament. Without any linguistic similarity the possibility of an allusion should not be pressed, but the possibility of an "echo" may still be present if the content points in that direction.
    2. Consider the individual writer's traits. First Peter, Hebrews and the Apocalypse, for instance, have a very high incidence of allusions. In the cases of these books a potential allusion has greater probability.
    3. Does the reflection of an Old Testament background make sense in the context? If it is out of keeping with the thought development of the passage, it is less likely. However, if the context is favorable the allusion or echo will add richness to the meaning of the passage. For instance, the use of Isaiah 53:10, 12 in Mark 10:45 (Mt 20:28) adds the nuance of the Servant of Yahweh who atones "for the sin of many" (Is 53:12). Several

scholars (such as Hooker 1959:140-47) argue that (1) the language ("servant," "for") is not used in Isaiah 53 (see principle 1); (2) the paucity of allusions to Isaiah 53 in the Gospels makes any allusion here doubtful (see principle 2); and (3) atonement imagery does not fit the context (see principle 3). However, Moo responds that while the linguistic parallels are not exact, the conceptual meaning of Mark 10:45 is so close to Isaiah 53 that an allusion is highly probable (1983:122-27). Further, while the Gospels do not contain many direct allusions to Isaiah 53, there are many indirect reflections (see the chart in Moo 1983:163-64) and these may well have greater force. Finally, as D. A. Carson points out (1984d:432- 33), it is common in Jesus' teaching to begin with the disciples' death to self (Mk 10:43-44) and to illustrate this with the example of Jesus' atoning death (Mk 10:45). In short, the use of Isaiah 53 in Mark 10:45 is probable and becomes a powerful illustration of the servanthood attitude enjoined of the disciples there.

4. C. H. Dodd argues that an allusion or quote often presupposes the original Old Testament context behind the allusion and not just the allusion itself (1952:126-33). This is an important point. Of course, the extent to which it is true depends on the immediate New Testament context. For instance, some think that the cry of dereliction in Mark 15:34 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") should be understood in light of the whole psalm (Ps 22, see vv. 22-31) as a faith statement placing trust in the God who will vindicate (see Trudinger 1974:235-38). Yet this ignores the obvious thrust of the context, for it occurs on the cross and the sense of abandonment is paramount. The lament is stressed here, although the whole psalm may still be in the larger context. The thanksgiving may be proleptic in the cry, anticipating the later joy of the resurrection.
5. Do not overexegete. It is common, especially for Old Testament scholars, to read all their detailed exegesis of the Old Testament passage into the New Testament setting. Rather, we should seek to determine (on the basis of the interaction between the Old and New Testament contexts and the way the Old Testament passage is handled in Second Temple Jewish texts) both the aspect of meaning highlighted in the New Testament setting and the way in which the New Testament writer understood the Old Testament

passage. For instance, Hebrews 2:12-13 provides an interesting juxtaposition of three passages: Psalm 22:22 (v. 12), Isaiah 8:17b (v. 13a) and Isaiah 8:18a (v. 13b). At first glance, the Old Testament passages seem unrelated and clumsy, but when we look at their meaning in the Old Testament context and compare that with the development of Hebrews 2, the whole begins to make sense. The three, briefly summarized, speak of overlapping themes—victory in the midst of suffering (v. 12), trust in the midst of judgment (v. 13a) and promise in the midst of judgment (v. 13b). The latter two passages are concurrent in the Hebrew text but are treated separately in this epistle. In the midst of God's judgment (Is 8) the remnant place their trust in him (v. 17b) and become his children (v. 18a).

2. ***Intertestamental allusions.*** The actual quotes from intertestamental literature are sparse, but the ideas generated during the period between the Testaments are crucial for understanding New Testament doctrine. Many of the Jewish parties in the time of Christ (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes) developed during this period, so New Testament customs and culture have their antecedents here. In addition, the oral tradition has its origin during this time, and doctrines such as belief in the resurrection of the dead or baptism have strong roots here. Wisdom and apocalyptic literature flourished and are important sources for passages like the Sermon on the Mount, the Olivet Discourse or the Gospel of John. Since apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature are similar to the documents of Qumran, I will discuss principles for using this material in the ensuing subsection.
3. ***Qumran parallels.*** In the early 1950s, as a result of the idealistic fervor following the discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars made rash decisions regarding the influence of Qumran on the New Testament. For instance, John the Baptist was seen as an Essene, Jesus was considered to be modeled after the Teacher of Righteousness (the "founder" of the sect), the church was said to be the Christian equivalent of the Qumran community, the Gospel of John and the epistle to the Hebrews were declared to be Essenic documents, and many practices (such as baptism) and beliefs (such as pneumatology and eschatology) were thought to be dependent on Qumran. However, on later reflection, many of these points have been strongly modified (of these points only Hebrews is still thought by some to be strongly influenced by Qumran).

William LaSor summarizes the current scholarly opinion when he states that the two groups (Qumran and the Christians) differ in their essential historical perspectives but are similar in their religious perspectives (1972:247-54). Historically they arise from different periods, and Qumran cannot confirm or disprove New Testament data. They are independent movements that developed differently, and Qumran cannot be an antecedent of Christian ideas. However, Qumran and Christianity were both sectarian Jewish sects with similar eschatological expectations, so Qumran provides a valuable parallel for Jewish and Christian ideas. As Michael Wise states (2000:264), the Dead Sea Scrolls represent an apocalyptic Jewish movement with strong parallels to Christianity, and the Teacher of Righteousness (as seen in the "Teacher Hymns") also viewed himself as more than a prophet, who through divine revelation provided the final form of the Torah and proclaimed the imminent coming of the kingdom. The key is a proper method for utilizing Qumran (and intertestamental) backgrounds.

1. *Use a good translation.* Millar Burrows is an especially good translation, but it lacks versification. Geza Vermes and Dupont-Sommer are also good translations, but for a one-volume translation Wise, Abegg and Cook (1996) is the best and includes recently published material. A good translation will keep the interpreter from misunderstanding and therefore misusing the text. Of course, using the original Hebrew is even better, but this is not always feasible.
2. *Word studies.* For word study, use the concordance by K. G. Kuhn (1960) and its supplement in *Revue de Qumran* 4 (1963): 163-234 as well as the encyclopedia by L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (2000). These are critical for tracing ideas through the Essenic literature.
3. *Parallels.* Before alluding to a parallel, study the exact theological nuances of the Qumran or intertestamental passage before applying it to a New Testament passage. Here secondary sources are helpful, and there is a growing literature exploring intertestamental books in depth (such as in the Anchor Bible series). Since opinions vary widely it will be helpful to check more than one source. Best of all, trace parallel passages and work out the meaning for yourself before applying it to the New Testament.

4. *Intertestamental passages.* Before using the intertestamental passage to interpret the New Testament passage, make certain that the former is a true parallel and not merely a seeming parallel. The key is to note the degree to which the thrusts of the two passages in their respective contexts overlap. One should also compare the extent of the overlap with other potential parallels and determine which possibilities are the closest to the New Testament passage. Only then will it be possible to call the intertestamental passage a valid parallel.

4. ***Rabbinic parallels.*** The major problem is the dating of the Talmudic traditions. While this problem is somewhat overcome by the care with which the rabbis preserved the material, there are many debates as to which material actually fits the situation before A.D. 70. When the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans, Judaism was forced to redefine the essence of her worship and ritual. Things were never again the same, and many customs written down in the later Talmud have their origin in Judaism after A.D. 70. The Mishnah, a collection of some sixty-two tractates that collected the oral traditions that had come down on six major topics—agriculture (from the Torah), holy seasons (sabbath and festivals), marriage and family life, government and conflict, the temple, and purity laws—was codified about A.D. 200. The other rabbinic writings—the Tosefta, the midrashim, and the two Talmuds—were composed from A.D. 300-1000. So many (e.g., Jacob Neusner, Joseph Fitzmyer) believe there is little if any continuity between the Pharisees of Jesus' day and the rabbis of the later period. However, there seems little reason for so radical a skepticism, and many, like E. P. Sanders, believe a critical openness is a better response (see Maccoby 1999:898-99).

   Richard Longenecker lists four strands of Talmudic traditions that he believes are relevant: (1) practices and rules deemed by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai to be very ancient, introduced by "our rabbis taught" or such like; (2) teachings of rabbis who lived before A.D. 70 or had roots in that period (such as Pirke Aboth 1-2); (3) passages that are not a reaction to either religious oppositions (mainly Christianity) or political oppression and do not stem from a later debate or situation; (4) ancient liturgies, confessions and prayers such as the Shema or Eighteen Benedictions (1975:75).

   However, many dispute even this list. Neusner, for example, argues that we cannot assume the validity of the Talmudic dating but must

question even those that claim to be early (1983:105). Neusner argues for form-critical techniques in the use of rabbinic material.[1] I agree with the three cautions of Sanders (1977:60-61) and add a fourth:

1. We cannot assume that rabbinic discussions automatically continued Pharisaic views. While the majority of scholars hold to the basic continuity of the two groups, all agree that individual rabbinic quotes cannot be assumed to be representative of Pharisaism. This is the problem with the massive work of Herman Strack and Paul Billerbeck (1961-1965), which places quotes from third- and fourth-century rabbis alongside New Testament passages without asking whether these actually reflect first-century Pharisaism.
2. We cannot assume that the early material is authentic, that it actually represents the period claimed. The ancient rabbis may have edited and re-created many of the sayings. However, I believe we can be more optimistic than Sanders allows. As with the sayings of Jesus there is more reliability in the collection of rabbinic quotes than many scholars concede. The burden of proof is on the skeptic to disprove their reliability.
3. We cannot assume that the material is united in its views. It is varied and very eclectic. Many of the sections in fact involve rabbinic dialogue giving both sides of the question. A common pattern of religion binds the whole together but does not give a united perspective on isolated issues. For instance, several famous quotes demonstrate a misogynist strain within Judaism (such as, “Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to a woman” [*y. Sota* 19a]). These are often presented as *the* Jewish position, but this was only one strain of Judaism. The rights of women were often upheld (divorce was the husband’s prerogative but the woman was given the right to petition the court to force him to divorce her) and on occasion women filled positions of leadership (see Stagg and Stagg 1978:51-53).
4. We should consider the possibility that the New Testament and the rabbis borrowed from a common Jewish tradition. Geza Vermes posits this as a solution to the problem when a Jewish source seems to lie behind a passage but cannot be shown to be before A.D. 70 (1982:373). He would like to consider the New Testament to be a valid witness to first-century Jewish beliefs and

as such to study it as part of the line of development from Targum to midrash. When considered from this perspective rabbinic (and targumic) material takes on a new relevance. We must still be careful not to misuse this by ignoring the historical dimension (the first three bulleted items). However, as a further possibility this can be extremely helpful.

5. ***Hellenistic parallels.*** Since Hellenistic backgrounds have been so misused by the history of religions schools, some have virtually denied the relevance of Greek ideas in favor of Jewish ideas as proper backgrounds for New Testament study. However, since the work of Martin Hengel (1980:110-26) scholars have recognized that Hellenistic ideas had permeated Judaism by the Maccabean period and on into the Christian era. With the onset of the universal mission this influence had increased, and we must consider Greek as well as Jewish parallels to all New Testament literature. T. D. Alexander gives four reasons for considering Greco-Roman literature as background: (1) Biblical history is "part of 'real history,' " especially evident in the Gospels and Acts, where the events take place in a Hellenistic Jewish milieu. (2) The Bible itself is "part of 'real literature,' " as seen in the Epistles, which follow Greco-Roman letter-writing conventions. (3) Both the authors and the readers of the books lived "in a real social world," and the problems described (e.g., in Luke and Paul) were first century social issues. (4) The people of the Bible "faced real political dilemmas" (e.g., Jesus before Pilate, or Paul before Festus) (1995:109-13). It is clear that all the events of the New Testament take place in the Roman world, and therefore no study can be complete without considering the political, social, and religious pressures that the early Christians faced.

   Here of course I want to repeat the cautions on using Hellenistic material mentioned in chapter two as well as the principles for interpretation in the summary following. Hellenistic backgrounds can be extremely helpful for understanding those epistles addressed to Gentile churches and many individual customs mentioned—for instance, Greco-Roman attitudes toward women in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 or 1 Timothy 2:9-15. They also help to clarify details regarding the missionary journeys, such as divination practices behind Simon Magus (Acts 8) or the possessed slave girl (Acts 16). David Aune provides an excellent example of Hellenistic backgrounds (1983:5-26), convincingly pointing out that the throne-room scene of Revelation 4—5 is built on the imagery

of Roman imperial court ceremony. This fits the emphasis throughout the book opposing the imperial cult and provides excellent illustrations for sermons today dealing with the problem of church and state. (For an excellent overview of sources for finding material, see Alexander 1995:114-18; Stanton 1999:464-73.)

6. ***Summary.*** Since I have discussed other sources of parallels (Philo, Josephus, the Targums) in chapter three, I will not cover these here but will summarize this section with a general discussion of criteria. (1) We must be certain that the evidence comes from the same period as the passage being studied; shoddy use of period data (third-century Gnostic practices read into first-century Christian concepts) has led many to false theories. (2) We must ascertain the reliability of the evidence; often Talmudic parallels have been casually introduced as background to New Testament events like the trial of Jesus without ascertaining their reliability for first-century Judaism. (3) We dare not be selective in the evidence gathered; if we do not search widely enough we may miss the true parallel, such as Greco-Roman customs as well as Jewish in the passages on slavery. (4) Work not only on the current situation but on the historical development behind it; often the factors that led to a state of affairs are as important as the predicament itself. For instance, the development of the oral tradition in Judaism is crucial for understanding many of the conflict situations between Jesus and Judaism. (5) Remember that the biblical accounts also provide historical data. Scholars often neglect the text itself and assume all the data must come from outside sources. This is often unnecessary, for the explanation is present either in the passage being studied or in parallel passages.

SOCIOLOGY AS A TOOL FOR INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

It has become increasingly popular to employ modern sociological methods in order to study more deeply the influence of society and customs on the biblical text. This has resulted in part from a feeling that the historical-critical method has produced a vacuum in actually understanding Scripture. Many have declared the labor of the last forty years "bankrupt," stating that as a result "the biblical-theological study of the Church seems to have stood still" (Edwards 1983:431). As T. F. Best says, form (and redaction) criticism, even with an emphasis on the "life-setting" of texts, failed to describe the historical or social situation behind the literary and theological dimension: "even Paul, who springs virtually to life in his letters, was reduced inexorably to a propagator of ideas" (1983:182). The desire is to reproduce not just the thoughts but the thought world of the biblical text.

Sociology as a discipline studies the human relationships and the social changes that shape a society. As John Gager has said, most would differentiate between "social description" and "sociological interpretation" (1982:259).[2] The former deals with the "what" of the text, trying to uncover background that will help us to identify the social factors, laws and so forth behind a particular statement. For instance, we could study first-century customs regarding proper hairstyle behind the "head covering" in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (see Thiselton 2000: 828-33). Philip Richter names three types of descriptive studies (1984:78-81). The most frequent is the study of the social environment within which Israel or the church developed, such as Joiachim Jeremias's monumental portrayal of the economic, social and racial background behind first-century Jerusalem (1967). Also important is the delineation of the social history of a group in terms of movements and events, such as Carolyn Osiek and David Balch's work on the centrality of the household for the development of the early church (1997). Finally, analytical studies trace the sociohistorical development of a class or sect, such as the debate over the social level of the early Christians, whether they penetrated society from the top down (the wealthy, so E. A. Judge and Abraham Malherbe) or the bottom up (the poor, so Gager and Theissen).

Sociological interpretation studies the "why" behind the text and uses current

sociological theory not just to understand the meaning of a text but to re-create the social dynamics that led to the production of the text. Sociological study most frequently employs current sociological theories to explain aspects of Jewish or Christian history. For instance, Norman Gottwald uses a "peasant-revolt" model taken somewhat from Max Weber but primarily from Karl Marx to argue that the conquest of Canaan took place not via invasion from outside but rather via a revolt of the dissatisfied lower class in Canaan itself (1979). Gager's study (1975) first describes the early church as a millenarian movement by comparing it to Melanesian cargo cults (which also had charismatic leaders and a following from the outcast groups). Gager then uses the theory of "cognitive dissonance" (L. Festinger) to explain how Christianity as a millenarian movement survived. According to this theory the church adapted to the failure of its prophetic expectations by reworking its eschatology and instituting the universal mission. In both these cases various theories and anthropological models are applied to biblical history in order to determine "what really happened."

The modern movement (for an excellent brief history see Horrell 1999:4-12) of sociological analysis had its precursor in the University of Chicago school, particularly in the work of Shailer Matthews (*The Social Teachings of Jesus,* 1897) and Shirley Jackson Case (*The Social Origins of Christianity,* 1923). The theoretical basis, however, was not strong and the school was short-lived. As Edwin Yamauchi explains (1984:176), the "father of sociology" was Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who pioneered a "scientific" study of societal development from simple to complex forms. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied Darwin's evolutionary theories to societal change, and Karl Marx (1818-1883) wedded Hegel's dialectical theory to Ludwig Feuerbach's materialism in centering on economics as the primary cause of societal disruption. Max Weber (1864-1920) introduced the modern era; he theorized that value systems rather than economics provide the grist for the mill of sociological development. In his study of Israel (1952) Weber theorized that its concept of the covenant led Israel to unity, and the charismatic leaders during the time of the Judges molded it into a cohesive force. The second major figure was Émile Durkheim (1858- 1917), who was the first to see society as an organic whole containing many interrelated parts. This functional view had a lasting impact on sociological method. In recent decades this functional approach has been quite influential, especially in biblical studies.

Bruce Malina describes three major models (1982:233-37). The structuralist-functional approach believes that society consists of certain expected patterns of interaction (structures) that are controlled by shared purposes or concerns

(functions). In contrast to form criticism, which isolates competing traditions in Israel or the church, functionalism views both as integrated wholes and seeks to determine the larger factors that generated those movements. As also seen in literary criticism, this tendency to recognize the unity of the biblical text is a valuable corrective to historical-critical excesses. The second is the conflict model, which studies society in terms of the disagreements and power politics between the various interest groups that are represented in the larger structure. The tracing of the changes that these pressures force on a society is the task of this approach. Finally, the symbolic model studies society in terms of its deeper value system, what persons, things and events mean within the societal structure. The shared aspirations and expectations of a society determine its structure.

With respect to the church, for instance, the first approach would study how its component parts (apostles, elders, local churches, men and women as individuals) related both within the Christian society and within the larger Jewish and Greco-Roman societies surrounding the church. The conflict model would note tensions in the church (Jewish vs. Hellenistic, tradition vs. false teaching, etc.) and in the larger realm (Christian vs. Jew vs. Greek) and use these to understand the development of the church. The symbolic model would research particular symbols like power or authority (Holmberg 1978) or ritual purity (Malina 1981) as keys for understanding the early church.

PROBLEMS IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

Many criticisms can be leveled against the validity of this new school of research. Bengt Holmberg labels his chapter on this "Finding the Body—And Losing the Soul?" (1990)—an apt title. Derek Tidball (1984:106) likens the use of socioscientific criticism to "wooing a crocodile," using Winston Churchill's metaphor regarding relations with the Eastern bloc, saying, "When it opens its mouth you cannot tell whether it is trying to smile or preparing to eat you up!" I will summarize the difficulties of sociological study briefly here.

1. ***Misuse of the models.*** It is easy to read historical situations in the light of modern theories without asking whether or not these current models actually fit the ancient data. David deSilva calls this the danger of "anachronism" (2004:127). The old "Life of Jesus" scholars recast him in the mold of the then-current liberal teacher. Many sociological researchers are doing the same with Israel or the church. John Gager, for instance, has been accused of ignoring aspects of early Christianity that did not fit his millenarian model. This problem is noted often in academic circles, and it is not different among proponents of this method. Scholars often choose only those groups that fit the model they wish to impose on the data and then select those aspects from Israel or the church that fit their theory. They then studiously omit aspects in both the external model and the biblical material that are not parallel. Thomas Best labels this "the problem of personal bias" and calls for "a fundamental stock-taking by those who want to employ" later models to demonstrate biblical theories (1983:189).

   In many cases sociology is an ideological tool for proving a thesis rather than an instrument for studying a movement. Norman Gottwald is often accused of forcing his liberation theory on the data (1979). He theorizes that egalitarianism rather than monotheism was primary in Israel's "socio-economic revolution" against the Canaanites. Yahweh was the symbol of the revolution, not the reason for it. Therefore, the conquest of Canaan was socioeconomic rather than religious at the core.

As Burke Long states, “The model for contemporary analysis is an ancient revolutionary society of which religious expression was but a part. Biblical theology seems to have become a kind of liberation sociotheology” (1982:255). In a more negative vein, Edwin Yamauchi says, “Despite his massive erudition, Gottwald reads into the Old Testament his ideological biases in his imaginative reconstruction that disregards both the Biblical and the archeological data” (1984:183). In light of this problem David Horrell (1999:22-24) calls for a “critique of ideology,” that is, for an unmasking of strategies and agendas behind the attempts to read modern theories into ancient texts.

2. ***Revisionism.*** Critical scholars often seem to have a preconceived notion that the biblical history is wrong as it stands and needs to be revised. This is not a problem with the sociological method per se, since by nature this approach tends to take the biblical data more seriously than previous schools. However, many work with the results of the historical-critical method and assume the validity of those conclusions. This is the case with Gottwald. Theissen discusses the problem of history for sociological research (1982:175-79). The historian is “entirely dependent on chance sources which have survived” (p. 175), and none of those documents are framed as sociographic statements. All too often theological assertions are treated as social statements. The problem of affirming the reliability of hypotheses is immense. How does one test a case that is built on such obscure evidence? My answer is to treat the biblical text seriously as a historical record in its own right.
3. ***Tendency to generalize.*** The problem with the structuralist-functional model is that it centers on a cross-section of society and has no place for individual contributions. Theissen lumps together Jesus and the apostles as “wandering charismatics” and gives little place to differences between them (1978). The creative genius of Jesus and Paul are replaced by social forces that shaped their contributions. This makes little sense, for true genius (Galileo, Shakespeare, Newton, Einstein) transcends the society in which it appears. By failing to take account of individual contributions and by overstating the place of social pressures, one’s results are usually skewed. Best decries the “tendency in sociological theory to regularize the data in favor of interpretive theories” in light of “the extraordinary diversity of social structures” in the church (1983:192). We dare not force unity on diversity.
4. ***The paucity of the data.*** Modern sociological conclusions are not made without extensive data collected over long periods of time. In comparison

the biblical data is sparse indeed and that which we have is not couched in sociological language. It is erroneous to read theological statements as sociological evidence, and we must exercise great caution in trying to do so. For instance, Elliott has to argue that *stranger* and *alien* (in 1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:11) are used as technical terms for the dispossessed rather than as theological metaphors for the Christian as an "alien" in the world (1981:24-48). I am not convinced that he is correct exegetically, and despite all the sociological depth of the book it founders at this crucial point.

Malina responds that the task of modern study is predictive and so needs a large data base (1982:238). Since the use of the social sciences in Scripture "is oriented toward efficient causality" (reproducing the past), the amount of evidence needed is not so great. However, this is disputable because modern sociology is descriptive as well as predictive. Robin Scroggs says that "the researcher must work with the utmost caution and strictness, with adequate guard against overenthusiasm" (1980:167). DeSilva adds that the nature as well as amount of the data is problematic since sociologists depend on "living samples" against which to test their theories, so one must proceed very carefully (2004:126-27).

5. ***Tendency to debunk the systems.*** Sociologists claim that theirs is an objective or value-neutral discipline, but this is in reality a façade. Yamauchi points to Peter Berger as especially stressing this aspect (1984:181,189-90). Yet it is inherent in such an empirical system as sociology to place religious phenomena in the end within the human sphere. The spiritual experience surrounding Israel and the church is read as the product of internal factors (such as societal) rather than external (such as supernatural). As Berger himself states (*The Sacred Canopy*, p. 180), "Sociological theory must, by its own logic, view religion as a human projection."
6. ***Reductionism.*** John Elliott says, "Exegetes using the social sciences will allow everything, especially theological beliefs, to be reduced, in Durkheimian fashion, to social phenomena" (1993:88). The tendency to explain all given aspects on the basis of societal factors is reductionist at the core. To be sure, many argue that modern approaches have surmounted this obstacle. Malina claims that the use of models to explain sets of data is not reductionist (1982:237), but he does not quite explain how to avoid subsuming broad aspects of Israel and the church under general models, whether or not the data actually fits. The more sophisticated do avoid this error to a large extent. However, it is quite

common to fail here. For instance, O. C. Edwards (1983:444) critiques Elliott (1981) for his assumption that all the inhabitants of Asia Minor can be assigned the status of resident alien or that Asia Minor was primarily a rural area. Elliott has overly simplified the evidence and overstated his case. As one general observation on the more complex situation behind 1 Peter, Elliott provides very useful material. However, on the broader plane he has failed to prove his hypothesis. Even Theissen, although he avoids reductionism in his study of Corinth (1982), falls into this pitfall in his study of the disciples (1978). Theissen has artificially elevated the class of "wandering charismatic" missionaries and given the settled leaders of churches (such as Philip, Timothy, Titus) a secondary and subsidiary role. As Philip Richter says, "Theissen never really gets beyond marshalling the relevant data. He fails to offer any adequate models that begin to explain the data satisfactorily" (1984:80).

7. ***Theoretical disarray.*** There are a tremendous number of sociological theories, some more valid than others, but the practitioners often fail to recognize the difficulties in applying them to biblical material. As Yamauchi points out, this is generally true of the whole field of academic sociology (1984:179-80). He quotes Gareth Steadman Jones:

> The vague and shifting character of its object, the inconstancy of its definitions, the non-cumulative character of much of its knowledge, its proneness to passing theoretical fashions and the triteness of some of its "laws" suggest that its theoretical foundations are contestable and insecure. (*British Journal of Sociology* 27 [1976]:300).

This very lack of correlation between specific data and general theory or model is the problem at the level of application to biblical material. Practitioners are guilty of the abstraction fallacy, which tries to capture the dynamic of the ancient situations in abstract modern concepts that often remove the life and breath from the original situations. David Horrell (1999:14-15) makes this criticism of Malina, who reads modern Mediterranean categories into the ancient setting. Scroggs suggests two ways of overcoming this tendency: (1) understand the methods completely and be clear of the extent to which they apply to the data, and (2) be aware of the theoretical presuppositions when explicating the ancient situation (1983:339). I would add a third: allow the data to control and alter the models as the situation warrants.

8. ***Determinism.*** Since the social sciences center on human behavior, the possibility of divine activity is almost ruled out by definition (see Holmberg 1990:145-46). DeSilva says, “The models cease to be heuristic tools and become Procrustean beds on which the texts are made to lie and to which they are made to conform” (2004:127). To be sure, the biblical practitioners are very aware of this tendency and take care to leave room for the noumenal as well as the phenomenal realms. However, since the entire task involves searching out the societal factors behind the text, the divine element is still too often neglected. In the study of Paul as a charismatic leader, for instance, the social phenomenon is highlighted and the biblical emphasis on divine commissioning at times seems replaced by the needs of the community (see Holmberg). Moreover, society gains absolute control of all human behavior, as every contingency is explained by these societal factors. This overstatement of the influence of society is deterministic, since events in Scripture that are attributed to God are placed under the aegis of society.

EVALUATION AND METHODOLOGY

I am tempted to be as negative toward the potential of sociological research as is C. S. Rodd, who states:

> It appears to me that the difficulties posed by the nature of the evidence and the differences in culture are greater than the exponents of sociological interpretation of biblical societies recognize, despite the qualifications which they insert into their writings. . . . I would claim that the attempt to apply sociological theories to biblical documents is not likely to be fruitful. (1981:103-4)

Rodd would use such theories only heuristically to suggest further lines of research. The theorist must rigidly control conclusions, noting that such general theories never can deal adequately with the contingencies of history. Since the researcher never can "test" his conclusions as in a living society, all results will be tentative at best.

The problems enumerated here are indeed difficult to surmount. Nevertheless, we must recognize the fact that the discipline as applied to biblical studies is still developing. Sociological approaches to Scripture must be fit into a "field" approach to hermeneutics, that is, an integration of all the tools into a comprehensive whole. To date too many exponents of sociological methodology have treated it as an end in itself, resulting in overstatement and confusion of issues. I must admit that in my opinion the more important aspect is "social description," for "sociological research" (see pp. 173-74 regarding the distinction) can be too reductionistic and cavalier in its results. However, the latter does have heuristic value if the resultant models are treated as approximations rather than as established truths. On the whole, background analysis is an essential tool in the task of coming to understand Scripture in depth, and without it the exegete is doomed to a two-dimensional approach to the text.

Therefore, I would suggest the following hermeneutical guidelines for background studies, moving from the particular (social background) to the

general (sociological models). This will function as a conclusion to the whole chapter, for sociological methodology is placed within the larger context of background studies as a whole. This is the only way in which the sociological approach can have validity, when it is placed within the larger framework of the other exegetical tools as one method among many to determine the meaning of the text.

1. Make certain the passage has been studied thoroughly along grammatical-semantic-syntactical lines. The results of detailed exegesis will form the control for determining the proper background parallels to adduce in deepening the meaning of the text. For instance, I cannot decide whether Galatians or 1 Corinthians 1—3 should be paralleled by Jewish or Hellenistic background until I have studied the language and concepts Paul employed.
2. Be comprehensive in the collection of data. At times the passage itself will indicate the background material, as in the use of Old Testament quotes and allusions. In such instances one will not need to search more widely. In addition, when the narrative itself builds on Jewish customs, as in the Gospels, the source is relatively simple to define. However, many passages are ambiguous. The background to Genesis is notoriously difficult to define, and in many cases scholars despair at finding the correct parallel. For example, the ceremony of walking between the parts in Genesis 15:7-21 can have several possible meanings (see Hasel 1981b:61-78). It could signify mystical union, the transferral of life, a self-curse or self-obligation or (in Hasel's opinion) covenantal promise. In this case similar practices in the Mari letters, Assyrian treaties and vassal ceremonies all point to the covenantal aspect. This convergence of evidence is an important pointer to the meaning of the ceremony. Most of Paul's letters draw on Jewish and Hellenistic sources. The interpreter must discover all possibilities in order to study the passage properly.
3. Study the contexts of the biblical and nonbiblical passages and see which converge most closely. We desire true parallels rather than seeming parallels, and only when all the possibilities have been exhausted can we decide which is the best one. Those parallels that overlap the biblical passage to the greatest extent are the most likely. If this is true with respect to social customs it is more so in the case of sociological research when one is applying models drawn from current theories. Robert Wilson notes six guidelines: (1) be thoroughly familiar with the approaches and their limits; (2) center on the results of competent social scientists; (3)

understand the theories completely in the modern context before applying them to ancient contexts; (4) survey a wide range of societies that parallel the phenomenon being studied; (5) note interpretive schemata used to study the data and avoid them unless they are actually useful; and (6) allow the text itself to provide the controlling factor, so that the hypothesis will be tested by the biblical data (1984:28-29).

4. Do not read nonbiblical parallels into the text any further than the data allows. In other words, do not force the data to fit the theory. Instead, modify the theory to fit the data. Most important, rework only those aspects that are truly clarified further by the background material. Do not exaggerate the importance of the sociological aspects to the denigration of the individual or spiritual dimensions. Remember that the text must control the background data and *not* vice versa!
5. Go into the passage with a large volume of potential theories and allow the text to select the theory that best fits. Often sociologists, like biblical theologians, take a paradigm approach in which they artificially select a single model and then force the evidence to fit their theory, ignoring any disparate data. There is no reason why Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds cannot converge on a passage or why cognitive dissonance, conflict and structuralist-functional models cannot explain different aspects of the church's development. In modern society a sociologist works from the bottom up, from the actual social situation of a group to a model that is constructed to fit rather than is forced on the data. The same should be true of using the social sciences to understand the Bible more deeply.
6. The text is primary and not the background material. We must remember that historical-cultural exegesis is a supplement to the text and not an end in itself. Therefore, we must apply the "event" behind the text only to the extent to which it will aid in understanding the message in the text. Too many background studies end up replacing the text rather than supplementing it and deepening our understanding of it. Some passages, such as theological or creedal material, will need very little. Others, such as historical narrative, will benefit greatly; however, even here we should use cultural data only to the extent that the text allows.
7. When we move from the text to the sermon, background information has a further value. By immersing the audience in the original situation behind the text, we help them to place themselves into the world of the text and see how it was speaking to the original audience. At that time we can then help the hearers to discover situations parallel to the text in their

own life and to contextualize the principle behind the text for their current situations.

PART 2

GENRE ANALYSIS

The basic hermeneutical task outlined in chapters one to five must now be applied to specific *genres* or types of literature. This functions on several levels: the larger literary unit (such as the book of Revelation as "apocalyptic" literature), the smaller section (such as Lk 15 as a series of parables within the larger Gospel) or the individual saying (such as Acts 1:9-11 as "apocalyptic" imagery in Jesus' statement). I will adopt the classical working definition of *genre* by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren: "Genre should be conceived, we think, as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose—more crudely, subject and audience)" (1956:219). I will expand this further as we consider how to detect the genre to which a passage belongs.

The current debate over genre is whether or not it can function as a classification device. Many argue that generic categories shift from epoch to epoch depending on literary interests, and that every text differs in its use of generic forms. Therefore, they conclude, no criteria for classifying works under specific genres can be established. As I have argued elsewhere, however, these arguments are not conclusive (Osborne 1983:1-27). My primary purpose here is to enable the reader to note the characteristics of the ancient genres as a key to interpreting biblical texts. Modern categories when imposed on the biblical framework (such as modern biography or fiction as a device for understanding the Gospels) are misleading and even inimical to actual understanding. However, the application of ancient characteristics (and of those modern devices that supplement and uncover the historical approach) is a necessary hermeneutical technique.

Moreover, arguments regarding the "mixing" of genres and the difference between individual texts belonging to a particular genre do not militate against the classification function of genre. The very fact that we can identify "differences" and even classify them (such as wisdom portions of prophetic books) presupposes a larger unity. Novels do contain plot, characterization, climax and so on. Poetry does employ meter, rhythm, symmetry, parallelism and so on. Certainly novels differ radically in particular expression (such as the

French “new novel”), and some poetry employs rhyming while other stresses a free form (e.g., T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*). However, these very distinctions occur within a larger framework. Daniel contains apocalyptic sections within the larger framework of prophecy; the Gospels utilize narrative, parables, proverbs, teaching and apocalyptic, but still function overall as Gospels. Yet the very possibility of detecting the smaller generic units within the larger supports the possibility and even the importance of classifying texts along generic lines. Tremper Longman states correctly:

> While it is true that the individuality of many compositions must be maintained, the similarities between the form and content of texts must not be denied. That there are similarities between texts which can serve as a rationale for studying them as a group is especially true for ancient literature where literary innovations were not valued highly as they are today. (1983a:3-4)

Genre functions as a valuable link between the text and the reader. We cannot neglect the reader in the process of interpretation. Every interpreter comes to a text with certain expectations based in part on his or her genre understanding. If a reader expects the Gospels to contain fiction rather than history (such as understanding the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke as parable, not an actual event), the interpretation will differ quite radically. E. D. Hirsch speaks of “intrinsic genre,” meaning that every text is part of a larger group of generically related texts (1967:69-71). As readers study a particular text, their expectations are increasingly defined as they narrow the possibilities to identify the proper genre to which the text belongs. The process proceeds by trial and error, as the text progressively revises the reader’s identification. In fact, the movement is indeed a “spiral” from preliminary identification and classification to close reading to interpretation and finally to application of its significance. By applying to the text the potential extrinsic genre-types (those imposed on the text from outside) the interpreter eventually determines the intrinsic, originally intended genre and thereby is able to utilize the correct “rules” for understanding that text. For one studying an ancient text this process cannot take place automatically. The modern reader needs help in understanding how those ancient genres functioned, and that is the purpose of the chapters in part two.

Yet we must ask how one determines the genre of a particular book or passage.[1] As Wellek and Warren’s definition makes clear, there are external and internal considerations. The external aspects concern the overall structural pattern, the form (meter, rhythm, narration), style, interrelationships and content.

Internal factors include the cohesive plot, action, narrative voice, setting and language. The characteristics of works that show similarities are studied both synchronically (within the same period) and diachronically (the development of the forms). Only when we understand the historical patterns can we avoid the oft-repeated tendency to draw generic parallels from the wrong period (see also p. 172). For instance, we would have been spared Rudolf Bultmann's use of Mandaean literature to interpret John if he had realized that Gnostic literature came from a much later period and could not parallel John. The parallels must not only be sufficient to justify the inclusion of the text in the particular class, they must also be drawn from the correct period.

Genre analysis represents both large portions of Scripture (entire books) and smaller units. Poetry can be found in the Psalms, but it is also a subgenre found in both wisdom and prophetic literature. This is also true in the New Testament. Apocalyptic is not only the genre of the book of Revelation (often called "The Apocalypse"), but it constitutes a major portion of 2 Peter, Jude and 2 Thessalonians as well as minor portions of the Synoptic Gospels, 1 Thessalonians and the epistles to the Corinthians. Parable is a subgenre only, but it is so critical to the teaching of Jesus that we must treat it separately. As Lars Hartman says, genre represents a set of literary conventions shared by readers and authors: authors accept it, more or less faithfully, and shape their texts in adherence to it; readers' expectations and attitudes when approaching texts are colored by it, and it affects their understanding of texts (1983:332). This is to say that discussing genre means discussing something that has to do with communication.

I would go one step further and state that genre provides a set of descriptive matrices (Wittgenstein's "rules of the language game") that further refine the general exegetical principles elucidated in chapter one through five and allow the interpreter greater precision in uncovering the author's intended meaning. James Bailey (1995:203-10) has a four-step process for analyzing genre in the New Testament: (1) Learn to distinguish the general types of literature, for example, the way narrative is structured, the kinds of poetic patterns used by Jesus, different types of material in epistles (thanksgiving, parenesis, doxology). (2) Learn to analyze alternating narrative and speech forms, that is, distinguish pronouncement stories, dialogical material, citation stories, miracle stories. (3) Learn to recognize the "rich and varied repertoire of genres" in the New Testament. With encomium, creeds, prayers, hymns, diatribes, vice and virtue lists, household codes in the Epistles, and maxims, parables, proverbs, apocalyptic, and monologues in the Gospels and Acts, there is an amazing proliferation of literary types in both testaments. (4) Identify the "structural

features” of the various genres. The chapters of part two intend to show how to identify the major types of genre in Scripture. The purpose is to enable the reader to understand and interpret the material properly.

6

Old Testament Law

Few areas of the Bible are as confusing to the average Christian as Torah (= the law portions of the Pentateuch). Why God made certain animals and aspects of life unclean seems mystifying, and the various sacrificial rituals simply do not make sense. Let's face it; most of us have never heard a sermon on the Torah, and most of us preachers have never really thought seriously about doing such a series. Why is this? Daniel Block gives five reasons why Christians do not study the Torah passages, calling them "mythconceptions" (2005:1). (1) The *ritualistic myth* makes us feel the law portions are consumed with "boring ritualistic trivia" that have been negated by the cross. (2) The *historical myth* states that the Torah originated in an ancient culture so removed from ours that it can only be of interest to antiquarians. (3) The *ethical myth* causes us to think that the Torah "reflects a standard of ethics that is rejected as grossly inferior to the law of love" established in the New Testament. (4) The *literary myth* confuses us by leading us to believe that the genre is so different from modern style that we could never understand it. (5) The *theological myth* makes us feel the Pentateuch "presents a view of God that is utterly objectionable to modern sensitivities." The result is an aversion and confusion that leads us to avoid the Torah passages.

Let us begin by asking why God would do such a thing, that is, develop such arcane regulations. Douglas Stuart speaks of the "three defining narratives for Israel as a people" in the book of Exodus: (1) God delivered them from slavery to the most powerful empire in the world then. (2) God's Shekinah presence returned to Israel, distinguishing them from all other nations. (3) God reconstituted Israel as his special people at the foot of Mt. Sinai (2006:163). They had spent three hundred years under the Egyptian culture, and now they were a distinct people under God. It is difficult to conceive the enormity of the task and how unprepared the people were for such an undertaking. The Torah was given to Israel to guide them in that task.

THE USES OF *TÔRÂ* IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament term for "law" is *tora,* but the Hebrew term does not really mean "law" but rather refers to teaching or instruction (from the verb *hôrâ,*[1]commands or general ethical guidance. It can even include poetry (e.g., Deut 32:1-41, called *tora* in v. 32). The idea of *tora* as teaching is seen especially in Exodus and Deuteronomy and is probably the best way to understand its purpose. In Exodus 24:12 God speaks of "the tablets of stone, with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction," and in Exodus 18:20 Moses is told by his father-in-law, Jethro, to "teach them the decrees and laws" (though the word *tora* is not used here, the Torah is intended). The Israelites were to be taught especially by the priests and Levites (Deut 33:10; 2 Chron 15:3; Ezra 7:6, 10), in the family (Ex 13:8-9) and in national assemblies (Deut 31:10-12). They are primarily instructions for daily conduct, not only with reference to God but also to fellow Israelites. Still, other words are used, such as *command, judgment, ordinance* and *covenant stipulations.* At the level of command, it does come close to the idea of "law." Torah is to be "kept" and "obeyed" (Deut 31:12; 32:46). The people were expected to learn the laws and understand them, so that they could keep them at all times. Still, the use of indicatives rather than imperatives in Numbers 5—6 and Leviticus 11—15 shows that the aspect of instruction was dominant (see Selman 2003:498-99; Block 2005:5-6).

The translation of *tora* by *nomos,* "law," in the LXX and the New Testament (Mt 5:17-18; Lk 16:31), shows that the regulations were quickly thought of as legal stipulations and binding requirements by the Jewish people. As such the term *law* can refer to the 600 plus regulations either as a group ("laws") or individually, to Deuteronomy as "the Book of the Law" (Josh 1:8), to a particular section or aspect of the Torah (e.g., the Decalogue or "the law of the Nazirites" [Num 6:13]), or to the whole Jewish religious system (Rom 7:1; 1 Cor 9:20). In addition, *tora* encompasses narrative in the Pentateuch. The stories are Torah in the sense that they provide moral examples for proper living before God and of God's mighty and gracious acts on behalf of his people. Quite often, of course, they are negative stories of Israel's failure, but that also highlights God's

covenant graciousness, for he did not destroy the nation as they deserved.

In addition, there are a number of specific uses (see Enns 1997:893-98): (1) *Cultic/ ceremonial matters*—the major aspect of the Law centers on issues like sacrifices and offerings, for example, regulations in Leviticus about sin offerings or guilt offerings for unintentional sins, burned offerings for atonement, grain offerings to thank God for his provision, and fellowship offerings. It also covers regulations for sabbaths and feast days, issues on clean and unclean (see pp. 190-93), exclusion of foreigners (mostly in Ezra-Nehemiah), and idolatry. (2) *Civil, social and judicial matters*—while civil matters in ancient Israel were actually part of religious law, relationships in the social sphere were still under Torah, for example, regulations for settling disputes, cities of refuge, judicial matters. Social injustice was mentioned often. (3) *Deuteronomy —tora* is used for the regulations in the book of Deuteronomy, in fact for all the speeches of Moses with their parenetic content. Indeed, it is a title for the book in places like Joshua 1:7 or 2 Kings 23:24. It is called the "Book of the Law" in Deuteronomy 28:61, Joshua 1:8 and the "Law of the LORD" in 2 Kings 19:31. (4) *Human instructions for godly living*—in Proverbs *tora* is used for the wisdom passed on from father or mother to son and the wise to the young in Proverbs 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; and 13:14. These are godly instructions given to ensure proper conduct (see Selman 2003:499- 500; Carmichael 1985).

LAW CODES OR COLLECTIONS

It is important to realize that the legal codes of the Old Testament were not unique in the ancient world. Most of the nations in the ancient Near East had similar legal systems. Victor Hamilton names the most important, in order of antiquity: Code of Ur-nammu (named after the king of that name in Ur) c. 2050 B.C., written in Sumerian; Code of Eshnunna, the place where they were enacted near modern Baghdad, written in Babylonian c. 1980 B.C.; Code of Lipit-Ishtar, written is Sumerian c. 1930 B.C.; Code of Hammurabi, who reigned 1792-1750 B.C. during the first dynasty of Babylon; the Hittite Law Code, uncertain but possibly 1525-1500 B.C.; the Middle Assyrian Laws, from the time of Tiglath-pileser I, 1115-1097 B.C. The difference between the pagan law codes and the Israelite code is that the former were idealized representations rather than the actual demands of their day (see Hamilton, 2005: 201- 2), while the Torah seems to have been enacted. For instance, many doubt that the jubilee year (Lev 25, the forty-ninth year in which all debts were erased) was ever observed, but Leviticus 25:2-7 says a sabbatical year occurred shortly after entering Canaan, and the prophetic denunciations of Isaiah 5:8, Amos 2:6 and Micah 2:2 may mean the jubilee year had at one time been observed.

There are four collections of laws in the Pentateuch. First, there is the Decalogue and Book of the Covenant, given at Sinai in Exodus 20—23 (and reenacted in Ex 34 after the golden calf incident). *Decalogue* means “ten words” rather than “ten commandments” and provides stipulations for the covenant relationship between God and Israel; it might better be called “ ‘the ten principles’ of covenant relationship” (Block 2005:9). It follows the *suzerainty* form in which a vassal (Israel) has certain obligations established before the superior power (Yahweh). As law it is closest to the apodictic or unconditional form[2] with absolute prohibitions followed by penalties for failure (the latter not found in the Decalogue but in the blessings and cursings of the covenant).[3] The Book of the Covenant contains instructions for the building of altars, essential for experiencing the divine presence (Ex 20:22-26), a series of “regulatory principles” with primary rules introduced by *kî* and secondary rules introduced by *⊂im* that are intended as paradigmatic illustrations for resolving grievances.

The whole is framed by worship (Ex 20:23-26; 23:10-19) and shows that the primary purpose for the stipulations was maintaining the relationship with God through worship.[4]

Second, there are the "Tabernacle Laws" of Exodus 25—40, which concern God's directions for building the temple (chaps. 25—31) and the description of Israel following these instructions (chaps. 35—40), with the golden calf incident of Ex 32—34 providing a counter to the main theme, challenging God's presence and demonstrating that there could be "no other god." With this Yahweh takes up residence among his people, fulfilled when the Shekinah cloud filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34- 38). There are three main topics repeated in both sections: building the ark, the architectural plan for the tabernacle and courtyard, and the duties of the priests. The plan for the tabernacle also corresponds to the creation accounts in Genesis 1—4 (the patterns of seven divine speeches in Ex 25—31, the dividing and ordering of both the world in Genesis 1 and the tabernacle), especially with the Garden of Eden (the garden as a "sanctuary" where the Lord was present with his people, the cherubim in Gen 3:24 and Ex 25:17-22; the menorah as a stylized tree of life). So the tabernacle was a microcosm of the cosmos in miniature, a re-creation of the Garden in which Yahweh is present among his people.[5]

Third, the laws of Leviticus expand on the tabernacle laws and flow out of Exodus. Some see two main sections, each beginning with ritual laws regarding the altar and concluding with rules for ritual worship (Ex 25—Lev 16; Lev 17—27).[6] The regulations here are wide-ranging and detailed, presented from a priestly point of view and centering on the core ideas of holiness, purity, and atonement. The first seven chapters contain instruction for the laity (Ex 1—5) and the priests (Ex 6—7) regarding the various offerings. Exodus 8—9 centers on the consecration of the tabernacle and ordination of the priesthood (Ex 10 is a narrative interlude), with Exodus 11—16 dealing with uncleanness and its treatment, that is, maintaining holiness before God. One could say that the first sixteen chapters deal with the purity and holiness of the tabernacle and the worship associated with it, and Exodus 17—27 with personal and national holiness along with purity. Chapters 17—26 have been wrongly called the "Holiness Code" (since Klostermann, 1887), but in reality the whole book is concerned with holiness. This section builds on the first half by looking at cultic requirements from a community and national perspective. A wide variety of issues are addressed (food laws, sexual behavior, neighbor relations, criminal activity, eating sacrifices, sabbatical and Jubilee years, blasphemy) but all relate to Israel living before the Lord as a holy people. The laws are set in a narrative

framework, with the Lord giving them to Moses one at a time and addressing practical situations in the life of the people (see Wenham 1979:4-6; Averbeck 1997c:910-15).

Fourth, the laws of Deuteronomy (Deut 12—26) consist of a series of speeches (Deut 1:6—4:40; 5:1—26:19; 27:1—28:68; 29:1—30:20) given by Moses on the plains of Moab just before Israel entered the Promised Land. In this sense it represents an exposition on the laws given previously and is meant for the second generation of the people of Israel, structured along the lines of Near Eastern suzerainty treaties (like the Hammurabi Code and Hittite treaties).[7] At the same time, as proclamations there is a parenetic element centering on the daily conduct of the new generation about to enter the land. The previous laws were given to the generation that has now perished in the wilderness after failing at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 13—14). So Moses' first speech is a historical prologue telling how Israel failed God and had to perish in the wilderness (Deut 2:14-15) before the Lord gave the people victories over Sihon and Og (Deut 2:24—3:11). Then they were able to divide the land (Deut 3:12-20), but Moses could not enter (Deut 3:21-29). The rest of the speech calls for obedience to the law given at Horeb (the name for Sinai in Deuteronomy). The theological significance of the Sinai laws is highlighted in Deuteronomy 5—11 (including a recapitulation of the Decalogue in Deut 5:6-21), told from the standpoint of the future inhabiting of the land. So the emphasis is on remaining true to God and not failing as they did at Kadesh (Deut 9:1-3) or as in the golden calf incident (Deut 9:7-29).

The covenant laws are found in Deuteronomy 12—26, following the suzerainty format and specifically calling for covenant renewal. The principles developed here build on earlier models, especially the Decalogue (some even think they are organized around the Ten Principles) and Book of the Covenant of Exodus 20—23. They presuppose the former laws and stress the humanitarian side; love guides the relationship of God to the nation (with the imagery of Father to son) and must also guide relationships within the daily life of the people (namely, to show mercy to the weak and poor).[8] The new generation must rededicate itself to the covenant, remember the mighty deeds of Yahweh and refuse to have anything to do with foreign gods. As a review and restatement of the regulations in Exodus, there is a recontextualization of the covenant code for the new generation. Bernard Levinson argues that the legal content, formulation and sequence exhibit a hermeneutical independence and a cultural transformation in a "today" that embraces future generations.[9] There is some truth in this, though not the radical revision that Levinson proposes. Rather, the revisions ask the new generation to remember Yahweh's past deliverance of his

people and gift of the Promised Land and then to avoid idolatry, obey Yahweh, and destroy the idolatrous Canaanites (Niehaus 1997:542-43). The organization shows this, as Deuteronomy 12—13 centers on exclusive worship of Yahweh, Deuteronomy 14—15 on holiness in daily life (clean/unclean) and social ethics (providing for the poor), Deuteronomy 16:1-17 on pilgrimage festivals, Deuteronomy 16:18—21:9 on civil authority (kingship, priesthood, prophecy, judicial and military matters, murder), Deuteronomy 21:10—25:19 on human affairs (marriage and family, true religion, illicit mixtures, sexual misconduct) and Deuteronomy 26 on worship and commitment in covenant renewal.[10]

McConville argues that Deuteronomy is meant as a constitution for Israel. The *torah* is seen as a gift by the grace of God, meant to be lived in a society that protects the helpless and the poor. As the chosen people, Israel is to live apart from other nations and as a brotherhood that transcends tribal distinctions as well as social differences like slave-master, male-female, or rich-poor. Deuteronomy develops a religion of the "heart" centering on love of Yahweh (Deut 6:5). A theology of the land centers on the control of Yahweh (not the king) and the centrality of worship. The idea of covenant is particularly rich, encompassing promise, command, loyalty and the movement from Horeb (Sinai) to Moab, with the central aspect of covenant renewal. The "chosen place" (a constant emphasis) centers on the life of the people as a journey before the Lord, with the divine name and presence being the essence of the sovereign control of Yahweh over his people.[11]

Block asks about the significance of these laws for the saints of the old covenant, beginning with Deuteronomy 6:20 where Moses asks how they will answer their children in succeeding generations when asked what the laws mean. In other words, the first purpose of the Torah was to transmit the faith of the earlier age to later generations. That is, the ceremonial, moral and civil regulations offer a way of responding to the grace of God in salvation and the gracious gift of the land, enabling the people to maintain their covenant relation to Yahweh. To most Christians they were burdens the nation had to bear, but the Old Testament does not really perceive them that way. They were more than that. God would hardly have delivered his people from the "burdensome and death-ridden slavery of Egypt" only to burden them under even more heavy and difficult requirements (2005:17-19; 2005a:4-6).

Block suggests several answers: (1) Obeying the law was not meant as a "precondition to salvation, but as the grateful response of those who had already been saved." The stipulations were a sign of God's grace, his covenant meant to keep them holy (Ex 19:4-6). (2) The regulations were not a duty imposed on the

people but an expression of their covenant relationship. (3) They were also “the precondition to Israel’s fulfillment of the mission to which it had been called and the precondition to its own blessing.” (4) Both God and Moses actually considered the Torah “a supreme and unique privilege (Deut 4:6-8)” that was a sign of God’s incredible favor (Deut 4:1-8), especially compared to the nations around them that could only hope to satisfy the capricious gods for offenses about which they had no idea. (5) Obedience was an outward expression of an inward fear and faith in light of the covenant love God had showered on them (e.g., Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6-10). (6) The rules are seen holistically as part of the whole of life under the suzerainty of Yahweh. (7) God and Moses considered the stipulations to be comprehensible and achievable (Deut 30:11-20) (Block 2005:20-27; 2005a:15-18).

In conclusion, to the modern reader the Torah regulations of the Pentateuch may seem capricious, arcane and confusing. However, each one makes perfect sense in the semi-nomadic culture of the wilderness wanderings and the early agrarian economy of Israel in the Promised Land. This is where good commentaries are absolutely necessary to understand the material. When we see how the rules applied to the life of holiness God mandated for his people, and how many of them related to the pressures of the pagan religions that surrounded them, then they are quite meaningful. Moreover, when we realize the cultural matrix and the theological purpose of them, then the underlying principles are quite transferable to our own situation. We have the same needs and problems (their capitulation to the ways of the Canaanites is very comparable to the growing secularity of the modern church). We even have an idol on our shelf—our checkbook. It just looks different!

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

We cannot understand the regulations for clean-unclean without recognizing the centrality of holy-common for the life of God's people. God is essentially holy; this is the primary attribute that defines his character. His two interdependent aspects, justice and love, flow out of his holiness. As Exodus 15:11 says, "Who is like you—/ majestic in holiness." And Hannah in her prayer of 1 Samuel 2:2 asserts, "There is no one holy like the LORD." In addition, God's word is holy (Jer 23:9), and his promises are holy (Ps 105:42). As the "Holy One of Israel" he is supreme over Assyria and its gods (2 Kings 19:22), his greatness is to be praised (Is 12:6; Ps 71:22), and he confronts the unworthy (Is 29:20). Even the revelation of his divine name flows out of his holiness. J. E. Hartley states, "God's giving the divine name on holy ground underscores the truth that the God of revelation, Yahweh, is indeed holy."[12] Thus God's primary demand for his people is, "Be holy, because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2). The key to issues of holiness as well as the notions of cleanness and uncleanness is how common people can experience a holy God. The purity laws of the Old Testament are intended to answer this question. In fact, it could be said that the whole legal system of Israel (the sacrifices, temple worship, everyday religious life) flows out of this question.

It is also important to realize that the concept of holy-common relates to the "status" of persons, places, things or times while the concept of clean-unclean relates to their "condition" before the Lord. For instance, a priest was a holy person in contrast to a common Israelite. But he could be in the condition of uncleanness if he had intercourse with his wife (nevertheless, it would not change his status as a holy person) (Averbeck 1997a:481). Some things are inherently holy (God, the firstborn, the tabernacle), while others must be made holy by proper behavior (the people via obeying the regulations, the sabbath by ceasing from work). Ritual procedures include anointing oil, sacrifices and offerings, elevating objects in the sanctuary, and dedicating something as holy (Wright 1992b:244).

What made the purity issues so critical in the Levitical system is the fact that in the tabernacle and temple Yahweh was actually present among his people. A

holy God must destroy all uncleanness from the land, so what is to keep him from destroying Israel? This is exactly what happened to Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10, when they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord and were consumed by fire from heaven. God's holiness cannot tolerate the unclean and will "consume" it. Thus in Leviticus 15:31 the purity laws are seen as necessary so that the people will be acceptable to Yahweh and will not defile his dwelling place, lest they be destroyed. An unclean person entering the sanctuary will bring God's wrath down on the nation. Richard Averbeck lists two things the priests were to do in this regard: maintain the sanctuary so it reflects the holiness and purity of the Lord, and instruct the people to honor the Lord by obeying the regulations regarding clean and unclean in three areas—the holiness and purity of God's presence in the tabernacle (Lev 10—16), maintaining the holiness and purity of Israel contra the other nations (Lev 17—20), and maintaining holiness and purity in their worship of Yahweh as a nation (Lev 21—27) (Averbeck 1997a:480).

The purpose of laws relating to clean and unclean were intended to help the people move back and forth between these conditions and to maintain their relationship to a holy God. The passages of special relevance are Lev 10—15; 18—22; Num 5—9; 18—19; Deut 12—15; Ezek 22; 24; 36—37; 39; 43—44. Leviticus contains certain summary sections that are particularly helpful (Lev 11:46-47; 13:45-46; 14:54-57; 15:11-33; 16:29-34) (Averbeck 1997a:477, 482). There are instructions concerning clean and unclean animals (Lev 11), which relate to clean and unclean foods ("You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten" [Lev 11:47]), and there are clean and unclean people (Lev 12—15).

Laws of clean and unclean centered only on animals and people. There were no unclean plants. The effects on the Fall centered on animate life, and the rules for clean and unclean follow the orders of creation to some extent. The categories of Leviticus 11:46 follow Genesis 1:24-31—animals, birds, water creatures and ground-creeping land creatures. There are four major theories for explaining the purity regulations: (1) They were hygienic and were meant to maintain the health of the people (e.g., the diseases carried by pork or rabbits—the view of many medieval rabbis). [13] (2) To separate Israel from the surrounding nations and protect them from foreign religious practices, including diet (cf. Lev 11:44-45)—the view of many of the church fathers).[14] (3) Clean animals represented behavior God wanted among his people, corresponding to the wholeness and completeness of God. The division of the animal world into unclean, clean and sacrificial parallels the division of humanity into unclean,

clean and priestly, and the division of foods into edible and inedible corresponds to the division of humankind into holy Israel and the Gentile world.[15] (4) The opposition between life and death, both in terms of protecting animals from wholesale slaughter (by limiting the number of animals that can be eaten) and in terms of death as the opposite of life-giving holiness.[16] Averbeck's view seems best when he posits an intersection of three factors: the structure of the animal world itself, the need to avoid the eating of blood by avoiding carnivorous animals or birds, the need for the Israelites to separate themselves from the surrounding cultures, even at the level of diet (Averbeck 1997a:484). I would add that the idea of the wholeness and holiness of God is the flip side of the need to separate themselves from the nations and is also part of the equation.

So the following classifications of clean and unclean animals/food are delineated: (1) land animals that chew the cud (vegetarians) and have cloven feet (probably its relation to human feet) are clean (Lev 11:3-8; Deut 14:3-8; e.g., oxen, sheep and goats among domesticated animals; deer, gazelle, antelope and mountain goat among wild animals), (2) fish with fins and scales can be eaten (Lev 11:9-12; Deut 14:9-10; e.g., catfish, eels and rays could not be eaten), (3) instead of a principle for birds, twenty birds that cannot be eaten are named, mainly birds of prey (Lev 11:13- 19; Deut 14:11-18; e.g., eagle, vulture, falcon, raven, several kinds of owl, hawk, stork, heron), (4) winged insects that walk on all fours are unclean, possibly because they swarm and have no holistic movement, but four kinds that hop can be eaten, namely, locust, katydid, cricket and grasshopper (Lev 11:20-23), (5) animals that swarm (i.e., dart here and there) are unclean (Lev 11:29-30, e.g., weasel, rat, mice, lizards). A lengthy discussion of the carcasses of insects and swarming animals making people and utensils unclean is found in Leviticus 11:24-28, 31-38, undoubtedly because they get into homes and pollute utensils, food and so forth.

With respect to humans, there are many more laws of purity. The purpose was to enable the Israelites to have a relationship with the holy God by maintaining ritual purity. To do so, they must be whole/clean before entering any sacred space, lest the holiness of God destroy them. I will begin with Leviticus 12—15. First, there is purification after childbirth. The mother is unclean more from the discharge of blood than from the birth, since blood signifies life (Lev 12:4-5, 7). The mother will make a purification offering forty days later for a boy and eighty days later for a girl. The reason is not explained—it may have to do with the place of the sexes in ancient society. Then there is impurity from infectious skin diseases (Lev 13). "Leprosy" then was not so much Hansen's disease as any infectious skin eruption. [17] Once contracted, the person would be quarantined for

two weeks (to make sure it is not just a rash), then forced out of the community (Lev 13:4-8), because everyone around the person will become unclean. They must tear their clothes, have unkempt hair, cover the lower part of their face and call out “unclean” whenever anyone approaches (Lev 13:45-46). The recovery demands an examination by a priest followed by a complex ceremony over eight days to pronounce the person clean (Lev 14:1- 32). There are similar regulations for mildew in clothing and houses (Lev 13:47-59; 14:33-57). Finally, Leviticus 15 centers on uncleanness caused by male (vv. 2-18) and female (vv. 19-30) sexual discharges.

In Numbers 19, another source of uncleanness was contact with a corpse or being in a room with a corpse (even animal carcasses in Lev 11), which made a person unclean for seven days. In fact, if anyone stepped on a grave, they were unclean for seven days. The process of purification took seven days, with sprinkling on the third and seventh days with water mixed with the ashes of a red heifer (Num 19:17-19).

Purity regulations are quite confusing, but here the central theme of maintaining holiness is essential. Sadly, most today have lost any sense of holiness at all, even though the recognition of holiness is absolutely required for a relationship with God. In our growing secularity (both in society and in church), holiness has become viewed more as an option than a necessity. As a result, too many Christians today have little relationship with God. We need to contextualize the purity laws as maintaining holiness in our daily lives so that God can truly be first.[18] On individual regulations, the better commentaries will help to understand the cultural and religious bases, and show how the theological perspectives implied in the laws can be applied to the comparable modern situation.[19]

THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

Virtually all ancient religions had a sacrificial system. Sacrifices and offerings were the central aspects of the Jewish religion, yet few understand why the system existed or why God established it in the first place, let alone how the complex system fit together. “Offering” was the broader term, speaking of all gifts “presented” or “brought near” (Heb *qrb*) to God. “Sacrifice” (Heb *zbh*) refers specifically to an animal offering, while “offering” could be grain or animal. Contrary to popular understanding, the practice of sacrificial offerings did not begin with Moses and Sinai. The very first we know of was presented by Cain and Abel (Gen 4:2b-5), then Noah built an altar and gave burned offerings after the flood (Gen 8:20-21). Abraham did so as well (Gen 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:2, 13), as did Isaac (Gen 26:25), Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:7) and Moses in Exodus 17:15 (before Sinai). In fact, altars continued to be built even after the tabernacle was constructed (Deut 27:5-7; Judg 6:24-27; 1 Sam 7:17). Still, the sacrificial system was tied to the tabernacle and temple for the most part.

Quite a few theories have arisen to explain the sacrificial system. Many are steeped in critical assumptions and reductionistic theories, but some are quite helpful. Gary Anderson surveys the social science explanations, beginning with Edward Tyler (1871) who reduced all sacrifices as gifts made to a deity as if the deity were a human in order to get something from the deity in turn. J. B. Frazier (1890) called it a ritual slaying or murder of a divine king to aid the crops. Robertson Smith (1889) labeled it a slaying of a totemic animal representing the tribe and its god, with the consuming of its flesh signifying communion with the god, thus sustaining the life of the community. It then evolved into the complex system of the Hebrews. H. Hubert and M. Mauss developed this into a gift that linked the profane and sacral worlds, with the animal partaking of both realms (the physical body and the spiritual life), thereby representing the sacrificer in a moment of consecration. The person gives a little (an animal) and receives much (divine blessing) in return. Another theory that has become popular is the sacrifice as food for the gods, with the altar called “the table of Yahweh” and the sacrifice “a sweet savor to Yahweh” (Anderson 1992:871-72).

Averbeck begins with the recent thinking of Mary Douglas, who describes the

basis of ritual in analogical thinking, namely, the perceived reality in terms of relation with supernatural beings. This leads to analogical actions in which the thinking is acted out and rules are established for the ritual behavior. The problem is that ritual texts do not explain the meaning of the rituals but rather display the rules. To understand them, one must enter the world of the ritual experientially and see the internal sets of analogies that enact the behavior and visualize the world of analogical relationships in terms of engaging the ritual world of the performance.[20]

Averbeck then sees a combination of three theories as best explaining the meaning of the sacrificial system. First, the gift theory looks at the offerings as a gift to Yahweh expressing homage, thanksgiving and gratefulness. One of the terms for a grain offering, *minhâ,* means a "tribute" or "gift" (Gen 4:3-5). Also, *qorban* means a "gift" as well as an "offering." In Numbers 6:14-15 it is used for all the offerings that conclude a Nazirite vow—burned, sin and peace offerings as well as the grain and bread offerings. The term *⊂išeh* means a "(food) gift, present" and refers both to burned meat offerings (Lev 1:9) and grain offerings (Lev 24:7, 9). At this point the idea of offerings of "food" for Yahweh is sometimes found (Lev 3:11, 16; 21:6, 8; Num 28:2, 24) as is the idea of the offering as a "pleasing aroma" (Lev 1:9; 2:2; 3:5; Num 15:3, 7). The lights in the holy place and the incense would give the impression that Yahweh lived there, and the morning and evening offerings could be seen as constituting his breakfast and dinner. This does not mean they thought he actually did so, but it enhanced the image of the sanctuary with the ark as his physical dwelling place (Shekinah).

Second, the communion theory builds on this, looking on the offerings as establishing personal communion with Yahweh. More than anything else, relationship with Yahweh was at the heart of the religious system of the Jews. The fat, kidneys and liver of the peace or fellowship offerings were thought as food gifts to Yahweh (the blood and fat belonged to him) but also a communal meal with Yahweh as the worshipers ate the meal (Lev 3:3-5; 7:22-25). Eating enacted a kind of table fellowship with Yahweh and established a bond or relationship with him (Deut 12:5-12).

Third, the consecration theory views the sacrifice as a consecration to the Lord; when they laid their hand on the animal, they were dedicating it to Yahweh (Lev 1:4; 3:2; 4:4) rather than transferring their sins to it in a way the high priest did when he laid hands on the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement and transferred the nation's sins to it (Lev 16:21-22). The purpose here was to maintain the holiness of the people. Israel was constituted a holy nation by the covenant ratification ceremony of Exodus 24:3-8, when the blood was splashed

on the people, signifying their consecration to Yahweh. Furthermore, the ceremony of blood in the guilt offering of Leviticus 14 for a leper was a reconsecration of them as they rejoined the holy community. Blood was splashed on the altar and then the person to signify that the person was reconnected to God and sanctified in a renewed relationship with Yahweh (Averbeck 2003:708-9; and 1997b:998-1003).

One other aspect must be emphasized, that of atonement. The Hebrew verb *kipper* could mean "to pay a ransom price" or "to cover" but probably comes from the Akkadian *kuppuru* and means to "cover, wipe away, purge" (Averbeck 1997a:691-97). The idea is that the sins are wiped away or removed, resulting in forgiveness. Atonement has three ramifications—consecration (i.e., changing the status of a person from unclean to holy), purification (i.e., changing the condition of a person from unclean to clean), and forgiveness, relating to the removal of guilt and the obedience that results (Averbeck 1997d:704-5).

There are five primary types of sacrifices, discussed in Leviticus 1—7. Structurally, if we consider Leviticus to flow directly out of Exodus (which makes a great deal of sense and is the way these books were written), then Leviticus 1—7 is framed by passages on the consecration of the tabernacle and priesthood (Ex 40; Lev 8). The whole section describes the events at the completion of the erection of the tabernacle. The Lord commands Moses to do so in Exodus 40, and Moses does so before the assembly of the people in Leviticus 8. Leviticus 1—7 then tells what the priestly duties in the tabernacle entail. (Averbeck, *DOTP*, 710).

First, the burned offering is described in Leviticus 1, from the Hebrew *ʿôlâ*, "an offering of ascent." It was totally burned on the altar, with the aroma "ascending" to God. These are animal offerings consisting of perfect male specimens from cattle (Lev 1:3-9), sheep and goats (Lev 1:10-15) or, for the poor, birds (Lev 1:14-17). The offerer would lay hands on the animal and consecrate it to the Lord, slaughter it (with the priests splashing the blood at the sides of the altar [Lev 1:5]). The animal was then skinned and cut up and placed on the altar (a large altar 7'6" by 7'6" by 4'6"). The purpose was a gift presented to God to please him and effect atonement. It does not so much remove sin as appease God's wrath and make fellowship possible. As such it would both cleanse the person and satisfy God's wrath when he accepted it as a "pleasing aroma" (Lev 1:4, 9). The whole animal (apart from its skin [Lev 7:8]) was burned on the altar and presented along with cereal and drink offerings in the temple every morning and night as a sacred meal for Yahweh.[21]

Second, the grain or cereal offering (that followed the daily burned offering [Num 28]) is described in Leviticus 2 and Leviticus 6:14-23. Several different

kinds were offered—sifted grain, baked cakes (cooked in an oven) or wafers (cooked on a griddle), and crushed grits of the first ripe grain (Lev 2:1-7, 14-16). Oil would be added as well as salt and sometimes incense (Lev 2:1, 2, 13). The purpose was to present a sweet-smelling aroma to Yahweh (Lev 2:2). The offerer would give it to the priest who would place a handful on the altar as a burned "memorial portion" to Yahweh (Lev 2:2, 9, 16), that is, a "reminder" that Yahweh deserves the whole but is pleased to accept a portion as well as to "remind" the person of the reason (i.e., the iniquity) for bringing the offering. The rest of the offering was "most holy," so only the priests would consume it.

The offerer would also bring drink with it (see Num 15:1-16 for the varying amounts with different types of offering) and with the burned offering provided a balanced meal (meat, bread, drink) for Yahweh (see p. 195 on this aspect). This offering was considered a "gift" or "tribute" to Yahweh (from the Heb *minchah*). It was often a thanksgiving offering at harvest time (Deut 26:9-10) but could also be an offering to remember iniquity, as when a man suspected his wife of adultery (Num 5:15). Yeast and honey were prohibited, probably because fermentation was viewed as corruption. When used with the burned offering, it signified thanks for the forgiveness experienced in the burned offering as well as a consecration of the person to God.[22]

Third, the peace or fellowship offering is described in Leviticus 3 and was a "sacrificial" offering (Heb *zebah*) involving cattle (Lev 3:1-5), sheep (Lev 3:6-11) or goats (Lev 3:12-17)—unlike the burned offering, female as well as male animals could be presented (Lev 3:1). It was considered a "food offering for Yahweh" (Lev 3:5, 11, 16) and was optional, presented as a confession offering, a free-will offering, or to fulfill a vow (Lev 7:12-18). As with the burned offering, the offerer laid his hand on the animal and then slaughtered it, then the priest sprinkled blood on the side of the altar, but unlike the other two the people would share in the meal. Unlike the burned offering, only the kidneys, fat covering the intestines, and liver (plus the fat of the tail for sheep) were burned on the altar as a food offering to Yahweh (Lev 3:3-5, 9-11). Also that same day, the offerer, family and friends joined in a sacred meal before Yahweh (Lev 7:15-20; Deut 12:7). The animal's breast was a "wave offering" and the right thigh a "tribute offering" intended for the priests alone (Lev 7:28-34). There were three types of peace offerings—a confession or thanksgiving offering either to confess sins and seek God's intervention or to thank God for that intervention after it occurred (eaten the same day), a votive offering connected to a promissory vow intended to gain God's help, and a free-will offering which could fit any purpose and was primarily thanks for his goodness (the latter two were eaten the first and second day [Lev 7:11-18]). The meaning of this offering is first to establish

communion with the Lord and then to bring peace or general well-being to the worshiper.[23]

Fourth, the sin or purification (*hattā't* has both connotations) offering is described in Leviticus 4:1—5:13; 6:24-30 and was used both for moral failure and for physical impurity (e.g., after the birth of Jesus [Lk 2:22-24]). The description in Leviticus 4—5 centers on the sin aspect, presented in two sections, inadvertent (meaning "in error" more than unintentional, so applicable to conscious sins) offenses against God (Lev 4:1-35) and sins of omission (Lev 5:1-13). As such it was the primary atonement offering involving blood. Each section of Leviticus 4—5 begins with "If anyone sins" and then closes with "the priest will make atonement . . . and they will be forgiven." Though required, it seemingly was offered less frequently than the others (Num 28—29). The meal aspect was not as important as the splashing of blood. There were four types—of the priest (a bull [Lev 4:3-12]), of the whole congregation (a bull [Lev 4:13-21]), of the leader (a male goat [Lev 4:23-26]) and of the common Israelite (a female goat or lamb [Lev 4:27—5:13]). The poor could substitute two doves/pigeons or a grain offering (Lev 5:7, 11-13; Lk 2:24). For the first two groups the priest sprinkled the blood with his finger seven times before the veil between the holy place and the holy of holies, while for the second pair he placed the blood on the horns of the altar of burned offering, because the first pair were admitted to the sanctuary (the congregation included symbolically in the priest) while the second pair could go no further than the altar. The point was that both sin and ritual impurity would contaminate the tabernacle and had to be expiated.[24]

Fifth, the nature and meaning of the guilt or reparation offering (Lev 5:14—6:7) have been quite debated, especially in its relation to the sin offering. It has been said that the first was for sins of ignorance and the second for intentional sins that have no witnesses (Josephus), or for mortal sins (sin offering) and venial sins (guilt offering, so Origen), or for intentional sins (sin offering) and unintentional sins (guilt offering, so Augustine). Recently there has been some consensus that the sin offering dealt with contamination of the tabernacle and the guilt offering with desecration or trespassing against holy things. When a violation occurred, the holy item must be reconsecrated, and restitution must be made for the violation. It is not clear what constituted such a trespass. Leviticus 2:10-16 provides one example, asserting that when holy food has been wrongly consumed by a common person, he or she must make restitution and add a fifth of the value (Lev 22:14). Another example is seen in a person who has unintentionally taken sacred property; he or she again must return it and add a fifth of its value (Lev 5:17-19). Often the person suspected the violation had

occurred but did not know how. Then no restitution could be brought, but the offering was still made. If a person took someone else's property and then made a false oath that they had not, full restitution plus a fifth more must again be made and then the reparation offering presented (Lev 6:2-7). Three other occasions are mentioned elsewhere—the cleansing of a leper (Lev 14:12-28), premarital sex with a slave woman (Lev 19:20-22), and defiling a Nazirite vow (Num 6:12). All deal with defiling a sacred object (the body, another's property, a vow to the Lord). Along with the restitution, they were to bring either a ram or male lamb without defect (no other kind of animal) to the altar of burned offering, perhaps laying hands on the animal (though it is not mentioned) and then killing it and splashing blood on the altar. The fat and entrails were burned on the altar, and only the priests were allowed to eat the meat.[25]

In conclusion, the sacrifices more than any other thing were intended for the forgiveness of sins and the removal of guilt, thus for maintaining one's communion with a holy God. The different kinds of sacrifices and offerings all center on the basic issue of holiness—how a person with sin, violations against God and impurities can stand in the presence of a holy God. Inner holiness is more important than the outward system. This is seen in those passages that contrast the outward act to the inward reality, such as Hosea 6:6, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, / and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings" (cf. 1 Sam 15:22-23; ; Is 1:11-14; Jer 7:21-23; Amos 5:21-27; Mic 6:6-8).[26] The issue of clean and unclean tells what types of things render a person unable to stand before God, and the offerings tell how that person can be cleansed so as to be able to be in God's holy presence. The reason for a blood sacrifice is simple. The holiness of God would consume any unworthy person, and the animal then stands as a substitute for the guilty person (Fee and Stuart 2003:178). They were also gifts given to God in grateful worship and offerings to maintain communion with God. God in his grace had revealed to his people rituals that would satisfy him, if they were performed with pure hearts and preconditioned by holy everyday living.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt 5:17). Yet Paul could say, “Christ is the end of the law” (Rom 10:4); “you also died to the law through the body of Christ” (Rom 7:4); and “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (Gal 3:25). Hebrews states, “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear” (Heb 8:13), and “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming” (Heb 10:1). The Matthew text is the key one, for Jesus is asserting that the Torah has not been abrogated and in fact is intact in him. Jesus followed Torah: At the four corners at the bottom of the robe he wore the “tassels” required by Numbers 15:38-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12 (Mt 9:20—they were to remind the people to obey the divine commands), and he paid the temple tax (Mt 17:24-27). When he ignored a practice, it was part of the oral Torah rather than the written code. Douglas Moo argues correctly that *fulfill* in Matthew 5:17 means Jesus does not abolish the law but “brings it to its intended eschatological climax,” that is, his teaching transcends the law and completes it (Moo 1992:457). The Torah is complete in him. Paul and Hebrews are in agreement, for they believe the new covenant that Christ brought fulfilled the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Again, the law had not been abolished, but it had been completed, and the ceremonial laws were no longer binding. In the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, the sacrificial system was no longer necessary, and there was no need to repeat the Day of Atonement every year (Heb 8—10).

Daniel Block offers five suggestions as to how Christians can approach Torah passages: (1) As divinely inspired Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17), we must recognize their ethical and theological relevance, thus studying and applying them (Ezra 7:10). (2) Familiarity with the Old Testament laws is necessary for a true understanding of Jesus’ and Paul’s ethical teaching. (3) We must respect the distinctions—criminal, civic, family, cultic and social laws—and utilize cultural background information to unlock the theological message. (4) We must investigate “the theological underpinnings and social function” of the individual regulations to unlock their significance; thereby we can determine their

“permanent relevance.” (5) We must contextualize the “underlying principles” of the cultural and context-specific laws and apply it properly to situations today. One issue that must come through is the premise that obedience to God’s commands is the necessary bridge to well-being, taught by God in the Old Testament and Christ in the New Testament (Block 2005:31-34).

Christians must remember that the Old Testament is as much divine canon as the New Testament. As such, it is binding; the only question is in what sense is it binding. The Torah does not consist simply of “types of Christ” that have relevance only as pointing to him. It is meant to be applied directly just like the New Testament. When we preach the stories and regulations of the Pentateuch, we must discover its original purpose, uncover the cultural specifics and apply its theological message *directly* to us today. Yes, we no longer follow the food laws, purity regulations or sacrificial system, but they have not been abolished. They have been fulfilled in Christ, so we must determine their theological purposes and apply them to current situations. We need holiness and a proper relationship with God just as they did, and the legal regulations properly understood can help us center on those critical areas of the Christian life.

7

Narrative

The current interest in literary criticism in biblical studies was spawned in large part by the failure of form criticism and redaction criticism to interpret the text. The tendency to break the text into isolated units is widely perceived as counterproductive, and so scholars turned to the field of narrative criticism to breach the gap (see the excellent summary in Petersen 1978:9-23). Narrative studies recognize that meaning is found in a text as a whole rather than in isolated segments, and so narrative criticism has become "the new kid on the block." Yet like all fads it has its dangers, such as the tendency to ignore or even reject the historical element in the text and a philosophical stress on the reader as the agent in producing meaning (see apps. 1-2). Therefore narrative criticism as developed here should never be done by itself but should be combined with source criticism and redaction criticism, which will act as a corrective to its ahistorical tendencies and to the excesses of its stress on the text as a final product rather than as a developing unit (see the conclusion to this chapter). Nevertheless, it is an invaluable aid in the task of interpreting a text and is one of the more positive "schools" of criticism to have appeared in recent years.

The major premise of narrative criticism is that biblical narrative is "art" or "poetry," thus centering on the literary artistry of the author. While many would not deny the presence of a historical nucleus, the tendency is to treat the biblical stories as "fiction" (with Sternberg being a notable exception). It is certainly true that there is little difference (at the genre level) between historical narrative and fiction, since both utilize the same methods to tell the story: plot, characters, dialogue and dramatic tension. In fact there is nothing inherently antihistorical in taking a "fictive" approach to biblical narrative.[1] Rather, such a perspective simply recognizes the presence of the "story" genre in biblical history.

As many have noted, the biblical narratives contain both history and theology, and I would add that these are brought together via a "story" format.[2] The historical basis for the stories is crucial, but the representation of that story in the text is the actual object of interpretation. While I believe that background is critical in biblical study, it must be controlled by the text and not vice versa (see chap. 5). Our task is to decipher the meaning of the historical-theological text in

biblical narrative, not to reconstruct the original event.

INTERPRETING BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

There are four aspects to studying biblical narrative (Old Testament or New Testament) —source, form, redaction and narrative criticism. These are not just four critical schools but more importantly four perspectives from which to appraise the text. Each adds significant nuances that enhance the understanding of how the text was produced and what it means. In this chapter we are centering on the fourth, but it is important to understand how all four interrelate, so each of the first three will be summarized.

1. ***Source criticism.*** Source critical issues in Old Testament narrative center on authorship issues—Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch or JEDP, the Deuteronomic corpus—while those in the New Testament center more on the literary interrelationship of the Gospels. While the JEDP hypothesis has controlled critical scholarship for over a century, it has come under fire recently and a cautious acceptance of the unity of the Pentateuch and Mosaic authorship is not out of the question (see Wenham 1999:116-44; Baker 2003:798-805). Whatever one's view, narrative criticism treats the five books of Moses as a unified composition held together by repetitive story lines, leitmotifs, type scenes, structural elements like chiasm and inclusion, and the like. There is an ongoing unity in characters, theme and perspective (see Hawk 2003:536-43). In the Gospels the issues are equally complex. Is there literary dependence between the Synoptic Gospels, and if so is Mark or Matthew the original Gospel? The number of passages that have nearly exact verbal correspondence (e.g., Mk 1:21-28 = Lk 4:31-37; Mk 8:1-10 = Mt 15:32-39) and those with the same order of pericopae (e.g., Mt 12:46 = Mk 3:31—6:6a = Lk 8:19-56) demand some type of literary relationship.

   The vast majority of scholars are affirmative on literary dependence, and three models have been suggested—Matthew first, used by Mark, which was used by Luke (Augustine); Mark first, used by Matthew and Luke (H. J. Holtzmann 1863; B. H. Streeter 1924); Matthew, with Luke using Matthew, and Mark using Matthew and Luke (J. J. Griesbach 1783;

W. R. Farmer 1964). The latter two have dominated. This is not the place for a lengthy presentation (see Black and Beck 2001), but there is valid reason for the dominance of the two-document hypothesis, that Matthew and Luke used Mark and Q (from the German *quelle* or source, for the 230 verses, mainly sayings of Jesus, shared by Matthew and Luke). Mark seems the "more difficult reading" in terms of both language (Matthew and Luke smooth out his language in several places) and theology (e.g., Matthew and Luke softening Mark's "hardness of heart" in Mk 6:52; 8:17 or Mark's "Why do you call me good?" in Mk 10:18). For these and other reasons Markan priority seems the better hypothesis (see Osborne and Williams 2002). This is important for redactional choices, which to an extent depend on who used whom (see p. 202).

2. ***Form criticism.*** There is no need to dwell on the debate over form as a criterion of authenticity that consumed critics from 1920-1960. That centered on the view that the Gospel stories floated orally and independently for thirty years and were only written down after considerable change on the basis of the kerygmatic needs of the church. Thus it was unreliable for recovering the historical Jesus. This is no longer held very widely (see Blomberg 1992), but the development of formal criteria has been a lasting legacy. The delineation of wisdom sayings, apocalyptic utterances, proverbs, pronouncement stories, parables, miracle stories, example stories, monologues and the like have inestimable value in establishing formal criteria for interpreting each type.
3. ***Redaction criticism.*** Redaction criticism began in the late 1950s with three of Bultmann's students—Günther Bornkamm (Matthew), Willi Marxsen (Mark) and Hans Conzelmann (Luke), mainly due to the scissors-and-paste view of form criticism. This school believes the Gospels are the result of composition and are literary wholes rather than artificial compilations. The key is to see how the redactor (editor) is using his sources and then to determine the theological purpose behind those changes. For those holding Markan priority, this is simpler with Matthew and Luke, since we do not know the sources of Mark or John. For Mark (and this applies to John as well), Stein (2001:349-51) suggests looking at the following: the Markan seams, insertions, arrangement of material, introductions, vocabulary, christological titles, modification of material, selection or omission of material, and his conclusion. We look for expansion (e.g., Mt 14:22-33 adding to the walking on the water story of Mk 6:45-52) or omission (in most episodes Matthew is shorter than

Mark), change of location (e.g., the Beelzebul incident in Mk 3:22-27; Mt 12:22-30; Lk 11:14-23), or altering a story (e.g., Mt 19:17 avoiding the implications of Mk 10:18, “Why do you call me good?”). The student asks why the changes are made and what the theological implications might be. In the 1970s the school moved into “composition criticism,” looking at the whole of a book, not just its changes, as the basis of its theology (see Osborne 2001b:128-49; Wenham and Walton 2001:74-79). With this, redactional study has moved into the arena of narrative approaches, and I believe the best method for studying biblical narrative is to combine the two (see the conclusion to this chapter).

THE METHODOLOGY OF NARRATIVE CRITICISM

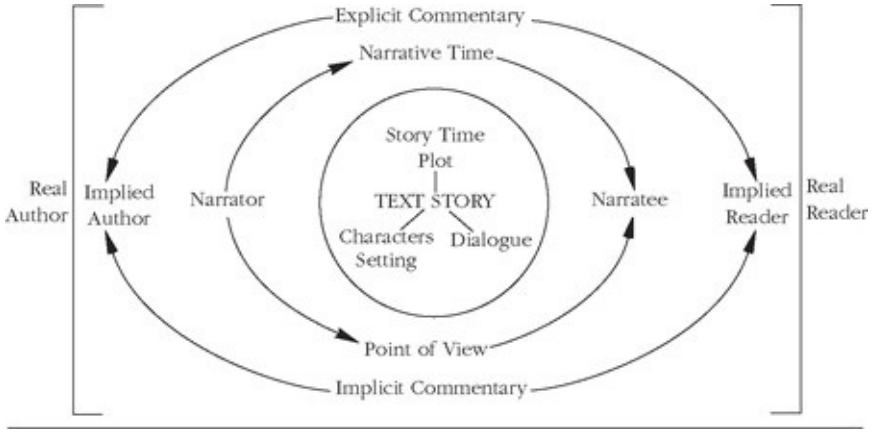
The basic method by which we are to study biblical narratives is simple: we are asked to *read* them! Most of us have grown up with the Gospels or Old Testament history as isolated stories. We have seldom sat down and simply read them through to catch the drama and power of the stories as they fit together to form a holistic panorama. Literary critics have developed techniques that will aid us greatly to perform a "close reading" of the text and to note such features as plot and character tension, point of view, dialogue, narrative time and settings, all of which will enable the reader to detect the flow of the text and therefore to see the hand of God as he has inspired the biblical author to develop his story. Evangelical hermeneutics has somehow stressed the author's intention for every book of the Bible except the narrative portions. We forget that each Gospel is developed differently and must be studied by itself as a single whole in order to understand its inspired message.

Since Murray Krieger the common metaphors for these dimensions of the text have been those of pictures, windows and mirrors.[3] The literary aspects guide the reader to the text as a picture or portrait of the narrative world presented in the story. The historical nature of the Bible leads one to treat the story as a window to the event behind the text. Finally, since the Bible is supremely relevant for today, the text is a mirror in which meaning is "locked up" so that readers see only themselves as part of the believing community for whom the text was intended.[4] The thesis here is that all three elements are part of a biblically valid interpretation; to neglect any factor is to do an injustice to the text.

The interpretation of narrative has two aspects: poetics, which studies the artistic dimension or the way the text is constructed by the author; and meaning, which recreates the message that the author is communicating.[5] The "how" (poetics) leads to the "what" (meaning). Meir Sternberg calls narrative "a functional structure, a means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies" (1985:1). To diagram these "strategies" I have developed those of Seymour Chapman (1978:6) and Alan Culpepper (1983:6)—see figure

7.1.

Figure 7.1. Aspects of narrative criticism



The purpose of this schematic is to demonstrate how an author communicates a message to a reader. Each of the categories below will explain an element within this diagram.

1. ***Implied author and narrator.*** No reader sees the real author in a text. Rather, as Peter Juhl points out, we know the author only to the extent that he reveals himself in the text (1980). This perspective helps us to overcome the tendency to psychologize the text in order to discover the author in a manner similar to that of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. The author is not present but has created a persona of himself in the text (the implied author), and we study the text, not the author. In other words, we don't study the author but the author's intended *message*. There we see those concerns, values and theological perspectives that the original author has chosen to highlight in this particular text.

   In some stories it is necessary to separate the implied author from the narrator; for instance, when there is a specific narrator in the story. However, this is rare in the Bible (an exception may be the "we" sections in Acts), and so I combine the two here. The narrator is the invisible speaker in the text, audible especially in the editorial sections. The narrator tells us the story and at times interprets its significance. For instance, in Acts the narrator continually tells us of the success of the gospel through the Spirit's work in the church, in spite of the many

problems and opposition the people of God encountered (see Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24). It is also the narrator who intones the marvelous poetic prologue to John's Gospel (Jn 1:1-18).

The biblical narrator has many important characteristics, but most importantly we must agree with Sternberg that he is often indistinguishable from God who inspires him. "The very choice to devise an omniscient narrator serves the purpose of staging and glorifying an omniscient God" (see further "Point of view, ideology and narrative world").[6] Darrell Bock (2002:211) describes the omniscient narrator as having "a bird's eye point of view, seeing events 'from above' with a full understanding of what is taking place."

The value of the stress on implied author and narrator is that it forces the reader to look at the seams and editorial asides of the text as important indicators of its meaning.[7] For instance, the decision of most commentators following Merrill Tenney (1960:350-64) that John 3:16-21 is an editorial comment rather than the words of Jesus provides an important clue to the narrative function of that critical text. It becomes John's commentary on the significance of the difficult dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in verses 1-15.

2. ***Point of view, ideology and narrative world.*** The point of view is the perspective taken by various characters or aspects in the narrative. Most frequently it is connected to the narrator, who interacts with the action within the story in various ways and so produces the effect that the story is to have on the reader. In other words the point of view points to the force or significance of the story. Every author has a certain message that he or she wishes to get across to the reader, and this is true also of biblical narrative. This point of view guides the reader to the significance of the story and determines the actual "shape" that the author gives to the narrative. In fact, as Berlin points out, a story usually has multiple perspectives because the biblical narrator, like a movie camera, zeros in on one aspect then another in the developing plot, thereby guiding the reader in several meaning directions at the same time (1983:43-55). Scholars have identified five areas where point of view operates.[8]

    1. The *psychological dimension* studies how the narrator provides "inside" information as to the thoughts and feelings of the characters. In this respect biblical narrative is "omniscient"; it gives the reader knowledge no one could possibly know.[9] The

Gospels are the most obvious examples. Luke describes the inner thoughts and feelings of characters like Simeon and Anna as they recognize the Messiah in the baby Jesus (Lk 2:29, 38) and relates Felix's desire for a bribe from Paul (Acts 24:26). John tells us Jesus' intentions (Jn 1:43) as well as the extent of his knowledge (Jn 2:24; 4:3). However, when the point of view is that of the characters within the story, the perspective is finite and often wrong. One of the clues to the Samson story is the carnal, mistaken perspective of Samson (Judg 13—16) contrasted to the omniscient comments of the narrator. As a result the reader experiences in a poignant way the tensions within the story.

2. The *evaluative* or *ideological* point of view denotes the concepts of right and wrong that prevail in the narrative. The actors in the drama are often at odds with one another and with the narrator as to the judgment of their deeds. In both Matthew and Mark the measuring rod of valid reasoning is "thinking the things of God" versus "thinking the things of men." This is the criterion for true discipleship (see Petersen 1978:107-8; Rhoads and Michie 1982:44; Kingsbury 1986:33). John has three levels, depending on the faith response of the individual to Jesus. The ideological mentality of the leaders of Israel leads them to reject Jesus; the point of view of the crowds often draws them to Jesus but more because of his signs than due to true faith (Jn 2:23-25; cf. Jn 6:60-66), and the faith of the disciples leads them to follow Jesus in spite of the price (Jn 6:67-71). The reader must choose between these three perspectives.
3. The *spatial perspective* of biblical narrators is "omnipresent"; that is, they have the ability to move from place to place freely and to relate the story from various vantage points. In the walking on the water miracle the narrator is with the disciples in the boat and with Jesus on the water simultaneously (Mk 6:48; note "he was about to pass them by"). The result is an ability to lead the reader more deeply into the story than would otherwise be possible. In the story of finding a wife for Isaac (Gen 24) the reader is moved from the place of ignorance (Canaan) to the place of testing (Abraham's former home), where a startling act of hospitality leads the servant to Rebekah. The reader is expectant throughout the narrative as the geographical movement of the story unfolds.
4. Closely connected is the *temporal perspective*, which can

consider the action from within the story (from a present point of view) or from the future. At the call of Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-19) the voice of God reaches into past (v. 5) and future (vv.7- 10) in prophesying Jeremiah's significance for the divine plan. On the other hand, the book of Nehemiah is written in a first-person style and shows a finite knowledge of events and the future. When the news comes of Jerusalem's desolation Nehemiah weeps (Neh 1:2-4). Thus the reader is made a part of the story and feels the drama in a different way than when a more divine perspective is taken.

5. The *phraseological* point of view relates to the dialogue or speeches in a narrative. Here again we see the omnicompetence of the author. The reader is able to listen in to dialogue he or she would never hear in the normal world, for instance, the personal conversation between Haman and his wife and friends (Esther 5:12-14) or the private dialogue between Festus and Agrippa regarding Paul's innocence (Acts 26:31-32). In such cases these interactions become the high points of the narrative, and the reader is given valuable inside information that leads to the dramatic and theological lessons.

These elements of point of view form the perspective of the "narrative world" of a book. The historical books of the Bible present a realistic world. Clarence Walhout notes an important distinction between fictional and historical texts:

> The assertive stance of the historian embraces an interpretation and evaluation of certain data as well as a narrative or descriptive account of the data. . . . The historian claims—asserts—that the projected world (the story) of the text together with the authorial point of view counts as a story and an interpretation of events as they actually occurred.[10]

Nevertheless, the portrayal is restricted to the limited horizons of the text itself. Thus the author is able to communicate to the reader. As Terence Keegan states, "At the end of the narration the implied reader will have a reasonably clear picture of this well defined, circumscribed, narrative world" (1985:102). The writer is not limited to the constraints of the real world but can provide vistas of perspective that the normal person cannot know. Thus

the reader is given a sense of the presence of God behind the story and this divine authority permeates the whole.

3. ***Narrative and story time.*** This refers to the order of the events within the story and the way they are related to one another. Narrative time is distinct from chronology because it has to do with literary arrangement rather than with historical sequence. The concept is very important when studying ancient history because sequential order was not as important as dramatic portrayal to chroniclers then. This can be demonstrated best by comparing the four Gospels. The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) give the impression that Jesus engaged in a one-year ministry, while John details a two-year ministry. The reason is that John tells of three Passovers (Jn 2:13; 6:4; 11:55) while the Synoptic Gospels mention only the Passover at the crucifixion. Clearly no attempt was made to be chronological, and the Evangelists were more concerned to relate the significance of Jesus' life and ministry (who he was as well as his impact on the disciples, the crowds and the religious leaders) than merely to give details regarding his life. Even in Matthew, Mark and Luke the sequence of events is startlingly different (as a perusal of any Gospel harmony will prove). Robert Stein (2001:352-53) notes how this is helpful: it helps us to center on the author's arrangement and the themes he develops through that order; it keeps us from trying to harmonize the Gospels into a chronological "life of Christ" and centering too much on history rather than theology; and it helps us to focus on the evangelists as theologians.

   Sternberg speaks of "temporal discontinuity" or suspense as a means of heightening reader involvement in the drama (1985:265-70). The author will cause a "gap" in the story by shifting events and will create suspense by providing incomplete knowledge of the future. This occurs in the binding-of-Isaac story since the reader feels that Isaac will be spared but is kept in suspense until the last minute.

   The space given to narrative events will vary depending on the writer's purposes. Genesis 1—11 is a kaleidoscopic dash through a bewildering sequence of events, linked together largely by the narrative or theological purposes of the text. The patriarchal narratives of the rest of Genesis, however, slow down considerably and take us on a lengthy stroll through a series of interconnected details. Similarly, the Gospels have at times been called a passion story with an extended introduction, due to the disproportionate length of the passion events compared to the other scenes in Jesus' ministry. Culpepper says that for John "the scenes can be

fitted into about two months of the two-and-a-half-year period covered by the narrative" (1983:72). This will be helpful when studying the selective process of the author in developing his plot and emphases. For the Evangelists the question was not what to include but what to omit (see Jn 21:25).

4. ***Plot.*** Seymour Chatman speaks of plot, characters and setting as comprising the story itself (1978:19-27; see also Kingsbury 1986:2-3). The plot encompasses the united sequence of events that follow a cause-effect order; these build to a climax and involve the reader in the narrative world of the story. The basic element of plot is conflict, and every biblical narrative centers on such—God versus Satan, good versus evil, discipleship versus rebellion. Plot can function at either the macro (the whole book) or micro (a single section) level. For instance, at the micro level John 9 contains an amazing drama contrasting the man born blind (who begins blind but progresses toward spiritual as well as physical sight) with the Pharisees (who claim spiritual insight but end up blind).[11] These conflicts often are amazingly complex since they can be external as well as internal in the narrative. This is the key to the Samson story. Supposedly his is an external battle with the Philistines, but in reality it is an internal conflict between his calling to be a judge and the self-centeredness and sensuality he increasingly exemplifies. This leads to a conflict with God and ultimately to his downfall.

   At the macro level the Gospels each have a different plot, even though they are relating essentially the same story. For instance, both Matthew and Mark center on Jesus' encounter with the secular authorities, the crowds and the disciples. Yet they do so in quite different ways. Mark stresses the so-called messianic secret, showing how Jesus' messianic nature was rejected by and hidden from the leaders, misunderstood by the crowds and disciples, and acknowledged by the demons. Matthew recognizes this but heightens the contrast by showing a growing understanding on the part of the disciples (cf. Mt 14:33 with Mk 6:52). Mark emphasizes discipleship failure while Matthew notes the difference that the presence of Jesus made as the disciples were enabled to overcome their ignorance and failures. The narrative world inhabited by both is the same—the in-breaking of the kingdom or reign of God into history. However, the plot and thereby the detailed emphases of each differ considerably.

   The reader must study carefully the plot and miniplots within narrative books in order to determine the developing themes and characterizations

of the author. This is the best indicator of the basic message(s) of a literary work. The interplay of opponents and the interaction between major and minor characters are the clearest possible guidelines to the meaning of a passage. The unity and lines of causality within the dramatic sequence of the story first draw the reader into the narrative world and then help the reader to relive its point and understand its purpose. In this way theology may be better served by narrative material than by didactic. We not only learn the truth but see it enacted in living relationships.

5. ***Characterization and dialogue.*** The success of a story depends in large part on its success in developing interesting, real people with whom the readers can identify. Culpepper notes Aristotle's dictum that characters should have four qualities: they should be morally good, suitable, lifelike and consistent.[12] In many ancient works characters remain undeveloped with few of these qualities. However, biblical narrative is replete with realistic figures seen in all their human frailty. Literary scholars have long noted the amazing transparency of biblical portraits. Samson's carnality, David's lust, Solomon's political and religious compromise or Elijah's cowardice in running from Jezebel are all presented with remarkable forthrightness. As a result they are all the more appealing and applicable to the reader. There was no attempt to hide the human frailty of biblical heroes. When Abraham tried to talk his wife into posing as his sister and would have allowed her to become part of Pharaoh's harem, Genesis 12:14-20 recorded the incident intact. Yet the important point is not that discreditable facts are recorded of biblical characters but that this characterization is carried out with a depth and subtlety that makes them very realistic and thus applicable to those with similar problems in every age.

   Sternberg speaks of the contrast between the character of God, which is immutable or unchanging, and the characters of the individuals with whom God works; the latter continually change in the text (1985:322-25). The constant alterations within God's actions are not due to changes in his character but rather to the ever-changing developments in the people within the stories. These developments are in five overlapping types of characterization, which Sternberg illustrates with the description of David in 1 Samuel 16:18 (p. 326): physical ("a fine-looking man"), social ("a son of Jesse of Bethlehem"), singular or concretizing ("knows how to play the harp"), moral and ideological ("the LORD is with him"), and psychological in a broad sense ("a brave man and a warrior . . . he

speaks well"). In every case, the depictions are not hyperbolic or extensive but serve to stress the power of God; God, not the biblical heroes, is magnified throughout. The narrator uses many techniques to portray the characters and to lead the readers to a proper understanding of their roles.[13] The most common is through description. David's bravery and Saul's jealousy are stated directly then further anchored in the drama enacted between them. Thus inference is added to description. Moreover, irony is added to inference, for Saul's actions undermine his initial description and promise, which is carried out by David rather than by him! There is one difference between the Gospels and the Old Testament narratives in this regard. In the Gospels traits are simpler, and both the rulers and the disciples can be lumped together as displaying basic characteristics. In the Old Testament the major characters (Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah) are more dynamic and at times change drastically. David vacillates from bravery and faith to self-centeredness, and Elijah from power to fear. In every case the reader's perception changes with the characters as the narration and dialogue expand the reader's horizons.

Dialogue often carries much of the emphasis in characterization and theology. The interplay between viewpoints often shifts between characters and even between their dialogue and the third-person narration in the story, often with the words of the characters proving unreliable and only the narrator being reliable (as in Gen 50:16-17 when Joseph's brothers put words in Jacob's mouth that he never said or when Ahab twisted Naboth's words in 1 Kings 21:2-6). The dynamics of the story are often controlled by the dialogue between the characters (Satterthwaite 1997:128-29).

6. ***Setting.*** The setting of the story, Chatman's third level of narrative technique, can be geographical, temporal, social or historical; it will provide the basic context within which plot and characters develop. As David Rhoads and Donald Michie state, the setting serves many functions: "generating atmosphere, determining conflict, revealing traits in the characters who must deal with problems or threats caused by the settings, offering commentary (sometimes ironic) on the action, and evoking associations and nuances of meaning present in the culture of the readers" (1982:63). An example of the use of a geographical setting is the Emmaus Road journey of Luke 24. The entire story is set in a framework of geography, with the two disciples leaving Jerusalem in defeat, meeting the risen Lord in Emmaus, then returning to Jerusalem in victory.

Temporal settings are equally important. The three Passovers in John 2:13, 6:4 and 11:55 form a temporal framework for the entire ministry of Jesus. In a broad sense the salvation-historical nexus of all the Gospels is a temporal setting. There is the time of Israel, the time of Jesus, and the time of the church. Jesus anchors his new revelation, the Torah of the Messiah, to the past revelation of God to Israel; he preaches the time of fulfillment in the in-breaking of the kingdom in the present, and he prepares for the ongoing salvific plan of God for the church in the future.

Social settings also can communicate a strong message. Consider the Lukan theme of table fellowship. An amazing number of scenes occur in banquet settings, with three different aspects: soteriology, symbolizing God's forgiveness and acceptance of sinners (Lk 5:27-32; 15:1-32; 19:1-18); social, with the message of God invading the social arena and bathing it in God's wondrous light (Lk 14:7-24; 22:31- 32); and mission instruction, as Jesus uses the setting to teach his followers regarding his true purpose and mission (Lk 9:10-17; 22:24-30; 24:36-49). Each of these builds on the Jewish notion of table fellowship, which assumes that the practice of sharing a meal involves sharing a lie (Osborne 1984:123-24).

Finally, the historical setting provides a helpful interpretive tool. This is true in two directions. The historical setting behind the text (such as the dating of Isaiah or Amos) tells us what historical period we apply to them. We can identify the exact set of problems that Amos was addressing and thereby understand the text far better. Second, the historical setting behind the writing of the biblical books also makes a difference. It is important to know whether Matthew was writing within a Jewish or Gentile context (a greatly debated topic), since issues like Matthew's supposed anti-Semitism are greatly affected by the decision.

7. ***Implicit commentary.*** In figure 7.1 (p. 203) "implicit commentary" refers to the rhetorical techniques whereby the author tells his story. By utilizing irony, comedy, symbolism and other literary devices the writer guides the reader through the drama of his story. In this section I will center on those literary devices specifically used in narrative but not covered in detail in the earlier sections (pp. 51-56, 121-30). The problem for the reader is identifying and interpreting properly the underlying message behind these techniques. However, identifying them and understanding how they function are the first steps.

   One of the more frequently seen methods is repetition. This is so important that Robert Alter has devoted an entire chapter to it (1981:88-

113, esp. 95-96; see also Satterthwaite 1997:125-28). Alter identifies five types: (1) the *Leitwort* or word-root in which cognates of a root word are repeated for effect ("go" and "return" in the book of Ruth), (2) motif, the repetition of a concrete image used symbolically (fire in the Samson story or water in the Moses cycle), (3) theme, in which a certain idea or value becomes the focus (obedience vs. rebellion in the wilderness wanderings), (4) a sequence of actions, often in a threefold pattern (the three captains and their companies warned of fiery destruction in 2 Kings 1), and (5) the type-scene, a key event in the life of a hero that is repeated more than once (the feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand or the three commissions of Paul to the Gentiles in Acts 22:21; 23:11; 26:17-18). Satterthwaite points to Judges 17—21 in which the scenes of anarchy become "travesties of earlier narratives": the Danites destroying Laish is an evil parody of the conquests of Joshua, with the Danites instituting idolatry rather than Yahweh worship; Judges 19 portrays Israel committing the same debauchery as in Sodom and Gomorrah; the ambush of Gibeah (Judg 20) parodies the ambush of Ai, except now it is Israelites ambushing other Israelites.

Some literary critics assert that these are purely literary devices while many evangelicals counter that the doublets are present because they simply happened. However, this is disjunctive thinking. There is no reason why history and literary artistry cannot exist side by side. There is no good argument apart from form-critical presuppositions for denying the historical authenticity of these multiple events, but the sacred authors included them not merely for historical reasons (they omitted far more than they included) but to make a point. Adele Berlin states that repetition is often utilized to show a story from more than one point of view; for instance 2 Samuel 18 describes David's grief over Absalom from three vantage points—his own as well as that of Joab and all the people. In this way the intensity of his grief is magnified (1983:73-79).

Another major technique is that of "gaps" in the narration. These are bits of information deliberately omitted by the writer in order to force the reader to get involved in the drama. As Sternberg points out, the text controls the gap-filling process by means of previous information, the development of the plot and its characters, and the cultural conventions behind the story.[14] In this way the search for meaning is both a quest and a process on the part of readers, who are forced to immerse themselves more deeply into the narrative world.

Sternberg uses the David and Bathsheba story (2 Sam 11) as a test case

(1985:190- 219). The writer does not label David's sins or tell how much Uriah realized, and the reader is forced to speculate and fill in the missing information. The writer also intentionally refrains from saying why David summons Uriah (vv. 6-13), so that the reader thinks the best until the terrible plot is revealed (vv. 14-15). This makes doubly ironic the seemingly inadvertent comment on Uriah's part, "How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (v. 11). The reader does not know whether Uriah is merely expressing loyalty to David or stating bluntly that he is not going to get David out of his dilemma by sleeping with his wife. Through the gaps in the narrative the suspense is heightened and the reader feels the emotions of the text in ever more powerful ways.

8. ***The implied reader.*** At first glance the implied reader seems another example of academic trivia, useful only to dry scholars holed up in dusty rooms. However, it is one of the most practical of the tools for the average reader. This theory is grounded in the supposition that every book has a group of readers in mind. These original readers are no longer available to the "real reader" (the person actually reading it today), and so the text yields only an "implied reader" behind the intended message.[15] The actual reader is called on by the text to read it from the standpoint of these implied readers and to identify with the problems and message intended for them. This process will help the actual readers to associate with the feelings and responses indicated by the text rather than with the meanings that they might read into the text.[16]

   While the possibility of discovering the original intended message is widely denied by literary critics, I believe that the implied reader is a figure that enables a person to detect the original intended message of a text rather than an elusive entity that allows one to play with multiple meanings in the text.[17] Culpepper says, "As the reader adopts the perspectives thrust on him or her by the text, experiences it sequentially, has expectations frustrated or modified, relates one part of the text to another, and imagines and works out all the text leaves for the reader to do, its meaning is gradually actualized."[18] In other words the text guides readers to its intended meaning via devices like the implied reader that force them to enter the textual world and relive it.

   While exegesis and biblical theology enable the interpreter to work out the prepositional or theological meaning of the text, the implied reader helps us to discover the commissive or relational meaning of the

narrative.[19] I call this step "reader identification," asking what the text is demanding of its intended or implied reader and then identifying with that purpose. In other words, in the act of reading a text I allow the text to determine my response by submitting to its internal dynamics and reordering my own life accordingly (note fig. 17.5, "The Six-Stage Process of Contextualization" on p. 432). In this way the real readers discover the significance or application of the story for themselves. This is a critical tool for preaching biblical narrative, as it becomes the basis for the application of the story to the present day.

For instance, the story of the wedding feast at Cana often has been used to teach persistence in prayer: if we, like Mary, insist that Jesus meet our needs (Jn 2:3-5), he will do it. However, this is not the stress of the context. It is clear from its setting in John 1—2 and from the editorial explanation of John 2:11 ("He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him") that the message is christological, centering on Jesus' glory rather than oriented to prayer. Mary's request is part of the emphasis on Jesus' messianic office (it meant the beginning of his public ministry) and is not a paradigm for discipleship. The implied reader is called to faith, and we recognize Jesus' glory with Mary.

Similarly, a close reading of the Elijah-Elisha chronicles (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 13) shows many deliberate parallels with Moses and Egypt. The miracles of 1-2 Kings have two purposes in this regard: to demonstrate Yahweh's power over Baal (as the plagues showed the powerlessness of the Egyptian gods) and to portray God's judgment on idolatrous Israel. Throughout these narratives the implied reader is being asked to trust God alone and to reject the overtures of secularism. The modern reader will not seek to duplicate the miracles so much as to relive the faith-commitment of these stories.

9. ***Conclusion.*** The process described in the preceding pages is both simple and complex. The terms and concepts seem beyond the average reader, and yet the methods they describe are based on a commonsense reading of the text. These are not separate aspects of reading but provide a perspective by which we can achieve a "close reading" of the text. By keeping all of these in mind while reading the text several times, the reader will gain a "feel" for the dramatic flow. The various dimensions of the story (plot, characters, setting) and of the discourse (the way it is told —implied author, point of view, implicit commentary, implied reader) will become elements of the reading process done simultaneously as the text dictates. In other words, we will look carefully at the literary artistry

of the biblical author as he creates the narrative world within which we will discover the meaning and significance of the story.

THE WEAKNESSES OF NARRATIVE CRITICISM

Like all schools of thought, literary criticism is a many-faceted discipline, and we cannot lump its adherents together under a single category. The problems mentioned in this section do not apply to all, but generally they can be exemplified in the movement. When a person becomes enamored with a new toy, even an academic one, it is often the case that caution is thrown to the wind and the individual uses the tool uncritically, not knowing when it will hurt. The list below is not intended as a denigration or a rejection of narrative criticism but rather is a set of warnings against its excesses. I hope that the student will utilize the techniques in the first section in such a way as to avoid the dangers of this section.

1. ***A dehistoricizing tendency.*** As noted by John Collins (see fn. l of this chap.), many literary critics radically deny any historical element in reading a text. The radical autonomy of the text (see app. 1) means that it is removed not only from the original author but also from the historical framework within which it was originally written.

   For some this involves a repudiation of the historical-critical method, and indeed there is some validity in this. Form criticism and redaction criticism in their traditional garb have ignored the final form of the text. In fact I have long felt that the very success of narrative criticism in showing the unity of the biblical stories has removed the very basis for the more negative forms of tradition criticism and source criticism, since decisions about "later additions" to the text are always based on the seeming incongruity of the flow of the text as it is. Narrative studies have shown the viability of seeing Genesis as a united text, and the aporias or clumsy literary connections are seen to make perfect sense as they are.[20]

   Nevertheless, many others also have denied the historical background behind the text. Indeed, the Bible has been cast adrift from its moorings and left to float on a sea of modern relativity. The "play" of meanings in the stories is seen to be open-ended, and modern readers must construct their own interpretation. Rhoads and Michie thus call Mark "a literary

creation with an autonomous integrity" existing independently from any resemblance to the actual person and life of Jesus. It is a "closed and self-sufficient world," and its portrayals, "rather than being a representation of historical events, refer to people, places and events *in the story*" (1982:3-4).[21]

The classic presentation of this view is given by Hans Frei, who calls for a departure from the preoccupation with history on the part of modern critical scholars and for a return to a precritical "realistic" reading of biblical narrative, or cognizance of its "history-like" character (1974:10-35). However, he separates this from any connection with the originating historical event; for Frei the narrative is its meaning; there should be no search for the event behind the text but only a close reading of the text itself. Yet this fails to do justice to the texts themselves. As Sternberg remarks, "It is a pity indeed that enthusiasts about the 'literary' approach to the Bible should preach as historical doctrines whose brief heyday has long passed and which were never quite literally meant, let alone practiced, even by their New Critical originators."[22]

In reality the literary and historical exist side by side and are interdependent. As a literal representation of event and its significance, both text and its background are essential components of meaning. This is especially true in light of the shared assumptions between the author and his contemporary readers, data that should be recovered in order to understand the text in its fullness. In short, two aspects of history are important to biblical narrative, the historical events behind the narratives and the background material that helps to elucidate the intended meaning of the text.[23]

2. ***Setting aside the author.*** Reader-response criticism is the final stage of a lengthy movement away from the author in the author-text-reader schema, which is at the heart of the hermeneutical debate (see app. 1). Most proponents of this school accept some form of the autonomy theory, that a text becomes autonomous from its author as soon as it is written down. Therefore, delineation of a text's meaning stems from the present reader rather than from the "past" author or text.[24] Yet this dichotomy is unnecessary. As Thiselton puts it:

> Valid insights about the role of the reader in literary and philosophical hermeneutics are sometimes pressed in such a way as to imply an infinite relativism on the part of the text or its author.

> Questions about meaning are reduced entirely to questions about language-effect in the modern world. (Lundin, Thiselton, Walhout 1985:91)

Such a skepticism and reductionism are unwarranted. The reader uses hermeneutical techniques to understand and identify with the intended meaning of a text. There is no need to banish the biblical author from his work.

3. ***A denial of intended or referential meaning.*** Denial of intended or referential meaning is also the subject of the two appendixes to this book, so it is unnecessary to go into detail here. Since for radical critics the implied author replaces the real author behind the text, and fiction replaces history, the words as well as the text as a whole become autonomous from their original reference or meaning, and the readers produce their own meanings in the text. Scot McKnight states:

> Literary theorists may stand in awe of the ice "floating on" the water and they may describe its aesthetic shape and its evocative powers, but sooner or later their ship will awaken to a crashing "Titanic-like" revelation of the fact that what they were staring at was in fact an iceberg, with much more below the surface than above. (1988:128)

4. ***Reductionistic and disjunctive thinking.*** To reduce meaning to intertextual factors like plot or setting is not only unnecessary but patently false. At one level literary criticism performs a needed service in reminding us that meaning resides in the text as a unity and not in isolated segments. However, half-truths can become falsehoods when elevated to the whole of truth. This is the case here. Without the broader horizons provided by exegetical and historical-cultural research, we simply cannot arrive at the intended meaning of the text. Of course, this has been the debate all along, and in a very real sense we are at an impasse. The radical literary critic does not believe we either can or should arrive at the author's original meaning, while one of the purposes of this chapter is to dispel that very notion.

   The two sides—exegetical research and a close reading of the text—are not an either-or but a both-and. If it is impossible to detect the author's meaning, the radical literary critics are correct, and we will have to live with our subjective encounters with the text. But such is not the

case, so we must judge the efforts to center on “the text and only the text” misguided at best and dangerous in the extreme.

5. ***The imposition of modern literary categories on ancient genres.*** Many modern theorists derive their approaches from a perusal of modern fiction. Even Adele Berlin, who attempts a “poetics of biblical narrative,” falls into this error when she defends “closing off the world of the text from the real world” on the supposition that “literary works should be analyzed according to the principles of literary science” (1983:16). We could agree with her larger point that literature rather than archaeology or psychology determines the rules of the language game. However, the problem is that usually modern literature rather than ancient genres supply the theories.

   Berlin herself (along with Sternberg and Alter) is a healthy exception, but perhaps the best corrective is supplied by David Aune, whose *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* deliberately seeks to redress the balance by considering each genre in light of its Jewish and Greco-Roman parallels. For instance, he carefully compares the Gospels with both Jewish and Greco-Roman biographical literature in order to determine how the Evangelists chose the form they did and in order to deepen the hermeneutical guidelines for interpreting them according to their own generic rules (1987:17-76). He responds to current methods by asserting that “the literary styles and structures associated with fiction by modern scholars cannot exclude the use of narrative art in ancient cultures to mediate a historical view of reality” (p. 111; see also Sternberg 1985:23-24). In other words the fictive genre was often employed in the ancient world (and at times is today as well) to depict what actually happened. It is erroneous to presuppose an ahistorical stance on the part of the biblical historians.

6. ***A preoccupation with obscure theories.*** Tremper Longman notes the proliferation of technical phrases and jargonistic explanations on the part of advocates (1987:47-50). Reading some of the reader-response or deconstructionist literature is tantamount to learning a foreign language. Furthermore, many of the theories themselves contradict one another. Longman notes the time lag between the latest avant-garde school of thought and its appearance in biblical studies. The current fad is a preoccupation with the social sciences, and as a result works begin appearing in biblical studies about a decade after they have become popular in the social sciences (such as deconstruction; see app. 1). Everyone wants to be a part of the latest movement; we are repeating the

error of the Athenians who "spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas" (Acts 17:21). Here let me add a caveat: there is nothing wrong with "new ideas," and every field—like medicine or engineering—has its own jargon (have you ever tried to make sense of a TV commentary on a sport with which you were not familiar?). However, when a field of thought claims to offer a pragmatic method that will be useful to the average person, it must avoid overly technical language and must unify its theories. In actuality this is one major purpose of this chapter: to simplify the bewildering array of technical approaches and to present a technique that unifies the disparate theories.

7. ***Ignoring the understanding of the early church.*** While the hermeneutic of the early church cannot be determinative for modern methods, since we are hardly bound to their modes of thinking, it is still worthwhile to note that the earliest exegetes universally considered the biblical stories to be historical. As McKnight states, "I know of no early church writings which treat the Gospels as literary masterpieces, no extensive comments which prove that the interpreters were interested in such things as plot, technique, character development and the like" (1988:146). This does not prove that a literary approach to the texts is wrong, only that it is new.[25] Yet it also shows that those who were closest to the actual events did not conceive that they could be purely literary creations. Since a referential approach was utilized from the beginning, we would need far better evidence than has heretofore been presented before we would jettison it.
8. ***Conclusion.*** There are obviously both pros and cons to the value of a literary study of biblical narrative. The problems are very real, and some are skeptical about any abiding value in the movement. McKnight goes so far as to say that "much of the good in literary criticism has already been exposed through redaction criticism in its 'composition criticism' emphases" (1988:50). He would subordinate literary criticism under the tradition-critical process. I would not go so far. Meaning is found more in the final form of the text than in the traditioning process, so if anything I would subordinate source criticism under the larger rubric of literary analysis. In fact, however, there need be no "subordination"; all aspects (historical-critical, grammatical-historical, literary) function together and inform one another in the hermeneutical process of discovering the meaning of a narrative text. All that remains is to provide hermeneutical principles for accomplishing this task and blending the components together in such a way that the narratives produce their intended goal in

the life of the reader.

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR STUDYING NARRATIVE TEXTS

Narrative criticism has a rightful place in the pantheon of critical methodologies within the hermeneutical temple. The various factors that produce meaning in a story and that draw a reader into the narrative world within that story are clearly elucidated in this discipline. Furthermore, they have proven themselves to be valuable components of a close reading of a text; in short, they work! Yet if cut off from historical and referential meaning, they become arbitrary and subjective. Therefore, any proper methodology must blend the two (literary and historical) in such a way that they modify one another, magnifying the strengths and avoiding the weaknesses of each. I will follow the basic outline established in the section on general hermeneutics, introducing literary elements as they fall into the larger pattern.

1. ***Structural analysis.*** We begin with a study or close reading of the text itself, looking for narrative flow and getting a preliminary idea of plot. First, this is done at the macro level, noting the development of the work as a whole. Then we analyze the micro structure of individual pericopes or stories. Each story is broken up into its "actantial" units, its individual elements or actions. These are charted to determine how the characters interact and how the conflict ebbs and flows within both the single story and the larger narrative of which it is a part. Next, we study the effect of the setting (geographical, temporal or social) on the plot line, and put the whole story back together in terms of its structural development.

   The resurrection in Matthew 27:66—28:20 is a good example. A competent reader will note that the whole is structured along the lines of a series of encounters with Jesus' opponents. When broken into its basic units, we will note the following progression: the efforts of the priests to secure the tomb and thereby to thwart the plan of God (Mt 27:62-66) is paralleled by the misbegotten trip to the tomb on the part of the women (who expected to anoint Jesus' corpse rather than to celebrate his resurrection [Mt 28:1]). Both are overturned by the miraculous

intervention of God in raising Jesus from the dead (vv. 2-4; note that Matthew favors supernatural scenes [Mt 27:51-53]) and in the angels' message to the women (vv. 5-7) and by the first appearance to the women (vv. 8-10). The second attempt to thwart God's plan occurs when the priests bribe the guards to lie about the resurrection (vv. 11-15), and this is paralleled by the disciples' doubt (v. 17). Both of these are overturned by the Great Commission (vv. 18-20). Note the contrasts between the guards (who faint for fear in v. 4) and the women (who are told not to fear in v. 5) and between the priests (who commission a lie [vv. 11-15]) and Jesus (who commissions the mission [vv. 18- 20]). The setting is both temporal (the time notes in Mt 27:62; 28:1) and geographical (with all the meaning of Jerusalem-Galilee noted above under "setting").

2. ***Stylistic analysis.*** The exegete must identify the various literary devices used to present the material, then see how these techniques deepen the plot structure and highlight certain aspects within the narrative. We must look for chiasm or inclusio (framing techniques), repetition, gaps, antitheses, symbol, irony and other literary traits. Each will add a different nuance to the passage. We should also study the individual stylistic tendencies of the author and see which of those are at work in the individual pericope.

   In Matthew 28 several of the basic devices are used. For instance, there is a gap in that Matthew fails to provide a description of the resurrection but allows the reader to infer it from the context. The suspense builds as the priests do everything humanly possible to stymie the plan of God, yet the marvelous contrasting scene with the power of God causing the hard-bitten soldiers to quake and faint out of fear is drama at its best. A scene of great irony occurs when the priests in their frustration are forced to bribe the guards to propound the very lie that they had begged Pilate to prevent in Matthew 27:62-66 (that Jesus' body had been stolen). The dialogue scenes lead the reader to feel this conflict between God and humanity—the manipulating machinations of the priests, the implicit rebuke by the angels, the unbelievable promises of the risen Lord. As Jack Kingsbury says, the central element in Matthew's plot is conflict,[26] and that is certainly true of his resurrection narrative. In fact, there is inclusio with the infancy narrative, which also centers on the conflict between God's plan and a Jewish leader's (Herod's) plot to frustrate the divine will.

3. ***Redactional analysis.*** For Kings-Chronicles and for the Gospels especially a source-critical and redactional study is invaluable as a

supplement to the structural and stylistic studies in order to determine the distinctive emphases. At both the narrative and the theological levels redactional techniques provide a control against subjective interpretation. There are two types of approaches, and both depend on the use of a synopsis that places the Gospels line by line next to each other. The first is more technical—a composition analysis that looks for the ways the writer used his sources. This demands a word-for-word comparison and the use of word statistics in order to determine what vocabulary was distinctly Markan or Matthean. The second type of redactional analysis is more useful to the nonspecialist. A comparison between the Gospels will help us to detect basic differences and to identify additions, omissions and expansions that greatly aid in determining major emphases in the text. This comparison has both external and internal criteria.[27]

Externally, the reader will look for the specific changes introduced into the text, namely, the way the writer has altered his sources. The "seams" that introduce sections and provide transitions to further material in the story point to distinctive linguistic and thematic emphases, because it is at the seams that we see the writer's hand most clearly. Summary statements (such as Mt 4:23-25; 9:35; which point to Jesus' preaching activity and frame a major section in the Gospel) provide helpful clues as to the purpose of a section. Editorial asides and explanatory additions can identify an author's distinct theology. For instance, Matthew's "formula quotations" (such as Mt 2:5-6, 15, 17-18) are the key to his concept of fulfillment and to his messianic thrust. Thus the alterations between the Gospels or Kings-Chronicles are critical clues to the distinct purposes and stylistic characteristics of an author.

Internally, the scholar looks for the "threads" or recurring patterns and characteristic expressions that the writer uses to carry his message to the reader. The structure as a developing whole (rather than the traditions employed by the author) is now the focus of attention. The interplay of the subgenres in a section (parable, didactic material, apocalyptic in the Olivet Discourse of Mark)[28] are helpful pointers to the artistic construction of the whole. Logical points of tension and particular uncertainties in the narrative also guide the reader further into the story world of the text. For instance, the use of misunderstanding in John's Gospel has often been noted.[29] Throughout the Gospel Jesus continually refuses to answer questions directly but seems to speak over the person's head (such as Nicodemus in Jn 3). We do not read very far before

realizing this is a deliberate narrative ploy, part of the above-below structure of the entire Gospel. Jesus deliberately speaks from a heavenly point of view, while his hearers respond from an earthly perspective. In this way the reader is forced to recognize the difference and make a choice. In other words the text uses this technique to encounter the reader with the demands of God in Jesus.

In summation, the interpreter studies the way the writer has arranged his materials, noting how he has utilized his sources as a control to see more clearly the specific message of the whole narrative. In other words, we combine source and redaction techniques with narrative criticism, allowing these (sometimes disparate) methods to interact and correct one another in order to understand the author's intended story and theological message.

4. ***Exegetical analysis.*** After a detailed examination of the author's redactional choices, the scholar will next take a grammatical-historical approach to the passage, using the methods discussed earlier under general hermeneutics (see pp. 113-14). The grammar will enable one to determine with greater precision the exact relationship of the words and therefore of the flow of the story, and semantic research will give clarity to the nuances of meaning intended. Of course, this is not necessarily done *after* steps one to three; in actuality these methods are utilized together. For instance, grammar and word studies are aspects of stylistic analysis; they are interdependent. In addition, redaction-critical analysis is part of the exegetical tools utilized in studying narrative literature. Exegesis functions in some ways as a summary of the others; in other ways it provides a control, for many narrative studies have neglected serious exegesis, and the results have been less than satisfactory.

   Background data is also exceedingly critical for narrative research. These stories are written within a culture that is no longer known to us; without these details we can recover only the surface plot but never the deeper significances. Of course, these aspects are not done separately from the redactional study; rather, these are part of a holistic study of the narrative, including the narrative techniques, the writer's use of his sources and the grammatical-historical configuration of the text.

5. ***Theological analysis.*** The scholar must separate the detailed emphases within a single passage from the major theological threads that link them to the major section and the book as a whole. These will yield the major and the minor points of the passage. Both dramatic and theological aspects are found within stories; the theological dimension relates to the

propositional component and the dramatic to the dynamic or commissive (related to praxis) component of meaning.

The interpreter must relate to both aspects of the passage. As we are drawn into the narrative world of the story, the drama forces us to interact with the plot and characters and to align with the implied reader. At the same time the theological lessons penetrate through the drama, and we learn even as we react to the story. These two elements of interpretation are interdependent and should not be separated. Theology without praxis is sterile, and praxis without theology is contentless. For instance, Matthew's resurrection narrative (see points 1-2) centers on christology, teaching that Jesus is the risen Lord and finalizing Matthew's major stress on Jesus as the divine Son of God who has the authority of Yahweh (v. 18) and is omnipresent (v. 20). At the same time it teaches the futility of opposing God's plan and the privilege of discipleship. Finally, the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20) culminates the First Gospel's emphasis on the universal mission "to all nations" (v. 19).

6. ***Contextualization.*** Contextualization is the core of biblical narrative, which asks the reader to apply the lessons to one's own situation. Narrative at the heart is a contextualization of the significance of the life of Israel (Old Testament), of Jesus (the Gospels) or of the early church (Acts) for the later community of God. For the Gospels there is the *Sitz im Leben Jesu* ("the situation in the life of Jesus") and the *Sitz im Leben Kirche* ("the situation in the life of the church community") for which each Gospel was written. The latter aspect was the evangelist's inspired contextualization of the life of Jesus for his church. This makes it natural to apply it to our own needs today. In every sense biblical narrative is theology seen in living relationships and enacted in story form.

   At the same time, narrative demands a reaction to the drama itself. Therefore, we cannot read it without reliving and applying the conflicts and lessons. Like the disciples we stand in awe and worship Jesus. With Jesus we submit to the Father; for us too discipleship means to "take up the cross," even if like many of them "the cross" involves our own martyrdom. Earlier I discussed the method in the section on the "implied reader" (see pp. 211-12). Our task is to identify with the intended reader of the text and allow the story to guide our response. Many (e.g., Robinson 1980:123- 24) believe that narrative preaching should employ indirect rather than direct contextualization. There is some truth in this because the original Gospels seldom spelled out their points explicitly. However, if we become too indirect, the intended message becomes lost

in a sea of subjectivity. I prefer to "suggest ways and means" (see pp. 446-50) and to guide the congregation's involvement with the significance of the story for themselves.

7. ***Narrative form and the sermon.*** Contextualization means to move from exegesis to sermon (chaps. 17-18). For biblical stories this involves what Sidney Greidanus calls "the narrative form."[30] Instead of a three-point sermon constructed logically around the main points of the text, this form of sermon follows the contours of the biblical story itself, retelling the drama and helping the congregation to relive the drama and tension of the unfolding narrative. Here the background information becomes a sermonic tool, drawing the audience into the original setting and thereby enabling them to experience anew its message. Many practitioners of the "story sermon" argue strongly against the use of sermon points here (Buttrick renames them "moves") on the grounds that this replaces the emotional power of the text with cognitive data. Yet this is disjunctive thinking. If there are two or three parts (or "moves") of the story in the text, it would be natural to construct the sermon around them.

   Biblical narratives contain theology, and there are principles or themes that are intended for the reader. At the same time, however, they are still primarily stories and therefore should be proclaimed as such. If the task of the preacher is always to enable the hearers to be drawn into the world of the text and to feel its evocative power, this is doubly true of narrative, for which this is its primary purpose. The key to the narrative sermon is that the plot line of the story controls its outline. In this way the "actantial" units become the "points" of the sermon, although it is better to think of "movements" (the "acts" of a play) rather than points (which are better for a didactic sermon).[31]

   After completing the six steps above, the preacher will try to incorporate the elements (plot development, dialogue, theological emphases, reader identification) into a dramatic sermon that recreates the original contextualized message for today. Using background, preachers will want to retell the story in such a way that the congregation will reexperience, even relive, it and also see the relevance that its message has for their contemporary needs. As the story is retold, application (or reader identification) will suggest itself in natural ways within the story. As in parable preaching, it is important to separate local color (those aspects which are part of the story) from theological emphases (those aspects which should be recontextualized for our day). The former will

help the hearers to be drawn into the story and feel its power, and the latter will help them to see its relevance for their needs. There is little need for illustrations from modern life. The story form is filled with illustrations from within itself, and they lead naturally into application. That is why narrative preaching has even greater potential for motivating and persuading than does didactic preaching; the latter describes Christian truths while narrative preaching acts out these truths in “life situations.”

8

Poetry

It was not until the Revised Standard Version of 1952 that the English reader was made aware of the true place of Hebrew poetry in the sacred canon. Previous versions had put only the Psalms into poetic format, but the RSV did so with all biblical poetry. There are many songs in narrative books (Gen 49; Ex 15:1-18; Deut 32; 33; Judg 5; 1 Sam 2:1-10; 2 Sam 1:19-27; 1 Kings 12:16; 2 Kings 19:21-34) and poetry comprises entire prophetic books (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah) as well as extensive portions of others (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Zechariah). Much more of the Old Testament is poetry than just the more widely known books like Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Song of Songs or Job. Poetry is therefore a device that cuts across other genres, being a major rhetorical technique in wisdom and prophetic literature.

The meaning and theology of the Psalms are very disputed today. The tendency for much of this century has been to place each psalm within the larger *Sitz im Leben* (historical situation) of ancient Israel's cultic life (such as William F. Albright and David Noel Freedman). This diachronic approach uses the poetic works to reconstruct the patterns and thinking of Israel's developing worship. Others, however, following the new literary criticism (see app. 1), consider each psalm a separate unit and seek only its individual artistic world (Alonso-Schokel 1960). However, the majority of scholars refuse to separate the corporate (the psalm as part of Israel's cultic worship) and the individual (the psalm as the product of a particular author) aspects. They are interdependent and should be studied together (see Gerstenberger 1985:424-25 and Brueggemann 1988:ix-x). In fact, Gerstenberger distinguished several stages from the individual to the family or tribe to national religious identity centering on the temple (1988:33-34). There are individual as well as corporate psalms, and each plays a somewhat different role in the religious formation of Israel's hymnody.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PSALMS

Scholarship no longer considers the psalms as isolated works artificially collected together in haphazard fashion. Rather, the psalter is recognized as a canonical whole, and studies tend to center either on the macrostructure, considering "overarching patterns and themes" or on the microstructure, namely, "connections among smaller groupings of psalms. The two of course are interdependent (Howard 1999:332-33). The turning point, as in most categories considered in this book, came with the onset of literary and rhetorical criticism as well as canon criticism in the 1980s, specifically with Gerald H. Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (1985). Using extrabiblical parallels, he shows the psalter was carefully edited and uses form-critical techniques to show there are five "books" of psalms. Each book ends with a doxology, marking the collection (Ps 41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; 145:21). With this we can distinguish five books (see Limburg 1992:526-27; Waltke 1997:1109-11):

- *Introduction (Ps 1—2)*—Some consider these to be a single psalm framed by the beatitudes of Psalm 1:1; 2:11. The first invites the righteous to meditate on the psalms, and the second centers on the anointed king on Mt. Zion.
- *Book 1 (Ps 3—41)*—These center on David, and ask for divine protection in light of his enemies. Most of the psalms are attributed to David.
- *Book 2 (Ps 42—72)*—There is a good chance that the first two books were originally one, as sixty of the seventy center on David. Psalms 42—49 are attributed to the "sons of Korah," probably a family in charge of temple music, with Psalms 51—65; 68—70 Davidic.
- *Book 3 (Ps 73—89)*—These are mainly attributed to Asaph (Ps 73—83) and form a series of laments centering on the breaking of the covenant and the sad state of the nation.
- *Book 4 (Ps 90—106)*—A new hope is presented, as Yahweh is king (Ps 93; 95—99) and performing his mighty acts on behalf of his people. Moses takes central stage (mentioned seven times), showing that the same God who rescued Israel then can do so now. Though the monarchy

is gone, Yahweh can save them.

- *Book 5 (Ps 107—45)*—God has indeed brought them out of their troubles (perhaps the exile), and it is time to return to the model of David (Ps 108—110; 138—45). Psalms 120—143 are "songs of ascent centering on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for worship.
- *Conclusion (Ps 146—50)*

Jewish tradition believed that the collection was a deliberate reflection on the five books of the Pentateuch. Some believe that the books can be regarded as a thematic history of Israel, with Book 1 = David's conflict with Saul, Book 2 = David's kingship, Book 3 = the Assyrian crisis, Book 4 = the destruction of the temple and the exile, and Book 5 = praise and reflection on the return from exile (Hill and Walton 2000:346, building on Wilson). This is interesting and viable (it fits the themes of each section), though it cannot be ultimately proven.

Another important issue is the titles and superscriptions in many of the psalms (116 of the 150). How reliable are they, and should we trust them as reliable historical data? They were added later than the writing of the psalms, and much of the material consists of technical musical comments and may refer to specific tunes (e.g., "According to *gittith*" [Ps 8; 81; 84] or "According to the *sheminith*" [Ps 6; 12]). Some seem to indicate the author of the piece (e.g., sons of Korah, David, Asaph). Others associate the psalm with an event in the life of David (see the list in point four of the conclusion [p. **???**]). Critical scholarship considers these to be late additions, with the historical data coming from someone searching for an appropriate setting for several of the psalms (Limburg 1992: 528). Yet it must be asked why more of David's psalms do not have the historical superscriptions if they were added a great deal later. Moreover, many psalms in the historical books have such superscriptions (Ex 15:1; Deut 31:30; Judg 5:1; 2 Sam 22:1; Is 38:9; Jon 2) have such superscriptions, and those are normally accepted. Finally, such superscriptions are found in Sumerian, Akkadian and Egyptian hymns and were common in the ancient Near East (Waltke 1997:1100-1102). Still, the differences between the superscriptions in the Masoretic Text and the LXX have made many doubt their authenticity, and the ambiguity of the Hebrew particle *lĕ* (it can mean "of, for, concerning, connected with") makes it difficult to know whether the psalm was written by David, about him or dedicated to him (VanGemeren 1991:19-20). In short, we can accept the superscriptions as containing what is probably reliable material but cannot always know what it connotes.

THE FORM OF HEBREW POETRY

It is crucial to understand how Hebrew poetry functions. It has rightly been pointed out that no portion of Scripture is more widely read than the psalms. In pocket versions of the New Testament the psalms are often appended, and in most worship services they are still sung or chanted regularly. The extent to which the psalter is quoted in the New Testament shows its importance in the life of the early church. Yet the psalms are not easily understood. The parallelism and metrical patterns are often difficult to unlock, and the unwary reader can read far more into the parallel statements than the context actually warrants. Moreover, many (like lament or imprecatory psalms) seem to be inapplicable at first glance. In addition, scholars and pastors often overexegete the imagery or metaphors in Hebrew poetry and give it more theological weight than they should. It is necessary to understand something of the form and function of Semitic poetic patterns in order to make sense of them.

1. ***Metrical patterns.*** Poetry can be identified both by metrics or rhythm and by parallelism of grammar and language. The former is useful primarily to specialists and does little to aid preachers, so I will not spend undue time on it. Yet a basic knowledge of metrics is important in order to enable the reader to gain some feel for Hebrew poetry. No one has yet discovered a formula for unlocking the secret of Semitic rhythm. As Freedman notes, every poem seems to bear different marks (1977:90-12). Scholars are divided as to whether to grade the structures via stress or syllable counts. Both depend on a knowledge of Hebrew and of phonetics. Stressed units refer to the oral side of poetry and divide a line on the basis of the syllables the Hebrew reader stressed as he recited a verse. For instance, Psalm 103:10 divides along the following stresses:

    Not on the basis of our sins/ does he deal/ with us,
    Nor on the basis of our iniquities/ does he make payment/ against us.
    (Author’s translation)

> Syllables are the basic units of speech, and many, like Freedman, believe they provide a more accurate and identifiable basis for structuring a poem. For instance, Psalm 113 has fourteen-syllable lines divided 7:7 and on occasion 8:6.

Yet not all poems are so easy to demarcate on the basis of either plan. There is simply too much variation, and each poem in Scripture must be studied on its own merits. The most we can say is that rhythm is one of the major identifying marks of Hebrew poetry. Using stress lines, scholars have divided psalms into 2:2, 3:2, 2:3 and many other patterns. Dividing by syllables has produced any number of patterns, with ten-, twelve- or fourteen-syllable lines. Moreover, strophes or verses are made up of two (as Ps 103:10) to five lines of parallel ideas. Within these there can be a myriad of forms, as the metric pattern and the parallelism are intertwined. In fact, many scholars believe that the two systems may represent stages in the development of Hebrew poetry. While this remains speculative and unverifiable, the fact remains that the poet's choice of language depended to an extent on metrical considerations. At the same time, sound (including not only metrics but oral reading, alliteration, onomatopoeia and the like) was often determinative in the choice and clustering of words in the strophes of the poem (Gerstenberger 1985:413-16).

In short, the interpreter dare not assign more meaning to individual terms than the whole psalm will allow. Word studies are not as determinative in the Psalms as they are in the New Testament Epistles, and meaning is derived more by the whole than by the parts. For all these reasons we must focus our attention more on parallelism than on metrics.

2. ***Parallelism.*** In 1750 Bishop Robert Lowth developed the position generally advocated in modern times of three basic types of parallelism: synonymous, synthetic and antithetical. Some still follow this (such as Gerstenberger, Murphy, Gray). However, a growing number of scholars (such as Kugel, Alter, Longman) have challenged this theory, arguing that it virtually reduces poetry to prose by "flattening out the poetic line" (Longman). They assert that the second line always adds meaning; in some fashion it clarifies the first. This latter approach is not only gaining ground of late, it is approaching consensus among current scholars (see the survey in Howard 1999:344-50). We could actually say that it is "winning by a landslide." As in so many areas there are not simply two types—synonymous (where the terms mean the same idea) and synthetic

(where the second adds a new idea) but many gradations between the two. Some passages exhibit virtually identical meanings, but in some the second adds a slight nuance and in others a great deal of meaning is added to the first. The many studies pointing to word pairs (a fixed stock of synonyms that were used regularly) mitigates against the view that there is always development between lines (for a good survey, see LaSor, Hubbard, Bush 1982:314- 15). Pairs like earth/dust, enemy/foe, Jacob/Israel, voice/speech, people/nation and similar combinations point toward synonymous parallelism on occasion. Yet even here some meaning is added, as the parallelism and word pairs add emphasis to the idea. Context as always must decide each case.

1. *Synonymous parallelism* occurs when the second line repeats the first with little or no added meaning. Often this includes grammatical parallels, as the second line matches the first grammatically (such as prepositional phrase, subject, verb, object) and possibly also matches in meaning. The interpreter in some instances should not read too much into the semantic variation between the two lines, for that could be intended more as a stylistic change for effect. On the other hand, there is frequently an added point, and this leads Robert Alter, Adele Berlin and others to challenge the traditional approach. For instance, many point to Psalm 2:2-4 as an example of synonymy. Let us consider each pair at a time. Psalm 2:2a states:

    > The kings of the earth take their stand
    > and the rulers gather together

    While the subjects (kings of the earth/rulers) are probably synonymous, there is development between “take their stand” and “gather together,” for the second implies the treaty that follows the “stand.” The same is true in verse 3:

    > “Let us break their chains,” they say,
    > “and throw off their fetters.”

    Certainly *chains* and *fetters* mean the same thing, but there is progression from “break” to “throw off.” It is unlikely that these are merely stylistic differences. On the other hand, consider Isaiah

53:5:

> But he was pierced for our transgressions,
> he was crushed for our iniquities;
> the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
> and by his wounds we are healed.

The first two lines more likely exhibit a type of synonymous parallelism, for the word pairs pierced/crushed and transgressions/iniquities do not exhibit significant variation in meaning. Proponents of the synthetic approach argue that the second line intensifies the first and so is not purely synonymous. Yet there is no new idea added; so it could still be labeled "synonymous parallelism." The latter two lines are clearly synthetic. Line three speaks of the means and line four the result. More difficult is the parallel idea in Psalm 103:3.

> who forgives all your sins
> and heals all your diseases

Some interpret the second line as physical healing. Certainly the Bible sees a connection between spiritual and physical healing; the two are combined often in Jesus' healing miracles (such as Lk 5:20). Yet we must be careful not to overexegete poetic parallelism in this light. While such is certainly possible, in Psalm 103 it is debatable. The two word pairs—forgives/heals and sins/diseases—often are synonymous in Scripture and in this context I would argue that we should not add physical to spiritual healing. The parallelism may be too strong, with the verb therefore referring to spiritual healing. The recent tendency, however, is to see the second line as a reference to physical healing. In conclusion, scholars are correct that there is no true synonymous parallelism as previously stated, there are a few instances (and they are rare) when the second line repeats the meaning of the first, and the only thing added is emphasis.

2. *Step parallelism* is also called "synthetic parallelism" and refers to a development of thought in which the second line adds ideas to the first. Some have doubted the validity of this category because the further meaning destroys the parallelism. However,

this is the dominant form and must be accepted; this has virtually become the definition of Hebrew parallelism. A well-known example is Psalm 1:3:

> He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
> which yields its fruit in its season
> and its leaf does not wither.
> Whatever he does prospers.

There are three "steps" here, from planting (line 1) to fruitfulness (line 2), to endurance (line 3), to a bountiful harvest (line 4, which drops the metaphor). Often the development is so stark that many think there is no parallelism at all. For instance, Jeremiah 50:19b reads:

> But I will bring Israel back to his own pasture,
> and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan;
> his appetite will be satisfied
> on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead.

There is some development in the first two lines (some would call it synonymous, but the thought moves from returning to the peaceful grazing awaiting Israel). The second pair may repeat the idea of line two, with the parallelism due to metrics rather than meaning. However, there the movement is from the act of grazing to the results (appetites satisfied). Yet consider also Psalm 139:4:

> Before a word is on my tongue
> you know it completely, O LORD.

There is no parallelism here, for the second line completes the idea of the first.

In conclusion, the reader must always let the lines themselves dictate where they lie on the scale from synonymous to synthetic to nonparallelism (metrical). I must admit that my own studies have convinced me that Berlin and Longman are mostly correct when they say that the tendency in Hebrew poetry is to add further nuances in the second line. Nearly every so-called example of synonymy I have seen in my studies (such as Ps 19:1;

103:7, 11-13) has turned out to exhibit some degree of synthetic development. Alter summarizes this school of thought when he asserts that "an argument for dynamic movement from one verse to the next—*[sic]* would be much closer to the truth, much closer to the way the biblical poets expected audiences to attend to their words" (1985:10). Yet while this is indeed "closer to the truth," it may well be that the new school is also guilty of excess when it states that there is "always" movement.

Let us consider Proverbs 3:13-20, another text commonly used as an example of synonymous parallelism. Nearly every pair actually exemplifies step parallelism, as verse 16:

> Long life is in her right hand;
> in her left hand are riches and honor.

Verse 17:

> Her ways are pleasant ways,
> and all her paths are peace.

Yet verse 14 is virtually synonymous:

> for she is more profitable than silver
> and yields better returns than gold.

One could argue that the second line makes the first more vivid (the same could be said of Is 53:5), but that is hardly a difference in meaning. In short, I would conclude that in some instances (such as Is 53:5; Prov 3:14) there is no further clarification and therefore they would fit the normal meaning of "synonymous parallelism." Though some nuance (vividness or concreteness) may be added, there is still synonymy. When there is added meaning the extent of synthetic (or formal) development will differ from case to case; exegetical study will be needed to decide.

3. *Climactic parallelism* is a type of step parallelism, but here several units build the thought to a climax. For instance, consider Psalm 8:3-4 (vv. 4-5 are quoted in Heb 2:6b-8a):

> When I consider your heavens,

the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you set in place,
what is man that you think of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

The first four lines build on one another in a sense of steps to the climactic denouement in the parallel lines of verse 4. Otto Kaiser speaks of a particular kind of climactic parallelism in which the second line repeats the key word of the first then adds the climactic thought (1975:322). For example, Psalm 29:1:

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name
worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

4. *Antithetical parallelism* reverses the stress of the others and is the third of the major types (with synonymous and synthetic). Instead of building on an idea, the second line is contrasted to the first. However, it still constitutes parallelism, for the second line restates the idea of the first by asserting the opposite. For instance, Proverbs 3:1 says,

   My son, do not forget my teaching,
   but keep my commands in your heart.

   Both units state the same idea but in opposite ways. However, in other cases the antithesis has elements of synthetic parallelism in which the second adds further clarification; for instance, Psalm 20:7 says:

   Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
   But we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

   The first line tells what not to trust and the second what to trust. Note also Proverbs 1:7:

   The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
   but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The wise and the foolish provide the major contrast in the book, but there is clear development from “fear of the LORD” (line one) to “wisdom” (line two). This is paralleled by the upright versus wicked contrast, as in Proverbs 3:33:

> The LORD’s curse is on the house of the wicked,
> but he blesses the home of the righteous.

5. *Introverted parallelism* is a particular type of antithetical parallelism in which two lines are contrasted with two others. Often it is presented in chiastic fashion, where the external pairs are contrasted with the internal pairs (AB BA), as in Psalm 30:8-10 from the Masoretic Text (Mickelsen 1963:326):

> Unto thee, O Jehovah, I was crying
> Unto the Lord I was imploring favor.
> What is the profit in my blood?
> in my going down into the pit?
> Will the dust praise thee?
> Will it make known thy truth?
> Hear, O Jehovah, and be gracious to me
> Be a helper for me.

6. *Incomplete parallelism* occurs when one element from the first line is omitted in the second; this normally occurs in synonymous lines, as in Psalm 24:1, where the predicate is missing:

> The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it
> The world, and all who live in it.

7. The *ballast variant* occurs when the second line compensates for the missing element by adding a further thought (Kaiser 1981:220, from Cyrus Gordon). This occurs more frequently than the pure incomplete form, as in Psalm 18:17:

> He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
> from my foes, who were too strong for me.

3. ***Poetic language and imagery.*** The psalmists used many of the rhetorical techniques discussed in previous chapters, such as synonymy, climax and chiasm. In addition, they used paronomasia (play on words), alliteration (where the lines begin with the same letter of the alphabet), acrostics (each line beginning with a successive letter of the alphabet) and assonance (similar sounding words). Paronomasia is exemplified in Isaiah 5:7, "He looked for justice *[mišpāt],* but saw bloodshed *[mispāh];* for righteousness *[sĕdāqâh],* but heard cries of distress *[sĕ'āqâh].*" Psalm 119 provides a good illustration of both alliteration and acrostics. The strophes of this magnificent hymn, which celebrates the Word of God, begin with successive letters of the alphabet and within each strophe the lines all begin with the same letter (for other acrostic poems, see Ps 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; Lam 3). Assonance is seen in Jeremiah 1:11-12, where God shows Jeremiah an "almond branch" [šāqād] and connects this with the promise that he is "watching over" *[sōqēd]* his people. Kaiser seeks an English equivalent: "God showed Jeremiah a 'pussy-willow branch' and said, 'This is what I *will-a-do* to my people if they do not repent' " (1981:227).

   The use of figurative imagery in poetry is particularly rich. The poets constantly reach into the everyday experiences of the people to illustrate the spiritual truths they are espousing. In Psalm 1:3-4 the psalmist contrasts the righteous, who are "like a tree planted by streams of water, / which yields its fruit in season" with the wicked, who are like "chaff / that the wind blows away." Such similes are found throughout poetry (Job 30:8; Ps 31:12; Prov 11:12; Is 1:30).

   Metaphors are even more frequent. In an especially suitable metaphor, Amos 4:1 addresses the "cows of Bashan . . . who oppress the poor . . . and say to your husbands, 'Bring us some drinks.' " In Psalm 19:1, 3 creation is personified as a herald ("The heavens declare the glory of God, / the skies proclaim the works of his hands") and as a foreign emissary ("There is no speech or language / where their voice is not heard"). Metaphors to depict God naturally are particularly apt. God is pictured as an enthroned king, a shepherd, a warrior, a charioteer, a father, a shepherd, a rock, a refreshing pool and much, much more.

   Such imagery draws the readers into the text and forces them to picture the truth in a new way. When God is asked to "take up shield and buckler; / arise and come to my aid" (Ps 35:2), the idea of God as the victorious warrior who fights alongside his people adds rich meaning to this psalm, which asks God's help against David's former friends who are

slandering him. The potential of such imagery for preaching is great indeed! Every instance is an illustration waiting to be uncovered.

In conclusion, identifying the type of parallelism is a critical aid to interpretation. This will help us to avoid reading too much into successive lines and to identify the key elements of the passage. When the structural patterns are combined with the imagery employed within them, a rich devotional as well as preaching experience results. Yet the richness added by metaphors has a corresponding problem—lack of specificity and accuracy. As Gerstenberger says, “Poetic language breaks through the confines of rationalistic world views, intuitively approaching the essence of things. Therefore, the use of comparative, inductive, indirect language is imperative for the poet” (1985:416-17). In such cases one does not seek “literal” meaning but rather “intended” meaning, that is, the meaning intended in the context of the poem. For instance, Psalm 44:19 states, “But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals,” which means a desolate uninhabitable area. The psalm itself talks about a crushing military defeat (see vv. 9-16) and this recapitulates that defeat in a section protesting Israel’s innocence before God (vv. 17-22). While the defeat was indeed serious, metaphors such as “a haunt for jackals” and “sheep to be slaughtered” (v. 22) constitute poetic license describing the unremitting enmity and suffering Israel experienced from her hostile neighbors.

TYPES OF POETRY

Semitic poetry had its origin in the religious life of the people, both corporate and individual. Prose was inadequate to express the deep yearnings of the soul, and poetry as an emotional, deep expression of faith and worship became a necessity. The many types of religious need called for different types of hymns. Hebrew poetry was not recreational but was functional in the life of the nation and its relationship with Yahweh. Poetry had a worship function in mediating between the people and God and a sermonic function in reminding the people of their responsibilities before God. The Psalms, for instance, were not peripheral as hymns often are today but were a focal point of the service both in temple and in synagogue. It is not without reason that prophetic utterances from God were so frequently given in poetic form. Not only were they more easily remembered, but they were also more emotive and powerful in their message.

1. ***War songs.*** War songs were one of the earliest forms of poetry. The call to arms of Exodus 17:16 and the war cry of Judges 7:18, 20 (and perhaps of Num 10:35-36), according to many, have poetic overtones. The best known are the victory songs of Moses (Ex 15:1-18) and Deborah (Judg 5); note also the song of victory over the Moabites in Numbers 21:27-30 and the shorter cry regarding David's military prowess in 1 Samuel 18:7, 21:11 and 29:5 ("Saul has slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands"). While in the latter case the dependence on God was not stressed, most others dwell rapturously on the hand of God stretched out against the enemies of Israel. The glory belongs to Yahweh, who shares the spoils and the honor with his people.

2. ***Love songs.*** Love songs constitute a second category of poetry. The Song of Songs, which has mystified scholars for centuries, comes immediately to mind. Childs notes five different ways the book has been interpreted throughout history (1979:571-73): (1) Judaism and the early church (as well as Watchman Nee, among others, in modern times) allegorized it as picturing the mystical love of God or Christ for his people. (2) Some modern scholars have seen it as a postexilic midrash on

divine love (similar to the first option). (3) A common view sees it as drama, either of a maiden with her lover (the traditional view) or with three characters (as the king seeks to entice the maiden away from her lover). (4) Most modern critics see no structural development but believe it is a collection of secular love songs, perhaps modeled on praise hymns. (5) A few believe the book uses love imagery for purposes of cultic ritual and was used in the festivals of Israel. Of these the third and fourth have the greatest likelihood; my personal preference is to see it as a lyric poem describing the love relationship between the beautiful maiden and her lover, described both as a rustic shepherd and as a king. Since both pictures relate to David and by extension to his son Solomon, I see no reason to follow the more complex (and difficult) three-figure drama (though see the arguments for this in Hill and Walton 2000:374-76). Nor do I see the structure as so loose that it represents a mere collection of poems (though see Longman 1997:1237-38, who sees this patterned after Adam and Eve in Gen 2—3 as a story of "redeemed sexuality"). The central feature is certainly the love between the two. The poem has only a slight plot structure, and the love relationship is as strong at the beginning as at the end. Therefore whichever of the three major views we take, it is preeminently a love song and would be excellent in a marriage seminar.[1]

3. ***Lament.*** The lament is the most common type of psalm. More than sixty laments are found[2] in the psalter. These include both individual (such as Ps 3; 5—7; 13; 17; 22; 25—28; 31; 38—40; 42—43; 51; 54—57; 69—71; 120; 139; 142) and corporate (such as Ps 9; 12; 44; 58; 60; 74; 79—80; 94; 137) laments in which the person or nation cries out its anguish to God. David uttered two outside the psalms, for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17-27) and for Abner (2 Sam 3:33-34). Such hymns both agonize over the situation and petition God for help.

   John Hayes notes seven common themes in the structure of lament psalms (1976:58-59; also Waltke 1997:1103-7): (1) address to God (such as the cry of dereliction taken up in Ps 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") often with a confession of faith ("In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame" [Ps 71:1]); (2) description of distress, often highly figurative ("I am in the midst of lions / . . . whose teeth are spears and arrows" [Ps 57:4]), at times presented as concern regarding himself ("I sink in the miry depths" [Ps 69:2]) or even as a complaint against God ("Yet you have rejected and

humbled us" [Ps 44:9]); (3) plea for redemption, both for deliverance ("Arise, O LORD! / Deliver me, O my God!" [Ps 3:7a]) and the defeat of his enemies ("Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked" [Ps 3:7b]); (4) statement of confidence or trust in Yahweh ("O LORD, you will keep us safe / and protect us from such people forever" [Ps 12:7]); (5) confession of sin ("forgive my iniquity, though it is great" [Ps 25:11b]) or affirmation of innocence ("though you test me, you will find nothing. / . . . I have kept myself / from the ways of the violent. / . . . my feet have not slipped" [Ps 17:3-5]); (6) a vow or pledge to do certain things if God grants the request ("I am under vows to you, O God; / I will present my thank offerings to you" [Ps 56:12]), often involving a reminder to God of his covenant commitments ("Remember . . . O LORD" [Ps 74:18]); (7) conclusion, which may be in the form of praise ("Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; / let your glory be over all the earth" [Ps 57:11]) or restatement of the request ("Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; / make your face shine upon us, / that we may be saved" [Ps 80:19]). Few psalms contain all these elements. Nevertheless, these do constitute the basic lament.

The value of such psalms for every believer is obvious. Whether one is ill (Ps 6; 13; 31; 38; 39; 88; 102), beset by enemies (3; 9; 10; 13; 35; 52—57; 62; 69; 86; 109; 120; 139) or aware of sin (25; 38; 39; 41; 51), the lament psalms offer not only encouragement but models for prayer. Many have claimed that we should pray them directly; I agree but prefer to meditate, contextualize and then pray these psalms as they reflect my own situation.

4. ***Hymns or praise songs.*** Hymns or praise songs are the nearest to pure worship of any type of biblical poetry. They are not the product of sorrow or need but directly celebrate the joy of worshiping Yahweh. This is an important reminder of the true purpose of the Christian life as expressed in the Westminster Confession, which says that the goal of man is to "glorify God and enjoy him forever." Nearly all hymns contain the same structure: calling on Yahweh ("O LORD, you have searched me / and you know me" [Ps 139:1]); a call to worship ("I will extol the LORD will all my heart" [Ps 111:1]); a motivation clause praising Yahweh and giving the reasons for worship, often centering on God's attributes and deeds ("Glorious and majestic are his deeds" [Ps 111:3]); and a conclusion repeating the call to praise, often including a series of blessings ("To him belongs eternal praise" [Ps 111:10]).

Fee and Stuart note three specific types of hymns (2003:213): Yahweh

is praised as Creator (Ps 8; 19; 104; 148), as protector and benefactor of Israel (Ps 66; 100; 111; 114; 149) and as Lord of history (Ps 33; 103; 113; 117; 145—47). Several hymns go into detail regarding God as in control of history by recapitulating the great salvation events in the life of Israel (Ps 78; 105—106; 135—136). These recapitulate Israel's failures and contrast them to God's faithfulness, calling on the nation to renew its covenant pledge. Such hymns were sung at harvest celebrations and festivals, at pilgrimages to the temple (Ps 84; 87; 122; 132), after military triumphs (Ps 68; 1 Macc 4—5) and at special occasions for joy. The Hallel psalms (Ps 113—118) formed a special part of the Passover celebration and were also a regular part of the synagogue service. The development of these psalms from the divine compassion for the oppressed (Ps 113) to his redemptive power (Ps 114) and help to Israel (Ps 115) to Israel's praise and thanks to Yahweh (Ps 116—118) provides as fresh and meaningful a worship experience today as it did when originally written and sung.

5. ***Thanksgiving hymns.*** More specific than hymn or praise songs, thanksgiving hymns thank God for his answers to specific prayers. We could almost say they form the "before" and "after" of religious trust, with the lament placing the problem before God and the thanksgiving praising him for his response. Like the laments, thanksgiving hymns divide into individual (Ps 18; 30; 32; 34; 40; 66; 92; 103; 116; 118; 138) and corporate (Ps 65; 67; 75; 107; 124; 136) expressions. In the life of the people they would be sung after God had delivered them from the calamity that led to the lament. Such is the form of Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish (Ps 2:2-9), expressed as a thanksgiving that reenacts the crisis (vv. 2-5) and the repentance (vv. 6-7), then vows to sacrifice to Yahweh and repay the debt (v. 9). In addition to thanking God for his deliverance, such psalms regularly pledge future fidelity and worship to God ("Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD" [Ps 18:49]) and specifically give the glory to Yahweh for the defeat of the psalmist's enemies ("You armed me with strength for battle; / you made my adversaries bow at my feet" [Ps 18:39]) or his recovery from illness ("O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit" [Ps 30:3]).

   There are six structural elements in thanksgiving songs (Gerstenberger 1988:15; see also LaSor, Hubbard, Bush 1982:519-20):

   - invitation to give thanks or to praise Yahweh (Ps 30:2, 5 [RSV 1,

4]; 34:2-4 [RSV 1- 3]; 118:1-4)
- account of trouble and salvation (Ps 18:4-20 [RSV 3-19]; 32:3-5; 40:2-4 [RSV 1-3]; 41:5-10 [RSV 4-9]; 116:3-4; 118:10-14)
- praises of Yahweh, acknowledgment of his saving work (Ps 18:47-49 [RSV 46-48]; 30:2-4, 12-13 [RSV 1-3, 11-12]; 40:6 [RSV 5]; 92:5-6 [RSV 4-5]; 118:14, 28-29)
- offertory formula at the presentation of sacrifice (Ps 118:21; 130:2; 138:1-2; Is 12:1) blessings over participants in the ceremony (Ps 22:27 [RSV 26]; 40:5 [RSV 4]; 41:2 [RSV 1]; 118:8-9)
- exhortation (Ps 32:8-9; 34:10, 12-15; 40:5; 118:8-9)

Several psalms (Ps 11; 16; 23; 25; 27; 62; 91; 111; 125; 131) praise God for his beneficent protection and invoke faith in his loving care. These hymns are very meaningful in stressful situations and provide valuable parallels to New Testament teaching on trust in God (such as 1 Pet 5:7).

6. ***Songs of celebration and affirmation.*** Songs of celebration and affirmation encompass several types of hymns that celebrate God's covenant relationship with the king and the nation (Fee and Stuart 2003: 213-14). These hymns were at the heart of Israel's sense of self-identity and so can rightly be placed under a single rubric, even though most scholars separate them. At the heart are the psalms of covenant renewal (Ps 50; 81) probably sung at the annual covenant ceremonies and valuable for a sense of spiritual renewal today. The Davidic covenant psalms (Ps 89; 132) celebrate God's choice of David's lineage and have messianic implications. As such these psalms affirm the election and calling of Israel to be God's special people.

   The royal psalms contain several types. The coronation psalms (Ps 2; 72; 101; 110) and enthronement psalms (Ps 24; 29; 47; 93; 95—99) were written to depict the implications of the accession to the throne, with its ritual crowning, swearing in before Yahweh, anointing with oil and receiving the homage of the people. The enthronement psalms may have gone beyond the single coronation to encompass an annual ceremony celebrating the kingship. The view of some scholars that they also teach the enthronement of Yahweh over Israel is based on slim evidence and is not as likely. The obvious messianic implications of these psalms often have overshadowed the deep theological significance of each within the life of the nation. We must seek to understand their historical meaning before plumbing their eschatological features. Other types of royal

psalms are the lament (Ps 89; 144), thanksgiving for victory (Ps 18; 118), war preparation (Ps 20; 27) and royal wedding (Ps 45). In each case the king is central.

Another type, Songs of Zion (Ps 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 122), praise God for his gift of Jerusalem, the holy city. The history of Jerusalem, from its connection to Abraham and Moses to its choice by David, as the new capital is sung and its sacred name, Zion, is central. John Hayes elaborates the themes (1976:42-52). The annual pilgrimage required by the Torah, a sacred and joyous occasion, is central in Psalm 84 and Psalm 122. The entrance into the sanctuary after the pilgrimage is celebrated in Psalm 15 and Psalm 24. The Songs of Zion per se (Ps 46; 48; 76; 87; 125) proclaim God's election, his protection of the sacred city and temple, and the security of the city against its enemies. Therefore, the pilgrims and indeed the nation are bidden to behold God's works there.

7. ***Wisdom and didactic psalms.*** Wisdom and didactic psalms (Ps 1; 36; 37; 49; 73; 112; 127; 128; 133) parallel Proverbs in the celebration of wisdom as God's great gift to his people and its connection to the inscripturated Word and Torah (Torah psalms are Ps 1; 19; 119). The people are called to a new awareness of their privilege and responsibility to heed the divine wisdom via spiritual purity and obedience. As in Proverbs, the way of the righteous is contrasted with that of the wicked (Ps 1; 49; 73) and the prosperity of the faithful is promised (Ps 1; 112; 119; 127—128). The high ethical quality of these songs makes them directly accessible to the modern Christian.
8. ***Imprecatory psalms.*** Imprecatory psalms (Ps 12; 35; 52; 57—59; 69; 70; 83; 109; 137; 140) are usually lament psalms where the writer's bitterness and desire for vindication are especially predominant. This leads to such statements as Psalm 137:8- 9, "[Happy is] he who seizes your infants / and dashes them against the rocks." Such statements are shocking to modern sensitivities and cause many to wonder at the ethical standards of the biblical writers. However, several points must be made. The writer is actually pouring out his complaint to God regarding the exile, as in Psalm 137. He is also heeding the divine command of Deuteronomy 32:35 (Rom 12:19), "It is mine to avenge; I will repay." Finally, as Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart note, the author is calling for judgment on the basis of the covenant curses (Deut 28:53-57; 32:25), which make provision for the complete annihilation of the transgressors, even family members (2003:221). The hyperbolic language is common in such emotional passages.

In short, these do not really contradict the New Testament teaching to love our enemies. When we can pour out our animosity to God, that very act opens the door to acts of kindness akin to Romans 12:20 (Prov 25:21-22). In fact, meditation on and application of these psalms could be therapeutic to those who have suffered traumatic hurt (such as child abuse). By pouring out one's natural bitterness to God, the victim could be freed to "love the unlovely." We must remember that the same David who penned all the above except for Psalm 83 and Psalm 137 showed great mercy and love to Saul. When you have called out for justice after being deeply wounded (like the martyred saints in Rev 6:9-11), Romans 12:19 is actually being fulfilled because the vengeance is truly left with God, freeing you to forgive your enemy.

POETRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

While the presence of hymns and poetic passages is not nearly so predominant in the New Testament, it is clearly present and plays an important role. Frank Gaebelein notes five kinds of poetic passages (1975:813-14): (1) quotations from ancient poets (Acts 17:28, from Epimenides in the Mars Hill address; 1 Cor 15:33, the aphorism of Menander of Athens); (2) fragments of hymns (1 Tim 3:16; Phil 2:6-11); (3) poetic passages following Hebraic forms (the hymns of Lk 1—2); (4) passages lacking meter but containing the exalted expressions of poetry (the Beatitudes of Mt 5:3-12 or the Johannine prologue, Jn 1:1-18); (5) apocalyptic imagery containing hymnic portions (Rev 4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12-13). Of these the two most important for our purposes are the hymns of Luke 1—2 and the creeds and hymns of the Epistles.

It is clear that New Testament poetry has close affinities with Old Testament patterns. Most of the characteristics previously described can be demonstrated in the New Testament. The Magnificat alone has

- synonymous parallelism My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. (Lk 1:46-47)
- synthetic parallelism He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. (Lk 1:51)
- antithetical parallelism He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. (Lk 1:52)

In the New Testament, especially in the Epistles, the hymns demonstrate the highest level of theological expression. The creeds and hymns utilize poetic format to present cardinal New Testament doctrines, especially christological truth, often centering on the humiliation and exaltation of Christ (Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:18, 22; see also Eph 2:14-18; 5:14; 1 Cor 13:1-13; Heb 1:3-4; and possibly Jn 1:1-18). These hymns provide excellent evidence for the possibility of blending the poetic format and the highest possible theological message in biblical times.

THEOLOGY IN THE PSALMS

Many modern critics, stressing the “poetry” and “art” of the psalms, argue against theological content and prefer to think of the “world” portrayed in the psalms. Yet it is also true that biblical poetry expressed the deepest dimensions of the faith of ancient Israel, especially the view of God. In fact, theology is central to biblical poetry. Israel’s cultic hymnody is so vast that any attempt to systematize it will never be able to capture its grandeur and depth. Yet those themes that are central to the psalms are certainly worthy of such a pursuit. Primarily, the psalms center on worship and prayer; they demonstrate better than any other biblical genre Israel’s God-consciousness. They make no actual theological statements, but their very God-centeredness is highly theological. Every area of life is related to God, and he is seen as sovereign over all. As Peter Craigie points out, the framework for this is provided by the covenant concept: “Their knowledge of God is rooted in covenant; they respond to God in prayer, in praise, or in particular life situations because of an existing covenant relationship which makes such response possible” (1983:40). Primarily, the covenant God is portrayed in intimate relationship to his people, and in this sense the psalms reflect popular religion, for they reflect the life of faith essential to every child of God, from the king to the common person.

Willem VanGemeren (1991:15-17) presents seven aspects of a theology of the Psalms: (1) the names of God (Yahweh, 700 times; Elohim, 365 times; Adonai, 54 times; showing the centrality of covenant), (2) the perfections of God (his goodness and glory, his compassion and love, yet also his judgment and justice), (3) the acts of God (creation, redemption, proclamation, rescuing, blessing and judging his people), (4) the hope of redemption and righteousness (the result of the first three centering on the beginning of God’s righteous rule on earth and the demonstration of his sovereignty to all, (5) the kingdom of God (the God of creation has both made and sustains this world, and he will rule over it through his people Israel, in whom his kingdom is present), (6) the Davidic Messiah (the Davidic king [Ps 2; 72; 89; 132] is God’s instrument for extending his kingdom worldwide), (7) wisdom from above (though persecuted, God’s righteous live in obedience to his laws, in other words, lives of wisdom).

The first step in determining the theology of Psalms as a whole as well as of individual psalms is to consider genre. Each type has a distinctive message. The lament centers on suffering and trials, the royal psalm on king (and Messiah at times) and imprecatory psalms on relating to one's enemies. In every case, however, divine sovereignty and covenant promise are central. Secondarily, Psalms celebrate the ethical responsibility of God's people as they relate to him in faith and apply that to everyday life. "Righteousness" in the psalms is life-related, depicting the moral life practiced by those who have experienced God's mercy. It is primarily a relationship with God and then the life of faith that results.

The second key is holistic exegesis. Due to the highly poetic nature of Psalms and the constant metaphors, the interpreter must read the parts in light of the whole. Hyperbole (in the imprecatory psalms) is frequent, and so archetypal themes must be developed by looking at the psalm as a whole and by noting the theological thread that links various psalms with similar themes.

Third, all the controls mentioned with respect to wisdom writings apply to Psalms as well. The reader dare not interpret individual statements like the all-encompassing promise of prosperity to the righteous in Psalm 1 apart from the larger context of Psalms as a whole. Some psalms (such as Ps 1) stress the positive side of the life of faith; others (such as Ps 39) center on the negative side, the transitoriness of existence. As Ridderbos and Craigie state, "The Psalms as a whole reflect a fully rounded wisdom on the nature of human life in relation to God, whereas the individual Psalms may contain only a part of the larger picture" (1986:1038).

Finally, every aspect must relate in some way to Israel's cultus, its ritual worship system. Even the wisdom orientation reflected primarily Israel's celebration of its life and walk before God. In this sense the psalms are a celebration of life, stressing the fact that existence has no meaning without the divine presence and imprimatur. Most scholars agree that every psalm was utilized in Israel's worship. Corporate laments and thanksgivings most directly reflect this orientation, but even individual psalms were secondarily related to the cultus. Interpretation must recognize this formal setting, for the theology is derived from this purpose.

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

While each of these categorical descriptions of biblical poetry has been helpful, they have not clearly told us how to approach and interpret properly the poetic passages.

1. Note the strophic (stanza) patterns of the poem or hymn. Structure is the first step of exegesis. The primary element of Hebrew poetry is the pattern of parallel lines and strophes. The newer translations aid the reader by placing the lines side by side, indenting the parallelism and leaving a space between the strophes. The most important criterion for discovering a break between strophes is thought development. For instance, in Psalm 31 the first strophe (vv. 1-5) is David's plea for help, the second (vv. 6-8) contains his statement of trust and the third (vv. 9-13) has his complaint. Stylistic changes also indicate new strophes. In Psalm 30 the first stanza (vv. 1-3) addresses God, the second the saints (vv. 4-5), the third returns to the relationship between the psalmist and the Lord (vv. 6-7), the fourth (vv. 8-10) is a direct prayer and the fifth (vv. 11-12) describes the results. Furthermore, chiasm or alliteration distinguish strophic divisions. In Psalm 119 the acrostic outline is quite clear, with eight lines in each stanza and each stanza beginning with successive letters of the alphabet. The effect of *Selah* is more debated, since no consensus has been reached as to its meaning. Kaiser correctly calls for caution, due to the use of the term in awkward places (such as in titles or in the middle of strophes), but he tentatively accepts its use in some cases to distinguish strophes (Ps 46 but not in Ps 57; 67—68).[3]
2. Group parallel lines. The poet is expressing his thought in whole units using very emotive, colorful language. The interpreter must walk a fine line between reading too much into individual lines and assuming synonymy whenever the thoughts are similar. Mitchell Dahood mentions a thousand word pairs or synonymous terms that are used in both Ugaritic and Hebrew poetry (1976:669). The reader must avoid the temptation to see too great a difference in meaning in such situations. Yet

at the same time the context must indicate whether or not the clauses are totally synonymous. For instance, the three lines of Psalm 23:2-3a form a single unit and should be interpreted together:

> He makes me lie down in green pastures;
> he leads me beside the quiet waters.
> he restores my soul.

David is not speaking chronologically. The restoration of the soul in line three states the basic meaning of the imagery presented in the first two lines. Further, it is important to note the type of parallelism. We do not have purely synonymous parallelism. As Craigie notes (1983:207), the "green pastures" may recall the "holy pasture" (Ex 15:13) that was the goal of the exodus from Egypt, and the "quiet waters" may echo the "resting place" associated with the ark in the wilderness wanderings (Num 10:33). Therefore, the imagery adds a sense of divine guidance and protection from the exodus and the wilderness wanderings to David's current experience. The basic idea is similar, but the second line adds a nuance to the first.

3. Study the metaphorical language. In poetry the figurative language is more predominant and at times more difficult to understand than it is in prose. Psalm 19, with the "heavens" declaring the glory of God, is not meant to teach Hebrew cosmology, nor does Psalm 121:1 ("I will lift up my eyes to the hills") mean God lives there. Yet the background to such imagery adds richness and depth to the understanding of the psalm. One can hardly overstate the beauty of Psalm 23 or Psalm 121, seen in the evocative symbolism of the shepherd and Sinai metaphors. Yet the imagery of the imprecatory psalms must be studied carefully from the standpoint of the covenant curse. Theology rarely stems from the metaphor itself but rather from the whole context of which it is a part. Here structural considerations will tell the reader how the metaphor fits into the whole message. Determining whether climactic parallelism, chiasm, inclusio or repetition controls the psalm is the first step to deciding how the metaphors interact to produce the psalm's message.
4. If possible, note the historical background to the psalm. In many cases the traditional title of the psalm will provide this. While these titles were added later and are not part of the canonical Scriptures, they are generally reliable traditions, although scholars differ as to how reliable they are. They contain five different kinds of data: the author or person(s)

connected to the psalm, historical background, musical notations, liturgical comments and the type of psalm (e.g., “A song of ascents” [Ps 120]). What interests us here are the historical notes, found in the titles of fourteen psalms (Ps 3; 7; 18; 30; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142), all connected to David’s life. Many doubt the authenticity of the titles, arguing that they were added at a later stage of the tradition, namely, when they were added to the canon, citing the fact that by the time of Christ (as evidenced in the Septuagint) most of the psalms have titles (see Childs 1971:137-50). Others give the titles canonical force and argue for their full authenticity on the grounds that there is no evidence these psalms ever existed without the titles (see Archer 1964:428-33).

However, it is probably best to take an optimistic but cautious approach to the titles (see Longman 1988:40-42 and Ridderbos and Craigie 1986:1031). On the whole, there is little reason to doubt the basic trustworthiness of the titles. Yet at the same time we cannot assume that the Masoretic traditions were always accurate, and we must check the historical note by the context. In most cases the title fits quite well. In some instances, however, there are difficulties. For instance, Psalm 30 is a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from a serious illness, yet the title calls it “For the dedication of the temple” (or house). On the basis of the title some link this psalm with 1 Chronicles 21—22, specifically with God’s lifting the plague in 21:14-30, leading to the preparations for building the temple in chapter 22. Yet others (such as Craigie and Longman) doubt this since it is an individual psalm and contains little that would relate directly to temple liturgy and worship. On the whole, it is best to be cautious in such instances. Still an excellent sermon series would be to preach several of the Davidic psalms chronologically (on the basis of superscriptions) as they relate to incidents in David’s life.

5. Study the psalm in terms of its type and basic stance. Each type of psalm elucidated (lament, praises, royal) must be studied differently. Some overlap (such as the royal lament) and should be interpreted accordingly. The statements about God and his relationship to his people differ markedly from type to type, and the applicability to present circumstances also changes. Those who wish to worship God will prefer a praise psalm to a lament, while those who are depressed about God’s seeming absence from their lives clearly need the latter.
6. Study the messianic psalms in terms of their historical purpose before noting their eschatological import. Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 45, 69, 72, 89, 102, 109, 110 and 132 have in part or in whole been seen as messianic.

Yet they also have historical dimensions primarily in terms of David's situations. Both dimensions must be noted and combined to catch the full meaning of the text. The interpreter must first exegete the psalm to determine the author's intended meaning. Many of the "messianic psalms" may not have been intended messianically but may have been understood as such in a typological sense (see Osborne 1988a:930-31). In such cases we would see the psalm primarily in its original sense and secondarily in its canonical/messianic sense. Of course a detailed discussion is not possible here but this general caution may prove helpful (see also Payne 1975:940-44).

7. Study the psalm as a whole before drawing conclusions. The thought flow of the psalm is critical to its meaning. This also follows general hermeneutical guidelines as elucidated in chapters one through five. After noting the basic structure of a passage and exegeting the details, it is necessary to return and rework the whole before elucidating its meaning. The psalms intend to be understood as literary units, for they were written individually on single occasions. Therefore, it is even more true of poetry (than of prose) that the whole is the key to the parts.
8. New Testament poetry must be studied on two levels. Since the creeds and hymns of the New Testament are often being quoted, they may have had a liturgical meaning in the life of the church before their incorporation into the particular New Testament passage. Moreover, each had a "canonical" status, and so that meaning has importance for us as well. The first level is the original theological meaning, and the second level is the use of the creed or hymn in the individual context. Philippians 2:6-11, for example, must be understood first as an incarnation hymn (its original meaning) and second as a model for Christian attitudes (its use in the context of Phil 2:1-11).

9

Wisdom

One of the least-known of the biblical genres is Wisdom literature. The Old Testament books placed under this rubric are Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In addition I would add the books of the Apocrypha Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) and the Wisdom of Solomon. Few people know quite what to make of these works, and even fewer sermons are preached from this body of literature. When they are preached, however, they are frequently misused to support an almost secular lifestyle. The reason is their subject matter. Preachers often have defined wisdom as "the practical use of the knowledge that God gives." Yet Georg Fohrer defines it as "prudent, considered, experienced and competent action to subjugate the world and to master the various problems of life and life itself" (1971:476). Its goal is to use properly God's creation and to enjoy life in the present under his care. Since wisdom writings deal so constantly with the pragmatic side of life, it is easy to misuse them to support an earth-centered lifestyle. In fact, I define biblical wisdom as "living life in God's world by God's rules." The central theme is not secular life but "fearing God" (Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; cf. Ps 111:10; Eccles 12:13) and its implications for daily life. Philip Nel (1982:127) calls the fear of the Lord the "foundation" of Israelite wisdom thinking.

Yet this very practical aspect makes wisdom literature so valuable for the modern Christian who seeks a relevant religion. Jesus and the early church recognized this, and the New Testament contains numerous wisdom themes (see p. 250). All ancient religions had to cope with life's problems, and as a result all developed wisdom teachings. Egypt and the entire region of Mesopotamia had wisdom traditions (see Berry 1995:29-36), and it is likely that the Israelites took these traditions and reworked them on the basis of their Yahwist theology. Ronald Clements (1992:16-19) believes these Near Eastern parallels as well as Psalms 1, 37, 73, 104 and 119 mean the origin could truly go back to Solomon's reign, though the major development came in the postexilic period. I see little reason not to locate the development of wisdom earlier (see "The History of Wisdom Teaching" on pp. 254-57). Central to all these traditions is the concept of the "wise man"; not as one who escapes the world but as one who learns to live in the world with God's guidance and help. There is no body of literature as

practically ordered as wisdom, and this alone makes its value immense.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WISDOM

Scholars continue to debate whether wisdom is primarily a perspective on life, hence a theological construct, or a body of literature (note the similarities to the debate on apocalyptic). I believe that wisdom is first a way of life and then a genre. Primarily wisdom is a theological pattern of thinking that applies the wisdom of God to practical issues of life. This attitude results in wisdom sayings and then in larger bodies of literature that collect such sayings (such as Proverbs and Sirach) or discuss wisdom themes (such as Job and Ecclesiastes). I will deal with the generic aspects later. Those characteristic patterns that define a "sapiential understanding of reality" (von Rad, Sheppard, Murphy) are the subject of this section. Before we can exegete wisdom sayings properly, it is important to understand how they function within the life and mindset of Israel.

1. ***A practical orientation.*** A practical orientation is the basic characteristic of wisdom thinking. The proverbs and sayings help young initiates take their proper place in society. The "wisdom" of the past is handed down to the young in order that the societal order and mores might continue unabated. Therefore, the collected sayings center on proper etiquette and speech ("Do you see a man who speaks in haste? / There is more hope for a fool than for him" [Prov 29:20]), self-control ("Like a city whose walls are broken down / is a man who lacks self-control" [Prov 25:28]), family relationships ("A wise son brings joy to his father, / but a foolish son grief to his mother" [Prov 10:1]), material wealth ("Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, / but righteousness delivers from death" [Prov 11:4]; but cf. "The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it" [Prov 10:22]) as well as topics like why the righteous suffer (the book of Job) and the evil prosper (Ps 49; 73). Kidner lists the following subjects discussed in Proverbs: God and man, wisdom, the fool, the sluggard, the friend, words, the family, life and death (1964:31-56; see also Kidner 1985:24-33). These topics provide the best possible evidence for the pragmatic nature of wisdom literature. The value of this for Christian life today is also obvious; few portions of

Scripture are more directly applicable to the modern age (see excellent examples in O'Connor 1988).

However, it is critical to heed the strong caution of Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart in this regard (2003:226-27). They note three ways wisdom books are misused. First, people tend to take the sayings out of context and misapply them in literalistic fashion. For instance, Proverbs 10:22 (on God blessing one with wealth) is preached as God's wanting all believers to prosper materially, while in reality it is part of the larger contrast between the righteous and the wicked in chapter 10 and must be tempered by other passages on the place of poverty (see Prov 17:5; 18:23) in God's plan. Second, many Christians fail to define properly wisdom terms like *fool* in Proverbs 14:7 ("Stay away from a foolish man, / for you will not find knowledge on his lips"). *Fool* refers to the unbelieving pagan who ignores God and follows self; it cannot be applied to the uneducated or to other believers regarded as "fools" because of theological differences. Third, people do not note the line or argument in a text and apply what the biblical text shows is actually wrong. For instance, Job 15:20-22 ("All his days the wicked man . . . despairs of escaping the darkness") is often preached as meaning that unbelievers are actually unhappy. However, Job denies (Job 17:1- 16) this speech by Eliphaz, and practical experience (as well as Calvin's doctrine of common grace) shows the erroneous nature of such a statement.

When applying practical wisdom teaching, it is crucial to use the exegetical tools at one's disposal in order to ascertain what the text meant originally before applying it to the modern situation. It is a dangerous practice to apply wisdom statements casually without noting what they do not say as well as what they say. When the author's intended meaning speaks directly to Christians today, however, it yields a rich treasure. Not only should there be more sermons from this portion of Scripture, but wisdom sayings should also be utilized much more frequently as secondary texts to anchor the application of other Scriptural texts.

2. ***Dependence on God.*** Dependence on God is the other major theme of wisdom literature. In the past scholars often have said that this genre was originally secular and became religious only at a later stage of development. However, few today make this claim for the Mesopotamians or Egyptians, let alone for the Hebrews. Bruce Waltke and David Diewert (1999:297) claim that "no distinction can be made between secular/profane and religious/pious in any ancient Near East

literature." As Morgan says, "The evidence available confirms the view of those who maintain that Israelite wisdom, as it has been passed down to us in wisdom and non-wisdom literature, was thoroughly Yahwistic" (1981:145). In responding to William McKane (1965), Stuart Weeks concludes (1994:73, cf. 57-73):

> The theory that early Israelite wisdom was a secular tradition has been examined in some depth, and found wanting in almost every respect. The internal evidence of Proverbs cited by McKane and others is, I have argued, largely illusory, while the Egyptian and other non-Israelite evidence suggests that wisdom literature conventionally incorporated religious elements long before it reached Israel.

The many variables and paradoxes faced in life forced the wise person to recognize his limitations and depend on God as the true source of wisdom. Proverbs 9:10 (cf. 2:5) shows this: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, / and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." God is seen as sovereign (Prov 16:4, 9; 19:21; Job 38—42), omnipotent (Job 38:31-33; Wisdom of Solomon 6:7; 8:3), omniscient (Prov 15:3; 21:2) and as both Creator (Prov 14:31; Job 28:23-27; 38:4-14) and Judge (Prov 15:11; 16:2).

James Crenshaw notes three aspects of the religious dimensions (1976:24-25). Although he believes they are successive stages of "theologization," I prefer to think of them as parallel constituents of wisdom thinking. First, wisdom links daily experiences with the centrality of God's covenant. Since Yahweh alone rewards virtue and punishes vice, the faithful must place every aspect of experience, domestic and social as well as religious, in his care. Second, the divine presence transcends the prophetic, sacrificial or priestly spheres. The divine presence also is felt in the practical life of God's people; divine Wisdom dwells in their midst. Third, wisdom is especially identified with Torah. While Crenshaw sees this as a late development found primarily in Jesus Ben Sira, the Torah link is identifiable in several places, such as the connection between the "commandments" and wisdom in Proverbs 3:1-12 and Proverbs 4:4-5. In short, the connection between Torah and wisdom had its foundation in the earlier period, though its explicit expression came later.

I would add a fourth characteristic of wisdom, the tendency to

personify wisdom as an extension of God himself, seen in one sense as a "craftsman" standing alongside of and aiding the God of creation (Prov 8:29-30), as a female teacher inviting students to learn from her at the gates of the city (Prov 1:20-21; 8:1-36) and as a hostess inviting people to her banquet (Prov 9:1-12). Wisdom is contrasted with the adulteress (Prov 2:16-19; 7:6-27) and with the foolish hostess (Prov 9:13-18).

Central to wisdom is the overriding concept of the "fear of the LORD," combined in Job 1:1 and 28:28 as well as Proverbs 3:7, 8:13, and 16:6 with the ethical maxim, "turn away from evil." These are two sides of the same coin. Nel discusses the combination of the ethical ("fear" as denoting a prior relationship with God) and the cultic ("fear" as denoting obedience to the Torah and the religious cult) in Israel and its wisdom literature (1982:97-101). The "fear of the LORD" is the milieu or sphere within which true wisdom is attainable. Therefore, wisdom does not connote the acquisition of cognitive knowledge but rather is lived as an ethical concept. It comes from "listening" to the Lord and obeying his precepts (Prov 1:5, 8; 2:2).[1] The other side of this is an active opposition to evil. The "wicked" are the antithesis of the wise (Job 27:13-23; Ps 1:1-6; Prov 1:20-33) and will inexorably move toward their own destruction (Prov 5:23; 10:21). Evil is pictured as a wanton woman luring the foolish down the path to death (Prov 2:16; 5:1-14; 9:13-18). The wise both avoid and oppose evil (Prov 14:16; 16:6). Again we see that we cannot discuss the religious orientation without discussing the practical ethical overtones. The two go hand in glove.

3. ***Indirect authority.*** In the past many argued that there was an absence of authority, and that wisdom derived its influence from tradition or from its practical value (from the fact that it worked). This view has been drastically revised, primarily due to the realization that the Yahwistic perspective behind wisdom thinking is paramount. However, the name of Yahweh never becomes the source of the wisdom tradition itself (unlike prophecy), nor do we find explicit formulas of the type used by the prophets, such as "Thus says the LORD." Therefore, divine authority is presupposed but not explicitly enunciated. Others argue that the family or the educational system provided the authority. This is extremely unlikely. While family and school may have played important roles in the development of wisdom thinking, neither is ever mentioned as the force behind the movement itself. Weeks (1994:132-56) discusses the question of schools in Israel and points out that the earliest mention of schools is in Sirach 51:23. Three passages sometimes adduced as pointing to formal

education (Is 28:9-13; 50:4-9; Prov 22:17-21) demonstrate no clear evidence for such. For instance, the "one taught" in Isaiah 50:4 does not demand official schools. Therefore, it is erroneous to point to formal education as the basis of wisdom in Israel.

Nel is closer to the truth when he notes that each wisdom admonition draws its authority from within, particularly from the motivating clause attached to it (1982:90- 92). It is the "intrinsic truth" embedded in the saying that demands obedience. Therefore, in a sense all three of those already mentioned (God, tradition, experience) played a role in the indirect authority of the wisdom promulgations. For instance, Proverbs 2 demands that the reader adhere to wisdom and centers its motivation on the fact that God is the source of wisdom (vv. 6-8), that wisdom will please the soul (vv. 10-11), that evil (the "strange woman"; cf. vv. 12-17) destroys (vv. 18-19) and that the righteous inherit the land (vv. 21-22). God is behind the whole, but the practical benefits are stressed and the reader is expected to adhere to the admonitions for *all* these reasons.

4. ***Creation theology.*** An emphasis on creation is part of the basic fabric of Old Testament wisdom thinking (see Zimmerli 1976:175-99 and Hermisson 1978:118-34). Here it closely parallels Egyptian wisdom, which centered on the "order" of life. This of course is at the heart of the theodicy of Job. The argument is that God created the world in the way that he saw fit, and humans should not question the divinely appointed order. All wisdom literature, not just Job, develops this theme (e.g., Is 40:28- 29). Human beings must take their proper place in the cosmos, find their appointed life and make the most of it. Since the Lord has made both "ears that hear and eyes that see" (Prov 20:12), a person must use all the senses under the rules God has established. Waltke and Diewert (1999:298-99) trace those (e.g., Hartmut Gese) who take this as a search for order (i.e., law and justice) that God has implanted in creation itself. Yet this goes too far, for wisdom is also cognizant of the uncertainty of life and that it is not the natural order but God who controls destiny or fate.

   We should note two aspects of this theology. First, the principle of retribution governs the universe. The same God who created the universe remains in control; the actions of the righteous and the wicked in the final analysis must answer to him alone. Since God is ruler as well as judge of the world, he will reward the pious and punish the wicked, as in Proverbs 11:21, "Be sure of this: the wicked will not go unpunished, / but those who are righteous will go free" (also Prov 10:27; 12:21; 13:25). Of

course common experience often challenged this, and the writers had to deal with the problem of the wicked person's prosperity. They did so by declaring that such is only illusory and will end in folly when God's inevitable judgment comes (Ps 73:18-20, 27). Death, the great equalizer, will show the fleeting nature of their so-called glory (Ps 49:14-20). The wise therefore want to discover and then submit to the will of God (Prov 16:1-3).

Closely connected is the second aspect of creation theology, the polemic defending the concept of divine justice. James Crenshaw notes the union of creation theology and theodicy in Job and Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) (1976:28-32). Both books deal with what could be called a crisis in wisdom theology, namely, the twin problems of evil and the suffering of the innocent. Both books provide the same answer, our inability to comprehend the divine order. God's justice transcends human frailty, and our duty is to await his answers. Rather than assume the right to determine the laws of God's created order (Crenshaw calls this "Titanism"), we must humbly submit to God's greater wisdom.

THE FORMS OF WISDOM LITERATURE

We can identify several subgenres within this body of literature, each with its own distinctive traits and rules for identification. It is important for us to delineate these characteristics in order to develop a proper hermeneutic for wisdom sayings.

1. ***The proverb.*** The basic and most prominent wisdom form, a "proverb" (Heb *māšal*) may be defined as a brief statement of universally accepted truth formulated in such a way as to be memorable. Proverbs are found in Scripture other than just in the book of Proverbs (such as in Gen 10:9 and 1 Sam 24:14). There are many different types of sayings, and several of the genres are called *meshallim* in the Old Testament, such as allegory (Ezek 17:1-10), aphorisms (Eccles 9:17—10:20), popular sayings (Jer 23:28), discourse (Num 23:7, 18) or similitudes (1 Sam 10:11). There are also several types of proverbs per se, such as the instruction (Prov 22:17—24:22), the wisdom saying or speech (Prov 9:1-6), admonition or prohibition (Prov 8:24-31, 33), the hortatory proverb or counsel (Prov 22:28), the numerical proverb (Prov 6:16- 19), synonymous (Prov 22:22-27) or antithetical (Prov 11:1-31) proverbs and factual or experiential statements (Prov 17:27).

   Most important, we dare not read more into the proverbial statement than is there. By their very nature they are generalized statements, intended to give advice rather than to establish rigid codes by which God works. As David Hubbard states, ancient wisdom "tends to emphasize the success and well-being of the individual," unlike "the prophets' marked emphasis on national and corporate religious life" (LaSor, Hubbard, Bush 1982:545). For instance, Proverbs 16:3 states "commit to the Lord whatever you do, / and your plans will succeed." This seems to promise an unlimited bounty of plenty, but as Fee and Stuart point out it is hardly meant to include any ill-conceived plan dedicated to God: "A hasty marriage, a rash business decision, an ill-thought out vocational decision—all can be dedicated to God but can eventually result in

misery" (1982:198). As in Joshua 1:8 or Psalm 1:3 the meaning of *success* or *prosperity* must be understood first in terms of the divine will and only second in a materialistic sense. What is successful in God's eyes may appear quite opposite to worldly standards. The interpreter must recognize the general nature of the sayings and apply them via the analogy of Scripture, that is in keeping with other biblical teaching that fills out the truth being elucidated.

2. ***The saying.*** Although sayings include proverbs (see Murphy 1982:4-5), I chose to discuss proverbs separately since they are so basic to wisdom literature. The saying is not quite as developed a form and has not attained the universal stature of the proverb. Sayings are often local, connected to a particular setting in the life of the people (such as Gen 35:17 and 1 Sam 4:20), and are didactic in purpose. Murphy notes two types. First, the *experiential saying* describes actual situations but remains open to clarification. These are observations but not fixed rules. For instance, Proverbs 11:24 ("One man gives freely, yet gains even more; / another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty") does not give advice but merely states what occasionally happens. Proverbs 17:28 ("Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, / and discerning if he holds his tongue") describes what sometimes is the case but is not even a general rule. Second, the didactic saying is less general and intends to inculcate a particular value, such as Proverbs 14:31, "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, / but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." The behavior expected is obvious; this type of saying is closer to the proverb, for it has more literary polish.

   Often these sayings are collected into a general discussion or instruction on a topic. This is especially true of Proverbs 1—9, which discusses extensively the wise man versus the fool and righteousness versus evil. We could also place the wisdom psalms and Ecclesiastes under this rubric. The instruction often concludes with a pithy statement that Brevard Childs calls a "summary-appraisal" (1967:129-36). He finds this specifically in Isaiah 14:26-27, 17:14b and 28:29, and finds wisdom parallels in Psalm 49:13; Job 5:27; 8:13; 18:21; 20:29; 27:13; Ecclesiastes 4:8; Proverbs 1:19 and Proverbs 6:29. Proverbs 1:19 summarizes the discussion of the way of evil (vv. 10- 18) by saying, "Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; / it takes away the lives of those who get it."

3. ***The riddle.*** Riddles are found in their pure form only in Judges 14:10-18 (the riddle Sampson gave the Philistines about the honey and the lion).

This of course is not wisdom literature in itself, but the strong use of riddles in the ancient Near East has led many scholars to propose a riddle form behind such numerical proverbs as Proverbs 6:16-19 (six things the Lord detests) and Proverbs 30:15-31 (vv. 15-17, four things never satisfied; vv. 18-20, four things not understood; vv. 21-23, four things under which the world trembles; vv. 24-28, four things small yet wise; vv. 29-31, four things with a stately bearing).

4. ***The admonition.*** Philip Nel has shown that the admonition is another basic wisdom form (1982). In its regular pattern the admonition is followed by a motivation clause that tells the hearers why they should adhere to the command, as in the parallel statements of Proverbs 9:9:

Admonition	*Motivation*
Instruct a wise man	and he will be wiser still
teach a righteous man	and he will add to his learning

The admonition can be positive (a command) or negative (a prohibition, such as Prov 22:24-25), while the motivation clause in both instances relates the practical consequences of the action entailed. Obviously, the whole statement is intended to convince the hearer of the wisdom of following the injunction. At times the motivation clause may not be stated (Prov 20:18) or may be implicit (Prov 24:17-18; 25:21- 22), but at all times commands are meant to stimulate response and obedience.[2]

5. ***The allegory.*** Although it is found often in Mesopotamian and Egyptian wisdom, the allegory can be demonstrated explicitly only twice in the Old Testament: in the series of figurative statements on the evils of adultery and blessings of marriage in Proverbs 5:15-23 and in the extended metaphor on old age and death in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7. In passages using highly figurative language (see chap. 8), it is important to divine the imagery and try to determine the reality pictured behind it. The images of Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 are quite difficult; for instance, in verse 5 does the “almond tree” signify gray hair and the “grasshopper” the brittle limbs of the elderly, or are they more literal images depicting an advanced time of life? Either way, the picture of advanced age leading to death is certainly the meaning of verses 5-6.[3]
6. ***Hymns and prayers.*** Hymns and prayers abound in all ancient wisdom

literature (see Crenshaw 1974:47-53). This is not only true in the case of the wisdom psalms but it also occurs in the many poetic sections in the wisdom books (Job 5:9- 16; 9:5-12; 12:13-25; 26:5-14; 28; Prov 8; Sir 24:1-22; Wis 6:12-20; 7:22—8:21; 11:21—12:22). The two major themes of wisdom hymns are the glorification of wisdom and thanksgiving to God as Creator and Redeemer. Wisdom allows us to participate in the creative power of God and to experience his deliverance. Wisdom prayers are based on the prose prayers of Solomon (at his dedicating the temple [1 Kings 8:23- 53]), Ezra (Ezra 9:6-15) and Daniel (Dan 9:4-19). Its developed form is restricted to extracanonical literature (such as Sir 22:27—23:6; 36:1-17; 51:1-12; Wis 9:1-18).

7. ***The dialogue.*** While several forms of wisdom literature are found within the book of Job (such as the lament, the courtroom drama and the confession), the dialogue is the primary subgenre in Job. The book is organized around a series of dialogues between Job, his friends and God. Crenshaw links this form with the "imagined speech" in which the thoughts of an adversary are rhetorically presented and then refuted.[4] Such is utilized also in Proverbs 1:11-14, 22-23; 5:12-14; 7:14-20; 8:4-36; and Wisdom of Solomon 2:1-20; 5:3-13 (for a good summary of the dialogues between Job and his "friends," see Kidner 1985:60-67).
8. ***The confession.*** The confession is autobiographical and employs the problems experienced by the sage as an example for others. Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) would certainly rank as an example; there the author (for the debate see Waltke and Diewert 1999:315-16) frankly confesses his struggle with the presence of God and meaning in a vain, secular world. This is especially exemplified in Ecclesiastes 1:12—2:26, which on the basis of Egyptian parallels has been called a "royal confession" because it shows the emptiness of life that often surrounds the throne. On occasion Job pours out his heart before his friends and God (Job 29—31; 40:4-5; 42:1-6). Finally, Proverbs 4:3-9 (from the time he was a child Solomon was told to seek wisdom) and Proverbs 24:30-34 (a personal glimpse of the dangers of laziness) rank as confessions. In each of these the personal experiences of the sage are used to drive home the truthfulness of the argument.
9. ***Onomastica.*** Wisdom lists, or onomastica, have been recognized since the work of Gerhard von Rad (1976:267-77). He showed that the series of questions posed by God in Job 38 is paralleled by the Egyptian wisdom work, the Onomasticon of Amenemope. In both cases the cosmic creative acts of gods are enumerated. Von Rad correctly refused to posit a

direct relationship between them but rather argued that the genre was common to the two cultures. He finds parallels in Psalm 148 as well as Sirach 43. Crenshaw adds Job 28; 38:27-37, 40-41; Psalm 104 and other apocryphal parallels (1974:258-59). These branch out from creation to other fields like psychology and even the trades (Sir 28:24—29:11) or to a standard curriculum of the wise man (Wis 7:17-20).

10. ***Beatitudes.*** Found frequently, beatitudes add a distinctly theological tone. One of the best known is Psalm 1:1, “Blessed is the man / who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,” and explicitly religious are Psalm 112:1, “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD” and Proverbs 28:14, “Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD” (see also Eccles 10:17; Prov 3:13; 8:32-34; 14:21; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14; 19:18). These others are more general, shading over perhaps into motivation statements, promises of a happy and prosperous life, of God’s blessings to follow.

WISDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It has been common to label much of the New Testament “wisdom,” to consider Jesus a “teacher of wisdom” and to label entire books (such as Hebrews or James) “wisdom literature.” While certainly there is some exaggeration in claims that Jesus primarily taught within the wisdom tradition, there is also a certain amount of truth. The definition of *wisdom* as ethical instructions or maxims demonstrating the centrality of God in the daily affairs of life fits much New Testament teaching. Aspects of the Sermon on the Mount (such as the antitheses [Mt 5:21-48]) and the emphasis on holy conduct parallel Jewish wisdom. Practical exhortations like Romans 12, James 1—3, the paraenetic portions of Hebrews (Heb 3:12-19; 4:11-13; 6:1-12), social codes (Eph 5:22—6:9; 1 Pet 2:11—3:7), vice or virtue lists (Gal 5:19-23; Col 3:5-17) all partake of wisdom influence. In addition, 1 Corinthians 1—3 centers on the problem of worldly versus divine wisdom (with the cross as the centerpiece of divine wisdom), and 1 Corinthians 13 is a wisdomlike paean to love. As with poetry, New Testament wisdom is similar to Old Testament wisdom and should be interpreted with the same hermeneutical criteria.

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

Wisdom literature can be difficult to interpret and apply. A basic hermeneutical error today is the tendency to take biblical statements out of context. General statements become absolute commands when interpreters fail to note the strong clarification added when they consider the whole of Scripture on a particular issue. For instance, many today take Proverbs 1:8 (“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction / and do not forsake your mother’s teaching”; cf. Prov 6:20) as enjoining children to obey their parents no matter what and to trust the Lord to make right any erroneous teaching or commands on the parent’s part. Some say that if a parent tells a child to quit attending church or taking part in Christian activities, the child must obey. Yet this is to extend the passage beyond its intended meaning and to ignore the many proverbs enjoining the parents to responsibility (such as Prov 4:1-9; 22:6). Moreover, it fails to consider the example of the disciples (Acts 4:19; 5:29), who, when faced with the command from the Sanhedrin to refrain from their Christian duty, said, “We must obey God rather than men.”[5] It is ironic that those who demand absolute obedience to parents never tell the children that they must heed parental teaching on humanism or sexual freedom; yet these parables deal more with teaching than with commands! In light of this and other interpretive problems let us note some basic hermeneutical guidelines.

1. Note the form of the wisdom saying. Is it a proverb or longer didactic saying? Is it allegorical? If it is a dialogue or imagined speech, is it presented as a correct or incorrect saying? Each subgenre has its own rules for interpretation, and noting the type of saying is essential for understanding. For instance, when Proverbs 15:25 says, “The LORD tears down the proud man’s house, / but he keeps the widow’s boundaries intact,” the reader must note the metaphor behind the statement. It is erroneous to take it literally. “It is a miniature parable, designed by the Holy Spirit to point beyond the ‘house’ and the ‘widow’ to the general principle that God will eventually right this world’s wrongs, abasing the arrogant and compensating those who have righteously suffered (cf. Matt

5:3, 4)" (Fee and Stuart 2003:236-37).

2. Ask whether the context is important. Proverbs 1—9, 13 and 30—31 each have a lengthy discourse style, and context is important. The rest of the book is primarily a collected series of proverbs, and context becomes less relevant. I would interpret Proverbs 10—29 on the basis of each proverb's parallelism (the lines interpret each other) and collate similar proverbs, interpreting them together. While context is often important, it is helpful to collect the various proverbs into topical or subject lists, then to note the cross-referential influence of similar sayings on one another (Kidner's commentary on Proverbs is a good example of what I mean). Waltke and Diewert (1999:311-13) survey those who find context important in Proverbs 10—22, noting connections based on paronomasia and catchwords (though there is little context here), theological reinterpretation (Yahweh sayings that shape surrounding sayings), repetitions (pointing to compositional structure), semantic significance (breaking Proverbs into collection A [10—15], B [16:1—22:16], C [25—27] and D [28—29] and then discovering some semantic coherence in the collections), and numerical coherence (e.g., 375 sayings in 10:1—22:16, the numerical equivalent of *slmh* or "proverb," cf. Skehan 1971:43-45). It is best to conclude with Roland Murphy (1996:19-20) that "there is no logical unity to the collections, although the sayings are not put together in a haphazard way" and at points there are connections between some of the sayings.

   Context is critical in perhaps the most widely misused statement from Proverbs. Popularly the phrase is "Spare the rod and spoil the child." The closest parallel is from Proverbs 13:24, but *spoil* is not found there. Nearly all translations, including the KJV, translate the Hebrew word here as "hate": "Those who spare the rod hate their children" (TNIV). Second, the context adds a clarifying statement, "but those who love them are careful to discipline them" (TNIV). This does not enjoin the type of heavy-handed beatings administered by several sects; in fact, just the opposite. It calls for careful, gentle punishment. Third, this is one of the places in Proverbs 10—29 where context is important; the saying is placed within a completely positive context in chapter 13, with the wise son following the father's discipline (v. 1). The whole emphasis is on the way of righteousness. Therefore, corporal punishment is only one part of a larger pattern of positive discipline, as one seeks to raise a child "in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).

   Context is equally important when interpreting Job and Qoheleth. We

discussed Job earlier, so here I will turn to Ecclesiastes. The entire book until the conclusion is a lengthy, at times almost rambling, discourse on the meaninglessness and futility of life (cf. “vanity” in Eccles 1:2; 12:8, which most interpret as “meaningless” or “futile”).

At key intervals the discussion is sprinkled with more positive statements, but on the whole the specter of death leads the preacher almost to decry the validity of a pious life (cf. Eccles 2:15; 3:19; 5:16; 8:14). Some have seen hints of a positive outlook, and the writer is hardly denying the presence and power of God or the place of happiness in life.[6] However, Qoheleth writes as one who takes a predominantly secular view of life. His advice on living life to the full (Eccles 5:11-15; 8:15; 11:8-10; 12:1-8) exemplifies this approach, and he adds that death removes the final value of it all (cf. Eccles 2:16; 9:5-10; 11:8). Indeed, there seems at first glance to be an almost schizophrenic outlook on life, as the writer in one passage affirms the importance of reverence and dependence on God, then in another passage elucidates a pessimistic hedonism.

Yet this need not be. The key is the epilogue (Eccles 12:9-14), written in the third person as a “theological commentary” on the rest of the book (Sheppard 1977:182- 89). The book ends with “Fear God, and keep his commandments; / for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccles 12:13).[7] Verse 13 shows that the book throughout was written for a similar purpose as Romans 7—8, namely, to show the emptiness of a life lived apart from God and the wisdom of living in the fear of God. We must understand the negative verses in light of the larger context, specifically the positive statements and especially the concluding epilogue. Yet it is still a generally negative portrayal of life (Longman 1998) by a skeptic who is testing meaning in life (Murphy 1996:51) yet written “as the search of an honest doubter” (Waltke and Diewert 1999:318). A good summary is the six points of Murphy (1996:53-60): (1) All life is “vanity” or utter futility since it provides no lasting satisfaction and no real profit. (2) While enjoyment of life is a worthwhile goal (some even call Qoheleth a “preacher of joy”) and a gift from God, the fact of death and the “inscrutable ways of the Almighty” (namely, the vicissitudes of life) mitigate even that. (3) While a critique of traditional wisdom (Eccles 2:13-15; 7:23-24; 9:16-17), this is still a book of wisdom that searches for the “good” (Eccles 2:3, 6:10) and for “profit” (Eccles 1:3; 2:11). (4) “Fear of God” (Eccles 7:18; 8:12; 12:13) in the book is fear of the

uncertain ways of life and the mysterious paths one walks, causing one to rely on the inscrutable God. (5) The just and the wicked are reversed, as the just often perish and the wicked survive (Eccles 7:15; 8:11-14) yet the judgment of God still takes place (Eccles 3:17; 11:9), though not in ways easily understood. (6) God is creator and giver of life but beyond understanding, and he must be accepted on his own terms. Sermons on Ecclesiastes could draw on current critiques of society (such as Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today,* or Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism)* and produce a highly relevant series of messages.

3. Determine whether hyperbole is present. Many statements deliberately exaggerate or generalize the truth presented, and we must detect such situations. For instance, Proverbs 3:9-10 argues, "Honor the Lord with your wealth, . . . / then your barns will be filled to overflowing." This could be taken as a guarantee that the Christian farmer or businessman will be blessed with plenty in terms of this world's goods. Yet the very next verse commands one not to "despise the LORD's discipline," and Proverbs 23:4-5 says, "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; . . . / Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone." The earlier passage is saying simply that God will repay all that one sacrifices for him. Fee and Stuart point out that such proverbs are not "legal guarantees from God," nor are they meant to be followed absolutely (2003:235). Rather, they are general maxims centering on a command with a promise given in hyperbolic language.

   Wisdom sayings are written in order to be remembered, and so they tend to be pithy statements that prefer rhetorical skill to accuracy. "Proverbs tries to impart knowledge which can be retained rather than philosophy which can impress a critic" (Fee and Stuart 1982:201). The reader must go behind the surface structure to the deeper truth that is embodied. For instance, Proverbs 22:26-27 seems to deny the right to take out a mortgage on one's home:

> Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge,
> or puts up security for debts;
> if you lack the means to pay,
> your very bed will be snatched from under you.

   However, the prevalent use of debts and bartering in Israelite life showed that this was not taken literally. Rather, the proverb cautions care in incurring debts, since we can lose everything in the process.

4. Obscure passages must be crossculturally applied to analogous situations today. Many of the wisdom sayings depend on ancient customs and cannot be understood from a modern perspective. The timeless principles embodied in such sayings must be extracted and reapplied to current situations. Of course, this is true of all wisdom passages, indeed all of Scripture (see chap. 17). Yet, since the "wisdom" of the ancients, by the very nature of its practicality, was particularly tied to that long-dead culture, we must be careful in handling and applying the material.

   For instance, Proverbs 11:1 ("The LORD abhors dishonest scales, / but accurate weights are his delight") depends on the use of scales to determine the value of goods and is for today a call to honest business practices. Similarly, when Proverbs 25:24 says that it is "better to live on a corner of the roof / than share a house with a quarrelsome wife," it is describing the flat-bed roof of biblical times, a place where families would often share a meal. We would say "better to live in the attic." When Proverbs 26:8 says, "Like tying a stone in a sling / is the giving of honor to a fool," it refers to the use of slings as weapons. It means that such honor will be thrown away like a stone. We could translate, "Honoring a fool is like putting a bullet in a gun; it will soon go off and disappear." The crucial thing is to choose analogous situations so that the deeper truth comes through.

EXCURSUS: THE HISTORY OF WISDOM TEACHING

No one knows the exact origin of wisdom as a movement. Macedonian, Sumerian and Akkadian archives contained many works such as proverbs or ethical teaching intended to enable the individual to deal successfully with life. These forms were developed further by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and an extensive literature appeared (see Waltke and Diewert 1999:302-4 for a survey of literature on this).

As Murphy points out, Macedonian wisdom literature was more diversified than its Hebrew counterpart, utilizing proverbs, folk tales, essays, riddles, dialogues, precepts, fables, parables and many other forms (1981:9). The Sumerians and Babylonians had a professional class of scribes or wise men who collected and transcribed the sayings. Similarities exist between works like the "Counsel of Wisdom" and Proverbs, and the "Babylonian Theodicy" and Job. However, the extent of literary influence is debated. The class of "wise men" or teachers of wisdom is a more certain parallel. In Jeremiah 18:18 (cf. 1 Sam 14:27) they are mentioned alongside priest and prophet as leading figures of Israeli society, apparently functioning as royal counselors and officials. Later they added the scribal role. Throughout the ancient world such teachers exercised a moral influence on society. However, Israel was somewhat unique in the centrality of the religious dimension. While Macedonian wisdom was closely linked with the gods, the teachers themselves were secular figures, and their interest was intensely practical. Only in Israel was the major goal to please God (Prov 3:7) more than to live successfully in society.

Egypt had an ancient and flourishing wisdom tradition. The key concept was *maat*, "order" or "truth," the prerequisite for living in harmony with the divine "order" of things. One noteworthy aspect is the lack of emphasis on personal experience and the stress on complete submission to the way of the gods. The Egyptians developed a technical term for the wise man who followed the proper course—"the silent man," one who is in complete control of himself and avoids excess by yielding completely to *maat.* In contrast the "passionate man" throws himself at life and has no "order." Scholars thought at first that Egyptian wisdom was completely secular and had little religious content, since so many of the

instructions are completely utilitarian and seem designed to teach youths how to make their way in the world. However, recent studies have shown decisively the underlying religious presuppositions (see Würthwein 1976:116-20). However, this *maat* or order is not given by divine revelation but is passed on by tradition from those teachers who have discussed it pragmatically. Success in this life and reward in the next life awaits the one who submits.

The extent of the influence of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom on Israel is very debated. With the continuous interaction between ancient peoples (military, political and trade) some influence is certainly warranted. This is especially true in Solomonic times; Solomon married princesses from Egypt, Mesopotamia and many other lands, and his court teemed with foreign influences. However, it is wrong to say that Israel had no tradition of its own and simply borrowed it wholesale from her pagan neighbors. Recent research provides evidence that Israelite wisdom pre-dated Solomon and that he was actually the most distinguished of a long line of wisdom teachers (1 Sam 24:14 shows "wisdom" was in existence at least as early as the beginning of the monarchy).

Moreover, in spite of the parallels, the differences between the emphases of Israel and of its neighbors are striking. For instance, Israel had no technical use of the "silent one," and stressed personal experience as well as submission to Yahweh (the two in fact work together to make one "wise"). It appears that wisdom categories in the ancient world developed somewhat independently, with a certain crossover of themes but not wholesale borrowing of entire traditions. Yet there was at times strong influence from other wisdom traditions, as in Egyptian themes behind Proverbs 22:17—24:22, as well as parallels with metaphors like God weighing the heart, righteousness as the foundation of the throne and the garland of honor (Crenshaw 1975:7). There is also some evidence that the Hebrews considered themselves part of an international wisdom movement, as in their recognition of the "sages" or wise men in Egypt and other nations (Gen 41:8; 2 Kings 4:30; Is 19:11-15). Many believe that the riddles by which the Queen of Sheba tested Solomon (1 Kings 10) were linked to his reputation as a teacher of wisdom. In Jeremiah 18:18, the sage is placed alongside the priest and the prophet as a leader in Israel (see Sheppard 1988:1076-77).

One possible source of evidence for the premonarchical origin of wisdom stems from the presence of family or clan wisdom in the ancient Near East. Although such an origin can only be surmised rather than proven, the educational process in ancient Israel depended first on the father and then on the tribe or clan in developing the child into a responsible adult. This process

centered primarily on the Torah but also included practical advice for living. The authority structure of the family and the clan is obvious in the patriarchal and Mosaic periods and provided an important source for the development of pragmatic wisdom. While many scholars take this too far and virtually equate wisdom and Torah at the earliest stage (see Morgan 1981:39-41), several factors do point to family and clan as a locus of the wisdom tradition. Of course, this does not mean it was a flourishing movement at the earliest stages. Nevertheless, the use of the "father-son" metaphor in Egyptian as well as in Jewish proverbs and the centrality of the family in all ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature would support this thesis.

More difficult to assess is the belief that the Israelite school provided an early locus for wisdom teaching. There are several problems with this view, such as the question as to whether schools existed at an early date in Israel.[8] The strongest argument is from historical parallels, namely, influence from the Egyptian and Mesopotamian educational systems. However, few are willing to read this into the period before the monarchy. This problem parallels the previous discussion of family or clan wisdom: any solution can only be surmised; there is no direct evidence. It would seem logical that an authoritative passing on of wisdom traditions would center on the school (if such was in existence) as well as on the family, and certainly the "high literary quality of the sayings" could well point to "origins, or at least culturation, among a scribal class that had some expertise with words or ideas" (Murphy 1981:8). However, we can go no further than note the possibility of such an early source as a school system, with possible educational sessions also in the temple and court life from the Solomonic era on (see Crenshaw 1974:228-29). Such are possibilities but no more. I agree with Gerald Sheppard that the data as we know it favors the presence of some type of public instruction, yet it is probable that no formal school system existed. Education occurred primarily through the home and sporadically via appointed sages who "taught the people" (2 Chron 17:7-9; Eccles 12:9). The earliest recorded "school" is that of Ben Sira in the second century B.C. (Sir 51:23). Before that the synagogue was probably the center of Hebrew education.[9]

An important topic is the possible wisdom influence on early nonwisdom literature like the historical books. The major difficulty is the criteria for assessing such sayings. As Sheppard notes, "The present wisdom influence labors under a lack of sufficient historical information and control" (1980:12). This is especially true with reference to the relationship between form and function. A saying may have the form of a proverb and yet not function as a

wisdom saying. A well-known example is Exodus 23:8 (cf. Prov 16:19), “A bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.” This has the form of a proverb, but it is speculative to assume that it is a wisdom saying, for the setting is legal rather than popular wisdom.

Many proverbs have been noted in the historical books (such as Gen 10:9; Judg 8:21; 15:16; 1 Sam 16:7; 24:13), but these cannot be automatically identified as early wisdom. Most today argue that the proverb is the basic wisdom form, but it is a subgenre in its own right and can be used in many different traditions. Crenshaw tries to rectify the situation by developing a methodology (1969:129-42). He begins by differentiating types of wisdom thinking: family wisdom, legal wisdom (a possible basis for Ex 23:8), court wisdom, scribal and didactic wisdom. However, in the remainder of his essay he critiques the methods of others rather than develops a precise set of positive criteria. Two basic problems with current methods are circular reasoning (reading a wisdom function back into possible wisdom forms) and a failure to reckon with the possibility of a “common linguistic stock” (such as the proverb) that crossed genre boundaries (see Crenshaw 1975:9-10). This has hermeneutical importance for more than wisdom literature, as these two common errors appear frequently in all genre decisions.

Several features may point to a wisdom saying. One basic type is the proverb. Other stylistic traits would be personification (“Wisdom” as a living entity), antithesis (strong contrast between two paths or forces, like wise-foolish), earthy metaphors (such as the foolish path pictured as a seducing prostitute in Prov 9:13-18) and above all the pragmatic nature of the teaching. The latter shades over into function, and indeed these two aspects (form and function) must merge together in identifying a particular saying as wisdom in essence.

On the whole the proverbial sayings may represent nascent wisdom, although many (such as, “So it became a saying, ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’ ” [1 Sam 10:12] or, “That is why it is said, ‘Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD’ ” [Gen 10:9]) are local sayings rather than wisdom. Judges 8:21 (“As is the man, so is his strength”) and 1 Samuel 24:13 (“As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds’ ”) both have the form and function of wisdom sayings and could well constitute evidence for an early tradition.

In conclusion, it is best to say with Nel that wisdom was present in Israel at an early date but thsat it became a fixed tradition only with the establishment of the monarchy (1982:1-2). It could hardly have been otherwise; in the earlier period Israel focused all its energy on survival and hardly had time to develop such an intellectual movement.

Two areas are of interest for hermeneutical purposes. First, the recent fad of

finding wisdom themes in nearly every book of both Testaments utilizes dubious criteria and produces very doubtful results. Such attempts should be treated with extreme caution and subjected to rigorous scrutiny. Second, wisdom themes nevertheless played an important role in the ancient world, and we need to pay greater attention to this extremely fruitful body of literature. Most likely the wisdom movement began early in Israel's history, although with David (note the wisdom psalms mentioned in the previous section) and Solomon it entered its greatest era.

10

Prophecy

Prophecy has become almost a fad today, the subject of innumerable sermons, books and even entire ministries (such as Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins). Unfortunately there is widespread misunderstanding about the nature and purpose of biblical prophecy; my purpose here is not just to correct these erroneous views but to enhance the value and power of biblical prophecy for today. Prophecy was predominant not only in the latter part of the Old Testament period but in the New Testament age as well. It is interesting that the writing prophets ministered for only three centuries (from the eighth to the fifth centuries B.C.) and yet spawned some of the most powerful works in Scripture. Only the New Testament age (just one century long!) can rival it for intensity and dynamic production—and that latter age also rightly can be called "prophetic." Berkeley Mickelsen has recognized the difficulty of the hermeneutical task regarding prophecy, calling for "an approach that will read nothing into prophecy that is not there, that will make clear all that the prophet said or wrote to his own people, and that will make the correctly interpreted message of the prophet relevant to our own times. That is no small task" (1963:280). There are many issues to be considered in fulfilling this task, such as the nature of the prophetic office, the origin and forms of the prophetic message, the types of prophetic literature and principles for interpreting prophecy.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart name three reasons why the prophets appeared at this particular juncture of history (2003:191): (1) Unprecedented upheavals in the political, military, economic and social spheres led to a terrible crisis. (2) There was religious upheaval, as the divided kingdom progressively turned from Yahweh and his covenant to serve pagan gods. (3) Shifts in population and national boundaries led to constantly unsettled conditions. Therefore, the divine message was needed anew, and God chose the prophetic medium to force Israel to realize that he was speaking. Historically, prophetic activity began quite early. Abraham is called a prophet in Genesis 20:7, but he never spoke in the name of the Lord. Aaron was to be Moses' "prophet" in terms of being his spokesman in Exodus 7:1, and Miriam is called a "prophet" in Exodus 15:20 when she sang the refrain to the Song of Moses. In Numbers

11:26-30 Eldad and Medad prophesied when “the Spirit also rested on them,” and in Numbers 12:6-8 God contrasted prophets, to whom he spoke in visions and dreams, with Moses, with whom he spoke face to face. In fact, the historical books (Joshua through Kings) are called the “Former Prophets” in the Hebrew canon and contain a fair amount of prophetic activity—from Deborah the prophetess in Judges 4:4 to Samuel (1 Sam 8:7, 10) to Nathan the court prophet of David (2 Sam 5:9, 7:13) to the powerful ministries of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 13), prophets who speak for God are central in launching and overseeing the monarchy (Schmitt 1992: 5, 482-83). The unique element about the prophets (compared to prophetic activity elsewhere in the ancient Near East and to other Old Testament books) is the stark judgment in the material. Beginning with Amos and continuing through the exile, the prophets announced the end of the covenant and therefore of the national existence of Israel and Judah. God would destroy the old nation and resurrect a new people in their place (Ezek 37). It is possible that this accounts in part for the collection of the oracles and then of the books (Gowan 1998:6-9).

There are three precursors to the prophets (cf. VanGemeren 1990:28-38): Moses was the “fountainhead of the prophetic tradition” with his special relation as spokesman for God and mediator between God and Israel (Num 12:6-8). His experience on Sinai went beyond the normal prophetic experience, and he became the eschatological prophet according to Deuteronomy 18:15-22. In fact, there is evidence for “linguistic, structural, and thematic links between Moses on the one hand and Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel on the other” (Baker 1999:269). Samuel then is the “prophetic role model,” called in Acts 3:24 the first prophet (and in Acts 13:20 the last of the judges) and the “prophet of Yahweh” to the nation (1 Sam 3:20). So he stood at the turning point of the progression from judges to monarchy and prophets. So he was the “guardian of the theocracy” in terms of keeping the nation faithful to God. Finally, Elijah was the one who “shaped the course of the classical prophets.” While he never had a book of prophecies, he established the pattern for the doom prophecy against an idolatrous people and was the first of the “covenant prosecutors” against the people. John Eaton (1997:5) considers four things that contributed to the greatness of the Hebrew prophets: (1) their criticism of society, (2) their visions of salvation (a new world and a messianic ruler), (3) personal dedication (lives completely given over to God), and (4) their literature (providing not just condemnation but meaning and hope). The great crises of the nation produced great prophets to meet those needs.

THE NATURE OF THE PROPHETIC ROLE

Before we can interpret prophetic passages we must understand how and why prophets functioned as they did. Each prophetic message grew out of the call and role of the prophet in the society of his or her day. As all recognize today, the prophet was a "forth-teller" before he was a "foreteller," and the true purpose of the latter was to assist and strengthen the former.

1. ***The call of the prophet.*** The prophet's call may come via a supernatural revelatory experience, as in the cases of Isaiah (6:1-13) or Jeremiah (1:2-10); it may also occur by natural means, as when Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21), signifying the transfer of authority and power, and may involve anointing (1 Kings 19:16). Unlike the priest or the king, the prophet never took his "office" indirectly through inheritance but always directly as a result of the divine will. The significance of the call is always the same: Prophets are no longer in control of their own destinies but belong completely to Yahweh. They do not speak for themselves and may not even want to utter the message (see Jer 20:7-18), but they are under the constraint of Yahweh, called to deliver the divine message to the people.

   God often used a symbolic action to drive home this truth to the prophet. Isaiah was given a burning coal to place on his lips, which signified the purifying of his message (Is 6:7), and Ezekiel was told to eat a scroll that "tasted as sweet as honey" (Ezek 3:3), signifying the joy of delivering God's words. The major stress, however, is the direct involvement of God and the revelatory nature of the prophet's message. Two Old Testament genres depend on a sense of direct divine revelation: the Torah (the law or legal portions of the Pentateuch) and the prophets (apocalyptic in the Old Testament is a subgenre of prophesy). These are the only Old Testament genres with so direct a sense of authority. The issue of authority is an important one in hermeneutics, and the prophets provide the crucial interpretation for such discussions. The prophet was "filled with the Spirit of God" (2 Chron 15:1; 20:14; 24:20; Is 61:1; Ezek

2:2; Joel 2:28). This sense of divine inspiration was the basis of prophetic authority.[1]

2. ***The complex role of the prophet.*** The prophet's role was complex and multifaceted. Primarily he was a messenger from God sent to call the people back to their covenant relationship with Yahweh. David Petersen challenges the designations "office" and "charisma" for the role of a prophet (1981:9-15). The two concepts often have been contrasted, as if an office is institutional and charisma is anti-institutional. Petersen argues that the prophets played a role rather than filled an office. He is essentially correct, for we have little evidence for institutionalization among Israel's prophets (unlike her neighbors, such as the Philistines). Jewish prophets were individualists like Elijah or Jeremiah; they were called by God directly and belonged to no "institution." In one sense they were "charismatic," for they were filled by the Spirit of God—the impetus came from God rather than from them. They had no control over their role but simply followed God's directions.

   There have been many false views of Israel's prophets, like Hermann Gunkel's view of them as ecstatics with deep religious experiences or Max Weber's characterization of them as charismatic gurus or Sigmund Mowinckel's idea that they were cultic divines consulted by the priests and functioning mainly at cultic sites. Closer is Peterson's study of the terminology that they were "seers" integrated into Israelite society as well as holy itinerant "men of God" and "prophets" who were "covenant spokesmen" (VanGemeren 1990:43-44).

   Some scholars have posited prophetic guilds, based on the common meal of the prophets in 2 Kings 4:38-41 and the references to groups of prophets ("sons of the prophets," found seven times between 1 Kings 20 and 2 Kings 9).[2] Others have even theorized a prophetic "school," based somewhat on the erroneous translation of "the second quarter" of Jerusalem as "college" in the King James Version (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron 34:22). However, there is too little evidence for either a guild or a school. Certainly, prophets could associate themselves with such groups on occasion (as Samuel in 1 Sam 10; 19; or Elisha in 2 Kings 4—6), but these were temporary rather than permanent. The groups of prophets do not play a major role in the biblical text; they were probably pious men who wanted to serve Yahweh and aid the prophets. They were assistants rather than fellow members of a guild. We have no evidence that the actual prophets belonged to such or even came from such groups. The

terminology for prophet is varied, ranging from "seer" *(rō'eh)* to "prophet" *(nābî)* or (*ḥôzeh*) or "man of God" *('îš'ĕlōhîm).* These are not used to distinguish separate aspects of the prophetic role but rather they are terms used at different periods or in different places. All refer to the central function of the prophet as God's mouthpiece. Many have differentiated between oral and writing prophets, but the latter certainly had an oral ministry, and Amos's denunciation of corporate injustice in Israel does not differ radically from Elijah's condemnation of Ahab's court.

As Ronald Clements says, "We can discern recognizable similarities between the very earliest prophets mentioned in the Old Testament, such as Balaam, as well as those who appear in connection with Saul and David, and the later canonical prophets both in their activity and in the characteristics of their preaching" (1975:3). It is better, I believe, to see differences of ministry or message as dependent not on *types* of prophet but rather on the exigencies of the moment, that is on the religious-social sins of the particular society. Therefore, we will discuss the roles of the prophets as a single class rather than artificially divide them into different types of prophet. Indeed, there is significant evidence for the prophetic phenomenon in the ancient Near East, as in the Mari texts from the eighteenth century B.C. where intermediaries called *nābî*("prophet") are mentioned as well as extrabiblical material about Balaam (Num 22—24) and divines in Egypt (Baker 1999:273-74). Several recently argue that early figures like Amos, Hosea and Isaiah were poets, not prophets, and were only labeled such in exilic times, when Jeremiah and Ezekiel received this designation (Auld 1996:3-23; Carroll 1996:25-31). However, one must wonder why such a bifurcation is necessary. There is quite a bit of evidence that they were both poet and prophet. Thomas Overholt (1996:61-83) shows that a consideration of the linguistic and generic aspects of the books shows that these figures were considered prophets and considered themselves to be prophets.

1. *Receiving and communicating revelation from God* was the prophets' major purpose. Here we can differentiate oral from writing prophets. Wayne Grudem (1982:9-10) believes that the prophetic message had two aspects of authority: an authority of actual words (in which the prophet claims to be revealing the actual words of God) and an authority of general content (in which the prophet claimed that the ideas were from God but not

the actual words). Both prophetic ministries were revelatory, and Yahweh was equally involved in both. At the same time the writing prophets had a canonical function not seen in the latter. We must remember that of the scores of prophets chosen by God, only sixteen were led to collect and publish their proclamations in written form. The oral prophets are known more for their deeds than for their actual messages. Of course, some of the writing prophets (such as Daniel and Jonah) also are known for their deeds as well as their words. However, many of the writing prophets (such as Obadiah) chronicle their preaching rather than place their message in a historical setting. For these books, the modern reader has the difficult task of understanding the message without the historical situation behind it. We will return to this later.

It is popular in many circles today to make the prophets revolutionaries or at least urban social reformers. This is not the case, however. While they decried the social sins of their contemporaries, they did not do so as an end in itself but rather as particular instances of their true message, the religious apostasy of the nation. They were not social workers but primarily were preachers, God's ambassadors representing him before a nation that had turned from his ways. They delivered not their own messages but Yahweh's, and their introductory formulas ("Thus says the Lord," "The Lord said to me") demonstrate their consciousness that they were entirely vehicles for the divine message.

2. *Reformation rather than innovation* defines the basic purpose of the prophets (see Wood 1979:73-74). It was common in the past (Wellhausen, Scott, Whitley) to view the prophets as playing a formative role in the evolution of Israel's religion, in fact to make them the formulators of ethical monotheism. Most recent scholars, however, recognize the paucity of evidence for such a view. The prophets did not develop a new message but rather applied the truths of the past to the nation's current situation. Theirs was a ministry of confrontation rather than of creation. They were not innovative theologians but rather revivalists, seeking to bring the people back to Yahweh and the traditional truths of the Jewish faith. For instance, the prophets did not construct the doctrine of messianic hope; that was already present

from Mosaic times (Deut 18:18). They elaborated it, adding further details, but hardly created messianism ex nihilo.

3. *The preservation of tradition* was therefore an important concomitant in the prophetic ministry. We can see this not only in the prophetic cry for Israel to return to its ancestral worship of Yahweh but also in the literary dependence of later prophets on the accepted statements of the Torah and of earlier prophets, such as Ezekiel's use of Jeremiah, Jeremiah's use of Isaiah, and Hosea or Isaiah's use of Amos (see the discussion in Fishbane 1985:292-317). Part of their task was to "pass on" the "received" tradition (cf. 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Tim 2:2).

   The connection of the prophets to the cultic religion of Israel has been widely debated (see the excellent summary in Smith 1986b:992-93). In the past, critical scholars (such as Wellhausen) posited a radical opposition between prophet and priest on the basis of such passages as Isaiah 1:10-15; Jeremiah 6:20; 7:22-23; Amos 5:21-25; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8. Yet this ignored the many passages that showed a connection between prophet and tabernacle or temple (such as 1 Sam 3:1-21; 9:6- 24; 2 Sam 7:4-17; Jer 2:26; 5:31; 8:10; Amos 7:10-17), and as a result others (such as Mowinckel) went to the other extreme and viewed the prophets as temple officials. Most today fall between these two, recognizing that the prophets acknowledged the centrality of temple and cultus but called for reform. The prophets functioned within the established religion but sought to excise the irreligious and unethical practices that predominated to call both the people and the priests back to the ancient truths (see Baker 1999:271). In short, they had a deep knowledge of cultic issues and called the people back to cultic life, but this does not make them officials. Another question is how peripheral they were to mainstream Judaism. Did they have a voice in public affairs, or were they countercultural in effect? Most of them, like Amos, were outsiders. Some, like Isaiah or Jeremiah, gave advice for a time (Isaiah during the reign of Hezekiah [Is 36—39]) but were ultimately rejected due to their prophecies of judgment (see Ward 1991:19-21).

   The basic message is elucidated in 2 Kings 17:13-14, which explains why the northern kingdom was sent into exile:

> The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets."
>
> But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God.

The stress on the ancestral religion as well as the designation of Moses and leaders of the past as "prophets" illustrates the place of tradition in the prophetic message.

4. We must also note the *centrality of the covenant and Torah.* Fee and Stuart (2003:184) call the prophets "covenant enforcement mediators," which refers to the presence in the prophets of blessings (positive enforcement; cf. Lev 26:1-13; Deut 4:32-40; 28:1-14) and curses or judgment (negative enforcement; cf. Lev 26:14-39; Deut 4:15-28; 28:15—32:42) attached to the covenant and Torah from the times of Abraham and Moses.[3] Following the model of Sinai, the prophets warned the people of the dangers attached to neglecting the commandments.

   Fee and Stuart summarize the biblical material into six general categories of blessings (life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect and safety), and ten types of punishment (death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution and disgrace). The prophetic proclamation centered on these categories and would accent one or another depending on the situation. The "messianic" promise of such passages as Amos 9:11-15 centers on prosperity (vv. 11- 12), agricultural abundance (v. 14) and safety (v. 15); and the curses of Nahum 3:1- 7 relate danger (v. 2), destruction and death (v. 3), disgrace and destitution (vv. 5- 7). The specific stress on the covenant is seen first in Hosea 6:7; 8:1, which condemned Israel for "transgressing the covenant." Jeremiah elaborated this into a full-fledged covenant theology, beginning with its strict requirements (Jer 11:6-7), which Judah had broken (Jer 11:8-10). Since the covenant was necessary as a guarantor of Yahweh's mercy (Jer 14:21) and since the old covenant was inadequate (Jer 31:32), Yahweh would establish a new and better covenant (Jer 31:31-34).

The place of Torah and cult is more difficult. There are seemingly contradictory emphases: some passages seem to make ritual worship a necessary element of the prophetic religion (the prophets at the high place in 1 Sam 10, and the centrality of the altar in the Mount Carmel battle between Elijah and the priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18). Samuel was reared and called by God to his prophetic ministry at Shiloh (1 Sam 3), and Nathan was consulted when David wished to build the temple (2 Sam 7). Yet at the same time several passages deride sacrificial worship, stating that Yahweh would have no part in it (such as Is 1:11-14; Jer 6:20; 7:21-23; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21- 23; Mic 6:6-8). Amos, for example, cut himself off from the established religion of the priests (see Amos 7:14).

Scholars have been found on both sides of the issue, some arguing that the prophets were merely extensions of the priestly order (Mowinckel, Eissfeldt), others that they were antisanctuary and anticult (most believe this is because in its early stages the prophetic movement followed Canaanite practices; see Robertson Smith). However, neither position is correct, and most today seek a more balanced perspective (Smith 1986b:992-93; Sawyer 1987:19-22). The prophets were not reacting against the Jewish system but rather rejected the apostasy and false religious practices of Israel and Judah. The prophets were protectors of Torah and cult and condemned Israel’s worship because it was impure.

THE NATURE OF THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE

Much of what was said in the previous section applies also to the message of the prophets, for we cannot separate role from proclamation. However, several issues still need to be discussed, and these relate directly to the message itself. The basic misunderstanding regarding the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is that it relates primarily to the future. It is common to think that "prediction" is almost the definition of prophecy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Carl Peisker notes that neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word lends itself to a future orientation (1978:74-84). *Nābî* has both an active and a passive side: passively, the prophet is filled with the Spirit and receives God's message; actively, the prophet interprets or proclaims God's message to others. The passive side may have predominated but both are present: a prophet is one inspired by Yahweh to preach his message to the people.

1. ***Present and future interact.*** While the message does not center on the future, "prophecies" of future events occur frequently. Fee and Stuart argue that less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is messianic, less than 5 percent relates to the new-covenant age and less than 1 percent concerns events still future to us (2003:182). Of course, this figure depends largely on exegetical decisions as to which so-called messianic prophecies were originally intended messianically. Nevertheless, the percentage either way would be relatively low. Most of the future prophecies related to the immediate future concerning Israel, Judah and the nations. Furthermore, the future prophecies were part of the larger pattern of proclamation, and their major purpose was therefore to call the nation back to God by reminding it that he was in control of the future.[4]

   In short, the prophet was primarily a *forthteller* whose message was addressed to the people and situation of his day, and *foretelling* in reality was part of that larger purpose. Several issues must be discussed in this respect.

1. *Historical distance* makes interpretation difficult, for the prophetic books use analogies and language that stem from their contemporary periods. We have to recreate the historical background behind individual prophecies and often fail to understand them completely because we have not done so. Such prophets as Obadiah, Joel or Jonah provide no historical referents and a certain subjectivity enters the search for background information (though see 2 Kings 14:25, which dates Jonah with the reign of Jeroboam II at the start of the eighth century). Nevertheless, it helps to know that the invasion of Jerusalem and involvement of the Edomites, so central to Obadiah's short work, could have occurred during the reign of Jehoram (853-841 B.C.) when the Philistines and Arabs carried away the king's sons and a portion of the army (2 Chron 21:16-17), during the reign of Ahaz (743-715 B.C.) when Edom took part in a Philistine invasion (2 Chron 28:16-18), or during the final fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1-21). The first is the only one to combine an invasion of Jerusalem with Edomite involvement and therefore is more likely. While we can catch the basic sense of the text without this data, it aids understanding greatly and avoids imprecision to regain the historical background as carefully as possible.

   Understanding this historical situation is enormously helpful when the modern reader approaches the text. In individual instances one or another aspect of this historical background will be important, and the reader will have to study the passage carefully to determine which is predominant. The prophets addressed these issues, and their message is set against the backdrop of these historical problems.
2. The *question of fulfillment* is also quite difficult. Here we might note the debate over the "double fulfillment" or "multiple fulfillment" of passages like Daniel 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11 (the "abomination which makes desolate"). The prophecy was originally fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphanes forced the Jews to sacrifice pigs on the altars and entered the holy of holies in 167 B.C. However, it was fulfilled again in the destruction of Jerusalem and will be fulfilled a final time in the end-time events (Mk 13:14 and par.; cf. Rev 13:14). The same is true of the Joel prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) alluded to in the Pentecost sermon (Acts

2:17-21). It too pointed beyond Pentecost to the eschaton. Willem VanGemeren (1990:82-83) prefers the term *progressive fulfillment,* considering these to be promises that continue to grow at each stage of their witness (from the historical situation to the later redemptive periods, from exile to postexilic to New Testament to the church period). These are more than prophecies of events but promises of God's intervention throughout history. So there is a progress in redemption that makes the eschatological promises new in every era.

I believe the answer is twofold. First, I prefer to use the term *analogous* (or *typological*) *fulfillment* to describe promise fulfillment. The terms *double* or *multiplex* are unnecessary, for the New Testament writers would see analogous situations in salvation history and link them prophetically. Second, the key is the Jewish concept of the telescoping of time. In God's acts within history a conceptual link would equate such analogous situations ("a thousand years are like a day" [2 Pet 3:8] amalgamates past, present and future). Therefore, the New Testament could draw together Antiochus Epiphanes (past), the destruction of Jerusalem (present) and the eschaton (future).

Mickelsen discusses two related issues (1963:289-94). First, prophecy is not just history written either after (liberals) or before (evangelicals) the event. The first is the product of antisupernaturalism, the second of overstatement. Both flounder on the enigmatic character of prophecy that reveals certain details of the future event but leaves much of it in doubt. Both Old Testament and New Testament prophecy are ambiguous, and while pointing to actual historical events, they do not reveal them in their entirety. The interpreter must cautiously consider the issue of fulfillment, letting the text rather than current events determine the interpretation.[5]

The second issue is the progressive nature of prophecy. Later prophecies often add details to earlier ones, and the fulfillment is greater than the sum total of the preceding promises. Messianic prophecies in particular demonstrate this. Even with all the details predicted by successive prophets, the Jews were not ready for Jesus (note the constant misunderstandings of the disciples) and the reality far exceeded the expectations. The fact is that God gave the prophets only limited glimpses and never the entire

picture. As Peter said, “The prophets . . . searched intently and with greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing” (1 Pet 1:10-11). In the same way, modern interpreters need humility rather than dogmatism as they try to understand the fulfillment of the end-time events. To borrow Pauline language (out of context), we too “see through a mirror dimly” when applying prophecy.

3. A *conditional aspect* is often seen, and some prophecies are dependent on the fulfillment of that condition. The destruction of Nineveh was clearly averted when the king and people repented, and the prophecy was nullified (Jon 3:4-10). The prophecy did not become unfulfilled, however, for it was conditional from the beginning. The principle is elucidated clearly in Jeremiah 18:7-10, which states that God would not fulfill doom pronouncements if the people repented, and he would remove promises if they departed from his ways. Many so-called unfulfilled prophecies (such as the prophecy of the total destruction of Damascus in Isaiah 17:1 or the statement of Huldah that Josiah would die in peace in 2 Kings 22:18-20) can undoubtedly be explained along these lines.[6]

2. ***The revelatory state differed.*** The way the message was communicated to the prophet differed greatly depending on the situation.

    1. *Visions and dreams* were often the medium through which the message came. Critical scholars (Wellhausen, Holscher) have long argued that Israel’s prophets learned the techniques of “ecstatic trances” and hallucinatory experiences from the Canaanites. This claim, however, is unnecessary. Leon Wood examines the major passages (Num 11:25-29; 1 Sam 10:1-13; 18:10; 19:18-24; 1 Kings 18:29; 22:10-12; 2 Kings 9:1-16; Jer 29:26; Hos 9:7) and finds no support for such conclusions (1979:39-59). Saul’s partial disrobing and stupor in 1 Samuel 19, for instance, can hardly prove such a thesis; Saul was not a prophet, and the others did not follow his example. The frenzy that accompanied an “ecstatic” experience was not really present. While pagan prophets did exemplify such frenzy (see 1 Kings 18:29), this is not seen of Israel’s prophets. Lindblom allows ecstatic experiences for the early oral prophets but not for the

later classical prophets (with the possible exception of Ezekiel; 1962:47-54, 122-23). The later prophets had visions but not ecstatic hallucinations. In fact, Petersen concludes that such behavior was not present at all in Israel's prophetic tradition (1981:29-30), and I concur with his assessment.

The difference is that the vision is a supernatural manifestation that corresponds to external reality while the hallucinatory, or "trance possession," is subjective and irrational. Numbers 12:6 states that God would indeed "speak" to his prophets via "vision" and "dream." At times these visions were "night" visions (such as Job 4:13; 20:8; Is 29:7; Dan 7:2) but more frequently they occurred during the day. Such visions often contained esoteric imagery that crossed over into apocalyptic and had to be interpreted, such as the dry bones of Ezekiel 37 or the little horn of Daniel 8. Most important, the prophet was in a conscious state, and the vision was sent directly from God (Ezek 37 does not even mention the visionary medium; cf. Ezek 1:1; 8:3).

Dreams differed from visions in that the prophet was not conscious. They were similar to the vision in that they too were sent from God. Nathan received such a dream regarding the Davidic kingdom (2 Sam 7:4-17), and Daniel received a dream regarding the four beasts (Dan 7:1-14), although the latter is also described as a vision (vv. 2, 15).

2. *Direct revelations* were the most common prophetic experience. Again and again Yahweh speaks audibly to his prophets. The formula "And the word of the LORD came to . . ." (2 Kings 20:4; Jer 1:2; 21) led to the formulas "Hear the word of the LORD" (2 Kings 20:16; Jer 24) or "Thus says the Lord" (2 Kings 20:5).[7] This of course is crucial for an understanding of prophetic authority as well as of inspiration. Often the revelation was linked to specific historical events, as when Nathan faced David with his sins over Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 12:7-12) and when Jeremiah predicted disaster to Zedekiah as Nebuchadnezzar approached (2 Sam 21:3-14).

3. ***The forms of prophetic proclamation vary.*** This is important for hermeneutical study, for like the forms of wisdom literature each type must be interpreted differently.

1. The *judgment speech* is the basic form of the prophetic message. As Claus Westermann has shown (1967:129-63), the prophecy of doom usually begins with an introductory section commissioning the prophet ("Go, prophesy" [Amos 7:15]) followed by a section detailing the accusation or describing the situation that led to the judgment ("You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel . . .' " [Amos 7:16]). Then comes the messenger formula ("Therefore this is what the LORD says" [Amos 7:17a]) and the prediction of disaster ("Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will die by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land" [Amos 7:17b]). Of course this is only a basic formula. As John Hayes states, the texts that actually follow this pattern may be "the exception rather than the rule" (1979:277). Nevertheless, these aspects are found in a great number of the texts and are helpful in understanding them. Sometimes this even takes the form of a liturgical complaint, with a description of the disaster, a plea for mercy, and a statement from God that he will not show mercy because of her sin (e.g., Is 63:7—64:12; Jer 14:1-22) (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, 1993: 296-98).
2. The *prophecy* of *blessing or deliverance*, also known as *salvation oracles* (see Is 41:8-20; Jer 33:1-9) had much the same form as the first type, with the situation detailed, followed by the blessing itself.[8] The major emphasis in the salvation oracle is on divine mercy. The prophets clearly state that the deliverance is due only to the intervention of God himself. Some (March 1974:163) separate the "oracle of salvation" (present deliverance) from the "proclamation of salvation" (future deliverance), but this is doubtful and the differences (such as the presence of "fear not" in the oracle and of the lament form in the proclamation) are due more to the situation addressed than to the form.
3. The woe *oracle* (Is 5:8-24; Amos 5:18-20; Mic 2:1-4; Hab 2:6-8) is a particular type of judgment prophecy that contains *hoy* followed by a series of participles detailing the subject, the transgression and the judgment. To the Israelite *woe* signified tragedy and imminent sorrow. It was a particularly powerful device for pronouncing doom, and the emphasis is more on imminent judgment than on the sorrow resulting (true also in the

"woes" of Lk 6:24-26). There has been considerable study as to the origin of *woe,* some centering on the woe as the negative counterpart to the beatitude, others on woe as a didactic device in popular teaching. The tendency today is to see its background in the funeral lament as a prophetic reaction to the inevitability of judgment to come (see Tucker 1985:339-40; Sawyer 1987:30).

4. *Symbolic actions* were also frequent in the prophetic period. These could be called "acted parables" (Fee and Stuart [2003:196] call them "enactment prophecies") and served as object lessons for the observers. Jeremiah and Ezekiel especially used this method. Jeremiah used a clay vessel to illustrate divine sovereignty (Jer 18:1-10; cf. Rom 9:20-23), and Ezekiel (Ezek 5:1-4) cut off a portion of his hair and burned a third, struck a third with the sword, and scattered a third to signify the three types of judgment God would send on Israel. Such actions were powerful illustrations of God's anger against his recalcitrant people.
5. *Legal* or *trial oracles* (Is 3:13-26; Hos 4:1-19) contain a summons to the divine law court, a trial setting in which witnesses are called, leading to a stress on both the guilt of Israel or the nations and the judgment or sentence due. Scholars debate whether the form originated from Hittite suzerainty treaties, the covenant or heavenly "lawsuit" *(rîb),* current legal customs or the covenant renewal liturgy of Israel. Most likely we can never decide this type of detail with any precision, and the prophetic form reflected more general patterns related to many if not all of the above. Eugene March notes (1974:165-66) that this form is used to express Yahweh's judgment on the gods of the nations (Is 41:1-5, 21-29; 43:8-15; 44:6-8) or on Israel itself (Is 42:18-25; 43:22-28; 50:1-3). Again the exact form is not found in all, as one element or another is omitted.

   For example, Isaiah 41:21-29 begins with the call of the pagan gods to trial, challenging them to assemble their evidence (vv. 21-23), followed by the charge that they are "nothing" (v. 24) and the witnesses who prove their guilt (vv. 25-28). Finally, the verdict is pronounced: they all are "false . . . amount to nothing . . . wind and confusion" (v. 29).
6. The *disputation speech* (Is 28:14-19; Jer 33:23-26; Ezek 18:1-20) has been examined in detail by Adrian Graffy (1984). It is used

primarily to quote the people's own words against them and to use their own statements to show their error. It consists of three parts: an introductory formula ("the word of Yahweh came to me saying"), the quotation of the opponents in order to show their errors (often containing chiasm) and the refutation that points out the error in their reasoning and details God's intervention in the situation. Jeremiah 31:29-30 uses the disputation form as an introduction to the new covenant prophecy of verses 31-34. The setting is the future ("in those days") and the quotation uses a local proverb on the collective punishment of the nation ("the fathers have eaten sour grapes, / and the children's teeth are set on edge"). The refutation centers on the new age, when punishment will be individual and the children will suffer for their own sins ("everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge"). This prepares the way for the individualism of the new covenant age in verse 34.

7. The *prophetic dirge* occurs when the prophet gives a "funeral lament" for Israel (cf. Is 14:3-21; Ezek 19:1-14, 26:17-18, 27:32), as if the nation was already a corpse prepared for burial. There are several formal aspects (using Amos 5:1-3): the call to listen ("Hear this word," the dirge itself ("Fallen is Virgin Israel, / never to rise again"), the messenger formula ("This is what the Sovereign LORD says"), and the prediction ("The city that marches out a thousand strong for Israel / will have only a hundred left"). The future disaster is treated as an event that has already occurred, and Israel is pictured as "a virgin who dies unmarried and alone" (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard 1993:295-96). See also the three funeral dirges of Revelation 18:9-20.
8. *Poetry* is used throughout the prophets. The ancient Near East was steeped in poetic expression. Poetry always had a more powerful voice since it was easily memorized and spoke more eloquently to the issue. Many of the devices discussed in chapter eight on Old Testament poetry will be helpful. Within the prophets there are laments (Jer 15:5-21; 20:7-18), thanksgiving songs (Jer 33:11), worship hymns (Is 33:1-24) and repentance hymns (Mic 7:1-12). One has only to glance through the prophetic books in a modern version to see how extensively they utilize poetry.
9. *Wisdom thinking* has long been allied with the prophetic

movement (see Crenshaw and Clements), and several of the forms mentioned in chapter nine are also observable in prophetic literature. Proverbs are often used. In fact, one such asked, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Sam 10:11; see also Jer 31:29-30 [Ezek 18:1-21 as discussed in 6). Popular wisdom sayings are employed (Jer 23:28), and even allegories (particularly used in Ezek 16; 20; 23). John Schmitt (1992:486-87) points out that wisdom and prophecy were “parallel phenomena” during this period, and Isaiah 5:19-24 and Isaiah 30:1-5 contrast the wisdom of the age with the wisdom of God. Wisdom background can be seen in Isaiah 14:24-27 and Jeremiah 19:7-15. In fact, many of the prophets may have trained with the sages. The difference is that the prophet spoke the words of God, the wise the words they had received from their predecessors.

10. *Apocalyptic* is found in later prophetic works like Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. We will investigate this link further in chapter eleven, but the form itself is restricted to exilic and postexilic prophetic works in the Old Testament.

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

In light of the general information already discussed, how can we approach prophetic literature so as to move accurately on the spiral from text to context? Walter Kaiser provides an interesting discussion of four ways *not* to preach prophecy (1982:186-93): (1) In prophetic typology the contemporary situation controls the text rather than vice versa. This is especially observable in liberation theology, where passages decrying social injustice are used to support modern revolutionary movements. (2) Prophetic action preaching takes the individuals and episodes of a story and symbolizes them to speak to modern events. Again, the actual meaning of the text is ignored, and a contemporary grid is forced on the surface of the text. For instance, the story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21 is used for the "little man" versus institutionalism or the state. (3) Prophetic motto preaching chooses one or two statements out of a larger context like 1 Kings 21 and constructs a message using these as a motto. For instance, verse 7 ("I [Jezebel] will get you the vineyard") is made a springboard for a sermon on women's liberation, even though in the context she is villain rather than hero. (4) Prophetic parable preaching constructs a modern parable on the analogy of the story line. The problem again is the surface parallels that are adduced without a deep understanding of the actual situation. Certainly there are many casual analogies, situations in which large corporations and so forth force people out of their homes, but again this ignores the prophetic component and the actual exegesis of the text.

I would add a fifth type of erroneous preaching, the "newspaper" approach of many so-called prophecy preachers today. This school assumes that the prophecies were not meant for the ancient setting but rather for the modern setting. Amazingly, that setting is often post-1948 (after Israel became a nation) America (see further "The Interpretation of Symbols," pp. 283-85). Such preachers ignore the fact that God chose all the symbols and passages to speak to Israel, and that modern people must understand them in their ancient context before applying them today. The modern interpreter must distinguish messianic prophecies from temporary (intended for the historical situation of ancient Israel) prophecies. "Newspaper" preachers instead take prophetic passages out of

context and twist them to fit the modern situation. This is dangerous for it too easily leads to a subjective “eisegesis” (reading meaning into a text), which does anything one wants to the scriptural text. We need exegetical principles that can truly unlock the text and enable the modern Christian to hear the prophetic Word of God anew. The following seven steps are useful.

1. Determine the individual saying. As Fee and Stuart point out, we must learn to “think oracles,” because many sections in the prophetic books comprise a collection of sayings, each addressed to different situations but without divisions indicated between them (2003:193). The reader cannot ascertain easily where one begins or ends, nor can we know for certain whether successive oracles were delivered to the same audience or situation. Naturally, the student needs help in doing this, and a good commentary is an essential aid. We do not want to misread successive oracles by taking them together and misusing the context of one to interpret the other. When the historical setting is provided, for instance in Jeremiah or Isaiah, the student is helped immensely. When it is missing and sayings are lumped together, the task is correspondingly more difficult. The servant songs of Isaiah 42—53 are placed in the context of a series of poems (Is 40—66) without historical referents. The interpreter must note each poem as a unit before running them together into whole sections (such as 40—55; 56—66).
2. Determine the type of oracle employed. Each subgenre has its own language rules, and it is imperative to isolate the literary type of each oracle before interpreting it. It not only adds interest value to note that a saying is a *lawsuit* or *wisdom* oracle but it enables the reader to look for a particular pattern or certain highlights depending on the type of saying employed. This has further value for the sermon. When preachers note a lawsuit oracle or “disputation” speech, they can choose illustrations that both highlight the text and make it more forceful and meaningful for the congregation.
3. Study the individual oracle in light of the whole prophecy, using both macro-and micro-exegetical techniques. Odil Steck (2000:20-43) calls this a “historic synchronic reading.” By this he means to consider the book as a canonical whole. For instance, even if we were to accept trito-Isaiah, we should consider Isaiah 1—66 as a whole when trying to understand its presentation and message. Steck sees four aspects of this: (1) Study the presentation of the person, chronology (“story time” in narrative critical terms), and linguistic procedures. In other words, look

at the thought development, characterization and sociopolitical perspective of the whole. See how individual oracles fit into this progression of ideas. (2) Check the character and intention of the book's portrayal. Avoid diachronic presuppositions and allow the book to speak for itself in terms of its intended message. (3) Study the compilation and redactional work of the book. Place yourself at the level of the final formation of the text and see the book as a unity, and then see how individual paragraphs fit into that unity. (4) Study the signals that point to a historically coherent reading. These literary signs include superscriptions that explain basic perspective, relationships between sections, blocks of statements connected by framing references, programmatic texts in the developing argument, highlighted connections and controlling words and phrases. Out of this will come the intended flow of thought. The point is that the parts must always be studied in terms of their contribution to the larger whole, and each oracle must be seen as part of the ongoing message of the book.

4. Study the balance between the historical and the predictive. Bernard Ramm notes three questions in terms of the essence of a passage (1970:250): Is it predictive or didactic? (e.g., Zech 1:1-6 is didactic and 7-21 predictive). Is it conditional or unconditional? Is it fulfilled or unfulfilled? In the latter case we must use caution because of the enigmatic nature of prophecy. First-century Jews thought Isaiah 53 was being fulfilled in the sufferings of the nation and did not realize it was messianic. We today also approach prophecy from a finite perspective and can very easily misunderstand the thrust of the promise. This demands a nuanced grammatical-historical exegesis of the passage. We must probe carefully the background, not only of the words but of the larger issues, before we can make any decisions. Many today leap too quickly into a futuristic interpretation of passages that were more likely meant to speak to the author's own day. In both aspects, however, it is critical to take note of the cultural context. With all the metaphors and poetry of prophetic writings, we must study the cultural background, remembering that the prophets were historical figures addressing historical problems in their own day (VanGemeren 1990:73-75). In fact, the key formula, "Thus says the LORD," is a messenger formula taken from the practice of emissaries from a monarch making pronouncements in his name (Schmitt 1992:483—see also the forms enumerated earlier [pp.267-70]). On the servant songs of Isaiah 42—53, study each song not just messianically but historically in terms of the referent (the nation in

the early songs and moving to a messianic thrust in the later songs).

5. Determine the presence of literal meaning or symbol. There is an ongoing debate between adherents of a literal approach to prophecy and those who take a symbolic stance, centering somewhat on the dispensational and amillennial schools of interpretation. While I will examine the biblical use of symbols in chapter eleven, I must note the issue here. There are three possible approaches to this issue. With a completely literal approach, each symbol refers to a specific individual and a specific time. However, no one takes an absolutely literal approach, believing that there actually will be monster horses with multicolored breastplates, heads like lions and breath like dragon fire (Rev 9:17). Most pick and choose where to be literal, often without seeming criteria for doing so. In the Distant Thunder film series about the tribulation period, for instance, the Beast (Rev 13) was a distinguished-looking gentleman in a three-piece white suit while the locusts (Rev 9) were literal but as large as jet planes!

   Second, the symbolic approach seeks the ideas behind the symbols, that is, eternal truths without temporal or individual significance. Few take a completely spiritual approach, such as removing the referent from all prophetic passages so that they refer only to spiritual truths and not to events. For instance, even those (e.g., R. T. France) who interpret Mark 13:24 (the coming of the Son of Man) as the destruction of Jerusalem rather than the parousia see an event behind the prophecy. Only the committed existentialist will see only spiritual meaning behind such texts.

   The third approach seeks a “language of equivalents” that notes an analogous situation but refuses to overload the text in the direction of either literal or symbolic. When we study the Old Testament messianic texts, for instance, this is the best solution. They were not purely symbolic since they did point to coming events. Nor were they completely literal, for they contained historical correspondence as well as direct messianic prophecy. Passages like the prophecy of the thirty pieces of silver (Jer 32:6-9 [Zech 11:12-13] in Mt 27:9-10) are analogous rather than literal prophecies. This approach notes the future event predicted, for instance, in the locust plague of Revelation 9 but does not try to read too many details (the breastplates = tanks) into the text.

6. Carefully delineate christological emphases. Many (Vischer, Geisler) have seen the Old Testament as christocentric in essence. Certainly all of the canon in one sense pointed forward to Christ (Gal 3:19); yet it also

spoke to its own day, and overly zealous Christian interpreters often negate the true canonical meaning of prophecy (as well as other Old Testament literature) by reading it in a christological rather than a historical direction. I argue throughout this book for the centrality of the "author's intended meaning," that thrust which God inspired the author to state. If we apply this to prophecy it means the interpreter is obligated to search for the original thrust of the passage.

Some passages are directly messianic (Mic 5:2 on the birth in Bethlehem; Mal 4:5 on Elijah as forerunner) while others are analogical (Hos 11:1 in Mt 2:15 on calling Jesus "out of Egypt"; Jer 31:15 in Mt 2:17-18 on the slaughter of the innocents). Still other prophecies are not messianic but had their fulfillment in their own day. Fee and Stuart mention Isaiah 49:23 (kings who will "bow down before you with their faces to the ground"), interpreted by some as a prophecy of the magi in Matthew 2 (1982:163-64). However, the context shows it refers to the restoration of Israel after the Babylonian exile, and both the intent and style of the passage demand it be interpreted of the nations' obeisance before Yahweh and his people.

While we must recognize the christological thrust of Scripture as a whole, we should interpret individual passages thus only if the text warrants it. We should never read more into a text than it allows. Nonchristological passages are part of the broader thrust of Scripture as it prepared for Christ but are not christocentric in themselves.

7. Do not impose your theological system on the text. As stated throughout this book, one's theological system is an essential and valid component of the hermeneutical tool chest. Without a basic system of thinking, a reader could not make sense out of any text let alone one as difficult as a prophetic passage. Yet at the same time a system that has become rigid can lead the interpreter to thrust the text in a direction it does not wish to go and thereby can seriously hamper the search for truth. On prophecy and apocalyptic, dispensationalists tend to be literalists, and non-dispensationalists stress the symbolic more. Often the decision regarding a particular text can be made on dogmatic rather than exegetical grounds. Here dialogue is essential. We should use works from both schools in studying the background and meaning of the biblical text. This will force us to a more balanced approach that can allow the text itself to question a prioris and guide us to a correct understanding.
8. Seek analogous situations in the modern church. Since Old Testament prophecy was given to a culture long passed from the scene, many

assume that it no longer speaks to our day. Nothing could be further from the truth. Kaiser points to 2 Chronicles 7:14, which says, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land” (1981:194-95). The phrase “called by my name” would certainly include believing Gentiles and the promise would apply to the church today. Indeed, a careful reading of the characteristics of prophecy shows the applicability of these themes to our own day. The necessity of dwelling within God’s new covenant, the judgment warnings and salvation promises speak to the modern Christian with the same clarion voice they held for the Israelites. The condemnation of social injustice and immorality are as needed today as then.

11

Apocalyptic

For most people apocalyptic literature represents one of the most fascinating and yet most mystifying portions of Scripture. When studying Daniel or Revelation, readers feel they have been transported into a fairy-tale world of myths and monsters, a Tolkien-type panorama of fantasy. The unreality of the symbols and the constant shifting from one mysterious scene to another is greatly confusing. At the same time, the text portrays the war in heaven and on earth, between good and evil, between the children of God and the forces of Satan. The reader is caught between the literal and the symbolic, not knowing quite how to approach these works. Once we know how to handle the locusts and demonic hordes, the many-horned goats and fearsome beasts, apocalyptic is a fascinating and pervasive vehicle for the presentation of theological truth.

Like narrative (chap. 7), apocalyptic cuts across the Testaments. In the Old Testament we would note Daniel and Zechariah as well as the visions of Ezekiel 37—39 and perhaps Isaiah 24—27 or the locust plague of Joel. From the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha are 1 Enoch, Slavonic Enoch (2 Enoch), Hebrew Enoch (3 Enoch), Jubilees, Assumption of Moses, the Ascension of Isaiah, 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch, 4 Ezra, Psalms of Solomon, Testament of Abraham, Apocalypse of Abraham, portions of the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Levi, Naphtali and perhaps Joseph), Life of Adam and Eve (Apocalypse of Moses), Shepherd of Hermas, Sibylline Oracles (books 3-5) and several of the Qumran scrolls (such as the War Scroll, An Angelic Liturgy, the Testament of Amram) (for an excellent lengthy presentation of Jewish apocalypses, see Collins 1992; for a short description see Russell 1994:31-41). New Testament apocalyptic might include the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13 and par.), 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Peter 2—3, Jude, and Revelation. This material covers a period extending from the seventh century B.C. to the second century A.D. The extracanonical literature is essential for a proper perspective and control in studying the canonical material. It is generally recognized that apocalypticism originated from both prophetic and wisdom influences, with prophecy providing the worldview and wisdom the practical orientation as well as “mantic wisdom” dealing with interpretation of dreams/visions (Aune, Geddert, Evans 2000:47-

48).

FORMAL FEATURES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The term *apocalypse* was not used of this body of literature until it appeared in Revelation 1:1, and it was not until the second century that the term regularly appeared for this genre. The word meant to "reveal" or uncover knowledge previously hidden (see Smith 1983:9-20) and so was a natural term to employ. Apocalyptic has two aspects: it is both a genre or type of literature, and a set of concepts found in texts that belong to this genre.[1] Therefore, I will separate specific formal features related to the style and content of the texts and more general characteristics that describe the mindset that led to the production of those texts.

A preliminary definition (adapting those of Rowland, Collins and Aune) draws together these features and introduces an overall perspective on the apocalyptic genre:

> Apocalyptic entails the revelatory communication of heavenly secrets by an otherworldly being to a seer who presents the visions in a narrative framework; the visions guide readers into a transcendent reality that takes precedence over the current situation and encourages readers to persevere in the midst of their trials. The visions reverse normal experience by making the heavenly mysteries the real world and depicting the present crisis as a temporary, illusory situation. This is achieved via God's transforming this world for the faithful. (See Hanson 1983:25-26)

1. ***Formal features.*** Scholars have vigorously debated the formal features of the apocalyptic genre. E. P. Sanders sums up the debate: (1) Many of these features (symbols, cycles) also can be found in nonapocalyptic works. (2) Many so-called apocalypses do not contain a majority of these traits. (3) Many of the lists fail to contain other elements commonly found in apocalyptic works (1983:447-59). Recent scholars overcome this difficulty in two ways, first by separating "genre" (considering a work as a whole) and "form" (dealing with small discourse units within a

work), and second by distinguishing apocalypticism (the sociological situation behind the movement), apocalyptic eschatology (the major theme of the movement) and apocalypse (the literary genre).

The most important of the distinctions is between form and genre. Few of the works listed previously are entirely apocalyptic. Large portions of the biblical books, like Daniel or Zechariah, are prophetic, and the same is true of intertestamental literature like 1 Enoch (chaps. 91—104 are not) and Jubilees (it moves back and forth between general discourse and apocalyptic). The book of Revelation contains the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2—3) in general epistolary style, and George Ladd calls it "prophetic-apocalyptic" in tenor (1957:192-200).

It can be easily shown that there are almost as many variations in apocalyptic style as there are apocalyptic works. Yet this is hardly a new phenomenon. I have noted the problem in virtually every genre already discussed, and it is not a final deterrent to generic categories (see Osborne 1983). Therefore, I will concentrate more on form and note that the apocalyptic genre depends on the accumulation of formal categories in small units within the larger whole. There is no such thing as a pure genre, and the attempt to elucidate such on the part of Sanders and others is doomed to failure.[2]

1. A *revelatory communication* is perhaps the most common trait. In the past it was often asserted that prophecy is characterized by a direct audition and apocalyptic by a vision or dream. While this is generally adequate it is not true in every instance. Zechariah 1—6 is a series of visions, while Zechariah 9—14 comprises a series of oracles (see also Is 24—27; Joel 1—2). The calls of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 2 are in the form of visions and contain definite apocalyptic elements (cf. 1 Enoch 15), as does Amos 7 on the locust plague (cf. Joel 1—2, without a vision). Nevertheless, a revelatory situation is behind nearly every apocalyptic work, including the intertestamental ones. The major exceptions are New Testament passages like the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13 and par.) and the epistolary material (2 Thess 2; 2 Pet 3), though their stature as apocalyptic is debated. These are narrative units that employ apocalyptic style and themes. Apocalypse per se employs visions (see Revelation).

   Another misconception is that apocalyptic literature had a secondary authority, since prophets had a direct communication

from God while apocalyptists had only visions and normally needed an angelic interpreter. However, this ignores the fact that both vision and angel were directly from God and were part of a supernatural communication of the divine will.[3] In short, the vision is a basic trait but by itself cannot point to apocalyptic.

2. *Angelic mediation* is part of the revelatory medium. Given the symbolism employed in the vision, the writer is understandably confused about the meaning of the communication. Often an angelic guide conducts the seer on a "tour," as in Ezekiel 40 (the measurement of the temple; cf. Rev 11:1-2), Zechariah 1 (the four horns), the Apocalypse of Abraham 10 (the angel Jaoel takes the patriarch to heaven) or Revelation 17 (the judgment of the great harlot). More frequently the angel interprets the vision or dream, as in the night visions of Zechariah 1—6, the visions of the four beasts and little horn in Daniel 7—8, the explanation of the heavenly Jerusalem in 4 Esdras 7, or the interpretation of the seven heads and ten horns in Rev 17. Alexander Rofé (1997:101) points out that a developed angelology is a characteristic of Daniel/ apocalyptic and that it signifies the "unity of the worlds," that is, the involvement of heaven in earthly affairs. Some late Jewish works like 1 Enoch, Jubilees and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs also employ the medium of the "heavenly tablets," secret books given to the great figures of the past like Enoch, Jacob or Moses and now disclosed to the seer himself. These tablets record the divine plan for the ages and have a future orientation, preparing the faithful for what is to come. As David Russell says, the divine revelations come via vision, angelic mediation or on "heavenly tablets" and disclose the long-hidden truths regarding past, present and future for the "last days" (1964:108-9). This disclosure was proof that indeed the End was near.[4]
3. *Discourse cycles* demonstrate the stylized literary form of apocalyptic (see Koch 1972:24). While the prophetic writings originally were spoken oracles, apocalyptic was literature from the start. The apocalyptist is told to write down his visions (cf. Rev 1:19) and therefore the formal elements have even greater significance. Daniel and Ezekiel demonstrate recapitulation, with Daniel's five parallel visions (Dan 2; 7; 8; 9; 10—12, see Beale

1998:135-36), in the resumptive style of Ezekiel (see Block 1997:24-25), or other works such as the Sibylline Oracles, the Similitudes of Enoch, or 4 Ezra. It is debated whether there is recapitulation/cycle patterns in the book of Revelation. I believe the seals, trumpets and bowls exhibit such a pattern, with a progressive intensity of judgment (1/4 to 1/3 to the whole planet affected) and with each ending at the eschaton (Osborne 2002:269-70).

Scholars have too often neglected the literary effects and rhetorical techniques. While the actual structure varies from book to book, the literary communication of hidden truths in order to bring the reader into line with God's control of history is a uniform pattern. Lars Hartman speaks of the importance of noting the place of the smaller units in the whole message of the work (1983:333-67). For instance, the appearance of the angelic mediator has the "illocutionary" function (a deeper message behind the surface) of linking heaven and earth and making the communication of divine realities possible. Moreover, the progression of visions has some importance, and they relate to one another in important literary ways. The book of Revelation is a carefully conceived work with a distinct structure and each element moves the reader forward in developing the basic apocalyptic thesis of God's sovereign control over history.

4. *Ethical discourse* often clarifies the purposes of the visions for the readers. Previously, scholars often stated that apocalyptic was not interested in the present age and had a paucity of parenesis or exhortation. While the prophets warned and castigated Israel, the apocalyptists comforted and confirmed the saints (Morris 1972:58- 61). While this distinction is basically correct, and while there are few condemnations of the saints (though see Testament of Benjamin 10:3; Rev 2—3), we dare not press this too far. There are constant ethical pronouncements, but they are more positive, calling the people of God to endurance and righteous living in light of the visions (cf. Rev 16:15; 22:7). In fact, Charles could call apocalyptic "essentially ethical" in the sense that the saints were constantly called to an awareness of and faith in the God who controls present and future (1913:2:16). Charles has certainly overstated the case; Russell more correctly notes that "eschatology, not ethics, was their consuming interest" but that

the two were not mutually exclusive (1964:101). “On the contrary they recognized the moral demands of God here and now. . . . Their one aim was to obey God and to carry out his commandments (cf. Dan 9:10f, 14, etc.).” In one sense the book of Revelation as a whole centers on the need of the saints to be “overcomers” (note the conclusion of each of the seven letters) rather than “cowardly” (Rev 21:8).

5. *Esoteric symbolism* is the most visible quality of apocalyptic literature. The source of these symbols also differs from the prophets and other biblical writers. The latter drew their symbols or metaphors from the experiential world, such as locusts, horses, salt and lamps. The apocalyptists would do so as well but added many symbols from the world of fantasy or myth, such as many-headed beasts, dragons, locusts with the tails of scorpions. However, these symbols were drawn from the times of the writers and many quickly became conventional; for example, animals stood for men, cosmic signs for supernatural phenomena and numbers for God’s control of history.

   The significance of numerology is particularly striking. In all apocalypses the numbers three, four, seven, ten, twelve and seventy predominate. For instance, the book of Revelation is dominated by the number seven and its multiples. At times this can be frustrating, such as in the mystifying use of 666 in Revelation 13:18 (for a survey of the possibilities see Osborne 2002:519-21). We will not know the meaning of that symbol for certain until we get to heaven, although it was probably well known to the readers. My own preference is to think that 666 may refer in part to Nero Caesar—the letters of his name in Hebrew (according to one spelling), if assigned numerical values, add up to 666. There is probably also a contrast between the Antichrist and Jesus, whose name in Greek adds up to 888; thus 666 is ultimate fallible humankind, while “Jesus” (888) is more than perfection (777).

   The rich profusion of symbols leads to great confusion among interpreters and is the subject of the next section (“The Interpretation of Symbols”). The problem is that while many ancient apocalyptic works provide an interpretation, others do not. This is especially true in the book of Revelation, which contains only one angelic interpretation (chap. 17). The reader is

increasingly bewildered as the images multiply. Morris provides a good example:

> Thus in I Enoch we read of stars falling from heaven and becoming bulls. They cohabit with cows and sire elephants, camels, and asses (I Enoch 86:1-4). Later we learn of a white bull that became a man (I Enoch 89:1) and of bulls which sired creatures as diverse as lions, tigers, wolves, squirrels, vultures and others (I Enoch 89:10). (1972:37)

We cannot begin to make sense of apocalyptic without coming to grips with the background and meaning of such symbols.

6. A *recital of history* is featured in many apocalyptic works, like Jubilees, that intertwine past and future. Several preoccupy themselves with the details of world history, especially that of Israel (Dan 2; 7—12; 1 Enoch 85—90; 4 Ezra 11—12; Apocalypse of Abraham 27—28). As Christopher Rowland points out (1982:136-39), this distinguishes these works from prophecy, which rarely recites historical facts (e.g., Ezek 20 uses it only to chronicle Israel's sins). The purpose is to demonstrate the divine control over all history on behalf of the people of God. This can be past history (1 Enoch 85—90) or the immediate future (Dan 7—12); both come together to show the sovereignty of God. By reflecting on God's control of the past, Israel or the church is asked to trust him in the present. The same God who was sovereign over past history is sovereign over present and future history. Israel need not fear the disasters of the present or the world empires of the future. Nothing takes place without the foreknowledge and consent of God. This has been proven in the past and will be reiterated in the future.

   Often this recital takes the form of a calendrical reworking of the ages. Jubilees, for instance, divides history into "jubilee" periods of forty-nine years each, taking the reader from creation to the Passover and exodus from Egypt. All of this is seen as a direct revelation from God to Moses. The Apocalypse of Weeks in 1 Enoch 91:12-17 and Enoch 93:1-10 divides history into seven past "weeks" or periods and three future "weeks." The similarities to the seventy "weeks" of Daniel 9:24-27 are obvious. In 1 Enoch the seventh week is characterized by apostasy, while

in Daniel it is the seventieth that is marked by “abominations.”

7. *Pseudonymity* is the first characteristic mentioned by many, but it is certainly overstated, primarily because of the assumption that Daniel is a pseudonymous second-century work. This, however, is at the very least debatable and in my opinion is dubious.[5] However, even without Daniel we would have a difficult time proving pseudonymity for Ezekiel, Joel and Zechariah, and few try to do so for the book of Revelation. Yet pseudonymity is undeniably true of intertestamental works. In the ancient world a work had greater authority when it was linked to one of the great heroes of the past. The Apocalypse of Abraham, for instance, recalls details from the patriarch’s life as providing the setting for visionary experiences. Similar attributions are made with respect to Enoch (1 Enoch), Moses (Assumption of Moses), Ezra (4 Ezra) and Baruch (2 Baruch, 3 Baruch).

   Leslie Russell lists several factors behind this:[6] (1) On the basis of the corporate solidarity between the heroes of the faith and the nation, the choice of these figures showed the unity of God’s people in all ages. (2) The idea of “contemporaneity” meant that all those within the tradition shared the same revelations from God and the same spiritual experiences as the great men of the past. (3) The “name” of a person bespeaks his character, and the choice of a name in a Jewish context linked the vision and the writer with the heroes of the past. Rowland argues that the first two notions have been recently challenged and are difficult to prove (1982:65-66). However, it is likely that such religious reasons approximate the reasons for such choices. The writers wished to deepen the impact of their visions by connecting them to the leaders of antiquity.

2. ***Characteristics.*** More difficult to delineate are characteristics that define the mindset of apocalyptists (see Oswalt 1999:385-88). Nevertheless, we can see clearly several aspects in a majority of the works.

   1. *Pessimism toward the present age* may be the dominant characteristic. Most who attempt to isolate a *Sitz im Leben* (situation in the life of Israel that gave rise to the movement) believe that apocalypticism developed in a time of great crisis and peril for the nation. The situations were so desperate that there

could be little hope for the present. All the child of God could do was await God's future intervention. Ladd believes that this is one basic difference between prophecy and apocalyptic (1957:198-99). The prophet argued that if Israel returned to God the condition would be met and the prophecy of doom avoided. The apocalyptist could offer no such optimistic forecast but could only comfort the reader that God in the future would bring contemporary history to a close and vindicate his people. In a very real sense one could say that the apocalyptists had a healthy respect for the depravity of humanity. They soundly rejected the falsely optimistic view of the progress of society and placed their trust not in humans but in God. Morris calls this "the shaking of the foundations," for the whole Jewish perspective or worldview was turned upside down (1972:41-43). No longer would things be right with the world, for not only did Judaism face troubles from without but troubles from within, a growing secularism and a clash of cultures with Babylonian, Persian and later Hellenistic values. Only God could bring order out of this chaos.[7]

2. The *promise of salvation or restoration* is the other side of the same coin. Sanders believes this is so important that it is the one essential peculiarity of the movement.[8] While Sanders overstates the case, there is no denying the centrality of this characteristic. Throughout the visions of Daniel and Revelation the theme of restitution is predominant. In Revelation 6:9-11 and Revelation 8:3-5 the prayers of the saints for retribution are answered in the outpouring of the wrath of God, and the book moves throughout to its climax in the glory and joy of those martyred for Christ. In fact, the climax is prefigured throughout in the juxtaposition of wrath (Rev 6; 8—9; 15—16) and glory (Rev 1; 4—5; 7; 10; 19) passages.
3. *A view of transcendent reality* centering on the presence and control of God is another major theme. Collins believes that this is in fact the primary distinguishing characteristic (1979:9-11). He finds two transcendent elements: the mediation of the revelation by a heavenly being; and a transcendent communication with a temporal axis (the coming eschatological salvation) and a spatial axis (the new order to be established by God on the earth). This divine transcendence relates to the futuristic eschatology of the

apocalypses. The emphasis actually is not so much on the hopelessness of the present as on the hopefulness of the future. Though it may have seemed as if God had disappeared from the scene, the apocalyptic writer is saying that this is illusory. In reality God still reigns over history, and he will bring it to a close in his own time.

However, this cataclysm would occur within history, and all humankind would see it. Descriptions of the event differ from writer to writer, and it was not until the time of Christ that their ideas were crystallized. Some stressed a messianic kingdom on this earth, others an otherworldly existence. For a time there was a two-Messiah doctrine that later coalesced into a single Messiah.[9] Many others had more interest in the messianic age than in the Messiah himself (the personal Messiah is missing in Tobit, 1-2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Jubilees, the Assumption of Moses and 2 Enoch). However, all alike emphasize the intervention of God in catastrophic fashion (such as the seals, trumpets and bowls of Rev 6; 8—9; 16). This triumph would be absolute, visible to all and would vindicate the faithful. Evil would be stamped out forever and righteousness prevail. Hartman delineates a fivefold pattern in the apocalyptic expectations: (1) cosmic catastrophes ending the sin and lawlessness, (2) divine intervention by God or a messianic figure, (3) judgment linked with retribution, (4) punishment of the wicked, and (5) salvation of the faithful (1966:28-49).

4. A *determinism* was observable, in which God completely controlled all of history. A very strong predestinarian perspective prevailed, as God had already charted the future course of this world. In fact, apocalyptic could be labeled the “revelation” of this future history preordained by God. In the midst of the persecuted minority among Judaism and the church, this message held immense comfort. In the present they saw only the control and triumph of the wicked. The message that this was only temporary and that the future triumph of God and his people was assured was extremely meaningful.
5. A *modified dualism* is seen in the doctrine of the two ages, this age and the one to come. This age is characterized by total opposition between God and Satan, between the good and the wicked. An unceasing war is being waged between these

opposing forces. The next age will be introduced by the complete victory of God and will be a new order. The poor and the dispossessed in the present order will experience exaltation at the hand of God, becoming like the angels or the heavenly stars (Dan 12:3; 1 Enoch 50:1). Yet this is not an absolute dualism, because the opposing sides are not equal. In fact, for Revelation the battle is already won, at the cross (Rev 5:5-6; 12:11). David Aune, Timothy Geddert and Craig Evans (2000:49) note two other types of dualism besides the temporal one above: ethical (good vs. evil) and psychological /microcosmic (the two forces struggling within the individual).

6. The *recreation of the cosmos* was expected in Isaiah 65:17, 66:22 and reflected often in apocalyptic works, sometimes with the existing world destroyed (1 Enoch 72:1; 83:3-4, 91:16; Sibylline Oracles 3:75-90, 5:212; Jubilees 1:29, 4:26) and sometimes with it transformed (1 Enoch 45:4-5; 2 Baruch 32:2-6, 44:12; 4 Ezra 7:30-31, 75; Testament of Levi 18:5-10) (Aune, Geddert and Evans 2000:51). In 2 Peter 3: 7, 10 and Revelation 20:11, 21:1, the former is the perspective, with a totally "new heaven and new earth" (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-6) amalgamating the formerly separated heaven and earth into a new unity and fulfilling the "groaning of creation" in Romans 8:19-22 (Osborne 2002:729-30).
7. There is a major *eschatological perspective* or even a worldview at work. L. J. Kreitzer describes this as a temporal axis and a spatial axis (1997:63-65). The former relates to the future Day of the Lord that will end the present development of human history. Apocalyptic does not so much reject human history as see it both ended and transformed. God is as much sovereign over the present as over the future ("who is, and who was, and who is to come" [Rev 1:4]). The spatial axis centers on "the earthly versus the heavenly" and shows an emphasis not found elsewhere, one in which heaven's armies are involved in earthly affairs and both come together in the "cosmic order" God has established.

THE INTERPRETATION OF SYMBOLS

Biblical symbolism is actually a special type of metaphor (see “Figures of Comparison,” pp. 124-26) and therefore part of the multiple senses of the semantic range. The task of the interpreter is to determine which figurative sense the symbol has in the larger context. This means that the true meaning is not to be found in our present situation but rather in the use of that symbol in its ancient setting. This point can hardly be overemphasized in light of the misuse of biblical symbols in many circles today.

This does not mean that prophecy and apocalyptic should not be applied to the current situation nor that their “fulfillment” should not be sought. Rather, it means that the interpreter should seek first the “author’s intended meaning” in the original context before delineating the way that the prophecies apply to our time. We should not look for the meaning of “666” (Rev 13:18) in things like the credit-card system or names of individuals in our current time (like “Ronald Wilson Reagan”—three names with six letters each, thus 666!) but rather in the context of the first century (see Beale 1998:50-69). At the same time the purpose of esoteric symbols in apocalyptic is to turn readers from the actual event to its theological meaning. In other words, readers are expected to see the hand of God in the future but are not supposed to know the exact sequence of events—that is, they are not given a description of what will actually happen. In short, we have no blueprint in Scripture for current events, but rather theological signs that tell us *in general* that God is going to draw history to a close. Symbols are literal in that they point to future events but not so literal that they tell us exactly how God is going to accomplish his purposes.

As Ramm points out, there are two elements in a symbol: the mental and conceptual idea, and the image that represents it (1970:233). The problem is the cultural gap; both the symbol and the idea it represents stem from the ancient world and the biblical realities of that day. Symbols are actual objects (a boiling pot, a goat or ram, a chariot) often placed in strange combinations (a lion with an eagle’s wings [Dan 7]; a beast with ten horns and seven heads [Rev 13]) to convey forcefully some religious truth. When the symbols are explained, as in Zechariah 6 (the chariots with red, black, white and dappled horses are heavenly

spirits patrolling the four corners of the earth), the meaning is self-evident. When it is not the reader is tempted to give the symbols more specific meaning than is safe, for they are interpreted on the basis of current cultural meaning.

There are six types of symbols (see Mickelsen 1963:266-78; Ramm 1970:235-38; Sterrett: 104-5): (1) external miraculous symbols (the burning bush, the pillar of cloud and fire, the ascension); (2) visions (the olive trees in Zech 4, the sheet filled with animals in Acts 10, the visions of Revelation); (3) material symbols (blood = life, the cherubim on the mercy seat = holiness of God, the vine and branches = God's sustaining power); (4) emblematic numbers (seven and twelve in Revelation), names (Isaiah's children in Is 7:3; 8:3), colors (the four horses of Zech 6 and Rev 6), metals (the hierarchical list from gold to clay in Dan 2), and jewels (the twelve foundation stones of the walls of the New Jerusalem in Rev 21); (5) emblematic actions (Ezekiel and John eating the scroll in Ezek 2 and Rev 10; Agabus binding himself with a belt in Acts 21); and (6) emblematic ordinances (the Jewish feasts celebrating harvest or the exodus and so forth, circumcision as a sign of the covenant, the Eucharist as celebrating Jesus' sacrificial death).

In moving from the symbol to the reality it envisions, the reader should seek first the biblical and historical background behind such symbols and then use this to interpret later allusions. There are three major sources—the Old Testament, intertestamental literature (especially the apocalyptic writings), and the Greco-Roman world (the social world of John and the original readers). For instance, the four beasts of Daniel 7 stand for the world empires and their leaders. The use of the beasts in Revelation 13 builds on Daniel 7 and should be interpreted accordingly. It is debated whether the beast from the sea of Revelation 13 is a person (the antichrist) or a world empire. In light of the presence of both in 2 Thessalonians 2 as well as in Daniel, it is doubtful whether such a distinction should be made: both are correct. The important thing is to allow the background behind the symbol to become a key to unlock its meaning.

Moreover, since Jewish and Christian apocalyptic did not exist in a vacuum, we must note the use of symbols in other cultures, such as Persian or Hellenistic. The Hellenistic background in the book of Revelation has been too long neglected. The readers came out of both Jewish and Greek circles, and God chose the symbols accordingly. The woman, dragon and child of Revelation 12 are an "international myth" (in a positive sense) with very close parallels in every ancient religion (such as Isis and Osiris, Marduk, Apollo). The symbol spoke eloquently to all backgrounds. Of course, Jewish background predominates, but this does not exclude Hellenism. For instance, David Aune makes a very convincing case for a background from Caesar's court behind the

throne-room scene of Revelation 4—5 (1983:5-26). This scene, following the central problem of the imperial cult in Revelation 2—3, shows where the true majesty and sovereign power exists and sets the stage for the use of Roman imagery throughout the remainder of the book.

Finally, note the total surface structure and on the basis of semotaxis (see p. 100) decide which of the possible meanings suggested by the diachronic (past background, e.g., in Scripture) and synchronic (the current semantic range) analyses of the symbol best fits the immediate context. In this light the theological thrust of the whole passage is the key.

Let us consider the twelve foundation stones of Revelation 21:19-20 as an example. Many interpretations have been offered down through the ages. In the early centuries it was common to allegorize each jewel, for example, as the twelve tribes or twelve apostles. However, this is only one among many options and is too subjective to be likely. The list parallels the jewels on the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28:17-20 and the similar royal list of jewels in Ezekiel 28:13. Philo and Josephus both believed that the high priest's jewels represented the twelve signs of the zodiac and from this Charles theorized that the list in Revelation reversed the order of the path of the sun through the zodiac (1913:2:165-69). However, there are too many discrepancies and this too is doubtful. Most likely, the jewels are not meant to be seen as individuals but rather suggest in a vague way the breastplate of the high priest and the magnificence of the New Jerusalem (see Osborne 2002:756-58). While they may have had a more specific meaning, there is no evidence for such and we must be content with a more general interpretation.

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

As Cook says (2003:63) we need to seek the "literal sense" that "sees apocalyptic texts as symbolically rich, inspired literature that invigorates the imagination, offering readers new orientation and resolve about the life of faith." Rather than forcing foreign theories on the text, let it speak on its own and challenge the comfortable world of the reader. The key is to take a "canonical approach," that is, understand it in terms of "the Bible's own inner world," the intertextual narrative reality of Scripture. When understanding the texts, we must interpret allusions and texts together, as the archetypal symbols are meant to stand rather than be decoded and to shed light on the transcendent reality behind them (2003:64-70).

1. Note the type of literature. There are differences between apocalyptic and prophecy. The fact is that none of the canonical books and few of the noncanonical are purely apocalyptic. Ladd has made a plea for the category "prophetic-apocalyptic" as better describing the biblical literature (1957). In many of the categories (such as pessimism vs. optimism, straightforward language vs. cryptic symbolism, prophetic figure vs. pseudonymity, no specification of time vs. the division of time into periods) the biblical works are mixed and in many portions are closer to the prophetic. The interpreter must be alert to these categories and work carefully with the smaller units within the larger whole. For instance, Zechariah 1—6 is primarily apocalyptic, but Zechariah 7—14 is primarily prophetic. Daniel is an obvious blend of the two genres. Aune argues rightly that the book of Revelation is a composite of apocalyptic, prophetic and epistolary forms (1997: lxxiii-lxxxi). John does not merely await the eschaton but has a great interest in the current age primarily because the present is the age of the Spirit (see Rev 1:10-11) and because the book blends apocalyptic form with a prophetic perspective (see Rev 1:3; 19:10; 22:18-19). Revelation speaks to the church of John's own day and to the church of every age. Further, John employs the epistolary form (see Rev 1:4-7; 22:21), addressing his readers in the customary "I-you"

manner. This makes it even more important to recognize the extent to which many of the visions address current situations in John's church and blend the present with the future.

2. Note the perspective of the passage. While the first point centers on the formal features of the work, this concerns more the previously discussed characteristics. The interpreter must study the aspects emphasized and particularly the pattern by which they develop. For instance, Ezekiel 38—39 (Gog and Magog) follows a familiar pattern (noted by Hartman 1966:28-49) of chronicling the sins of the wicked followed by the cosmic catastrophe (Ezek 38:19-20, 22) which publicly manifests the judgment of the wicked (Ezek 38:23; 39:7, 21-23) and total destruction (Ezek 39:9-20), magnifies God's holy name (Ezek 39:7, 22) and, after demonstrating the iniquity of Israel (Ezek 39:23-24), restores the remnant (Ezek 39:25-29). Determinism is stressed, and the dualism is seen in the fact that a message of repentance is not present. The vision moves directly from the punishment of Israel for her sins (Ezek 39:23-24) to the restoration of the nation after the exile (Ezek 39:25-29).
3. Note the structure of the passage or book. No vision or detail functions by itself. Critical scholars usually state that apocalyptic works are composite, that is, collections of isolated visions (Koch even makes it a formal feature). I have two responses: first, it is by no means proven that apocalyptic books are composite. I have already noted that apocalyptic is more literary than oral; if that is true the visions were never meant to be individual entities but rather were given as parts of larger wholes. I personally doubt the accuracy and validity of this assumption. Second, the canonical order is still critical. Even if we grant later redactors or collections (which I would argue against), most would agree that the structural development of the books is still crucial. Brevard Childs, for instance, grants a composite nature to Zechariah and accepts the view that each vision addresses a quite different historical circumstance (1979:474-76). However, he argues that the final shaping of the text has important theological implications for the meaning of the book.

   This is not the place to argue the critical issues, but Childs's plea for the final canonical shape fits the recent trend toward literary exegesis rather than historico-critical restructuring and is essentially correct. The visions of Zechariah 1—6 provide an eschatological reinterpretation of the return from exile (539 B.C., twenty years prior to Zechariah's visions) in the direction of the final deliverance at the eschaton. There is a unified theological pattern and each one builds on the other. The

themes of Zechariah 9—14 (judgment and restoration), while quite different in form, expand and clarify the earlier chapters.

4. Note the function and meaning of the symbols. After noting the basic thrust of the whole, one must exegete the parts. Fee and Stuart make a special plea for the necessity of exegesis when studying the book of Revelation, primarily because it is so common to ignore historical factors when interpreting apocalyptic literature (2003:257-59). The prevalence of predictive elements causes the reader to forget the original situation and accent only the futuristic fulfillment (primarily in terms of the current age). Yet in every case the author's original meaning must predominate, for it is the key to the fulfillment. For instance, it was thought that Revelation was occasioned by an official outbreak of Roman persecution, but recent research has proven there was no empire-wide official persecution, and on the whole Christians lived peacefully during the reign of Domitian (Thompson 1990:116-32).[10] At the same time, this does not mean there was no persecution at all (contra Thompson), only that it was not official. The passages dealing with persecution (Rev 1:9; 2:3, 9, 13; 3:8; 6:9, 11; 13; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4) should not be explained away, especially as this is supported by contemporary documents like Clement 1:1, 7:1. DeSilva shows that the relation between the state and Roman religious life placed pressure on all to participate in temple worship and the idolatrous guild banquets (1992:274-77). This was especially true in the rabidly pro-Roman province of Asia (where the seven churches were) and especially concerning the imperial cult, the worship of the emperor as a god. Cities vied with one another for the honor of building a temple to the emperor, making them a *neokoros* or temple-warden city. All but one of the seven cities had such temples, and Ephesus erected a seven-meter high statue of either Titus or Domitian (it is debated) in the temple (possibly the background to Rev 13:14-15). So there was severe local persecution and pressure to conform to societal demands (Osborne 2004:479-86).

Since I have already discussed hermeneutical principles with respect to symbols (see pp. 283-85), a summary is sufficient here. We will want to ask first whether the symbol is interpreted in the immediate context or elsewhere in the book. If so, this will provide the control for the meaning of those symbols not directly interpreted. Next, we will study the synchronic (the use of the symbol in literature of the same period) and diachronic (the use of the symbol in the past) parallels. Especially important will be a direct allusion to a past text (such as the use of

Ezekiel or Daniel in the book of Revelation). These provide specific helps to the meaning of the symbols, although the final arbiter is still the immediate context.

5. Stress the theological and note the predictive with humility. This does not mean that futuristic prophecy is not as important as the theological message to the writer's own day. Rather, the future, even in apocalyptic texts, was not an end in itself but a means to an end, namely, to comfort and challenge the saints. I personally believe that one reason for the use of cryptic symbols was to keep the reader from giving the future fulfillment too great a place in the message of the book. The writer wanted to turn the reader toward God, not just toward future events. Therefore, the actual event prophesied was clouded in the mist of symbolism and the reader had to turn to the God who would bring it to pass.

   This point is as relevant to the church today as it was to Judaism and the church in the past. We often forget how mistakenly Israel interpreted prophecies of the first advent. We have no greater perspective from which to interpret prophecies of the second advent. We must remember that each era of the church through the ages has believed that Christ would return in its generation. Therefore, we need to stress the theological meaning of apocalyptic and hold to interpretations of fulfillment in our own day (such as those related to the reinstatement of Israel as a nation) with humility. Above all, we dare not preach such prophecies as absolute truth. Otherwise, when they fail to come to pass, people's faith can be hurt and the church made to look foolish. Such occurred with respect to some who gave too much credence to the pamphlet promising the Lord's return in 1988.

   The implications of this for preaching are enormous. Apocalyptic contains a powerful theological message centering on the ancient followers of God and their difficult situation. That same message has parallels with and repercussions for the saints of our own day. With concerns about unemployment, a greater amount of worldwide persecution today than ever before in history and vast uncertainty about the future economically and ecologically, the apocalyptic truths are more needed than ever before. Note the following recapitulation of the book of Revelation and ask the extent to which that historical situation applies today.

> The main themes are abundantly clear: the church and the state are

> on a collision course; and initial victory will appear to belong to the state. Thus he warns the church that suffering and death lie ahead; indeed, it will get far worse before it gets better (6:9- 11). He is greatly concerned that they do not capitulate in times of duress (14:11-12; 21:7-8). But this prophetic word is also one of encouragement; for God is in control of all things. Christ holds the keys to history, and He holds the churches in His hands (1:17- 20). Thus the church triumphs even through death (12:11). God will finally pour out His wrath upon those who caused that suffering and death and bring eternal rest to those who remain faithful. (Fee and Stuart 2003:258)

Even these passages primarily concerned with the future apply to the present. For instance, the beast and his forces (the antichrist of the future) also depicted Rome and the enemies of the church (the many antichrists) in John's day. The seals, trumpets and bowls are future outpourings of wrath but remind the unbeliever of the certainty of God's judgment and the believer of God's future vindication.

Above all, note the congruence of present and future throughout biblical apocalyptic literature. There is a very real "telescoping of time" throughout, which in the New Testament is built on the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" in the eschatology of Jesus and the early church. The prophecies regarding the "not yet" are so closely tied to the "already" that the two can at times appear to be simultaneous. Therefore, we must avoid dogmatic pronouncements and contrive to address our present in light of the certainty of God's control over history and of his future vindication of his faithful followers and punishment of the wicked.

EXCURSUS: THE ORIGINS OF APOCALYPTIC

Many believe that apocalyptic developed primarily during the Maccabean period as a Hasidic protest against the religious policies and persecution of the Seleucids and of Antiochus Epiphanes in particular (Rowley 1963:21-24; Russell 1978:2). Ezekiel, Zechariah and the other earlier works are considered to be prophetic precursors but not apocalyptic works (see the survey in Nickelsburg 1983:641-46). Certainly one could argue thus for Isaiah 24—27 and perhaps Joel. While themes of Jewish eschatology are present in the Isaiah passage (destruction of the earth, cosmic portents, heavenly banquet, Leviathan, the dragon), many of the signs of apocalyptic are not (the vision, the negation of the present in favor of the future, the dualism). The locust plague of Joel 1—2 does use symbolism but without the profusion of images, and it is more a prophetic call to the people to return to Yahweh.

However, when we look elsewhere there are clear signs of apocalyptic. Paul Hanson (1971:463-68) finds the perspective of despair in the present and the direct intervention of God in several oracles of Isaiah 39—66 (such as 40; 43; 51). "This interlocking of primeval-past, historical-future . . . lends cosmic significance to the future event" (p. 465).[11] Such is even more true with respect to Ezekiel and Zechariah. Christopher Rowland (1982:199-200) notes the literary setting of Ezekiel 40, with its vision followed by interpretation, as a constant apocalyptic mode (cf. Dan 8—10; Rev 17). Zechariah also employs an angelic interpreter (Zech 1:19; 3:1; 4:2). The use of cryptic symbols in the dream visions and the themes of the visions demonstrate the presence of apocalyptic thinking.

Moreover, apocalyptic literature was present in the ancient Near East prior to the prophetic period. In Jan Bergman's excellent article on Egyptian apocalyptic (1983:51-60) he discusses the Egyptian determinism and cyclical view of eternity, which in the opinion of some make any apocalyptic tradition in Egypt impossible. Bergman argues that this represents only one among many religious traditions in Egypt and in fact there was interest in the ages and in heavenly journeys. In the same volume Helmer Ringgren (1983:379-86), Gus Widengren (1983:77-156) and Anderes Hultgard (1983:387-411) discuss the motifs in

Akkadia and Persia respectively. Akkadia represents an early stage of developing apocalyptic ideas, but the Iranian texts on the role of Zoroaster as apocalyptic mediator, in spite of difficulties of dating, show a developed mode of thinking at an early period. On the basis of the divine names, S. Hartman (1983:71-73) argues that the basic Iranian traditions go back to the sixth century B.C. and that Iranian dualism as well as ideas of preexistent wisdom and an eschatological redeemer were well known to Jewish thinkers. In short, there are parallels elsewhere in the period of the prophets. Naturally, the question of direct influence is subjective and difficult to detect. Rather, I would argue that there is little evidence to suggest that apocalyptic was a late development and every reason to conclude that it originated parallel to Iranian and Near Eastern ideas primarily in a prophetic milieu from the eighth to the sixth centuries B.C.

However, prophecy was not the only influence on apocalyptic thinking. I have already mentioned the connection between wisdom and apocalyptic Gerhard von Rad in fact argues that wisdom was the primary source for apocalyptic thought, since both movements stem from the quest for knowledge and human experience in this world (1972:280-81). Yet while a connection does exist, there are too many differences between the two traditions (such as the absence of an eschatological orientation and esoteric symbolism in wisdom thought) to posit direct influence (see Rowland 1982:203-8).

It is of course impossible to isolate any particular *Sitz im Leben* (situation in the life of Israel) for the rise of apocalyptic. It seems most likely that due to the pressures and exigencies of the exile, God added to his direct pronouncements through the prophets a series of visionary experiences relating his control of the future and the necessity of Israel's remnant trusting his direct intervention in the historical processes as the only answer to the situation. The mediums of vision and symbol became the best means for proclaiming these truths, and from Isaiah to Ezekiel to Daniel to Zechariah this method became increasingly predominant in the divine revelations. One thing is clear: the answer is not found only in sociological analysis. We must note the mind of God as the key to the process. Naturally the two are not mutually exclusive. God chose the mode that best fit the moment for the communication of his will.

A second and more developed apocalyptic movement took place in the second century B.C. In the post-Maccabean period the movement was linked with the Hasidim (the pious party that later gave rise to the Pharisees and the Essenes). Connections with both parties can be noted, but they are certainly more direct with the latter. Morris correctly notes that while some apocalyptic concerns can be found in Pharisaism (resurrection, the after life), on the whole the latter movement was opposed to such "enthusiastic" religious approaches (1972:14-

16). At an earlier date a connection is likely, but the two groups went in different directions. Apocalyptic was not a political movement or party like the Pharisees or Sadducees. Like wisdom it was more a way of thinking, a mode of looking at life. It was first a divinely chosen means of revelation and then became an outlook on life that cut across the different Jewish sects and manifested itself at different times in all of them (with the exception of the Sadducees). Most important, it provided one of the most obvious links between Judaism and Christianity, far more direct than any single party.

12

Parable

There are few portions of Scripture as exciting and relevant for preaching as the parables. Along with apocalyptic, they have been among the most written about yet hermeneutically abused portions of Scripture. Klyne Snodgrass says, “Throughout much of the church’s history the parables of Jesus have been mistreated, rearranged, abused, and butchered. Often they still are today. They are *used* more than they are heard and understood” (2004:177). This is understandable since the two form at one and the same time the most dynamic and yet the most difficult to comprehend of the biblical genres. The potential of the parable for communication is enormous, since it creates a comparison or story based on everyday experiences. However, that story itself is capable of many meanings, and the modern reader has as much difficulty interpreting it as did the ancient hearers. Jesus himself gave the operating principle:

> The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to
> others I speak in parables, so that,
> “though seeing, they may not see;
> though hearing, they may not understand.” (Lk 8:10)

Mary Ann Tolbert correctly states, “Judging by the varied opinions and continued controversies that mark the study of the parables of Jesus . . . it is undoubtedly true that most modern parable interpreters fall into the category of the ‘others’ ” (1979:13). The disciples had great difficulty understanding the parables, and this is even more true in our day. If one were to read a cross-section of works on the parables or hear a randomly selected cross-section of sermons, the multiplicity of interpretations would be bewildering. Is the “author’s intended meaning” possible? And by “author” do we mean Jesus or the evangelist? These are only two of the many issues we face when coming to grips with the parable genre.

THE MEANING AND USE OF PARABLES

The importance of parables is evident when we realize that fully a third of Jesus' teaching in the Synoptic Gospels comes in parabolic form. In modern terms, we think of a parable as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Yet what did it mean in the ancient world? The Hebrew term is *masāl*, which also is used for the "proverb" or "riddle" and has "comparison" as its basic meaning. Indeed, the proverbial form often established a comparison, such as Proverbs 18:11, "The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; / they imagine it an unscalable wall." As Carl Peisker points out, *masāl* developed from a popular term for proverb to a technical term for wisdom teaching and finally to a broad term used for prophetic proverbs, parables, riddles, and symbolic actions (1978:744-45). Several prophetic parables might be mentioned, such as Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb, which dramatically demonstrated his own injustice to Uriah (2 Sam 12:1-2) or Isaiah's parable of the unfruitful vineyard, used to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness and God's judgment on the nation (Is 5:1-7). More than 325 rabbinic parables are known, but all apart from a couple stem from after A.D. 70, and Jesus' parables are different, since rabbinic parables developed a point of the biblical text while only the Good Samaritan parable (Lk 10:25- 37, developing Lev 19:18, "love your neighbor") does so. They are also distinctive from Hellenistic parallels, most of which are a form of argumentation, while Jesus' *meshalim* center on life situations as illustrating kingdom realities. So Jesus' parables are *sui generis* (Hultgren 2000:6-9).

The background of the parable in wisdom and prophecy is crucial when considering Jesus' development of the parable form. It has long been recognized that Jesus was a teacher of eschatological wisdom and his parables demonstrate this quite well. Yet, as Pheme Perkins points out, there were significant differences (1981:37-39). Jesus was not a teacher of wisdom in the sense of helping the young learn to live as responsible members of society. Purely pragmatic issues like friendship, choosing a wife and future leadership in society are all missing. Rather, Jesus was preparing citizens of the kingdom, and he used the methods of wisdom to that end. This has important ramifications for the positive side of Jesus' use of parables to challenge the hearer to respond for the

kingdom.

Like the many forms of the Jewish *māšāl*, the *parabolē* that Jesus used had a multiplicity of forms. There are proverbs (“Physician heal yourself” [Lk 4:23]), metaphors (“Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted” [Mt 15:13]), similes (“I send you out like sheep among wolves” [Mt 10:16]), short comparisons (Mt 13:31-32, 33) or longer implied analogies (Lk 11:5-8, 15:3-7), figurative sayings (Lk 5:36-38 on the new wine in old wineskins, which utilizes *parabolē*, similitudes or more developed similes (Mk 4:30-32, comparing the kingdom to a grain of mustard seed), story parables in which the comparison takes the form of fictional narrative (Mt 25:1-13, the ten virgins), illustrative or example stories in which the parable becomes a model for proper conduct (Lk 10:29-37, the good Samaritan) and allegorical parables in which several points of comparison are drawn (Mk 4:1-9, 13-20, the sower and the seed) (see Stein 2000:41-47; Wright 2005:559-60). The one common element is the use of everyday experiences to draw a comparison with kingdom truths. When most people think of “parable” they think of the story parables, but as we have seen the form is much broader. No wonder Mark could add, “With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to [the crowds]. . . . He did not say anything to them without using a parable” (Mk 4:33-34).

Let us delve a little more deeply into the similitude, parable and allegory. The first two have strong similarities, as each maintains a formal, literal comparison stressing a central idea. However, a similitude is a straightforward comparison with one or more verbs in the present tense, applying a common experience or typical habit to greater spiritual realities. Consider Mark 13:28-29: the everyday reality (the fig tree sprouting leaves as evidence that summer is near) demonstrates the kingdom truth (the events of Mk 13:5-27 as harbingers of the return of Christ). A parable on the other hand is a narrative employing a particular event in the past tense without the direct and obvious comparison. It is indirect and demands that the hearer react. It does not appeal to the mind as much as to the whole person. As Eta Linnemann says, the similitude finds its authority in the universality of the imagery, the parable in the “perspicuity” with which it is told, that is, in the power of the story to attract and hold one’s attention (1966).

The allegory paints a series of pictures in metaphorical form, all of which combine into a whole story in parabolic fashion. It is common today to state that the major difference between a pure parable and an allegory is that in the latter all the details have symbolic significance with many thrusts rather than a single point. Yet this is debatable, as exemplified in Matthew 22:1-14 (parable of the royal wedding feast) in which the king refers to God, the servants to the prophets

and the son to Christ.

The extent to which allegories are found in Jesus' teaching has been debated. Joachim Jeremias argues that allegorical details are later church embellishments or additions and must be removed to get back to Jesus' original parables, which have a single point (1972:66-89). However, as most now recognize, Jeremias was forced to employ circular reasoning to prove his case. From Adolf Jülicher he received his basic thesis that Jesus' parables had to make only one single point, and he then read this theory back into the evidence. The presence of allegory at the earliest stages of Jesus' teaching is strongly attested in the Gospels. The very first parable narrated, the parable of the sower (Mk 4:3-9), provides one of the clearest cases of multiple thrusts; one could also mention the parables of the tares (Mt 13:24-30), the net (Mt 13:47-50) and the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-8). However, only the context may decide which details provide local color without spiritual significance (part of the story world) or have individual theological meaning themselves (meant to be contextualized).

Craig Blomberg provides the strongest challenge yet to the "one-point only" school of Jülicher and Jeremias (1990:29-70, esp. 36-47). He argues that the distinction between parable and allegory has been overstated, and that both Jesus and the evangelists intended the parables to be understood as having several points: (1) Both Old Testament and rabbinic parables show that the Jewish *masāl* preferred a carefully controlled allegorical thrust. (2) There never was a distinction between allegorical and nonallegorical forms in the Greco-Roman world; most preferred mixed types in which some but not all the details had a "second level of meaning." (3) The form-critical assertion that the tendency in ancient times was to allegorize originally simple stories can be turned on its head; the tendency may well have been to abbreviate, not expand. (4) Even single-point parables are metaphorical and thus allegorical, since they involve further levels of meaning. (5) There is a difference between *allegory,* a literary device in which the author draws the reader into a deeper and intended level of meaning, and *allegorizing,* in which levels of meaning (never intended) are read into the text. The former is true of the Gospel parables, but not the latter. (6) So many details in the parables are indeed meant to be understood on the metaphorical level due to their extravagant nature (they go beyond the normal story line) that they cannot be mere added details; they must have spiritual significance. Bernard Scott (1989:50-51) states that the heart of metaphor is explaining "one thing in terms of another," that is, using a pictorial mode for depicting certain aspects of a thing. Thus it highlights certain points but hides others. As such the interpreter must uncover which aspects are stressed.

The task is to distinguish between "local color" (details not meant to carry

spiritual meaning) and theologically loaded details (those which do have allegorical significance). [1] This is determined on the basis of context, both macro (the larger context within which the parable is found) and micro (the parable itself), as well as the historical background of the details as seen in the story. In general, as Blomberg states, the main characters or symbols of a parable contain significance. For instance, in the parable of the sower, the four types of soil signify different types of receptivity to the gospel, the sower refers to God and the seed is the gospel. Here most of the details are allegorized. In the prodigal son parable (Lk 15:11-32), however, the characters have significance (the father = God, the prodigal son = tax collectors and sinners, the elder son = scribes and Pharisees; see Lk 15:1), but the details (such as the famine, the pigs and the carob seeds) add vividness rather than spiritual meaning. In each case we must study the parable in terms of external (larger context) and internal (structural development) considerations before making any decisions.

THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

One of the most difficult parable sections in the Gospels is the only one that clearly delineates their "purpose": Mark 4:10-12 (Mt 13:10-15; Lk 8:9-10), which gives a very negative perspective:

> To those on the outside everything is spoken in parables so that,
> "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
> and ever hearing but never understanding;
> otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"
>
> *(Mk 4:11-12)*

Modern interpreters have had a great deal of trouble accepting a statement that implies that Jesus used parables to hide the kingdom truths from unbelievers. Linnemann, for instance, argues that this could only have been added by a later church in absolute conflict with Jewish opponents (1966). Others argue that Mark created the story as part of his "messianic secret," his view that Jesus wished to conceal his true identity. This is convenient but hardly convincing. Frank Kermode argues that this forms the very core of Jesus' enigmatic preaching, which both conceals and reveals (1979:25-47). The "mystery" of the gospel produced the enigma.

One of the keys is Mark's use of *hina* in Mark 4:12, indicating purpose, and Matthew's use of *hoti* in Matthew 13:13, indicating cause or reason. This seeming contradiction is very similar to the so-called contradiction between Paul and James over faith and works. Paul says works cannot produce salvation while James says works are the necessary proof of salvation. They are two sides of the same coin. The same is true here. Another key is Jesus' use of Isaiah 6:9-10. Isaiah 6 is Isaiah's commissioning service, as he sees the holy God lifted up on his throne surrounded by the seraphim and is told by God to take a message that will cause rejection to the obstinate and apostate nation. Jesus sees the same in the current generation: like ancient Israel, the people still see God's work in Jesus but fail to perceive it. They hear the words of Jesus but fail to understand

them.

In short, Mark 4:10-12 and Matthew 13:13-15 clearly indicate that Jesus chose the parable form to symbolize God's judgment on his opponents and on an unbelieving people. Jesus often used parables not from a desire to communicate truth but to hide the truth from unresponsive hearers. Parables confirmed unbelievers in their rejection. However, we must ask a further question: Was this *the* purpose of the parable form or *a* purpose? On the surface it seems as if for Jesus the parables were an antievangelism device! One of the keys to the determination of dogma from Scripture is to reject proof-texting (determining a doctrine from single statements rather than from the whole of Scripture). Two factors force us to seek other evidence: this quote is found within the conflict-and-rejection parables of Mark 4 and Matthew 13 and therefore occurs in a limited context, and parables are definitely used to challenge and instruct the disciples (such as the parable of the moneylender [Lk 7:40-43], the parables in the Olivet Discourse [Mt 24:32—25:46], those in the farewell discourse [Jn 14:2-3, 6; 15:1-8; 16:21-22]) and also to challenge the crowds and even the Pharisees to respond (such as the parables on seeking the lost [Lk 15] and the good Samaritan [Lk 10]).

It seems clear that Jesus did indeed have a larger purpose in using the parable form. Parables are an "encounter mechanism" and function differently depending on the audience. In his controversies with the leaders and unbelieving Israel, a large part of that purpose was to conceal the truth from them. This was a divine judgment on recalcitrant Israel that paralleled the judgment on Pharaoh and on the apostate nation of Isaiah's day. In response to their rejection of Jesus' message God will harden their hearts further via the parable. Yet this negative sign was part of a larger purpose that had its roots in the Old Testament wisdom use of parables to challenge and draw the people to response (such as Nathan's parable to David in 2 Sam 12). Indeed, here the "performative" language in the parables noted by the New Hermeneutic is valid (Funk 1966:193-96). The crowds are forced to make a decision for or against Jesus, and his disciples are challenged and taught by them. Each group (leaders, crowds, disciples) is encountered differently by the parables, which demonstrate the leaders' rejection, challenge the crowds to decision and force the disciples to think more deeply about kingdom reality.

The parables encounter, interpret and invite the listener/reader to participate in Jesus' new world vision of the kingdom. They are a "speech event," an illocutionary challenge and a perlocutionary encounter that never allows us to remain neutral; they grasp our attention and force us to interact with the presence of the kingdom in Jesus, either positively (those "around" Jesus in Mk 4:10-12)

or negatively (those “outside”). Scholars are beginning to agree that Matthew 16:19 and especially John 20:23 (“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven”) relate primarily to the proclamation of divine truths; the hearer must respond and this response leads to salvation or judgment. This is very applicable to the parable. For those who reject the presence of God in Jesus (the leaders of the Jews) the parable becomes a sign of sovereign judgment, further hardening their hearts. For those who are open (the crowds) the parable encounters and draws them to decision. For those who believe (the disciples) the parable teaches them further kingdom truths.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PARABLES

1. ***Earthiness.*** Jesus borrowed pictures from home life (lost coin, leaven, prodigal son), nature (mustard seed, tares), the animal world (birds of the air, wolves in sheep's clothing), agriculture (sower, vineyard, lost sheep), commerce (talents, unjust steward, wicked tenants), royalty (royal wedding), hospitality (good Samaritan). To this extent Jesus followed in the tradition of the sages (wisdom teachers), who centered on the practical side of life. Yet Jesus also transcended the sages in that this was primarily the picture or image side of the metaphor and not the true thrust. At times there was an ethical message (such as the good Samaritan) but it formed a kingdom ethics.

   At the same time the point of the parable can be skewed unless we understand the earthy details behind the image in the parable. For instance, explaining the topography of Palestine aids greatly in understanding and applying the parable of the sower. The seed "beside the road" is based on the fact that roads run right through the middle of the fields and since farmers sowed seed liberally rather than scientifically some would naturally fall on the hard-packed road. The "rocky place" refers to the limestone shelf just a few inches below the soil in many parts of Palestine. This would hold in the water, allowing the plant to sprout quickly. However, the sun would dry it up just as swiftly, and the crop would wither; there was insufficient soil for deep roots. The "thorns" were a type of weed that sunk roots more quickly and so "choked" the moisture and nutrition from the new stalks. Finally, in many parts of Palestine a hundredfold yield has actually been recorded, so Jesus' point is not just hyperbole.
2. ***Conciseness.*** The parables recorded in the Gospels are simple and uncomplicated. There are seldom more than two or three characters, and the plot line contains few subplots. Here we must correct earlier misunderstandings, however. From Jülicher and Jeremias, many have taught that parables have only a single perspective or plot. This is not

quite true. The prodigal son does have a major plot (the profligacy of the son followed by repentance, forgiveness and reinstatement) but also has two other perspectives (the love of the father, the jealousy of the older brother), both of which have meaning in the parable and transcend mere "local color" (that is, are part of the story but have no theological significance). The parable itself must guide us into its complexities.

3. ***Major and minor points.*** Whether a parable has major *and* minor points is the most debated aspect of parable research. Due to the tremendous influence of Jülicher still today, many demand a single major point and argue that minor points are "local color." However, I would modify this. I agree that the continuing tendency of many to allegorize parables subjectively must make the interpreter extremely cautious. [2] However, each parable must be interpreted individually, and the interpreter should be open to the possibility of minor points as the text dictates. There is in one sense a unified message; the individual details of the parable of the sower point to a basic truth, challenging the reader to identify which type of soil/response he or she will become/make. In the prodigal son parable, the forgiveness of the father is contrasted with the self-centeredness of the older brother. Yet in both parables the secondary elements do have significance.

   We can speak of allegorical parables but not of allegorizing per se. There is no license for interpreters to do whatever they wish with the details. There is a very tight control and the inner dynamics of the story tell us whether or not to see a theological point in a detail. For instance, the mustard seed and the great plant are the center of the Mark 4:30-32 parable, and it is debated whether the birds in the branches should be allegorized; their function in the parable is to emphasize the great size of the plant.[3] Dan Via says, "While the meaning of Jesus' parables cannot be restricted to one central point of comparison, that does not mean that they are allegories. . . . We must seek a non-allegorical approach to the parables other than the one-point approach" (1967:17). Yet I have noted many indications that the parables are indeed allegories, albeit tightly controlled by the author's intention. Blomberg (1990) in fact argues that there are as many points as there are characters in the parables and that they are indeed allegories. While this is somewhat overstated, it is nearer the truth than the "one point" approach.

4. ***Repetition.*** Repetition is sometimes used to stress the climax or the major point of the parable, as in the twofold confession of the prodigal son

("Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" [Lk 15:21]) or the similar wording of the reward to the faithful servant ("Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" [Mt 25:21, 23]). Some parables are delivered in two settings, like the parable of the lost sheep, addressed to the disciples in Matthew 18:12-14 and to the Pharisees in Luke 15:1-7. Audience criticism will note slightly different emphases in such circumstances. In Matthew 18:14 Jesus teaches that the Father "is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (with the stress on mission), and in Luke 15:7 the accent is on the heavenly rejoicing "over one sinner who repentants" (with the emphasis on conversion). This is often used as a prime example of the open-ended nature of parables, since the Evangelists place them in different situations and give them slightly different thrusts. However, this ignores two things: (1) Jesus as an itinerant preacher would naturally use parables in more than one setting, so it could well be his own interpretations (this is my preference). (2) This does not give us license to remove parables from their historical settings and read multiple meanings into them; in fact, it argues just the opposite, for both Matthew 18 and Luke 15 are *textual* interpretations and not free renderings. Parables *can* be read in many ways, but if they are to be *Scripture* the context must decide!

5. ***Conclusion at the end.*** Jesus often uses a terse dictum to conclude a parable, such as "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself" (Lk 12:21). Other times he may elicit the lesson from the listeners via a question such as the two debtors in Luke 7:42 ("Which of them will love him more?") or the good Samaritan in Luke 10:36 ("Which of these three do you think was a neighbor?"). At times Jesus interprets the parable himself (Mt 13:18-23, 36-43; 15:15-20). Of course this is a general rule rather than an ironclad law. The parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16) ends with a statement on the reversal of roles ("the last will be first, and the first will be last" [v. 16]) almost opposite to the thrust of the parable itself (vv. 1- 15) on divine generosity to all alike. Yet these two aspects are not in conflict. While the concluding statement does not provide the main point of the parable, it does fit the situation. As Robert Stein says, "If the *Sitz im Leben* of the parable is indeed Jesus' defense of his association with publicans and sinners and his offering to them of the kingdom of God, then there is a sense in which the parable does reveal that 'the last will be first and the

first last' " (1981:128). In other words, the final saying (v. 16) does not interpret the parable but rather applies it to the broader situation (Jesus turning to the outcasts; note that this method parallels Mt 19:30 following the rich young ruler incident).

6. ***Listener-relatedness.*** Listener-relatedness takes us to the heart of the parable form. Primarily Jesus intended to elicit a response from the listener, either positive or negative (see "The Purpose of Parables," pp. 294-96). Dominic Crossan points out that this provides a basic difference between Jewish parables and those of Jesus (1973:19-21). Rabbinic stories are didactic, elaborating a specific text and illustrating a dogmatic proposition. Jesus' parables drive home a point and elicit a response. For instance, the question parables (see point 5) drew the audience into the action via dialogue and reached them in the midst of their situation. As Blomberg says, the centrality of the audience for interpreting the parables is coming more and more to the fore (1982:11-14). The parables were addressed to the actual historical situation in Jesus' dialogues with three concrete groups: the crowds, the scribes and Pharisees, and his disciples. In each situation Jesus challenged his audience, often emphasizing the urgency of repentance (Lk 12:16-21; 13:1-9) and demanding "decisive (Lk 16:1- 8), radical (Mt 13:44-46), watchful (Mt 24:42—25:13) action because the kingdom is near" (Peisker 1978:749). I would add one clarification: the encounter related to the crowds and the disciples. For the religious leaders parables were intended only to confirm their rejection (see "The Purpose of Parables").

   Eta Linnemann provides an excellent summary of the way parables accomplish this (1966:25-33). The parable is so structured as to "interlock" the hearer with the narrator's message. It does so by "conceding" a point to the hearer, by approaching the listener from his or her own world of experience. The parable then employs double meaning to switch from the listener's experience to the greater reality of the kingdom truths. It "claims one thing as another," drawing a comparison between the main point of the parabolic image and the reality the narrator (Jesus) wishes to convey. Thereby it becomes a "language event" in the proper sense as Jesus through it presents a new possibility to his hearers and moves them to the point of decision.[4]

7. ***Reversal of expectation.*** The major way by which Jesus forced decision was to break conventional lines in his parables. Time and again a totally unexpected turn of events startled the hearers and forced them to consider the deeper implications of the parable. The normal way of

things was shattered by the parable's reversal of norms, and the hearer was forced to consider the kingdom reality behind the image, for kingdom truths also run counter to the world's ways. At the same time the parables exhibit what Martin Petzoldt calls an "antithetical structure," as Jesus' meaning clashed with the interpretation of his hearers and forced them out of their narrow religious framework (1984:24-30). God's call is never a comfortable one, and the parables are characterized by a discomfiting aspect as human expectations clash with the kingdom presence of God in Jesus. Arland Hultgren (2000) speaks of "the element of surprise," in which an atypical turn shows that God does not act in accordance with human expectations or mores.

Unfortunately, this reversal of expectations is often lost on modern readers because we no longer know the background. Perhaps no aspect of interpretation illustrates the importance of historical background information more than the parable. Consider the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14), in which the Pharisee's self-centered prayer is rejected and the tax collector's plea for mercy was accepted. Most modern Christians accept this without question, having already accepted all Pharisees as self-righteous hypocrites. Yet this entirely misses the point. Anthony Thiselton quotes Walter Wink here: "The scholar, having finished his work lays down his pen, oblivious to the way in which he has *falsified the text* in accordance with unconscious tendencies; so much so that he has maimed its original intent until it has actually turned into its opposite" (1980:14, quoting Wink 1973:42). While it is doubtful that the true scholar would make such a mistake, it is a common error to ignore the original situation. The Pharisee's prayer was perfectly acceptable to Jews of Jesus' day. The hearer would have been quite satisfied with the prayer and shocked to see the despised tax collector justified (see Jeremias 1972:140-41). Jesus' original purpose was to unsettle his audience, to reverse their value system and force them to rethink their religious priorities. Modem readers are confirmed in their assurance that they at least are not guilty of "Pharisaism," while partaking of the same errors.

This plot twist is quite common in the parables. The hated Samaritan, not the priest or Levite, is the one to bind the wounds of the robbery victim (Lk 10:30-37; normally the Samaritans were the muggers not the saviors!); the profligate son is the one given the banquet (Lk 15:11-32); the poor and the crippled sit at the great feast (Lk 14:15-24); the steward who alters the master's credit sheet is lauded (Lk 16:1-13). This last is

one of the best examples. Often called the most difficult of Jesus' parables, the "shrewd manager" is lauded by his master for his shrewdness just after defrauding the man of a small fortune (v. 8a)! The key is that the master is not God but just a part of the story (local color), and this is a parable about secular worldliness. Jesus is contrasting the shrewdness of the world, that knows how to use its resources to get ahead, with the absence of shrewdness on the part of "the children of light" (v. 8b). The world *takes* in order to "gain a home," while God's people must *give* their resources to the needy in order to gain an eternal home (v. 9). Thus shrewdness for the children of the kingdom is the reverse of shrewdness for the world. By reversing normal patterns Jesus can force the hearer to take a new look at God's true kingdom realities. This also is part of the paradoxical purpose of parables already discussed. Only one with the proper key can unlock the mystery of the parable's meaning, and that key is the presence of the kingdom. Without the key the opponents of Jesus are confirmed in their rejection of his teaching. Only those who are open or have already accepted the "mystery" of the kingdom in Jesus can understand why God looks to the "sinners" and outcasts and rejects those the establishment considers "righteous."

8. ***Kingdom-centered eschatology.*** The single theme that rebounds throughout the parables is the presence of the kingdom. This was C. H. Dodd's central contribution, although his misunderstanding of the parables as teaching a realized (present) eschatology had to be corrected by Jeremias. Yet they deal with more than the kingdom; the parables are christological at heart, focusing on Jesus as the harbinger and content of the kingdom, which we will define as "God's rule." Hultgren (2000:1) speculates viably that Jesus' kingdom parables may have led in part to his crucifixion, since they spoke so explicitly of a "divinely established kingdom" and thereby labeled him as a messianic pretender. God's rule is seen first as a present reality. In the parable of the new patch/ wine and the old cloth/wineskins (Mk 2:21-22) the kingdom is seen as forcing a break with the past. The new era is here; as Jesus says in the debate over his exorcism, "The kingdom of God has come to you" (Lk 11:20). In fact, the kingdom is now in the process of developing, as seen in the "growth parables," such as the mustard seed (Mk 4:30-32) or the leaven (Mt 13:33). While many believe these are futuristic and describe a final in-breaking of the kingdom, Marshall is correct in interpreting them in the light of inaugurated eschatology: the growth takes place in the present, although the full extent of the greatness of the kingdom will not

be manifest until the eschaton (1963:27-29). In light of the kingdom's presence, several of the parables of growth demand radical response (the sower, the tares, the dragnet). Several other parables, especially in Luke, describe the course of the kingdom in this age as typified by discipleship and social concern (the rich man and Lazarus, counting the cost). Finally, a future crisis of judgment will consummate the presence of the kingdom. Several parables warn the hearers to be ready (the Olivet Discourse parables, the great supper) and to work in light of that future reality (the talents) since it would judge their works (the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats).

9. ***Kingdom ethics.*** The presence of the kingdom in Jesus demands a higher ethical stance on the part of his followers. This of course is developed especially in the Sermon on the Mount and the parables in it. The disciple is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16) and must at all times live as a citizen of heaven. Therefore, the follower of the kingdom must be characterized by a wholehearted devotion to heavenly rather than earthly treasures (Mt 6:19-24) and by an unwillingness to judge others (Mt 7:1-5). The believer takes the narrow way (Mt 7:13) and thereby builds a solid house that cannot be destroyed by the storms of life (Mt 7:24-27). These emphases are carried throughout Jesus' parabolic teaching. In fact, this is where Jesus comes the closest to the sages or teachers of wisdom; whatever the basis, the presence of the kingdom alters the grounds of the ethical conduct. The parables present a radical demand for a new approach to life involving absolute forgiveness (the unforgiving servant, the two debtors), reconciliation (the prodigal son), compassion (the good Samaritan), sharing (the friend at midnight), the wise use of money (the unjust steward) and resources (the talents).

   Above all, the disciple is seen as living his life both in the world and before God. The one who is the "light of the world" must live kingdom ethics before the nonbelievers, yet primarily is responsible to God. In the parable of the sheep and goats (Mt 25:31-46) the judgment depends primarily on deeds; acts of love performed to "the least of the brethren" are considered deeds done to God (v. 45).[5] Radical discipleship is the theme of several of the parables (the builders and king going to war [Lk 14:28-33], the hidden treasure and pearl of great price [Mt 13:44-46]). The kingdom demands not partial but total, unswerving allegiance demonstrated before each other and God.

10. ***God and salvation in the parables.*** God appears in several guises in the parables as king, father, landowner, employer, father and judge.

Throughout, the picture is of one who graciously and mercifully offers forgiveness but at the same time demands decision. In the prodigal son parable (Lk 15:11-31) the father forgives all as he welcomes back and restores fully the one who had so misused his privileges. In the parable of laborers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-6) the employer graciously rewards all equally, even those who had not given as much. In the other parables of Luke 15 (the lost sheep, the lost son) the extent of God's yearning for the lost is seen. The parables illustrate the truth of 2 Peter 3:9, "[The Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Salvation is present, and insistently demanding response. God's rule is typified by grace, but that grace challenges the hearer to recognize the necessity of repentance. In the parable of the two sons (Mt 21:28-31) Jesus challenges the scribes to recognize the error of their own ways. The son who at first refuses to work in the vineyard then repents and does work obviously represents the "tax collectors and sinners" (Lk 15:1) who inherit the kingdom, while the son who agrees to work then fails to do so represents the scribes and Pharisees (15:2). As Archibald Hunter says, "The story pops up and leaves [the scribes] flat" (1960:54-55). In the parable of the great banquet (Lk 14:16-24) the God of grace provides a double salvation invitation and then sends his heralds into the highways and hedges after the original guests refuse.[6] Clearly, salvation is a crisis invitation that demands response. The God of mercy is also the God of judgment who will bring history to a close and whose offer of salvation cannot be ignored, only accepted or refused.

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

Three major approaches to the parables have been utilized throughout history (Hunter 1960:92-109). The first two have been widely rejected in our time and must be dismissed. Allegorizing, the method of the church fathers, can be utilized only if the text so indicates, and there is no subjective allegorizing in the Gospels. We must interpret those allegorical elements that are found in light of their Jewish background (such as the vineyard = Israel, the harvest = the Day of the Lord). Moralizing, the method of Jülicher and of nineteenth-century liberalism, is also dangerous, for it replaces the dynamic kingdom thrust of Jesus' preaching with pure humanism. Of course, many parables have a distinct ethical message, but this is part of the larger picture of the kingdom presence in the lives of the community. The third method, the *Sitz im Leben* approach of Jeremias, also has its dangers. This "severely historical approach," as many call it, can denigrate the narrative dimensions of the parable and lead to a radical dichotomy between the "situation" in Jesus' life and the use of the parable by the individual evangelists. A fourth method is an aesthetic or literary approach that sees the parable as having multiple meanings in different contexts. However, it has been dominated by views of textual autonomy, and the parables often have been removed from their historical context. Therefore, none of these models is adequate and the interpreter must allow the text itself to control the process. The best approach will be a combination of the third and fourth methods, blending historical and literary interests.

However, we must consider another oft-repeated claim before we can develop a method. Some say that to interpret a parable is to destroy it as parable. They argue that the aesthetic dimension is lost when the parable is historicized, for the evocative power of the parable disappears. Therefore, the parable should be presented rather than explained. Sallie TeSelle states it the most strongly when she says, "Metaphors cannot be 'interpreted'—a metaphor does not *have* a message, it *is* a message" (1975:71-72). Therefore, the reader does not interpret the parable but instead is interpreted by the parable. This is an obvious reflection of the New Hermeneutic and is subject to all the criticisms of that school. Via admits the problem but still argues for the necessity of interpretation, saying

"aesthetic objects can be interpreted-translated to some degree, and the need for clarity justifies the effort" (1967:32-33). I would go a step further. *Without* interpretation the power of the parable is lost, for every parable must be understood before it can be applied. Its "evocative power" is best discerned when seen as Jesus intended it; that is, in terms of its first-century background and in its Gospel context. Nevertheless, we should not relegate it merely to a word-by-word analysis. It must remain parable lest its ability to startle and move the hearer be lost.

Therefore, the form of the parable must remain intact. The following principles develop a basic method for accomplishing this goal. I agree with David Wenham's statement that he "takes the parables of Jesus in the form in which they are found in the gospels, and seeks to make sense of them in the context of Jesus' ministry and teaching, drawing also on the broader context of New Testament thought to illuminate their meaning" (1989:19). Stephen Wright notes three goals of the interpretive task: divine significance (the character of God in the parable), human intention (the original purpose in its first-century context), and resonance for hearers (contemporary connections that flow from the parable) (2005:561).

1. Note the setting within which the parable is placed. Blomberg states as a given that "the parables are authentic in the forms and contexts in which they appear" and that there is no need "to pit Jesus' original meaning against the evangelists' use of the parables in some new setting" (2004:23). This includes both the immediate context (the literary dimension) and the audience to which the parable is addressed (the historical dimension).[7] The specific group that Christ was addressing significantly alters the thrust of the parable. The problem Christ was facing when he uttered the parable and the discussion that followed are also important background factors. For instance, the parable of the two debtors (Lk 7:41-42) is addressed to Simon the Pharisee, who objected when Jesus allowed a prostitute to wash and perfume his feet. The cancellation of the debts of two individuals, one owing five hundred denarii and the other fifty, could be applied in several directions, such as the mercy of God or degrees of sin. In the immediate context Jesus takes it one direction (the sense of grateful love returned to the one who forgives debts or sins) and in the broader context another (Jesus' power to forgive sins). As many have noted, this parable is a simpler version of the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-35).

   Most scholars stress here the distinction between the situation in Jesus'

ministry and that in the Gospels. This does not have to mean the two are in conflict or that one is "historical" while the other is the product of the later church (see Stein 1981:75-79 for a good approach). The Evangelists highlighted certain aspects of the original situation for their own audiences. The situation in Jesus' day involves historical information; the situation in the Evangelists' day involves contextualization, as we note the themes that the various Gospels draw out of the individual parables. These two aspects are supplementary, not contradictory (see chap. 7). Wenham notes three levels of context—the historical context of first-century Palestine, the context of Jesus' life and ministry, and the context within the individual Gospel (1989:16). All must be considered.

By comparing the Gospels we can detect an illuminating series of emphases. For instance, the parable of the pounds (Lk 19:12-17) or talents (Mt 25:14-30) is clearly the same basic parable told in two different settings with different emphases.[8] In Matthew it is part of the judgment parables on watchfulness in the Olivet Discourse and warns the disciples that failure to use their resources and to be ready for the parousia could result in exclusion from the kingdom. In Luke the setting is that of the crowd's expectation of the imminent in-breaking of the kingdom (Lk 19:11), and so the parable centers on the delay of the king. In both parables stewardship is a major thrust, but the application of that theme to the needs of Matthew's and Luke's readers differs. Yet in both cases the thrust is also faithful to the original situation in Jesus' ministry. There is no reason to deny that Jesus himself had told the parable in those two settings.

2. Study the structure of the parable. The structural form of metaphor and similitude resembles those of wisdom literature already discussed, so I will center on the story parables here. What was stated in chapter seven (on narrative) applies even more to the parable, which is fictional at heart. Since the parable is indeed a literary phenomenon, the interpreter must apply compositional and rhetorical techniques to discover its plot development and literary patterns. We must note chiasm or inclusio, repeated phrases and major divisions within the story. In Luke's version of the parable of the pounds, two plot lines are juxtaposed, one centering on stewardship (Lk 19:12-13, 15b-26), the other on rebellion against the king (Lk 10:14-15a, 27). The two interpret one another, illustrating the "hardness" of the king (v. 22) and the harsh justice by which he rules.

The following principles will aid the reader in delineating the structural development: (1) Note breaks in narrative style, such as the

switch to direct discourse from third-person narrative in the prodigal son parable. (2) Study the changes in the focus and actions of the characters, such as the switch from the absentee landlord to the servants to the tenants in the parable of the wicked husbandmen. (3) Determine the points of reference, those items with which the hearer is to identify. The interaction of these referential aspects leads to the basic thrust. For instance, in the parable of the two debtors (Lk 7:41-43) we are to ask whether we are like the Pharisee (v. 39) or the sinful woman (vv. 37-38; cf. vv. 44-47) in attitude. (4) Seek patterns in the outline and ask how they relate to one another. Kenneth Bailey, for instance, notes step and inverted (chiastic) parallelism (see pp. 227-29) in Luke's parables. His chiastic outline in groups of three in the good Samaritan parable is illuminating (1976:72-73).[9] (5) Discover the climax of the story (such as the welcoming reaction of the father in the prodigal son parable), where the turning point occurs. (6) See how the action shifts before and after the turning point (such as the actions of the elder brother to the prodigal son) (see Bailey 1976:72-75; Tolbert 1979:74-83; Perkins 1981:50-58; Fee and Stuart 2003:153-54 on all six principles).

3. Uncover the background of the earthly details (on this see Young 1998). We must understand the historical context if the parable is to make sense. Yet this dare not become a mere recital of background details. Instead, the parable should be retold in light of this historical information. Here a good course in preaching techniques (see chap. 18) is essential, for the power of the story in all its drama and unexpected twists must come through for the audience. For instance, one must decide whether the parable of the unjust steward (Lk 16:1-13) stresses his dishonesty (so Bailey, Stein) or comes from the background of the laws of usury and commission (so Derrett, Fitzmyer, Marshall). When that decision has been made (I used to side with the latter view but have changed my mind!), the story should be retold using that background to make it more forceful and understandable. Often it will be helpful to connect the story with modern parallels so the evocative power will be seen. Stein repeats the Cotton Patch version of the good Samaritan as a case in point:

> A man was going from Atlanta to Albany and some gangsters held him up. When they had robbed him of his wallet and brand-new suit, they beat him up and drove off in his car, leaving him unconscious on the shoulder of the highway.
>
> Now it just so happened that a white preacher was going down

that same highway. When he saw the fellow, he stepped on the gas and went scooting by.

Shortly afterwards a white Gospel song leader came down the road, and when he saw what had happened, he too stepped on the gas.

Then a black man traveling that way came upon the fellow, and what he saw moved him to tears. He stopped and bound up his wounds as best as he could, drew some water from his water-jug to wipe away the blood and then laid him on the back seat. He drove on into Albany and took him to the hospital and said to the nurse, "You all take good care of this white man I found on the highway. Here's the only two dollars I got, but you all keep account of what he owes, and if he can't pay it, I'll settle up with you when I make a pay-day."[10]

4. Determine the main points of the parable. Often the clue comes in the context itself. At times it can come before the parable in the introduction (Lk 18:9; 19:11), at other times in an epilogue (Mt 15:13; Lk 16:9). Sometimes the indicator may be found via a question introducing the parable and an application afterward (Mt 18:21-35; 20:1-15; Lk 12:16-20). The larger context can help greatly in interpreting (such as Mk 4 and par.; Lk 15—16). Blomberg (1990:166-67) believes that most parables are triadic and contain the same number of points as they have characters. This works in most cases but not all (e.g., the parable of the sower, where Blomberg sees the three points being the sower, the seed and the soil rather than the four soils that dominate Jesus' presentation).

   Mary Ann Tolbert suggests clustering parables that exhibit similar traits or patterns. [11] We can do this either on the basis of thematic similarities (such as the servant parables) or structural similarities. She uses the parables of the unjust steward (Lk 16:1-8a) and wicked tenants (Mk 12:1-9 and par.) as an example. Both have similar structures, with a setting (12:1 = 16:1a-b), a narrated wrongdoing of servants (12:2- 5 = 16:1c), the decision of the master (12:6 = 16:2), an evaluation of the situation by the servants (12:7 = 16:3-4), the action of the servants (12:8 = 16:5-7) and the response of the master (12:9 = 16:8a). The quite different plot twists within the similar structures are highly illuminating. For instance, the wicked tenants parable ends with the destruction of the servants while the unjust steward parable closes with the commendation of the servant. In addition, the longest section of the former is that of the

evil actions of the tenants (12:2-5), while the major section of the latter is the steward's evaluation and resultant action (16:3-7). Thereby we can note the major points of emphasis in each. Yet one caveat is necessary: the context within which each parable is found, not clusters of similar parables, is the final arbiter of meaning.

When a parable contains several points of emphasis, the decision is more complex. The parable of the sower (Mk 4:3-9, 13-20 and par.) is one of the most debated. The traditional interpretation centers on the sower or the seed and stresses the proclamation of the Word and the warning to "take heed how you hear." Another interpretation (Dodd, Jeremias) centers on the abundant harvest and stresses the eschatological triumph of the Word in spite of Satan's power. The key is the context in which the parable of the sower is found, namely, the rejection of the Jews. Therefore, the parables of Mark 4 are called "controversy parables," and the place of the parable of the sower within this context is seen both in the purpose of the parables (vv. 10-12) and in Jesus' interpretation (vv. 13-20). Therefore, while there is an eschatological element (such as the end-time harvest), the major idea is the four types of soil.[12] The harvest relates only to the final soil type and does not elevate it to central status. The hearers are challenged to identify themselves with one or another of the soil types, and so the key meaning is one's response to the kingdom proclamation (the seed), so I would title it "the parable of the soils." Each type of soil relates to a different response and has equal importance to the parable's thrust. In other words, there are four main points, and the harvest scene both concludes the final type or response and warns the hearer regarding the importance of reacting correctly to the Gospel.

5. Relate the point(s) to Jesus' kingdom teaching and to the basic message of the individual Gospel. Both of these points already have been explored, so it is necessary only to relate them to the process of interpretation. After one has looked at the progress and message of the parable itself, it is important to place its message first within the larger context of Jesus' teaching and then within the emphases of the Gospel within which it is found. This will help the interpreter to avoid overstating or misinterpreting the points. For instance, the parables on constructing the tower and going to war (Lk 14:28-33) occur in a context of discipleship, and on the basis both of Jesus' teaching and Lukan emphases they center on the radical demands of the kingdom for total commitment. Half-hearted discipleship will result in spiritual defeat. We

must “count the cost” before entering into a spiritual contract with God, for he will hold us accountable.

6. Do not base doctrines on the parables without checking corroborative details elsewhere. This is closely connected to point 5, but because of widespread misuse of the parables in exactly this area, I present it here as a separate point. For instance, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) is often taken as proof of a compartmentalized Hades. However, such a doctrine is not found in Jesus’ teaching in Luke, and indeed nowhere else in Scripture. Therefore, the setting of the parable in Hades is local color rather than dogma and cannot be pressed too far.[13] Similarly, Calvinists and Arminians can use the parable of the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1- 8) only with great caution, for its meaning depends on the biblical theology on sovereignty and responsibility in John’s Gospel as a whole.

   Petzoldt has provided the most thorough treatment of the relationship between the parables and dogmatics. His basic thesis is that Jesus’ parable preaching provides an indispensable supplement to Paul and provides the heart of dogmatic theology (1984:161-66). While Paul interprets Jesus, the latter interprets God with respect to God’s interpretation of humanity. The opposition between the two, God’s presence and the human’s dilemma, is solved by the threefold schema of the parabolic form, “reception-interrogation-renewal.” Petzoldt argues that this is the major contribution of the parables to dogmatic theology. While he stands firmly in the historical-critical tradition, his basic thesis is correct. We must recognize that the great themes of the parables carry theological weight, but we must exercise great care in delineating the theological core of each parable.

7. Apply the central truth(s) to similar situations in modern life. Via asserts that the aesthetic dimension of parables means they “are not as time-conditioned as other biblical texts, and the need for translation is not, therefore, as compelling” (1967:32- 33). He believes the historical distance between the first century and our day is not as great in the case of parables. To an extent he is correct, although this does not remove the need to supply historical background. The evocative power of the parable is as great today as it was in the first century. In fact, the great preachers of the past century, like Charles Spurgeon or Chuck Swindoll, are known for their parabolic style. The parables reach down to the deepest levels of the human psyche and grip the heart and will. Moreover, the themes speak as clearly today as they did in Jesus’ day. Forgiveness and

compassion, and jealousy and self-centeredness are certainly as meaningful in our day as in ancient times. The message of divine mercy and the radical demands of the presence of the kingdom should ring with a clarion call in the church today. Blomberg believes it quite helpful to include modern parallels in preaching a parable, since they "work to recreate the original dynamic, force, or effect of Jesus' original story" (see also point 3) (2004:25).

8. Preach the parable holistically. The tendency to fragment parables and to contextualize each element as it comes up tends to destroy the parable as story and to break its power to draw the hearer into its narrative world. Some parables may lend themselves to a point-by-point development (such as the parable of the sower), but on the whole it is best to dramatize the parable by retelling it via background information (to create a "you are there" atmosphere) and to allow its power to enthrall the hearer and then to draw out its significance.

EXCURSUS: THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

As I have sought to demonstrate throughout this book, history provides the context, both positive and negative, by which we approach Scripture. As we sift through the examples of exegetical technique and interpretive approaches, we must seek to learn from the successes and failures of the past. In the case of parable interpretation this will be helpful indeed, although I can do no more than summarize.

The basic approach during the patristic period and the Middle Ages was allegorical (see Hunter 1960:22-31; Stein 1981:42-48; Fee and Stuart 2003:149-50; Kissinger 1999:235-39). Every element of a parable was reinterpreted and spiritualized to portray Christian truths. The only development was the extent of the allegorizing, as later writers went into more and more detail, and in the Middle Ages they utilized the fourfold-sense method. For instance, for Augustine in the parable of the good Samaritan the injured man became Adam who was leaving the heavenly city (Jerusalem) headed for the moon (Jericho, standing for our mortality) but was waylaid by the devil and his angels (robbers) that led him into sin (wounds). The priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament (the priest and Levite) refused to help, but Christ (the Samaritan) healed him (oil = comfort or compassion, wine = blood) and led him via the incarnation (the donkey) to the church (the inn). The innkeeper is the apostle Paul and the two denarii are the command to love or the promise of life now, and life to come (see Snodgrass 2000:4). There were voices in opposition to such allegorizing (Tertullian, Chrysostom, Calvin), yet while the Reformers clearly rejected the allegorical method on behalf of a literal hermeneutic, they were inconsistent when interpreting the parables. Martin Luther pretty much followed the patristic approach to the good Samaritan, but Calvin rejected it and regularly refused to spiritualize parables. However, Calvin's was a lone voice until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Richard Trench's *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* (1841), still on the shelves of many pastors, clearly follows in the train of Origen and Augustine.

The modern period of parable research began with Adolf Jülicher's *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1888). Reacting to the domination of the allegorical

method, he argued strongly that parables contain a single picture and teach a single point. Parables are extended similes, not allegories, and cannot be interpreted as allegories. The point of each parable/story is a simple maxim, not a complicated set of metaphors, so they do not need to be interpreted. The influence of this work was remarkable. Works that followed built on his thesis. C. H. Dodd's *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1966) went further and argued that the parables must be situated within the life and teaching of Jesus, primarily his preaching of the kingdom. Joachim Jeremias's *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (1947) built on both Jülicher and Dodd, systematically removing what he believed were later church additions (allegorical elements) to get back to Jesus' actual kingdom parables and centering on Palestinian background to the detriment on context within the Gospels.

These seminal works are still highly influential today, and many (Linnemann, Crossan, Lambrecht) still accept Jülicher's basic premise. However, while most teach a modified form, there is a growing dissatisfaction with the rigidity of the one-point' theory, and it can be said that the one-point approach has been rejected (so Snodgrass 2004:178-80). We can note several weaknesses with this hypothesis (see Via 1967:3, 13-17; Stein 1981:54-56; Bailey 1976:16): (1) The single-point approach may overlook important elements in the parable and thus shift its actual meaning. (2) The rigid distinction between parable and allegory is arbitrary and is actually only a difference of degree, not kind; therefore, we cannot categorically deny the possibility that Jesus did use allegorical parables. (3) Many of Jesus' parables are indeed allegories. (4) Jülicher used Aristotelian categories and turned Jesus into a Hellenistic rather than a Jewish teacher; Jewish parables mixed allegory and similitude and therefore we cannot rule such out on a priori grounds. (5) Jülicher, a nineteenth-century liberal, tended to moralize the parables and missed the central eschatological point. Therefore, a more modified approach is called for.

The redaction critics studied the parables individually in terms of their function within the various Gospels. Their use within a single chapter (Kingsbury on Matthew 13) or Gospel (Bailey on the Lukan parables or Carlston on the Synoptic parables) became a focus for research, and the evangelist's creative reworking of the parable came to the forefront of interest. This was an important shift from the situation in Jesus' teaching (Jülicher, Jeremias) to the situation in the Evangelist's church (redaction critics). However, in recent years a further shift of focus to the perspective of the modern reader has taken place. Two schools of thought have now centered on the parables as prime examples of recent literary theory applied to biblical studies. The structuralists (1970-1980, primarily Via, Funk, Crossan) seek the "codes" of the text, establish grids and

then delineate the “deeper structures” of meaning behind the surface parable. However, this school has many problems (see app. 1). As Lambrecht says, “One gets the impression that its lengthy descriptions tend to actually divert attention from the content of the text. Moreover, the method of structural analysis has been applied to the parables in rather divergent ways, and the results are disappointing” (1981:11).

More influential has been what Stein calls “aesthetic criticism,” which applies literary paradigms from the ancient world, like tragedy or comedy, and tries to understand the communicative power of the parable (Stein 2000:34-38). Following in the footsteps of the New Hermeneutic, these scholars view the parables as “language events” that compel the hearer to make a decision (see esp. Ernst Fuchs and his student Eta Linnemann). Both structuralists and aesthetic critics stress the autonomous and polyvalent nature of the parables. Thus the original meaning of the parable is not a goal and in fact is perceived to be a detriment to the power of the parable to address us today in new and significant ways (see Via 1967:77-93; Wittig 1977:80-82; Crossan 1980; Tolbert 1979:15-50). In fact, the parables became the primary example of the new literary and reader-response schools, since by nature they were devoid of meaning at the core and needed the reader to complete their meaning. For instance, Bernard Scott (1989) takes parables first as “performative” utterances and seeks to discover their original structure, thereby reducing them to their basic essence; and Hedrick (1994, 2004) called parables “poetic fictions” or stories stemming from Palestinian culture, banal or enigmatic sayings that failed to communicate any clear religious concept! As Klyne Snodgrass concludes, such an approach “is ultimately nihilistic and offers no hope, meaning or theology” (2004:188). Such theories meet the same objection leveled in chapter one: there is no reason to ignore the original context or the cultural background and every reason to make these central to exegesis.

Let us consider here a major example of removing a parable from its context and reading it in polyvalent fashion to support an already existent thesis, namely, the use of the prodigal son parable by N. T. Wright (1996:125-31). Wright argues that in its Jewish context it is the story of Israel, particularly of exile and restoration. Building on the exodus, Israel is seen going off to slavery in a pagan land (with three stages, from Egypt to Babylon to Rome), and the only solution was for Israel to repent and return from exile to God. Jesus then is saying that this restoration can only take place in him, and the multitude, virtually Samaritans (the older brother), are jealously standing in the way. This interpretation would work well within the *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, but such can never be more than speculative. In the setting of Luke 15 it is quite unlikely. There

three parables of salvation (the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son) demonstrate the forgiveness of God for sinners and especially address the situation of Luke 15:1-2, the unwillingness of the Pharisees and scribes to accept the tax collectors and sinners. Thus it is better to see the parable as describing salvation for the lost rather than return from exile. We cannot say Jesus never told the story this way, only that evidence for such is nonexistent.

We can note several other problems (see Stein 1981:68-69; Boucher 1977:16-17): (1) When Jesus demanded that the listeners "hear" (Mk 4:9, 33-34), he referred to *his* message, not the hearer's subjective understanding. Jesus' intended meaning was the only true meaning. (2) The parables are important not in their own right but because they are Jesus' parables; modern interpreters often seem to attribute deity to the parable rather than to Jesus! (3) When these critics lose sight of the original historical contexts of the parables, their interpretation invariably degenerates into allegory. (4) Poetry differs from rhetoric; while poetry is often autonomous, rhetoric can never be. Once rhetoric allows the aesthetic dimension to gain the ascendancy it loses its power to move the listener to decision. Since parables demonstrably belong in the camp of rhetoric rather than to aesthetics or poetry, they cannot be understood apart from their literary and social contexts. Therefore, I argue for a contextual interpretation of each parable in its immediate Gospel setting, utilizing background studies to deepen the understanding of the parable as a historical story grounded in the first century historical setting.

13

Epistle

This is the most basic of the genre categories, yet few hermeneutics texts to my knowledge have a section on epistles in the discussion of special hermeneutics (Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard 1993 is an exception). Yet many issues pertain particularly to the epistolary literature, and many mistakes in both interpretation and application are made due to a failure to understand the particular hermeneutical peculiarities of epistles.[1] Yet the principles discussed in part one, "General Hermeneutics," might apply more directly to the Epistles than to any of the other genres. Part of this is due to the fact that we have been raised in the Epistles and our thinking (including hermeneutical principles) has been shaped by them. The Epistles do not contain such complicating factors as plot or characterization (narrative), esoteric symbolism (apocalyptic) or metaphorical subtleties (parable). However, they have several aspects with which we have not fully interacted and which we should explore. In order to do so, we will first consider letter-writing in antiquity and then note some of the crucial issues.

LETTER-WRITING IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

At the earliest period messages were memorized and sent by courier. This had its natural limitations and by the third millennium B.C. messages were sent via wood or clay tablets, ostraca, wax surfaces on wood or metal and then papyri sheets. In the ancient Near East many of the epistolary conventions (such as the opening address and the thanksgiving) were derived from the oral period, and in many cases the messenger delivered the letter orally as well as by tablet.[2] As might be expected, the earliest type of correspondence was the official letter, which reported military or civic affairs to the king or other official (cf. 1 Kings 5:8-9; 2 Chron 2:3-10, 11-15) (White 1988:85-86). The Ancient Epistolography Group of the Society of Biblical Literature has identified ten types of ancient epistles: letters to the gods, edicts and proclamations, historical letters, military correspondence, administrative correspondence, scholarly letters (divination reports, astrological observations, etc.), letter prayers, letters to the dead, business letters and feminine correspondence. We can divide these into two major categories, the nonliterary letter centering on personal correspondence and the literary epistle or treatise written for a general audience and intended for publication. The first organized postal service was a pony express system developed by the Persian king Cyrus of the sixth century B.C., which was adopted by Alexander the Great, but it was always used for official business, and throughout the ancient world personal letters had to be sent by courier or travelers (White 1988:87-88).

All ancient correspondence consisted of three sections: the opening, the body of the letter and the closing. While the opening and closing closely followed conventional patterns, the body of the letter differed widely, depending on subject matter and thus cannot be so easily classified. The address often indicates relative status because ancient laws of etiquette were based on social stratification (relating to those of higher, equal or lower status). The contents and style of the letter would differ depending on the relative status between sender and recipient (see Aune 1987:158- 59). Brent Knutson (1982:18) states that the superior’s name always comes first in the Ras Shamra letters, while in Mesopotamian letters the addressee’s name is first, irrespective of rank (“To

———say, ‘Thus says———’ ”).

Salutations often would reflect social status as well, for instance in the “subordination formula” of the El-Amarna letters (e.g., “I am the dust beneath your feet”). Letters between equals would include a more general blessing or wish for well-being. In the Neo-Babylonian period the salutations became more stylized and no longer reflected relative rank. However, Aramaic correspondence from the first millennium B.C. often used family names to indicate relative rank with *lord, father* or *mother* used for superiors; *brother* or *sister* for equals; and *servant, son* or *daughter* for inferiors. In the Aramaic correspondence the salutation normally involved some form of either “peace” *(šālôm)* or “blessing” *(bērak)* and often were highly religious, invoking Yahweh or the gods, although others employed more general wish statements. In Greek epistles the salutation was often brief: “———to———, greetings and good health.” In many instances these are followed by a secondary greeting, either to be passed on to other relatives or friends or greetings sent from friends with the sender. The closing also embodies a formula with šā*lôm;* Fitzmyer notes two types, “I have sent this letter for your peace (of mind)” and “Be (at) peace” (1982:36).

Practices related to the order of names also differed from period to period. As just mentioned, in ancient Mesopotamia the recipient’s name was first (“To ———, thus says———”) while in Babylonian, Persian and Greek periods the order was reversed (“Tablet of———, to———”), except in the Ptolemaic period when correspondence from an inferior often mentioned the recipient first. Dennis Pardee applies this to Hebrew letters, including those in the Old Testament (1978:321-44; 1982:145-64). As would be expected, Old Testament epistles omitted the opening and closing formulas and summarized the contents, since they were included in the larger narrative works of Scripture (2 Sam 11:15; 1 Kings 21:9-10; 2 Kings 5:6; 10:2- 3, 6; 19:10-13 [= Is 37:10-13]; Jer 29:4-23, 26-28; Neh 6:6-7; 2 Chron 2:11-15; 21:12-15).

Interestingly, Aramaic canonical epistles have preserved the opening formulas, with the superior mentioned first: for example, “To King Artaxerxes, your servants . . . the priest” (Ezra 4:11), “Nebuchadnezzar the king to all peoples” (Dan 4:1). The normal Hebrew epistle placed the sender first if both were named but often only the recipient was mentioned (“To———, greeting”). Hebrew letters preferred *bērak,* “bless,” to šā*lôm* until the Bar Kokhba period (A.D. 132-135). Superior-inferior distinctions do not seem to be prevalent, and neither secondary greetings nor concluding formulas are found in pre-Christian Hebrew correspondence. One similarity with both Aramaic and biblical letters (in 2 Kings 5:6; 10:2; cf. Neh 6:7; Jer 29:27; 2 Chron 2:12) is the use of *w’attah* (“and now”) to provide the transition from the salutation to the body of the letter.

The closest parallel to the New Testament is found in Hellenistic epistolary practices.[3] In the later Greek, period letters became the accepted form, not just for private correspondence but also for literary purposes. Cato, for instance, published his essays in the form of letters to his son, and many of Cicero's 931 letters were published in order to win public support. Evidence indicates that none were written specifically for publication, and some were never meant to be published (indeed, they hurt Cicero's reputation with their criticism of Caesar). However, Cicero himself published several, and clearly his aim was to influence public opinion. Isocrates and Horace developed an exhortation epistle intended to instruct readers regarding various philosophical, historical or legal themes. Seneca's letters to Lucilius demonstrate a tractate type of epistle, giving general moral advice. By the time of Jesus and Paul this literary epistle had become very popular. Students were taught epistolary style in the rhetorical schools, and several "handbooks" were produced to teach correct form. This tradition is important for the New Testament epistolary tradition.

William Doty lists four basic types of letters in addition to personal correspondence (1966:102-23): the official letter (royal, military, legal correspondence); the public letter; the "nonreal" letter (pseudonymous literature, the epistolary novel, heavenly letters); and the discursive letter (religious, scientific and moral parenesis, all designed to instruct). Stanley Stowers develops this typology in a different direction, taking a functional approach centering on rhetorical conventions (1986:49-173): letters of friendship (see 2 Cor 1:16; 5:3; Phil 1:7-8; 1 Thess 3:6-10); family letters; letters of praise and blame (1 Cor 11; Rev 2—3); exhortatory or parenetic epistles (1 Thessalonians, the pastorals, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter); letters of mediation or recommendation on behalf of a person (Philemon, Phil 2:19-30); and juridical or forensic (accusing, apologetic, accounting) letters (1 Cor 9:3-12; 2 Cor 1:8—2:13; 7:5-16; 10—12).

The form utilized in these letters followed certain conventional patterns quite similar to those found in the ancient Near East. The opening began with the sender and recipient ("———to———"), followed by a stereotyped greeting (*charein*, "grace" or "greetings") and sometimes a more developed thanksgiving or prayer for good health. The body of the text is then followed by a closing involving greetings sent to mutual friends and a final wish for good health and so forth. Letters were written primarily for the sake of "presence" or contact. As Richard Longenecker says, for personal letters this took the form of maintaining a "friendly relationship," in pastoral letters of maintaining past contact and present authority, in public letters of conveying authority and in tractates or discursive letters of instructing the readers (1983:102).

Detlev Dormeyer traces the connection between orality and writtenness in antiquity and in the New Testament (1998:47-61). The differences have been overstated, for most speeches were written out, memorized and then delivered. Students in schools studied primarily Homer and then were trained in rhetoric and genres like fable, history, *chreiai* (concise, useful sayings), and proverbs. It is erroneous to assume the New Testament writers were unsophisticated and lacking in rhetorical training. While written in everyday Koine for the most part, the writings exhibit a high literary standard. Certainly many of the disciples were uneducated in terms of formal training (how much had Peter the fisherman received?), though Paul and probably Luke had received a thorough education. Yet they produced fairly sophisticated literature. Luke recognized that the Christian leaders were “unschooled, ordinary men” (Acts 4:13) by Hellenistic standards, but most negative judgments, by such as Celsus, came via comparison with high artistic prose, a style the New Testament writers deliberately avoided. They sought the language of the ordinary person in the street to demonstrate not secular wisdom but the wisdom of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 10:1, 9-11).

NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

1. ***The form.*** Adolf Deissmann believed that Paul's epistles were personal letters rather than literary epistles (1909:224-46). They were therefore occasional and circumstantial, the product of the moment rather than careful literary creations. According to Deissmann Paul's epistles were characterized by a dialectic between his powerful spiritual depth and the problems of the individual situations to which he wrote. He believed Paul's letters were nonliterary real letters, while the catholic letters were literary epistles (Dormeyer 1998:23). However, as most now agree, this is too simplistic. For one thing, few would place Paul's letters (apart from Philemon) in the nonliterary category. For another, there were far more patterns than Deissmann suspected in Hellenistic and Jewish epistolary practices. The three that are most applicable are the private letter, the public epistle and the treatise. Of these the private letter is the least likely, for Paul and the other sacred writers wrote with a consciousness of apostolic authority and spoke to the whole church, intending that their epistles be read publicly in the assemblies (see 1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16). Indeed the conclusion of each letter to the seven churches in Revelation 2—3 reads, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." To be sure, some individual epistles (Philem, 2-3 John, to an extent the Pastoral Epistles) could be placed in the personal category, but the others are clearly public in nature and some could be placed in the category of treatise.

   Longenecker uses the categories "pastoral letter" and "tractate" to distinguish them (1983:102-6). The latter sometimes maintain the epistolary form (Hebrews lacks the opening, James, 2 Peter and Jude lack the concluding greetings, and 1 John lacks both opening and closing formulas), but their content goes beyond local situations to speak to general concerns of the church as a whole. Letters that often are considered to be a treatise or tractate are Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter and 1 John. Of course, several are debated, especially

since all but 1 John maintain the epistolary form, and 1 John seems to have a particular situation in mind (a proto-Gnostic group of false teachers). Many consider Romans to be addressed to Jewish-Gentile factions in Rome. Ephesians, Hebrews, James and 1 Peter are most commonly assigned to the tractate category. Ephesians centers on the topics of Christ and church; 1 Peter may be a collection of Peter's sermons (though I personally doubt this); and Hebrews and James address problems within the Jewish-Christian community.

The epistles of Paul do not merely reproduce earlier patterns, and this is a clear departure from normal practice, which slavishly imitated established conventions. Paul's letters "are new in so far as form (introductory and closing formulae), content (variety and intensity of material in a single letter), or length (beyond the usual length even of the more literary-minded writers) is concerned" (Doty 1966:164-65). This is even more startling when we realize that the patristic writers returned to the stereotyped patterns. The New Testament Epistles therefore blend normal patterns with Christian innovations. For instance, the greeting combined the Greek *charis* with the Aramaic šā*lôm* but added to both a theological depth hitherto missing. The salutation became a realized eschatological promise, in other words, "What you have wanted when you have said 'Grace' or 'Peace' has now been given you by God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!" Moreover, the thanksgiving and prayer found in ancient epistolography is extended and avoids the cliché. Indeed, Paul Schubert (1939:71-82) and Peter O'Brien (1977:262-63) demonstrate that the thanksgivings and intercessory prayers embody in embryo the basic purpose or message of the individual epistles.[4] O'Brien adds, "Many have a didactic function so that either by fresh teaching or recall to instruction previously given the apostle sets forth theological matters he considers important (see esp. Col 1:9-14). An exhortatory purpose is also present in several of these passages (e.g., Phil 1:9-11)" (1993:552).

The body of the Epistles is also far lengthier and more complex than normal Greek letters. The one thing they have in common is the practical orientation of the contents. All center on particular problems in the churches. Even those often assumed to be treatises fit this category. Hebrews struggles with the danger of apostasy on the part of one or more Jewish house churches in Rome that have become *nothroi* ("lethargic" or "spiritually dull" [Heb 5:11; 6:12]). Romans is both presenting Paul's gospel as an introductory letter to the Roman Christians (Moo 1996:17)

and addressing specific problems at Rome. An interesting aspect of this is the Pauline parousia in which Paul not only speaks of his plans and rehashes his past ministry but uses himself as a model of the point he is making. In a sense he spoke as one who was "present" with them in his letter. The closings of the letters also involve more than conventional patterns. Paul again offers the eschatological "grace" to the readers and not only greets members but often exhorts them to greet others with a holy kiss (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; Rom 16:20). Instead of the typical health wish, there was a benediction or doxology (White 1988:98-99; O'Brien 1993:552).

The New Testament Epistles fall between the private letter and the treatise, having elements of both along with rhetorical features drawn from both Hellenistic and Jewish forms.[5] They speak to specific situations (even the more general letters like 2 Peter, James or 1 John) and yet are meant to be read again and again in the churches (such as Philem 2, showing that the epistle was also addressed "to the church in your house"). Moreover, nearly all the epistles (apart from pure letters like Philemon and 2-3 John) mix several forms and cannot be classified easily. For instance (as Roller correctly notes, 1933:87-88), the book of Revelation contains a hortatory section in somewhat epistolary style (Rev 2—3) and, unique among ancient apocalyptic, is framed by an epistolary prescript and postscript (Rev 1:1-8; 22:10-21). Complex epistles like Romans or the Corinthian correspondence contain many of the rhetorical types and must be examined section by section. Dormeyer says Paul deliberately chose "public literary speech style" for his epistles because he wanted them read at the assemblies (1 Thess 5:27) but utilized rhetorical modes (showing he had training) and showed sophisticated literary quality in his chosen mode of writing (1998:78-79).

The major point of hermeneutical significance is that the Epistles contain both occasional and supracultural elements. For our purpose here, we must be aware that many elements in the Epistles do not directly provide paradigms for the Christian life today. The extent to which a command is addressed to the particular situation of the readers is the extent to which the surface command does not apply today. While this is quite easy in some cases (such as the request that Titus come to Paul in Nicopolis in Tit 3:12), in others it is quite difficult to separate the cultural from the supracultural (e.g., the passages on women in the church or on excommunication; see the excellent discussion in Aune 1987:226-49).

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart note other issues that stem from this

problem (2003:58). The importance of identifying the problem behind some of the statements in the Epistles is critical, but the task is difficult. "We have the answers, but we do not always know what the questions or problems were. . . . It is much like listening to one end of a telephone conversation and trying to figure out who is on the other end and what that unseen party is saying." The reader also must understand that the sacred writers were not producing a systematic presentation of their theology but rather were using theology to speak to specific situations. Therefore, we dare not read individual statements as finished dogma, but rather we must move from the individual statements to ascertain the biblical theology and then to develop a dogmatic or systematic theology (see chaps. 15-16).

The opening and closing formulas in the Epistles follow ancient conventions and need to be understood properly. For instance, the emphasis on "apostle" in Paul's correspondence (all except the Thessalonian epistles) shows that these are official letters. In Galatians 1:1-2 the expanded form is due to the polemical nature of the epistle; since Paul's opponents challenged his authority he spent much of the first two chapters defending his status. Extensive thanksgivings and prayers are also common, as is the use of these to present the major themes of the epistle (Phil 1:9- 11; Eph 1:15-19; 3:14-17). When the thanksgiving or prayer is missing (Galatians, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 1 John, Jude) this is evidence of the extremely serious nature of the problems addressed. Finally, the closing greetings, benediction and farewell were also typical formulas in ancient letters (for fine discussions of this, see Stowers 1986:20-23; Aune 1987:183-87).

2. ***Authorship.*** Two issues are relevant here, the presence of a scribe or amanuensis (secretary) in the writing of several epistles, and the question of pseudonymity. Paul (Rom 16:22; cf. 2 Thess 3:14) and Peter (1 Pet 5:12) mention secretarial help. However, the extent of the involvement of the amanuensis in the production of the text is debated. A rudimentary form of shorthand was practiced in the first century; Plutarch credited Cicero with its invention. However, the degree of freedom exercised by the scribe varied widely, from word-for-word dictation to total freedom, with the master providing only the subject matter. Otto Roller believes that Paul's amanuensis was given great freedom and that the styles of the epistles are mixed, with much left to the scribes to develop in their own way (1933:146-47). On the other hand, Werner Kümmel argues that the breaks in the thought flow of the epistles and the uniformity of the

Pauline language would not occur if the secretaries had great freedom, and that therefore Paul was dictating his letters (1975:251). The fact that Paul often added comments (presumably to a companion's writing) can hardly be doubted (in addition to the passages already named, see 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; Philem 19). Thus we can hardly doubt the fact of secretarial activity.

Only the degree of freedom in writing is at issue. I would agree with Richard Longenecker that "Paul's own practice probably varied with the circumstances encountered and the companions available" (1983:109). There is little evidence to suggest that the scribes had total freedom to produce the epistle, but in 1 Peter probably and the Pastorals possibly the style could well be due to the amanuensis. This in no way lessens the authority of these epistles, for the Holy Spirit could inspire the amanuensis as well as the author. The process of producing the canonical books was fully superintended by the Spirit, and there is no reason to believe that the sacred authors were not responsible for the content. In the ancient world the masters authenticated every word written under their direction. There were three general levels of scribal activity in the first century: the letters could be dictated (no scribal involvement), the contents could be told but the actual wording and style supplied by the secretary (moderate scribal involvement), or the topic could be told and the rest left up to the secretary (nearly total scribal involvement). There is no evidence for the third level but the first two can be found (1 Peter and the Pastorals at level two; many believe Luke was the amanuensis of the Pastorals due to the number of "Lukanisms" seen in them).

The possibility of pseudonymous (falsely attributed) writings in the New Testament is more the subject of an introduction than of a hermeneutics text, but if Ephesians, the Pastorals, 2 Thessalonians, James and the Petrine Epistles were actually the products of the later church, that would have hermeneutical implications, so the issue must at least be raised. It is common to argue that pseudonymous works were widely accepted in the ancient world and that since the Holy Spirit was viewed as the true author of the Epistles, the early church had no problem with pseudonymity (e.g., Aland 1961:39-49; Mead 1986).

However, as Donald Guthrie notes, while there were many pseudonymous works in the first century, there is too little evidence that they were accepted as authoritative (1990:1011-28; see also Wilder 2001:296-335). The Jewish pseudonymous works were not included in the Hebrew canon, and it is doubtful that anyone believed they actually

had been written by those under whose name they appeared. The question of pseudonymity must be decided on an individual basis, and I for one remain unconvinced regarding the late origin of works like Daniel, the Pastorals, James or 1 Peter. Anonymity is less of a problem, for this was common in the ancient world; in the case of Hebrews the letter carried its own authority (as Origen recognized). The historical situation is not really more difficult to ascertain, for the recipients and purpose are identifiable in the contents of the letter.

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

We could simply recapitulate the process of hermeneutics elucidated in chapters one through five, namely, structure-grammar-semantics-syntax-historical backgrounds. However, there are special issues that relate especially to the Epistles, and I will explore these while stressing that the reader should place them within the broader steps explained previously in this book.

1. Study the logical development of the argument. While this is not too difficult in some epistles (such as Corinthians and Hebrews), in others (such as James and 1 John) it is extremely difficult. Martin Dibelius called James an artificially collected group of separate homilies (1976:34-38), and I. Howard Marshall has despaired of making sense of 1 John (1978:22-26). He organizes the latter into separate sections. In neither case is the verdict wholly justified, but commentators have long struggled with the logical patterns of the two.

   James, I believe, moves from an introductory discussion of trials and faith (Jas 1:1- 18) to the first issue, practical Christianity (Jas 1:19—2:26). The latter section moves from the theme (1:19-26) to two specific aspects, partiality (Jas 2:1-13) and good works (Jas 2:14-26). The second major section then deals with teaching and the tongue (Jas 3:1—4:12), moving in rondo style from an introductory statement on teachers (Jas 3:1) to a general description of the dangers of the tongue (Jas 3:2-12), then back to the teacher's qualifications (Jas 3:13-18) and then to the problems stemming from a misuse of the tongue for fighting (Jas 4:1-10) and slander (Jas 4:11-12). There follows a series of problems in the church: self-reliance (Jas 4:13-17), the misuse of wealth to oppress the poor (Jas 5:1-11), oaths (Jas 5:12), prayer and healing (Jas 5:13-18). James concludes with a closing statement that sums up the ethical problems of the epistle and calls the church to bring the errant sinners back to Christ (Jas 5:19-20). There is a definite homogeneity to the epistle, as Peter Davids recognizes (1982:22-27; see also Moo 2000).

   First John is more difficult but is written in rondo style around the

three central “tests” of true Christianity, the moral test (obedience), the social test (love), and the doctrinal test (belief), as John Stott notes (1964:55-56). The important point in each case is to relate the parts to the whole and to see each part as it relates to the author’s developing argument.

2. Study the situation behind the statements. This is more important than it appears at first sight, for it determines not only the background for the argument of a book but also the extent to which the passage applies to situations beyond the historical circumstances of the original readers. In narrative literature the situation is part of the context, but in the Epistles it is not always so easy to detect. There is a great deal of controversy behind the identification of Paul’s opponents at Corinth, Colossae or Philippi, or John’s opponents in 1 John. Yet the interpretation of key passages depends on the decision. For this reason it is important to consult up-to-date commentaries and other tools. For instance, some argue that Paul was not fighting a particular heretical movement in Colossae but rather a general syncretism of Jewish and pagan ideas in a Christian setting (see Hooker 1973). Most scholars have not followed this line of reasoning, but if it were true the list of ritual and ethical characteristics of the cult in Colossians 2:16-23 would have to be rethought in terms of its true meaning. Paul would be providing a representative list rather than describing actual practices and beliefs.

   Fee and Stuart discuss two related aspects, the problems of extended application and of particulars that are not comparable (2003:76-80). The key in their minds is to do our exegesis well enough to ascertain the specific life situations of the biblical times and to gain confidence that our situations are truly comparable with theirs. Extended application occurs when one applies a biblical text to a modern situation that is not genuinely comparable to the original meaning of the text. This is an extremely difficult task because the interpreter must make a subjective decision as to when an application is extended too far. Yet the principle is important. For instance, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:19-20 speaks of Christians as God’s “temple” and says negatively that God will “destroy” anyone who “destroys God’s temple” (3:17); further, Christians must “honor God” in their bodies (6:20). This has been universally extended to refer to harmful foods, even though the original meaning had nothing of the sort in mind. Another example is 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers,” applied to marriage between a Christian and non-Christian, although the context is more general,

referring to participation in pagan practices. The first example is most likely erroneous because junk food, cigarettes and so forth are a different situation entirely, but the second is an adequate extension of the same principle, although unequal marriages should be preached as an implication of the text rather than its meaning.

The problem of noncomparable particulars deals with situations in the Epistles that no longer occur or are unlikely to occur today. An important example here would be the strong-weak passages of 1 Corinthians 8—10 and Romans 14—15. Since in the Western world we no longer have idolatrous temples or meat sacrificed to idols and then eaten in temple feasts or sold in the marketplace, we must seek first the underlying principle and then apply it to analogous situations. The basic principle is to do nothing that would prove to be a "stumbling block" to a weaker brother. However, this does not refer to that which offends legalistic Christians; rather it means not to do that which can lead another into sin.[6] Fee and Stuart (2003: 77-78) note three commands: (1) They are forbidden to attend the idolatrous feasts, since that involves participation in the demonic. (2) Paul defends his right to financial support (1 Cor 9:14). (3) Meat sacrificed to idols may be eaten, although one should avoid such when it might cause another to stumble. The first and third may apply in some Third World tribal settings today but have no parallel in the First World. Yet the issues to which they have been applied are legion (dress, length of hair, jewelry, cosmetics, movies, cards, gambling, drinking and smoking, to name but a few). Christians must be careful to maintain a balanced perspective, noting the complex situation caused by religious sensibilities and stumbling blocks to weaker Christians. It is wrong to flaunt one's freedom and thereby do disservice to the cause of Christ. At the same time, some of the contemporary issues mentioned are allowable in private settings but should be avoided in public situations (a valid extension of the meat-sacrificed-to-idols principle).[7]

Romans 14:1—15:13 is a perfect case in point. Douglas Moo has an excellent discussion on the applicability of this passage to current issues (1996:881-83). He makes two points: First, the specifics have limited relevance, for the actual situation was not just a difference of theological opinion but the limited faith on the part of the Jewish Christians to appropriate the new covenant situation. Therefore, of the three issues—prohibition of meat and wine, and the observance of special days—only the issue of sabbath observance today is a real parallel. However, the

principles do apply more broadly to current issues on matters of *adiaphora,* that is, issues that are open biblically and on which we can "agree to disagree." He notes three points made by Paul: (1) as a realist, he knew that Christians actually live at different levels, and for the weak Jewish Christians these issues were indeed "sin" for them (Rom 14:14, 20); in the same way, believers today should not violate their conscience. (2) Other believers are stronger and do not share these scruples; they must understand the weaker believers, respect their convictions and make sure they build up rather than tear down the others' "faith." They can practice their freedom whenever the "weaker" Christians are not there to be "harmed" (cf. 1 Cor 10:25-29), but they should curtail their practices whenever it will cause problems. (3) The " 'bottom line' is the unity of the church." The weak are not to condemn the strong, and the strong are not to look down on the weak (Rom 14:10). Rather, the unity of the church must be preserved in all areas where it is a matter of openness (that is, where it does not impinge on a cardinal doctrine). There are two ways to contextualize biblical material, at the specific level (food laws, wine, holy days) or at the general level, in which the principles are applied to issues that parallel the biblical situation (see also Osborne 2006).

3. Note the different subgenres employed in the Epistles. Nearly every type of literature discussed in these chapters on genre is found in the Epistles, such as hymns and creeds, apocalyptic and proverbs. The reader must note these carefully and apply the particular principles of that genre when interpreting the epistle. For example, the cautions for interpreting apocalyptic will be invaluable when studying the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2) or the destruction of the world (2 Pet 3). Rules for interpreting poetry will help us understand 1 Timothy 3:16 or 1 Peter 3:18, 22. In the case of the hymns this will lead to two levels of interpretation, the meaning of the hymn in its original form (such as the incarnational theology of Phil 2:6-8) and in its setting within the epistle itself (Phil 2:6-11 as a paradigm for humility).

14

The Old Testament in the New Testament

Of all the sources for studying the New Testament, none is so pervasive as the Old Testament itself. Every book except Philemon and 1-2 John contains either quotes of or allusions to the Old Testament.[1] There are approximately three hundred quotes in the New Testament and literally thousands of allusions.[2] The prevalence of such quotations and allusions shows that early Christianity was rooted in Judaism, and the Old Testament was their canonical Scriptures. Just as we anchor our messages in the two Testaments, so they anchored theirs in the Old Testament. The formulas that introduce many of the quotations show the high degree of inspiration claimed for the Old Testament. In addition to those like "Scripture/the Law/Moses/Isaiah says," we also find "God/the Lord/the Spirit says." Clearly the early Christians believed the Old Testament constituted the very words of God. The best-known claims are in 2 Timothy 3:16 ("All scripture is God-breathed") and 2 Peter 1:21 ("[prophets] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit").

THE CANON AND THE SEPTUAGINT

The Old Testament canon was fairly complete by the time of Jesus. Josephus (c. *Apion* 12, 38-42), Philo (*De Vita Contemplativa* 1-2, 25, 28-29), Ben Sira (prologue to Sirach), and Qumran (4QMMT, B, II, 9-10) attest to the traditional list and divide the Old Testament into either three (law, writings and prophets) or four (the law, the hymns, the prophets and the writings) groups (Ellis, 1991:7-9). Esther is missing at Qumran (all the others are present), and Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs may have been disputed as well. Still, the evidence as we have it indicates the canon may have been closed by 100 B.C. (Dunbar 1986:314-15).

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, probably done between 250-150 B.C. in Alexandria but with three Jewish (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion) and three Christian (Hesychian, Hexaplaric, Lucianic) recensions. As with the New Testament the originals are lost, and it must be reconstructed via text criticism. Still, it was the basic Bible of the first century, accepted even in Palestine, and a great many of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament stem from the Septuagint.[3] For instance, of the eighty quotations in Matthew, thirty are from the LXX, but most occur in the direct speech of Jesus and John the Baptist, leaving the impression that Jesus used the Septuagint. The same is true of the speeches in Acts.[4] Even the most Jewish epistles—Hebrews and James—use the LXX exclusively. D. Moody Smith has said, "Because of the preponderance of septuagintal quotations, as opposed to quotations which reflect the Hebrew in distinction from the Septuagint, it has been widely assumed that the Septuagint was the Bible of the primitive church. This is by no means an erroneous assumption."[5]

Some have posited two canons, a Jewish canon composed of twenty-four books (= the thirty-nine of our day) and the Alexandrian (= the Septuagint) adding the apocryphal books.[6] However, this is no longer accepted, for the LXX codices as we have them are the product of later Christian writers, not Jewish, and Philo, the greatest writer of Alexandrian Judaism, shows no knowledge of a wider canon (Bruce 1988:44-46). Albert Sundberg gave this new form by arguing for a greater openness in pre-Jamnia (A.D. 90) Judaism to including apocryphal books in the canon on the basis of the presence of some apocryphal

works at Qumran, the LXX codices, and the inclusion of Judith, Tobit and so forth by some church fathers (e.g., Origen, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem) (Sundberg 1964). However, the authority of Jamnia on such matters has been drastically revised, and the uncertainty of the early fathers about the extent of the canon is due more to their ignorance of Jewish views on the issue than to the actual state of the canon then (Dunbar 1986:309-10).

In conclusion, the early church used the LXX extensively as a source for quotations, but their canon was exclusively the received twenty-four (= thirty-nine) books of the Old Testament. The only exception is the quotation of 1 Enoch 1:9 in Jude 14- 15, but while Jude accepts this as “prophecy,” there is no evidence he accepts 1 Enoch as canon (Bauckham 1983:96).

JEWISH EXEGETICAL PATTERNS

It is generally agreed that Jesus was a rabbi in his interpretation of the Old Testament (Bultmann 1934:57-58; Chilton 1984), and the rest of the New Testament writers generally followed suit. The Judaism of the Second Temple period was diverse and exhibited more than one tendency in their approach to the Old Testament, and the New Testament was part of Second Temple Judaism, so it is critical to understand the techniques that guided their interpretation of the Old Testament. Therefore, a survey of methods will help greatly, especially since most can be seen in the New Testament as well.

1. ***The Targums.*** By the time of Jesus, Aramaic was the common language of Palestine, and Hebrew was understood only by an educated minority. Thus it became necessary to provide Aramaic paraphrases of biblical texts so the common people could understand the Scripture readings (*trgm* means "translate/explain"). Paraphrase was desired because the purpose was not only to hear it but to understand its sense. In *m. Megilla* 4:4-10 it was specified that at least three verses were to be read at a time, with targumic interpretation given after each verse (though this may represent only the later period).

   The quality or faithfulness of the paraphrases are quite different. *Targum Onqelos* (finalized in the third century A.D.) tends to be faithful to the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text, but the paraphrases of *Targum Neofiti* (A.D. 700) add entire paragraphs with free renderings commonplace. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (after A.D. 700) is even more free in its renderings and is twice the length of the Hebrew text. *Neofiti I* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* represents Palestinian Judaism, while *Onqelos* is Babylonian. Two other sources must be noted: the Cairo Genizah fragments stem from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, and the *Fragmentary Targum,* a collection of readings from the Middle Ages, are both Palestinian in style (see Longenecker 1975:21-22; and Chilton 2000:903-5). Yet while finished late, it is agreed generally that the Targumim represent early understanding of biblical texts that predate the

New Testament period. Of course, the same care must be taken as stated regarding rabbinic literature in general (see the chap. 5, “Historical and Cultural Backgrounds”).

Philip Alexander gives three ways the interpretive dimension is provided: (1) by addition, that is, an explanatory word or phrase attached to a literal translation (e.g., *Pseudo-Jonathan* adds the names of the provinces to names of the sons of Japheth in Gen 10:2), (2) by substitution, in which a word of phrase replaces the literal term (e.g., the border “south of Kadesh Barnea” in Num 34:4 is replaced by “south of *Reqem-Ge’ah*” (= Petra); by (3) rewriting, in which a whole new statement is made (e.g. “we will make you circlets of gold with studs of silver” [Canticles 1:11] becomes in the Targum a lengthy statement to Moses about “two tables of stone . . . gleaming like fine gold” with “the Ten Words refined more than silver”) (Alexander 1992:329).

As such, the Targumim represent a meeting of rabbinic Judaism with the common people, and so the style is similar to that of Jesus and Paul. There are several places where targumic readings help us to understand a New Testament reading. One well-known example is Mark 4:12, where Jesus quotes the Old Testament in a form close to *Targum of Isaiah* 6:9-10, “so that while seeing they might see and not perceive . .. lest they repent and it be forgiven them.” Both the *hina* (= purpose, “so that”) and the use of “forgiven” rather than “healed” (both MT and LXX) reflect the Targum, showing that Jesus’ purpose was to describe the hard-hearted leaders from the parable of the sower and in contrast to call the hearers to understanding. Another can be the echo of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Leviticus 22:28 in Luke 6:36, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Chilton 2000:906; Evans 2004:131).

2. ***Midrash.*** From the Hebrew *drš* (to seek/inquire) this is the major Jewish term for interpretation or explanation of the text. Thus it refers to the process by which the ancient teachers/rabbis sought to explain the significance of biblical texts for the first-century Jewish people. The belief was that there were meanings that went beyond the obvious and got at the true thrust of a text; that was the goal of midrash. Jewish teachers employed both *peshat* (literal) and *midrash* (meaning beneath the text) patterns. There were two aspects, halakah (*halak*, “(how) to walk,” thus legal issues) and the haggadah (*nagad*, “to explain,” thus homiletical or expository approaches). The former came from the academies and centered on rules for life, the latter came from the synagogues and centered on the ways of the people of God. There were

also two kinds of literature, expositional works that were in the form of running commentaries on a text, and the other homiletical works that developed a theme or issue (Evans 2004:132; Porton 2000:889-90).

The seven *middoth* or rules for interpretation were attributed to Hillel by the Talmud (Longenecker 1975:34-35):

1. *Qal wachomer.* What is true in a less important situation will also be true in a more important situation.
2. *Gezerah shawah.* Building a family from one text—a verbal analogy between verses means that if a phrase is found in more than one passage, the same considerations apply to them all.
3. *Binyan ab mikathub ⊂ehad.* When a phrase is found in several passages, a meaning found in one applies to them all.
4. *Binyan ab mishene kethubim.* Building a family from two texts—when a principle is established by relating two texts, it can be applied to other passages.
5. *Kelal upherat.* The general and the particular—a general rule can be extended into particular cases of it, and conversely a particular rule can be extended into the general.
6. *Kayoze bo bemaqom ⊂aher.* As found in another case—a difficulty in one text can be solved via comparison with a clear passage that has general similarities.
7. *Dabar halamed me'inyano.* Meaning is established by its context.

Douglas Moo points out that points 1, 5 and 7 have to do with logical processes, and points 2, 3, 4 and 6 with verbal associations (1983:27). These rules allowed for arbitrary, fanciful exegesis that threw together passages with little or nothing in common and were often abused, especially in homiletical passages. The seven were later expanded into the thirteen of Rabbi Akiba (A.D. 110-130) and the thirty-two of Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose ha-Galili (A.D. 130-60) and added principles like gematria (connecting words or phrases with the same total numerical value). The starting point is Scripture itself, and the goal is to contemporize the text to meet the needs of today. Moo brings out the fact that these "rules" are not so much techniques as approaches popular in the first century and demonstrate the two most characteristics rabbinic methods—"comparison and combination of texts, and an emphasis on single words ion isolation" (Moo 1983:28-29).

3. ***The pesher interpretation at Qumran.*** The root *psr* means "to loosen,

interpret" and is used in Daniel for "interpreting" dreams. The Qumran sectarians and other Essenes believed that they were the eschatological community of the last days, the elect of God who were to prepare for the messianic age. The angels walked in their midst, and they were the fulfillment of the mysteries, namely, everything the Old Testament prepared for. So their approach to interpretation took the form of "This is that," that is, this is the final meaning of the ancient text. It is not just that the ancient meaning of the text was relevant for them but that these texts were meant exclusively for them.[7] This is especially true of the Habakkuk commentary (1QpHab), with its distinctive atomistic exegesis introduced by "the interpretation of this word is"; it is always concerned with present or near future events in the community. As such, they believed that their interpretation shared the authority of the text itself.[8]

George Brooke argues that "pesher" can only be applied in cases where the author "engages in the interpretation of unfulfilled or partially fulfilled blessings, curses, and other prophecies" (Brooke 2000:779, 782; and in his 1979-1980:483-503). The hermeneutic at Qumran displays several parallels with midrashic techniques, and some have even called it "midrash pesher" (Brownlee 1951:54-76), but it is best for the two to remain separate. Joseph Fitzmyer sums up the exegetical devices utilized, many of which parallel midrashic techniques—"the actualization of the text, the atomistic interpretation of it, the use of textual variants, a play on words, a deliberate manipulation of the text to suit the new context better" (Fitzmyer 1974:54).

There has been quite a bit of debate regarding the influence of Qumran on the New Testament. Some in the 1950s and 1960s believed that John the Baptist and Jesus were Essenes, but that has been disproven. Krister Stendahl argued that the fulfillment passages in Matthew were a pesher type of exegesis,[9] and that has received more approval; but still Brooke says, "It [Matthew's fulfillment formula] is rather a description of an event that has already taken place for which a prophetic text is provided as a prooftext" (Brooke 2000:782). In other words, it is similar but not quite a pesher reading. Several scholars also believe the epistle to the Hebrews was written to a congregation of converts from the Essenes on the basis of parallels like the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ.[10] William Lane says, "Little consideration seemed to have been given to the striking linguistic and conceptual differences between the scrolls and Hebrews. The scrolls from Qumran were written in Hebrew and Aramaic

and are Semitic in conception; Hebrews is written in exceptional Greek and is Hellenistic Jewish in conception" (1991:cviii). Yet there are important differences as well; for instance, in the lack of fulfillment formulae at Qumran, in the christological function of much New Testament use, and especially the fact that "Qumran theology is still dominated by a forward look, and expectation of what is to come in the *eschaton*, whereas the Christian theology is more characterized by a backward glance, seeing the culmination of all that preceded in the advent of Christ" (Fitzmyer 1974:13). In short, the best use of the Dead Sea Scrolls seems to be in elucidating the New Testament use of the Old Testament.[11]

APPROPRIATION TECHNIQUES

Craig Evans keeps appropriation techniques under “exegetical patterns” with Targums, midrash and pesher; but it is better to separate these into two groups: hermeneutical methods for understanding the text, and the means of appropriating the text for community use.[12]

1. ***Typology.*** Typology differs from direct prophecy in that the latter texts are forward-looking and directly predict the New Testament event, while typology is indirect and analogously relates the Old Testament event to the New Testament event. The early Christians (like the Jews) saw all of salvation history (God working out his plan of salvation in human history) as a single continuous event. Therefore events in the past are linked to those in the present, so that God’s mighty deeds like the exodus or the return from exile foreshadow the experiences of God’s present community, the church.[13] This does not see a direct prophetic link but rather a correspondence in history, in which the current experience relives the past. God is immutable or consistent and acts today just as he did in the past, so typology seeks to identify the theological correspondence between those salvific actions in past and present.

   Behind typology is the idea of “promise and fulfillment.” The Old Testament event is the promise that looks forward to its fulfillment in the New Testament. Yet this gets at the heart of the debate, for *promise* envisions a forward-looking or prospective movement in which the Old Testament anticipates and foreshadows the reality of the New Testament. David Baker surveys the study of “promise” over the last century, concluding with the sevenfold definition of Jürgen Moltmann (Baker 1991:213-14; Moltmann 1967:102-6): Promise is (1) the announcement of a reality that does not yet exist yet, (2) that binds one to the future with a sense of history (3) that is not cyclical but has a trend toward the promised fulfillment. It (4) stands in contrast to the reality that is experienced now, and (5) creates tension between the uttering and the redeeming of the promise. Most of all, it (6) is directly entrusted and

dependent on the God who promises, so that its fulfillment carries newness and surprise, and (7) was not liquidated within the history of Israel. The idea of fulfillment language then, for example, the *plēroō* language of Matthew's fulfillment quotations, centers on the idea that the new climactic revelation of Jesus has "filled up" the "preparatory, incomplete revelation to and through Israel" (Moo 1986:191). This is in keeping with Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law," meaning that "Christ has become the culmination or climax of the law in the sense that it has pointed to him and been finalized in him" (Osborne 2003:265). Jesus has filled up all that the Old Testament means and brought it to completion.

The prospective aspect is especially linked to the idea of *sensus plenior* or "a deeper/fuller sense" behind the Old Testament passage seen fulfilled in the New Testament. For typology the change of meaning occurs in the New Testament as the author sees Jesus or the church reliving the Old Testament event (a retrospective thrust). For *sensus plenior* the change comes in the Old Testament, as God has a "deeper meaning" in directing the Old Testament event or wording so that it would anticipate the New Testament fulfillment. This deeper meaning was not understood by the human authors of the Old Testament but is clearly understood when seen in the light of the further revelation of the New Testament (Brown 1955:92). The concept became popular in the second half of the twentieth century, first in Roman Catholic circles and then in Protestant circles (e.g., LaSor 1978:49-60). Moo responds to the primary objection that it separates the human from the divine intent in revelation, saying that divine revelation never meant that the human authors understand everything about the inspired message, and that the deeper sense is connected to the literal sense, providing an extension or development of that sense rather than an entirely new meaning (Moo 1985:203-4). Still, I wonder if all Old Testament promises are prospective. I do not see that element, for instance, in Jeremiah 31:15 or Hosea 11:1 as fulfilled in Matthew 2:15, 18. Nor do I see a need for a "deeper sense." It seems to me that typology is sufficient to explain the use of the Old Testament in the New.

There are several examples of typology in both Testaments. The exodus is a type of both going into exile (Jer 31:15) and returning from exile (Hos 11:1), and each of these is typologically fulfilled in the infancy story of Jesus (Mt 2:15, 18). Isaiah predicts a new exodus (Is 43:16-21; 48:20-21; 52:11-12) and a new Garden of Eden (Is 11:6-9, cf.

Rev 22:1-5). The prophets depict the Messiah as the ideal David (Is 22:20- 24; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 34:23-24; Zech 3:8). In the New Testament Jesus sees the days of Noah and Lot fulfilled in the judgment to come (Lk 17:28-30) and the lament of David fulfilled in his death (Mk 15:34 par.). Paul sees Adam as a "type of the one to come" (Rom 5:14; cf. Rom 5:14-21) and the Passover lamb as a type of Christ sacrificed for sin (1 Cor 5:7). Hebrews could be designated a typology of Jesus fulfilling the entire ceremonial law (see Goppelt 1982, with extensive examples).

2. ***Allegory.*** Unlike typology, allegory is a symbolic interpretation of details in the text or story. It searches for a spiritual meaning behind the details. Qumran used allegory extensively, for instance in Cairo *Damascus* 6:22b-11, where each element of Numbers 21:18 ("the well that the princes dug, that the nobles of the people sank . . . with staffs") became a metaphor for the covenanters themselves (well = the Torah, princes = the covenanters, staffs = the seekers of Torah, the nobles = interpreters of Torah) (Moo 1983:39). Philo was famous for his allegorical readings of the Old Testament, in which he tried to show that the Hebrew Scriptures were compatible with (even superior to) Hellenistic thought. There are several allegorical segments in the Old Testament, for example, Hosea's marriage to Gomer and his two sons as symbolical of Israel's unfaithfulness to God or the Song of the Vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7 as an allegory of Israel's judgment under God. Though many scholars in the twentieth century, following Adolf Jülicher, have denied any allegorical elements in Jesus' parables, it seems clear now that Jesus used allegory frequently in his parables, as in the parables of the sower (Mk 4:1-20 par.) or of the wicked tenants (Mk 12:1-12 par.). The best known allegory is Paul's use of Sarah and Hagar for the covenants of grace and of law in Galatians 4:24-31.
3. ***Reorienting the text for new meanings.*** It was quite common for Jewish interpreters to find new meaning in texts by shifting their meaning or by modifying the text itself.[14] Both methods have implications for New Testament writers as well. The first has already been exemplified in the techniques of the Targumim, the rabbinic writings and Qumran. It is clear that Jewish interpreters often sought whole new meanings by fanciful word associations and allegorical interpretations. But did the New Testament writers employ such methods and interpret the Old Testament with little regard for its original meaning? Many have said they did, but I would join that minority that argues New Testament writers were always faithful to the original text. This does not mean there were no new

meanings portrayed but that those meanings were always aware of the original and built on it.

Let us turn to the second category, modifying the text itself. The problem with this is knowing when the text is being deliberately modified or when the author had a different recension of the text before him. Moo asks the same question of the Qumran writings, noting that in 30 percent of the cases is the Old Testament citation in the scrolls identical to the Masoretic Text, and in most other cases there are only minor differences (Moo 1983:41-45). There is evidence of as many as three recensions, and the LXX may be based on a further recension (Moo 1983:45-47). So differences in reading in the LXX as well as in the New Testament can no longer be written off as free changes but often could derive from a different recension than the Masoretic Text.

Two examples from the New Testament will show the complexity of the issue. First, in Ephesians 4:8 and Paul's use of Psalm 68:18 there has often been a *crux interpretum* for the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. The first two lines ("When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train") follows the LXX except for switching from "you" (God) to "he" (Christ), but the third line reverses the psalm's "received gifts from men" to "gave gifts to men." The number of proposed solutions are legion. Some say Paul made a mistake or deliberately changed the text to "gave gifts." For the most part, there are two options: (1) the majority feel Paul followed a rabbinic tradition similar to the Peshitta rendering and that found in the Aramaic Targum on the Psalms ("you have given gifts"), possibly seeing Christ as a new Moses and associated with Pentecost in the synagogue liturgy (so midrash pesher) (Lincoln 1990:242-44). (2) A minority view sees the background as Numbers 8 and 18, where God took the Levites out from the rebellious nation and then gave them back to God's people as his grace gift; Paul then is seeing God's gift of the Ephesian leaders (Eph 4:11) to the church as his grace gift, in continuity with God's choice of leaders throughout history (so typology) (Smith 1975:181-89; O'Brien 1999:292-93). Of the two, the latter fits the context better, especially in terms of vv. 11-16. There is then no mistake but a deliberate expanding of the biblical text to give it added theological meaning.

The second example is Revelation 1:7 and the programmatic use of Zechariah 12:10 there. The verse is strange in the context, interrupting the emphasis on the triune Godhead in Revelation 1:4-6, 8. The verse is an aggregate combination of Daniel 7:13 ("Look, he is coming with the

clouds") with Zechariah 12:10 ("and every eye will see him, / even those who pierced him, / and all peoples of the earth will mourn because of him"). Scholars are divided as to the meaning of the quote. In Zechariah 12:10 it refers to the repentance of the people of Israel, who "mourn" their sins and come back to God. Paul has expanded the reference by replacing Israel with "all the peoples of the earth." While many scholars see this as the repentance of the nations (Sweet, Caird, Kraft, Beale), others see this as mourning in the midst of judgment (Charles, Ladd, Giesen, Mounce, Aune), since the closest parallel is Revelation 18:9, where the kings of the earth mourn and weep over the destruction of Babylon the Great. The parallel in Matthew 24:30 also combines the return of Christ with the mourning of the nations as they face the final judgment. There is also the possibility of a deliberate ambiguity as this leads into the two tracks of the nations in the book, with some repenting (Rev 5:9-10; 14:6-7; 15:4; 21:24, 26) and others headed into judgment (Rev 11:18; 13:4, 7-8; 14:8; 17:3-4; 18:2- 8; 20:11-15) (Osborne 2002:69-71). Again, there is a creative use of the Old Testament passage along with a modification of the text, but not a wholesale disregarding of the original context.

A METHOD FOR UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

To understand the use of an Old Testament passage in a particular New Testament context, it is necessary to take several steps. This is especially true when it is a messianic passage since there is always a question as to whether we are dealing with direct prophecy or indirect typology. In doing so, we must consider whether passages like Psalm 22, 16, 69 and 110 are messianic in nature or not. The term often used for this today is *intertextuality*, a word not used in biblical contexts until 1989 but which quickly became a key term in the discipline and refers to the interplay of dialogue between one text used in a different context.[15] As such the two texts reverberate between the original source and the new situation. Stanley Porter argues that the term has been abused and linked with everything from echoes to source criticism and so should be dropped (1989:84-85). This is an overreaction, but it is true that we must define it carefully. Intertextuality is best used as a study of the reuse of an Old Testament passage in a New Testament context, considering exactly how the dialogue between original meaning (Old Testament context) and new meaning (New Testament context) develops.[16]

There is a great deal of debate as to the extent to which the New Testament writer remained true to the Old Testament context. Peter Enns notes three views within evangelical scholarship: (1) the New Testament writers were cognizant of and faithful to the Old Testament context; (2) they were not faithful to the context but were not "interpreting" but "applying" it; and (3) they were under apostolic authority and so did not have to remain true to the Old Testament context. He believes all three are weak and suggests a fourth, that they were not consistent with the original context but were interpreting it "in light of Christ's coming" (Enns 2005:115-16). In one respect I agree: they are seeing the Old Testament through the fact of Christ's coming, but they are also cognizant of the Old Testament context and transforming it in light of the Christ event. The key is typology. As Messiah, Jesus relives not just the literal prophecies but also the history of the Jewish people. Let us look at one of Enns's examples, Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I have called my son") in Matthew 2:15.[17] It is true that Hosea

was not thinking of Jesus but rather of the return from exile, but Matthew saw Jesus reliving the return from the exile (see pp. 333-34). My point is that Matthew is cognizant of the Hosea context and wants his readers to be as well. He is transforming that context. So in one sense Enns is correct: the Hosea context is transformed. But in another he is not: Matthew is still faithful to that context and in fact wants his reader to know it. He sees Jesus fulfilling what Hosea was describing.

1. ***Original meaning.*** A serious exegesis of the Old Testament passage in its original context is important for understanding what the New Testament writer is doing with it in the first-century context. We need to see how it was used originally as a control to how it is used in subsequent contexts. C. H. Dodd provides an important hermeneutical dictum when he says a quote or allusion often presupposes the original Old Testament context behind the allusion and not just the allusion itself (1952:126-33). For instance, Jesus' cry of dereliction on the cross in Mark 15:34 stresses the lament of Psalm 22:1 but also implicitly presupposes the victory to come, as in Psalm 22:22-31.
2. ***Jewish understanding.*** The passage must be studied in the various strands of Jewish understanding—LXX, Targums, apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Josephus, Philo, early rabbinic writings—to identify how Second Temple Judaism understood the passage. This will often provide a critical clue for how the New Testament author was using the passage.[18] A common error of Old Testament scholars in studying the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is to read all their modern exegesis into that passage. We must ascertain how Judaism understood the Old Testament passage and then see how Paul or Peter were using it.
3. ***Meaning in its New Testament context.*** There are several stages to take when determining the Old Testament meaning in its New Testament context. First, note how the author has altered the quote. Does it follow the Masoretic Text, the LXX or other Jewish sources (Targums, rabbinic readings)? Is it a free rendering or a paraphrase? Does it use extrabiblical tradition as well as the Old Testament text? Second, note the context in which it is found. How is the author using it, and what are the influences on that use (Qumran, rabbinic, etc.)? Third, what are the theological implications of the quote? Fourth, is it a quotation, an allusion or an echo? A quotation has a near verbal similarity to the Masoretic Text or LXX; an allusion uses several words or phrases from the Old Testament

passage (verbal similarity); and an echo has few verbal parallels, just a word or two or a theme. The first two are conscious allusions, the third may not be intended by the author but implicit in the larger context.

TENDENCIES IN THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament authors tend to have distinctive styles in using the Old Testament in their respective books. All are trying to anchor their teaching in canonical truth and to legitimize their exhortations by connecting them to divine revelation, yet each writer has his own distinctive style in doing so.

1. ***Matthew.*** The first Gospel contains sixty quotations and numerous allusions and echoes, making the Old Testament more central than in any other Gospel, both in terms of frequency and emphasis. Graham Stanton says it well: "The OT is woven into the warp and woof of this gospel: the evangelist uses Scripture to underline some of his most prominent and distinctive theological concerns" (1988:205).

   Of the sixty quotes, there are ten fulfillment *(plēroun)* passages (Mt 1:22-23; 2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10) along with one *anaplēroun* formula passage (Mt 13:14-15), all commentary on the part of the evangelist. In addition, several fulfillment passages lack the formula introduction (Mt 2:5; 3:3; 9:13; 11:10; 12:7; 15:8-9; 26:31, 56). The emphasis is on the sovereign control of history by God, who governs all of human history to fulfill his will. Half of the quotations occur in the introductory chapters to establish just this point. The life of Jesus fulfills or completes all the promises of God found in the Scriptures. The meaning of *plēroun* is found in the programmatic Matthew 5:17-20, "I have not come to abolish . . . but to fulfill [the Law and the Prophets]." There *plēroun* means that the meaning of the Old Testament is completed by being fulfilled in Jesus; in both his deeds and his teaching he lifted the Old Testament to a higher plane. There are two ideas—he has completed or "filled up" the meaning of the Old Testament, and he is the final interpreter of Torah.

   The problem is that few if any of the fulfillment passages were intended originally as messianic prophecies. So in what way were they fulfilled? The answer is typology (see pp. 328-29). With respect to Jesus

as reliving the experiences of Israel another concept is crucial—corporate identity. As E. Earle Ellis says, "the individual (male) person may be viewed as extending beyond himself to include those who 'belong' to him. Thus, the husband (at the family level) and the king (at the national level) both have an individual and a corporate existence encompassing, respectively, the household and the nation."[19] The king (or high priest) represents the nation before God at the time of his office, but the Messiah represents the whole history of the nation, so Jesus is corporately identified (and relives) the history of Israel, that is, the whole Old Testament. So Jesus (1) relives the exile, both going in (Mt 2:13- 14) and returning from it (Mt 2:15), (2) fulfills the Isaianic longing for both salvation for the Gentiles (in his Galilean ministry [Mt 4:14-16]) and healing (the work of the Suffering Servant in Is 53:4; 8:17) as well as the promise of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 42:1-4 (Mt 12:17-21), (3) fulfills the opposite promises of judgment on those who reject (Mt 13:14-15), and of God's mysteries spoken in parables to those who are open (Mt 13:35), (4) fulfills the Zechariah 9:9 promise of the Messiah revealed riding on a donkey (Mt 21:4-5), and (5) Matthew sees Judas fulfilling the pattern of rejection seen in Jeremiah 19 and Zechariah 11 (Mt 27:9-10). In so doing, Matthew sees all three sections of the Old Testament—the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets—fulfilled in Jesus. He has completed their expectations and fully interpreted their meaning.

The major debate concerns the nature of these quotations. The fulfillment quotations (often called "reflection quotations" because they reflect on the prophetic nature of the fulfillment) seem to be Matthew's own translation of the Hebrew mixed with the LXX (see esp. Gundry 1967); and the other quotations, taken from Mark, Q or M material, are woven into the narrative and taken from the LXX. Several hypotheses have been suggested: (1) Matthew was utilizing a testimonia collection of messianic proof texts, which is doubtful because of the distinctive nature of them and their close fit in Matthew's Gospel. (2) They are the product of a "school of Matthew" that utilized the pesher exegesis of Qumran,[20] though Qumran used an ongoing interpretation of a continuous text rather than the sporadic use as in Matthew (Gärtner 1954:1-24). More likely, they stem from the missionary preaching of the church (Gärtner 1954), though with their appropriateness in Matthew, several probably stemmed from Matthew's own study of the Old Testament background to the life of Jesus.[21] The main point is that all the quotations present Jesus and the

church/kingdom community he founded as fulfilling the prophetic expectations of the Old Testament. Stanton adds that Matthew's redaction is also highly christological and reflects his distinctive themes: The use of *hyios* in Matthew 1:23 and 2:15 emphasizes Jesus as Son of God; in Matthew 1:23 Jesus is Emmanuel—God with us—echoed in Matthew 28:20; at Matthew 2:6 he is the shepherd of Israel; in Matthew 2:13-15 Jesus relives the exodus and exile; in Matthew 2:23 he is the messianic "branch" ("Nazarine," a word play on the Hebrew *nēṣer* and thus a reference to Is 11:1) and "holy one" of God; in Matthew 8:17 and 13:35 he is the lowly servant; in Matthew 21:4-5 the two animals at the triumphal entry stress Jesus as the humble king (cf. Mt 5:5; 11:29) (Stanton 1988:216-17).

2. ***John.*** John's pattern of quotation follows that of his Gospel as a whole. In the Book of Signs (chaps. 2-12) they are introduced with some form of "it is written" (Jn 1:23; 2:17; 6:31, 45; 7:38, 42; 8:17; 10:34; 12:14), while in his passion narrative (chaps. 13-20) they are introduced by "in order that it might be fulfilled" (Jn 12:38, 39-40; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 28, 36, 37). The first half Jesus' ministry is seen as "in keeping with" Old Testament requirements and expectations, while the second half the rejection of Jesus (most of the quotations center on his enemies) is especially seen as not contrary to his messianic work but actually as "in fulfillment of scriptural prophecy" (Evans 1992:587). Evans believes that central to John is Isaiah 53 ("Who has believed our message?") and Isaiah 6:10 ("close their eyes") as culminating in John 12:37-38 ("Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah"). Jesus is the Isaianic Suffering Servant who met every scriptural requirement, yet the people rejected him in fulfillment of Scripture.[22]

   The quotations in John are inherently christological in keeping with the high christology of the book. A key to his perspective is seen in John 12:41, where after the quotation of Isaiah 6:10 (in v. 40), it says, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory." In other words, the whole Old Testament is a testimony to the glory of Christ and finds its completion in him. The Baptist fulfills the voice in the wilderness of Isaiah 40:3 (Jn 1:23); Jesus fulfills the messianic zeal of Psalm 69:9 (Jn 2:17) as well as the manna in the wilderness of Exodus 16:4 and the messianic instruction of Isaiah 54:13 (Jn 6:45). In John 7:38 he is the source of the living water of the Spirit (possibly Is 12:3), and in John 7:42 he fulfills Micah 5:2 as well as 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Psalm 89:3-4 and Isaiah 9:7 in his origin as the

Davidic Messiah. In John 8:17 his messianic ministry is grounded in the Deuteronomic demand (Deut 17:6; 19:15) for two witnesses; in John 10:34 his calling himself "Son of God" is grounded in Psalm 82:6; and in John 12:14-15 his triumphal entry is grounded in Zechariah 9:9. D. A. Carson (1988:246) notes, "If the crowds cite Scripture to associate Moses and manna, reflecting perhaps the tradition that the messiah would provide a similarly lavish supply (6:31), it is so that Jesus can be presented as the one who not only fulfils such expectations but outstrips them."

The fulfillment quotations of the passion narrative show that even his enemies oppose him in fulfillment of Scripture, and this culminates in John 19:28-30, where his death "fulfilled" Scripture. Interestingly, this is not *plēroun* as in Matthew but *teleiēthē,* the same term as in verse 30 where Jesus says, "It is finished." Herein climaxes one of John's great christological themes, that Jesus' death is also his exaltation (Hübner, 1992:1102), seen in the Johannine passion predictions ("the Son of Man must be lifted up" [Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32]). The message is that when the Son of Man is "lifted up" on the cross, he will be "lifted up" to glory.

When one adds the Old Testament allusions found throughout the Fourth Gospel, it could be said that the breath of the Old Testament permeates the entire work. The prologue begins with a new creation theme in John 1:1-5. Jesus as God brought a new "beginning" from Genesis 1:1; he is the Creator (Jn 1:3), and with a double meaning has added spiritual "life" and "light" to the physical "life" and "light" of Genesis 1:1-3.[23] In John 1:14 Jesus is the incarnate Shekinah walking planet Earth, and in John 1:14-18 there is a contrast between the new revelation in Jesus and the old revelation through Moses at Sinai. Moses could not look on the face of God and live, but Jesus "exegeted" (Greek *exēgēato*) God for all to know (Jn 1:18). Moreover, the "I am" statements as reflecting the sacred Tetragrammaton *yhwh* stem not only from Exodus 3:14 but from Isaiah 41:4 and 43:10-13 ("I, the LORD . . . I am he").

Carson believes that the dominant hermeneutical axiom in John is typology, in particular Davidic typology behind the Psalm quotations (Jn 2:17; 15:25; 19:24, 28) (1988:250-51). The psalmist's suffering in the lament of the righteous sufferer (Ps 69) prefigures the one "in whom righteous suffering would reach its apogee."[24] There are, of course, direct messianic quotations (e.g., Jn 12:37-41 in its use of Is 53:1; 6:10), but

typology is the dominant feature. Caron also notes (1988:254-55) the replacement motif (e.g., Moses in Jn 3:13-14, the manna in Jn 6:31-32, the feasts of Passover in Jn 6:35-36, Tabernacles in Jn 7:37; 8:12; Dedication in 10:22-23). This theme can also be seen in Jesus as the good shepherd (Jn 10 = Ezek 34) or the true vine (Jn 15 = Is 5).

3. ***Acts.*** Fitzmyer finds thirty-seven places with whole or significant parts of quotations. All follow the LXX for the most part, and all but two occur in the first fifteen chapters, mainly in the midst of speeches.[25] This is a significant difference from Matthew or John, for these are not so much proof texts for fulfillment as they are examples of early Christian use of the Old Testament in sermons and speeches.[26] There has been a major debate considering whether Luke follows the model of the Roman historian Thucydides in making up the speeches himself (Glasson 1965:165) or whether Luke was following Jewish patterns of historiography and sought "accuracy of content," namely, the gist of what was originally said (Longenecker 1975:80-83). The latter is more likely. The sermons of Acts are major exemplars of the way early Christians preached in terms of their use of creeds and catechetical material as well as in the use of Old Testament patterns.

   Longenecker overstates the case when he concludes that the early Christians employed Old Testament passages almost exclusively within the mission to the Jews rather than the Gentiles (Longenecker 1975:96), because certainly in the Epistles the Old Testament is quoted equally for Jewish congregations (Hebrews, James), Gentile congregations (many of the Pauline Epistles) and mixed congregations (Romans, the Johannine and Petrine Epistles). Still, Acts does demonstrate the use of the Old Testament in missionary preaching. In this there are several remarkable global references in which "all the prophets" bear witness to the reality of Christ (Acts 3:18, 24; 10:43; 17:3; 18:28; 24:14; 26:22) (Fitzmyer 1998:91), showing the early Christian understanding that Christ has fulfilled all the Scriptures (cf. Mt 5:17-20). This is in continuity with Jesus' resurrection instruction of the disciples in Luke (Lk 24:25-27, 44), again centering on the witness of "all the Scriptures" about Jesus. For Luke the Jesus story is both in continuity with and the climax to the metanarrative of all of Scripture (Fitzmyer 1998:91-2).

   The use of the Old Testament in Acts is preeminently christological, as the passages intend to show that Jesus is the one foretold in Scripture. However, other themes can be found as well. The important theme of the

Holy Spirit inaugurating the witness is seen in the Pentecost sermon of Acts 2:14-36 in which Joel 2:28-32 is used to undergird the outpouring of the Spirit "on all people" (v. 17), and even David spoke "by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:25) (Fitzmyer 1998:92). There is also a strongly soteriological element in Acts, as even the christology aims to convince the Jewish listeners/readers to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38).[27] The message in each is clear. First, the mighty acts of God in bringing his people to himself under the old covenant is rehearsed. Then the final act in which he sent his Son and the Jewish guilt in crucifying the Son of God are retold, followed by the call to salvation: "Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36; cf. Acts 3:26; 4:10-12; 13:26-41).

In the exegetical patterns observable in Acts, there are both *peshat* (e.g., the use of the Abrahamic Covenant) and *midrash* (e.g., Peter's use of Ps 16:8-11 in support of Jesus' resurrection in Acts 2:24-32) patterns. Bock gives three examples of midrashic techniques: First, Acts 13:16-41 is a *proem* homily, that is, an exhortation that bridges the Torah reading to the reading from the prophets in the synagogue service, building on an introductory text. Here Paul uses 1 Samuel 13:14 to link Deuteronomy 4:25-46 and 2 Samuel 7—16, thereby describing the history of Israel in light of God's promise to David as fulfilled in Jesus. The second is Acts 15:13-21, a *yelamedenu* ("let the [rabbi] teach") form of sermon in which a practical or halakhic problem is tackled scripturally and solved by instruction. The problem was the debate over the mission to the Gentiles, and James solved it via Amos 9:11-15. Third, the use of link words to bind the argument together is exemplified in Acts 2:16-40 ("pour out" in vv. 17, 33; "Lord" in vv. 21, 36; "Hades" in vv. 27, 31; "seated on a throne" in vv. 30, 34; "at the right hand" in vv. 33, 34); in Acts 13:34-35 (with "holy things" from Is 55:3 linked with "holy one" from Ps 16:10); and Acts 15, with "Gentiles" bringing together vv. 17, 19.[28] Finally, C. K. Barrett notes the wide variety of citation formulae (using forms of *write* or *say* in addition to *command* or *promise,* often with the name of the Old Testament author), concluding that "Luke thought of the Old Testament less as a battery of texts than as a record that told of kings and prophets, but especially of a people, of Israel" (1988:242). This is valuable in light of the fact that Luke was writing the story of a people, heir to Israel, seen through the prophetic utterances of Peter and Paul.

4. ***Paul.*** Moisés Silva, combining several surveys of the Pauline citations,

comes up with 107 total, with forty-two reflecting both LXX and the Masoretic Text, seven reflecting the Masoretic Text rather than the LXX, seventeen reflecting the LXX rather than the Masoretic Text, thirty-one free translations that follow neither, and ten that are debated.[29] From this data it is clear that Paul was familiar both with the Hebrew Bible and the LXX and could move between them with skill. It is always difficult to know for certain whether changes from LXX or the Masoretic Text reflect Paul's own decision or whether he was using a different textual tradition. There was no single text form for either the Masoretic Text or the LXX in Paul's day. Still, at times his choice of text form may have been dictated by the needs of the context, and he chose that form which best got his message across. Christopher Stanley estimates that fully 60 percent of Paul's quotes were adapted to the needs of his context. [30] So when the wording differs from both the LXX and the Masoretic Text, there are three choices: he could be (1) using a different Vorlage, (2) quoting the passage from memory, or (3) altering the text for the sake of the point he is making (see discussion of Eph 4:8 on p. 330). One interesting example of this is 1 Corinthians 2:16, where Paul concludes his discussion of wisdom from the Spirit by quoting Isaiah 40:13 LXX, "who has known the mind of the Lord" rather than the Masoretic Text's "the Spirit of the Lord" (which would have fit his larger theme of the Spirit as the source of wisdom). The reason is probably that he closes with, "But we have the mind of Christ," so he chose the reading that fit his immediate context (Stanley 1989:633-34).

Another interesting feature is that the vast majority of the quotes (101) occur in the *Hauptbriefe* (the chief four epistles—Galatians, Romans, 1-2 Corinthians), with more than half (59) in Romans alone (and almost half of those [25] in Rom 9—11). The others (apart from Philemon, with no references at all) have several allusions but few quotes. This is partly because some of those churches (e.g., Thessalonica and Philippi) were predominantly Gentile; and others (Ephesus, Colossae and the Pastorals) had many allusions and false teachers who blended Jewish and Gentile ideas together. The number of citations in Galatians (10) and Romans is due to the Jewish nature of the problem. Even though in both churches Gentiles were predominant, Paul was addressing the false teaching of the Judaizers and so employed the Old Testament vociferously.

In the citations Paul quotes Isaiah 28 times (in 25 cited texts), the Psalms 20 times (in 29 citations), Deuteronomy 15 times (in 13

citations), Genesis 15 times (in 12 citations), and the Minor Prophets 8 (in 12 citations). Five or fewer citations are taken from Exodus, Leviticus, Proverbs, 1 Kings, Job and Jeremiah (Hübner 1992:1097). Longenecker shows in detail the midrashic techniques Paul utilized from his own training. There are several examples of "pearl-stringing" midrash in which several Old Testament passages are strung together to elaborate a point and show the unity of Scripture on the theme (Rom 3:10-18; 9:12-29; 10:18-21; 11:8-10; 15:9-12; Gal 3:10- 13; 1 Cor 15:54-55; 2 Cor 6:16-18).[31]

The rabbinic *middoth* are also found. *Qal wachomer* (light to heavy) is found in Romans 5:15-21 in the first Adam-last Adam contrast, in Romans 11:12 in the contrast between the Fall and the fullness of Israel, and in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 between the "ministry of death/condemnation" and "ministry of the Spirit/righteousness" contrast. *Gezerah Shawah* (analogy) is exemplified in Romans 4:1-12, bringing together Genesis 15:6 and Psalm 32:1-2 via a contrast between God's imputation of righteousness to Abraham and failure to impute sin to "the blessed man." Then *kelal upherat* (general and particular) is found in Romans 13:8-10 in terms of love in action, with all the commandments summed up in love of neighbor (v. 9). *Kayoze bo bemaqom 'aher* (as found in another place) is used in Galatians 3:8-9, where Paul uses Genesis 12:3 to make Abraham the recipient but the nations the ultimate beneficiary of the covenant promise. Then Paul uses Genesis 22:18 (similar to Gen 12:3) to make Abraham and his "seed" the focus. Finally, *dabar halamed me'inyano* (context) is found in Romans 4:10-11 where Abraham is reckoned righteous *before* he was circumcised, and also in Galatians 3:17-18 where God confirmed his promise 430 years *before* the Mosaic law (Longenecker 1975:117-18).

Silva (1993:635-36) discusses places where Paul might exemplify Alexandrian and Qumran exegetical patterns. Some have found Alexandrian allegory in 1 Corinthians 9:9 (not muzzling the ox), 1 Corinthians 10:3 (the wilderness rock equated with Christ) and especially Galatians 4:21-31 (Sarah and Hagar, utilizing the Greek term *allēgoreō*), but Silva disputes this, since Paul neither dehistoricizes the biblical accounts nor places them within a philosophical framework like Philo does. So Silva doubts that Paul uses Alexandrian patterns. There is a difference of opinion regarding Qumran-type exegesis. Longenecker (1975:130-32) follows Ellis (1957:144) in seeing about twenty examples of pesher-type exegesis (e.g., "This is that" patterns in Gal 4:4; 5:14; 1

Cor 15:3-5; 2 Cor 6:2; raz-pesher style in Rom 16:25-27; Col 1:6-7; Eph 3:1-11). But Silva doubts that Paul exemplifies this because the events fulfilled were so completely different (for early Christianity they were inaugurated in the past by Jesus' arrival and death/resurrection; for Qumran they were entirely future though imminent), and there are no examples of sustained verse-by-verse patterns in Paul (Silva, 1993:636). The best conclusion is to say Paul uses a Qumran-style exegesis on occasion but never in a sustained *pesherim* style.

Silva (1993:634-35) shows the importance of allusions by discussing Philippians as a test case. They can be every bit as powerful as formal quotations because they are woven into the text and add a richness of meaning by the very fact of their embeddedness into the narrative. In Philippians 4:18, Paul calls their gift to him "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God," an echo of Exodus 29:18 and Ezekiel 20:41 that views Christian service as a transformation of the ceremonial system of Israel transferred to the church. Paul in this sense may see himself as God's priest ministering in the church as the temple of God and accepting the offerings of God's people. Another example is Philippians 1:19, where "what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance," an allusion to Job 13:16 LXX that brings out the relationship with God that is central to the Job context. For both Job and Paul earthly trials are an opportunity to watch God at work. These are but two of many in Philippians that demonstrate the importance of allusions and echoes for theological understanding.

D. Moody Smith summarizes Paul's use of the Old Testament under four headings: (1) Paul's prophetic and kerygmatic view of the Old Testament as precursor and promise of the Gospel, for example, Adam as the "pattern of the one to come" (Rom 5:14) and Abraham as a model of the person of faith (Gal 3; Rom 4); (2) the ecclesiastical and parenetic use of the Old Testament for instruction and edification, for example, love as the fulfillment of the law in Roman 13:8-10, Galatians 5:13-15); (3) the historical-eschatological perspective, for example, the Old Testament as key to the unfolding events in Romans 9—11, 15:8-9; Gal 4:21-22; Phil 2:10-11); (4) the apologetic use of the Old Testament to prove a point, for example, in connection with wisdom (1 Cor 1:19, 31; 2:9, 16; 3:19-20) or Christian freedom (1 Cor 10:26) or glossolalia (1 Cor 14:21) (1972:37-39).

5. ***Hebrews.*** This is probably the best-known exemplar for the use of the Old Testament in the New. In this medium-length epistle we have 35 or

36 quotations, 37 or 35 allusions, 19 or 18 summaries, and 13 or 14 names or topics.[32] Divine inspiration is emphasized. Rather than the common "it is written," Hebrews uses some form of "said," mostly from the lips of God (23 from God, 4 each from Christ and the Spirit). God once more actively speaks after the four hundred years of silence between the Testaments. The two primary sources for the quotes are the Pentateuch and the Psalms. The Pentateuch (11 quotes, 41 allusions) anchors the emphasis on redemptive history, and the Psalms (18 quotes, 2 allusions) anchor the christology of the book.[33] This is especially true in the case of Psalm 110:1, which appears at key points in the developing argument to stress the exaltation of Christ (Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

All agree that the source of the quotations and the allusions is the LXX, but there has been considerable debate as to whether the author had access to one like Codex Alexandrinus (LXX ^{A}) or Codex Vaticanus (LXX ^{B}). Most today agree that there is no simple solution and that the author may have had a composite text before him.[34]

The main debate, however, regards the hermeneutic employed by the author. It has been very popular to link it with Alexandria and a Philo-type exegesis, often with Apollos as the author.[35] Others have seen in it the pesher style of Qumran.[36] However, the general consensus today is that it utilizes a Jewish typology, in particular, apocalyptic Judaism.[37] For instance, the differences between 1Q Melchizedek of Qumran and Hebrews 7 far outweigh the similarities. So Hebrews belongs within mainstream Judaism and primitive Christianity.

Guthrie (1997:842-45) and Lane (1991:cxix-cxxiv) do an excellent job of developing the forms and principles utilized in Hebrews. In terms of form, there are several midrashic types of exegesis, as when the author uses Psalm 39:7-9 LXX in Hebrews 10:5-7, explaining that the *tote* ("then") of the psalm means God has set aside the old ways to establish his new order. The same is true of Melchizedek and Genesis 14:17-20 in Hebrews 7:1-10, in which rabbinic exegesis rather than Philonic controls the use of "without genealogy." In the warning of Hebrews 10:19-39, the author uses Habakkuk 2:3-4 (v. 38) to reinforce the call to perseverance, and in Hebrews 8:13 he draws out the implications of the quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34 (in Heb 8:8-12). There are also chain quotations (Heb 1:5-13) and example lists (e.g., the heroes of faith in Heb 11).

Hermeneutical principles in Hebrews must begin with typology. In one sense this permeates the whole book. Typology here is not Philonic but

fits mainstream Jewish patterns. A major example is the use of Psalm 95:7-11 in Hebrews 3:1—4:13. There the wilderness generation of Numbers 18 is presented as a type of the house church(es) in Rome that are addressed in the letter. Peter Enns says that for the writer Jesus is the new Moses and the church the new Israel, with deliverance predicated on faithfulness to God (1989:352-63). Other examples are the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries of Hebrews 8:1-5 and the earthly and perfect high priests of Hebrews 8—10. The rabbinic *middoth* are also exemplified. *Qal wachomer* (lesser to greater) is found in Hebrews 2:2-4 (Mosaic law to the gospel), Hebrews 9:13-14 (blood of goats and bulls to the blood of Christ), Hebrews 10:28-29 (rejected the Mosaic law to trampled the Son of God), Hebrews 12:25 (the one who warns on earth to the one who warns from heaven). *Gezerah shawah* (analogy between two passages) is found in Hebrews 4:1-11 (Ps 95:7-11 and Gen 2:2) and Hebrews 5:5-6 (Ps 2:7 and 110:4).

In conclusion, we might note the "two complementary factors" mentioned by Paul Ellingworth (1993:39-41): first, the author does not try to go behind the Old Testament text to the event but builds on the interpreted texts (e.g., the Hymn of Moses or Psalms) and adds his own often original contribution so as to strengthen the faith of the readers. Second, the interpretive texts do not replace the historical accounts, for the author has both in mind and often takes the freedom to highlight features in cited passages that fit the main argument. The author does not ignore original context and use his quotes as proof texts but rather proceeds from the premise that "Christ was active in OT history from the beginning," so that texts were indeed speaking of him in a final, typological sense.

6. ***Revelation.*** This book has no formal quotations (though Zech 12:10 in Rev 1:7 and Ps 2:9 in Rev 2:27 come close) and yet more allusions by far than any other New Testament book.[38] There are no introductory formulae, and the partial quotations and allusions are woven into the tapestry of the narrative in what is called a "compositional use" of the Old Testament (used in Paulien 2001:9-10). The result is rich theological expression but some uncertainty as to exactly what the message is and how it proceeds. There is also some debate regarding which Old Testament book is most influential. Greg Beale (1998) believes Revelation is a midrash on Daniel 2, 7. But the statistics do not bear out the centrality of Daniel. H. B. Swete has 46 references to Isaiah, 31 to Daniel, 29 to Ezekiel, 27 to Psalms and then, in descending order of

frequency, references to Genesis, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Joel and Zechariah (1906:cliii n. 1). S. Moyise has 122 from Isaiah, 97 from the Psalms, 83 from Ezekiel, 82 from the Pentateuch, 74 from Daniel, 73 from the Minor Prophets and 48 from Jeremiah (1994:16). It is clear that no book dominates Revelation, and John considers the Old Testament as a whole his source. There has been an explosion of interest on this topic, with major studies of the various Old Testament books behind Revelation.[39]

One of the major debates regards John's faithfulness to the original meaning and context of the Old Testament passages he uses in his work. Austin Farrer (1963) has become well-known for his groundbreaking book arguing that John breathes new life into the Old Testament images he invokes. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza speaks of the anthological style of the book as John moves from one allusion to another without mentioning any original context, concluding that he "uses its [the Old Testament] words, images, phrases as a language arsenal in order to make his own theological statement or express his own theological vision" (1985:135). Beale notes four reasons why many believe John ignores the original context: the informal nature of the citations, John's prophetic spirit (centers on his own authority rather than that of the Old Testament), his Hellenistic, illiterate readers who would never have been able to recover original meanings, and the lack of evidence that John wants to be faithful to the original context (1999:81-86).

However, we must ask the extent to which this is true. Does John really ignore context and meaning? I believe that John transforms meaning but always in keeping with the original context. J. Fekkes says it is wrong to "find prophetic activity and authority incompatible with exegetical activity" (1994:286-90). His point is that anthological style does not rule out faithfulness to original context. In fact, it seems clear that John expects his readers to catch the nuances supplied by the original context, for, as Beale says, they always fit. Beale uses John 4:2-9 as an example of John's prophetic spirit, yet the Old Testament allusions are all from descriptions of theophanies that introduce judgments of Israel (e.g., Is 6:1; Ezek 1:5, 13, 22, 28; Zech 4:2, 6).[40] The very consistency seems to show John was aware of the context and wanted the readers to be aware of it as well. Certainly many of them were illiterate and unaware of the parallels, but John could expect leaders in the communities to explain such to the others. "The most fundamental thing is that John has

built a bridge between two contexts, thereby setting in motion an interaction that continues to reverberate throughout the whole book," namely, a "dialectical imitation, in which the symbolic world of the Old Testament is dynamically used and a broad interplay occurs between two worlds" (Moyise 1993:295).

Beale finds four presuppositions behind John's use of the Old Testament: Christ corporately represents the new Israel; history is unified under God's plan, so ancient events typologically correspond to later events; Christ's first advent has inaugurated the age of end-time fulfillment; and the later parts of canonical history interpret the early parts (1998:45). Therefore, John follows the earlier context and finds it essential for his message. The recent debate between Moyise and Beale will demonstrate the complexity of this. Moyise states that John involves the readers in the process, asking them to create new understandings as they read, so the meaning is open-ended for them.[41] Beale responds that this depends on one's epistemological approach, and if one accepts the critical realism of E. D. Hirsch, Kevin Vanhoozer or N. T. Wright, the author must be allowed to speak and generate the meaning (1999:152-80). One must separate meaning from significance. Paulien seeks a middle ground, arguing that New Testament writers do respect the context of Old Testament passages, but the reader is still involved in the meaning:

> Far too often authoritative appropriations of Scripture . . . are based not on careful exegesis but on presupposition-laden "reader responses," treated as accurate reflections of the text's intent. The ground for such readings has often been the drive for power and control more than faithfulness to the authoritative text. (2001:21, cf. pp. 18-22)

The best position is to say John uses the Old Testament with faithfulness to the original context but at the same time with freedom to transform it so as to address the new context of his churches.[42] Richard Bauckham says it well: "Allusions are meant to recall the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusions to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy" (1993:xi).

In conclusion, let us note how the Old Testament is used in

Revelation:[43]

1. *Literary prototypes*. Often Old Testament passages become models for major sections. For example, Daniel 2, 7 for Revelation 1, 4—5, 13, 17; Ezekiel 37—48 for Revelation 20—22; or Ezekiel 2:8—3:3 for Revelation 10:8-11; the Exodus plagues for the trumpet and bowl judgments.
2. *Thematic analogues*. Themes are frequently established based on clusters of traditional material, such as the "holy war" theme (see also Bauckham 1993:210-37), the "ancient serpent" of Revelation 12:9, 20:2, or divine titles applied to Christ.
3. *Typology*. Old Testament figures such as Leviathan (= the dragon) or the little horn of Daniel (= the beast from the sea) are typologically related, as are places such as the tabernacle/temple (= the heavenly temple) or things like the horsemen of Zechariah 1:7-11, 6:1-8 (= the horsemen of Rev 6:1-8).
4. *Universalization*. Often what applied to Israel is taken and applied to the world (Zech 12:10, Israel mourning, in Rev 1:7) or the church (Ex 19:6, "kingdom of priests," in Rev 1:6; 5:10).
5. *Indirect fulfillment*. In this Old Testament passages are used informally to strengthen the imagery. For example, Moses and Elijah behind the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-13 (on the basis of the miracles performed) or the inaugurated use of Daniel 7:13 behind the "one like the Son of Man" in Revelation 1:12-13 (thereby applying the universal dominion of that passage to Jesus).
6. *Inverted uses*. This occurs when the meaning of the Old Testament passage is deliberately reversed, as in Revelation 3:9, promising that the Jewish persecutors will bow down before the believers (the opposite of expectations in Is 45:14; 49:23; 60:14) or in Revelation 12:7-8, the overthrow of the dragon by Michael (the opposite of Dan 7:21 where the little horn overpowers the saints).

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to overstate the importance of understanding the use of the Old Testament for New Testament research. Every strata of the early church—every tradition, every author in the New Testament—was immersed in the Old Testament and its theology is based on it. Yet at the same time each aspect of New Testament traditions, as seen in the second half of this chapter, uses the Old Testament in slightly different ways. But the one thing they all have in common is the approach they inherit, the Jewish appropriation of Old Testament stories and passages within the strata of Second Temple Judaism. Midrashic exegesis, typology and pesher patterns are utilized by the New Testament writers and permeate the pages of the New Testament. So when we study quotes or allusions, we must look at all levels, the Old Testament context from which they come, the Jewish theology and techniques in their own appropriation of the particular text or story, and the explicit use of that passage in the New Testament context. The writers both expected the reader to understand the original context and to see what aspect of it is utilized in the new context. There is both faithfulness to the original and a transformation of it in its new context. Both aspects must be understood for a true understanding of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament.

PART 3

APPLIED HERMENEUTICS

15

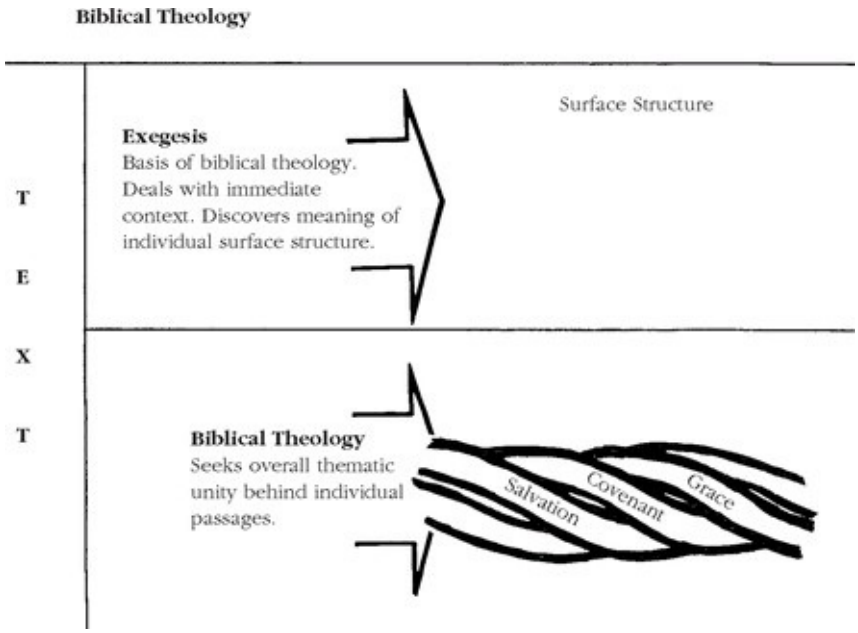
Biblical Theology

Previous chapters centered on methodology for determining the original intended meaning of a text, a task that I identified in the introduction as the "third person" approach, treating the text as an object to be studied in order to discover the author's message. In this chapter we begin the switch from the text (meaning) to the current context (significance). As noted in figure 15.1, biblical theology constitutes the first step away from the exegesis of individual passages and toward the delineation of their significance for the church today. At this level we collect and arrange the themes that unite the passages and can be traced through a book or author as a whole. This is done in three steps: first, we study the theological themes in terms of individual books, then we explore the theology of an author, and finally we trace the progress of revelation that unites a Testament and even the Bible as a whole (that is, the historical development of these themes throughout the biblical period). In this way biblical theology collates the results of exegesis and provides the data for the systematic theologian to contextualize in developing theological dogma for the church today.

The discipline was late developing (see Reventlow 1992; Scobie 2000; Bartholomew 2005), for until the late eighteenth century it was considered systematic theology. When Marcion tried to unify the New Testament by removing all the Jewish elements, Tertullian and then Irenaeus recognized the diversity of the four Gospels as equally inspired. For the next one thousand years the Bible was viewed as inspired, but theology was dominated by the dogmatic method, proof-texting verses to support preformed dogmatic conclusions. Luther and then especially Calvin broke free by trying to tie doctrine to Scripture more comprehensively. But it was not until J. P. Gabler in 1787 that biblical theology became a separate discipline. As a result of Pietism, which rejected scholasticism for a "biblical theology" and of the rise of the historical-critical method that emphasized the historical nature of biblical truth, Gabler, in his inaugural address on receiving the chair at the University of Altdorf, separated biblical and dogmatic theologies, viewing the former as the time-conditioned writings of Scripture and the latter as the timeless truths of dogma (see the

excellent discussion in Esler 2005:12-20). For the next couple of centuries the rationalistic side dominated (with a few exceptions like J. C. K. von Hoffmann and E. W.

Figure 15.1. The task of biblical theology



Hengstenberg, who defended the unity of Scripture), for instance, F. C. Baur's dialectical approach and William Wrede's history of religions approach. The biblical theology movement was about to die the death of historical relativity, and the years 1880-1920 have been labeled "wilderness wanderings" (Trible 1991:54). Still, Adolf Schlatter, the conservative counterpart to Wrede, in successive years produced a biblical theology and a work on Christian drama, thus fulfilling the challenge of Gabler (Esler 2005:25-26).

With the onset of dialectical theology in the 1920s came new life, and Eichrodt in the Old Testament (central theme of the covenant) and Bultmann in the New Testament (central theme of authentic existence) sought a historical delineation of biblical theology. After the second world war the "biblical theology movement" began, mainly in America, but it lasted only from 1945 to about 1961 due to critiques from James Barr, Langdon Gilkey and others (see Childs 1970). They argued that a concept of revelation within history is untenable in the modern world and that its tendency to read theological meaning into biblical words is a semantic error. However, Francis Watson demonstrates

that words in sentences can carry theological meaning when interpreted with care (1997:23-26). Still, Heikki Räisänen (1990) gives four reasons why such an enterprise is invalid: (1) history and theology are incompatible as fields of study; (2) the nature of biblical material confines us to writing a history of religion; (3) confining one's study to the canonical documents is invalid because that is a later theological decision; and (4) there is so much contradiction between the documents that a consensus is impossible (see Marshall 2004:17-18). (A response to these issues will be provided on pp. 357- 65). It must be noted that the number of works on this topic has continued virtually unabated, and Barr's critique was successful only within the time and community in which he wrote, when radical theology was in its heyday. The times have changed, and a greater openness to the reality of God in history has changed the landscape (see Osborne 2003). Räisänen has not convinced the world of scholarship on the issue either.[1] The problem has always been the balance between diversity and unity in Scripture. There are three major differences in the current scene: (1) the emphasis on unity in the 1950s through the 1970s, producing attempts to find a central unifying theme, was replaced by the emphasis in the last couple decades on diversity, leading most to see a cluster of themes at the top. (2) Growing interest in literary approaches has led to a narrative approach to biblical theology, exemplified in the recent *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2000). (3) There is a postmodern turn in which the rhetorical and literary dimensions come to the fore with a rejection of the place of history in the task. (Dan Via [2002:98-105] names Walter Brueggemann and A. K. M. Adam under this rubric; see his negative assessment of the value of postmodernism for biblical theology on pp. 113-25.)[2] Still, the tension continues between the church with its desire for a theological unity and consensus and the academy with its desire for a purely historical analysis of early Christian religion.

Several scholars have described biblical theology as in "crisis." (See Childs 1970; Reventlow 1986 for good introductions to this topic.) The current emphasis on diversity rather than unity (see pp. 357-58) has resulted in skepticism about the very possibility of discovering any "unified" theology. Moreover, the many works claiming to have discovered the "central" theme of the Old or New Testament have not only failed to establish a consensus; rarely do any two works even agree at all! Yet the task is not hopeless, and several strands have begun to come together at the methodological level as a way out of the impasse. This hermeneutical solution will be the subject of this chapter.

We may define biblical theology as "that branch of theological inquiry concerned with tracing themes through the diverse sections of the Bible (such as

the wisdom writings or the epistles of Paul) and then with seeking the unifying themes that draw the Bible together."[3] I. Howard Marshall (2004:23) says the aim is "to explore the New Testament writer's developing understanding of God and the world, more particularly the world of people and their relationship to one another." In a broader sense Stephen Motyer (1997:158) defines it as "that creative theological discipline whereby the church seeks to hear the integrated voice of the whole Bible addressing us today." This has the advantage of bridging from the meaning of the theology to its significance for the church today, and both are the task of biblical theology.

Charles Scobie considers it a "bridge discipline" that brings together the historical meaning of the biblical text and its use in the faith and life of the church (2003:46- 47). There are two types of inquiry: the search for unifying or central theme(s) behind the Testaments or Bible (the task of the scholar) and the attempt to trace a particular theme (such as the Holy Spirit or perseverance) through the various stages of the biblical period (the task of every Bible student). Therefore, while biblical theology provides a bridge to systematic theology and the contextualization of Scripture, it remains primarily within the sphere of exegetical research because its major goal is to discover the views of the biblical period. Still, it bridges to systematic theology because it too is meant for the confessional needs of the church. In fact, Motyer says its central concern is not just what lay behind the text (historical meaning) but "the contemporary theological agenda" (2000:160; cf. also Scobie 2003:8). This is an overstatement, however, because its task is to describe the theological meaning behind the text so as to provide a foundation for the contemporary needs of the church. It must move in both directions, and in the latter sense it provides the content that both informs and guides systematic theology.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

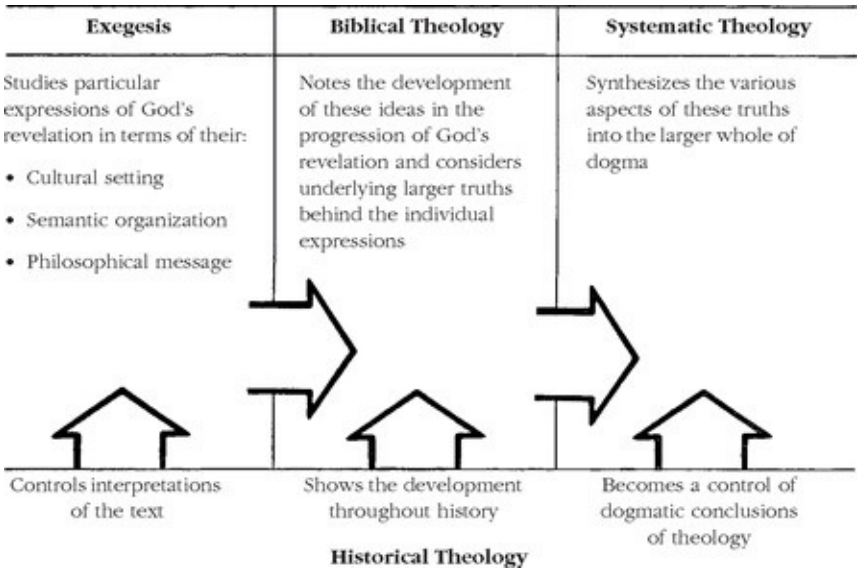
Figure 15.2 displays the relationships among the various theological disciplines. In the next few pages we will look at biblical theology in relation to each of the other disciplines.

1. ***Biblical theology and exegesis.*** Richard Gaffin asserts that "biblical theology is regulative of exegesis" because "the historical framework of the revelation process itself" rather than "literary relationships" determines the message of Scripture.[4] A continual tension exists within the biblical theology movement between diversity and unity, between historical-critical concerns and historical-grammatical exegesis.

   Critical scholarship in this sense is often more "literalistic" than are conservative scholars in that it often assumes that any so-called contradiction or difference between biblical writers removes the basis for a deeper theological unity between them. This is unnecessary, for writers use different terms or phrases for similar biblical concepts and stress one side or another of a larger theological reality. For instance, divine sovereignty and human free will are not contradictory aspects of the process of salvation but can be harmonized at a deeper level (though one cannot harmonize conditional security with unconditional security—either people can lose their salvation or not). The same is true of faith (Paul) and works (James). While works cannot save us (Eph 2:8-9), they are the necessary result of a true faith (Eph 2:10 = Jas 2:14-16).

   Yet this is only part of the picture. There is a two-way relationship between biblical theology and exegesis. The former provides the categories and overall scriptural unity behind one's interpretation of individual passages, while exegesis provides the data collated into a biblical theology. In other words, the two are interdependent. The exegete studies the author's meaning on the basis of literary considerations (grammar and thought development) and historical background (socioeconomic), then the biblical theologian works with the results and compiles patterns of unity behind the individual statements.

Figure 15.2. The relationships among the disciplines



In sum, the hermeneutical spiral is now extended to include theology in a dialogue between five compartments of the hermeneutical process: exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology and practical theology.[5] Within this scheme exegesis, biblical theology and systematic theology stand together in an ongoing trialogue.

2. ***Biblical theology and historical theology.*** Michael Horton says that the goal of historical theology is "to determine what the church has in fact said in its dogmatic formulations through their organic development," that is, "the development of church dogmas in relation to their environment" (2005:293). All scholars are part of a confessional community, and that community's tradition plays virtually a normative role over the individual scholar's interpretive processes and procedures. The history of dogma traces the development of these community traditions as well as of the doctrines that they hold. As such historical theology plays a critical part in the hermeneutical enterprise, though it is conspicuously absent in most commentaries or works of theology. Yet by emphasizing the background behind exegetical or theological decisions, the history of dogma is immeasurably valuable to the interpretive discipline. The importance of church history for hermeneutics is

threefold: we can (1) see how passages have been interpreted throughout the history of the church, (2) see how a doctrine has developed through the periods of the church, and (3) trace the origins and belief structure behind our own confessional tradition.

Biblical theology, concerned as it is with the thought patterns of the biblical period itself, seems removed from the debates and interpretations of later times. Yet this is idealistic, for our preunderstanding has been developed within these later debates, and this can obscure our attempt to determine a truly "biblical" theology. Historical theology provides an important check on an overly exuberant tendency to read later ideas into the biblical period (see the discussion of the "politics of theological decision making" in chap. 16). The interpreter must at all times be aware of the fallacy of reading subsequent theological issues into the text. This has occurred often, for instance, in studies of the Eucharist or baptism. A good knowledge of the developing practices between the first and second centuries will make us wary of reading New Testament passages in the light of later practices, like the use of fish in the second-century Eucharistic celebration or complex baptismal liturgies of the later period. Richard Muller notes five values in the study of the history of doctrine: (1) We cannot understand our present belief system without tracing its past roots, highlighting good models to emulate and poor models to avoid. (2) It provides a foundation for understanding our current formulations of doctrine. (3) It gives lessons in the problems of applying New Testament principles to radically different situations in the life of the church. (4) It provides important examples of the importance of history to current issues. (5) It helps us to understand and develop the self-understanding of our Christian community by enabling us to identify our place in the developing history of the church (1991:104-8).

Historical theology technically belongs between biblical and systematic theology. It studies the way later paradigm communities understood the biblical doctrines and enables us better to understand current theological debates by placing them in bold relief within the history of dogma. The process of revelation is seen in terms of inspiration (the data provided in the Bible) and illumination (the interpretation of that data throughout the history of the church).[6] In this way the theologian gains a critical hermeneutical tool for determining the validity and shape of dogma for the modern age.

At the same time historical theology provides a way out of the tension between biblical and systematic theology, namely, a recognition of the

proper place of tradition as preunderstanding in the interpretive task. Many have noted the positive value of community understanding (tradition) in providing categories for understanding (so Gadamer). Without traditional dogmas we would fail to catch the implications of biblical passages. Yet at the same time these preformed belief systems can play a negative role when they force biblical statements into preconceived dogmatic categories. The answer is a proper "hermeneutical circle" or spiral within which the text is reconstructed on the basis of our theological system, yet challenges our preunderstanding and leads to a reformation of our tradition-derived categories. The history of tradition greatly aids in this task by placing our theological prejudices in historical perspective and thereby making them more open to influence (and correction if necessary) from the text itself.[7]

One of the major breakthroughs in hermeneutics is the place of "community exegesis" with its twofold thrust: dialogue with the past community of faith via the history of dogma, and dialogue with the present community via both recent theological works and debate between communities. The past aspect is our concern here. Church history helps us to avoid the facile assumption that the current community understanding is inviolate and enables us to forge an openness to the original world of the text, even if it conflicts with the community desires. Historical theology accomplishes this by enabling theologians to view the larger picture (the historical development of dogma) within which both the understanding of the text and the community's position might be placed.[8]

3. ***Biblical theology and systematic theology.*** Otto Piper mentions four limitations of biblical theology: the variety of ways in which the salvific events of the Bible were interpreted within Scripture; the diversity within the biblical kerygma, both in terms of form and function; the historical nature of biblical language, which forms a barrier between biblical theology and modern man; and the subjectivity of the exegetes, which causes them to shift the original meaning in subtle directions (1957:106-11).

   I argue in this chapter that the dilemma can be solved via an integration between biblical and systematic theology, thereby bridging the gap between divine revelation and human understanding. These two disciplines both supplement and complement each other.[9]

   The core of the issue is this: does the diversity within Scripture remove

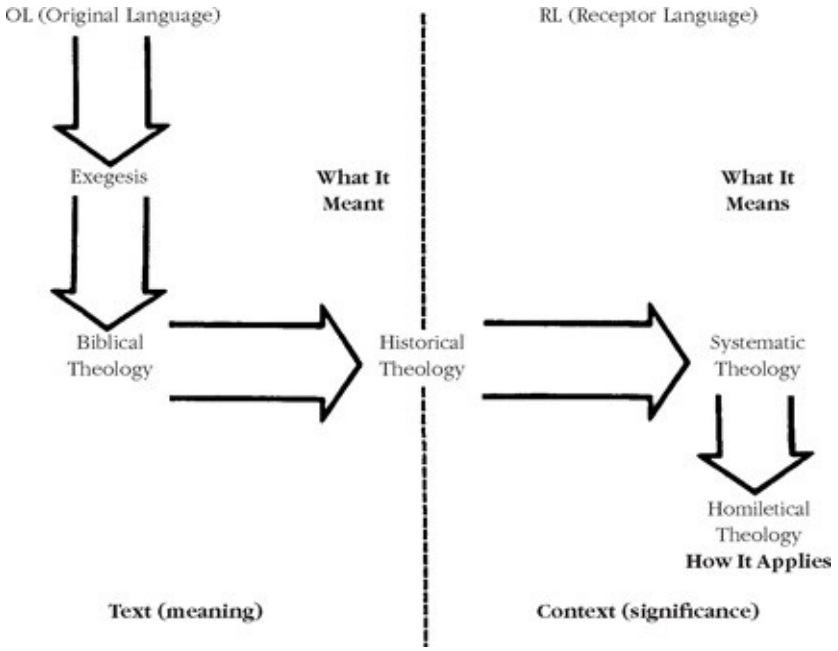
the possibility of discovering a biblical or systematic theology? The following discussion will attempt to demonstrate the underlying unity behind the diversity within the biblical traditions/books. In fact, biblical and systematic theology are a critical component in the solution to the dilemma of modern hermeneutics. An overemphasis on diversity has caused the liberal skepticism toward normative truth in biblical statements. The recovery of unity allows us to reaffirm the absolute nature of scriptural truth claims and to renew the search for intended meaning.

Yet what is the exact relationship between biblical and systematic theology? In a very real sense they are inseparable and interdependent.[10] All five aspects of the theologico-hermeneutical enterprise (exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology and practical theology) coexist in a conceptual unity. In one sense they flow in a straight line in the order presented here, as each forms the foundation for and flows into the next. In another sense the latter three provide the mental framework for exegetical and theological study (see fig. 15.3). The theological preunderstanding established by one's confessional tradition is a necessary component for exegetical decisions. Still, both biblical and systematic theology collate the revelation of God in his Word (see Sailhammer 1995:12-16), so they are two parts of the larger task of un understanding and applying the Word.

In terms of method, however, each discipline also has a certain functional autonomy. This is why I discuss them in separate chapters. Biblical theology studies the themes behind the individual books and traditions within the Bible, seeking covering laws that integrate them into a holistic pattern. Systematic theology then contextualizes these into a logical and conceptual whole that reconstructs dogma for the modern period. I. Howard Marshall (2004:43-44) points out that while biblical theology is descriptive and systematic theology prescriptive, the former is determining the theological teaching of Scripture and so also plays a prescriptive or normative role. The scholar descriptively traces the thought of the biblical books, but that in itself provides the basis of systematic thought. As Roger Nicole says, "Biblical theology is a foundation for systematic theology in that it provides the rich fruit of exegetical study conducted with a proper relation to the original context and the development of divine revelation" (1978:185; see pp. 185-93). I would add that it also begins the process of collation into dogma by delineating the theological themes of the biblical books; these provide the

metamodels for systematic theology. Yet many disagree at this point. Some (such as Donald Guthrie in his *New Testament Theology*) believe that the organizing principles are derived ultimately from dogmatics. Others (such as George Ladd in his *Theology of the New Testament*) take a descriptive approach, allowing the organizing principles to be derived from the text itself rather than from an external source like systematic theology. As Wayne Ward says, "The *structure*, or principle of *organization*, for a biblical theology should be determined by the literary units within the Old and New Testaments" (1977:383).

Figure 15.3. From text to context



Let us consider Ladd and Guthrie as examples. One of Ladd's basic problems is a lack of synthesis (his failure to seek unifying themes that link the New Testament traditions) while Guthrie fails to allow the biblical documents themselves to determine the structure of his theology. Yet Guthrie's is the more serious error from the standpoint of biblical theology, for his is more of a systematic theology in the guise of a biblical theology.[11] Guthrie needs to allow the biblical authors themselves to dictate the theological categories and to determine the larger unity between themselves. The best approach would be to amalgamate the methods of Ladd and Guthrie, that is, to note the diverse

expressions and themes of the various New Testament strata and then to compile these in order to forge a united core of theology within the first-century church. Ladd's analytical mode and Guthrie's synthetic mode can inform and correct each other.

In sum, biblical theology is descriptive, tracing the individual emphases of the sacred writers and then collating them into archetypal themes that unify the Testaments; dogmatic theology collects the material generated by biblical theology and restates or reshapes it into a modern logical pattern, integrating these aspects into a confessional statement for the church today.[12] For instance, biblical theology begins with the realized eschatology of John (salvation/eternal life as a present possession of the believer) and the final eschatology of Hebrews or 1 Peter (salvation as a future attainment). Noting that these aspects are complementary and part of a larger truth (inaugurated eschatology, which recognizes that salvation begins in the present and is consummated in the future) the biblical theologian finds both security and responsibility in the Christian life. Systematic theology takes this result and places it within a more comprehensive doctrine integrating soteriology and eschatology.

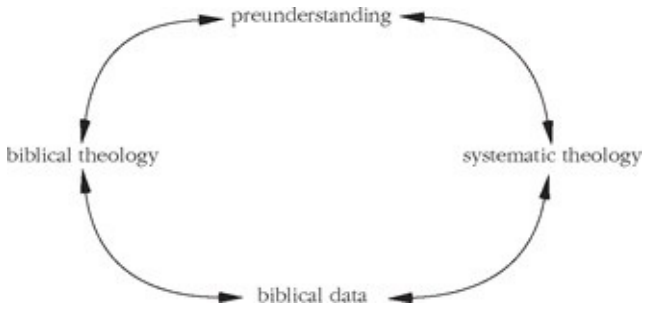
Finally, systematic theology is the intermediate step of the bridge between "what it meant" (the task of exegesis and biblical theology), "what it means" (the task of systematic theology) and "how it applies" (the task of homiletical theology)—see figure 15.3. Of course, this is not a totally satisfactory arrangement: biblical theologians object to being "dropped in some middle point between the text of the New Testament and modern reconstruction of the New Testament message" (Barrett 1981:5), and systematic theologians object to the denigration of their discipline into a contextual and philosophical study. In actuality any attempt to separate the tasks too greatly is artificial, for one cannot be done without the other: they are interdependent. Biblical theology must watch over the theologian to "check . . . when his enthusiasm runs away with him" (Barrett 1981:7). In similar fashion the dogmatic preunderstanding of the biblical theologian interacts in a type of "hermeneutical circle" as each discipline informs and checks the other (see fig. 15.4).

4. ***Biblical theology and homiletical theology.*** P. J. H. Adams says "biblical theology demands a preacher" for the purpose of the discipline is to delineate what "God has spoken" and condescended to address humanity (2000:104-5). God then has caused these revealed truths to be written or "inscripturated" in holy texts, and in those texts God has called for his

people to proclaim these theological truths to the church and the world. All scholars recognize that biblical theology dare not merely describe the past thinking of the canonical authors but must demonstrate the relevance of those ideas for the modern context. If biblical theology has a prescriptive component, then it must be proclaimed. James Dunn stresses the "ecclesiastical level" of biblical theology, namely, the demarcation of the present implications of the canon for the church today (1982:26-27, 40-43). As Georg Strecker says:

> That the New Testament has something to say to our present is not the least important dimension of its claim and demand. In listening to what is said in Scripture, the church understands itself as a "ecclesia semper reformanda," assures itself of its origin, and lets itself be critically asked whether in the concrete form in which it presently appears it is in line with the foundational claim and demand. (2000:3)

Figure 15.4. The interdependence of theological disciplines



Dunn argues that only this can carry influence for the modern church, since in fact every branch of the church builds more on its own ecclesiastical tradition than on the canon itself. While this is correct in a pragmatic sense, I would not wish to canonize diversity to this extent. One of the major purposes of this book is to provide methodological controls for avoiding just this error, so that interpreters can indeed allow the text to speak to their diverse theologies and thereby allow divergent traditions to interact and move together.[13] No person is only a biblical theologian or only a preacher. Everyone who reads a biblical text and seeks to discern its meaning (including what it *meant* and what it *means*)

must of necessity blend the disciplines.

At the same time homiletics is further removed from biblical theology. The biblical data has been translated and interpreted by exegesis, collated by biblical theology, forward transformed into dogmatic theses by systematic theology, developed into the thought patterns of various church situations and traditions by historical theology, and now is applied to the current situation by homiletical theology. There is no single hermeneutical circle but rather a spiral of interlocking spheres of dialogue. The purpose is to allow what the text "meant" to address the church anew. As Adams states (2000:106-7), the preacher will always practice good or bad biblical theology, for God in his word calls for kerygma and didache, and in every sermon the text and its theology should guide the content. In fact, biblical theology will help the application of the text to stay on target by bridging from ancient text to contemporary significance (see also Kysar 1991:143-56).

SPECIFIC PROBLEM AREAS

1. ***Unity and diversity.*** Here we are at the heart of the debate over the historical-critical method. Critical scholars doubt whether we can amalgamate individual scriptural statements into covering models of doctrine in light of the diverse streams of tradition in the biblical period.[14] Rolf Knierim notes "the plurality of theologies" in the Old Testament and says, "the coexistence of these theologies in the Old Testament demands the interpretation of their relationship or correspondence, a task that is more than and different from the interpretation of each of them, in its own right, which is done in historical exegesis" (1995:1-2). Petr Pokorny. calls this an almost insurmountable problem for establishing continuity between biblical traditions. Since biblical material is circumstantial and linked to an irreversible historical development, Pokorny. maintains, it becomes virtually impossible to derive a united theology (1981:1-3). Yet at the same time Craig Bartholomew says (2005:88), "However, the intuition that motivates comprehensive biblical theology stems from the gospel itself, so that discernment of the inner unity of the Bible itself must remain the goal and crown of biblical theology."

   Certainly there is indeed tremendous diversity between the biblical books. The differing genres and purposes have originated from a plethora of situations and problems faced by Israel and the early church. Most of the New Testament books were written to defend apostolic Christianity against various aberrations, and there is a great variety of expressions and perspectives between the writers. David Kelsey concludes that "there is no one, normative concept 'Scripture.' Instead, there seems to be a family of related but importantly different concepts of 'scripture' " (1975:14-15). Yet this skepticism is unwarranted. Diversity by no means connotes disunity, and a deeper level of unity can be discovered. Rudolf Schnackenburg states, "Can we, then, really talk about a New Testament theology? We can and we must, precisely because the New Testament is

a unity . . . at one in the confession of one Lord, one faith, one God and Father (Eph. 4, 5, 6)" (1963:22; see also Marshall 1976-1977:5- 14; Moule 1981:234). Marshall notes three possible reactions to seeming contradictions: consider them irresolvable, see if they can be harmonized, or see if a deeper unity can be adduced between them (2004:30-31). The latter two are the way most approach such issues. The individual diverse theologies must be placed side by side with care to allow each to speak for itself, and then the larger unity should be traced.

Guthrie in his *New Testament Theology* does an excellent job of demonstrating the unity behind the diverse New Testament expressions, as do Gerhard von Rad, Walther Eichrodt and others in the Old Testament. The basic problem is linguistic, and therefore the difficulties will be solved at the semantic level, specifically via the semantic field behind theological concepts. Are we to see conflict between the Deuteronomic, Davidic and prophetic concepts of covenant or between the Matthean and Pauline concepts of law and grace? Here we must determine exactly how the terms (such as *fulfill* in Mt 5:17 and the language of Rom 4:13-15 or Gal 3:19—4:6) are used in the surface structure and message of the text and then delineate the underlying theological principles in the deeper structure. At this deeper level we often can promulgate unity.[15]

Many note the importance of the "social history of ideas" as an arbiter in deciding questions of meaning and authority (see Woodbridge 1982:26-27). We dare not assume unity or diversity without noting such factors as background, semantic field, community influence or the sociological development of Israel and the church. D. A. Carson's seven "positive reflections" provide a proper conclusion: (1) Everyone manifests some type of "unified" theological system of beliefs. (2) The database is the entire canon, which is open to the laws of logic; theology (or claims of diversity) must arise from the sacred text, not be imposed on it. (3) Progressive revelation should be seriously considered but again must arise from the text. (4) Biblical differences often reflect "diverse pastoral concerns" rather than divergent confessional structures. (5) Diversity also often reflects the individual styles and interests of the writers themselves. (6) Theological harmonization is valid when the underlying statements are compatible. (7) The scholar must avoid proof-texting and allow each passage to determine its own meaning and theology (1983:77-95; also 2000:95-97).

2. ***Tradition history.*** James Dunn and James Sanders argue that the canon-

consciousness of the communities depended on each stage of the development of traditions for their self-understanding; therefore, not only the final stage but the earlier stages constitute the Word of God, and the prehistory as well as the final codified form of the text is essential for a true biblical theology.[16] There are two ways to look at the traditioning process: via a radical reconstruction of the history of the text and of the nation along the lines of Martin Noth, or a dependence on the text as canonically conceived without such a speculative revision of history. The former type makes a biblical theology virtually impossible since it tends to produce the kind of multiple interpretations that result in an extreme skepticism regarding the viability of any such enterprise. Therefore, most utilize the latter approach.

The scholar most commonly associated with a traditio-historical approach to biblical theology is Hartmut Gese, who takes a consciously canonical tack, arguing for a closed, united process of tradition that links both Testaments. For Gese tradition history is not an artificial collection of fragmented and at times contradictory traditions but a lengthy process of development in which traditions were reinterpreted to meet new contingencies. For instance, there was more than one Decalogue as the Torah was reworked in differing situations. Yet there is continuity, and later interpretations built on rather than displaced the classic laws.[17] Gese believes that only a tradition-critical process can unite the Testaments; since texts develop out of the "life processes" of the communities, only a method that encompasses both redaction and composition criticism properly can assess the theological developments. Each stage is essential to the final product and yet dependent on that final goal. This means that for Gese the Old Testament is not fulfilled until the New Testament. Gese's program has come under a great deal of criticism.[18] He seems in many ways to replace the concept of a unifying center with his theory of a tradition or revelatory process; he ignores theology in favor of hermeneutics and history. All tradition-critical approaches depend on speculative reconstructions of biblical history and so are dependent on the shifting sands of historical opinion. In sum, the biblical theologian must be aware of the traditioning process in Israel and the early church, but it is one factor among many in the exegetical arsenal and not the key component in the formation of the history of dogma in the biblical period.

3. ***Theology and canon.*** Closely linked to the issue of tradition is canon,

and it is certainly a major issue, as is witnessed by the number of works on the issue. Taking a tradition-critical approach to the issue, Marvin Tate argues for a dynamic concept of canon that includes the stages of development as well as the final canonical product (1981:174-75). Therefore, there was no "intertestamental period" but a complex unity as the canon progressed to fulfillment. On the other hand, Brevard Childs considers canon to be a stance or perspective from which to view the Bible (1970:147). As such the canon relativizes the historical-critical method and challenges the scholar to consider the text as it is in terms of its function for the community. Therefore, "the canonical shaping . . . [forces] the interpreter . . . to confront the authoritative text of scripture in a continuing theological reflection" (Childs 1979:83).

The debate over canon and tradition in biblical theology has been both interesting and informative. Sanders objects to Childs's focus on a "final form," calling it a "canonical shape which few if any subsequent tradents heeded."[19] According to Sanders, the critic should consider not only the "freezing" of a tradition in the canonical text but also its prehistory and subsequent development. Since ancient communities read texts via tradition rather than via a "canonical" order, we must study the Bible not only synchronically (in its canonical shape, so Childs) but also diachronically (in its tradition development). Childs responds that the results of tradition-critical research do not justify the emphasis placed on that method, arguing that he includes the shaping process but that the final text must have priority: "The entire history of Israel's interaction with its traditions is reflected in the final text" (1980:54; see pp. 52-60). Childs is attempting a constructive approach that will overcome the dilemma of critical scholarship and recognize the "theological role of canon."[20] Rolf Knierim agrees with the centrality of canon, saying, "In the process of canonization, authoritative theological traditions from many generations and diverse settings were condensed into close juxtaposition on the same synchronic level" (1995:4). Thus the goal (one that can be realized) is the unification of the plurality of theologies into a conceptual whole. Max Turner says taking a canonical perspective does not obviate academic integrity, providing each writer is given due hearing and room is made for underlying unity as well as differences (2000:54-55). One has to recognize the divine message, the voice of the human authors, and the church's witness in a canonical approach (see also Wall 2000:165-82).

There is much to laud in the canonical methodology of Childs. His stress on the unity of the canon and the relationship of the whole of Scripture to each of the parts is similar to the "analogy of faith" of the Reformers. In his Exodus commentary and monumental two-volume *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* and *Introduction to the New Testament as Scripture,* Childs shows a brilliant awareness of canonical literature and indeed of the whole array of scholarship on the bewildering number of issues involved. He has indeed managed to blend critical scholarship with a canonical approach.[21] In doing so, however, he has had to jettison interest in the historical "intended meaning" of the biblical author in favor of a canonical interpretation. To be certain, for Childs "intentionality" addresses mainly speculative reconstructions of historical background (such as attempts to rewrite the history of the conquest of Canaan or of the prophetic period) because they skew the canonical meaning of the text (1985:35-37). Yet at the same time all referential approaches to meaning (see app. 2) are rejected as inappropriate in favor of a canonical or literary tack.[22]

The centrality of the original community (Israel and the church) in Childs's system parallels the grammatical-historical method in biblical theology. We seek the theology of Israel or the early church as we collate the individual theological strands in the Testaments. Yet as Thomas McComiskey points out:

> There is an important hermeneutical problem here. Canonical criticism forces us to derive our understanding of texts like the royal psalms from the community. Thus the narrower intent of the author is expanded. . . . Does not the community reflect a hope fashioned more by historical circumstance than authoritative word?

This dichotomy between author and community must be resolved.

From this vantage point let me address briefly the subtopic of a "canon within the canon." This controversial issue is related to the problem of preunderstanding and assumes the viability of choosing certain strands of biblical theology as more "canonical" or central than others. For instance, Ernst Käsemann freely admits that his Lutheran bias has led him to favor Pauline concepts of justification over other New Testament emphases as his "canon within a canon" (1964:95-107; see also Morgan 1973:60-61). Dunn goes a step further: "Whatever the theory of canonicity, the reality is that *all Christians* have operated with a canon within the canon."[23]

Whenever we place our theological system above the text and decide dogma on the basis of proof texts rather than on the whole of Scripture, Dunn is correct.

Therefore, we must reject a "canon within a canon" approach to biblical theology. Gerhard Hasel correctly notes that it is too speculative and reductionistic to provide any basis for deciding themes in biblical theology (1978:166-67; see also Thielmann 2005:36-37). He quotes Hans Küng in labeling it "subjective arbitrariness" because it allows a person to choose any theme desired as the center of biblical theology. A "canon within a canon" cannot deal rightly with the totality of Scripture, because it is based on the principle of arbitrary selection, which itself leads to rampant subjectivity. To summarize, the canon must be taken as a whole; it demands a perspective on the unity of Scripture that allows neither community nor scholar to predominate over the canonical text itself.

4. ***The* analogia fidei *and progressive revelation.*** The "analogy of faith" or (more properly) the principle of Scripture determining Scripture is a key concept in the determination of theological meaning. Yet its relevance for biblical theology is debated. The term that describes the danger of this tool (as well as the problem of the tradition-critical or "history of religions" approaches) is Samuel Sandmel's "parallelomania," the tendency to apply any analogous passage (or religious situation) to define the meaning or origin of a biblical idea (1962:2-13). This also can lead to an overemphasis on the unity of biblical texts, resulting in what Carson calls an "artificial conformity" that ignores the diversity of expression and emphasis between divergent statements in the Bible.[24] Gerhard Ebeling goes so far as to claim that the *analogia fidei* actually undercuts a true biblical theology, since in the end "the faith" or the interpreter's preunderstanding takes precedence over Scripture itself.[25]

   Certainly the danger of our "faith" rather than Scripture controlling our interpretation is very real; however, this does not mean that we must jettison the concept altogether. In fact, we could not do so if we wanted to. One's theological perspective is too deeply ingrained for that, and I believe that it is an aid rather than an enemy in the task of discovering meaning. Rather, we should control our theological presuppositions in two ways: change the concept to the *analogia scriptura* (Scripture rather than our faith as the final arbiter), and allow "community exegesis" (dialogue with the past community via commentaries and so forth and with the present communities via constant interaction) to challenge our

interpretation.

A further danger is shallow harmonization, the other side of "parallelomania." In biblical theology this is often seen, for instance, when canon criticism leads one to read later texts into earlier ones, as when one sees the Old Testament as a christological case book. Walter Kaiser calls for "the analogy of antecedent Scripture" to combat this, namely, a "diachronically conscious" hermeneutic that allows a passage to stand by itself in light of its own prehistory rather than to read back into it the future development of the theological concept (1978a:18-19). In contrast, Childs argues that the totality of canonical revelation is applicable, indeed necessary, to any given part (1970:189-91). In my opinion, the truth lies between the two options. If we apply Kaiser's principle too woodenly, there could be no concept of the "progress of revelation," and we would become tradition critics, a position already seen to have serious problems for biblical theology. On the other hand, the canonical approach easily can lead to Barr's "illegitimate totality transfer," as the whole of the biblical witness is erroneously applied to a single biblical statement or theme. The answer is a proper use of parallels. They are not determinative of meaning but simply provide possibilities for reflection and yield parameters for the options. For instance, we do not choose Matthew 24:29-31 (posttribulation rapture), Revelation 3:10 (pretribulation rapture) or Revelation 20:1-10 (amillennial position) and then interpret the others on the basis of the preferred "proof text." Rather, we set all three passages alongside one another and seek that position which best harmonizes them.

The hermeneutical principles by which we may do this are critical. Primarily, we must assess the relative value of each theological parallel, giving the most likely passages greater weight but giving due weight to all passages dealing with the theme. We need to differentiate true parallels from seeming parallels, but at the same time we must explore all ramifications of the larger issue and place them in their proper biblical framework (see Thomas 1980:45-53). I have already explored this at the level of semantics (chap. 3), and the principles there can be applied also to theological parallels. The *analogia scriptura* is a key to a proper biblical theology and an essential ingredient in a canonical approach.

5. ***Authority.*** Critical scholars denigrate the authority of biblical theology since it is perceived as a purely descriptive science. Barr states flatly:

> It is less and less likely that biblical theology can be deemed to have

> said the last word about anything. . . . On the one side, the authority of the Bible can no longer be taken for granted, but must be *shown* on sufficient grounds. On the other side, biblical theology cannot work in isolation; involved in historical judgments on the one hand, it is linked with logical, philosophical, and finally, systematic-theological judgments on the other.[26]

The argument is that biblical theology, dealing only with "what it meant," is descriptive; systematic theology, telling "what it means," presents the normative element in Christian truth (and even here it is normative only for that particular community of faith). In this latter sense, Dennis Nineham goes so far as to assert that the Bible as poetry has spoken to each generation but that the "authority" question is culturally conditioned and caught up with the parallel authorities of church, conscience and reason.[27] He states, "What if God, taking history very seriously, actually wants the Church in the twentieth century to be engaged in dialogue with herself" (1976:271).

Evangelicals recognize that the human element was present in the stages of tradition and transmission, in the codification of the tradition in the canonical books and in the church's validation of the "inspired" books via the process of canonization. However, this in no way vitiates the divine element, which was central in each of these stages. While some conservatives are perhaps too docetic when they ignore the human side, many nonconservatives are too Arian when they ignore the divine side. In spite of all the historical problems already enumerated, we are continually brought back to the bottom line: God has spoken to humanity! The biblical revelation is not so relative or culturally conditioned as to be inaccessible to modern people. The science of hermeneutics enables us to get back to the intended meaning of the original propositions, and biblical theology is part of the process whereby we allow that authoritative message to address us today.

6. ***History and theology.*** The relationship of history and theology has always been a major issue, for the Enlightenment had as a major purpose the "liberation of the historical study of the Bible and early Christianity from the dogmatic concerns of the church" (Thielmann 2005:20). Barr notes four problematic aspects in any attempt to anchor revelation in history: (1) ambiguity regarding the nature of the revelatory events and their connection with historical causation, (2) ambiguity about the sense of "history" in terms both of the accessibility of revelation to critical

historians and of its being revelation if it is accessible, (3) ambiguity regarding the relation between revelation and history, as to whether they are equal or separate and whether any criteria can be adduced to prove it actually happened, and (4) difficulties in the relation between revelation and the biblical text itself, since the latter shows no awareness of such (1976:746-49). Barr argues that the tradition-history of Israel (or the church) is the true locus and that revelation per se played no part in the development of the canon.

The problem areas that Barr notes are valid, but his pessimism is unwarranted for several reasons. The history behind the Gospels, for instance, is quite accessible to the historian, as several recent works have argued.[28] There is no true dichotomy between theology (or revelation) and history in the Gospels or in the historical books of the Old Testament. While there is historical relativity in the Bible due to the circumstantial nature of the books, the cultural environment is not the controlling factor, at least not in the minds of the authors. Inspiration (and a concomitant sense of revelation) is frequently claimed, both in the prophets and in the apostolic authority behind New Testament literature. Gotthold Lessing's "ugly broad ditch" between history and truth (his statement that "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason") was based on the philosophical skepticism of the Enlightenment. However, the historical relativity of Scripture does not entail a relativism that destroys the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Rather, we should follow the lesson of church history and return to a "precritical," though critically informed, view of the connection between history and truth in the Bible (see Hughes 1983:173-94 for an excellent discussion of this issue).

There is no reason why biblical theology must on the one hand divorce itself from the possibility of revelation in history (Barr's demand) or on the other hand demand a positivistic reconstruction of history as the basis for its work (the tradition-critical approach).[29] Siegfried Hermann calls for a "theology of history" based on the biblical view of time and history as centered on the interrelationship between human history and divine action.[30] While history itself betrays no revelatory aspect, God has made himself known in the midst of human history, especially via the dimension of promise fulfillment. At the level of religious experience God's active presence in history is known. While I cannot agree with Hermann that history is ontologically incapable of being revelatory, he

does provide a good basis for the union of history and theology. I would argue that since God has given his revelation in history the two are ontologically related. Peter Balla says that biblical theology is primarily theological in terms of tracing the early Christian understanding and experience of God, yet at the same time it is historical in terms of its use of historical criticism in developing the individual voices within the New Testament (1997:20-22, 211-15; on the positive use of history see Provan 2000:229-66).

John Hayes and Frederick Prussner chronicle the reaction against the union of history and theology as opposed primarily to the "revelation in history" school of G. Ernest Wright and others (1985:241-44, 262-64). The current mode of thinking is to replace history with a view of the Bible as "story." In this way the question of historicity need not arise and the literary features of the narrative (in which the theology actually is found) can take precedence over the "event" itself. However, the historical aspects of the biblical narrative are a part of the theology, and no such dichotomy should be made. Frank Thielmann notes that critics consider a focus on the theological component of the canon a fundamentally church-related enterprise but doubt the ability of theologians to bracket their presuppositions in allowing the historically conditioned texts to speak for themselves (2005:33-34). He responds that theologians can be just as successful as historians in opening themselves up to the text in its historical message. History and theology are not antithetical (see also Osborne 2003), and the student must find a theologically charged history mingled with a historically charged theology as the two draw the past text and the present church into "dialogue and communion" (Esler 2005:36-37).

7. ***Language, text and meaning.*** Surprisingly, texts on biblical theology too seldom discuss the problem of language, except in the sense of descriptive (what it meant) versus normative (what it means) tasks (such as Stendahl). However, the problem of language has moved to the forefront of discussion due to recent theories regarding language and hermeneutics. The debate centers on the interrelationship between the three aspects of meaning—author, text, and reader. Tremendous problems occur at each link; what is the exact relationship between an author and the reader, and how does one get back to the theology of the biblical author in light of the great gap between the original setting and that of the current age? Yet I believe that religious language is open to verification via hermeneutical criteria of adequacy and coherence. Since language

contains both “dead” (static) and “live” (dynamic) metaphors, the Bible can be both propositional truth (static) and language event (dynamic). As such, a biblical theology is a vital element in the ongoing interaction between God and this world. Max Turner provides several reasons why a confessional/ literary approach should not supplant the search for intended meaning: (1) The author has shaped, interpreted and given the text an illocutionary force and should not be ignored. (2) Believers cannot be faithful to the biblical text by detaching it from historical meaning; in fact, the confessions themselves are historically defined, grounded in God’s revelation and the historical crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. (3) Any who confess to “the Word made flesh” must care about the historical events and teaching that developed these truths and so be “open to transcendence” (Stuhlmacher). (4) Literary approaches must supplement history and not eclipse it (2000:62-65).

8. ***Old Testament and New Testament.*** All agree that the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament is the central issue for any proper biblical theology. Once again the basic problem is unity and diversity: each Testament must have its autonomous place within the larger unity of Scripture. Yet the balance between the two remains difficult to attain. Many have taught that Old and New Testaments should remain separate. Marcion was the first to demand a radical dichotomy, removing from the canon not only the Old Testament but also any New Testament works related to the Old Testament. In our time both Adolf von Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann have stressed discontinuity. For Bultmann and Friedrich Baumgärtel this leads to a promissory approach to biblical theology. The Old Testament is the “presupposition” of the New, and the failure of the covenant hope of Israel led to a new religion centering on the promissory hope of justification.[31]

   However, this negative tone has not been influential. Claus Westermann responds that the negativism of such scholars shatters the value of the Old Testament as religious history (1963:122-33). Moreover, New Testament background is also loosed from its historical moorings and flounders in a sea of mythical irrelevance. To remove “fulfillment” from “promise” is arbitrary and inadequate. In the final analysis it is impossible to separate the two Testaments, and any truly biblical theology must begin with the recognition of unity and demonstrate such. The simple fact that there are at least 257 quotes and over 1,100 allusions (according to the Nestle-Aland Greek text) of the Old Testament in the New (see chap. 14) shows the extent to which the latter built on the

former. In terms of vocabulary, themes, religious emphases and worship, the two depend on one another. In terms of redemptive history a clear typological relationship of promise-fulfillment exists between the Testaments, and any concept of the progress of revelation in history (the backbone of biblical theology) must build on this deeper interdependence.[32] In fact, Charles Scobie (2003) has produced an eight-hundred-page synthesis between the two Testaments, a biblical theology of the whole Bible, utilizing the concepts of proclamation and promise, and proposing that eschatology provides the unifying structure.

TOWARD A METHODOLOGY

The second major area of disagreement (after a unifying center) is the method by which we develop a biblical theology. Scholars have never attained any consensus with respect to approach. Biblical scholars have tended to prefer an analytical or descriptive approach, and theologians have always preferred a synthetic method. For instance, Ladd in his New Testament theology utilizes an analytical method that takes each book as a distinct entity, while Guthrie follows a synthetic approach that proceeds theme by theme. The solution is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of these and other proposed methods. Stuhlmacher suggests five criteria by which one can judge a viable biblical theology: (1) It must correspond with the religious-historical as well as the churchly aspects of Scripture. (2) There should be historical and dogmatic coherence in defining the relationship between the testaments. (3) It must unite the strands of theology between the various books and traditions. (4) It should demonstrate the link between the biblical message of salvation and the church's attestation of faith in such a way as to reflect canonical history. (5) It should preserve scholarly expertise in the exegetical and hermeneutical disciplines. Of course, the way in which we will interpret these criteria will differ according to our own paradigm community; that is, according to the type of "critical" school to which we adhere (1979:163). Nevertheless, this provides an excellent control in assessing the following methods (note the interesting chart in Reumann 1991:3). I would note three specifics: the method employed must be cognizant of the diversity of individual expressions; at the same time it must demonstrate the deeper unity behind those expressions; and it must trace the progression of the revelation/historical development of biblical dogma.

1. ***The synthetic method.*** In the synthetic method theological themes are traced through the biblical strata in relation to the various historical periods. Two different approaches are taken: some follow a history of religions approach that studies the sources and the changing theological situations (many Old Testament theologians), while others simply describe the differing theologies with little attempt to trace lines of

continuity or development (many New Testament theologians). The strength of the synthetic method lies in its stress on the unity of Scripture. It is often assumed that the themes elucidated draw together the various traditions behind the biblical writers. The thematic approach also graphically demonstrates the interconnections between the traditions. At the same time, however, the synthetic method can be artificial and subjective, since the categories can be easily imposed from outside (from theology) rather than arising naturally from within (from the text). Even when major concepts like covenant or kingdom are applied indiscriminately, the data itself can be ignored or twisted to fit the preconceived pattern.

Nevertheless, this approach has made a significant impact, for example, in Walther Eichrodt's *Theology* of *the Old Testament,* in which a unifying theme (covenant) is traced by means of cross-sections of the canonical literature. Eichrodt wished to be true to history yet to retain the basic unity of Scripture. His selective process was intended to avoid the control of historicism on the one hand and of systematic theology on the other hand. However, while his method gained wide acceptance, his unifying theme did not. Using a similar approach, Theodorus Vriezen (1970) argues for the communion concept, Walter Kaiser (1978a) for the promise theme, and Samuel Terrien (1978) for the presence of God as the central theme.

2. ***The analytical method.*** Stemming from the post-Enlightenment period, the descriptive or analytical method has always been central to the task of biblical theology. It studies the distinctive theological emphases of individual books and the developing traditions in order to discern the unique message of each. Theoretically it is opposed to harmonizing the individual messages into covering or unifying themes. Avery Dulles notes several dangers this avoids: the tendency to exert a kind of tyranny over other approaches; a romantic tendency to "canonize" biblical thought patterns, as if the modern person should think like the ancient Hebrew; and an external control over biblical thought by contemporary philosophy and theology (1965:214-15).

   At the same time there are clear dangers: the analytical method can result in a mere collage of individually diverse theologies without cohesion; while this could be correct, it is hardly how the Bible or the Jewish-Christian faith perceived itself. Moreover, it can easily degenerate into a history of religions approach, with concern only for genealogical origins rather than for the living faith that produced the documents. This

in fact has been the most common form of the analytical method.

3. ***The history of religions method.*** The history of religions method has often been the analytical approach. Yet it is also a separate school and so deserves consideration since it elucidates the development of religious ideas in the life of Israel and the early church. In its radical form it assumes that these ideas were borrowed from surrounding religions. In its more conservative form it traces the progress of revelation, that is the history of God's revelation in the canonical period. The key distinction is that this method centers on history while the analytical approach centers on theology.

   The best-known proponent of this method, Bultmann, called the message of Jesus the "presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself" (1951:1:3). Theology therefore does not begin with the historical Jesus and his teaching but with the Christ of faith, which is the product of the preaching and teaching of the early church. Two aspects control Bultmann's thought—history of religions (the historical side) and existentialism (the interpretive side). For Bultmann the major stress is on the latter, since biblical theology has meaning, "not as theoretical teachings, timeless general truths, but only as an expression of an understanding of human existence which for the man of today also is a possibility for his understanding of himself" (1951:2:251).

   The basic error of Bultmann and his followers is what Hasel calls their "tunnel vision," which leads them to stress only those sections of Scripture that cohere with existentialist interpretation. As a result they often ignore works like Hebrews, James or Revelation (1978:101-2). Moreover, there are too few controls, so that their reconstruction of theology tends to leave the biblical data at the mercy of the critic. Finally, history of religion theorists often assume that any potential parallel is a precursor or source of New Testament ideas. More often than not, the parallels are analogical rather than sources of New Testament ideas. In conclusion, there is promise when the theorist sticks to the biblical data, tracing the historical development of biblical themes in light of the environment in which they developed (the progress of revelation). However, when the method steps outside the biblical framework and seeks a speculative revision of that data, it becomes too subjective to be useful.

4. ***Diachronic and tradition-critical methods.*** I have already discussed the issue of tradition criticism (pp. 358-61), so I will concentrate here on the

hermeneutical method used by this school. Gerhard von Rad's epochal Old Testament theology opposed a strictly historical-critical reconstruction of biblical theology on the grounds that it resulted in a negative approach. Instead he wedded history to kerygma, that is, a kerygmatic theology grounded in history. For von Rad history of tradition provides a positive key to the kerygmatic portrait of the biblical text; the developing confession of the community has greater theological relevance than a reconstructed history of that community. However, von Rad does not deny the viability of that reconstruction. Rather the developing creed has the place of primacy, and von Rad argues that the confessional formula rather than the originating event is the true task of biblical theology. He calls this "retelling" and believes that it bridges the gap between history and theology. Thereby the acts of God, or redemptive history, come to the fore. However, this very dichotomy between objective history and salvation history has occasioned most of the criticism directed against him (see Hayes and Prussner 1985:233-39 for a fine summary).

Although the developing community is important, I doubt whether it solves as many problems as it creates. Biblical theology should be erected on a solid foundation, and the speculative theories of tradition or community development do not provide the necessary groundwork. I prefer a concept of the progress of revelation as exemplified in Geerhardus Vos (1948), which takes the text of Scripture at face value and does not try to impose a revisionist concept of tradition development on it. The text itself, rather than historical-critical reconstruction, best determines the method. A book-by-book descriptive approach could be organized on the basis of the progress of revelation, and in this way a diachronic approach would be an important step forward methodologically. Here Childs's *Introduction to the Old Testament* as *Scripture* (and its New Testament counterpart) provides a good model.

5. ***The christological method.*** According to Wilhelm Vischer (1949) we must interpret every part of the Bible in light of the Christ event. The Old Testament tells us what Christ is and the New Testament who he is; thus we have a complete picture of Christ in the Old Testament. Ernst Hengstenberg, Karl Barth and many modern Lutheran theologians show the popularity of the christological approach today. Indeed, the method has several advantages: it guards against an overly zealous historicizing tendency among many biblical theologians and recognizes the centrality of the Christian faith; for the Christian the whole Bible does indeed point

to Jesus Christ. The analytic approach often produces an Old Testament theology that is virtually unaware of the New Testament or the prophetic purpose of the Old Testament.

However, on the whole there are greater dangers than strengths in this movement. Nearly all practitioners allegorize and spiritualize Old Testament texts to fit preconceived "types of Christ" or some such thing. The Old Testament as the history and record of God's salvific dealings with his covenant people Israel is lost. Subjective speculation and a reductionism reduce it to a series of prophetic acts. The intention of the text, the Old Testament as canon in its own right and the validity of the religious experiences of the Hebrews as the chosen people of Yahweh are all sacrificed on the altar of "relevance." There must be a better way to demonstrate the continuity between the covenants.

Barr posits a "trinitarian approach" in which the Old Testament has historical priority and the New Testament christological authority, with both grounded in the unity of the Godhead—Father, Son and Spirit. When this is augmented with a promise-fulfillment perspective, the relationship between the Testaments is given a much stronger foundation. The Old and New Testaments stand on their own as the record of God's covenant with his two peoples—Israel and the church—yet are united into a single Bible via the Christ event.[33]

6. ***The confessional method.*** Practitioners of the confessional method consider the Bible to be a series of faith statements that demand adherence and as such transcend history. Several scholars include this perspective in their systems (such as von Rad and Cullmann), but some make it the kingpin and radically oppose the analytic or historical approaches. Vriezen (1970) argues that a purely objective or neutral stance is impossible, and that only a theoretical stance like that of the original communities can understand biblical theology. Hasel mentions Otto Eissfeldt, G. A. F. Knight and Roland de Vaux as taking a similar stance (1975:40-41). The Old Testament must be understood as Christian Scripture, and theology as a science demands faith.

The major strength of this school is its cognizance of the centrality of creed and worship in biblical faith. Both Testaments are certainly written by believing communities and demand assent on the part of all readers. As Jesus taught, kingdom truths are reserved for the faithful (Mt 13:10-17; Mk 4:10-12). Yet there are also distinct weaknesses. Hasel writes that Otto Eissfeld's positions (accepted by all adherents) "are on the one hand dominated by a superseded historical positivism and on the other hand by

an artificial and unsupportable separation of knowledge and faith" (1975:41-42). Like the christological method, this approach reads more into the Old Testament than is actually there and tends to impose theological categories (such as Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed) on biblical statements in both Testaments. The basic premise, that one should read the text from a similar faith stance to that of the originating community, is valid, but there needs to be strong controls on the task. Moreover, both synthetic and analytic schools also recognize this point.

7. ***The narrative method.*** Many recent approaches to the theology of various books have taken a narratival approach (see Reumann 1991:7-8; Robinson 1991:129- 42), tracing the theological development of the ideas in a book rather than topically organizing the themes within the work. This is utilized in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, volume four (1997), the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (1999) and the recent theologies of Marshall (2004) and Thielmann (2005). This has enormous value in helping students see how themes emerged and intertwined in the development of the book, but it can often degenerate into a glorified survey of the contents of the book. This does satisfy the historical component of biblical theology, but at times it does an injustice to the theological component. The key is to keep one's eye clearly on the theology of the book and not to allow the historically contingent problems behind the contents to drive the discussion. It is also good after a corpus (e.g., Paul's) to add a section discussing the issues topically (e.g., Marshall 2004:420-60; Thielmann 2005:438-79).
8. ***The multiplex method*** (see Hasel 1981a:181-83). Each of the approaches has certain strengths, and by combining them and allowing the text to guide us, we can minimize the weaknesses. This multiplex method is my preference. Any such attempt to build a valid biblical theology has five criteria or controls: (1) The data must reflect the individual theologies and genres of the biblical literature (such as wisdom, the theology of Ruth or Esther as well as of Mark or Matthew). (2) We must work with the final canonical form of the documents (lest we drown theology in the speculative reconstructions of historical critics) and seek the interrelationship between the themes of both writers and books. (3) The task is two-pronged, beginning with the diverse theologies of individual biblical works (the descriptive or analytic side) and then delineating the longitudinal themes as they emerge from the individual works and unite them with others (such as Paul with James). (4) The purpose is to trace

the development of individual themes and then to discover the dynamic unity and multifaceted patterns that bind the parts together; in other words, there are two tasks: the study of individual themes and the discovery of unifying themes. (5) The final product must integrate the Testaments, noting both the diversity and the unity between them.

At the outset the stance taken is a confessional one, accepting at face value the perspective of the biblical writers and identifying with it. However, this does not negate a descriptive approach. We seek a "biblical" theology not a dogmatic one. The study of the diverse "theologies" of the individual traditions combines two aspects that too often have been set in conflict with one another: a book-by-book and a historical-genetic approach. Each is valid but needs to be supplemented by the other. By itself the book-by-book approach can be artificial; for instance, should we follow the Hebrew canonical order or the early church's? Neither is completely satisfactory, for they do not yield true continuity of themes. Similarly the purely historical approach is usually dominated by alien historiographic presuppositions (such as tradition critical or history of religions), which easily ignore the text and center on theories of origin and development. The best solution is to combine them and allow each to correct excesses in the other. There is a basic tradition-critical unity within the books and yet a historical or chronological relationship between them.

At this point of the task the diversity of the data will dominate. Yet at the same time interlacing patterns will begin to emerge. The progress of revelation will become manifest as the individual themes begin to bridge to other works, first at the level of chronological similarity (such as the eighth-century prophets) and then between periods. As these interlocking themes appear, the relationship of the parts to the whole must always be in mind. The first task of the theologian is exegetical; the text must speak for itself. Individual statements should never be elevated to dogmatic status as assertions of the whole of dogma; instead, each should be seen in light of the context in which they appear and then collated with similar statements in the book or corpus (such as Pauline). Very seldom can a single statement be taken as indicative of the whole theological truth. Usually each relates a single aspect of the larger doctrine to particular situations and issues in the community addressed. For instance, we cannot "solve" the issue of election simply by appealing to Romans 9 or Ephesians 1. Rather, we must consult all passages dealing with God's "call" to salvation and our response. This is why exegesis and biblical

theology are so interdependent. Each informs and at times controls excesses in the other. Exegesis provides the content, biblical theology the perspective for serious Bible study. As the patterns of dogma develop from the exegetical sphere, they begin to intersect with other streams in the historical development of the biblical documents. In this manner the themes appear inductively from within the scriptural data and are not imposed deductively from outside. This does not mean, however, that presuppositionless exegesis results. The very patterns detected are the result of interpretive choices and must be continuously clarified and, if necessary, corrected by the text itself and by competing interpretive communities. The value of challenge from opposing theories is that they drive us back to the text and allow it the final say.

9. ***The problem of a unifying center***. It must be stated at the outset that the very assumption of most biblical theologians that a unifying center should be sought is a tacit recognition that the goal of the discipline is to forge unity out of the diversity of the biblical witnesses. The final stage in the development of a biblical theology is the identification of the archetypal concept(s) or unifying themes behind the diverse documents. As the interlocking principles between the strata of the biblical period become visible, the patterns coalesce around certain ideas that bridge the gaps between the individual witnesses. However, it is very uncertain whether any single theme or concept stands at the apex of biblical theology. Many believe that the complete lack of consensus demonstrates that a cluster of ideas, rather than a single theme, unites all the others. James Walther suggests thirteen motifs at the core: captivity and deliverance, God and Son of God, gift of Torah, covenant, people of God, cultus, kingship, creation, wisdom, Spirit of God, righteousness and justice, Day of the Lord, and promise/hope (1969:222-23). Yet we must wonder whether such complex ideas are not simply lists that easily could be unified further, such as God and Spirit or covenant and kingship.

   Six criteria must be met in any search for a central motif (or motifs) that binds together the other themes: (1) The motif must express the nature/character of the Godhead. (2) The theme(s) should account for the people of God as they relate to God, their world and one another. (3) The concept(s) must include the world of humankind as the object of God’s redemptive love. (4) The motif must explain the dialectical relationship between the Testaments. (5) The motif must contain and sum up the individual emphases of the diverse parts of Scripture, such as wisdom as well as apocalyptic or epistolary portions. (6) The theme(s) should

account for other potential unifying themes and must truly unite them under a single rubric. It should explain and balance the others and not merely be imposed on them.

Most of those motifs proposed by various scholars fail to meet these qualifications. Walther Eichrodt and Nicholas Ridderbos propose "covenant" as the central theme, arguing that it expresses the binding relationship between God and his people and contains both the legal contract and eschatological hope or promise that results. However, too many portions of Scripture (such as wisdom) do not contain it, and it does not sum up the others. Still others propose some form of the Godhead at the core—God and Christ (Hasel), Yahweh (Zimmerli), divine holiness (Sellin), lordship (Koehler), kingship (Klein), or divine presence (Terrien). Each of these variations, however, fails to account for the diverse aspects noted in the six criteria previously discussed. Existential reality (Bultmann) or communion (Vriezen) considers the other side of the divine-human interaction but likewise fails to be broad enough.

Another motif often stressed is eschatological hope, either in the sense of "promise" (Kaiser) or "hope" (Moltmann, McComiskey). The strength of this proposal is the extent to which it unites the Testaments, and it does in a sense unify the other themes. However, several portions of Scripture (such as wisdom or the Johannine corpus) do not emphasize this, and in many ways it is one aspect rather than the whole of the redemptive plan.

More promise is found in various forms of a "salvation history" schema of Gerhard von Rad, Oscar Cullmann, Leonhard Goppelt or George Ladd. This position recognizes God's (Christ's) redemptive activity on behalf of humankind in terms of past, present and future communion. More than the others it subsumes into itself each of the categories normally mentioned. Yet there are major stumbling blocks here as well. It is more artificial than those already mentioned, which are supported by biblical language, and this is a theoretical concept without linguistic support. Moreover, Scripture does not put a great deal of emphasis on this concept. Only in Luke does it play a major theological role. Finally, the emphasis on the "God who acts" (Wright) often separated redemptive history from real history, making it a theological category bereft of real meaning (see Hayes and Prussner 1985:241-43).

For this reason most scholars today are positing a cluster of themes. Walter Brueggemann believes that a "two-trajectory" track is emerging in Old Testament theology, variously defined as "visionary-pragmatic,"

“covenantal-sapiential” or “ethical-sapiential” (1984:5). He calls these “boundaries” or “parameters” around which a theology can be determined. Similarly, Rolf Knierim presents a twofold pattern: Yahweh’s relationship to the world and its people, and his relationship to reality (1984:44-45). These and other similar theories have not yet pointed the way to any consensus, but it is safe to say that most recognize that the Bible is too diverse in its interests and emphases to be summed up in a single theme.

CONCLUSION

The role of biblical theology in the hermeneutical task is twofold: internally, it studies the diverse themes of individual books and of the Testaments, organizes them into a holistic set of dogmas and then collates these into archetypal doctrines that reflect the progress of revelation; externally, it provides a bridge from exegesis to systematic theology. In many ways biblical theology is the forgotten element in serious biblical research. Yet among those who have rejected the possibility of systematic theology it has also wrongfully been made the final stage of the hermeneutical process. I view biblical theology to be at the apex of the exegetical stage (discerning "what it meant") and as providing a transition to the contextualization stage (determining "what it means"). Biblical theology also provides the basis for systematic theology in that it tells us the systematic theology of Israel and of the early church. By collecting and collating the biblical material along the lines of the progress of revelation, biblical theology describes the emerging beliefs of the biblical period and theoretically organizes them in the patterns originally held by Israel and the church.

There are two types of study under the guise of biblical theology: one done by all Christians; the other pretty much restricted to the specialist. The former consists of tracing individual doctrines through the Word of God in order to determine exactly which theological statement actually fits all the data (the synthetic approach). Every church that has ever rewritten its constitution or gone through a doctrinal debate has had to do this. Issues like baptism, eternal security or the charismatic debate cannot be settled any other way. Yet churches inevitably fail to do the task adequately, for proponents seem to collect only those passages that support the position they prefer and fail to look at all the passages that bear on the issue before formulating their statement of the doctrine. The answer is to trace the issue through each stage of Scripture and only then to organize the material and decide the issue. The key is to "bracket" our own beliefs and to allow the other side to challenge our preferred positions. This will drive us to examine the biblical data anew and to allow all passages on the topic to have equal weight.[34] I will examine this further in chapter sixteen on systematic theology.

The second type of biblical theology can be done at several levels, studying the theology of an individual book (such as Isaiah or Matthew), a corpus (Pauline theology), a Testament (Old or New Testament theology) or of the Bible as a whole. Needless to say, this is a massive undertaking. The scholar must determine the individual theological emphases of each book and of each author, and then collate to determine the archetypal themes that tie together the Testaments and unite them into a whole. I have discussed the viability of such a seemingly impossible goal several times in this chapter; I believe that it is not only possible but critical in order to understand both the diversity and the unity of Scripture. Most of all, the themes that unite the various tradition strata of Scripture must emerge from below and not be imposed from above; that is, they should be drawn out of the text rather than out of the theologian's imagination and should truly sum up the other major sub-themes of Scripture.

16

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology has deservedly been called “The Queen of the Biblical Sciences.” In essence every discipline and technique discussed thus far must be used in constructing a systematic theology. The current voguish way of defining it is “faith seeking understanding” (Vanhoozer, Stone and Duke et al., meaning that the community of faith seeks to understand its own belief systems). One begins with the traditional views inherited (preunderstanding) from the chosen theological community (such as Methodist, Reformed, Anabaptist, charismatic). Then the theologian traces a particular issue (such as atonement or eschatology) through Scripture inductively, determining which passages speak to the issue. At this stage exegetical study searches for the exact nuances in each passage that addresses the doctrine and begins to organize the passages in order to determine which aspect of the doctrine each passage teaches. Biblical theology collates the results and determines the belief of Israel and the early church on the issue. Next the theologian traces the issue through church history to see how it was developed to meet different needs in different eras. This tells how the doctrine was contextualized in the past and provides invaluable positive as well as negative clues for the recontextualization of the doctrine for our own time.

In other words, systematic theology is the proper goal of biblical study and teaching. Every hermeneutical aspect (including contextualization, discussed in chap. 17) must be put into practice in constructing such a theology for our day.

David Wells has put forth a controversial thesis (1993) that evangelicalism has lost its interest in theology and replaced it with pragmatism, leading to a business model for ministry (with the pastor as CEO) and a pop psychology that seeks a feel-good mentality rather than the true gospel. This led to a great deal of counter theses. Alister McGrath argues that (1) evangelicals have produced more theological works than anyone else, exhibiting a rich intellectual development; (2) these theological works exhibit American pragmatism, and there is not so much an aversion to theology as to a scholasticism that ignores the practical needs of the church; (3) the centrality of the authority of Scripture within evangelicalism shows that the real concern is for theology to lead to an engagement with Scripture rather than with theological systems (2000:17-20).

McGrath is correct regarding Wells's overstatement of the issue, but at the same time Wells has a point regarding the popular church movement. In fact, there is more marginalization of theology today than when Wells wrote. The problem is the bifurcation between church and academy. There is a great deal of interest in theology in the seminaries and in the churches that are connected to them. But there is a growing antipathy against the seminary in the megachurch movement. Some megachurches have even said they refuse to hire seminary graduates. So, Wells's theory stands, and a theological method that can bridge the gap has never been more important. John Stackhouse says, "In many evangelical churches, theology of any stripe is something for which apologies are rendered . . . (and) something to be held up for amusement and scorn, as the silly games of underemployed and slothful evangelicals" (2000:39). Clearly much work needs to be done.

In itself this process sounds complex enough. Indeed, each stage has enormous problems, and these difficulties as well as the process itself summarize the Gordian knot of hermeneutics. In a nutshell the dilemma can be stated simply: each stage described in the first paragraph of this chapter is done by an interpreter who looks at the material through prejudiced eyes, through an interpretive grid shaped by the believing community of which he or she is a part as well as by experiences and personal proclivities that subtly shape the direction of the study and the results. In other words, we all want to make certain that our side wins! Hardly anyone at any time conducts a purely objective search for truth. These biases, plus the unbelievable plethora of options available in our pluralistic world, make it difficult if not impossible to determine which theological option is actually best, let alone which of them is "true" (in the sense of final or absolute truth).

Yet these aspects of theological method—preunderstanding, community stance, experience, rational thinking—are not merely negative influences. Each contributes positively to the process of constructing a personal and community theology. The problem is that in our complex world the ability to think critically—of one's own ideas as well as of other options—has been blunted, and it is increasingly difficult to make decisions on probability grounds. More and more critical scholars are replacing the concept of "truth" with a pluralistic (and postmodern) openness to many possible "truths," even in theological matters. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a methodology for adjudicating between the numerous options and to discuss the many serious issues theologians too often ignore. In many ways this chapter provides a summary of the other chapters and will as such build on material presented elsewhere. The discussion of meaning and truth found in the first two appendixes is especially

critical in providing a rationale for the very possibility of discovering a systematic theology. The trend in higher-critical circles today is to replace the idea of *a* systematic theology with the possibility of *many* systematic theologies, each one "true" for a particular community of faith or a particular situation. George Lindbeck (1984) says that all meaning and theology stem from the ecclesial community itself, both in terms of its past tradition and its present interpretive climate. This is part of the postmodern (Lindbeck calls it "postliberal") denial of any absolute truth of and the affirmation of a plurality of possible truths. I believe that the problems in determining the best possible theological system as well as in constructing a particular doctrine are very real but not insurmountable. We will study these problems in the ensuing sections.

THE COMPONENTS OF THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

Many factors intersect in theological decisions, and each plays an important role in the process. It is commonly assumed in evangelical circles that only the first —Scripture—is valid, and that the others are barriers rather than positive components of theological construction. Yet this is untrue. Each aspect is an important ingredient in the theological mix, and each one carries certain dangers that we must avoid.[1] The order here is idealistic. A few years after the first edition *The Hermeneutical Spiral* came out, I discussed the issue again (Osborne 1994) and this time asked how the average believer actually constructs his or her theology; the order was actually the opposite! Our experience and worldview tell us what we want to believe, and then our present community helps us shape our views. Scripture often has little place except to help us find proof texts to support what we wish to believe. One purpose of this volume is to help us consciously to make Scripture the deciding factor in our theology.

1. ***Scripture.*** Many believe that dogma emerges automatically from Scripture. One need merely quote a few verses and the doctrine becomes clear. However, this ignores the fact that the *meaning* of those passages is far from clear, and that many have been debated for centuries. Moreover, these very debates account for the theological differences. As a result others go to the opposite extreme and posit an open-ended theology with a pluralistic core, that is, with many possible answers and no final dogma. Obviously we want to find a middle ground between the two extremes.

   The first determining factor is one's view of biblical authority. Those like myself who believe that the Bible is the inspired, revealed Word of God accept it as the final arbiter of all doctrinal statements. Those who do not have this high view of biblical authority must take a different approach. The key is to recognize the centrality of one's conception of Scripture for theological construction. As Wentzel van Huyssteen states it, this "fully determines the theologian's manner of problem solving and may function either as a considered, critically responsible model or

uncritically as a submerged model serving as an invisible filter in the theologian's provisional and hence limited perspective on the Bible" (1989:179). In other words, we must carefully work through our view of Scripture in terms of both the Bible's authority and our own finite interpretations.

This tension produces the basic problem for theological study. Too often we assume that our interpretation is what the Bible says and fail to realize the many other factors that determine meaning. As a result, doctrine is produced by a rabbinic type of "pearl-stringing" in which a connected list of favorite texts seemingly "proves" the viability of a particular dogmatic formulation. The difficulty is that opponents are providing their own set of proof texts (often entirely different texts that address the same issue, with each side ignoring the other's proof texts!), and the two sides speak around rather than to each other. For instance, many who argue for a pretribulation return of Christ center on Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:37-41; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7; and Revelation 3:10; 4:1, 4. The midtribulation position depends on Matthew 24:21-22 and Revelation 11:15-19. Posttribulationists dwell on Matthew 24:29-31, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3. Too seldom is there an honest dialogue or consideration of the other position's texts.[2]

Those who do theology from a liberal perspective argue that the Bible itself is the product of tradition and thus cannot be the ultimate source of theology. Gordon Kaufmann argues that the gospel centers on the liberation of the individual from all bondage, including that of religious traditions.[3] Theology therefore is always in a state of development and is subject to constant reformulation as the historical context changes. The pluralism of religious ideas and approaches caused by the constantly shifting circumstances and worldviews does not allow any final answer or theology. Tradition, even that of the Bible, is not ultimate but is subject to the changing needs of the community. Bible and creed, according to Kaufmann, provide "truth" but must be restated and transformed for current needs.

In this regard Schubert Ogden finds three "phases" in theological reflection: (1) the historical aspect, which traces the developing tradition beginning with the tradition behind the biblical statements (via tradition criticism) and moving to the changing perspectives within Scripture and then throughout church history, (2) the hermeneutical perspective, which

studies the historical witness (step 1) as human witness to ultimate reality and then reinterprets that witness for the present situation (recognizing the pluralism inherent in both critical reflection and praxis), and (3) philosophical inquiry, which notes the centrality of the existential question, namely, the meaning of ultimate reality for us (1991: 417-36). For Ogden human experience filtered through philosophical reflection determines the valid witness for our community.

For these scholars Scripture is a valuable witness to the power of God in the life of the community but not the final authority for theological formulation. Nonevangelical theologians believe that the original purpose of the biblical books was to attest to God's salvation-historical presence among his people rather than to provide an atomistic set of required doctrines. Edward Farley and Peter Hodgson call this latter perspective the "scripture principle" and believe it was the product of the early church, which due to pressure from rival Christian communities and the growing cosmopolitan and crosscultural nature of the Christian movement was forced to transform its view of the biblical writings into "a canon of officially recognized authoritative writings" that demanded "atomistic exegesis and proof-texting, and the establishment of revelation as the foundation of theology contained in human-historical deposits regarded as inspired and infallible" (1985:68). Due to the development of the historical-critical method and of modern theology, they argue, this view of infallible propositional authority has collapsed and been replaced by an understanding of Scripture as a symbolic expression of God's redemptive activity, which must be "redescribed" in functional terms for our day.[4]

In short, in this approach the Bible ceases to contain a revealed set of doctrines that must be believed but rather becomes a casebook that provides models to follow in constructing a modern Christianity. Moreover, the locus of theological construction shifts from an authoritative Scripture to the needs of the current community in much the same way as modern hermeneutics has shifted from the text to the reader as the locus for the construction of meaning (see app. 1). Following David Tracy, Sallie McFague defines scriptural authority as that of a "classic poetic text" in the sense that it speaks with power to all peoples of every age and is flexible, open to a wide diversity of interpretations (1982:59, see pp. 54-65).[5]

Evangelical theologians dare not ignore this challenge, for there are

many valid points in the liberal critique of conservative hermeneutics. It is indeed true that there is a plurality of interpretations and theological models. Every Christian tradition contains certain distinctive doctrines and beliefs, and at times these differ considerably from one another. It is also true that these religious traditions at the pragmatic level often have even more influence than Scripture in determining what a person believes. The actual process of sifting and interpreting the available data in constructing dogmatic theories is certainly far more complicated than has heretofore been said.

However, this does not mean that any hope of arriving at theological "truth" with Scripture as the foundation is groundless. As stated in appendix two (pp. 500-521), there are indeed many "meanings" for which one may search, such as existential, contextual (which I call "significance") or theological. However, the author's intended meaning is another, and I believe it is the basis for the others. Every chapter of this book addresses the issue of the priority (and the possibility) of the intended meaning of a passage. While the reader's preunderstanding certainly makes it difficult to discover that meaning, and while there is always a plethora of possible interpretations to sift through, this does not make it impossible to make a probability decision as to the "meaning" that best fits the original context.

Moreover, all the "possible meanings" are not equally valid, and there is no necessity to surrender and accept a multiplicity of possibilities. At times I have the feeling that a new "final authority" operates for many critical theologians, namely, that of the contemporary context resulting in relativism and radical pluralism. The Bible itself demands that we understand it on the basis of the author's intended meaning. Therefore, we have a responsibility to seek that interpretation which best fits this goal.

Biblical theology allows the theologian to move from the individual text to the theological framework of which it is a part. It is common among liberal theologians (and even many evangelicals!) to deny the validity of propositional theology. Scripture becomes a model of religious experience rather than a compendium of dogmatic statements. The problem with this is its disjunctive nature. The two—propositional and commissive—stand together. It is not either-or but both-and. Even narrative sections, as redaction criticism has shown, have a deposit of theological assertions that the author wished to communicate with his readers. Didactic sections also contain a parenetic or commissive element

that addresses action as well as belief. In other words, proposition and experience stand side by side in Scripture, and both are valid, indeed necessary, hermeneutical goals. For those (like myself) who take a speech-act approach (see app. 2) to biblical communication, we must remember that Scripture is not just illocutionary (action) and perlocutionary (parenetic) but also locutionary (propositional) in form and function.

Finally, Scripture itself claims to be the basis for belief and practice. Many today (such as Farley and Hodgson) separate Scripture from the "scripture principle." The Bible, they argue, was originally a record of the religious beliefs of the various traditions that existed alongside one another in Israel and the early church. Only later, under pressure from "heretical" opponents and the growing diversity within the church, did the scripture principle develop, that is, the belief that the Bible is the final arbiter for theological statements. However, this does too little justice to the fact that much of the New Testament was written to establish a set of doctrines that could guide the church's teaching. For instance, most of Paul's epistles correct misunderstandings and demand that false teachings be corrected. In other words, a good part of the New Testament was written to establish this "scripture principle." Therefore, we are correct in making the Bible the foundation and final arbiter for all doctrinal development.

2. ***Tradition.*** It is common to relegate the concept of "tradition" to the Roman Catholic magisterium, but this is too simplistic. Every Protestant denomination also has its own magisterial "tradition," and in many ways these traditions are just as binding as Roman Catholic dogma.[6] In essence, *tradition* refers to that set of beliefs and practices that has developed throughout the history of a movement and that directs and shapes the current form of the group. Howard Stone and James Duke bring out the positive role of tradition in shaping not only the church's beliefs but its practices as well (1996:47-50). Moreover, it protects the adherents from "being blown along by the latest wind of doctrine. This theological deposit provides the framework for developing a system of beliefs. The problem is that the church down the street has learned a different set of doctrines and a different set of proof texts, and I too often fail to notice the radically diverse approaches we are taking to the same questions. McGrath notes the extent to which many theologians (he names R. C. Sproul and Michael Horton) identify true evangelicalism only with their tradition (2000:30-32).

Here it is necessary to understand the history of dogma and to take a critically constructive approach to the sociocultural matrix that was at work in the formation of specific doctrines. Theologians must place their beliefs within the spectrum of historical interaction and understand where each aspect fits in the developing structure of church dogma. It is a humbling experience to realize that one's church tradition does not go back to the apostles themselves (no matter what creative reasoning may be behind the claim) and arose due to church conflict rather than to pure theological reasoning. This does not mean that all creeds and confessions are automatically suspect. Many are as valid today as they were when they were developed. However, we do not validate a belief simply by appeal to a tradition, for that is only a model that itself must be clarified and, if necessary, altered whenever one's study so dictates.

The key is to recognize the interpretive nature of church traditions.[7] They do not possess intrinsic authority but are valid only in the extent to which they cohere to scriptural truth. Every confessional formulation has its origins in a concrete historical situation. As Wentzel van Huyssteen states, "Since confessions claim to follow the Bible interpretively—and not to become a timeless Bible in themselves—every credo reflects the theological and nontheological climate of its time and is as such already a theological model, regardless of the authority it has in the course of time acquired in that tradition" (1989:184). As a model it must always be reexamined and if necessary corrected or restated on the basis of further biblical and sociohistorical reflection. Every tradition was not only a result of biblical research but was also a product of its time. As such each must be examined not only for scriptural reliability but also for sociohistorical aptness for our day. Many, such as the Nicean or Athanasian creeds, are as apt today as they were originally. Nevertheless, we must often explain the language and rewrite the creed to be understood by the modern person.

Yet this is not meant to suggest that tradition plays primarily a negative role in theological formulation. That would be untrue. In fact, there could be no theological construction without tradition. Hans-Georg Gadamer correctly notes that

> understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused. This is what must be expressed in hermeneutical theory, which is far too

dominated by the idea of a process, a method. (1975:258-59)

The interpreter does not directly or with complete objectivity apply the text of Scripture to a current issue. Rather, all theological understanding is consciously historical, as the biblical text is assimilated via tradition. Tradition not only informs but shapes our preunderstanding. As such it has a positive and often decisive role in every dogmatic decision.[8] McGrath gives three reasons why tradition can have a positive place in theological formation: (1) It shows how biblical interpretation in the past was often controlled by the culture and philosophy of the times and so helps us to realize that is a danger today as well. (2) Past shifts in cultural and philosophical ways of thinking have controlled following generations, and this will enable us to avoid the same mistakes. (3) Through it evangelicalism is able to make "a critical appropriation of its own heritage" so that we can recognize the provisional nature of our own interpretations and find humility (2000a:149-50). I would add another—it provides models for our interpretations that enable us to think more clearly about our own developing system.

It is the task of church history to unlock the formative process of tradition development. Many critical theologians at this level refuse to separate Scripture and tradition, since both were part of the developing process by which the church defined itself. This means of course that the canon process in the first few centuries of the Christian era was a wrong-headed enterprise since it effectively codified the Bible and placed it above critical scrutiny. These scholars would make Scripture and tradition part of an ongoing process of rediscovery as the church reaffirmed its identity in ever new situations. However, there is a distinctive difference between the Bible and the tradition that built on it. Church history does not support a picture of theologians who constantly created new doctrines. Rather, it demonstrates that Christian leaders addressed new situations by applying scriptural truths to them. This is not creation but contextualization. Even in the Roman Catholic Church the magisterium was not a new set of doctrines created ex nihilo but was an authoritative set of "interpretations" of Scripture.

The key is to realize that traditions, like confessions or even creeds, are contextualizations (or what Farley and Hodgson call interpretive "sedimentations") of biblical statements. In this way all current theological statements have their origin in history as well as in Scripture and to this extent are historically conditioned. The church today must

examine traditions and creeds in two ways: their adequacy in restating the biblical truth, and their ability to reflect the beliefs of the current community. These two aspects must ever be in tension. As Richard Muller says, any attempt to be objective in theological reasoning does not stem from an unbiased, disinterested approach to the past but from a "methodologically controlled analysis of the materials of history" (1991:100-101). One must at all times be aware of the historical and cultural conditionedness of the data, of our community and indeed of ourselves and of all understanding. This realization will allow us to recontextualize biblical and traditional truths for our current needs.

Thus, Scripture provides the content and tradition recontextualizes the biblical models by developing new models whereby the present community of faith can reformulate dogma so as to speak with as clear a voice today as the biblical documents and traditional creeds did in their own time. Moreover, a consideration of historical issues provides positive and negative examples so that we can be aware of our own presuppositions and allow Scripture to have the final voice. It also helps us to place our church tradition within the spectrum of church history and thus provides a corrective to an arrogant assumption of the inerrancy of our own faith community.[9]

We need to discover the (often primarily political) historical origins of our tradition and thus gain a better appreciation for our theological opponents. For instance, we discover that the Reformed tradition has its roots in Augustine and even more so in Calvin, the Arminian groups in Arminius and Wesley, and dispensationalism in the Plymouth Brethren movement of the nineteenth century. None of these traditions go back to the first century. Even Catholicism has its true origin in the political skirmishes between Rome and Alexandria in the second and third centuries. I would argue that the resultant humility provides the best antidote against needless schism over noncardinal doctrines (see further "The Politics of Theological Decision Making," pp. 399-402).

In short, tradition has both a negative and a positive impact on theological construction. Negatively, it too often has more formative influence than Scripture on our beliefs and can as such be a barrier to discovering truth. Positively, it guides and informs our task at every step and is a necessary aid to understanding.

3. ***Community.*** In one sense the faith community is part of the traditioning process, for one major value of tradition is the extent to which it guides the current community, and as soon as the present group defines its

doctrine it becomes part of that historical process. Yet at the same time the faith community must be considered a separate topic, for it exercises control over tradition and reevaluates the historical data in order to meet its needs. Reader-response theologians go so far as to define theological "meaning" entirely on the basis of the faith community, which does not so much redefine past doctrine as re-create it.[10] They argue that there is no way to reconstruct the meaning of past theological statements. Rather, the community simply "plays" with previous beliefs and formulates its own dogma entirely from the standpoint of present needs or theological "strategies." To such scholars both the Bible and church tradition merge into a set of dogmatic possibilities that the church community assimilates and reworks into a current belief system. According to reader-response theory, the Bible, creeds and set of doctrines are not so much understood as transformed on the basis of the situation of the reading community. For these scholars there is no such thing as normative or static doctrine but only a dynamic and ever-changing development of beliefs.

Stone and Duke speak of embedded theology (the community set of beliefs inculcated into the members) and deliberative theology (beliefs arrived at after serious reflection and study) and argue that the two should be interdependent, informing and expanding each other (1996:13-20). There is no doubt that community and context play a significant role in theological formulation. The issue is whether this aspect is formative or supplemental. I contend that the community's situation should inform and aid but not determine the choice. In actual fact there is no guarantee that the Bible is the final arbiter in the task of constructing theology. In practice many choices are made on the basis of situation and context. However, at the theoretical level the community should play a critical role—but not the decisive one. Context forms part of the complex "preunderstanding" (including tradition, community and experience) from which the biblical text is addressed in theological formulation. Moreover, the community's situation and cultural patterns guide both the wording and organization of individual theological constructions as well as of whole systems, thus recontextualizing traditional formulations for the modern age.

4. ***Experience.*** This forms the final third of the preunderstanding triumvirate (with tradition and community). The influence of each on theological decisions narrows progressively, for tradition binds the church in every age, the community contextualizes those traditional beliefs for its own situation, and the individual reworks them on the basis

of his or her own personal experiences. Yet each level has enormous potency to affect one's theological choices. *Experience* refers not only to that complex of events which shapes one's life but also to the worldview that results. Of special importance here is religious experience, but secular experiences are critical too. The whole complex of circumstances that transpires in a person's life often determines that individual's view of God and religious experience as a whole. William Newell (1990) says that all religious reflection is primarily a "getting at ourselves" and often becomes a mask hiding the self. So he calls for a four-stage process: (1) ripping away the mask of inauthenticity or worldliness to open up the unconditionality and autonomy of ourselves and allow God to enter; (2) discovering a new "religious faith a priori" by reimagining God and becoming a pilgrim and seeing the world with God's eyes; (3) "naming" the new reality of God by listening, understanding and following; (4) allowing a new "hermeneutic" to make sense and find significance in the theological moment.

Van Huyssteen makes this the core of the "nature" of theological statements: "The way the theologian, as a Christian believer, experiences his or her faith and the nature of religious language are mutually determinant of the status of theological statements, both in theology itself and in philosophy of science" (1989:128). Van Huyssteen believes that our religious experiences provide the basis for the theological language we employ and thus for the doctrine that results. Moreover, they are mutually interdependent, because our religious language is also critical in shaping our interpretation of what we experience. It is no longer valid to assume that objectivity is obtained only by standing outside our belief system. Most argue today that religious assent is vital to making rational decisions about theological truth. Truly cognitive components in theological statements must of necessity take account of a theologian's subjective beliefs, since the latter definitely affect the way we interpret the evidence. In other words, theological affirmations shape and in turn are shaped by religious commitment. The question is not whether the belief system influences the decision but whether or not one is aware of it (pp. 126-32).

Tracy calls this the "situation," namely, contemporary sociocultural factors that condition the individual and must be analyzed in order to form a valid theology.[11] Yet this "situation" is always changing and the answers of yesterday cannot satisfy the present. For instance, the reply of existential theology (such as Tillich) to the alienation and

meaninglessness of the modern age no longer addresses this postmodern society. According to Tracy such “classical” questions of the past must be reformulated for the contemporary situation, which centers on conflict and pluralism. There is no longer any single answer but rather a babble of voices clamoring for attention, and the individual is suffering from overload. The theologian must establish a dialectic between the Christ event and the complex situation at the macro (sociocultural influences on all) and micro (the inner psyche of the individual) levels. A mutually critical correlation between normative Christian event and present human dilemma becomes for Tracy the only viable theology.

Certainly Tracy correctly perceives the enormous influence of the current situation or experience on the theologian. However, he overstates its authority and understates the authority of the Word of God. Following Tracy, Sallie McFague demands a theology “for our time” that accepts no fixed, binding or absolute norm but recognizes the openness of religious truth (1987:21-28).

> It is evident that fundamentalism does not accept the metaphorical character of religious and theological language, for its basic tenet is the identification of the Word of God with human words, notably those human words in the canonical scriptures of the church. The essence of metaphorical theology, however, is precisely the refusal to identify human constructions with divine reality. (p. 22)

Tracy and McFague correctly stress the importance of a “relevant” theology that addresses current issues, but they fail to give the Scriptures the normative place that they must have in a “true” as well as contemporary theology.

Moreover, this does not mean that all theological decisions are subjective at the core, or that one can never arrive at truth (since all decisions have their origin in experience). The situation is a major component of preunderstanding but not the only or decisive one. One’s experiences are interpreted on the basis of the community’s teachings; both are heavily influenced by traditional beliefs; and all are informed by the Word of God.

5. ***Philosophy.*** The theologian must truly be a renaissance person, for it is necessary to exegete the Scriptures, collate the theological threads via biblical theology, be aware of the development of dogma throughout church history, then contextualize all this for the modern situation; and at

each stage philosophical reasoning plays a critical role. In a very real sense the theologian is asked to be an expert exegete, historian and philosopher. Kevin Vanhoozer follows Reinhold Niebuhr in noting five possible approaches to the relationship between theology and philosophy (1991:111-28; see also Erickson 1983:1:40-53): (1) Some (such as Kant and Hegel) have believed that only philosophy contains truth. (2) Others have taught that philosophy yields true knowledge of God and prepares the way for theology (such as Tillich's "correlation" between existentialism and theology or Tracy's concept of Christ as one of many "classics"). (3) Many argue that church and academy are autonomous but in dialogue (Schleiermacher's "absolute dependence" or Bultmann's dialogue between the cross and existentialism). (4) For many, theology controls philosophy, and the theologian is free to borrow from many systems without obligation to any (Anselm, Barth, Frei, Lindbeck). (5) Finally, theology has at times repudiated philosophy. Tertullian believed that the incarnation rendered human philosophy obsolete, and Luther often stated that philosophy was of the devil.

None of these positions alone is satisfactory. The best solution seems to be a combination of options three and four. Theology dare not be wholly tied to any single system but must be free to utilize any that make the biblical solutions relevant and clear. Most of all, philosophy helps the theologian to avoid subjective reasoning and to ground theological formulations in critical reasoning, coherence and rationality. Vanhoozer calls for three characteristics in such a balance: (1) individual integrity, as philosophy critically reflects on the current situation and theology critically reflects on biblical truth; (2) relative autonomy, with each having a different starting point (world and Word) and serving a different community (academy and church) but mutually integrated at the level of worldview, that is, the nature of reality and meaning of life; and (3) mutual accountability, as theology transforms the biblical worldview into a coherent and relevant worldview for the contemporary setting.

I would add that in the final analysis Scripture has the normative voice, and philosophy is a supplement to theology in helping the latter reformulate biblical truths rationally and coherently in order to address the current situation. They are not equal partners, for theology contains the ultimate truth, but philosophy forces the theologian to be both logical and open to new expressions or clarifications of the timeless truths.

There are two basic approaches to theological reasoning: deduction, which proceeds from general assumptions or evidence to particular

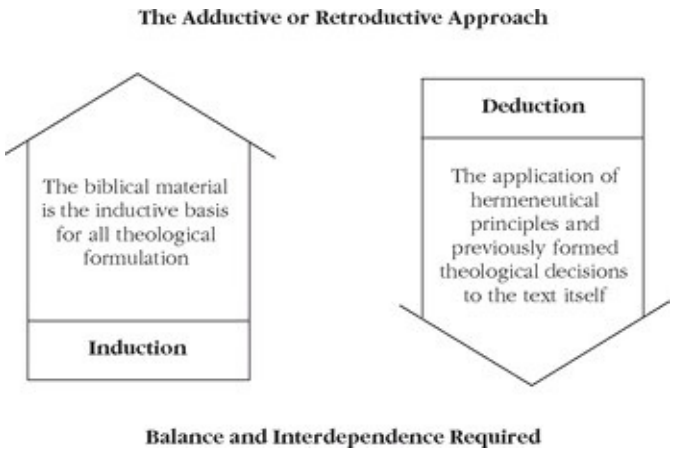
conclusions and involves a degree of probability as to the logic of the argument; and induction, which proceeds from particular or specific data to general conclusions and therefore arrives at possible rather than probable answers. Most theologians today argue that inductive and deductive methods must be integrated in constructing theological systems.[12] Pure deduction would lead to a univocal approach to the figurative metaphors in Scripture and would demand that the historical events themselves determine dogma. Moreover, pure deduction would ultimately demand a radical pluralism since the many formulations of dogma would themselves be normative for each tradition. On the other hand induction by itself involves standing above the text and imposing a hierarchical system on it. As Arthur Holmes says, induction demands an omniscient knowledge of Scripture on our part rather than an incomplete, analogical knowledge (1968:133-34).

In contrast, the theological enterprise centers on a hermeneutical awareness of the preunderstandings we bring to the task, and this in itself calls for an interdependence between inductive and deductive reasoning (Holmes calls this *adduction*, Montgomery labels it *retroduction* and John Feinberg uses the term *abduction*). The biblical material becomes the inductive basis for theological formulation; the data itself in the end provides the basis from which dogma is "adduced." Yet the formulation itself also proceeds from the deductive interpretation and collation of those texts as well as from the application of issues derived from the history of tradition. In short, these two aspects must remain in dynamic balance throughout the theological task (see fig. 16.1).[13]

Inductive reasoning utilizes the imagination to move from observations on the material (Scripture) to the theories or concepts that best explicate those truths for this day. Deductive reasoning utilizes logic to establish theological models that can be verified on the basis of the evidence. Moreover, as John Warwick Montgomery states, there is a continuous cycle (I prefer to call it a spiral) from one to the other as the theologian continues to refine the model on the basis of an increased understanding of the data. The important thing to keep in mind is that there are not several norms (Scripture, experience, tradition, philosophical speculations) but only one final source of revelation, the Word of God. The others influence but should not in themselves determine doctrine. The Bible must at all times provide a logical control on the domination of divine truth by either existential subjectivism or

theological abstractions.

Figure 16.1. The integration of philosophy with exegesis



ISSUES IN THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

These five components—Scripture, tradition, community, experience, philosophy—together influence one's choices in the production of theological covering models that can explicate the divinely inspired truths of the Word of God for our day.[14] Yet we must face several issues before these can interact to produce a viable system or determine a particular doctrine. Each contains certain problems that make the process more difficult, yet at the same time each also contains certain provisions that enable the interpreter to ascertain more clearly how to make the resultant models more accurate and meaningful for our day.

1. ***Inspiration/revelation.*** It is quite clear that the relationship between the five components depends in large measure on where we place the locus of revelation. If a theologian locates it in tradition as well as in Scripture (the classic Roman Catholic view), the resultant dogma will be dependent on the church's magisterial decisions. If he or she makes the current context (community and experience) revelatory (as in liberation theology), then the present situation will determine the shape and thrust of the theology. In other words, the issue of inspiration must be settled before we can begin forming a systematic theology.

   The one position that has dominated since biblical times is that revelation inheres in Scripture, and that only the Bible contains the Word of God. Though it is common in many circles to argue that the Bible makes no internal "claims,"[15] I agree with those who find a consistent atmosphere of divine inspiration behind such phenomena as the revelatory consciousness of the Old Testament, the prophetic emphasis on "Yahweh says," the New Testament's recognition that the Old Testament is God's Word, the growing creedal and canonical consciousness within the New Testament period, the placement of the *logia Jesu* on a par with the Old Testament (such as 1 Tim 5:18) and the placement of Paul's letters on a par with the "other scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16).[16] Many nonevangelicals assume that the conservative position is outmoded and presuppositional, based on a deficient theory of language

or truth and an uncritical acceptance of unproven assumptions. To say this, however, is to be unaware of the vast amount of literature on the issue within the evangelical camp.[17] Few evangelical scholars today are unaware of the hermeneutical issues involved. The very amount of literature addressing the problem demonstrates that the evangelical camp is not satisfied with past or trite answers but is continually searching for better definitions.

In short, if a theologian accepts the traditional view of inspiration, that God has revealed himself in Scripture, the Bible will provide the material on which doctrine is based and the other components (tradition, community, experience) will be used to redescribe biblical truth for the modern situation. The formative factor, however, is Scripture, and the theologian's task is to interpret, collate and restate its teachings so that people today can understand and apply it.

2. ***The question of metaphor.*** Recent works on theology make metaphor the central issue for developing a viable theory for theological formulation. It is an incredibly complex problem, especially as regards theology, because a case could be made that most theological statements are metaphorical at the core. Certainly this is true of Scripture. For instance, the titles of God (El Shaddai, Abba, etc.) are not simply literal terms that exactly denote God but are metaphors that we must interpret in their own context. To understand El Shaddai ("God Almighty" [Ex 6:3]), we must uncover the military roots of the metaphor and see the imagery of a God who defends and fights for his people. Abba is a similar metaphor and pictures God as a loving and protective "father."

   In the same way theological concepts in Scripture are often presented via metaphors. Terms like *salvation* or *baptism* are clearly metaphorical, the first building on the exodus imagery of the "deliverance" and the second on the cultic imagery of being "washed" or made pure before God. In fact, most theological concepts in Scripture are essentially metaphorical. This is because eternal truths cannot be expressed in human, temporal language with exactness. Metaphors are not only the best way to depict such concepts but they are the way God has chosen to express himself in Scripture. Moreover, it is not correct to intimate that metaphors by nature are vague or dispensable. The answer is a proper understanding of metaphor as a theological tool and a proper delineation of its referential nature (see Feinberg 2001:75-80).

   There have been two different approaches to metaphor. Since Aristotle the "substitution" theory—that a metaphor is similar to literal or

propositional language and can be replaced by a descriptive statement—has predominated. In recent years, however, the consensus has changed to a view of semantic opposition (M. C. Beardsley) or interaction (Matthew Black). A metaphor is now seen as an "odd" or tensive use of a term to clarify or describe a concept further. The two ideas are not simply compared, for the second term is not equivalent or analogous but dynamically changes the meaning of the first. There is interaction at two levels: interplay between the normal and figurative uses of the metaphor itself (such as *bear* in "The man is a bear," in which only certain aspects of a bear are connoted), and interaction between the subject and the metaphor that redescribes it. Moreover, the meaning is construed not at the level of the individual terms but at the level of the whole utterance or speech act (e.g., does the man look like a bear, or is he as strong as a bear, or is he a "bear" of a grader?). As Janet Soskice points out, it is not so much that two distinct subjects interact (so Black) but that within the whole statement two sets of associations interrelate.[18]

An example is the depiction of God as a "victorious warrior" in Zephaniah 3:17 (see p. 133). In Zephaniah 3:15-17a God is seen as the heroic soldier who annihilates the enemy; in verse 17b he is described as one who is "quiet in his love" and "exults with joy" in Israel. Two metaphors *(warrior* and *exulting love)* stand side by side in the text and clash with each other in describing the two sides of the divine nature—his justice and love. Moreover, both do so by interacting separately with the idea of "Yahweh God" (also metaphorical titles) and then with one another. A certain semantic opposition is established, causing readers to redefine their view of God.

It is not similarity but dissimilarity that leads the reader to rethink definitions. As McFague points out (following Ricoeur), a new, extended understanding is "redescribed" or transformed via the unconventional interaction between subject and metaphor. There is a semantic clash between the traditional understanding of the subject (God) and the new qualities ascribed in the metaphors (in Zeph 3:17 the juxtaposition of warrior and love). Moreover, the resultant shift in meaning is more vital and apt.[19] Metaphors in this sense are seen as "rule-changing" and not just "rule-governed" aspects of language. They do not follow established conventions but break new ground in creating a dialectic between literal and figurative truth as one's perspective on "the way things are" (God and the world) is transformed.[20]

At this point a definition of metaphor is essential. Soskice correctly defines metaphor as "speaking about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another" (1985:49). In this way a metaphor creates its own meaning as it interacts with the subject that it clarifies. It does not need to be "translated" into literal language to be understood. We must distinguish between literal and metaphorical language, yet we can detect the difference between them only at the level of the utterance or speech act as a whole. A statement like "she went off the deep end" is literal when used in the context of swimming, and metaphorical when used of a mental breakdown. In essence, a statement is literal if the primary or conventional meanings of the terms are intended, and metaphorical when associative meanings cause a semantic interplay between the terms that creates a dynamic new understanding of the subject.

Moreover, we cannot simply reduce a metaphor to a literal statement, as in theories of metaphor as analogy. In the past linguists have theorized that a metaphor can communicate only when translated into a direct utterance. However, metaphorical statements communicate on their own terms and are just as cognitively verifiable as are literal sentences. When reduced to literal communications, their actual meaning is significantly altered. "He is a ferocious fighter" does not mean quite the same thing as "he is a bear of a fighter." It is no longer valid to state that metaphors are noncognitive or have no referential value.

In fact, the current consensus is quite the opposite: metaphors speak directly and do not need to be translated into "literal" language to be understood.[21] Timothy Binkley points out that while the literal is behind metaphorical language (for without it the reader could not detect an "unconventional use" of a term in a metaphorical direction) there is no need to "translate" the figurative term (1981:142-45).[22] Indirect metaphorical meaning is accessible in and of itself. The context makes it clear, and the meaning is communicated on its own terms. "Although metaphors are not literally 'true,' there is no reason to suppose that truth has to be literal."[23]

In other words, metaphors communicate themselves indirectly but should not be unduly contrasted with literal language, as if an indirect relation to reality (metaphorical) is less meaningful than a direct relation to reality (literal). No term is either literal or metaphorical: context will tell us whether a word is used literally or metaphorically; the key point is that in both cases meaning is understood. In short the "truth" of an

utterance does not depend on its literal nature.[24] Soskice uses the distinction between *sense* and *reference* to argue for a referential theory of metaphor (1985:51- 53). "Sense" is the dictionary definition of possible meanings, while "reference" denotes the actual meaning of a term in a particular context. In other words, metaphors impart referential meaning as part of a whole speech act. Moreover, they do so as metaphors and carry the same communication potential and truth value as literal statements, namely, as part of a whole utterance.

We need not follow McFague and others who state that metaphors are indeed cognitive but in an uncertain and open-ended way. According to McFague theological metaphors refer to reality but do not do so in positivistic or ultimate fashion. The key to metaphorical truth is that it is apt or appropriate rather than binding.[25] As such, metaphors are attuned to particular situations and must yield to new and more vital metaphors when those situations change. For these scholars the great danger is assimilation, as the "shocking, powerful metaphor becomes trite and accepted"—that is, it turns into a dead metaphor and is canonized into established dogma (McFague 1982:41). When this happens the metaphor loses both its tensive power and its ability to shape meaning. New generations fail to see the metaphor as "one interpretation among many" and thus it ceases to address the modern situation.[26]

If we accept this view of a "metaphorical theology," it means that there are no absolute norms except a theology "for our times." The contemporary situation, and not revealed or theological "truth," will control our language and beliefs. William Alston provides one solution, asserting that while metaphors connote ideas on their own, they do not turn their back on literal meaning. Readers take the literal "model" and discover new resemblances that as contextual clues guide them to the correct choice. In fact, metaphorical truth claims are able to be translated into literal language and thus can be verified.[27] However, Alston goes too far; this in actuality is another form of the substitution theory with which I have already disagreed (see pp. 124-26). Metaphorical communication can be verified on its own terms and need not be "translated." It differs in linguistic type but not in quality from literal communication, as if metaphor is partial and only literal truth can bridge the generation or situation gap. Both metaphor and literal communication impart cognitive information, albeit in their own distinctive ways.[28]

On this point I agree with McFague that metaphors impart meaning on

their own terms and that this communication is dynamic and tensive. But I disagree with her that the meaning denoted is partial and nonauthoritative. Moreover, metaphors do not have to become "dead" with time, that is, cease to impart dynamic new meanings and turn into literal or static dogma. Nor is it correct to assert that all theological statements are by definition metaphorical. While evangelicals are guilty of ignoring the metaphorical component, liberals are guilty of ignoring the literal component. One example will suffice, and it is a critical one. Debates over the doctrine of election usually center on the individual (Calvinist) and corporate or foreknowledge (Arminian) options. Yet all fail to ask the extent to which the language is literal or metaphorical. There is no question that the New Testament writers primarily take up a term used by Israel to describe her special place before God. It is indeed possible that this figurative component (that we are God's chosen people) is the major message of election language in the New Testament rather than the literal way the terms are often used; that is, to describe the actual process by which God saves people, namely, by "electing" certain ones to be saved. It remains to be seen whether this obviates the (traditional view of a) literal use in some key passages like Romans 9—11 or John 6, but the metaphorical aspect must be considered more closely in future studies of election theology.[29]

Terms have both a metaphorical and a literal aspect, and the two components interact in producing meaning, with specific linguistic markers in the context to indicate which is the communication strategy in a particular utterance. All terms and concepts (even theological ones) can be presented in literal or metaphorical fashion; the interpreter must decide which is being utilized on a given occasion. The meaning derived will be communicated on its own terms (as literal or metaphorical statement) and will contain its own inherent authority. Literal speech acts are not more "permanent" or binding than metaphorical ones, nor are they more easily understood. Both types of utterance speak and demand adherence on their own terms.

3. ***Theological models.*** Models are by their very nature metaphorical since they are creative approximations intended to depict a particular theory or belief graphically. McFague defines a model as "a metaphor that has gained sufficient stability and scope so as to present a pattern for relatively comprehensive and coherent explanation." [30] However, this definition overstates the case. Ian Barbour notes the presence of both

literal and metaphorical models in science and religion (1974:45-48). The closer a theoretical model adheres to observable reality, the more literal it is. Soskice challenges the conflation of metaphor and model, pointing out that such an equation would reintroduce the comparison or substitution theory of metaphor, since a model is analogous to or a representative of the reality it envisions.[31] She prefers to think of the model itself as an analogous representation of a theory, while its linguistic presentation often takes the form of conceptual metaphors (such as the brain as a computer).

When we apply this to theoretical models in theology, the issues become even more complex. The Bible itself tends to use metaphors to describe the reality of God and his relation to this world. Therefore, most biblical models are metaphorical at the core. Applying Soskice's distinction, we could state that while the linguistic presentation of biblical models in Scripture often is metaphorical, there is an analogous representation of the reality behind them. Yet this literal aspect recedes further into the background as we move away from the actual models of Scripture itself to biblical-theological models and then to systematic-theological models. Each level becomes more heuristic and metaphorical.

To distinguish further between metaphor and model, a theological metaphor is a temporary and figurative redescription of a concept intended to add a further nuance of meaning, while a model is a more permanent and comprehensive description that becomes a pattern for belief. For instance, the psalmist describes God via the metaphor "shield" (Ps 3:3) and then calls him by the titular model "Yahweh" (v. 7). A religious metaphor becomes a model when it attains permanent status in the creedal confessions of the group.[32] It is one thing to call Jesus "Master" but quite another to affirm him as "the Christ" (Messiah). Both are metaphorical, but the latter has become a model for christological reflection. Another way is to think of a metaphor as a literary device meant to heighten the meaning of a concept while a model is a theoretical device that provides theological scaffolding for our understanding.

A model is also a heuristic device that is used to organize and structure related ideas. It is at times a single notion (such as God as Father) but at other times a representation or pattern that links together and systematically describes a set of ideas (such as the doctrine of God). This is best known in science where every discovery is conceived first in terms of a "map" of the theory, as in the DNA model that revitalized our

understanding of heredity. Yet this is also true of religious models that not only depict the truth adhered to but also often determine the very theological structure of the group. Such models are essential in theology, and virtually every doctrine is expressed in terms of a model of the biblical teaching. The heuristic function is especially important for understanding the way in which models depict reality. Models do not observe reality (the positivistic approach) or relate exact descriptions (the naive realist approach) or provide dispensable approximations of a theory (the instrumentalist approach). Rather, models suggest and explore patterns that potentially depict the reality envisioned (the critical realist approach).[33]

Many, like McFague, posit that biblical or theological models do not so much teach truth as evoke response. This is closely connected to the existentialist theory propounded by the New Hermeneutic. Soskice discusses this in terms of the false notion that "the models of science are explanatory and those of religion affective" (1985:108; see pp. 108-12). As she points out, this is a false dichotomy, the product of disjunctive thinking. Indeed, the cognitive function of metaphors and models, dependent as it is on "an explanatory grid between model source and model subject," makes the structural and explanatory function paramount (p. 109). In other words, theological models are primarily "reality depicting" in purpose and only secondarily evocative or action-guiding. For instance, to speak of God as "our Father" is first of all to tell us who he is and on that basis to guide our response to him. Like metaphors, models have a referential function in and of themselves.

> As dominant metaphors, models emphasize the priorities of a particular religious tradition. As systematized organizational principles in the rich network of such a tradition's figurative language, religious models consistently lead us to systematic thought and theorizing; as comprehensive interpretive frameworks they also form the center of theological questions about their referential quality—and thus about truth and the depiction of reality. As metaphors, models control and regulate the way we reflect on God and humanity. (Van Huyssteen 1989:139)

Since theological models are in essence blueprints of a community's beliefs as well as representations of biblical truths, they also have a creedal function and thereby shape as well as describe the belief system.

As such they demand adherence and assent, forming the framework as well as the boundaries of the community's acceptable dogma.

The basic problem of theological models is the tendency of their adherents to give them an absolute or permanent status that often becomes more powerful than Scripture itself. This is demonstrated in the tendency of all traditions to interpret Scripture on the basis of their beliefs rather than to examine their systems and alter them as needed on the basis of the scriptural evidence. The answer is to utilize the basic hermeneutical metaphor of this book, that of the spiral. The systematic model forms the preunderstanding that we bring to the scriptural data when we interpret, collate and contextualize it, yet at the same time we must allow the text to challenge, clarify and if necessary change that very system. The continuous interaction between text and system forms a spiral upward to theological truth.

Scripture itself contains models that we identify via biblical theology. However, our very reconstruction of these models is done from the standpoint of our own preunderstanding and therefore must continually be reexamined. How do we know when the text has truly presided over our theological proclivities? Our preunderstanding affects not only our interpretation but also our perspective and methods. The solution here is to welcome competing models as the best means for forcing us to reexamine the basis and structure of our dogma. It is difficult to question the systemic patterns of our faith since our commitment to them blinds us to their weaknesses. Our opponents keep us honest.

A primary issue here is the viability of this sense of permanent status attributed to theological models. Many scholars are utterly opposed to the idea of fixed or final dogma. Van Huyssteen speaks of "unchangeable and ageless icons, at the inevitable expense of all the provisional, referential, and open qualities of metaphors" (1989:140). There is undoubtedly some truth to this, for many groups do turn their founding fathers as well as their inherited traditions into virtually "inerrant" objects of veneration. However, van Huyssteen overstates the "provisional" and "open" nature of theological formulations and models. Metaphors (and models) communicate just as propositionally (albeit in different fashion) as literal statements. Therefore, we must be careful not to take his statement too far, as if there were no ultimate theological truth and every doctrine were valid only for a certain religious community.[34] A high view of biblical authority demands a corresponding search for a systematic theology that expresses those biblical truths in ways that are

understandable and meaningful for the contemporary community. In this search we build on the giants of the past and must both trust their insights and refine them.

Our constant goal is to develop the tradition in search of that theoretical model which best restates the eternal truths of Scripture. Rather than the completely open and changeable metaphorical theology of McFague, I prefer to think of theological models as statements of doctrinal belief to which we give strong assent but that are still open to modification and even replacement if the biblical evidence so dictates. No model should have permanent status in and of itself, although those that have stood the test of time (such as the creeds) come close. Even these, however, are subject to further insight and restatement, as seen in the growing number of evangelical studies on cardinal doctrines like the Trinity or christology.

Each model represents the way that position organizes and conceptualizes the biblical data on the basis of tradition, community and experience.[35] It is educational to compare the different ways in which the traditions understand and collate the same biblical material. Yet the question persists: Does this demand pluralism, the view that they are equally valid within their respective tradition frameworks? It does demand a pluralistic or humble attitude, for each side should recognize the possibility that the other might be right. Yet this need not lead to pluralism, for every person can examine the data and decide which of the options best fits the evidence. The best way to attain truth is to allow the opposing side to challenge our basic beliefs and then to seek to learn from it and be driven back to the text so that we might see anew what Scripture really teaches.

By comparing the models represented in figure 16.2 we observe that both Calvinists and Arminians affirm total depravity (the view that sin so controls the individual that every person when confronted with the gospel rejects God’s offer of salvation). For the Calvinist humankind is divided at this point into the elect and the nonelect. The elect are called or predestined on the basis of God’s mysterious will and therefore are brought by his irresistible grace to faith decision. For many Calvinists the extent of God’s sovereignty is seen in the belief that God accomplishes his act of regeneration before the faith response is made.[36] Once a person becomes a Christian, God keeps him or her eternally secure. Perseverance is “final” or certain, for God oversees believers and

protects them. On the other hand, the nonelect continue in their rejection of Christ, and the only "conviction" they experience is proof of their guilt before God (Jn 16:8-11). Their eternal damnation is certain but just, for they have continually refused the sufficient call of God. (It is efficient only for the elect.)

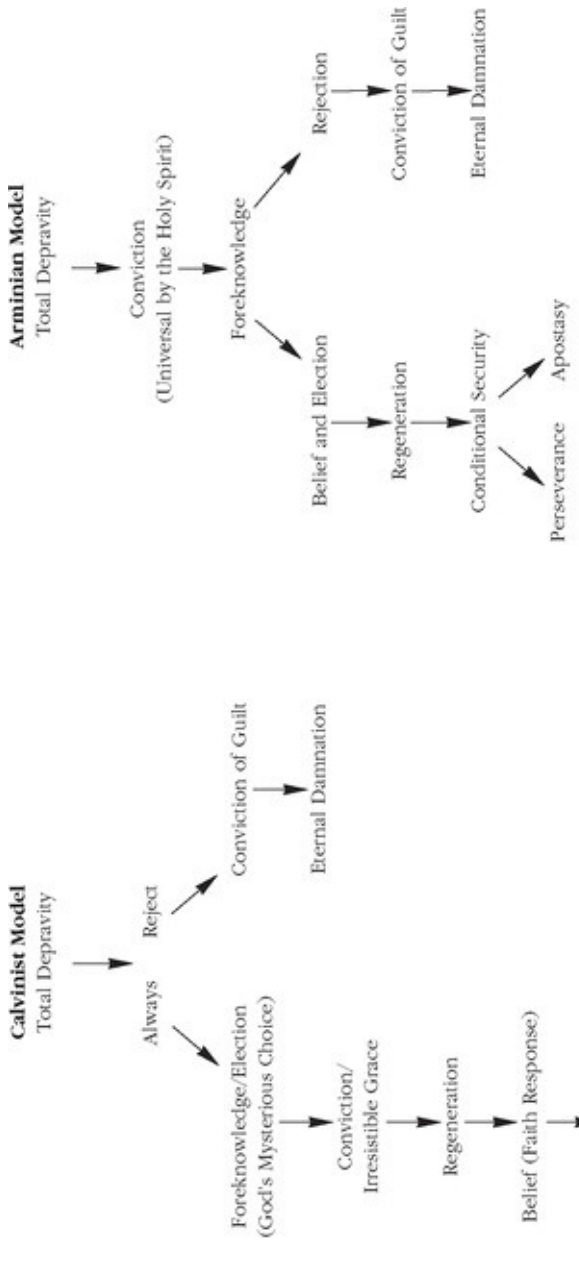
The Arminian model differs from this at several points. Both Arminius and Wesley affirmed God's sovereignty in the salvation process (unlike Pelagius) but argued that the individual makes a valid faith decision on the basis of free will. This is accomplished by the universal convicting power of the Holy Spirit, following God's desire that all be saved (universal salvific will). This Spirit conviction allows the individual to overcome total depravity and make a "true" faith decision. Divine election occurs simultaneously with this faith decision (based on foreknowledge). The result is regeneration, which as in the Calvinist position is wrought by God rather than the individual (contra Pelagius).[37] Conversion for the Arminian leads to conditional security, which teaches that God keeps the believer secure but that the power to live the Christian life is only efficacious if the believer perseveres in God's enabling strength. If the believer does not do so, apostasy (falling away from the Christian faith) might finally result.

4. ***Tentativeness and authority of theological assertions.*** In our discussions of both inspiration and models, the question of the staying power of theological statements has arisen. Since theological constructions are finite approximations that represent or redescribe biblical doctrines, how much authority do they have? When we consider the metaphorical core of theological concepts, it becomes clear that doctrinal statements are figurative representations of theoretical constructs, and the accuracy or "truth" of their portrayal is always a moot point. To this extent theological constructions tend to be tentative and provisional, and we must always determine the degree of adherence we should give individual dogmatic statements.

   Moreover, all theological assertions have a historical dimension, for in every decision I am not only interpreting Scripture but am both reaffirming and interacting with a tradition. In David Tracy's discussion of the "classic" (which includes not only the Bible but also great works like those of Calvin, Luther, Barth, etc.), he notes four stages in creating a theology: (1) theologians approach the task with a certain preunderstanding; (2) they react to the claims of the text with faith or recognition; (3) they engage in critical dialogue with not only the text but

its history, effects and tradition development; and (4) they employ all contemporary hermeneutical understandings to retrieve, examine and make public the claims of the tradition as they have reinterpreted them.[38] The total effect of this process is a continual reassessment and refinement of theological schemata.

Figure 16.2 Calvinist and Arminian models of soteriology



The basic difference between Tracy's approach and mine is the final authority I give the biblical text over all other "classics." Still, the process Tracy promulgates holds a great deal of truth. We do not simply move from the Bible to theological assertions, and those assertions are not automatic reproductions of biblical truths. Rather, all decisions are filtered through a network of tradition and preunderstanding, which itself exerts tremendous influence on our interpretations and choices. To this extent each decision we make is provisional, and we must establish a continual dialogue between tradition and biblical text in the spiral upward to truth.

In this sense the models of figure 16.2 are themselves general rather than specific, for individual Calvinist and Arminian scholars would disagree with one or another aspect. For instance, Calvinists differ as to whether the "decrees" (such as election) came before the Fall (supralapsarian position) or after it (infralapsarian position). They also disagree regarding the predestination of the unbeliever to damnation (double predestination). Finally, Calvinists debate whether or not the atonement is limited to the elect. On the other hand, some Arminian scholars add the concepts of perfectionism or the second work of grace, and many define such doctrines as depravity or security differently than I have done. Each of these is a refinement with which the burgeoning theologian must interact, and all are subject to debate and clarification.

We dare not assume any of these doctrines without an ongoing reexamination of the scriptural and historical evidence. Moreover, since Thomas Kuhn, scholars have recognized the impact of the "paradigm community" on all decisions—religious as well as scientific.[39] The influence from tradition and community cannot and should not be entirely rejected; on the other hand, theological formulations are seldom a pure reflection of scriptural truths, and the extent to which this is the case is the degree to which resulting dogmatic conclusions are tentative.

Yet dogmatic or creedal statements are also models of scriptural teaching, and the more they cohere with the biblical data (attained by collating all the scriptural statements that address the issue) the greater the authority they possess.[40]

We can even give such decisions a percentage value, so long as we recognize that any such is a personal estimate. For instance, I feel 99.99 percent certain that my views on the deity of Christ and substitutionary atonement are correct but only 90 percent sure of my middle position on

the charismatic issue (that tongues are used of God today but not meant for everyone) or my premillennial posttribulation belief. As for my moderate Arminian views or my openness to women's ordination I feel about 80 percent certain.[41] Moreover, some of my colleagues disagree with me on many of these "models," some with nearly 100 percent certainty! Still I preach and teach each with authority while seeking to instill an aura of humility into both my teaching and my students. At the same time I frequently debate these same positions with both colleagues and students, trying to demonstrate the superiority of the evidence for my position.

In short while there is a degree of tentativeness in theological models, this does not mean that we must be uncertain. Such degrees of certitude will be held by both the individual and the community. Moreover, some doctrines are more clearly taught in Scripture, and many of these are mandatory or cardinal doctrines. Such (e.g., the deity of Christ or justification by faith) will necessarily have the highest possible authority, and to deny any of them is tantamount to biblical heresy. We identify these doctrines on the basis of the clarity of the biblical evidence as well as the combined agreement of most segments of the church. While they are open to further clarification they can never be replaced or rejected. I have discovered an interesting phenomenon in Scripture: only the cardinal doctrines are absolutely clear! All of the noncardinal issues have scriptural support on both sides of the issue.

My point is that in every theological construction a natural tension exists between the tentative nature of all such conceptualizing and the final authority that they have in one's belief structure and in the community.[42] In fact this tension between provisionality and authority is a necessary component of any systematic theology. The verification process and the community itself give the theological model authority as it meets the test of time and answers challenges from competing schools. Yet this does not diminish the authority of the theological assertions confessed by individual and church. The process of reformulation, which includes comparison with Scripture and competing models as well as the fact of our faith in the tradition or system we have chosen, yields a high degree of authority. However, this is tempered by a humility and a continued search to make certain that our theological model is truly the best contextualization of scriptural teaching.

5. ***Theology as contextualization.*** Closely linked with the previous

discussion is the concept that systematic theology is a contextualization of biblical theology, filtered through the history of dogma but recontextualized for the contemporary situation and both organized and expressed in current thought patterns. Biblical theology collates the biblical teachings and conceptualizes the theology of Israel and the early church. Church history studies the attempts of the church in differing social settings and with differing problems to redescribe or contextualize that data to meet specific problem situations in particular eras. Systematic theology continues that enterprise so that the Bible might speak as validly now as it has in the past. This means that the content of theological truth remains inviolate and is provided by the sacred Scriptures. However, the communication of that truth content does change, and the search to make certain that our tradition's formulation provides a superior model of that dogmatic core never ceases. The authority of our tradition depends on the demonstration of its superiority over competing models and on its ability to communicate those truths to the modern person.

This also means that the actual expression of theological truth will differ from culture to culture. For instance, the oriental culture should develop a more cyclical approach to theology in keeping with its patterns of logic, and many Third World cultures will place more stress on story theology. Yet the content, namely, basic theological truths, will not change (see chap. 17 for further discussion of the method).

6. ***Verification or validation of theological assertions.*** How does one assess the degree of tentativeness and authority of various theological constructions or the success of a particular dogmatic model? This of course has vexed scholars for centuries, especially in terms of debate with other paradigm communities (such as Luther and Zwingli's Marburg colloquy on the Eucharist). Both sides believe that their doctrinal formulation is correct and neither will budge. Moreover the layperson is rightly confused, since both sound viable when taken separately. One of my advisees in seminary a few years ago went to a visiting Calvinist scholar (the student was a moderate Arminian) and asked, "What is the basic difference between my position and yours?" The professor answered (somewhat in jest), "Mine is biblical!" Yet how do we verify which is *more* biblical?

   The method that I have chosen for verification is "critical realism."[43] The basic premise of this approach (which has been borrowed from a philosophy of science perspective) is that assertions, scientific or

theological, are valid representations of the "way things are." At one time it was thought that religious statements could never claim to be real since they could not be verified. However, with the development of analytical philosophy (see app. 2) it was realized that religious or theological assertions could be verified, for there are several levels at which one can affirm reality. This approach is also "critical" because it never assumes that theological constructions are exact depictions of revealed truth (unlike "naive realism"). Instead, dogma is an analogical model that approximates or re-presents truth. Thus critical realists never assume that they have achieved the final statement of theological truth; the process of validation and improvement never ceases, for there can be no facile assumption that they have arrived, though of course one can verify that a particular statement is an accurate depiction of the biblical norm.

The process of validation within a critical realist approach is at once simple and complex. It is simple because the verification comes via criteria of coherence, comprehensiveness, adequacy and consistency. It is complex because each criterion must be applied hermeneutically to the many interpretations and organizing patterns of the competing systems. The most difficult (many would say impossible) aspect is to recognize one's own preunderstandings and to seek as objective an examination of the data as possible. This in fact is the most important contribution of critical realism, for it refuses to take itself too seriously and attempts to learn from competing schools of thought via an honest recognition that the others might be correct.

The first step in validating a theological construction is to see whether it fits the biblical data (criterion of coherence): Does it provide a better map of the biblical doctrine than do the other systems? This concerns the "explanatory success" (van Huyssteen 1989:152) of the model, whether it accurately portrays the scriptural teaching (tested by exegesis of the relevant texts) and has clarity, that is, makes the complex doctrine understandable.

The second step is to ascertain whether the dogmatic assertion is a true model of the biblical material taken as a whole (criterion of comprehensiveness): Does it account for all the statements of Scripture on that issue, or does it merely arise from selected portions (a canon within the canon)? At this level too the theologian must compare the theological model with competing systems to see whether the others are in fact more comprehensive.

Third (the criterion of adequacy), does the formulation provide a better

description of the doctrine than do those of competing schools?

Fourth (the criterion of consistency), does the system fit together and form a viable pattern? If some portions contradict others, this calls for reexamination and modification; if there is inconsistency throughout, the system may be fatally flawed.

The fifth step, the criterion of continuation or durability, asks, Does the theological construction have staying power? The community over a long period of time helps to arbitrate the viability of a doctrinal statement. The creeds generally are ascribed more authority than other statements because the church down through the centuries has recognized their accuracy.

Sixth, have many differing schools of thought accepted the viability of the assertion (criterion of cross-fertilization)? If several traditions have recognized the truth of a theological construction, this demonstrates that it is not merely the logical outgrowth of a particular tradition but transcends regional interests. Such a phenomenon has a greater chance of success.

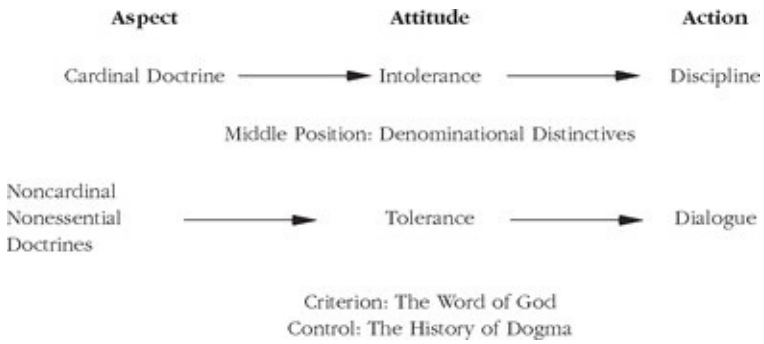
In the final analysis these criteria do not so much "prove" a doctrine or theological construction as show its likelihood. There will always be the need to recheck the biblical data behind it. In addition a critical-realist approach will suggest ways in which the modern statement can be reworked so as to conform more closely to the biblical teaching.

7. ***The politics of theological decision making.*** Attempts to make changes in one's theological affirmations or to alter a traditional formulation of a doctrine are in some ways dangerous moves. Every decision made, every clarification pursued, every system in some sense altered has political ramifications within the traditional matrix or community and can result in the loss of one's job or ministry. This is not only the case in fundamentalist or evangelical circles. The number of university professors who have lost their posts due to a paradigm change in their position, the number of evangelical students whose theses have been rejected because of their conservative cast, all demonstrate the universality of the "politics of exegesis."

   In any tradition there is a pressure to conform, a demand to affirm and not to question the basic beliefs of the group. Nor is this necessarily wrong. There must be controls against wild and dangerous speculations, especially in religious circles where the very life of the group is at stake. We must balance "academic freedom," the right to make certain that dogma truly does reflect scriptural teaching, with the harmony and

homogeneity of the group. Clearly the Bible does demand a strong stance against false teaching. The problem is deciding what indeed constitutes heresy or false teaching. It is certain that some doctrines are essential to the core of biblical Christianity (the cardinal doctrines), while others are not clear in Scripture and were never intended by God to serve as controlling beliefs of the church. The difficulty is deciding whether a given teaching belongs to one group or the other (see fig. 16.3; Osborne 1988b:152).

Figure 16.3. A perspective on theological debates



It is important to exercise extreme care when a church encounters issues like eternal security, the charismatic debate or the status of women in the church. People tend to feel very strongly about such things, and every new pastor must learn at the outset of his or her ministry specifically which issues are the “hot button” ones. (I pushed a hot button for many when I said “his or her ministry”; yet should anyone doubt this book because I remain open on this issue?) What happens when differences of opinion arise in a church on such matters? In our age of mobility and crossover between denominations, such debates are more likely than ever, as people from quite diverse backgrounds congregate together in the same church setting. When this occurs it is vital to know ahead of time how to deal with it.

At the outset the church or community must decide on the proper attitude with which to approach the particular debate: tolerance, in which the group “agrees to disagree,” or intolerance, with the community refusing to allow the view to be promulgated. Each attitude leads to a corresponding action: tolerance produces dialogue on the issue, with each side trying to learn from the other and the opponents returning together to

the Scriptures to rediscover the true biblical teaching. Intolerance produces discipline, as the offender is removed from a teaching role and perhaps brought before the church for censure. Yet we need some guidelines to help us know when dialogue is called for or when discipline is demanded.

There is only one basis for making this distinction: Is the issue a cardinal or a noncardinal doctrine? A cardinal doctrine is a theological belief that is central to the Christian faith and clearly taught as such in Scripture (i.e., the return of Christ). A noncardinal (or nonessential) doctrine is one that is not clear in Scripture or is not presented as a mandatory belief of the church (such as the millennium or the tribulation positions). The latter are viable doctrines but have arisen more from the church's desire for comprehensive dogma than from biblical emphases. It is not that there is no warrant for such beliefs but that there is an absence of clarity and emphasis on them in Scripture. It is valid to pursue these issues (I tell my students that they owe it to the Bible, themselves, and their churches to determine such doctrines to the best of their abilities) but erroneous to make them tests of fellowship.

Yet it is extremely difficult in the final analysis to decide which are cardinal and which noncardinal doctrines. The single criterion is theoretically the Word of God, but as I have noted frequently, the Bible is always filtered through tradition and personal proclivity (hobby horses) before it becomes dogma. In fact, in actual practice tradition more than Scripture often decides which are considered cardinal issues. In Reformed circles the Calvinist model is often seen as a cardinal doctrine, likewise the Arminian model within that tradition. Dispensational groups turn the pretribulation rapture into a fundamental doctrine.

We need a control to indicate when a doctrine that we consider essential in Scripture is actually a hobby horse on our part, in other words when it is our tradition rather than Scripture that is making the decision. Only then can we allow Scripture to determine the outcome. I propose that this control is the history of dogma. Whenever a theological debate arises, we subject the issue first to the light of church history. If the debate has been settled for centuries and agreed on by all with a high view of biblical authority, that indicates the likelihood that this is a cardinal doctrine. If, on the other hand, the agreement is restricted only to our tradition, and other traditions have formed the opposite conclusion, then it is probably not a cardinal position. Issues that are not likely to be solved in the church before eternity arrives are not essentials.

There is, however, a middle position: many times in the historical development of a denomination an issue that Scripture does not designate an essential becomes a cardinal doctrine. Several examples can be given, like the Calvinist or Arminian dogma within their respective denominations, or the charismatic and millennial debates. When this occurs, it is usually best for the individual to recognize the right of the denomination to determine its own distinctives but then to help the people within the movement to understand that it is not a cardinal doctrine and thus to respect members of other denominations who disagree. At times if one feels strongly enough about the matter (such as women in the church), that person can try to encourage the community to remove it as a mandate and allow the other side to express its convictions.

Let me give examples of both cardinal and noncardinal issues. The debate over Christ's twofold nature was settled at the Council of Chalcedon; the church since has recognized that it is the best model of the biblical teaching on that doctrine. Therefore, there can be refinements in one's definition, but any teaching faithful to Scripture must reflect the unity of Christ's two natures, which is universally accepted as a cardinal doctrine. At the same time the most vociferous debate of this decade is over women in the church, and many on both sides treat it as a clear, cardinal issue. Yet many inerrantists, as well as those from other traditions, have accepted and continue to hold to the viability of women's ordination, and throughout the history of the church women have held positions of authority and prominence. Virtually every denomination has had women pastors and deacons in the recent past.[44] My point here is not to settle the debate but to argue on the basis of the figure 16.3 that women in the church is a noncardinal issue regarding which we need to exercise tolerance rather than intolerance. Both sides need to continue in dialogue with one another.

Finally, we cannot disregard the "political" repercussions whenever theological decisions are made. However, we can minimize the danger by considering carefully both the seriousness of the matter and the proper response to make. Many schisms over unnecessary issues can be avoided by determining the biblical importance of the doctrine. Even when the debate is central to the denomination or group we can encourage respect toward the other side (such as charismatics vs. noncharismatics). Our primary concern must be to safeguard biblical truth and preserve the "good deposit that was entrusted" to us (2 Tim 1:14) while, at the same

time, guarding the biblical mandate regarding the unity of the church (Jn 17:20-23). Once more, a “hermeneutics of humility” must prevail.

8. ***The postmodern turn.*** In line with the influence of postmodernism (for the philosophical issues see Feinberg 2001:95-109) since the early 1980s, a segment of evangelicalism has coined the term *postconservative* (Olson 2000:201; Taylor 2004:17) to describe a movement identified with Stanley Grenz, Roger Olson and Nancey Murphy. They believe the emphasis must shift from battles over the Bible, theological details and liberalism to a new constructive theology that is more open to innovation and movement. Olson (2003:36) identifies their chief characteristics as completely evangelical, a generous yet critical orthodoxy, experience rather than doctrine as the true essence, critical realism rather than foundationalism, irenic dialogue rather than debate with nonconservatives, an inclusive view of evangelicalism, a relational view of God’s being and of reality, an inclusive view of salvation. In light of postmodernism they argue for a new era of reflection and creativity centered on relational theology—spirituality and a community experience—rather than propositional theology. In this Grenz (2000a:197-98) follows George Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic approach to placing doctrine within the believing community rather than viewing it rationally as final or external truth. So theological reflection on Scripture (the ultimate authority for theology) must be a community event, and the Spirit speaks not just through the text but within the community and through its tradition (2000a:206-11). The reason is the demise of foundationalism, the belief that the structure of knowledge can be grounded in certain indubitable or foundational principles. Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* is a major example. Grenz argues that among philosophers foundationalism is passé and should be replaced by a coherence view of knowledge, that is, a “web of beliefs” that fit the community context (2000:112-19; see also Grenz and Franke 2001). Following Pannenberg and Lindbeck, Grenz seeks a coherent belief system that redescribes human existence in relation with God. For evangelicals this means there is no universal set of criteria for affirming belief and that theological truth will be found in the community and its traditions (2000:119-27; following Plantinga and Wolterstorff). So theology becomes a conversation in which the community (and its tradition) reflects, reforms and delineates its belief structure into an integrated and prescriptive set of doctrines. The Word provides the foundation and the Spirit the voice guiding the process.

This is a wide-ranging movement that must be taken seriously. The emerging church is strongly affected by this structure, and all of us can learn from it. On one issue they are exactly correct. Theology is meant to be lived out in community. Stephen Williams says true reflection "can take place properly only if it is done cooperatively, in the context of congregational church life where we think together in fellowship" (2000:161). Nearly every command in the New Testament is in the plural and is intended to be fulfilled in a community setting. Relationship is at the heart of it all—love and unity in the Godhead is fleshed out first in the love and unity between Christ and us and then must be reflected in love and unity in the family of God (cf. Jn 13:34-35; 14:15-16, 23-24; 15:4-5, 7; 17:21-23). True theology is lived, not just believed! Yet there are serious questions about some of the other points. It is true that foundationalism is being rethought and must be replaced, but is it valid to say that every form of it has passed from the scene? It is interesting that Olson sets critical realism opposite foundationalism when in reality it is considered soft foundationalism. J. P. Moreland and Garrett DeWeese argue for the validity of the correspondence theory of truth (a thing is true if it conforms to facts) and for metaphysical realism (there is an objective reality [God] outside linguistic categories) (2004:85-89). Then they propose a "modest foundationalism" that establishes a "reliabilist" connection in a "modalist tie" (= cause or necessity) between evidence and a truth (2004:90- 93; on truth see Groothuis 2004:59-79). This corresponds with the critical realism discussed in appendix two. With this, correct doctrine corresponds to truth (when stemming from Scripture itself) and stands above the community, not beneath it. Moreover, this does not mean each community can discover its own truth, and that truth is as reliable as any other community's "truth." Communities can be wrong and must be judged on their correspondence with what the inerrant Bible actually teaches (Moreland and DeWeese 2004:105-7).

Carson provides a multifaceted critique of Grenz and the postmodern turn: (1) the sociological-historical approach to evangelicalism leads Grenz to set up false polarities between a rigid and an open form; (2) the completely positive approach to postmodernism and the negative description of classical evangelicalism loads the dice; (3) Lindbeck's use of doctrine as belonging only to the community is extremely dangerous and a major step away from Jesus and Paul with their belief in the binding authority of God's truths in his Word; (4) postmodernism's view

that knowledge is a social construct does not mean the church is not only the locus but the object of theology, let alone that the church is the truth-maker; (5) coherence is just as central in modernist epistemology as it is in postmodern systems (2004:43-53). In short, the postmodern turn rightly centers on community, but in replacing logical reasoning with the interpretive community as the matrix of theological truth, it goes too far. Theological truth is Bible-centered, not community-centered, and it is not up for grabs depending on which community you join.

Let us conclude with a positive reflection on contextualizing the gospel in a postmodern society. As Don Bartel says, we must admit we are in a missionary field here in this postmodern society, and we need to think like a mission outpost in a strange foreign land (2000:343-49). There are seven principles for a proper contextualization (combining the insights of Carson 1996:494-514; Long 2000:328-34; Davy 2000:356-67; Fleming 2005:316-18): (1) Be willing to critique the bankruptcy of our age. This is true of modernism as well as postmodernism; the emptiness and moral confusion of our times can be a means of witness. (2) Allow the metanarrative and the turning points in redemptive history to guide that witness. The Bible has already confronted a pluralistic world, so we need to center on biblical theology more than systematic theology so that the biblical worldview confronts the false worldviews of our day. Tell the biblical story and establish a narrative witness. (3) Replace the individualism of modernism with the community of postmodernism. This is a relation-hungry culture, and people are looking for a place to belong. A loving, healing faith community is the best witness in these times, both in Western and non-Western cultures. (4) Let the historic gospel control all contextualizations of it (see chap. 17 on this). Too much of Western gospel proclamation is devoid of content, and as much syncretism occurs in the popular church as in Third-World contexts. (5) At the same time use imagination to supplement verbal communication with emotive and aesthetic forms to portray “the beauty and mystery of the gospel” (Fleming 2005:317). In other words, be culturally relevant in a media-savvy age. (6) Use conversation and life stories to draw the postmoderns into the “real” world of Christianity. (7) Think carefully how to live as well as what to say. In this age we witness with our transformed lives as much as with our informed lips. We must avoid the materialism and success-oriented lifestyles of our culture and exhibit a countercultural community to the world.

9. ***Theological method and systematic theology.*** Many, like Wayne

Grudem, believe “theology should be explicitly based on the teachings of Scripture” (1994:15), and so they simply trace the issues through the Bible in order to develop their theology. That is laudable, for I have argued all along that the Bible is the *primary* source for dogma. But is it truly possible to construct a systematic theology *solely* from scriptural passages? Can we ignore tradition/history of dogma or community in the process? The problem is that the Bible is not systematic, and the task is not just to find out what the Bible says but to provide a logical arrangement, a *system*, for our theology. J. I. Packer suggests five principles for the twenty-first century: (1) Theology must always further the righteousness and holiness of the saints and reflect “historic supernatural Christian orthodoxy.” (2) It must also reflect exegetical truth, biblical theology, and at the same time build bridges to life today. (3) It must reflect constant dialogue with biblical teaching and exude the impact of the Holy Spirit in spiritual understanding. (4) It must continually engage culture and the ideas that drive it, then present the gospel as the way forward to solving the prevalent issues. (5) It should maintain dialogue with Catholic, Orthodox and mainstream liberal Protestant thought, refusing the isolationist mentality that destroyed witness in the past (2000:186-89).[45]

One theologian who is developing a theology that meets these criteria is Kevin Vanhoozer. He begins with the gospel (the drama of redemption) and *sola scriptura*, but develops this along the lines of “the drama of reading,” in which the Bible as “performance” instructs the reader in the actions of God both in the redemptive stories of Scripture and his speaking in and through the text to the reader who then “performs” in responding to the challenge of the text (2000:63-67). Vanhoozer develops this in three acts, first the drama of divine revelation and human response, as God on the one hand is revealed and on the other speaks in a “divine communicative action,” not just through propositions but more through actions that encounter the reader and demand reaction (the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects) (2000:69-74). Second, the “canonical-linguistic approach” is postpropositional in the sense that Scripture does more than just convey information but acts with a plurality of voices that is disseminated via a plurality of interpretive traditions and leads to a plurality of theological systems which interact. The theologian seeks “canonical competence” in interpreting texts and becomes sapiential in terms of knowing God and placing one’s self under the text so as to perform the theological truths uncovered (2000:74-90).

Third, doctrine becomes a drama, a covenant experience or performance with great urgency in terms of the fitting participation of the believer in the drama of redemption and the incorporation of more players into that drama (2000:90-101). In this sense doctrine is the set directions that guide the participants and orchestrate the drama.

In his *First Theology* (2002) Vanhoozer collected about ten years of his essays to develop the primary three aspects of his drama—God, Scripture, and hermeneutics. The proper response to a postmodern society is to experience God in a new way by indwelling the biblical texts and experiencing them as divinely communicative speech acts. Then in his *The Drama of Doctrine* (2005) the program is set forth in depth, building on his 2000 article. He begins with the potential sources for a "first theology" (2005:3-25): biblical propositions, the person of Christ, piety, the church and its practices (the cultural-linguistic turn), arguing that the true norm is the drama of the Word of God acting in our lives, the canonical-linguistic turn in which "the understanding that faith seeks is dramatic" (p. 17) as the covenant affects the community. He describes the program in four stages. First, the "theo-drama" unfolds as God encounters the world through the gospel—the Christ event, the canon that proclaims it, and the Spirit who empowers it—in a trinitarian "self-communicative action," with doctrine directing the church's participation in the drama. Second, "the script" discusses the role of Scripture and tradition in helping the church find the correct direction for its life. The canon as a covenant document that directs the praxis of the church in a canonical-linguistic act as the Spirit's enabling presence allows the "canonical practices" to be lived in the community. Third, the role of the theologian is developed as a "dramaturge" (the Spirit is the director of the drama), the one assisting the director in guiding the cast to understand and perform the script. "Faith seeking understanding" becomes the process of understanding and then performing in new contexts, that is, the science of interpreting the script and the practice of fitting it to the current cultural context. Fourth, the "performance" traces the role of theology in the life of both individual and community. The church becomes "the theater of the gospel" as the drama of redemption and reconciliation is played out before a watching world. This scenario provides exciting possibilities for a new theological synthesis that unites all elements of doctrine—the propositional and the action side. Doctrine must be understood then synthesized into a logical order and then finally lived out in daily life. The first and third are the key areas, but the second

helps the community to understand how it all fits together holistically.

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

Theology is done at many levels, and it is difficult to develop criteria that can fit all the possibilities. At the lowest level all Christians make theological decisions while listening to sermons or even while thinking about their faith. Next comes the person teaching a lesson or Bible study on a particular doctrine. A pastor preaching a series of doctrinal sermons is called on to do even more technical work. Then there is the person preparing an ordination paper or the seminary student doing a technical term paper. At the top are those writing theological treatises, but even here there are several levels. A person producing a single-volume systematic theology will not work as deeply as one writing a multivolume systematics, and that person will not research as extensively as one doing a major work on a single topic, such as biblical anthropology. Finally there is the Ph.D. dissertation or magnum opus on a narrow subject, such as the perseverance of the saints or propitiation. Each level will probe more and more deeply into the subject matter and work more extensively in the various stages I will propose. All I can do is present the guidelines and provide general advice as to how these various concerns might be met.

In addition, two types of theological studies can be done, and each builds on the other. The basic approach ponders a particular doctrine, traces it through Scripture and the history of dogma, and then tries to formulate it accurately for today. This type of study is the one most commonly done. The systematic approach examines and reconstructs a model collating several doctrines in holistic fashion, such as pneumatology (including not only the doctrine of the Holy Spirit but also spiritual gifts and the charismatic debate). The following principles proceed from one to the other. (For an excellent example that puts all these together, with a remarkable balance of the biblical, historical and philosophical data, see the study of the Trinity in Feinberg 2001:437-98).

1. Consciously reconstruct our preunderstanding. If we desire an honest reexamination of the issue, we must define carefully where we and our tradition stand on the doctrine before beginning the study. This is accomplished at three levels—individual, church, and denomination—for

it is likely that subtle differences exist at each one. Unless these are brought to the surface they will dominate and skew the research, for it is natural to want the evidence to corroborate rather than challenge our presuppositions. Placing them in front of the biblical data will free us to use our preunderstanding positively to study the evidence rather than negatively to predetermine our conclusions.

2. Inductively collect all the passages relating to the issue. Using each of the tools available we must gather every biblical passage that addresses the doctrine. This cannot be done simply with a concordance; it is also necessary to examine books on the issue to see which passages they utilize. It is particularly crucial to note passages that seem to contradict the conclusion our tradition prefers (such as passages on security or on the necessity of perseverance). It is common for a tradition to interact only with those that favor its position and to explain the others away on the basis of the favored proof texts. These two sets of passages should be placed beside each other so that the final formulation might be balanced.
3. Exegete all the passages in their context. This is one of the most difficult of the steps, for each major passage is a thesis in itself, and it is no wonder that few systematic theologies in our generation have provided an adequate study of the relevant texts. This aspect in fact will be done in depth only for a major study, for the time and space necessary would be immense. The pastor will nevertheless make this the core of the presentation. The critical part of this step is not only to exegete the passages but to do so "in their context," for when the biblical statements are artificially placed side by side, the context can be ignored, with the result that the passages take on a life of their own and begin to interpret one another in ways that go beyond the author's intended meaning or theological emphasis. This leads to another form of illegitimate totality transfer. The theologian needs to see which aspect of the issue the passage addresses *in its context* before considering the larger theological truth that emerges from all the passages placed together. Only then can the biblical data be collated into a coherent whole and decisions be made.
4. Collate the passages into a biblical theology. The theologian organizes the texts in terms of both the history of redemption (the chronological or diachronic development of the doctrine in Scripture) and the beliefs of Israel and the church on the doctrine (the synchronic aspect). This is indeed a "systematic theology" of the early church, but it must be contextualized or reconstructed to speak to the contemporary church and its interests. As such it provides the primary content for a modern

theology, telling us what the doctrine *meant* to the biblical writers and thereby building a bridge to what the doctrine *means* for us. It also provides a crucial control against domination by any preconceived tradition, since it uncovers the belief pattern of the early church rather than of the history of dogma.

5. Trace the developing contextualization of the doctrine through church history (for the history of various doctrines see Berkhof 1975; Hart 2000). The changing models of the history of dogma exemplify the development and restatement of the issue through the differing eras and situations of the church. By considering carefully how the church reshaped and applied the dogmas to meet its changing needs, we are given negative (heresy) and positive (creeds and confessions) examples for our own contemporary contextualization. Most of the issues have already been discussed by the giants of the past, and careful consideration of them in a historical framework will greatly aid our task. Moreover, we should study the development of our own tradition to see where it fits into the history of dogma and what sociocultural factors led to its development. This will teach us humility as we assess the validity and contribution of our tradition to systematic theology as well as help us to go behind our tradition to the biblical text in reformulating the doctrine for today.
6. Study competing models of the doctrine. Metaphors and models are indeed "reality depicting," but they do not provide exact replicas of biblical truth. The influence of tradition and community as well as experience can override Scripture in determining the shape of the theological model. The solution is a critical-realist approach to the data, in which the competing schools continually force us to rethink our approach. We cannot complete a redefinition of the doctrine until we have carefully considered and learned from our opponents. The way to a balanced statement is to allow the other systems to point out weaknesses in our models and then to return to the scriptural data to correct them. It is erroneous to think that any system has a lock on truth. All can be enhanced, and the constant appearance of new works on virtually every issue shows that improvements are always welcome. Today's magnum opus is often tomorrow's partial failure. Time uncovers logical inconsistencies and gaps that later works must clarify and fill. The best way to discover and plug these gaps is to allow our opponents to teach us, that is, to point out biased interpretation of passages and inadequate argumentation. The result will be a stronger and more balanced model.

7. Reformulate or recontextualize the traditional model for the contemporary culture. The content of the doctrine (the extent to which it is based on biblical teaching) is inviolate, but its expression or redescription changes as the thought processes of a culture change. Therefore, the way a systematic theology or individual doctrine will be expressed should alter from generation to generation and from culture to culture. In my opinion it is time for a new theological genius to rework the patterns of systematic theology, now that the Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian thinking behind Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield is no longer culturally necessary. The rigid demarcation of doctrines from bibliology to theology to christology and so on to eschatology (last in order because it is the doctrine of "last things") no longer communicates as well as it used to.

   This does not mean that the approach of the nineteenth century has no relevance at all; it is obvious that all of us who have been steeped in that method have found it adequate, and nearly all theology professors continue to use it with success. Yet there are serious drawbacks. Especially problematic is the failure to show the interdependence of doctrines; for instance, the necessity of eschatology (not only "last things" but the presence of the kingdom now) for understanding christology (Jesus inaugurating the kingdom).

   I do not know exactly what form this new theology will take, but I believe that it will center on a reorganization and restatement of traditional doctrines.[46] The content will not change (except where the interpretation of texts has been logically weak and "unbiblical") but the form will; I also believe that there will be more balance between the competing systems, that is, they will move closer together.[47] A good example of one such attempt is the movement to "story theology," a narrative approach to theology that follows the models of the Gospels and centers on the praxis element of theology rather than on abstract reasoning. We must oppose those practitioners who use story theology to deny and replace propositional truth in Scripture, but Gabriel Fackre's *The Christian Story* (1984, 1987) is an excellent exception. He wishes to supplement other approaches by centering on "community story," which he defines as "the Great Narrative of the deeds of God evolving from within the early kerygma through the Christian community's various expressions of it" (1987:185). It will be interesting to see how he works out this program in subsequent volumes.

8. After individual doctrines are reformulated, begin collating them and reworking the systemic models. The final stage is to redefine the systems themselves. Previous steps have dealt with individual issues like sovereignty versus free will, election versus faith decision, security versus perseverance. After the theologian has finished restating these, it is time to examine the larger pattern of which they are a part and to restructure the models like those presented in figure 16.2 (p. 395). We must first study and diagram the various traditional models (as well as the modifications suggested by past scholars) and then construct our own revised model to fit the patterns suggested by the conclusions arrived at earlier. The final step is to test the model by comparing it with the competing models and to ask at all times whether it fits (note the criteria on pp. 398-99) the biblical data and the lessons derived from the history of dogma better than do the others.
9. Work out the implications for the community of God and for the daily life of the believer. It is more and more evident from recent works that theology was never meant just for the scholar's study or the classroom, but mainly for the church. If theology is not lived, God considers that it was never heard or believed (Jn 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10). Belief is a community thing and must be worked out in the community life. It is more practical than theoretical, more illocutionary than locutionary.

17

Homiletics I

CONTEXTUALIZATION

The study of Scripture can never be complete until one has moved from text to context. The static study of the original meaning of a text dare never be an end in itself but must at all times have as its goal the dynamic application of the text to one's current needs and the sharing of that text with others via expository teaching and preaching. Scripture should not merely be learned; it must be believed and then proclaimed. This dynamic aspect of the Word is the task of contextualization and homiletical analysis. Moreover, David Wells (1991:173) calls for a realization of the "missionary nature of theology" because "ours is a culture often as alien to Christian conviction as many of those that, today, are under the dominance of Marxism, Islam, or Hinduism." Our culture is far removed from the biblical culture, and our mindset is even further removed.

As we move from the world of the text to its significance, we must wed those two aspects. We cannot finally separate exegesis from application, meaning from significance, because they are two aspects of the same hermeneutical act. To derive the meaning of a text is already to arrive at its significance, because the horizon of your preunderstanding has united with the horizon of the text, and exposition has become the beginning of significance. The preacher's task is to ensure that the Word speaks as clearly today as it did in ancient times. This does not occur easily and is often shallowly done. Even those who exercise great exegetical care in elucidating the original meaning of the text often fail on this point. For the most part this is because homileticians have failed to provide a strong hermeneutical foundation for application. When I first began teaching a course on interpretation, I looked in vain for a preaching text that discussed application from a hermeneutical standpoint. Several gave excellent presentations of practical methodology, but none went deeper to the underlying theory behind it. The theory has now been provided by missiologists, and it is important to note that what they call "contextualization" is identical with what homileticians call "application."

Contextualization is "that dynamic process which interprets the significance of a religion or cultural norm for a group with a different (or developed) cultural

heritage." The term originated in 1972 when the Theological Education fund published a document called *Ministry in Context* and said, "Contextualization is not merely a fad or a catch-word but a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the Word" (Gilliland 2000:225). Dean Fleming says it "has to do with how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious, and historical setting" (2005:13-14). I would expand this to cover each passage and theological teaching of Scripture. At the heart it entails crosscultural communication, and while the theory is fairly recent, the process characterizes not only Christianity but every religion that has appeared on earth as each relates its theories to the "marketplace." Stephen Bevans calls it an imperative, not an option, and says it must take account of "the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change in that culture, whether it is brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice, and liberation" (1999:1).

We must define the term *dynamic process* carefully, for as David Hesselgrave and Ed Rommen demonstrate, the priority of the text diminishes progressively as one moves away from a high view of scriptural authority.[1] The supracultural nature of biblical truth is replaced by the primacy of current cultural context in postmodern contexts. The result is what they call "syncretistic contextualization," in which the religious interests and cultural needs of the receptor audience provide content as well as focus. Liberation theologians, for instance, argue that the climate of economic oppression and deprivation controls the contextualization process, so *sin* is redefined as social injustice and *salvation* becomes the liberation of the poor. However, this is the antithesis of the approach taken here. God's revealed Word is the final arbiter of all truth, and contextualization of necessity must recognize the inviolability of its truths. A plenary-verbal, inerrantist approach to contextualization accepts the supracultural nature of all biblical truth and thereby the unchanging nature of these scriptural principles.

At the same time, an evangelical contextualization is aware of the transformational character of the current receptor context. While the *content* of biblical revelation is unchanging, the *form* in which it is presented is ever changing. These two aspects—form and content—provide the indispensable core of contextualization. The debate in hermeneutical circles relates to the relationship between form and content; in other words, how dynamic is the process? How free are we to translate a biblical concept into its corresponding idiom in the receptor culture, and how do we do so? The fact that we must do so is inescapable. William Dyrness asks regarding contextualization in the diverse

cultures of the third world, “What shape will Christian obedience take in these places? And what kind of theological reflection is appropriate to this obedience?” (1992:15). Perhaps the best way to demonstrate this is to note how often the biblical writers themselves had to contextualize previously revealed truths for their new situations.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

The key issue is *relevance;* religious principles constantly must be adapted to meet new cultural challenges. This in fact is exactly the problem that led to the development of the "oral tradition" in Judaism during the intertestamental period. The Torah, developed for Israel during its wilderness and conquest periods, did not readily apply to the cosmopolitan culture of the Greco-Roman period. Therefore, the Jews developed an "oral Torah" to contextualize the laws for the new situation. Recent studies, like Martin Hengel's *Judaism and Hellenism,* have demonstrated how extensively Hellenistic ideas had permeated even into Palestine itself. This is seen, for instance, in the extent to which towns and even Jewish people bore Greek names in Palestine (see Mussies 1987:1040-64).

Yet this does not mean that the Jewish people Hellenized their religion. Within this contextualization there was still the unifying force of Torah and a strong nationalism. David Flusser argues that the Jews were quite tolerant of pagans in their midst and only reacted against religious encroachments among the Jewish people themselves (1976:1065-1100). Therefore, while much influence was seen on a cultural and linguistic level, the Jews "in Palestine and elsewhere were not attracted by paganism and remained faithful to their God and their distinctive way of life."

This is especially true of the diasporate communities, where we would have expected a great deal of "contextualization." Yet again the assimilation lay more in the externals, in form rather than in content. On the whole, the influence was quite similar to that which occurred in Palestine. The economic influence was very well defined; S. Applebaum shows the extensive military and trade involvements of diasporate Jews in Hellenistic society (1976:701-27). They often belonged to Greek societies, took part in the gymnasium education and in general contained families of both wealth and distinction. However, the extent of this is vigorously debated, and few doubt that diasporate Judaism as a whole stressed its separateness. S. Safrai states:

> The Judaism of the Hellenistic Diaspora was closely linked to Hellenistic

> culture. Not only was Greek the language . . . but even a Greek literature was produced, especially in Egypt. It was a literature which was closely identified with the rich culture of the Greeks, and with the mentality which dominated there. Various documents . . . show how closely the Jews were attached to institutions of Hellenistic law and to concepts tributary to this sphere. But the Jews of Egypt and the Hellenistic world . . . generally remained loyal to the Torah both in public and in private life. . . . It is clear from the sources that all the circles which departed from the spirit and practice of Jewish observance remained isolated. . . . There was no general tendency to assimilation with the environment and to the adoption of the cultural heritage of the Greeks. . . . Though the Jews of the Diaspora were part and parcel of Hellenistic culture and society, they regarded themselves essentially as Hebrews living abroad. (1974:184-85)

Philo, for instance, is best known as one who "contextualized" Judaism for the Greek way of life. However, he was an orthodox Jew who sought assiduously to keep the Torah. He was not trying to alter Jewish concepts but considered himself a student of Scripture who sought to show that Judaism was palatable with Hellenistic philosophy.

The early church followed the Jewish pattern. By studying Acts and the Epistles, we can determine the extent of contextualizing in the early church.[2] There is no question that acculturation occurred; the movement of the church from a Jewish sect to a universal religion for "all nations" demands that. Norman R. Ericson provides several New Testament examples: (1) The council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) ruled that Jewish cultic requirements, especially circumcision, could not be required of Gentiles; however, it asked Gentiles to respect Jewish customs. In short, cultural barriers were breached. (2) First Corinthians 8:1—10:22 shows that Paul accepted the basic cultural contingencies of Gentiles (especially 1 Cor 9:19-23) but asked that such freedom be waived for the sake of new believers. (3) First Corinthians 5:1-8 shows that Paul uses cultural regulations from society when they are conducive to Christian ethics. (4) Colossians 3:18—4:1 and the other social code passages illustrate situations when the church followed accepted social structures (1978:74-79). Within this we note the tension reflected that the slave was at one and the same time to be "brother" of his master (Philem 16) and content with his situation (1 Cor 7:27). In other words, Paul refused to demand social change on the external scale but did demand an internal change on the relational level.

There is more than one aspect to this issue. First, we see relational changes in terms of interpersonal communication. This involves language, as demonstrated

in the use of the Septuagint in Old Testament quotes, or in Latinisms Aramaisms and so forth in the New Testament. It also involves cultural accommodation, as in the Jerusalem decree and letter of Acts 15, and in the strong versus weak in 1 Corinthians 8—10. Second, we note evangelistic contextualization, the cultural attempt to be "all things to all people" so as to "save some" (1 Cor 9:22). This is especially demonstrated in the preaching of Acts, with the very different approach to Jews (Acts 2:14- 36; 3:12-26) and to Gentiles (Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31). In the Areopagus speech (Acts 17) Paul's utilization of Greek philosophers is an especially important example of contextualization, demonstrating what missiologists call "redemptive analogies."[3] Third, we note polemical contextualization, in which the language of the church's opponents is used against them, as in Romans 3:5-9; 6:1-2, 15-16; 2 Corinthians 10—13; or Colossians 1:15-20.

This final category is especially crucial in showing the limits of contextualization. While the church borrowed the forms of their receptor cultures (1 Cor 9:19-23), it refused to compromise the content of its message.[4] This can best be illustrated in the two major heresies of the New Testament period (the Judaizers and Gnostics), both of whom centered on a misguided contextualization. The Jewish Christians demanded that Gentiles accept Jewish culture and religious practices in order to be Christians. In Galatians and Romans especially, Paul told them that this would compromise the gospel, therefore the church must refuse to do so. The incipient Gnostic movements at Colossae, Ephesus and so forth led to several epistles, notably Colossians, the Pastorals, 1 John and the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2—3). In each epistle the church was uncompromising against those groups that had allowed contextualization to produce another gospel. In other words, the early church looked at contextualization as an evangelistic tool; to that extent, it influenced the form of the gospel presentation, but the content did not depart from the divinely revealed model. The principle was to be "all things to all people" in areas where the gospel was not compromised but to be countercultural in every area that conflicted with gospel truth and requirements.

Fleming, after a detailed study of the way the New Testament books contextualized the gospel for diverse cultures, sums up his findings in five principles: (1) the writings sing the gospel story in many diverse keys as they use the language and images to make sense in several cultures via "context-sensitive theologizing" and fresh images. (2) In the midst of the diverse voices, there is a coherent gospel story behind them all. The Christ-centered message that God has intervened in history and the redemptive significance of the cross lie behind all

the voices, and this metanarrative must guide all contextualization today. The Christ story must provide the foundation for all the diverse theological contextualizations. (3) As the New Testament writers did, we must discern the "limits" between valid contextualization and syncretism. At times they had to oppose an unwillingness to contextualize (the Jewish Christians in Acts 10—11; 15), at other times they had to say no to syncretistic compromise (1 Cor 15; proto-Gnosticism in 1 Jn). Like them, our contextualizing must be in keeping with the one true gospel, led by the Holy Spirit, tested by the wider Christian community and have the power to transform the community. (4) We must enculturate the gospel into the lives and customs of the people whom we serve by reclothing the supracultural message in a new cultural garb "without loss of meaning." This can only be done with care in order to have a "transforming engagement" in multicultural settings today. (5) We must " 'globalize' the gospel" and at he same time transform the local community by listening to the "vernacular theologies" of the powerless people groups and at the same time seeking harmony in the broad sphere. By submitting our message (including Western theologizing!) to the larger community and seeking a "transcontextual" unity and an "intercultural conversation" between the diverse theologies of the world (2005:297-315; on this see also the chap. 16 on systematic theology).

Several critical principles come out of this data. Most important, contextualization must occur at the level of form rather than of content. This corresponds to the discussion of surface and deep structures elsewhere (pp. 114-15). We must distinguish between the forms the gospel presentation took in the first century and the theological core that provided the core of the gospel message and its ethical ramifications. Biblical truths are absolute and must remain inviolate in any crosscultural communication. Dean Gilliland says it well, "In the process of contextualization the church, through the Holy Spirit, continually challenges, incorporates, and transforms elements of the culture in order to bring them under the lordship of Christ" (2000:225). The recent missiological debate centers on "dynamic equivalence" contextualization, which attempts to make the gospel and Christian theology meaningful and relevant in the diverse cultures of our modern world. Many approaches to contextualization have centered on the contemporary context rather than the ancient text as the generating force. Charles R. Taber denies the possibility of an "absolutist" theology and argues that "failure to recognize the cultural relativity of theology" leads to confusing theology with God, a form of idolatry (1978:4-8). The "orthodoxy of verbal formulation" centering on "abstract propositions to be believed" is the approach of the Western world and is no more valid than the Eastern symbolic framework (p. 7).

Charles Kraft takes a similar approach in his highly discussed *Christianity in Culture* (1979), where he calls the Bible a "divinely inspired casebook" rather than a theological textbook. As such it centers on the subjective pole of communication (divine-human interactions) more than on the objective pole of propositional dogma (see chap. 10). On this theoretical foundation Kraft erects his superstructure (chaps. 13-17). His major point is that the "translation" must be hearer-oriented rather than based on "formal correspondence" or a literalistic model, which is grounded in an outmoded theory of language. Contemporary translations must achieve the same impact on the receptor culture as was felt by the original readers.

Furthermore, Kraft argues that the form of the text must be changed in direct

proportion to the distance between the source and the receptor cultures. The reason is that the supracultural truths of God were revealed in the culture-bound language of the human authors of the Bible. Therefore it must be contextualized.[5] Thus, while the translation is based on reproducing the writer's intended meaning, we must "transculturate" that message for the receptor culture. This is done by reproducing the process of the original message and not merely the finished product. The interpreter must bridge the vast differences in perception among the cultures. This may involve replacing the author's intent with God's higher intent, certainly within the range of interpretations yet expressed without Western theologizing.

In applying this theory Kraft finds three types of passages in Scripture: (1) culture-specific commands, which are completely tied to the ancient culture and must be altered to fit the current situation (such as the head covering on women [1 Cor 11:2- 17]), (2) general principles, which apply ethical truths (such as "You shalt not covet" [Ex 20:17]) that transfer directly from culture to culture, and (3) human universals, which automatically transcend their own cultural context and are mandated in every age (such as love of God and neighbor [Mk 12:29-31]). The latter two types of commands do not need to be contextualized, while the former does (1979:139-43).

Certainly I applaud much of what Kraft is doing. His concern for the author's intention on the meaning level is laudatory and very close to my conclusions. However, the application of dynamic equivalence to the task of communicating theology needs to be considerably sharpened. There is too little left of the text when Kraft finishes, too little that is supracultural. The Bible as he sees it is too culture bound, with too little theological truth that carries over.[6] The separation of God's intention from the author's results in a canon within a canon and calls the interpreter to seek a "deeper structure" in some ways similar to that of structuralists (see pp. 471-74).

Again we come to the crux: Which is to be authoritative, the Bible or the receptor culture? All our evidence thus far is conclusive: we dare not neglect the supracultural content of the sacred Word. I certainly agree with the dynamic-equivalence school that we must go behind Western theologizing to the text itself. However, while I do not treat the creeds as inerrant, neither do I deny them. The text of Scripture must challenge the creedal statements and if necessary alter them (such as removing *descensus ad inferno* ["descended into hades"] from the Apostles' Creed if one agrees with recent interpretation regarding 1 Pet 3:19-20), but meaning must never be negated in the name of contextualization. We do not rework the content, only the *presentation* of gospel

truth. This is the model provided in the early church. In other words, we need much greater precision at the level of significance/application.

The problem is relativism and syncretism. How do we decide when a contextualized theology is no longer orthodox? Robert Schreiter suggests five criteria for judging: (1) there must be an inner consistency, not only within itself but with the basic truths of Christianity; (2) it should be able to be translated into worship; that is, it should have a sapiential direction; (3) it must lead to valid orthopraxis, again as defined by the church; (4) it should be open to criticism and correction from other traditions; that is, it should grow and assimilate into the larger orthodox movement; (5) it should be able to interact with and challenge other theologies; that is, it should contribute to the life of the church as a whole (1985:117-21). What all these have in common is the constant interaction with past and present Christian truth in ascertaining when innovation becomes dangerous. Dyrness says that the only viable approach is to establish a dialogue, a "horizon of interpretation," between cultural models that allows each to both challenge and learn from the other (1990:20-23). Each side can grow theologically from such a dialogue, and together they can avoid relativism.

Relativism and syncretism are firmly in control of all too many nonevangelical (as well as evangelical) contextualizations. E. Jansen Schoonhoven has studied nine major African journals, and notes that African theologians blend Paul Ricoeur and Ludwig Wittgenstein (see app. 1) in calling for a purely African theology without Western hermeneutics (1980:9-18). Gabriel Setiloane provides an example of this "purely African theology," which in his view should center on African rather than Western religious images (1979:1-14). The individual is presented as a "participant in divinity" (a contextualization building on animism), and the Christ myth is expressed via the African Bongaka, or "witch doctor," who is possessed by divinity. Setiloane believes that the African concept of divinity is deeper than its Western counterpart, and goes so far as to say the "Christian orthodox trinitarian formula of divinity should be 'dismantled. ' "

However, this is hardly justified. Ricoeur and especially Wittgenstein would never play so fast and loose with the content of Scripture. Only the most radical hermeneutic would treat the basic theological truths as pure symbol. Without controls that center on the meaning of the text, one will contextualize to a religious expression that is no longer Christian. This is certainly the case with Setiloane. When cultural norms have ascendancy over the text itself, there is no longer *theology* but only a human-centered *anthropology*.

Of course, this does not mean that Western churches have the right to force their "forms" on Third World churches. African Christians should create an

indigenous theology that reexpresses the normative biblical content in dogmatic symbols that communicate biblical truths to their own culture. Paul Hiebert argues for a “transcultural theology” and religious system that is in essence a biblical theology in contextualized form (1985a:5-10; 1985b:12-18). While many in the dynamic-equivalence school locate meaning primarily in the reader/receiver, Hiebert proposes a “critical realism” that situates meaning in the text/sender and seeks to develop a contextualized model that fits the revealed truths. The key to critical realism is an openness to competing theories, a continual reexamination of conclusions by going back to the data. In other words, relativism is unnecessary, and the intended meaning of the text (meaning) must always be the norm that controls contextualization (significance).

The solution is to maintain the tension between meaning and significance as two aspects of a single whole. The intended meaning does have a life of its own as a legitimate hermeneutical goal. However, it is not complete until the significance of that data has been determined. Since I have already discussed the problem of preunderstanding for meaning, I will illustrate it with the hermeneutical spiral (see fig. 17.1).

The text itself sets the agenda and continually reforms the questions that the ob-serverasks of it. The means by which this is accomplished is twofold: grammatical-syntactical exegesis and historical-cultural background. These interact to reshape the interpreter’s preunderstanding and help to fuse the two horizons.[7] The actual contextualization then occurs as this process of fusion reaches out in another and broader hermeneutical spiral to encompass the interpreter’s life and situation (see fig. 17.2).

Figure 17.1. The hermeneutical spiral

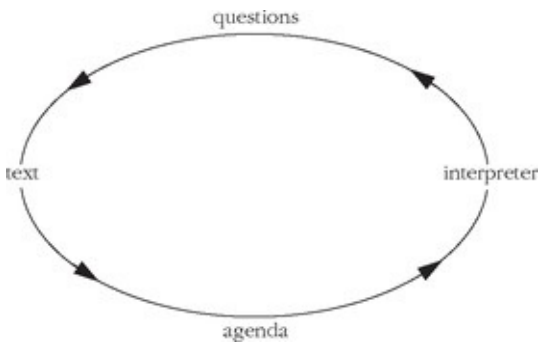
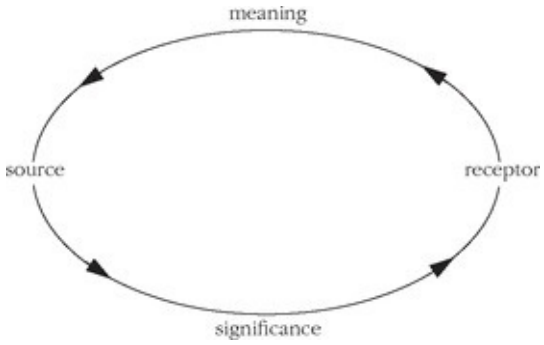


Figure 17.2. A broader hermeneutical spiral



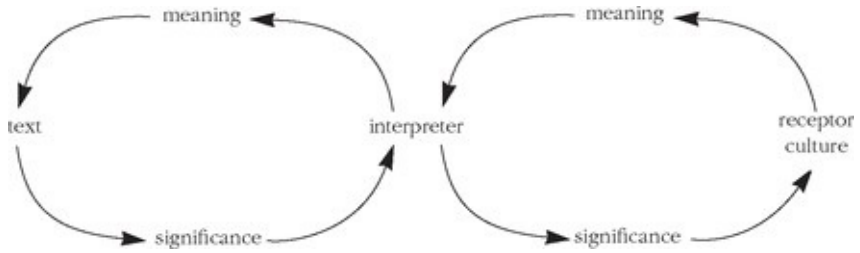
Here the receptor culture/interpreter goes to the source/Scripture to determine its meaning. This is the goal of the first spiral (fig. 17.1). The source then yields not only meaning but significance. It is important that significance be grounded in the text's context. We certainly agree that communication is dynamic rather than static, yet these categories are too neat. The issue of abstract proposition and dynamic communication is not either-or but both-and. The Jews as well as the early church clearly perceived revelation to be propositional as well as relational (see app. 2). It is true that twentieth-century evangelical hermeneutics has emphasized only the propositional dimension; but we do not solve that by going to the opposite extreme. A biblical balance is required.

The key is to allow the dictates of Scripture to challenge and then to transform the receptor culture, yet in an emic rather than etic direction. Here I will follow David Hesselgrave's plan (1978:87-94). Missionaries first contextualize themselves to identify the text, thereby transforming their own perspectives. Then they further contextualize themselves to identify with the worldview of the receptor culture. Only then can they contextualize or communicate crossculturally the biblical message. Most assume a two-way process, a source (Scripture) and a receptor audience. However, there is in any communication an intermediate step, the interpreter/proclaimer, and it is in the tension between these aspects that the dilemma of the preacher/missionary resides. Therefore, this dynamic-equivalence model must be repeated, once for the preacher as interpreter, and again for the preacher/interpreter as proclaimer.[8] The second step fuses the interpreter and the text as the contextual communication takes place for the receptor culture (see fig. 17.3).

The key issue is still the form-content debate. How much freedom should the contextualizer have in transforming the biblical command? Larkin argues strongly that the biblical form as well as its meaning is normative unless the scriptural text explicitly points in the other direction.[9] Otherwise, he says, we are in danger of disregarding biblical content as "form," since there are no criteria

for separating the two with any precision. Therefore, Larkin continues, we do not need principles for normativeness but for nonnormativeness; that is, we assume that the command is intended for all cultures unless there is specific evidence otherwise. While I deal with this further in the next section ("Cultural and Supracultural Norms in Scripture"), it is at the heart of the contextualization process and must be discussed here. I contend that often the form as well as the content (such as baptism or the Eucharistic celebration) is inviolate, but I disagree that no criteria exist for separating the two. In a very real sense I am not that far from Larkin, as he admits, because the criteria are indeed found in the text itself.[10] However, the starting point is quite different. Larkin and McQuilkin assume normativeness, while I seek to allow the text to tell me and in that sense assume nothing.

Figure 17.3. The preacher's dual role as interpreter and proclaimer



Two aspects support my contention that we dare not assume form as well as content to be normative. First, at every stage of the cultural development of Israel and the church, they had to contextualize biblical truths, often in terms of form. For instance, some forms of Israel's worship changed when they moved from the seminomadic tabernacle to temple worship. No longer were the tribes gathered in companies, and the day-by-day worship patterns altered dramatically. This was even more true during the exile after the temple had been destroyed and in the postexilic situation. The absence of centralized temple worship led to the development of the synagogue and a more democratic religion in which the priest increasingly exercised less control of the religious structure. Similarly, much of the New Testament chronicles the changing form of both worship and church government as the church moved from a Jewish to a Jewish-Gentile amalgamation.

Second, the history of dogma demonstrates the changing forms in which theological truths have been presented. Systematic theology is a contextualization process that depends on the form-content distinction. In short,

the distinction between form and content is essential to the contextualization process.[11] For instance, David Hesselgrave and Ed Rommen note that in Islamic areas it is viable to incorporate Muslim forms of worship like “sitting on the floor, removing one’s shoes in the place of worship and bowing prostrate when praying” (1989:chap. 13). The content of worship and prayer is supracultural, but the form can be contextualized. Yung Han Kim suggests four aspects of a cultural theology: (1) it must nourish cultural transformation by remaining socially responsible and allowing Christ to challenge and transform oppression. (2) It must develop a biblical ethics regarding technology, to use it with wisdom and remain aware of God’s creation mandate. (3) It must develop an ecological theology that takes a stand against the destruction of resources and find order and balance in its creation theology. (4) A transformed cultural theology must establish dialogue and understanding with other world religions and work with them to improve the plight of the world’s poor as well as to bring them to Christ (2002:45- 48). This is a good example of listening to the theological voices of other cultural communities. The concern for a theology of liberation is very present in the Bible (over 2,000 references) and is a weakness of Western evangelical thought. It is sad that it is identified primarily with the Marxist element. Such a theology should be the natural outgrowth of biblical contextualization.

CULTURAL AND SUPRACULTURAL NORMS IN SCRIPTURE

The major difficulty in contextualizing Scripture is deciding exactly what are the cultural or time-bound elements in a passage and what are the supracultural or eternal principles. Some assert that the Bible, written in human language to specific cultural situations, is by nature culture bound. Interpreters therefore must remove the time-bound (or, with Bultmann, the mythical) element before they can derive the normative principle underneath. Yet there is a vast distinction between affirming the circumstantial nature of Scripture—the fact that it was written to specific situations—and the belief that it is thereby culture bound. In fact, one literary type of New Testament epistle, the "treatise" (e.g., James, perhaps Hebrews or parts of Romans), is predicated on the premise that it is not written to answer specific problems but to center on theological truths meant for all.

James Olthuis argues that "misinterpretations" of the biblical text make any "certitudinal" authority on the surface level impossible (1987:24-26, 32-40). The issues of "semantic symbols" and "structural specificity" determine the "universe of discourse" against which the world of the interpreter must clash. Following Hans-Georg Gadamer and the New Hermeneutic, Olthuis states that we seek not the author's intended meaning (the "semantic" level of symbols) but the vision or world of the autonomous text (the level of "meaning"). Therefore, any certitudinal hermeneutic must take cognizance of the fact that true authority occurs at this visionary or macrostructure level. At this deeper level we encounter the true reality of God's revelation. However, Olthuis's assumption that all authoritative statements are found at the macro or deeper level of meaning fails to consider the strong probability that in many cases the surface structure itself states the deeper or normative truth. We cannot assume that biblical authority occurs only when Scripture is interpreted down to the "deep-level" principles of theological truth. It is clear that the Bible throughout claims authority for itself at the surface level (see Grudem 1983:19-59; McQuilkin 1983:39-41). When we distinguish cultural and normative aspects, we are not doing so at the level of authority but rather of applicability.

Yet there are also situations in Scripture—slavery, foot washing, temple feasts, meat offered to idols and so on—that are first-century issues and seem to have little to do with us. While we want to avoid the reductionism and relativism of those who give the Bible little authority at the surface level, we must know how to determine which passages are normative and which are not. McQuilkin and Larkin argue that only those passages which are explicitly overturned in the New Testament should be considered culturally relative.[12] Yet what do we do with the many passages that are implicitly tied to first-century culture (like slavery or meat offered to idols)? We must contextualize these at a secondary level, for such practices do not occur in our modern culture.[13]

D. A. Carson argues that attempts to distinguish supracultural from culture-bound content are misguided (1984:19-20). All biblical statements (even theological assertions like "God is holy") were written in cultural guise, that is, in human language, and attempts to distinguish some types from others are doomed to failure. Additionally, doing so leads to subjectivity, for the interpreter's grid and current cultural fads all too often determine what is "cultural" and no longer applies. While these are very real concerns, they do not obviate the attempt I am arguing for. I am not establishing a canon within a canon (a set of superior commands) or distinguishing first-class from second-class passages. This is a matter of contextualization or application. The issue is not whether a passage is normative but whether the normative principle is found at the surface level (that is, supracultural) or at the principial level underlying the passage (with the surface situation or command applying mainly to the ancient setting). All biblical statements are authoritative; some, however, are so dependent on the ancient cultural setting that they cannot apply directly to today since there are no parallels (such as foot washing or meat offered to idols). We need hermeneutical criteria to enable us to make such decisions on firm ground.

Few people assume that all biblical statements are normative for all time. Even those who come close, like denominations that still practice foot washing and the holy kiss, fail to demand cultural commands like many of the Levitical laws. The problem is that few have sought hermeneutical criteria to distinguish the normative from the cultural. Denominations assume that their individual traditions will guide them, and ethno-theological anthropologists (such as Taber and Kraft) assume that individual cultures will somehow come up with the proper criteria.

Therefore, the major need is for hermeneutical rules that will aid the interpreter in demarcating the cultural from the supracultural within individual passages. First, we must answer the claim of many Third World theologians and

anthropologists that our very criteria are culture bound as the product of "Western thinking." This is erroneous, for if conceptual communication between cultures is to be possible at all, some means of detecting that communication must be attempted. While the Western mind can learn much from Eastern idealism or symbolism (which has many affinities with segments of biblical truth), the Eastern mind can also learn from the conceptual approach of Western thought. It is doubtful whether the "tradition" or "sound doctrine" so central to New Testament thought can be understood as anything other than conceptual or prepositional in nature. In fact it is the job of hermeneutics to observe the generic type of any piece of literature and to interpret it properly on that basis (see further app. 2).

Kraft argues for a "dynamic equivalent" approach and believes that the key is the specificity of the command (1978:357-67). As the level moves to the more specific the command becomes more culture bound as the product of "Western thinking." He proposes three levels of abstraction: (1) the basic ideal level, which is the most general category and therefore is true for all cultures, (2) the general principle level, which is true in all cultures but may be interpreted differently, and (3) the specific cultural form, which differs between cultures. The basic ideals would be those supracultural commands such as love for one's neighbor (Mt 22:39) or the need for proper order in church (1 Cor 14:40). The general principle would be the command not to steal, a sin against your neighbor. The specific cultural form would then be the command for women to pray with heads covered, a sin against proper church order. He illustrates this with the importance of polygamy for a "good reputation" in certain African cultures (in his case, the Higi culture of Nigeria), which would be allowed on the basis of 1 Timothy 3 (1979:323-27). Yet we would question whether passages against polygamy are not themselves supracultural in essence.[14]

Kraft's categorization model is inadequate, for it would demand that *any* general command be normative and *any* specific command be culture bound. Yet the general commands (such as 1 Cor 14:40) derived their meaning from the cultural circumstances, and most specifics had their origin in general principles (such as the creation and Fall principles behind passages concerning women in the church).

With this in mind I would posit the following hermeneutical model for biblical contextualization, with the express purpose of providing "a series of covering laws to distinguish the eternal case from the cultural application in all the commands of Scripture."[15]

HERMENEUTICAL MODEL

There are three basic steps in the process of deciding whether a particular command is normative or cultural, whether it applies at the surface or deep (principial) level. First, we note the extent to which supracultural indicators are found in the passage. We will use the passages on women in the church as a test case. The appeal to creation and the Fall in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 (cf. 1 Cor 11:8-9) would indicate that Paul is appealing to eternal principles in the passage. This points toward normative force, but in itself it does not solve the issue. The issue of meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8—10 is linked to the principle of the stumbling block (1 Cor 8:7-13), and foot washing is linked to servanthood. This points to but is not proof of normative or supracultural force. We must consult the other two aspects before reaching a decision.

Second, we must determine the degree to which the commands are tied to cultural practices current in the first century but not present today. Both the head covering (1 Cor 11:2-16) and speaking or teaching in public (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11- 15) were closely linked to first-century customs regarding the woman's place in the home and in society. Whether the head covering be a veil (the traditional view) or the hair piled on top of the head (Hurley), it was a sign of respectability; to allow the hair to flow loose signified a prostitute. For the Corinthian women to flaunt their freedom in this way was a scandal and was even grounds for divorce. In addition, women did not speak or teach in public; to do so broke cultural taboos in both Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds. Therefore, all three passages (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-15) were closely allied to cultural mores. However, this too is only a pointer and does not constitute proof that a passage is primarily cultural. We must consider a further aspect. These practices do not threaten the husband-wife relationship today.

Third, we must note the distance between the supracultural and cultural indicators. For instance, the Old Testament passages on creation and the Fall that Paul used relate to the wife's submission and are applied to the issues of the veil and speaking/ teaching. This may favor the view that these commands are normative at the deeper level (submission) but cultural at the surface level (wearing the veil and teaching). In other words, distance may indicate that Paul

himself was *contextualizing a normative principle* to address a current cultural problem. On the other hand the issue of authority in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 may indicate that the prohibition of teaching is normative. The interpreter must ask whether the distance between the supracultural and cultural indicators is sufficient to justify the decision that the surface command applied to the first century alone and only the underlying principle (in this case submission) is supracultural. If the distance is sufficient we would apply the surface command only in modern cultures that parallel the first-century situation. For example, women missionaries in Islamic cultures might well (I would say *should*) choose to go about with their heads covered.

These three criteria do work with other passages. The statements regarding homosexuality in Scripture (such as Rom 1:24-28; 1 Cor 6:9) are quite clear that it constitutes a serious moral sin. Furthermore, the eternal principle and its cultural application are one and the same; there is no "distance" between the cultural and supracultural aspects, indicating that the passages are normative. Also, as Fee and Stuart state:

> Since the Bible as a whole witnesses against homosexuality, and invariably includes it in moral contexts, and since it simply has not been proved that the options for homosexuality differ today from those of the first century, there seems to be no valid ground for seeing it as a culturally-relative matter. (Fee and Stuart 1982:70)

In short, the criteria have helped us to apply properly two different sets of passages relating to current contextualization debates. Yet in and of themselves they do not provide enough depth for such momentous decisions. Other criteria are needed to supplement them, and I will divide these into general and specific categories.

PRINCIPLES FOR DETERMINING SUPRACULTURAL CONTENT

1. Try to determine the extent to which the underlying theological principle dominates the surface application. Julius Scott correctly stresses the need to isolate the salvific intention and relation of the command to the early church's faith and practice (1979:67-77). When we have ascertained the principle on which the command is based, we can delineate the extent to which they overlap. For instance, the command to greet "with a holy kiss" is based on the principle of mutual love. By separating the cultural practice of the command from the principle, we can reapply it today, greeting one another with Christian love and commitment, but not necessarily with a "holy kiss."
2. See when the writer depends on traditional teaching or on the other hand applies a temporary application to a specific cultural problem. These, of course, are not mutually exclusive. However, it is helpful to recognize when the author borrows from earlier teaching, which shows that the current situation does not entirely control the response. Paul's use of traditional teaching and Old Testament proof texts must caution us before we too easily assume that the passages regarding women in the church no longer apply to our day. The same is true of Paul's arguments regarding long hair for women and short hair for men (1 Cor 11:14-15). There Paul uses cultural language ("it is a disgrace") but the key is "nature" ("does not the very nature of things teach you" [v. 14]), which George Knight interprets as the creation order rather than cultural practices (1984:247-50). However, this is not at all clear, and I agree with those who see "nature" in terms of cultural practices. Yet even if we accept Knight's interpretation, this does not mandate the command for us as well. Both tradition and culture interact, and we must turn to the other criteria to aid us in deciding whether the short hair/long hair passage transcends cultural differences.
3. When the teaching transcends the cultural biases of the author and

readers, it is more likely to be normative. This is true regarding Galatians 3:28 and the issue of slavery, as well as passages related to the universal mission. Clearly, they are not tied to any specific cultural situation and therefore are programmatic theological statements. Fee and Stuart state this another way (1982:68). When a writer agrees with a situation in which there is only one option, the passage is more likely to be culturally relative. They use slavery as an example. When Paul and the other writers fail to denounce slavery as evil, they simply reflect a situation in which there was no other possibility. The universality of the practice means that they had no basis for considering other options. In Galatians 3:28 they went as far as the larger situation allowed.

4. If the command is wholly tied to a cultural situation, it is not timeless in itself. However, as Cheryl Guth shows, it is not so easy to determine the extent of the cultural influence (1981:chap. 2). She suggests four tests to do so: (1) Does the author's language contain cultural indicators that lead one to search for the divine norm behind the temporal application? If the author himself states that it is not normative (such as Jn 13:15, which calls Jesus' foot washing an "example"), the decision is simple; if there is strong cultural language (such as "scandal," "disgrace" or "no other practice" in 1 Cor 11:2-16 on the head covering), we have a pointer but not absolute proof of a time-bound assertion. (2) Does it point to a local custom or cultural institution? Again, we have to determine the extent of the connection. The wearing of the head covering was strongly connected to the first-century situation rather than to our own day, but is this enough to overcome the basis in the creation command? (3) Does the author address only a culture-specific situation or question? The instructions regarding meat offered to idols stemmed from the Corinthian situation as mentioned in Chloe's letter. Therefore, the principle of the strong and the weak applies, but not the specifics (unless we have a similar cultural situation). (4) Would the command be an issue today if there were no mention of it in Scripture? This, of course, is more subjective but with the others can still be helpful. It is another pointer to the cultural basis of the head-covering command as well as foot washing or the holy kiss.[16]
5. Commands that by nature are moral or theological will be closely tied to the divine will.[17] Commands dealing generally with such issues as adultery or prayer by nature transcend any particular cultural setting. Here we would note that the later prohibition of polygamy was not merely due to cultural change but was rooted in the progressive

revelation of God's will.[18] In the same way, we must see the prohibition of homosexuality as normative, tied as it is to divinely established moral laws. Here too the answer to the question of baptism in Islamic lands is answered. It is a theological mandate with no cultural limits. Whether in Judea or Rome, baptism was practiced. Anchored as it is in the Great Commission (Mt 28:19) and in God's will (1 Pet 3:20-21), it is mandated for all generations.

In sum, the major problem of dynamic-equivalent contextualization is the assumption that biblical authority occurs only at the "deep structure" level and not in the surface statements. As J. Robertson McQuilkin asks, "Does inspiration extend to all of Scripture or only to enduring religious principles?" (1980:114). I agree with McQuilkin's fear that such rules as we have just discussed may enable one to replace Scripture with culture as the truly authoritative norm. The criteria must be used together and never separately. For instance, the issue of women in the church can be solved only when one has compared the fact that Paul grounds it in the eternal norm of creation and the Fall with the further presence of cultural indicators within it. We must seek God's will for the present day rather than read our own will into the text.

It is important to emphasize that I am not arguing for a canon within the canon. We are not dealing here with meaning but with significance. The process of deciding supracultural or cultural does not entail the former having greater "authority" than the latter. Rather, we seek to delineate *how* a passage applies to us in our context, whether at the level of the surface command (if it is supracultural) or at the deeper level of the underlying principle (if the surface command is cultural or meant for the first century but not applying literally to today). Both types are inspired and authoritative; the only question is in what way the command applies to our current context. We must remember that a culturally based command is still applicable today in any culture that parallels the first-century setting.

Finally, after determining the supracultural element, it is still difficult to enculturate it in the diverse situations of our day. As James Buswell states, we must radically remove these principles from our own norms: "Only a supracultural message disengaged from any cultural context is free to be inculturated in another" (1974:103). In other words, the significance of a passage refers to the many different ways that principle can be applied in various contexts. Interpreters dare not demand their own contextualization but must allow the principle to live anew in other

situations. That is the subject of the next section.

A METHOD FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION

The key to contextualization is to seek a true fusion of the horizons of both the biblical text and the modern situation. This involves primarily a fusion of contexts, the context behind the ancient text and the one currently faced. Once more I will utilize Eugene Nida and Charles Taber's useful diagram; only now I will switch from the original language and receptor language to the original context (OC) and receptor context (RC)—see figure 17.4.

There are two aspects of the biblical (original) context: the sociocultural situation behind the passage (discovered via background research), and the literary context that contains the passage (discovered via exegetical research). Both are essential. The cultural context determines the sphere of modern life addressed by the passage; the literary context determines the message addressed to the modern context. The interpreter must seek a consistent and significant overlap between the original and receptor contexts before true contextualization can occur. Failure at either level will result in an improper if not false contextualization that can have serious consequences. At the missiological level it will produce a syncretized religion that is only half Christian (called "christopaganism"), similar to that produced at Colossae or Ephesus (see Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Jn or the Nicolaitan heresy in Rev 2). At the level of the Western church it can lead to serious distortions like positive confession, the gospel of prosperity or positive thinking. At the very least shallow contextualizing can undo much of the good that proper exposition has accomplished, since the congregation will carry into their daily lives an improper understanding as to how to put the elucidated truths into practice. Good contextualization is just as important as good exegesis in hermeneutics, since interpretation includes praxis as well as theoria. If the proper task of translation and exegesis is to ask how the original author would say it (that is, the truth presented in the passage) if he were speaking to my audience, the task of contextualization is to determine "how what was asked of the original audience (what the author asked them to do) can be relived by my audience."[19]

Figure 17.4. The process of contextualization



There should be contextual overlap or match in three areas for proper contextualization to occur, according to Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:chap. 12). There should be overlap first in the semantic field or at the level of meaning. If one alters the biblical message in order to establish communication or to apply the text to a specific need, truth can be sacrificed on the altar of relevance. The first priority is God's revealed message; the medium of communication must not only take second place, it must be selected entirely for the purpose of putting across that message. However, scholars fiercely debate the amount of freedom we have in choosing the correct term or idea. For instance, do we take a significant theological idea like "the lamb of God" and change it to "the pig of God" for certain African tribes that do not have lambs but raise swine instead? Most missiologists say no because there is not sufficient linguistic overlap and it will inevitably clash with Old Testament passages on pigs as unclean animals. The arguments for retaining the unknown figure is that the missionary can explain important concepts, and the process will deepen the understanding of the tribes. This is certainly valid in areas where there are teachers; however, it will not work in bush regions where there are none.

One solution might be to contextualize a figure like the lamb if the translation is for evangelistic purposes and is intended for areas devoid of Christian teachers. Elsewhere such important theological images, even if unknown, would be retained. However, we must wonder whether the new metaphor would be much better. For instance, the function of pigs in African societies is scarcely the same as lambs in ancient Judea. Therefore, it is better to keep the term *lamb of God* and add a brief explanatory note.

The second area of overlap or match is that of context. The goal is to enable the modern hearer to actualize that revealed message with as much practical validity as did the original audience for whom it was intended. I will expand this in chapter eighteen but must introduce the concept here as well. Interpreters and proclaimers must note the situation behind the passage—that is, the circumstances that led the original author to emphasize his point—and then they must seek a *parallel* situation in the lives of the receptor audience. The passage will then be applied to and address that parallel modern situation.

Finally, contextualization should seek to match the biblical message with the "internal template" of the hearer, namely, one's internal bank of worldview, knowledge about the world and memory system. Hesselgrave and Rommen

assert that good contextualization will expand the internal memories to include the data being presented (1989:chap. 12). In other words the truths will be internalized and personalized to the extent that they become part of the individuals, transforming the very way they look at the world and react to it. In this sense contextualization includes not only interpretation and application but persuasion and motivation (see pp. 450- 51). This is certainly correct, for praxis involves acting on the data, not merely understanding how it applies. Dyrness (1992:29-37) calls for a "vernacular theology" that weds the text to the community via a tacit knowledge and a theological reflection that stems from the culture and practices of the culture and the community. Such reflection is done more by the people within their lives than by the professional theologian in his or her study. The two levels must inform each other and function together.

The Willowbank Report calls for a fusion of the horizons that takes "with due seriousness the original historical and cultural context" and at the same time speaks to our time. This is accomplished when the reader from his or her cultural background establishes a "dialogue" with the text:

> As we address Scripture, Scripture addresses us. We find that our culturally conditioned presuppositions are being challenged and our questions corrected. In fact, we are compelled to reformulate our previous questions and to ask fresh ones. So the living interaction proceeds. (Coote and Stott 1980:316-17)

In this sense contextualization is the second half of a unitary hermeneutical journey from meaning to significance as the Word of God is actualized in human, cultural experience.

This does not mean that the interpreter can move behind his own preunderstanding to meaning, as if we can leave our own cultural history and move solely into the biblical world to objective knowledge. As Gabrielle Dietrich asserts, "Any theology is necessarily contextual. Therefore it will be more honest the more it becomes *conscious* of its context."[20] Within a proper hermeneutical spiral, the biblical worldview highlights our own and enables us consciously to place our belief system in front of the context for challenge or (if need be) correction. Certainly, once we have explained the "meaning" of the text, we have already contextualized it to an extent. However, if the process of backward and forward transformation diagrammed in figure 17.4 works (as I believe it does), we can discover that transcultural meaning that bridges from the text to our context without violating the original meaning. In this way we bracket and transcend our preunderstanding, yet communicate properly to our own

cultural context.

In backward transformation the interpreter detects the transcultural element in the passage, that basic content which transcends the biblical context and addresses the church in every age. Some passages cross over intact, such as commands against pride and dissension (Phil 2:1-4, 14-18). Others must be transferred at a deeper level, such as Paul's diatribe against the Judaizers (Phil 3:1-6, 18-19), which would be applied to false teachers in general. Some are debatable, such as passages dealing with persecution (Heb 12; 1 Pet 3:13—4:19). Many believe these should be contextualized only in terms of specific persecution today while others think they are applicable to general trials as well (see Jas 2:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7).

The backward transformation yields universal truths that apply to all cultures. These can then be forward transformed to address particular issues in the receptor culture. The goal is to seek those parallel situations that the biblical writers would address if they were present today. For instance, the passage on the "traditions of the elders" (Mk 7:1-20) makes no sense in our modern context, for ritual uncleanness is not found in many societies today. Therefore, we must seek the universal truth embedded in the story. The issue is human tradition versus God's rules. The law requiring washing before eating was not a part of the law of Moses; it was only found in the "oral tradition." Therefore, Jesus argued that the Pharisees set up extra rules that actually resulted in obviating the true intentions of God. This is the deep structure principle or universal truth. In contextualizing it in a receptor culture we would look for other legalistic regulations that become "yokes" around the believer's neck (cf. Acts 15:10). Some might have certain dress codes or behavioral demands (such as "Sunday dress" or certain acts of piety) that stem from the near past rather than Scripture and can become barriers to the proclamation of the gospel. Such should be opposed in ways similar to Jesus in Mark 7. Similarly, worship patterns in oriental cultures should be built on their own ways of expressing praise to God rather than on Western modes.

Liberation theology provides a good case study. Its theologians' evaluation of context is certainly correct—the economic oppression of the poor, the misuse of Scripture by the wealthy to keep the poor content to wait for their reward in heaven and so forth. They also correctly note the strong emphasis on care for the poor in the Torah, the prophets, Jesus' teaching and the Epistles. However, when they give this context hermeneutical control over Scripture and turn even the cross into a protest against economic exploitation, they go too far. To define salvation as the liberation of the poor and to identify a guerilla fighter like Che Guevara as a Christ figure are serious errors.

Scripture is just as opposed to economic oppression as is the liberation theologian, but not to the virtual exclusion of the spiritual sphere of salvation, which clearly is the central issue throughout the Bible. When liberation theologians reinterpret passages on spiritual salvation as demanding economic revolution, they ignore the meaning of the text and are guilty not only of serious hermeneutical error but also of teaching heresy. Evangelical "liberationists" like Orlando Costas, René Padilla or Emilio Nuñez are in the process of developing an alternative model that seeks a balance between the temporal (the necessity of prophetic opposition to social injustice) and the spiritual (reaching the unbeliever with the gospel message of spiritual salvation in Jesus the Christ), between the *already* (liberation in the present) and the *not yet* (final liberation only at the eschaton). Most important, evangelical contextualizers wish to operate from the whole counsel of God, to make the biblical voice central over the voice of the modern context, to achieve a true fusion of horizons in which all the intended transcultural truths of the Bible are actualized in the lives of Christians today. Opposition to social evils will not cease but rather will take its proper place not at the top but within the matrix of Christian praxis as one aspect of (but not the whole of) Christian reaction to the world (see, e.g., Padilla 1979:63- 78; Nuñez 1984:166-94).

Paul Hiebert calls for a "critical contextualization" that avoids the ethnocentrism of the past or the relativism and syncretism that too often results from dynamic equivalence approaches.[21] His three steps provide a good summary of the forward transformation process. First, one must study the receptor culture via an uncritical analysis of beliefs and customs, that is, a search for understanding and appreciation of their total worldview and of the customs that result. Second, the preacher guides the people in a study of Scripture as it speaks to the "cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions" of their culture. In so doing, the people will be led from the intended meaning of the biblical text to its significance for their situation. Both aspects are necessary. Third, the people themselves evaluate critically their beliefs and customs in light of the biblical truths. Discovery leads to evaluation and then to response. At times this will result in a positive assessment as they integrate scriptural truth into their cultural assessment. At other times they will have to modify or radically change their customs. New rituals will be developed that express these contextualized truths.

DEVELOPING A TRANSFORMED CHURCH CULTURE

The early church built a transformed new culture in the midst of the culture wars between Jew and Gentile both outside and inside the church. It was based on the gospel of Christ crucified and demanded a new lifestyle centered on a consuming love for God and for "your neighbor" (Mk 12:29-31) (see McKnight 2004). Every church develops its own culture, the result of its ethos, values and outlook as a community. Sadly, of late too many churches have begun to resemble the world around them and are becoming just another entertainment, a club like the Rotary International or Lions Club International. The transformed community that Christ established is too seldom seen. An important part of contextualizing the gospel is contextualizing the ethos of the gospel in local churches. Aidan Nichols speaks of three features of culture—its diversity, with an infinite number of variations; its permeability, as the intercommunication of cultures cause an infinite number of microchanges to occur; and its resulting changeability, with perpetual transformations occurring through the influence of surrounding cultures (1999:10-12). The challenge for theology is to guide the infinite variations, to help the members decide which aspects are helpful and which are harmful, and to maintain the centrality of Christ in the midst of the onslaught. How do we perform this incredibly complex task? Nancy Ammerman says church cultures are shaped by their theological tradition, the secular culture in which they are located and the ethnic groups that attend (1998:79-82). It is critical to know the subcultures represented in our congregation, what various people do for a living (white collar vs. blue collar), the things that make people feel at home, their expectations and ways of doing things. So first we must identify the culture behind our church, looking from the top down because the leaders establish that culture. Ask whether the church is focused on kingdom values and is value-driven or program-driven. Robert Lewis and Wayne Cordeiro say change comes with the intersection of three values: God's kingdom agenda, reflected in constant life change and countercultural values so that every activity of the church reflects "kingdom culture building"; who we are, in which the leaders of the church are immersed in the Word of God and disciple those around them; and the unique setting of the church, placed by God in a particular context

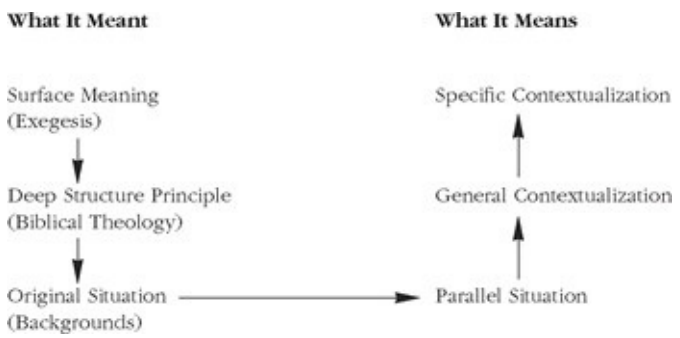
so that they can implement the kingdom values for that unique setting (not just copying someone else's model) (2005:16-24). So the key is an innovative spirit led by the Spirit. We must identify our church culture (whether it is transformational or just "business as usual") by looking at the values (entertainment vs. transformation, business vs. spiritual healing), at the leadership (success and power vs. serving others), at the vision or mission statement, and at the trappings or symbols (worship styles, what your church honors and celebrates) (Lewis and Cordeiro 2005:44-50).

CONCLUSION

A six-stage process may best describe the task of contextualization as it moves from the biblical text to our modem context, from original meaning to current significance. Simply stated, the method blends theoria and praxis, with the goal of enabling the church in diverse cultures to affirm and live out biblical truths with the same dynamic power as did the early church (see fig. 17.5).

1. Determine the surface message. Using the exegetical tools elucidated in part one of this book, the interpreter should determine the original intended message of the passage. Moreover, this should be done with contextualization in mind, that is, the way the biblical author addressed his original readers. Biblical books were situational in nature; they were written with a specific message addressed to a particular situation in the life of Israel or the church. The preacher/interpreter wants to distinguish both aspects: the original message and the way it was communicated to the reader.
2. Determine the deep structure principle behind the message. This is the larger biblical-theological truth utilized by the author in addressing the readers. The surface message often contextualizes the deeper principle in order to address a specific problem in the original audience. For instance, the “alien” and “sojourner” passages in 1 Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11 build on the early church’s teaching on home or citizenship in heaven

Figure 17.5. The six-stage process of contextualization



(such as Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20; Heb 12:22). Also, the passage on the head covering for women (1 Cor 11:2-16) contextualizes the principle of submission (vv. 3, 7-9) for the problem of women praying with their heads uncovered. The "covering" was a sign of submission. Paul and the other sacred authors would stress one aspect of a larger theological truth in order to speak to a particular issue. It is helpful for the interpreter to discover the biblical theology behind the point of the text and to see exactly what issue is being addressed. This is a critical aspect in delineating cultural from supracultural passages. It is also important as part of the process of contextualization. The passage can be applied to the modern context at either the surface or deep structure level.

3. Note the original situation. The situation behind the text determined why the author chose the particular aspect to stress in the surface message. However, this is also the most difficult of the three levels (surface message, biblical theological principle, and the situation addressed) to determine. The Epistles and the prophets are more direct in stating the situation than is narrative literature, but nevertheless it is often very complex even there. For instance, what are the exact identities of the false teachers in the Pastorals, the heresy in Colossians or the super-apostles in 2 Corinthians? However, we can still determine the situation in a general sense, and so long as we do not assume more certainty than we possess, it is a helpful tool.[22] In narrative books, there are two types, the historical situation depicted in the text and the *Sitz im Leben* ("situation in the life" of Israel and the church) behind the text. The latter is very speculative, and out of twenty-five articles by scholars on a passage, there will often be twenty-five different opinions. Therefore, the situation in the story itself is more valuable. For instance, it is almost impossible to detect the *Sitz im Leben* behind the Jacob and Esau conflict (Gen 27), but the situation in the text (rivalry over the blessing but God's

unseen hand in the background) provides tremendous contextualization opportunities.

4. Discover the parallel situation in the modern context. Most scholars recognize the importance of applying a text in the same way it was used in the original setting (see Fee and Stuart 1981:60-61; Liefeld). This means that we should contextualize it in terms of parallel situations in our current context. It does little good to spend a great deal of time and energy exegeting a text properly only to throw it all away when we apply the text. If God's Word is any indicator, knowledge is inadequate unless it leads to action. As in Joshua 1:8, we study the text not just to increase our cognitive understanding (though that is certainly true of many passages) but more "to *act* according to all that is written in it." Proper contextualization is just as important as proper exegesis.
5. Decide whether to contextualize at the general or the specific level. Missiologists must decide whether to retain a specific image or message (such as the "lamb" in cultures that know nothing about sheep) or substitute a dynamic equivalent. For instance, should evangelism and conversion be direct and individual in cultures that are not? Many missiologists are turning to networking and "web relationships" (reaching the nuclear family as a whole) in oriental cultures. As another example, what form should baptism take and how public should it be in Muslim cultures? Issues like this provide great difficulty for contextualizers who wish to remain true to Scripture yet produce a relevant, dynamic Christianity in the diverse cultural settings around the world. Flexibility between general and specific levels has distinct limits (see the discussion of dynamic equivalence on pp. 413-17).

   In the sermon one can often choose to apply the message of the text generally (so long as it is tied to the biblical-theological principle behind the text, as in fig. 17.5) or specifically. For instance, passages dealing with persecution (such as Jas 1:2- 4; 1 Pet 1:6-7) apply theology dealing with "trials of the faith" (note the "trials of many kinds" and "testing of your faith" in Jas 1:2-3; 1 Pet 1:6) to persecution. The preacher is free to apply the principle in both directions; for the early church persecution was a specific type of trial. In many cases one can apply it only on the general level. Fee and Stuart note two types (1982:61-65): "extended application" (such as the application of being "yoked with unbelievers" in 2 Cor 6:14 to marriage with nonbelievers) and "particulars that are not comparable" (such as the "meat offered to idols" in 1 Cor 8—10). In both cases, choosing a comparable but general parallel is valid (in the latter it

is mandatory). In the instance of meat offered to idols, the pastor could refer to issues that are not critical to God but matter to many Christians and can become stumbling blocks to weak believers. (Fee lists women's slacks, movies, cards, dancing and mixed swimming.) In such situations participation may not be biblically wrong, but if it will become a "stumbling block" (1 Cor 8:7-13), one should avoid doing so. More will be said on this in chapter eighteen.

18

Homiletics II

THE SERMON

As stated in the introduction to this book, the true goal of hermeneutics is not the commentary but the sermon. The commentary performs an important task in opening up the original intended meaning of the biblical passage. However, the true purpose of the Bible is not static (an object of historical study) but dynamic (a life-changing mechanism). Therefore, contextualization is a necessary goal of interpretation. Meaning and significance unite in the hermeneutical process, and it is the sermon that best brings the two aspects together. In fact, many believe the term *hermeneutics* is primarily connected to the relevance of a text for today. In reality both aspects—meaning and significance—are part of the hermeneutical task, so this study would be incomplete without contextualization and homiletics. Richard Mayhue sees five aspects in a true expository sermon: the sole source of the message is Scripture; it is derived from Scripture via careful exegesis; it carefully interprets the passage and catches the original meaning; it carefully explains that God-intended meaning to the congregation; it applies that biblical meaning to our day (1992:12-13).

The sermon is a bridge-building mechanism that unites the ancient world of the biblical text with the modern world of the congregation. Contextualization is the mortar that binds these two worlds together as the preacher attempts to help the congregation understand the relevance of the text for their own lives. The sermonic process is a continual bridging enterprise in which the preacher helps the audience to relive the drama and spiritual power of the text for its original audience and then to understand how that original message relates to similar situations in their own lives. Moreover, this is done point by point as the passage develops. My basic principle is that *any point worth developing is a point worth applying—on the spot*. Thus the preacher travels back and forth from the text to the modern context, developing the superstructure of both the text and its contextualization for our day.

This is especially true in light of the sad state of both society and church in our day. I remember a study several years ago that said evangelicalism has never been more popular than now but at the same time has never had less effect on

society. The reason is that the church has begun to mirror society, in other words, has become the secular church. Scott Gibson chronicles the disintegration of society and the collapse of authority in society and church (2004:216-23). The locus of authority has shifted "from absolutes found in Scripture to the supremacy of the self," and the locus of preaching has shifted from the truths of the Word to the salving of egos and entertaining stories. There is only one answer—back to the Bible and a sovereign authority above our paltry rationalizations. Jeffrey Arthurs observes that the mindset of our postmodern culture is centered on epistemological relativism, moral relativism, the search for pleasure and power, and political correctness (2004:180-96). In light of this, our preaching must center on patient instruction from the authoritative Word that reinforces the values and beliefs the people already know as well as a message that is personal, holistic and interactive. Establish a dialogue with the congregation that draws them into your life (through sharing yourself) and helps them to understand the true significance of the Word of God.

Ed Rommen describes three stages in this process: communicators first seek to understand the text (meaning intended) then to "decontextualize" or divest themselves of culturally conditioned understandings of the text (meaning perceived) and finally to contextualize the passage for the listeners' context (meaning applied) (Hesselgrave and Rommen, 1989:chap. 20). I would break the latter into two stages: personal appropriation (devotional study) and sermonic application. Communicators must apply the text to their own lives before considering how it touches the congregation's lives. Moreover, each stage is governed not just by the science of hermeneutical procedures or by the art of pastoral experience but by spiritual empowering from the Holy Spirit.

THE PLACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is a "theology" of contextualization, for this aspect of Bible study is also meant to be controlled by the power of God. The Holy Spirit was behind the biblical books (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) and led the disciples to reproduce those aspects of Christ's life which God knew were necessary for the needs of the church (Jn 14:26; 15:26). The Holy Spirit alone can empower the preacher so that his or her message exemplifies not with "persuasive words . . . [of human] wisdom" but rather demonstrates "the Spirit's" and "God's power" (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Charles Spurgeon delivered a well-known address titled "The Holy Spirit in Connection with Our Ministry" (1877:1-23). His basic thesis was that our very ministries depend for their viability and power on the presence of the Holy Spirit, who gives knowledge and wisdom to those who seek him. The Spirit anoints the utterances of the preacher. "Oh, how gloriously a man speaks when his lips are blistered with the live coal from the altar—feeling the burning power of the truth, not only in his inmost soul, but on the very lips with which he is speaking!" (p. 7). The sermon must be forged in a spirit of dependence and devotion, that the strength may be of the Spirit rather than of the flesh. The effects of the gospel are entirely the result of the Spirit rather than of our skill. Finally, Spurgeon discusses the ways in which we can "lose this needful assistance" (pp. 17-22), namely, through insensitivity to his prompting, dishonesty, lack of grace, pride, laziness and the neglect of prayer. The person of God must strive for the Holy Spirit in exegeting as well as in proclaiming the Word of God.

In his *Institutes* John Calvin speaks of the "internal witness of the Spirit" in bringing us to salvation and enabling us to understand God's Word (1:93-95). John Frame calls this an "intimate participation in God's own self-knowledge" (1986:23). Although for many modern theologians (such as Karl Barth) this inner testimony replaces the traditional view of inspiration, for the evangelical the Spirit's witness provides a means for appropriating the inspired Word of God. In other words the Spirit enables the reader to hear God's sovereignly chosen message found in his Word (Jn 16:13; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13). As Frame points out, the Word provides the objective authority, the witness of the Spirit

provides the subjective authority (that understood by us) of the divine revelation.

The "illumination" of the interpreter is one aspect of the larger ministry of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to regeneration and daily growth in their Christian life. It is that portion of the "internal testimony" that relates to understanding and applying God's revealed Word (see MacArthur 1992:102-15, esp. in his separation of illumination from inspiration). Technically, the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum* relates to our conviction regarding Scripture's authority, and illumination refers to understanding that Word. As Fred Klooster points out (1984:460), "Paul repeatedly prayed that the believers might grow in understanding and knowledge through the illumination of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4-15; Eph. 1:17-19; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-13; cf. also 1 John 2:20-27)." Klooster uses the term "organic illumination" to describe the relation of the Spirit to the process of interpretation. This means that the Spirit works through the mind and study of the interpreter. However, there is no guarantee that the person will "automatically" comprehend the intended meaning of the passage. The hermeneutical tools all provide grist for the Spirit's will in the act of interpretation.

While the Spirit enables the reader to gain insight into the Word, he does not provide that information for the reader. We still must utilize our rational capacity to draw inferences from the data. As Frame states, the Spirit allows us to overcome the effects of sin on the rational process. "The Spirit does not whisper to us special reasons which are not otherwise available; rather, he opens our eyes to acknowledge those reasons which *are* available" (1986:234). In other words, the Spirit makes it possible for the reader to use every faculty to discern the Word and apply it. How does this explain the fact that equally spiritual scholars interpret the same passage quite differently? The Spirit makes it possible to overcome our preunderstanding in order to discern the Word, but he does not guarantee that we will do so. On difficult passages we must use every tool we can muster, but we still will often read a text the way our experience and theological proclivities dictate. My good friend Doug Moo (1996) and I (2004a) have both written commentaries on Romans (I call mine "Moo light"!) and disagree on several points (e.g., Rom 7:14-25; 9—11), but neither of us say to the other, "You must be wrong because the Spirit told me this is the meaning!" Some passages are so ambiguous that more than one interpretation is possible. We must make our hermeneutical choice but remain open to further leading from the Spirit and challenge from our peers. The Spirit enables us to free our minds to the text but does not whisper to us the correct answer.

Moreover, the Bible does not state that the unbeliever cannot intellectually interpret it quite accurately. As William Larkin says, "Paul locates the barrier in

the area of evaluation rather than cognition" (1988:289). In passages like 1 Corinthians 2:14 (to the "natural man" spiritual truths are "foolishness") and 2 Corinthians 4:4 ("the god of this world" has "blinded" unbelievers so they cannot "see the light of the gospel"), the non-Christian cannot understand the truth of the gospel. Such passages do not state that unbelievers cannot understand the *meaning* of the text but rather that they will reject the *implications* of it. The Holy Spirit deals in this latter realm, enabling readers to separate truth from falsehood and to apply the Word properly to their lives.

Connected with this theme is John's theology of the "chain of revelation" (see Osborne and Woodward 1979:9-10), which describes the Christian's authority and responsibility in sharing the Word. One of the major christological emphases in the Fourth Gospel is that of Jesus as the "sent one," a concept stemming from the Jewish idea of the *šālîaḥ*,the "representative" who reveals and embodies the will of the sender ("counselor" [TNIV] or "advocate" [NLT] in Jn 14:15; 17:3, 6). In the Farewell Discourse of John 14—16 Jesus passes this authority on to the Holy Spirit, twice "sent," or "given," by the Father (Jn 14:16, 26) and twice by the Son (Jn 15:26; 16:7). The final stage is seen when the disciples/believers themselves are described as "sent ones" (Jn 17:18; 20:21). In the latter passage this is accomplished via the coming of the Spirit (Jn 20:22) and involves a participation in Jesus' work as Judge (Jn 20:23; cf. Jn 5:22; 8:15-16; 9:39). Indeed, the triune Godhead is incorporated within our ministry of the Word and empowers us as we share its message.

A DEVOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

On the way home from a sabbatical in Germany in 1985, my family and I had a stop-over in Iceland and took a tour through the lava fields and hot springs of that fascinating island. As we were passing through the desolate countryside the tour guide pointed to a series of stone cairns, erected in the last century to direct travelers to the firmer pathways over the soft ground. “We call these cairns ‘priests,’ ” she said, “because they point the way but never go there themselves.” This is all too often true, for preachers often do not “practice what they preach” and seem to proclaim an irrelevant, unworkable gospel message. The Word of God claims our allegiance and obedience before it asks us to minister to others.

There are three reasons why the preacher must give priority to personal application. First, the Word of God itself demands that our lives be changed before we partake of mission. This is seen in the oft-repeated condemnation of the “hypocrite” who gives the appearance of piety but lacks the inward transformation of character that God demands (Mt 6:2, 5, 16). True love and wisdom are characterized by an absence of hypocrisy (Rom 12:9; Jas 3:17), and the latter can be accomplished only when the gospel message we proclaim has first claim on our own lives. The truths we share are an I-thou summons from God, first to our own selves and then to our congregations. Sermon preparation therefore must be a devotional exercise first (a first-person encounter) and a proclamation event second (a second-person encounter). No one should ever preach a passage that has not first reached into the depths of his or her own heart. James Rosscup says, “If the preacher is to deliver God’s message with power, prayer must permeate his life and furnish a lifelong environment for the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23)” (1992:63-65). The preaching ministry must be characterized by godliness and dependence on God’s power not his own preaching ability (see also Larsen 1989:chap. 4).

The second reason for the centrality of the devotional experience is that we cannot ask someone to do that which we have been unwilling to do ourselves. If a congregation hears a preacher inveigh against losing one’s temper and knows him to be continually irritable and cantankerous, they will lose respect for both messenger and message. Simple logic demands that we earn the right to be heard

before we take leadership in the church. This is true not merely in general terms but specifically applies to every message we share. We move from the meaning of the text to its implications for our own life and then to its significance for the situations of those whom God has committed into our care. Of course, this does not demand sinless perfection before we can preach, but it does mean that we are growing in these areas. In fact, admitting to a proclivity to irritation and then sharing how the Spirit is helping us overcome it will be a perfect illustration in such a message.

The final reason for the importance of a devotional experience is practical: when our lives have been touched by the message we are proclaiming, that message will be preached with an excitement and urgency it would not have otherwise. The best salesman is one who is personally convinced that the item is the answer to everyone's need. The person who does not pray can seldom provoke interest in a sermon on prayer. The message may be accurate and academically correct but lacks power. We must be convinced of the importance of an action if we are to persuade others to do it. As Spurgeon said, such dishonesty can never experience the power of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, when one moves from the prayer closet to the pulpit, when the passage studied that week has aroused the soul of the preacher, the message will demonstrate a presence and power it could never otherwise attain. In fact, we will be excited to proclaim the truth and share how it has touched us.

Berkeley Mickelsen notes five goals in personal Bible study: (1) fellowship with God as believers listen to what God has to say in the text, (2) directions from God for daily decisions, as Christians respond to the significance of the Word for the problems of life by maintaining an awareness of God's presence and an openness to his will, (3) the commands of God for modern situations, as the saints obey the injunctions of the Bible, (4) the counsel of God for interpersonal dialogue, as believers share their faith with others, and (5) the message of God for public preaching, as the pastor or Bible teacher confronts others with the biblical truths that have gripped his or her own life (1963:345-66). The crucial point is that Scripture is dynamic, imparting life-changing principles that demand to be lived out in daily experience, rather than static, imparting only knowledge to be discussed and debated. Preachers ignore the personal dimension of the Word only to their peril.

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

In a remarkable passage moving from effect to cause, Paul describes how people enter the kingdom of God in Romans 10:14-15—how people cannot call on God without belief and cannot believe without hearing and cannot hear without preaching and cannot preach without divine sending, concluding with Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Paul is saying that God specifically uses preaching as part of his plan of salvation and "sends" preachers as his official representatives. This theology of the *shaliach* or "sent one" is developed fully in the Gospel of John as part of the "chain of revelation." First, God "sends" his Son as the living revealer, the very voice of God (*logos* in Jn 1:1-18, Jesus as the "sent one" some thirty times). Then the Father and the Son send the Spirit to "convict" the world (Jn 16:8-15). Finally, the triune God "sends" the believer with the message of salvation (Jn 17:18; 20:21-23). When we preach, the Godhead speaks through us! This theology of preaching becomes part of soteriology in Acts, where the very world itself is reached through the preaching of the gospel truths, with recorded sermons to Jews (Acts 2:14-41; 3:11-26; 13:16-41) to God-fearers (Acts 10:34-43) and to Gentiles (Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31). The common theme is the death and resurrection of Christ as the basis of salvation. In Revelation 14:6-7 the angel flying in midair proclaims a minisermon to the world. The two New Testament terms for this are *kerygma* and *didachē,* and they have become technical terms for "preaching" and "teaching" respectively. C. H. Dodd thought of them as absolutely distinct and believed the earliest teaching could be recovered. It is now known that no sharp distinction can be found. There is a definite didactic element in the kerygma (see the sermons in Acts), and a sermonic aspect in New Testament teaching (see Polhill 1997:626-29). In other words, the life of the church is dependent on teaching and preaching, and the two flow into one another—the sermons must teach theological truth, and the teaching must impact lives in a practical way.

Richard Lischer laments the exclusion of preaching from theology and the exclusion of theology from preaching (2001:1-13). This has resulted in a lack of substance, an incoherence, an irrelevance and a loss of authority in modern preaching (see also Briscoe 1989:68-69). Yet theology is supposed to be the

mediator between exegesis and preaching, and through the sermon is actualized in the lives of the people by establishing a dialogue with them. Yet at the same time preaching brings life to theology and give it its kerygmatic character. Gail O'Day develops this theology along four lines: first, as a "word of hope" proclaimed in a time of fear, as in the prophetic oracle "Fear not" and the lament hymns of the Old Testament (e.g., Ps 13:1-3, 5-6; Lam 3:55-57), in which God "speaks" and transforms despair to hope, resulting in a refusal to allow fear to govern God's people. Second, God's promises were preached in the midst of exile, when the people feared they had no future. The people were called to faith in the God of salvation. Third, this message continued in the preaching of the church, as in the Farewell Discourse when Jesus proclaimed a new peace in the midst of troubled times (Jn 14:1, 18-19, 27; 16:6-7, 22). Fourth, for O'Day preaching is primarily a "salvation oracle" announcing God's "fear not," offering hope to a world in despair (1993:19-32). Paul Wilson asks how this theological dynamic can be enacted in the preaching moment (1995:88-96). He begins with the principle of limitation, that the focus must be on a few key or core doctrines that flow out of the material. Then he advises sermonic movement through the developing stages of the doctrine, showing its relevance to the lives of the people. Finally, make certain the theological points flow out of the text.

FROM TEXT TO SERMON

The hermeneutical process culminates not in the results of exegesis (centering on the original meaning of the text) but in the homiletical process (centering on the significance of the Word for the life of the Christian today). Modern scholars in fact often restrict the meaning of *hermeneutics* to significance and use *exegesis* for the process of detecting the intended meaning. While I cannot agree with this restricted meaning (see pp. 21-22) and believe that *hermeneutics* covers both meaning and significance, this definition does point to the importance of contextualization for the hermeneutical process.

There are four steps in proper sermonic development (see the six stages in the conclusion of chap. 17, pp. 431-33).

First, one should study the original situation behind the message of the text. In other words, how was the biblical author contextualizing or applying biblical truths to the situation behind the text? This is discovered by applying background material to the problems addressed in the passage. For instance, some interpreters hold that the parable of the shrewd manager (Lk 16:1-13) describes a "man of the world" who uses his resources shrewdly to get ahead. Jesus then contrasts that shrewd secularist with the believer whose shrewdness is the opposite—giving away rather than taking. If this is correct, Jesus contextualized his shrewdness (vv. 9-13) to demonstrate how the believer should use his worldly resources shrewdly to benefit the kingdom.

Second, the interpreter should determine the underlying theological principle behind the text. Every passage addresses a surface situation and applies a deeper argument to that situation! In the case of Luke 16, this is found in verses 8b-13, which use teaching on "treasures in heaven" (cf. Lk 12:33; see vv. 22-34) to address a wise use of one's monetary resources to aid the poor and produce true heavenly rewards.

Third, the student of the Word must meditate on the biblical and theological truths studied. It takes time to think through the issues involved and the relationship between the surface or cultural aspects and the deeper or theological truths elucidated. Looking again at Luke 16:1-13, it is obvious that social concern is mandated for the believer. Our rewards in heaven are closely linked

with helping the needy (cf. Jas 2:13-17). These cultural overtones make it easier to think through the two spheres and to note how Jesus is arguing. We can then separate those elements that belong to the contextualized situation of the first century (such as the situation with the tenant farms and the altering of the books) and those that transcend the time of writing, and apply them to every era of the church age. Here we focus the mind on God and his revelation, asking how these spiritual truths address the church.

Fourth, the reader seeks to discern parallels between the original situation addressed by the sacred writer and the contemporary experiences of the Christian and the church. Application built on the significance of the text will occur at this level. It is crucial to remember that the parallels should be genuine rather than contrived. The preacher/teacher should ask, If the biblical writer were exhorting my congregation /class on this subject, what aspects of church life would he address? It would be hermeneutically weak, for instance, to rail against short hair or loose-flowing hair on women on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, because how a woman wears her hair is no longer a sign of submission (see p. 424-25). We could address, however, the situation of overbearing husbands or demanding wives today (although one must at all times keep in mind Eph 5:25-33 here).

PRINCIPLES FOR DETERMINING APPLICATION

The most important thing (as stated in chap. 17) is to base the application/contextualization on the intended meaning of the text.[1] We want the passage to live anew in our own current situation, but it must be the inspired message that is relived rather than our subjective manipulation of the text. Therefore, we determine what the text says before we apply it. Our basic question is, If Paul (or Jeremiah, etc.) were preaching *this* principle to my congregation, what issues would he address? The original point of the passage is reexpressed in the thought modes of the receptor culture, whether our own or a further culture within which we are ministering at present.

Sermon preparation must be a devotional exercise (a first-person encounter) before it becomes a proclamation event (a second-person encounter). Preachers continually must place themselves before the text rather than merely place themselves behind the text in order to direct it to this or that situation in the church. The latter will result first in a barren message devoid of personal interaction and second in a misdirected message that often will derive from the needs of the congregation rather than from the message of the text. The goal is to wed the text with the current context of the congregation.

However, the problem of distanciation (the cultural gap between biblical times and today) cannot be solved easily. Many erroneous methods have been devised: (1) Literalistic preaching assumes God automatically bridges the gap and preaches the text as if it were written for today. Normally this is accompanied by a lack of serious effort to understand the text, resulting in shallow, subjective sermons. (2) Allegorizing began in Alexandria with Philo and then Origen, dominating the church in the Middle Ages. It assumes that beneath the literal, surface meaning lies the “real” meaning, such as the Song of Songs as a picture of Christ and the church. The problem is that this normally ignores the intended meaning of the text and degenerates into eisegesis (reading into the text whatever you wish). (3) Spiritualizing takes historical passages (such as the David and Jonathan story [1 Sam 20]) and uses it as a parable illustrating a spiritual reality (such as earthly friendship). While there is some validity in this (namely, when the text itself is allegorical), it too often ignores the historical

context and fails to do justice to the intended theological meaning of the text. (4) Moralizing looks on all texts as providing examples of virtues (or vices) to be imitated (or avoided) by the Christian.[2] Sidney Greidanus says, “Unfortunately, in overemphasizing virtues and vices, dos and dont’s, and in not properly grounding the ethical demands in the Scriptures, they trivialize them and turn them into caricatures” (1988:163-64). This is often seen in biographical preaching, with Esau exemplifying the carnal Christian and Jacob the Christian with proper priorities. The problem again is that the actual message of the text is ignored, and often a message contrary to the intended meaning results. How then are we to determine the actual meaning and significance of a text?

At the first stage, we must recapitulate the steps to contextualization and apply them to sermonic application. Determining the situation behind the text is a major factor in differentiating the cultural from the supracultural elements in the text (see p. 423). While in many cases we cannot ascertain the exact situation with precision (esp. in narrative portions; see p. 421), what we can discover is very helpful. This decision affects contextualization or application and provides the basis for the other principles that follow. By noting the situation behind the surface command, the interpreter can see how the author has contextualized his underlying theological principle (stage two) and can seek parallel situations in the life of his current congregation (stage three). For instance, the situation behind the prayer of Ephesians 3:16-19 (see pp. 134-39) is the disunity between Jewish and Gentile factions in the Ephesian church (see Eph 2:11-12). Each element of the prayer for love and discernment was addressed to that situation. Through this preachers or teachers can address similar factions in their own community, such as a rampant denominationalism that refuses to cooperate with other evangelical churches or internal squabbles in the church.

Walter Liefeld notes several aspects in reviewing the “life setting” of the passage (1984:95-98). At the outset, we will study the circumstances or needs addressed. This will help both the preacher and the congregation to immerse themselves in the original situation and better understand how the text can address itself anew in the current context. We will also ask what purpose the text originally served. Simply put, we ask why the sacred writer emphasizes the particular points. For instance, why does Luke retell the story of Paul’s conversion three times (Acts 9; 22; 26) rather than summarize the event the latter two times? What theological purpose led Luke to repeat such a lengthy event? Why does the book of Revelation repeat such similar judgments in the seals, trumpets and bowls? These are clues to the theology behind the text.

Further, the interpreter will ask what immediate results the author sought. This will make the purposes more specific as he or she asks how the text addressed

the reader's situation and what it sought to accomplish in terms of concrete action. The interpreter will then describe this purpose or function in a single word or phrase. Liefeld suggests the following categories: Is the text motivational, convicting, comforting, proclaiming the Gospel, leading to worship, setting standards, setting goals, dealing with doctrinal issues, dealing with problems, showing cause-effect relationships, laying a foundation for faith or action, giving perspective on life, or teaching ethics? These will help specify the proper application (1984:99-107).

The second stage in moving from text to context is to delineate the underlying theological principle. J. Robertson McQuilkin names three ways we can determine the "generic principle," a biblical standard that applies to later situations (1983:258- 65): (1) It might be stated directly in the text, as in "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Mk 12:31). (2) In historical portions it might be implied on the basis of the text's explicit interpretation of the event, as when Scripture itself commends the occurrence (such as the thesis paragraph on early church life and worship in Acts 2:42-47). (3) It may apply indirectly in terms of general principles rather than the specific situation if the cultural or supracultural indicators so dictate (such as the holy kiss being the same as the loving greeting in Christ). Many historical passages, especially Old Testament stories, apply only indirectly to us. For instance, the Sampson narratives hardly call for aggressive conduct on the part of the believer, nor do the holy war passages justify all wars. Rather, they show that God can use even unworthy individuals (like Sampson) and that God alone can call a holy war. In such cases we must search for the parallels or "imp1ications" for us today.

The third stage entails a search for parallel situations in the current life of the congregation. The original situation behind the text (stage 1) led the sacred writer to employ certain theological principles (stage 2) to solve a certain problem or address a certain aspect in the life of the original readers. Now the interpreter tries to elucidate similar aspects in modern life to which the underlying biblical principle might also apply. This entails what Lloyd Perry calls a "life-situation" analysis of the congregation's needs (1973:104-25). Paul Wilson adds, "Even as exegesis of the biblical text is necessary, exegesis of our situation is also necessary, or we cannot adequately interpret the text" (1995:160-64). This is true both of a general critique of society and for the specific cultural situation of the people in our congregation. The preacher in a very real sense must become a sociologist, analyzing the social and ethical needs of the flock before applying the text to meet those needs. In some ways it is as important to analyze the congregation's needs accurately as it is to exegete the text correctly. If one spends a great deal of time expounding the text's original

meaning but applies it such that few lives are touched or that the wrong conduct results, the sermon has still failed to accomplish its God-given purpose.

One current theory that fails to accomplish this is found in some large churches. So-called superpastors at times believe that their major calling is to feed their flock and so they spend all their time in the study preparing their message(s), leaving the day-by-day ministry to their staff. The problem is they never get to know their flock, its needs and interests. At best they receive it secondhand from the staff or board. As a result they preach to modern America as a whole, often with a radio or television ministry. However, the specific needs of the congregation remain untouched—at least in the pastor's pulpit ministry. Pastors and missionaries must know their flock and take time to discover their specific situation in life. This will lead to a sermon style that eschews technical jargon as well as generalizations. The reason that in-depth preaching sometimes seems dry and uninteresting is not due to the content but to the style of the sermon. A proper contextualization will cause the preacher/teacher to become practical and specific. Application will not be dry or cliché-laden but will zero in on the people's specific needs, suggesting ways to make the text meaningful in the concrete situations encountered in the days following.

Primarily, the application should be specific rather than general. It does little good to say, "Pray more." The congregation already knows that. Center not just on the *what* but on the *why* and the *how.* Be concrete, telling the overworked doctor and professional how prayer can help them in their daily struggles.[3] Give the high school student practical advice as to how to face the unbelievable pressures on the modern teenager, or tell the housewife how to cope with an inattentive husband or rebellious children. In other words, address the individual needs of the congregation via the truths of the text. This can best be done by suggesting specific areas that the text can address and by giving examples at certain points in the message as to how the point can apply to the lawyer or the factory worker. By spreading these throughout the sermon all the various groups can be addressed specifically.

PRACTICAL METHODS FOR APPLYING A TEXT

In a fascinating study a group of scholars examined how people listen to sermons and what things made them pay attention and be willing to change (McClure et al. 2004:1-20). They characterized their findings under six aspects: *ethos,* or the persona of preachers as perceived by the congregation, established by the way they relate from the pulpit as well as live their lives in the community (e.g., are they authentic, do they "walk the talk"); *congregational culture,* namely, the values, make-up, relationships, outlook and so forth, and the extent to which the preacher relates and communicates to the expectations arising from that culture; *logos,* the language and modes of communication used to persuade and motivate the people to action, especially the success in contextualizing the message to their needs; *pathos,* the appeal to the emotions in bringing the people to decision regarding the purpose of the message; *embodiment,* namely, the extent to which the sermon comes to life and engages the people, drawing their attention to the points of the sermon; and *identification,* the relationship established between preacher and congregation as a culture of listening is created and the people are drawn into the message. These six areas determine the success of the sermon in reaching the heart and changing the minds of the listeners.

It is crucial to apply a text with sensitivity and tact. When we strike at the "cherished sins" of a person (long rationalized), we must pray for divine wisdom so that the person will know we speak with love and understanding. We should not overly personalize the application, and those who are convicted by the sermon need to feel our compassion. As J. Daniel Bauman says, we must appeal to "shared values," to the common interests of the audience (the positive side) rather than to the differences that distinguish, for instance, the "spiritual" from the "carnal" (negative preaching) (1972:245-46). The latter causes a defensive reaction in the sinner/hearer. Above all, preachers need to share themselves, to be honest in showing how they have handled similar temptations. The audience can identify far more with a "human" person behind the pulpit. I have found personal illustrations to have a far greater affect than "cutesy" stories. This does not mean that we "hang out our dirty linen" in the sermon. We share not just

problems but rather the solutions we have discovered as we have faced the problems addressed in the text. This will keep the congregation from concluding that we are "attacking" them and better demonstrate our own "devotional" study of the text we are preaching.

There are three types of application (see Broadus), and it is good to use these as a control list to ensure a variety of techniques in our sermons.

1. ***Focusing the claims of the truth.*** The modern audience cannot automatically apply biblical truths, for the teachings of Scripture were given in an ancient culture and address problems alien to our culture. Moreover, people today, as in ancient times, do not easily change their patterns of living. Rather, pet faults are rationalized, and people (including preachers!) must be persuaded to change. Here we must steer a middle ground between Broadus, who says the application should normally be direct, and Bauman, who warns against insulting the audience by spelling out the obvious. The key is to maintain a balance between the direct and the labored. We should apply a text mainly when there is a need to drive home the point, rejecting the oblique, academic sermon in which the lesson itself is lost but at the same time refusing to belabor the obvious by wordy explanations of what the audience already knows or to using moralizing minisermons that break the flow of thought.

   Direct application is a useful tool when used properly. There are several types: (1) Elucidation is a direct remark that states succinctly but precisely what the audience is to do; this is especially useful in evangelistic or parenetic (ethical exhortation) sermons. (2) Inference is an application in which the basic interpretation is itself the significance for today. John Broadus insists that it must flow from the text and be practical rather than abstract (such as critical issues or philosophical and theological debates) (1944:212-13). (3) Lessons are more elaborate discussions in which the application is spelled out in detail. This should be done only when the audience analysis points to a particularly important need. (4) Hyperbole or overstatement is a powerful tool for driving home a point (such as Jesus' use of hyperbole in the Sermon on the Mount), but it must be used with care, lest the audience take it as a literal application (such as feeling they have to have a prayer life like "Praying Hyde" or faith like George Mueller to be spiritually mature). (5) Interrogation bridges from direct to indirect application, since the rhetorical question demands a response (direct) yet does not specify the

exact form that response should take (indirect). The preacher will look at both the message of the text and the needs of the congregation and see where one or another of these methods can best contextualize a particular point.

2. ***Suggesting ways and means.*** "Suggesting Ways and Means" is Broadus's title (1944:213). It is, in essence, indirect application and has great value in helping the audience to participate in the process of application. Direct application does not involve the mind but gives the congregation a task to accomplish. Indirect application forces the hearer to decide how to contextualize the point for him- or herself. Several psychological studies have shown that behavioral changes occur best in a context that induces the audience to participate in the process, to change themselves. While Bauman tends to overstate its importance, it is true that many situations and audiences favor an indirect approach (1972:249-50).

   The average preacher or teacher lives in an idealistic world of *what* or *why,* simply pointing to the theological principle behind a text and directly addressing the audience with it. However, the average congregation or class lives in a different world, with many obstacles providing a barrier between the realization of need and the achievement of practical change in their lives. Every person needs to discover not only *what* but *how!* The preacher therefore should suggest practical ways by which the individual can discover the application and put it to work in concrete daily situations.

   The danger with a preponderance of direct application is the common "delusions of grandeur" fallacy: the preacher or teacher seems to believe he or she is an expert in all fields and can analyze exactly what people should do in every circumstance. For instance, preachers often lecture on politics or economics as if they know what politicians should do. This does not mean that ministers should remain uninvolved; they do have a prophetic responsibility to proclaim Christ's message of social concern (this is a major theme of Luke's Gospel). Rather, in doing so a pastor or teacher needs to humbly realize that he or she does not have all the answers. At times pastors must simply state, "We need to mobilize experts in this area." Churches would do well to sponsor key dialogues and to take action in such things as the ghetto landlord problem or urban injustice. However, they should seek good advice before acting in too precipitate a manner. In the sermon the pastor should highlight the problem and suggest some courses of action but avoid shallow demands.

Here a dialogue sermon is helpful; in such a message the audience participates and suggests possible solutions. At times it would be good to preach the message and then have a panel of laypeople discuss how to put the points to action in their lives. This is especially helpful for sensitive issues (like politics or stewardship).

There are four types of indirect application (see Bauman 1972:250-51).

1. *Illustrations* actually function as one type of application, but they need to be done well. Literally, *illustrate* means to "throw light" on a topic; therefore, this type of application should explain the underlying principle of the text. A well-chosen illustration is one of the best methods because it attracts attention, arouses the emotions and often gives relief in an intense sermon by introducing a bit of humor and interest into an otherwise serious discussion. Moreover, an illustration will help the audience retain the point far longer. John MacArthur says illustrations make an exposition interesting, memorable, convincing, clear and motivating (1992a:293-4). John Stott shows that illustrations have played a central role throughout the history of preaching (1982:237-39). From the biblical use of metaphors to Jesus' parables, Scripture itself teems with examples. The Dominican friars in the Middle Ages even developed an *exempla* or collection of illustrations similar to the modern "treasury of sermon illustrations." The problem in the Middle Ages (as occasionally today) was that the *exempla* became ends in themselves and were used to "prove" erroneous theology or took over the sermon so that the point was lost in entertainment. Therefore, the Reformers eschewed them and stressed preaching from the Bible. The Puritans returned to a rich use of imagery (such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) and illustrations have formed an essential part of the sermonic presentation ever since.

   On the positive side, an illustration should match the point made by the text. If an illustration is chosen well the audience will be moved to accept the argument. As Haddon Robinson states, "Logically, of course, examples cannot stand as proof, but psychologically they work with argument to gain acceptance. . . . The analogy wins as much agreement as the reasoned argument" (2001:152). Since they are experiential and closer to life, they

show a congregation how the truth can be practically useful in addressing current problems. They dramatize the point of the message. When drawn from life situations they are especially relevant. For this reason it is best to make the illustration as close to the daily life of the congregation as possible.

David Buttrick lists three criteria for judging an illustration: it must be analogous to the point made in the sermon (text); the shape of the illustration should match the structure of the content; and the illustration should be "appropriate" to the sermon content (1987:133-36). Furthermore, there should not be more than one illustration per point. Multiple examples weaken the power of the point, for they draw attention to the metaphor rather than to the message. The choice of illustration is critical, for it will center on the modern relevance of the point made. Finally, the illustration should be concise. A lengthy anecdote draws attention to itself and overwhelms the biblical point.

There are several sources for such illustrations. The most popular, of course, is the pastor's file of stories culled from *Reader's Digest*, the newspaper and so forth. While I use the former, I prefer two other sources that provoke greater interest. First, I like personal illustrations drawn from my own experiences. When I share my own struggles, the audience identifies me as a human being with the same problems they have. Two caveats are necessary on this topic: I must not share my problems alone, but I must show how God has led me to answers. If the congregation sees only my struggles, they will lose respect for my authority. On the other hand, I must avoid the opposite extreme, painting myself almost as a saint who always comes out the hero. When the two sides are balanced—problems and solutions—the illustration will have power because I have proven the point in my own life.

A corollary of this is the illustration drawn from everyday life. The whole world surrounding you is a treasure house of metaphors, examples and illustrations. The purpose of an illustration is to awaken the senses of the audience so they can feel the point of the text in a fresh, evocative way. You are building a word picture in their minds, turning their senses into a rich canvas onto which you are painting a portrait of the biblical truth involved. Therefore, you must be creative, spontaneous and

colorful as you draw them into your illustration. For instance, when preaching on Yahweh the victorious warrior who “loves” his people (Zeph 3:17; see p. 133) you can use the imagery of the military hero who returns victorious to claim his bride. As you paint the picture of the joy, beauty and pageantry of such a wedding (with the parallel of Israel and the church as a bride) the audience will listen!

The second source comes from historical research into the meaning of the text. The background behind a word or passage not only opens up its meaning but also provides some of the most interesting illustrations. I used to be afraid to teach Hebrews 8—10 because of its heavy dependence on Jewish ritual. However, I have discovered that people are fascinated by the explanation of the Old Testament background to Hebrews and become very interested in its message. The very explanation is a first step toward contextualization, for the hearer can see how the writer addressed the ancient situation and then can better identify parallels in modern life. Moreover, word studies often provide very interesting background material. I remember one sermon when I explained the military background behind the word *equip* (NASB, NKJV) or *prepare* (NIV) in Ephesians 4:12. When I described the pastor-teacher (v. 11) as a “drill instructor” the audience’s interest was immediately evident. Weeks later some still mentioned it. The background of a passage or term opens up the richness of its meaning and is an illustration in itself. Look at it this way—every metaphor in the text (and at times that can be every other term!) is an illustration waiting to be unlocked. All we need do is contemporize the ancient metaphor and we have an interesting illustration.

At the same time there are several cautions to note regarding possible misuses of illustrations. The first is the corollary of what has already been said: the illustration must fit the point of the text. The proverbial story of the speaker who used the same cute example in ten different sermons is tragically all too often the case. If the story does not center on the point of the passage, it will detract from the power of the text and confuse the congregation. Second, the illustration must point to the message and not become an end in itself. If the story or example is too elaborate and lengthy, the audience will forget the point of the

message and get caught up in the drama or humor of the narration. The result will be entertainment rather than conviction. As W. E. Sangster has said, illustrations are not to be "like pretty drawingroom lamps, calling attention to themselves" but rather "like street lamps, scarcely noticed, but throwing floods of light upon the road" (quoted in Stott 1982:241). The story or analogy must draw attention to the point of the text and not just to itself.

Illustrations also should be clear and easily understood. We should not have to belabor the explanation or exegete the illustration. If a story does not convey its point easily, it should not be used. It must be simple and yet interesting. We should not expand peripheral details or add unnecessary characters. Robinson calls for a dramatic simplicity: "A skillful storyteller cuts away surplus details that fail to contribute to the punch line of his story. . . . The story should be told as dramatically as possible so that the audience enters into the illustration and feels, as well as understands, the point being made." [4]

Moreover, the preacher must be honest when using illustrations. Many present fictional accounts as if they actually happened. In any ethical sense this is a lie, and many pastors' reputations have been hurt when people discovered the stories he or she used had not really occurred. The sad thing is that the point would be just as relevant if the pastor presented it as a fictional story. On a related matter, pastors should not use personal illustrations involving family or friends unless they have received permission to do so. This should be done whether or not the person is named; great harm has been done when people realized suddenly that their experiences or problems were being used publicly to make a point.

2. *Multiple choice* can help a congregation realize possible applications of a point. The options are listed, and the congregation is asked to choose the best one. This can be used two ways: all but one can be negative or even humorous, pointing to the proper choice; or all can be relevant and the audience encouraged to note the one that best applies to their individual situations. The value of this type of application is that it treats the congregation as mature adults who can see the relevance of the text and make their own decisions. The difficulty is that unless the preacher works with skill the point can be unclear and the

people confused. If multiple choice is used properly, the audience is subtly taught how to find their own sources of information. Indirect guidance is often superior to direct lecture. If used improperly, however, this tool can lead to confusion. I had a professor who always listed options and never give answers. Two kinds of students resulted: scholars who knew how to find answers on their own and agnostics who were never certain that there were answers! The preacher or teacher must guide the hearers to the answers and not leave them without tools for discovering those answers.

3. Narration is used most often in biographical sermons but can refer to an extended illustration in a message that calls for such. All the points made about illustrations apply to this except the demand for brevity and simplicity. The preacher in a sense is either retelling a biblical story or centering on a personal (or historical) event. The story must be told in dramatic fashion with extensive background material. For instance, parables or biblical stories can be expanded and explained in terms of their original meanings. For biblical stories this can be invaluable, for it immerses the congregation in the original setting of the text and helps them both to understand and to relive it. This enables them to discover parallels in their own lives with much greater facility.

   Extended narration of personal anecdotes or current stories is much more difficult. As with illustrations, a lengthy story can detract from the power of the biblical message and can prove to be entertaining rather than motivational. In some instances, however, a lengthy story on a difficult point may be useful. For instance, if the point is particularly challenging or controversial, an extended story will help the audience understand and accept the argument. Nevertheless, if the lengthy illustration is to maintain its persuasive power, one must hold peripheral details to a minimum and include only those aspects which move the hearer to respond.

3. ***Persuasion and motivation.*** While secular hermeneutics concludes with the impartation of meaning and significance, biblical hermeneutics is not finished until the hearer is persuaded of the relevance and truthfulness of the message and motivated to act accordingly. Actually, three separate steps build on the meaning of the text. The audience is told how to apply

the message to their lives, persuaded with respect to its importance and motivated to change their lives accordingly—that is, to put the points into practice. Many preachers simply assume that people will be persuaded when the truth is placed in front of them. However, this ignores the ability of human nature to rationalize away the truth.

Persuasion dare not be attempted too quickly or too directly. It cannot be accomplished in a moment, and it is a common error of preachers to expect instant acquiescence to their arguments. It takes time and patience to help people alter the direction of their lives. Most of all, preachers and teachers dare not attempt persuasion in their own strength; they must realize that the Holy Spirit is the only one who can change lives. Therefore, persuasion and motivation have both a passive and an active aspect. Passively, Christian leaders depend on the Spirit and must spend much time in prayer seeking divine guidance and empowering for the message. Actively they seek wisdom to choose the proper techniques that will provide a channel for the Spirit to do his work.

Motivation involves an appeal to the will or emotions, showing how the truth can fulfill the audience's basic needs or desires. On this topic I must begin with an important caveat: biblical ethics demands that the pastor be cautious, for unscrupulous preachers have bilked many people out of money or led them astray by misusing this aspect. Motivation research has demonstrated that a strong appeal to basic desires literally can force people to do anything. The television industry is the best example: by creating advertisements that appeal to basic drives, marketers have proven that people can be led to buy virtually anything. When the pastor uses these (potentially dangerous) techniques, the motivation must be balanced and based on the actual meaning of the text.

Emotional appeals must be made carefully; many prefer logical argumentation because of the misuse of emotional appeals in some circles. However, we must remember that our Lord and Paul often utilized emotional arguments (see Sunukjian 1982:292-97). The key lies in the use of emotive, well-chosen language that leads the people to react. Most important, the appeal must be carefully tied to the truth content and never go beyond it. We must contextualize the passage properly before motivating the hearers to action. Speak positively and glowingly about the results that accrue from such action, but be certain that the results are both true and biblically based, derived from the text rather than from subjective experiences that may or may not be correct. Hyperbole is a common error when motivating an audience, for the stronger the

argument the better the results. However, in such cases the speaker can replace content with emotion and is in danger of destroying the eternal truth in favor of temporary results.

CONCLUSION

Application is crucial to the task of biblical interpretation and must be as exacting as the process of determining the meaning. Contextualization refers to the attempt to translate the religious principles of Scripture for the different "contexts" or cultural heritages of our own day. We must make Scripture relevant for our time and understandable in cultures alien to the time of the Bible. Therefore, we must make a careful distinction between form and content, making certain that the latter remains the focus of our proclamation, unless the form itself is indispensable to its meaning (such as baptism or the Eucharist).

The hermeneutical task has three levels: *meaning*—considering the intended message of the text; *interpretation*—asking to what extent its message is determinative for our own day; and *contextualization*—seeking the form that will best communicate that normative message and lead to concrete application to people's daily lives. At each level, however, we must stress and remain fully cognizant of both our complete dependence on the Holy Spirit and our human tendency to insert ourselves into the process of understanding (theory) and action (praxis) that constitutes the task of interpretation.[5]

The following points will serve to conclude not only this chapter but the whole book proper.

Level 1. Meaning/interpretation. 1. Look at the *whole.* This is done on two levels. First, we chart the book itself, noting the ebb and flow of its thought development. Second, we determine its biblical theology, that is, the major emphases the author seeks to stress. Through this the pastor or teacher develops both understanding of the whole message of the book or paragraph and a preliminary thesis statement.

2. Look at the *genre.* We must determine the genre or type of literature before interpretation can begin. The pastor will preach apocalyptic quite differently than poetry or narrative. As we learned in chapters six through twelve, we must study and proclaim each biblical genre differently, according to its own

purposes and rules, lest we proclaim a message alien to the divine intention in the text.

3. Look at the *grammar, semantics* and *syntax.* When we move from the whole to the parts, it is important to see how individual statements fit together, to note the major and minor clauses and to study the interrelationships of the units of thought (see Thomas 1992:137-53). We must look at the whole statement and ask the author's intended meaning in the context before applying it to our context. Above all, we dare not declare our belief in an inspired, inerrant Scripture when by our treatment of the text we demonstrate a lack of concern for the inspired meaning. God couched his revelation within human language, and any study of linguistics demands that we note the relation of each word to its context. Word study must be wed with grammar and syntax to allow the divinely inspired message to shine through the text. Richard Wells finds five values of critical study for the preacher: (1) It teaches the preacher to use the important scholarly literature so as to understand the Bible more deeply. (2) It helps us think more analytically, asking questions about genre, grammar, semantics, historical and biblical context. (3) It enables us to preach with greater authority because we have thought more deeply about its meaning. (4) It develops our scholarly ability to think critically with a more holistic understanding of the Bible and a greater use of all the resources in preaching. (5) It increases the preacher's repertoire of biblical knowledge and thus enhances the whole process of preaching (2001:512-13).
4. Look at the *historical/cultural background.* We need to understand the passage and book within their historical context as well. It is amazing how much more meaningful the Bible becomes when viewed in this light. Moreover, this often highlights a contextualizing situation in the history of Israel or the early church and provides a helpful step in leading the congregation to note the significance of the passage for their own lives. Finally, this aspect can lead us to highly meaningful illustrations as we recreate the "world" behind the text and draw parallels with our own world.
5. Look at the *analogia scriptura*. While steps 1-4 recognize the diversity of Scripture, here we consider the unity of the Bible, asking what parallel passages help to clarify the true point of the

text. Primarily, we need to realize that individual statements must be understood within the broader context of Scripture as a whole. We tend to overly dogmatize single passages when the author was only stressing one aspect of the larger truth for the sake of the problem he was addressing. We must consider several levels: the passage, the theology of the writer and the theology of Scripture as a whole. Each must be applied before we can understand the exact meaning of the passage.

6. Look at the interpretation of the passage throughout *church history.* Many modern errors of interpretation could be avoided if we were aware of similar mistakes in the past. On individual passages the better commentaries will often list the possible interpretations, and this can be of great benefit, lest we force a reading on a passage that does not really best fit the context. Moreover, the history of dogma also supplies the pastor with excellent examples of contextualization to use in the sermon.

Level 2. Interpretation/relevance. At the interpretation stage we determine the extent to which a passage is normative for all times or applies an underlying eternal command to a specific cultural situation. We all recognize that portions of Scripture are not meant to be followed today, such as historical narrative or purely cultural commands. That Paul made urban evangelism his approach at Ephesus (Acts 18—19) does not mean that the village evangelism of our time is wrong. Nor do we literally have to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16). However, we must evangelize and greet one another in love. Therefore, before we can contextualize a passage we must determine the extent to which it is meant for our day.

1. Note when the argument is anchored in *prior revelation.* If a statement is grounded in the Old Testament proof text, a saying of Jesus or a canonical creed (such as 1 Cor 15:3-5), it may demonstrate that the author is not merely dealing with a current cultural situation but rather in the revealed, eternal counsel of God.
2. Determine the *circumstances* and the *underlying theological or ethical principle.* We must always search for the theology behind the biblical statement as well as the historical situation that occasioned the emphasis. If the principle is prescriptive rather

than descriptive, it will more likely be normative. Also, we must determine the distance between that underlying principle and the explicit statement in the text. If there is distance, it will perhaps support a cultural application, and we will apply the passage at the principial level (deep theological structure) rather than at the surface level (see also points 3-5).

3. Determine whether the teaching transcends the *cultural biases* of the age. If it does transcend those norms of society, it will provide a clear signpost for the supracultural relevance of the command. If it does not, we must consider the other principles, for we may then need to contextualize it within the new situation.
4. Determine whether a teaching is primarily *cultural* or *theological/moral* in essence. If the former, it is usually applied at the principle level, such as those concerning slaves and their master (labor-management) or the holy kiss (Christian greeting). If the latter, it is supracultural and therefore normative for all ages and cultures.
5. Recognize that the *supracultural content of Scripture is eternal and universal* and cannot be altered, while cultural forms may be changed depending on the context. This of course provides a transition to the last level. The major point is that our decision regarding eternal norms is binding on all cultures. Pragmatic considerations should not be allowed to overrule biblical demands. At the same time, however, if we decide that the command is cultural, it is still binding in subcultures (such as many fundamentalist and evangelical groups) that are similar to the first century in this area.

Level 3. Contextualization/application. The purpose of contextualization/application is to make clear and readily available to persons in any culture the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ and the abundant life he provides. Further, the Bible demands that we challenge all persons and societies with the supracultural norms of Scripture.

1. Add to our exegesis of the Word an *exegesis of our world.* Before we can properly apply any biblical statement to our culture or another, we must seek a deeper understanding of the specific cultural environment. This is just as true of our society as it is of

one overseas. Many pastors have lost touch with white-collar and blue-collar workers. In another culture it is even more crucial and should involve both library research and participant observation. Busy pastors too need to function as sociologists, constantly doing the type of life situation study that will enable them to meet the needs of their congregation.

2. Allow the *Word to encounter the world.* At times this will involve a positive confirmation of the world and at other times a negative confrontation with it. Missionaries and pastors should seek redemptive analogies that will allow them to make the Word relevant and understandable within the given culture. Of course, this process may also have to distinguish cultural form from content, accepting the content but replacing the form in a culture that would not understand it. This positive or negative pull will be determined by a trialogue between text, interpreter/contextualizer and recipient culture. The Word first addresses the interpreter who must internalize it before seeking to apply it to the culture. The interpreter becomes contextualizer when he or she participates both in the Word and in the world. In this process the Word challenges then transforms first the interpreter and then the receptor culture.
3. Take account of the scriptural teaching regarding the *eschatological end of this age.* Jesus taught that the kingdom "has come" in his first advent and that we are now living in a state of tension between this age and the age to come. Jesus has bound Satan by the incarnation and the cross (Mk 3:27), yet Satan is still the god or prince of this age (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2). We now exist in the heavenly realms (Eph 1:3), where Satan operates (Eph 3:10; 6:10-12) and must manifest Jesus' victory in our lives. Many issues facing the church are of a global, even apocalyptic, nature. The church ignores these at its peril. We must avoid irrelevant or even deceitful speaking on these issues (such as social injustice, arms escalation and so forth) yet at the same time maintain a balance between evangelism (which is primary) and social concern (which in the end should not be radically separated from it).
4. Note *the priority of authority.* Too often preachers' and teachers' interpretations and even their applications are given an *ex cathedra* authority. We need to remember that only the inspired

text is inerrant. Our interpretation is dependent on the Spirit's illumination and its authority depends on the amount of effort we put into studying the passage. Our finite understanding and human perspective too easily control our interpretation. Therefore, our delineation of a passage's message carries authority only to the extent that it conforms to its intended meaning. The contextualization is even further removed and is also dependent on the Spirit's illumination and is still another step removed from the text since it depends on the interpretation and our own decision as to the text's normative content and applicability to the receptor culture. Therefore, our task in contextualization is to shape our response to the results of levels 1-2.

5. Finally, realize the *necessity of praxis.* Proper contextualization recognizes that right understanding ideally results in right practice. The Bible seeks not just correct thinking or understanding but more the correct action that results. The equivalent Hebrew and Greek words mean both "hear" and "obey." Therefore, changed lives are the intended results of the enculturation of the Word. Stephen Macchia (1999) visited one hundred churches and after extensive research developed ten traits of a truly healthy church—God's empowering presence, God-exalted worship, spiritual disciplines, listening and growing in community, a commitment to loving and caring relationships, servant-leadership development, an outward focus, wise administration and accountability, networking with the body of Christ, and stewardship and generosity. These are many of the goals the pastor will strive to develop through the preaching ministry. They define the praxis of the church.

Level 4: Preparing the sermon. 1. Rework the *outline.* The Bible study outline that resulted from the exegesis is presented in descriptive language and simply summarizes the meaning of the parts of the passage. In the sermon these points will be reworked in dynamic language in order to challenge the hearer to respond to the point.

2. Decide how to *contextualize the points.* The pastor or missionary will work through the sermon points on the basis of a life situation analysis of the audience. Certain aspects will be

emphasized to meet those needs, and the pastor or teacher will then decide what type of contextualization (such as illustration, suggesting ways and means, direct confrontation of issues) will best serve the purpose at each point of the passage.

3. Work on *packaging the sermon.* The preacher must remove pedantic language and seek a smoothly flowing sermon. The wording should be worked carefully to maintain interest and grip the hearts of the hearers. The speaker will want to plan carefully the proper rhetorical techniques for the various parts of the sermon. The Holy Spirit is the one who actually persuades and motivates the listener, but the speaker must utilize methods that will form a channel rather than a barrier for the Spirit's work.

In conclusion, we cannot "correctly handle the Word" (2 Tim 2:15) until it has been interpreted and contextualized so that the same voice of God speaks today as spoke in biblical times. Of course, God is strong and wise enough to speak through erroneous interpretations. However, at the same time it is incumbent on each of us to speak with as clear a voice as possible, to seek to say, "God worked in my ministry because of (and not 'in spite of') the interpretation and contextualization that I was led to present today." Paul states, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (Rom 10:15; cf. Is 52:7). There is no greater privilege than to be the proclaimer of divine truth within the desperate situation of our world today. May we be careful to make certain (through the leading of the Holy Spirit and our own hard work) that it is indeed God's voice speaking through us as we contextualize his Word for our world.

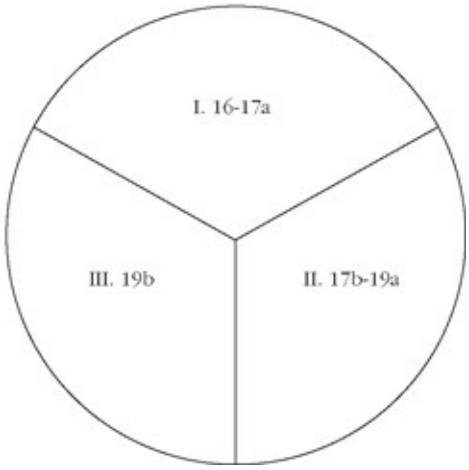
EXCURSUS ON PREPARING THE SERMON

In many ways a detailed study of the sermonic process goes beyond the subject of this book. However, several aspects touch on the hermeneutical spiral from text to context and are helpful in communicating the significance of the passage.

1. ***Develop a thesis (propositional) statement.*** After concluding the exegesis of the passage, the pastor or teacher should summarize the message as a whole and determine the single point the writer has been trying to develop. This is easiest when one preaches by paragraphs (using a paragraph Bible like the NIV), for often a message changes themes slightly from one paragraph to another. The purpose is to center on the message as a whole rather than the isolated parts. Homileticians continually castigate biblical scholars for developing so many points in a message that the congregation is confused as to what areas they should develop in their lives. Moreover, the biblical writers saw their message as a single whole rather than as a series of disjointed parts. Therefore, we are true to Scripture only if we develop the "big idea" (Robinson's term) that the author intended. The details of the text or main points of the sermon will actually develop aspects of this thesis statement. Each main point will be one part of the larger whole, much like pieces of a pie (see fig. 18.1).

Figure 18.1. The pieces of a sermon on Ephesians 3:16-19

I. Petition God for Power (3:16-17a)
II. Petition God for Insight (3:17b-19a)
III. Petition God for Fullness (3:19b)



2. ***Outline the sermon.*** This is the third step in determining the structural development of the passage. In the basic survey of the context (see chap. 1) the Bible student does a preliminary outline and in the detailed exegesis reworks that to its final form. In preparing the sermon the pastor takes that final outline and contextualizes each main point to speak dynamically to the congregation. Some (such as Jay Adams's *Pulpit Speech*) have said that the sermon outline stems from the congregation's needs and not necessarily from the outline of the text. In other words, a sermon on prayer from Ephesians 3:14-21 (see chap. 4) might have only two points, one on *strength* and the other on *love* if that is the perceived need of the hearers. Then the pastor would omit the other points and save them for another time. However, I find that problematic and unnecessary. It is problematic because the busy pastor could easily skew the meaning of the passage and thus of the words *strength* and *love* by ignoring the context from which they come. Adams is not saying that one should neglect exegesis, but on the pragmatic level this would occur. Further, such a method is unnecessary because the pastor could do the same thing by following the *text's* outline and contextualizing specifically at those points. The outline of the text must provide a control on the common tendency to analyze a text subjectively (from the congregation's needs) rather than objectively (from the author's meaning).

   The technical exegetical outline is rephrased to communicate the dynamic message of the text. The goal is to speak the original message to

the needs of our day. Therefore, it is a conscious contextualization of the text. For instance, the three points of Ephesians 3:16-19 could be reworked:

1. Petition God for Power (vv. 16-17a)
2. Petition God for Insight (vv. 17b-19a)
3. Petition God for Fullness (v. 19b)

Alliteration has been much maligned of late, due to misuse on the part of many. We need to remember, however, that it is a technique used often in Scripture. For instance, Psalm 119 is an acrostic on the Hebrew alphabet, and Matthew organized his material in groups of threes, fives and sevens. So long as we do not skew the meaning of the passage, alliteration can be a valuable device for helping a congregation remember the points. We should not use this method constantly, however, lest the congregation tire of it. Variety is the primary goal. If we were to use alliteration on the Ephesian passage, the three "petitions" could be for power, perception and perfection (the latter is the title for v. 19b in Markus Barth's Ephesians commentary). Most important, the titles for the major sections should share two characteristics: (1) they should constitute parts of the thesis statement; (2) they should ask the audience to participate in the application of the text to their own lives.

Let us employ Zephaniah 3:14-17 (see pp. 131-34) as a further example. Developing the Bible study outline of the passage gives us the following:

1. We Can Respond Joyfully to Trials (vv. 14-15)
2. We Can Confess Our Hope in the Midst of Trials (vv. 16-17)

Here I have presented possibilities rather than commands because I want the hearers to respond with anticipation rather than with guilt, positively rather than negatively.

Walter Liefeld mentions three functions of a good sermon outline: (1) it groups the data in order to facilitate comprehension; (2) it focuses attention on those parts which the text (or preacher) wants to emphasize; (3) it moves the sermon along toward its goal (1984:115). I would add a fourth: it challenges the congregation to implement the major point(s) in their lives. An outline is like a good lawyer who not only assembles the facts but does so in such a way that the jury (the congregation) is moved

to respond to the truths of the message. It establishes rapport and helps the audience desire to attain the goals presented in the message.

3. ***Rework the body of the sermon.*** This must be done in keeping with the life situation analysis of the congregation and the propositional statement. Choose those aspects of the message you wish to highlight and apply, and then work carefully through the proper contextualization of those parts. With a proper balance between explanation, persuasion and motivation, the preacher will develop a message that immerses the congregation in the ancient situation and message and then in its relevance for their own lives.

   Transition statements between points of the text are crucial, for they are the mortar that binds together the idea blocks of the edifice of the sermon. Transitions should be natural, leading the congregation from one point to another and enabling the listeners to see the relationship and progression between the ideas. There are three elements here: the concise summary of the previous section (“We have seen how Jesus taught that God’s forgiveness is conditional on our willingness to forgive”), a transitional phrase (“and now we will turn to the Epistles”) and the introduction of the next point (“in order to see what they say about forgiveness”). The key is brevity and simplicity, making certain that the audience understands the development of the message.

   Another critical element is sermonic flow. The preacher must remove all pedantic, unnecessary parts and rework the points so that the audience’s interest will be maintained. The goal is not to transmit mere information about the text but the spiritual power of the text. Each element must flow into the next, and details should be paired down so that the hearers are not bored by needless data that adds little or nothing to the real message of the text.

4. ***Prepare the introduction and conclusion.*** The introduction and conclusion are the last elements of the sermon proper to be developed. The pastor needs to know exactly what the passage teaches and how it should be developed for the congregation before deciding how to introduce and conclude the passage. Both aspects are tailored to fit the propositional statement. The introduction is written to catch the interest of the congregation and prepare them for the sermon proper. Robinson says says a good introduction must (1) command attention by grabbing the interest of the people and commanding their intention; (2) uncovering their needs by being practical and relevant; (3) introduce the body of the sermon by centering on the big idea and introducing the first main point

(2001:166-72). It should be about 10 percent of the message and consists of three parts: (1) an interesting anecdote that will both capture the imagination of the listeners and lead into the propositional statement; (2) the propositional statement itself, which will be both the "moral of the story" concluding the opening anecdote and the thesis of the sermon; and (3) a brief note of the context that situates the message in the larger framework of the biblical author's developing message, connects it with previous sermons in the expository series and leads naturally into the main points of the body of the message. This will help the audience note the larger context within which the passage occurs and will function in a sermon the same way a book chart (see chap. 1) works in Bible study. The central part is the proposition or "big idea." As you are developing the message and exegeting the passage, you should have a preliminary thesis as to what the passage is all about, refining it as you study. Then, when you are finished, concretize that idea and ask, *What do I want my congregation to do with this sermon?* That becomes the proposition for your message. It should be short, striking and embody all you believe God wants the passage to say to the people. It sums up both "what it meant" and "what it means."

The conclusion ties together the points of the sermon and its contextualization, motivating the congregation to live out those points concretely in the days following. It should also be concise (no more than 5 percent of the sermon) with well-phrased sentences built around a personal appeal that contextualizes the propositional statement. The goals are to drive home the main point and motivate the audience to act on it. As Paul Wilson says, there is no need to sum up the main points, for that would seem pedantic (1995:184-85). Rather, in a concise way with direct, simple language, recontextualize the propositional statement and provide a "sense of completeness" for the message. The listeners should feel that the conclusion is addressed to them personally, and so it should be phrased in positive terms, centering on action (what to do) rather than guilt (what to avoid). Finally, the conclusion must be forceful, direct and urgent, demanding immediate response and giving the audience something to act on immediately (if they can put it off they will forget the point). I prefer concrete suggestions rather than generalities. Give them a "homework assignment" (the best way to think of the conclusion) that asks them to put the sermon to work in specific ways in the days to follow. For instance, you could concretize the message on Zephaniah 3:14-17 by asking each hearer to list three trials that he or she is

experiencing currently and then to note specific ways in which God confirms his love (v. 17) to them in the midst of each trial during the coming week.

EXCURSUS ON STYLE

1. ***Story preaching.*** The tendency in current homiletic theory is to reject the propositional form of preaching for "story preaching," an "event" approach that narrates a plot or tells a story rather than presents in didactic fashion a series of theological assertions. The problem of traditional preaching, it is argued, is its basis in Aristotelian rhetoric, which has controlled Western logic and communication from the start. As a result, preaching has always tended to be didactic, trying to convince the congregation of the truth of the propositional points made in the message. However, the homiletical version of reader-response criticism (pp. 478-82) argues that the Bible consists not of propositional assertions but of religious metaphors. As Buttrick says, "Revelation is associated with the symbols through which we interpret life. Thus preaching, as it forms faith-consciousness, is a means of God's self-disclosure and saving grace now" (1987:115-16). For story theology, preaching is not assertive but suggestive, not propositional but symbolic. Metaphor and self-awareness are the names of the game. Proclamation has given way to sharing, and truth orientation has been replaced by life-centeredness. It is not so much content as shared experience that characterizes story preaching.

   Edmund Steimle states that there are three "stories" in preaching: the biblical story (the basis), the preacher's own story (the example) and the congregation's story (the occasion for the sermon) (1980:41-42). The authority of the sermon is derived from the extent to which it touches on and interweaves these three elements. According to Steimle, the "story sermon" must be "secular" from start to finish, addressing the needs of people today in the same way that biblical writers chose their redemptive metaphors (e.g., *redemption* was derived from the slave market) from the secular world (pp. 165-67). For him the "timeless sermon," which is just as relevant today as it was a century ago, is not a good sermon, for it does not touch lives. A truly "biblical" sermon establishes a dialogue with the

daily needs of the hearers, and the best way to do this is to structure the sermon around a plot or story that draws the audience into the suspense and life-relatedness of its message.

We can commend much in the emphasis on life-oriented metaphors and relevance. However, it ignores the fact that the Bible is indeed theological and propositional at the core; it is story *and* theology, not story *or* theology (see app. 2). Moreover, redaction criticism has shown that behind even biblical narrative is a theological core. Proposition and metaphor are not opposed to one another. Narrative preaching has an important place in the preacher's arsenal, but it is a supplement to and not a replacement for the more didactic form. I agree with Sidney Greidanus that the text and subject matter should dictate sermon form (1988:148, 154). The textual form should be reflected in the sermon form. Moreover, relevance and relatedness can result from a judicious use of application and illustration in a didactic sermon as well as from a story sermon. However, authority is found not in the relevance of the contextualization but in the centrality of the revealed Word of God in the message. In one sense the three "story" elements (text, preacher, audience) is an excellent summary of the hermeneutical enterprise as developed in this book. In another sense, when it depends on a symbolic rather than a propositional approach to theology and the sermon, it turns the Word into word and Christian truth into relativism. We must adopt the "story" form only in two instances: when preaching biblical narrative, in which case it is the best way to preach the material, and as a method for applying and illustrating the point of the text.

2. ***The style of presentation.*** Thomas Swears says, "Words are the most important and sacred tools available to preachers for accomplishing this task (of acquainting people with God) . . . words are deeds, and they do, in fact, change lives" (2000:19-20). It is essential to prayerfully and carefully choose the language you utilize, for as Jesus said, "I tell you, that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Mt 12:36-37). A Bible study and a sermon differ markedly in presentation. The former is didactic while the latter is rhetorical and dynamic. Style in a Bible study maintains interest via dialogue as the original message is taught while sermonic style involves and grips the audience in more dynamic fashion. Style is the instrument by which the sermon becomes memorable. The great preaching stylists (such as Jonathan Edwards, Donald Barnhouse

and Chuck Swindoll) have all worked as hard on presentation as they have on exegesis. Unfortunately, in many circles style has replaced content. Many spend far more time on packaging than on determining the truth content. The reason is obvious: poor content with good style will satisfy many, while good content with poor style will satisfy few. Yet style must always remain a supplement to the message of the text rather than an end in itself.

Preachers should develop their own style. By definition *style* denotes that which characterizes a person. It is unnecessary and wrong to copy the great rhetoricians of our day like Billy Graham or Haddon Robinson. All preachers and teachers must find their own manner of expression. It seldom comes easily; no great writer or speaker has ever failed to struggle in developing an individual style. The best way is to notice how you speak in formal situations, to discover what comes naturally. Building on this, work on vocabulary, and experiment with various combinations of phrases. Rework sentences until they have that "ring" which feels comfortable. A thesaurus will help you find the correct words and avoid redundancy.

There are several qualities to seek in a good style.

1. *Clarity* enables the audience to understand the message easily. A common mistake of young seminary graduates is phrasing a sermon or lecture in language familiar to them (usually the technical language of the classroom) but unknown to their hearers. Actually, clarity is difficult to achieve because most speakers believe "style" denotes flowery language, and thus they sacrifice meaning for rhetoric. Daniel Bauman argues for precision and economy, the ability to find the exact expression and avoid fuzzy expressions like "fast travel" or "expensive meal" (1972:161-62). To do this well the speaker must work hard at developing a good vocabulary and learning how to use it.
2. *Energy and forcefulness* demonstrate enthusiasm. The audience will feel that the pastor is convinced of the importance of the message and will be more easily persuaded themselves. I cannot overstate the danger of a dry, uninteresting presentation. Speakers must make their hearers feel the excitement of the message if they are to catch their interest. Of course animate, passionate expression comes only when the speaker is fascinated with the message. Once more the devotional approach must be the starting

point. We must study the message first for ourselves; after it has spoken to us, we can feel personally the value of the message and can communicate an aura of excitement. When the passion of the text is felt by the audience, they too will conclude that the truth is crucial for them.

3. *Vivid language* causes interest and paints word pictures in the minds of the hearers.[6] Jesus constantly used rich metaphors. In our television generation people expect imagery and seldom develop interest without it. A television executive recently defended the industry's preoccupation with visual over content-oriented news: "A good story with poor pictures will always fail; a poor story with good pictures will never fail." The speaker must avoid overused, common expressions (dead metaphors) such as "sleeping like a log" and seek fresh images (e.g., "his repose seemed as peaceful as the slumbering oak, swaying gently in the breeze"). Rhythm or alliteration can also be helpful, so long as it is not strained. An overly worked phrase can ruin a statement, but good metaphors will draw attention to the truth content. Mainly, realize you must appeal to both head and heart, to the mind and the volition. It is a fine line to walk, but our language must always find that balance of appealing both to the emotions and to reason (see Longman 1997:51-94; Swears 2000:21-27).
4. *Fluency and elegance* add an air of poetry to good prose. It would be well for a speaker to write a manuscript sermon once in a while (many do nothing else!) to work on this. I do not wish to eschew simplicity (see the first point); a well-written sentence will find that subtle balance between precision and elegance. The two are not mutually exclusive. Consider Albert Schweitzer's marvelous prose as he denied the validity of the "old quest for the historical Jesus" school:

> Formerly it was possible to book through-tickets at the supplementary-psychological-knowledge office which enabled those travelling in the interests of Life-of-Jesus construction to use express trains, thus avoiding the inconvenience of having to stop at every little station, change, and run the risk of missing their connexion. This ticket office is now closed. There is a station at the end of each section of the narrative, and connexions are not

guaranteed. (1948:330-31)

5. *Strong transitions* help the congregation to know where you are going and to understand the logical development of your points. Robinson says they "serve as road signs to point out where the sermon has been and where it is going" (2001:187). Without them the message seems disjointed and chaotic, but with them the organization is plain to all.

   We would do well to study great writers and expositors of the past to see how they phrased their ideas. Also we should learn to think in terms of impressions, to seek that which will reach both the eyes and ears of our listeners. Paint pictures that capture the imagination and help motivate the congregation in the direction of the sermonic goal.

3. ***Rhetoric and delivery.*** It is not easy to summarize rhetoric and delivery in a paragraph; the Greeks among others spent generations developing them.[7] However, I must mention several aspects because they are part of that final stage of the hermeneutical process, proclamation.

   1. *Posture* can help tremendously when seeking to project the positive image of being relaxed yet enthusiastic and confident. Studies have shown that posture communicates a great deal of information to an audience. If the speaker is too stiff, the audience becomes tense; if draped over the podium, the audience assumes the content will not be strong. A good posture is an effective communicator.
   2. *Tonal inflection and variety of pitch* sustains an audience's interest. Effective use of pauses will point to a particular emphasis. A speaker should be animate in vocal tone as well as in gestures. A monotone or too-rapid delivery will cause the listener's attention to wander. I have often struggled with speed of delivery. Once after a sermon a woman asked in amazement, "Did you ever take a breath?" Since that time I have worked at pauses and rate of delivery, but I still do poorly at pacing my sermons. Most people cannot handle an unremitting flow of rhetoric. The rhythm or flow of speech is an important aid to the speaker. One should note the syllables to accent and keep the pace even through each sentence, not trailing off at the end of sentences.

3. *Gestures* should be direct and emphatic, well paced and moderate. Those which are overly dramatic will impress in the wrong way, detracting from the message and drawing attention to the speaker rather than to the text. Lloyd Perry states that good gestures grow out of the speech (are natural) rather than being tacked onto the speech: it is important to seek both variety and precision so the hearers gain the impression of an earnest, relaxed and sensitive speaker (1973:186-87).
4. *Eye contact and facial expression* should also be direct and appropriate to the mood of the point. A proper use of these will convince the congregation of the speaker's sincerity and help lead them into the content of the message. In fact the only way to impart one's feeling of excitement for the message is to demonstrate it via pitch, rate, gestures and facial expression. Lack of animation hinders the audience's confidence in the speaker and turns them indifferent toward the message.

These are important supplements to the study of both text (the original meaning) and context (ways to apply the passage to the congregation). However, the external packaging must always be dependent on (rather than productive of) the interpretation of the text. These techniques are instruments for communication and dare never take precedence over the meaning and significance of the text. The average person reacts more to the packaging than to the content, and that makes it all the easier to spend most of one's time on the external aspects. The gifted preacher frequently depends on techniques rather than on the study of the text. Unfortunately, only a few listeners may even notice the difference. All of us must be ever cognizant that we do not just preach *to people;* more important, we preach *for God.* While people may not notice, God always does, and he alone is the final judge! Therefore, these rhetorical tools *must* be kept subservient to the overriding task of determining God's revealed message to his people of all ages and of its significance for this day.

However, I do not mean here that only "expository" sermons can be biblical. In an important recent debate Haddon Robinson says, "Topical preaching common in American pulpits flirts with heresy" (1984:804). Erwin Lutzer correctly responds that while there is an inherent danger, topical preaching, when done "effectively and with biblical integrity," is a valuable ally to

expository preaching (1984:833). Irving Busenitz says that “to be effective, all topical preaching and teaching, whether the topic be thematic, theological, historical, or biographical, must be consumed with expositing the Word” (1989:255). Many modern issues can be addressed better topically, such as theological or ethical subjects. The key is to make certain that every passage used in a topical message is preached in accordance with its context and intended meaning. Ask, *What does the Word say on this issue*, then collect the passages and collate them on that issue. The outline will reflect the organization of the biblical material on that point. When that is done the topical message is “biblical or expository.”

Appendix 1

The Problem of Meaning

THE ISSUES

Most readers of the Bible assume that it is possible to discover its intended meaning. However, an extensive debate rages today over both the possibility and the importance of a critical examination of Scripture (or any other text) in order in order to ascertain its original message. Craig Bartholomew speaks of a "crisis in biblical interpretation," pointing out that the dominant method has been historical criticism, grounded in post-Enlightenment modernity; but those philosophical assumptions have been radically questioned by postmodernity and shown to be merely traditions rather than accepted axioms of reading (2000:4-5). These challenges have thrown the hermeneutical enterprise into disarray, for they have appeared from every side. Does *hermeneutics* mean principles of interpretation or the act of appropriating a text's meaning for one's own situation? What is the meaning of *meaning?* These questions form the topic of this appendix.

The process of discovering the "meaning" of a written utterance has three foci: the author, the text and the reader.



The author "produces" a text while a reader "studies" a text. Yet which of the three is the primary force in determining its meaning? The focus has shifted from one to another of these as various theories of meaning have been propounded. Since an author is no longer present to explain the meaning of the text once it is written, is the text autonomous from the author? And since the

reader provides the grid by which the text is interpreted, what place does the text itself have in the process of understanding? Moreover, it is now generally accepted that the very process of coming to understanding that we have all accepted must now be considered to be little more than another set of traditions bound by prejudices on our part (Bartholomew 2000:255-56). So we need a metacriticism of our very reasoning apparatus! These are valid questions that demand answers.

In 1967 the literary critic Paul de Man spoke of a similar crisis in criticism: "Well established rules and conventions that governed the discipline of criticism and made it a cornerstone of the intellectual establishment have been so badly tampered with that the entire edifice threatens to collapse" (1971:3). In defining this crisis, he spoke of "the incredible swiftness with which conflicting tendencies succeed each other," the extensive appearance of books inaugurating "a new kind of novelle nouvelle critique," and the replacement of philosophy by the social sciences at the helm of literary criticism (pp. 3-4). There is no sign that this incredible productivity is waning, and one is bewildered to discover that by the time news appears regarding a "new" school, someone is already writing that the movement is passé. In the appendixes of this book I hope to make sense of the scene and to attempt a possible map for finding our way out of the maze to the kind of "field approach" that John Dominic Crossan suggested a few years back when things seemed so much simpler (1977:39-49).

The problem is indeed a serious one. Some have charged proponents of a reader-oriented criticism with undue skepticism, but the difficulties of objective interpretation are far too great for such a charge to be valid. The simple fact is that all of us read a text on the basis of our own background and proclivities. It is not only impossible but dangerous to put our knowledge and theological tradition aside as we study a biblical text. That very knowledge provides categories for understanding the text itself. At the same time, however, these traditions have potential for controlling the text and determining its meaning. This constitutes reader-response interpretation—meaning produced by the reader rather than by the text. As Werner Jeanrond says, texts are not so much objectively understood as they are read anew in each situation, a dynamic process that is often open-ended and produces a new image of reality in the act of reading (1988:11-12).

The point I wish to argue is not whether this is ever the case; any observer has to admit that it is usually so. But I do challenge whether this *must* or even *should* be the case. This is the task of hermeneutics, not only to determine principles for interpretation but also to delineate the proper goal(s) of interpretation. Kevin Vanhoozer calls meaning a "theological phenomenon" and the hermeneutical

task “a theology of interpretation” (1998:9-10). He argues for the “ethics of meaning,” that is, the morality of seeking what the text wants to convey. The thesis of these appendixes will support the priority and possibility of determining the author’s intended meaning as the true core of biblical interpretation.

Hermeneutics originated as a biblical discipline. Yet many fields of study have provided input. Until recent decades the primary influence was always philosophy. Then with structuralism, linguistics came to the fore, and at the present time literary criticism has seemingly assumed the throne. Of course, no single force is behind the hermeneutical enterprise, and each of these disciplines as well as sociology, anthropology, psychology and so forth are important. Jane Tompkins provides a helpful summary of the historical development in literary criticism (1980:ix-xxvi). She describes the evolution of the focal center of interest from text to reader to response, and it is illuminating to discover the parallels between literary critical thinking and biblical hermeneutics. I will trace this basic pattern.

THE PROBLEM OF THE READER AND THE TEXT

The problem of interpretation begins and ends with the presence of the reader. How does the reader get back to the perspective and message of an ancient text? The problem is difficult enough when we try to interpret one another in oral communication, for each of us has a slightly different perspective, and we use the same terms but with different content. Often my wife and I will discuss an issue for some time before we realize that we are looking at the problem from quite different vantage points. Only when we align our perspectives do we actually begin to communicate. When we multiply this by two thousand years of development from biblical times to the current period and by the fact that the culture of the Bible ceased to exist when the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the problem becomes almost insurmountable. The tendency is to read modern issues back into the text, and a purely objective approach that re-creates the original situation without recourse to the modern preunderstanding is exceedingly difficult, indeed impossible.[1] The act of interpretation itself is done from within a cultural and theological framework. In fact, this framework is both positive and necessary if understanding is to take place. Yet where does that leave the text? Anthony Thiselton speaks of the problem of tradition when biblical texts "become assimilated into the function of creeds: they become primarily institutional mechanisms to ensure continuity of corporate belief and identity" (1992:8-9). This is usually the case, in fact. People read Scripture within a reading paradigm dominated by the denomination of which they are a part. They don't seek truth but conformity to their assumed theological position.

Hans Frei has shown most persuasively that this issue is hardly new to the twentieth century.[2] Biblical scholars throughout history have struggled with the difficulty of literal or text-oriented and nonliteral or cultural/theological approaches to the Bible. Nevertheless, the issue has surfaced in a new way in the last three decades. Frei states that the apologetic cast of hermeneutics has until recently eclipsed a realistic approach to narrative because "the historical-critical method was a powerful antidote to a serious consideration of narrative interpretation in its own right" (1974:141; see pp. 124-54). In short, a true hermeneutics was rendered impossible by an approach that failed to let the text speak for itself. The hermeneutical switch from the text to the individual resulted

from a switch of focus from the accessibility of the text (in terms of method for interpreting a text) to inquiry into the structure of understanding itself.[3] The focus of interest has thus shifted from the text to the self, and the significance of this shift is still being explored. The result is that the reader is now seen as the creator of meaning rather than the text, and the act of "coming to understanding" has become an individual self-discovery more than a process of decoding textual meaning. The author is now seen as entirely removed from the text or the discovery of meaning.

1. ***Author-centered hermeneutics.*** Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is the father of modern hermeneutics. For him the purpose of interpretation is the reconstruction of the author's original message. Interpreters, through historical and critical reflection on the text, align themselves with that intended meaning. Schleiermacher wedded the spirit of the Enlightenment to the process of interpretation by eschewing a dogmatic approach and treating the Bible like any other book. A German pietist and Lutheran preacher, Schleiermacher nevertheless refused to allow his philosophical system to triumph over his religious consciousness. His response was to wed idealism (which teaches that reality is determined by the rational process) with romanticism, which led Schleiermacher to say that religious faith is grounded in the feeling of absolute dependence on God. Yet for him this "feeling" was a function of the intellect, and his hermeneutical system reflects this. The key to interpretation, he believed, is a common ground of understanding between subject and object, between reader and text.[4]

   Schleiermacher's system has two major factors, the grammatical and the psychological, which correspond to the two spheres of knowledge—the external linguistic codes and the internal consciousness. Grammatical inquiry attempts to develop the linguistic dimension by demarcating the meaning of individual concepts on the basis of the surrounding words. He was ahead of his time in demanding that meaning be seen in the whole, not in isolated parts. Yet he is best known for the psychological aspect. Schleiermacher taught that the interpreter should align himself with the mind of the author and re-create the whole thought of the text as part of the author's life. The interpreter's task then is to reconstruct not only the text but the whole process of creating the thought on the part of the author.

   Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) takes this psychological approach to its logical conclusion. Interpretation for him involves the union of subject

and object in a historical act of understanding. Dilthey called this the "rediscovery of the I in the Thou," by which he meant that a person discovers his or her self in the act of reading (1969:235). For this reason Dilthey wrote his *Critique of Historical Reason* as a corrective to Kant by developing a system that united science and life, theory and praxis. The process of understanding is a historical process that seeks objective knowledge of an author's meaning. From Schleiermacher he borrowed the idea of readers identifying with authors but went further by positing the possibility that readers are in a position to understand the meanings of texts better than the authors themselves. Since readers intersect authors' minds from outside and bring to bear many techniques, they can recreate meanings that go deeper than the authors themselves realized (see Bleicher 1980:19-26 for a good discussion).

This approach has obvious weaknesses, and few have followed Schleiermacher or Dilthey this far. By making the author, more than the text, central to the hermeneutical process, they have moved beyond the possible bounds of hermeneutical theory. They have been guilty of reductionism by simplifying a complex process of understanding into a psychologistic study of the author.

2. ***The movement away from author-text: Gadamer.*** However, with the rise of the dialectical movement via Karl Barth and especially Rudolf Bultmann, this historical approach increasingly came under attack. Here I will attempt to chronicle the attack from a two-pronged perspective, the phenomenology of Heidegger and Gadamer and the semiotics of the poststructuralist school.

   It would be instructive before I begin, however, to compare with this the parallel but distinct evolution of literary criticism. Similar to Schleiermacher's influence at the turn of the century, the school of New Criticism dominated from 1930-1960. With an emphasis on the form and texture of the text rather than on its historical dimensions, the New Critics took an intrinsic approach to the text that failed to consider adequately the subjective involvement of the interpreter. The onset of phenomenological and structuralist concerns appeared later on the scene than in biblical studies but accomplished a reorientation of the literary discipline much more quickly, to the extent that literary criticism has now moved further along the path of reader-oriented dynamics than has biblical hermeneutics (see Detweiler 1980:3-23). This is not to say that the school of New Criticism has been replaced. Indeed, it has spawned a number of off-shoots, such as the neo-Aristotelian "Chicago School"

with its stress on a philosophically grounded "mimesis" or "imitation." Yet the scene today is controlled by the reader, rather than by text-oriented approaches.

In recent criticism we must begin with Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose magisterial *Truth and Method* typified the word-event theologians of the post-Bultmannian school. Thiselton posits three movements that led to "radical metacriticism": a sense of "radical historical finitude emerging from Dilthey to Heidegger"; "the constitutive role of language" in the process of understanding; and the unease and struggle as hermeneutics intersected the social sciences and radical literary ideas (1992:318). What Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling (founders of the "New Hermeneutics" school) label the "hermeneutical circle" is seen by Gadamer as the "fusion of horizons," namely, the horizon of the text and that of the interpreter. Building on the thought of the later Heidegger, Gadamer argues that language is grounded in our very "Being" rather than just in our thought life, and thus both language and text are autonomous entities with a life of their own (see Thiselton 1980:327-56 for an excellent survey). The act of interpretation does not so much unlock the past meaning of the text as establish a dialectic with the text in the present. The psychologistic attempt (of Dilthey and others) to ascertain the author's intention is not a part of this, Gadamer argues, for in the act of writing "meaning has undergone a kind of self-alienation" and must be "stated anew" or reawakened to spoken language by the reader (1975:354-55).

In other words, when I study those passages where Paul reflects on his past life—such as Romans 7 and Philippians 3—I do not study Paul but the texts he wrote, and the texts speak to me in my present situation rather than re-create the original author's past situation. Gadamer states, "To understand it does not mean primarily to reason one's way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said" (p. 353). This is because "texts do not ask to be understood as a living expression of the subjectivity of their writers. . . . What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships" (pp. 356-57). The language of the text as presently constituted is determinative for meaning.

Yet at the same time, Gadamer insists, interpretation is not an "action of one's subjectivity" but a historical act, a "placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused" (p. 258). The key is the "temporal distance" between subject (interpreter)

and object (text); this allows one to sift the preunderstanding or historical tradition so as to select only those aspects that prove meaningful in understanding the text.

Contrary to the Enlightenment's negative appraisal of preunderstanding as a barrier to interpretation, Gadamer makes it a positive factor, indeed the key to true understanding. Here Gadamer's use of "preunderstanding" is similar to Schleiermacher's: it is the common ground between the interpreter and the world of the text, that store of knowledge which allows one to grapple with the ideas in the text. The interpreter's prejudgments interrogate the text and are interrogated in turn by the text. Thereby subjectivity and objectivity merge together, and interpretation becomes application as new horizons of possibility are opened.[5] In short, both text and interpreter take part in the historical process of interpretation. The openness of the text is paralleled by the openness of the reader and the historically conditioned horizons of both merge in the act of coming to understanding. Most importantly for Gadamer this process occurs in the present and cannot be controlled by the past subjective component of authorial intention.

Gadamer follows Heidegger in orienting all understanding to language: understanding comes not so much through the "methods" of interpretation (as in the classical schools of hermeneutics) as in the act of "disclosure" (or "truth") within communication. Furthermore, it is an aesthetic experience and occurs more readily in oral than in written speech. In the former one has a ready-made context within which to interpret the communication. With a "text," however, the past thought world is missing, and the message is open to the subjective perspective of the reader. The only solution is the universal basis of language. The interpreter comes to the text aware of his preunderstanding and utilizes it to ask questions of it. The thought world of the text opens itself up and in the dialogue that follows reshapes the questions of the interpreter. This is Gadamer's version of the hermeneutical circle, called the "fusion" of horizons. The past (the text) and the present (the interpreter) merge.

It is important to realize here that Gadamer never denies the place of objective or scientific method. Rather, he argues that it can provide only a degree of certainty and can never truly re-create the "intended" or "original" meaning of the text. There are not two (interpretation and understanding) or three (with application) separate aspects in the hermeneutical enterprise but rather one single act of "coming-to-understanding." Past and present are fused together. One cannot interpret

“God so loved the world” merely from the Johannine perspective; John 3:16 is always considered from the perspective of one’s present experience of divine love.

In sum, Gadamer’s aesthetic hermeneutic moves from the author and the text to a union of text and reader, with roots in the present rather than in the past. Gadamer has correctly seen the place of the reader in the hermeneutical process and the fact that the subject is always present in the study of the object. His “fusion of horizons” is an important correction to the psychologist school. Yet there are several weaknesses inherent to this theory. As is true also of the New Hermeneutic, it is not so clear how Gadamer avoids the danger of subjective interpretation. For him there are two controls against subjectivity—the past horizon of the text and the present community of the interpreters (the “tradition” that challenges subjective interpretations). However, there are no clear criteria for avoiding subjectivism. In fact, each moment of reading can produce a new and innovative understanding.

In addition, Gadamer does not develop a method for distinguishing true from false interpretation. As Jeanrond points out, “systematically distorted communication” can twist the meaning of the text (1988:14-16, 22-37; see also Thiselton 1980:314-16), but Gadamer develops no criteria for noting inadequate understandings. Furthermore, he has an uncritical view of the role of the reader in interpretation. It is difficult to see how he can avoid polyvalence (multiple meanings) since each present situation or perspective is free to guide the text wherever it wishes. Anarchy could easily be the result. Vanhoozer points out that in such a method there can never be “one formula for hermeneutical fusion” because understanding is dominated by the differing horizons of the readers (1998:106-7).

Finally, Gadamer gives tradition an uncritical role in the act of coming to understanding. As E. D. Hirsch points out, “The reader who follows the path of tradition is right, and the reader who leaves this path is wrong” (1967:250). However, there is no stability in this approach, for tradition is ever developing and changing depending on the community and the data.

Moreover, this results in a radical change in the definition of truth since it would differ depending on the tradition that develops it. Truth would have no universal or absolute basis that would bridge from one community to another. While this may indeed be the case, it does not have to be so, and in these appendixes I will attempt to establish the

viability of seeking the original intended meaning of a text.

3. ***Structuralism.*** In France structuralism filled the vacuum left by a growing disenchantment with Sartrian existentialism; in biblical studies it filled a similar void caused by the disenchantment of many scholars with the results of form and redaction criticism.[6] Current biblical criticism, proponents of structuralism argue, is preoccupied with the historical traditions rather than with genre and plot development and as a result has produced an impasse in which the interpreter is unable to cross the chasm between meaning and significance. Historical truth *(Geschichte)* is sacrificed on the altar of history *(Historie).* Structuralism takes the opposite pole and argues that such diachronic (historicist) interests are a barrier to true meaning and that the interpreter must consider only the synchronic (literary) presence of the text as a whole.

   A movement further away from the priority of the author and text occurs within structuralism, or more accurately the poststructuralist school of semiotics.[7] The Russian formalist Vladimir Propp developed a formal "grammar" of narrative in 1928 in his study of Russian folktales, showing how the common elements of the story (hero, villain, etc.) controlled the interaction of the plot and generated meaning. Claude Levi-Strauss in the 1950s was the true "father of structuralism" (Kurzweil's term). Although he was more the popularizer than the creator of the school, he developed the system that we know today. Two primary sources influenced him. First, Ferdinand de Saussure (1915) distinguished between *langue* (the language system) and *parole* (the individual speech act) and between the signifier (the image) and the signified (the concept behind it) in language. A term like *love,* for instance, means quite different things not only in various cultures but even to individuals within the same culture. It is not easy to move from the signifier (love) to the signified (sacrificial giving, strong affection or lust) in a given speech act.

   Second, Roman Jacobson's formal system of binary opposites argues that a polarity exists between metaphor (the vertical relationship or association between a term and its literal meaning) and metonymy (the horizontal or sequential relationships between linguistic concepts, which lead to word combinations). To use the same illustration (love), there is a tension between the semantic range of the metaphor and its specific use in the individual set of word combinations within a speech act. One must decipher the code behind the surface relationships of the words, and often

these are contradictory. Only then can one “understand” the “meaning.”

From this base Levi-Strauss forged his theory that linguistic phenomena must be understood not in the sense of conscious but unconscious meaning determined not by individual terms but by the unconscious systems within which they are encoded or found (1963:1:32-34). A structuralist will not be interested in the surface message of Romans 5:8 but in the underlying codes of Romans 5 and the hidden message behind the surface text. The interpreter must apply general laws to this closed system of signs in order to determine the deep structure or unconscious (mythopoetic) meaning underlying the surface structure.

For structuralists the human mind structures thought via a closed system of signs or codes that are organized according to universal patterns in the brain. These patterns bridge from one culture to another and basically determine the writer’s view of reality (worldview).

Therefore, this system subsists at the subconscious level. Meaning has both horizontal (syntagm) and vertical (paradigm) aspects, with the syntagm representing the thought development within the surface context and the paradigm the thought world to which each idea corresponds. The interpreter studies the structure of all the elements in the work taken as a whole; these elements become the clue or “code” that points to the deeper meaning structure behind the writer’s surface words.[8] In the many books and *Semeia* articles devoted to an application of these principles, the story as a whole is first of all decomposed or broken up into its basic narrative units (called “actants”). Then these units are examined in terms of the structural codes or narrative sequence in the actantial (narrative sequence) units; this yields the composition or structure of the configuration of the codes. Finally, the structure is recomposed on the basis of transformational rules (following Chomsky), from which the underlying message for today is determined.

This school is very confusing to the general reader (indeed to most scholars!). Perhaps an illustration—again from John 3—would help. The structuralist would deny that the surface statement from John 3:16 can impart the text’s meaning to the individual. Rather one must consult the entire dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1-15, in particular the binary codes of the above (Jesus) and the below (Nicodemus), then further apply these to the editorial addition of John 3:16-21, with its own codes of sending-receiving, judgment-salvation, believe-reject, light-darkness and truth-evil. These symbols are then

deciphered to discover the deep structure or underlying message and then transformed on the basis of the codes of our own day. The background or the surface grammar does not speak, but rather the oppositions within the text itself communicate meaning. These, moreover, speak directly to every reader.

For structuralists one cannot utilize a diachronic approach to the text in order to delineate what it meant in the past but must take a synchronic approach in order to decipher what it means in the present. Therefore, this method (like phenomenological approaches) is unconcerned with the author's intended meaning and seeks only to uncover the structure behind the writer's expressed thought, the "common world" of the underlying codes that address us directly. Since appearances do not lead to reality, the interpreter can enter this common world only by uncovering the structures behind the whole rather than behind the parts, the plot development and plurisignification (many meanings) of the text rather than the past meaning of the surface statements.

In addition, structuralism opposes the stress on the subject or self proposed by phenomenology or existentialism. Humankind is seen as a whole rather than as individuals, and the universal laws of the mind are said to structure reality in such a way that the individual "is automatically devalued insofar as human thought functions everywhere according to the same logic" (Harari 1979:20). Experience and reality are no longer continuous but must be reordered or structured in terms of a deeper meaning, hidden from one's perception of phenomena. Thus one constructs models or code structures that go beneath the perceived world to its underlying true nature. "There is, therefore, a discontinuity, a break between the diversity of the real and the formal abstraction of the structure that signifies it, the movement from one to the other implying a passage from diversity to simplicity, from the concrete to the abstract" (p. 22).

A dissatisfaction with basic structuralist concerns arose quite quickly, and inherent weaknesses in the system led to what is now called "poststructuralism." In fact, it is now often stated that structuralism per se has been superseded or is even "dead," replaced first by semiology (the early Barthes) and then by semiotics (Derrida and the later Barthes).[9] It would be helpful here to summarize the weaknesses of the earlier structuralism that led to this shift:[10]

1. A preoccupation with linguistics and a failure to lay a secure

philosophical foundation. This is considered to be one of the major distinctions between the old structuralism and the poststructuralists; all the other difficulties are connected.

2. A denial of history. Many poststructuralists realize that a radical denial of history leads to the dissolution of meaning. The progress of ideas dare not be replaced by a concern only for the moment, lest understanding itself be lost.
3. The loss of human freedom. If individuality is replaced by a closed system of codes, determinism results. There is no meaning in the individual; understanding adheres only in the group mindset. This is too great a price to pay.
4. Overstatement of the place of a closed system of sign codes and of binary dualism. They have extended partial truths to covering laws. Most today reject rigid views of a closed or universal system of laws and recognize that while the human mind does at times employ semantic opposition (such as good-evil, light-darkness), thought structures cannot be forced into so limited a category.
5. A reductionistic tendency. The system forces the ideas and plots of a text into artificial theoretical constructs and ignores the complexities of individual surface expressions. Today poststructuralists realize that the school is more an ideology than a science and that it yields tentative classifications (what Barthes calls a “hypothetical model”) rather than covering laws.
6. Failure to recognize the necessary link between deep narrative syntax and surface structure semantics. The surface structure determines the underlying principles, and usually the deep structure is based on conscious rather than unconscious meaning. There is inadequate evidence for the separate existence of “deep structures” in the mind.
7. The difficulty of the quest for a text’s world representation. It is not so easy to determine how universal truths can be discovered by means of the sign system, since the normal hermeneutical principle of mimesis or imitation is ignored in favor of the synchronic moment. The results of structuralist interpretation are even more subjective and diverse than those of historical criticism.
8. The radical denial of intentionality. The refusal to consider a text’s historical horizon or context actually denies the synchrony

of the text itself, since it arose in a past era, not out of the modern era. Saussure's distinction between langue and parole hardly demanded so radical a step.

4. ***Poststructuralism.*** There is a growing realization that structuralism itself can discuss only how a text communicates meaning, not what or why it does (see Perpich 1984; Harari 1979:22-23). The lack of a rigorous methodology has thereby led to a reappraisal. One of the first attempts has been to wed poststructuralist concerns and phenomenology, primarily aligned with the work of Paul Ricoeur. This movement has been influential to the extent that Norman Petersen concluded his article "Literary Criticism in Biblical Studies" by coining the term "phenomenological semiotics" (1980:42) to cover what I will label "the new literary criticism." The key shift is the movement from the signs embedded into the text to the reader as the generator of meaning. So the new semiotic movement has turned from the signs themselves to the perception of those signs in the mind of the reader.

   Robert Detweiler (1978), Petersen (1978) and Edgar McKnight (1978) simultaneously attempted to bring together the formerly opposed disciplines of historical-critical study and structuralist concerns. The hermeneutical problem relates both to extrinsic concerns (relating the text to other similar texts) and to intrinsic methods (dealing with the text itself). Since language is a direct semantic system and the meaning of the surface level determines the deep structure message, the "intentionality" of the consciousness as defined by phenomenology is essential. Only by "bracketing" or considering the surface or conscious meaning can one get at the reality behind it.

   The phenomenological perspective dealing with man's existence and perception of the world is wedded to the poetic dimension (Jacobsen). The resultant interaction with the text as text is made possible by the perspective of Ricoeur's "second naiveté," a "postcritical" attitude that allows one to enter the imaginative thought world of the aesthetic work. The biblical writer(s) and original readers are bracketed, and the interpreter speaks only of the "implied author" and the "implied reader" (see pp. 203-4, 211-12). The text speaks for itself. The author and reader cannot be known with certainty. One has only the text and the author provides only glimpses of himself, primarily via the "narrator" who becomes the presence behind the story and the actual source of information. He is the visible element in the text.

A further result is “polyvalence,” or “plurisignification” (multiple meanings). Since the perspective of the reader is crucial for the interpretation, polyvalence naturally results when various contemporary worldviews are employed to examine the grid of the text. Susan Wittig’s programmatic essay “A Theory of Multiple Meanings” follows the poststructuralist essays in *Semeia 9* interpreting the parable of the prodigal son from the perspectives of Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian archetypes and strict structuralism. She argues that the situation as it is (that readings of a text by different individuals produce a multiplicity of meanings) demands a theory to explain the phenomenon (1977:84-92). She then suggests a semiotic approach to both reader and text, and states that this demonstrates that ultimate significance is derived not merely from the interplay of the linguistic text but from a “second-order system.” This system involves an unstated significance that compels the interpreter to complete it. Since readers complete the meaning of the text within the constraints of the surface structure itself, their mind or belief system determines the unstated signified (the meaning of the text) more than the signifier/text itself. The analytic system employed “generates” or reshapes the interplay of text and interpreter, and plural meanings result —meanings determined not by the text but by its dialogue with various faith communities.

John Dominic Crossan follows Wittig’s article with his “Metamodel for Polyvalent Narration” (1977:119-21, 133-34). Following Jacques Derrida he applies the Nietzschean concept of “play,” arguing that “freeplay” in the text removes the possibility of any final or ultimate deciphering of its meaning. Since all sign systems have their origin in play, all interpretation is ludic rather than mimetic, open-ended rather than representative. The text as a sign system is in this light an arena open to many games, and each interpreting community is free to “play” on that field according to its own rules. Different “games” in a text lend themselves to different meanings. Crossan applies this theory to the two textual aspects of plot and metaphor, asserting that “plot manifests story as play,” and that metaphor becomes allegory and therefore is plurisignificant at the core. All literature is read on different levels depending on the “perceived perceivers” (the readers) and their perspectives. Since all language is metaphor, and since metaphor is “dead of meaning at its core,” language is characterized by “absence” (the absence of literal meaning and of hermeneutical constraints). Therefore, multiple meaning necessarily results, as the perceiver provides the

content for the autonomous and empty metaphor.

Wittig and Crossan would argue that each person will interpret the message of John 3, for example, on the basis of his or her own belief system. Moreover, each one's interpretation will be a valid "truth" from within these different perspectives. There is something to be said for this. For instance, Calvinists and Arminians often interpret "God so loved the world" quite differently, especially in comparison to other Johannine passages (such as Jn 6:37-40; 15:1-6). Some Calvinists stress John 6:37-40 and emphasize the sovereign side of divine predestination in salvation; the *world* becomes the elect. Arminians emphasize John 1:4, 7, 9; 15:1-6 and the individual responsibility in faith decision. Every person in the "world" is given a charge to respond to God's love. The debate is whether both sides are equally correct and whether or not an extended dialogue between the various systems (in this case between Calvinists and Arminians) can help the interpreter to "bracket" the systems and allow the text to speak for itself. I believe that the latter is indeed the case.

With structuralism and poststructuralism we have moved even further from the object /text to the subject/reader. Barthes states, "As an institution, the author is dead: his civil states, his biographical person have disappeared; disposed, they no longer exercise over his work the formidable paternity whose account literary history, teaching, and public opinion had the responsibility of establishing and renewing."[11] Vanhoozer points out that for poststructuralists like Stephen Moore the act of reading a text to discover the author's intended meaning is an "immoral interpretive act" since the ethical obligation of the reader is to go against the grain of the biblical text at times (1998:81-82). The key is the autonomy of the text. Modern literary critics believe that the text as an entity becomes independent from the author as soon as it is written down, and therefore it cannot be restricted to the original author or readers. The proper place of the reader/perceiver/interpreter in the hermeneutical task introduces an epistemological and ontological dimension that distances the reader from the historical situation of the original writer. The hermeneutical circle thus established between text and reader involves the constant intrusion of the reader's own interpretation. Indeed, the autonomous nature of the text demands that the reader enter its common world and complete its meaning. This interaction between perceiver (reader) and perceived (text) opens the text to endless interpretive possibilities.

We are again at the heart of the problem. You, the reader, do not know me, the author. The text of this book does not truly reflect my personality. That is, of course, obvious; the question, however, is whether it adequately reflects my thoughts on the possibility of meaning. Can you as reader understand my opposition to polyvalence, or is this text autonomous from my views? At this moment I am writing in the library of the theology faculty of the University of Marburg. Certainly many of the professors here, schooled in the existential or historical-critical approaches and having grown up in the German culture, will read these arguments from a quite different perspective. The question is not whether they will agree but whether they can understand my arguments. I will not be around to clarify my points, so certainly this written communication lacks the dynamics of oral speech. Moreover, those readers without the necessary philosophical background will definitely struggle with the concepts herein.

However, does this mean that no amount of clarification can impart the meaning that I seek to communicate in these paragraphs? I think not. This issue has two aspects: can we know what another person meant in a written account, and is it important to know that original intended meaning? Both questions must be considered.

Most poststructuralists look at the text as “art” rather than as “work,” since art has a life of its own after it is completed while work is merely “displayed” (Barthes 1979:74-75). The old relationships between author, reader and observer have experienced what Barthes calls an “epistemological shift.” With respect to this, he provides seven propositions: (1) The text is experienced only as activity, as the production of a work that does not stop. (2) The text is paradoxical or even subversive with respect to attempts to classify it generically; it cuts across all hierarchical distinctions and so is open-ended. (3) The field of the text is that of the signifier, which has an infinite number of possible meanings; as such the text is radically symbolic and without closure. (4) The irreducible plurality of meaning possibilities centers on difference and intertextua1ity; that is, the text contains within itself other texts in terms of its multiple meanings.[12] (5) Unlike a work of art, the text is not linked to “the Father’s signature,” that is, the author’s intentions; the author comes back, if at all, as a “guest” who is no longer necessary in the interpretive task. (6) The distance between writing and reading is removed when reader and text are linked “in a single signifying process” in which the reader is asked to collaborate in producing a *new work* with

the text. (7) The text participates with the reader in producing aesthetic pleasure via the "transparency of language relations"; at the moment of reading the interpreter makes it his or her own work (pp. 74-81). Think of the text as a playground. On such a field a person can play whatever game they wish—kickball, hide and seek, volleyball, softball. The field has only the possibility of play; the group decides which game they wish to play and what rules they want to govern the game. So it is with a text according to this view. A text has only a possibility of understanding. The actual process and result of interpretation is decided by the reader not the book.

5. ***Reader-response criticism.*** Two final schools remain (reader-response and deconstruction), and each in quite distinctive fashion culminates the movement away from the author/text to the reader (for an excellent brief history of this move from Augustine to the present, see Van der Weele 1991:127-32).[13] Reader-response criticism goes beyond the poststructuralists by positing not only the autonomy of the text but the veritable union between text and reader at the moment of response. Several essays in *Reader-Response Criticism* (Tompkins 1980) demonstrate this. Norman Holland argues that response involves a merger between author (note the presence of "author"!) and reader as the latter "mingles" his or her basic self with the text (pp. 70-100). This act is reader-centered rather than text-centered. David Bleich goes further, positing a subjective criticism in which even the autonomy of the text is denied and replaced by individual identity (pp. 134-63). The text is an object only in a physical sense; as "meaning" it exists only in the mind of the reader. Therefore, "response" unites the person with the text and is a subjective act, a process in which the whole community of interpreters produces meaning via a dialogue regarding the text. Note that with reader-response criticism subjectivity in interpretation is no longer something to be avoided but is to be welcomed and encouraged.

   Stanley Fish defines meaning itself via phenomenological categories (1980:177). Understanding does not arise via experience; there is no epistemological choice between alternate meanings but an ontological union between the reader and the text. In other words, the text disappears and the reader "creates" meaning. Formal features such as style and authorial intent interpenetrate the reader's awareness, leading to Fish's basic thesis "that the form of the reader's experience, formal units, and the structure of intention are one, that they come into view simultaneously, and that therefore the questions of priority and

independence do not arise." His major question is how one begins. If the text has no existence apart from interpretation, what does one interpret? Fish answers the dilemma by pointing to the prior existence of "interpretive strategies" that stem from the community of interpreters. The reading strategy, developed within an interpretive community (similar to Gadamer's "tradition"), unites with the text and produces meaning.[14]

Yet there are important differences between the proponents of reader-response criticism.[15] Some, like Wolfgang Iser, center more on the text and maintain links with the formalism of the text-centered New Criticism. For Iser the themes of the text bridge to the readers and guide as well as correct their interpretation. Iser speaks of the "indeterminacies" or gaps in the text that force the reader to become involved in its textual "world." Thus it is in the dialectic between the indeterminate signs of the text and the perspective supplied by the reader that "understanding" occurs (1978:24-25). However, for Iser the text provides the impetus, engaging readers and drawing them into its narrative world. It does this via a textual "repertoire" or configuration that provides an internal sequence (plot, dialogue and so forth) perceived by the reader. The actantial units or developing sentence structure sets up a series of anticipations that involve the readers in the plot line and force them to complete its textual meaning. The readers do this on the basis of their reading strategy and experience, and therefore the text is plurisignificant at the core; nevertheless, for Iser the text controls the reading process (pp. 93-111). The modern readers in this way align themselves with the implied reader (see pp. 211- 12) to grasp the reading strategy of the text. Thus the readers "complete" the meaning of the text.

Most biblical studies of the reader-response type (such as Culpepper, Fowler, Rosseguie) fit into this category. These latter scholars seek to blend reader-response with historical-critical perspectives and study how "the author of the gospel has undertaken to direct and control the reader's experience and reading" (Fowler 1981:149; quoted in Porter 1990). In this sense most of us are reader-response critics of a type. As a Gospels specialist, I tell my students that they need to perform a "reader identification" with the original readers in order to study the significance of a story for our day. That is, they ask what Mark or Luke are telling their original readers to do with the story and then align themselves with that action and ask how it applies to our day.

Yet many literary practitioners of reader-response fit a second type, exemplified in Stanley Fish. For Fish the reading strategy is not a component in the production of meaning but *the* component. The reading situation dominates the text, which guides but has no identity outside the mind of the reader. The text supplies only potential meanings (note the stress on the plural, "meanings"), and these are then actualized by the readers, who select those meanings that fit their interpretive strategies. It is not a text's intention but "readers performing acts" that produce meaning (1980a:11-14). In fact for Fish the text as a formal entity does not exist apart from the reader's interpretive act. Preexistence belongs to the community that shapes the reader's experience.

> The relationship between interpretation and text is thus reversed: interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually assumed, arising from them.[16]

In other words, the Sermon on the Mount as a text is called into being as the reader experiences it. Moreover, there is no objective interpretation of Matthew 5— 7 but rather a subjective act as the reader chooses a reading strategy and approaches the text accordingly. For this reason readers may experience a text differently each time they read it.

For Fish dialogue and critical inquiry can proceed only from within a set of reading interests with shared assumptions. Therefore, debate and understanding are possible only within a literary community. Those from differing communities use the same words or symbols but assign them differing meanings; there is no literal meaning, only a plurality of meaning possibilities that are actualized in the act of reading (pp. 356-76). The goal is not to discover what the text is saying but first to experience what it does and then to persuade others regarding the validity of your perspective on the text (pp. 303-21). The synchronic or present moment of reading alone can be called "interpretation." The past act of interpretation (that of the original readers) belongs to a community that remains forever lost and cannot be recovered. So for Fish the reader can exult in the present moment of discovery and creative experience in reconstructing the text. It is the reading strategy adopted from the paradigm community of which one is a part that provides the methodology for interpreting a text, and the understanding that results

will necessarily be different from the understanding arrived at within other communities. My understanding of the book of Revelation will be very different if I belong to a dispensational or a Reformed community.

In sum, neither text nor interpreter has autonomy, for both fuse at the moment of reading and cannot exist apart from the other. As Jane Tompkins states, we should not separate the "formalist theory" of the New Criticism from the "institutional praxis" of the reader-response school (1980:201-32). Since both actually identify criticism/ interpretation with issues of explication/meaning, they partake of the same rules. At the same time, however, their radical denial of the text and espousal of its autonomy places them further along the spectrum away from author and text and toward the reader/community as the generating force in hermeneutics.

Much can be commended in reader-response criticism, especially among those following Iser. Hermeneutical theory has not dealt sufficiently with the place of the reader and of the interpretive community in the act of coming to understanding. Similarly the influence of preunderstanding or the reading strategy on so-called objective interpretation must be considered more carefully after interacting with this school. In fact, the basic approach of chapter seven on narrative analysis stems in large part from this school.

Nevertheless, there are several serious drawbacks. Primarily, there is a reductionism in saying that the reader rather than the author or text produces meaning. Not all reader-response critics posit this radically. Edgar McKnight says that "a literary approach to the Bible in the context of contemporary literary study, however, allows—even requires—a view of the text as both an ancient document with original meaning and a living message with contemporary significance" (1988:107). He sees continuity between the message for the original readers and for modern readers. At the same time, however, he denies any necessary link between those meanings. The modern reader is free to find his or her own meaning in the text apart from considerations of historical or original meaning.

Further, there is a radical and unnecessary skepticism inherent in the approach. While this is manifest more in Derrida than in Fish, it is nonetheless present in some degree in all these adherents. McKnight defines "postmodern" reading as one that challenges the assumption that a text has an objective or referential meaning. Rather, meaning is found in the reader (pp. 14-15). However, when these critics posit radical

discontinuity between text and reader, they are guilty of disjunctive thinking. Text and reader are not completely autonomous. Rather they address one another (the hermeneutical circle) as the reader seeks understanding. While I, the reader, perceive the meaning of a text like the Sermon on the Mount from the standpoint of my preunderstanding, I can still allow the text to address, challenge and if necessary change that perspective. In other words, there is a dialogue, indeed a trialogue, between author, text and reader leading to the meaning of the text. The exact place the author and text have in this system will be the subject of appendix two; here I want to make the simple point that both have a place in the process of discovering meaning. We, like the original readers, can also approach the text via a close or informed reading, discerning the intertextual and historical dimensions of the stories as well as the unfolding plot.

Moreover, while reader-response critics like Fish have a skeptical attitude toward the author and the text, they have an uncritical and docetic attitude toward interpretive communities and reading strategies. No critical apparatus exists for a critical dialogue between communities, only for dialogue within a community. Fish has created a system that has free play but never the type of truth that can bridge between communities. In the infinite possibilities within a text it is difficult to see how he escapes relativism.[17] Controls exist only within a reading community, and there are no controls to guard against relativizing communities, especially since the relativized reader is free to choose from an infinite number of communities. The kind of community envisioned by reader-response critics is at one and the same time too large (a macrocommunity encompassing a language system or culture as a whole) and too small (microcommunities with infinite combinations from which readers are free to choose any number at any time). It is hard to see how there is any cohesion with so indistinct and confused a concept of community.

Thiselton calls Fish a “socio-pragmatist,” one who looks at both text and reader as controlled by differing cultural contexts that can never intersect (1992:537-39). There is no objectivity but only an inner subjectivity that controls the interpretive process. Fish’s “fatal error” is his refusal to find a middle ground between formalism and a radical pragmatic antiformalism (which he espoused). Thiselton then compares Fish to Wittgenstein (1992:540-50). In his concept of “language games” Wittgenstein found the middle ground, but Fish (probably due to his lack

of philosophical depth) has not. The truth is that there can be dialogical interaction between differing communities. Thiselton has five criticisms from the standpoint of biblical communication: (1) if textual meaning is a community product, texts can never transform readers "from outside"; (2) prophetic address has lost its power and in fact achieves the opposite, for its message is constructed by the very community it purports to address; (3) notions like grace or revelation are illusions, since there are no givens; (4) the "message of the cross" becomes no more than the "linguistic construct of a tradition"; (5) nothing can ever be counted as error in the development of doctrine, for it is all little more than a social construct (pp. 549-50).

6. ***Deconstruction.*** Jacques Derrida has developed an approach that takes the most radical tack thus far, for he questions the very possibility of theological or philosophical criticism as we currently define it. Derrida is the product of a direct line of continuity from structuralism to poststructuralism to deconstruction. Each school built on the strengths and sought to correct the weaknesses of its predecessor. Poststructuralism (Barthes) reacted against the structuralist assumption that the linguistic codes provide a direct line to the meaning of a language or a text, arguing that every language, even the second-order discourse of structuralism, is open to another metalanguage behind it. Deconstruction then goes further to challenge the communicative power of language itself. It is indeed difficult to describe the thought of so complex a thinker in a few paragraphs, yet the very number of works that have appeared testifies to Derrida's impact on theological studies (Detweiler 1982; Culler 1982; Ellis 1989; Burke 1992; Critchley 1992; Rutledge 1996). In fact, it is indeed strange that it has taken so long to "discover" Derrida due to his impact on the scene of structuralism since the mid-1960s, especially after the simultaneous publication in 1967 of three major works: *De la Grammatologie, L'Écriture et la différence* and *La voix et le phénomène*.[18]

   Derrida attacks the very foundation of Western philosophical thinking, arguing that philosophy no longer holds an unassailable, privileged place as the overseer of truth. He builds on Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) in arguing for a rhetorical rather than a philosophical approach to epistemology. At its heart deconstruction attempts to free language and rhetoric from the constraints of philosophical thought. In Derrida's inaugural address (in which the movement was launched) at Johns Hopkins in 1966 ("Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the

Human Sciences") he argued that philosophy deconstructs itself because there is no true center outside itself that can act as a "transcendental signified," because it is part of the universe of signs and therefore needs more signs to justify its claims. Due to the endless chain of significations it decenters itself. All discourse is provisional and characterized by instability (see Jacobs 1991:175-79). Here Nietzsche is essential as the precursor to Derrida. Nietzsche takes a skeptical look at Western metaphysics, arguing that it stemmed from the Socratic rejection of the metaphorical basis of language. Since Socrates and Plato, Nietzsche and Derrida assert, rational thinking has maintained a tyrannical hold over human understanding. Since all logic pretends to be rational but is actually metaphorical, attempts to determine meaning are doomed to failure, and truth is radically relative. Philosophy claims to be logical, but in fact it is rhetorical and so is both an illusion and a fraud. This can be exemplified in Nietzsche's definition of truth:

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are: metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.[19]

Derrida coined the term *logocentrism* to describe philosophical reasoning; this term refers to the "myth" that the spoken word or rationality provides the central fulcrum behind the quest for understanding. Derrida deconstructs this presupposition. In "Violence and Metaphysics," he argues that encounter with the text must always be defined by "negativity," for "the infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought of on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always the horizon of the same" (1978:92-109). Encounter can only transcend and separate itself from negativity via interrogation, that is, the reader's "play" in the text. The Platonic logos (the rational communication of meaning) is negated by the inside-outside superstructure of metaphor and the unity of thought and speech. In other words, metaphor controls both the internal meaning and the external sign system behind language. One can never differentiate any distinct

“meaning” in philosophical discourse, and so the latter becomes nonphilosophy, seen in “the inability to justify oneself, to come to one’s own aid as speech” (p. 152).

Derrida defines deconstruction as a “decentering” process in which the central locus of a structure, that which gives it meaning, coherence and presence, has been disrupted and has become “a nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play” (p. 280). The metaphysics of “presence” in Western thought has been deconstructed by the dual concepts of sign (with the signified both identified with and “expelling its signifier outside itself”) and of play as the Nietzschean destroyer of metaphysics by way of discourse (pp. 280-81). Derrida means that there is no actual “presence” of meaning in a text, because the symbols can no longer be identified with their original meaning. In the act of writing, the author’s intention (indeed his very presence) has been “expelled” from the autonomous text, which now “plays” in whatever interpretive playground the reader brings to it. A text like the resurrection narrative of Mark 16:1-8 no longer has any connection with the original author or readers. It consists of a series of signs that draw the reader into “freeplay” in its textual arena.

Derrida specifically attacks the concept (from Saussure) of “presence” in spoken language, arguing that “writing” has priority over speech, and that “absence” and “difference” characterize language. He is especially opposed to “closure,” the search for a central meaning, because according to him the text becomes locked up in the single meaning and ceases to exist as text. Moreover, for Derrida, closure is impossible because when we unlock the door to the signs, we find the room empty: there is no central or original meaning. Rather, a text is “open” or free to be reproduced in the reader’s experience.

“Difference” arises from Derrida’s attack on the priority of spoken over written language in philosophy. For Derrida the tension between speech *(parole)* and “language as system” *(langue)* is deconstructed in writing, which substitutes a depersonalized sign system for the so-called presence in speech. Writing introduces a free play that displaces meaning; in this sense the spoken word is a kind of “generalized writing,” a writing in the mind. Thus writing precedes speech and determines speech; this then disrupts the Western approach to language. “Difference” for Derrida is the result; this concept signifies an interplay between the French terms *differ* (pointing to the basic opposition between signifier and signified, which breaks down the concept of meaning) and

defer (pointing to the fact that meaning is "deferred" by the endless play between text and reader). Since language *(parole)* can never yield complete access to the "self-presence" or thoughts *(langue)* that lay behind it, absence characterizes the search for meaning.[20]

For Derrida and his followers, there is never and cannot be any true transfer of meaning or the signified. Rather, the signified is transformed in the act of reading, and difference is conceived both in spatial (lack of contiguity) and temporal (meaning as deferred or excluded from the present) categories. Derrida states that one cannot know the "original meaning" of any text. The meaning derived by the interpreter differs radically from that of the author. The latter simply cannot be transferred. Here the outside-within tension comes to the fore in Derrida's thought:

> Writing is the outlet as the descent of meaning outside itself within itself: metaphor-for-others-aimed-at-others-here-and-now, metaphor as the possibility of others here-and-now, metaphor as metaphysics in which Being must hide itself if the other is to appear. . . . For the fraternal other is not first in the place of what is called inter-subjectivity, but in the work and peril of interrogation; the other is not certain within the place of the *response* in which two affirmations *espouse each other,* but is called up in the night by the excavating work of interrogation. Writing is the moment of this original Valley of the other within Being. The moment of depth as decay. Incidence and insistence of inscription. [21]

Deconstruction is not a formal school (though it is a "form") but a perspective on discourse and reading. Josue Harari describes the system by relating it to Demda's later article "The Supplement of Copula." For Derrida the sign is a "supplement" (the written word) to discourse but as such never completes itself: "the supplement is added to make up for a deficiency, but as such it reveals a lack, for since it is in excess, the supplement can *never* be adequate to the lack . . . a supplement to the supplement is always possible" (1979:34). For instance, metaphysics is a supplement to the concept of presence in Descartes' *Cogito* ("I think, therefore I am") and as such must be deconstructed and recast apart from its historical referent (original intended meaning). Harari labels the task a "desedimentation"—not a deconstructing and restructuring of a text but the exposure of "forgotten and dormant sediments of meaning which have accumulated and settled into the text's fabric."[22] A text is neither

past nor present; it has no father-author but is a “fabric of grafts” that is “always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferment” (p. 37; quoted from 1972:92).

In sum, Derrida seeks to “decenter” or deconstruct Western metaphysical reasoning by pointing out its radically metaphorical nature. Philosophy, like language in general, is characterized by “absence” of meaning. However, writing precedes spoken language because it expresses the true sign system behind speech and language. There is no “presence” in writing, and therefore none in language as a whole. Rather, there is “difference,” the absence of any literal meaning signified behind the codes of language. As a result the interpreter must deconstruct meaning and engage in a sort of free play with the signs in the text. Moreover, readers deconstruct not only the original author-text referent but also all “understandings” of the text throughout history. Only then will the “field” of the text be open for the readers to “construct” their own understanding. There is no extratextual referentiality, for texts simply point to other texts (intertextuality) and words point to other words (metaphoricity), not to any external world behind the text. Yet it must be stressed that proponents do not consider deconstruction a negative movement that destroys any possibility of communication. They are not hermeneutical anarchists but seek to free the reader/interpreter from the “false” constraints of Western thinking and from the search for final meaning in a text. From their viewpoint, they are liberationists! In 1992 Cambridge University sought to award Derrida an honorary doctorate, and it led to unprecedented controversy, for Derrida has sought to undermine virtually the whole structure and thought behind the university system and indeed of Western culture itself (Vanhoozer 1998:20, 49).

John P. Leavey describes a two-step process or strategy for the interpretive side of deconstruction, stemming from the view that “writing according to the latter wants-to-say-nothing, means-nothing . . . at the point where meaning runs out of breath” and that one must thereby “enter into the play . . . of difference” (1982:50; quoted from Derrida 1981:14). First, “reversal” overturns the hierarchy of the text and its intertexts on behalf of the concepts suppressed in the speech/writing opposition. Second, “reinscription” displaces or dislodges the new hierarchy so that a continual openness results. Displacement occurs though “undecidables” (concepts that do not fit philosophical oppositions and demand a new

reading of the text) and “paleonymy” (the use of the old term for the new concept), involving the erasure of the term, the transformation of the old concept and the intervention of the new. This then constitutes the act of writing, which itself is characterized by absence and difference (pp. 50-55).

Deconstructionists would do two things to Mark 16. First, they would radically reject the historical referent that ties the text to first-century Christianity and would look for codes that unlock the narrative to new meanings. Second, they would delineate the multiplicity of new concepts that lay under the surface codes. At the level of original meaning they would detect nothing but “absence” and therefore would stress only the present interaction of the reader, who re-creates the text in newness.

What then are we to make of this movement? Its importance, both as challenge and as possibility, cannot be overstated. It does little good to react with anger or contempt as so many have done. Such is often the result more of ignorance than of knowledge. The problems in developing an architectonic schematic (a blueprint for understanding) for the interplay of author-writing-interpretation are very real and must be considered carefully. There are no glib answers, and scholars from the traditional and the postmodern camps must avoid labeling. Detweiler argues that the legacy of Derrida (1982:11) and the other poststructuralists is not “critical bankruptcy,” because

> [one] plays with the text to draw in other dimensions and expand its significance. . . . Rather, I think that it recalls for us the delight . . . that literature and its interpretation should inspire. . . . One takes perverse joy in uncovering, or creating, a meaning for the text that is original, at the boundary line of credibility, and yet compelling. Through intertextuality Derrida’s vision of a metaphoric criticism finds incipient realization.

I might note that a great deal of what the deconstructionist argues actually occurs in some modern preaching and Bible study groups. The tendency has often been to ignore the historical dimension of biblical texts and to ask directly, How does this relate to my situation? The difference of course is that Derrida denies the historical referent while many evangelicals merely are unaware of it. However, the result (namely, subjective interaction with the text) is quite similar.

Deconstruction has many strengths. The metaphorical nature of

language is for the most part correct. While I would not give such a radical definition in terms of its closure and the absence of literal meaning (see the discussion of Ricoeur on pp. 490- 92), there is little doubt that any valid hermeneutic must deal with the metaphorical and rhetorical dimensions of language. The process of deriving a core of meaning in a text is every bit as complex (though not so impossible) as Derrida asserts. The question is whether we are forever locked out of the external reference behind an utterance or whether the attainment of original meaning, though difficult, is indeed a possible goal. I believe that it is, and appendix two will center on my reasons for this position. Here I will restrict myself to some tentative concerns with respect to deconstruction.

Derrida's views have been hammered out largely in interaction with Nietzsche, Husserl, Saussure and Heidegger. A central core of his polemic regarding these figures is his theory that writing precedes speech and disrupts the presence of *langue* in *parole.* Yet one wonders if this is entirely true. Is thinking merely a "writing in the mind" and does this demand a view that asserts the absence of meaning at the core of thought? I think not. The removal of the Kantian subject-object distinction is not nearly so easily accomplished. Certainly the hermeneutical circle blends subject and object. Derrida has taken a half-truth (an inconsistency or problem in epistemology) and elevated it into a covering law. Each step is problematic. Does writing really have ontological priority over speech and thought? Is the subject (the Cartesian I) really missing in the act of language? Does the metaphorical nature of langue actually decenter the referential dimension behind parole? My argument is that so-called inconsistencies need not imply error. These are all viable problems but do not necessarily lead to so skeptical a view of literal meaning. In fact Derrida breaks his own rule when he accuses John Searle of "avoiding reading me and trying to understand" (1988:113, in Benson 2004:184).

Derrida is correct if one posits a first reading of the text. His problem is his demand for complete and immediate access to the meaning that lies behind speech. It is a question as to whether one stresses the lack of completeness and time span necessary to grasp meaning (thus "difference") or the resultant meaning achieved. If one is optimistic rather than skeptical, Derrida's critique fails to convince. A "close" reading can overcome these difficulties. The argument of this book is that a lengthy "spiral" from reading and study to interpretation is needed, that

is, going over and over the material using all the hermeneutical tools (within the context of critical realism) at our disposal and gradually coming to conclusions. With this methodology Derrida's radical skepticism is unwarranted**.**

"Difference" is indeed true in essence, for there is often a great gap between signifier and signified. The question is whether it is as insurmountable a gap as Derrida argues. Here the pragmatic or commonsense argument is helpful. We all communicate in speech and writing as if the hearer/reader can decode the signs of that individual communication. The key is the context. Many deconstruction examples look at metaphor apart from context. If I say, "I love the big apple," you do not know whether I mean New York City or a large apple. But in a proper context you will know exactly what I mean. When the average Christian reads a passage of Scripture, he or she often deconstructs its meaning, for there is often no search (or even cognizance that one should search) for the "original meaning." However, this is not the issue. The question is whether one could (or should) search and discover its meaning. This introduces the ethical question. I agree with Vanhoozer that the reader has an ethical responsibility to consider the intended meaning of a text, especially if that text in essence asks us to do so (1987). As I will show in appendix two, this is certainly true of the Bible. Now, if deconstruction and reader-response critics are correct that such is an impossible dream, the ethical aspect would not be quite so strong a case. However, the absence of meaning has been claimed but (in my estimate) not proven.

Finally, the concept of "freeplay" in the infinite number of sign potentials or meaning possibilities must come under the same scrutiny. Again I agree that this is usually the case, especially with a casual reading, but it does not have to be the case with a close reading. While scholars will disagree regarding interpretive details, usually a 70 to 80 percent consensus regarding the basic parameters of a passage exists. Moreover, I believe that the very conflict of communities regarding the meaning of a text can and should drive scholars to a reexamination of that text and thereby closer to its "meaning." In other words, "difference" does not demand free play.

Thiselton provides a fourfold critique of deconstruction: (1) critique and interpretation can come from outside a community and correct false understanding, so all interpretation is not the result of purely internal factors; (2) an "infinite chain of signs" is not mandated in the

hermeneutical process, and the arbitrary nature of signs does not demand that suspicion be turned into a worldview; (3) the rules for human communication do not swim in a sea of subjectivity but are based on human judgments in which linguistic signs relate to common experience, and the "speaking /writing subject" is part of Wittgenstein's "public world of behavior," communicating in a decipherable way; (4) "textual play" cannot merely be linked to the aesthetic pleasure of listening to a concert or observing a painting, for this is not a general theory of reading but a specific theory for reading *some* texts (1992:124-32; see also Carson 1996:102-36 for further reflections).

Nicholas Wolterstorff in two strong chapters writes "In defense of authorial-discourse interpretation: contra *Ricoeur*" and "contra *Derrida*" (1995:130-71). Ricoeur differentiates between sense and reference, arguing that texts have the former but not the latter; that is, they have similar meaning (a being-in-the-world) but differ depending on context (e.g., the ancient author and the current reader). In a dialogical situation the author is present to clarify what he or she means, but in a textual situation the author can only be inferred. So referentiality is impossible. Wolterstorff responds that the reader does not have to be content with only the sense. "Why not interpret with the aim of discerning the authorial discourse of which the text is the medium—its illocutionary stance, its noematic content (sense), its designative content (reference)?" (p. 149). The author performed certain speech acts, and these can be studied. Ricoeur assumes the distanciated subject is irrecoverable, but that is not the case. When a sentence is placed within a distinct linguistic context, the authorial discourse can be understood. Derrida argues that authorial discourse interpretation is completely untenable, but while he rejects metaphysics, that is, the concept of transcendent presence in human discourse, he cannot disprove it. For even he admits that the very language he uses is metaphysical; so all he can do is reject it. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental presence behind the very possibility of human discourse, and within this authorial discourse is viable.

In fact Alan Jacobs says that "while it (Derridean deconstruction) seemed a juggernaut bearing down on literary study," it now seems "little more than another rejected, or outgrown, approach to literary study" (1991:189; see pp. 189-97). There are several reasons: since the nihilism of the 1960s has passed, deconstruction has lost its edge and seems somewhat "innocuous," just one more way to read texts. Moreover, the movement ends up deconstructing itself, for while it dismantles present

structures, it will of necessity also dismantle the structures it sets up to replace them. Marx is just as subject to deconstruction as is the Republican right. It would be good to be in a course taught by such a scholar, for your "true" would be just as viable as the professor's "false," an automatic A+. Further, the movement can give no good reason for abandoning the intellectual enterprise, for debate on issues is something deconstruction is involved in as well. It simply has too little to offer, asking us to surrender the world of truth and meaning, then offering us only "freeplay" in turn. It too is a power game, but it replaces the power of the text with the power of the individual to do whatever he or she wants. The point is that other literary modes present "better games than any deconstruction can offer. In short, however different it may seem the first few times you try it, deconstruction in the long run is *boring*" (p. 196).

7. ***Conclusion.*** In this first major section I have attempted to trace a line of continuity away from the traditional concept of hermeneutics as a historical search for authorial intention.[23] On the basis first of phenomenology and then of structuralism the emphasis has shifted further and further from any such possibility to a stress first on preunderstanding and then on an ontological displacement of original meaning by the reader's encounter with the text. This has culminated in reader-response criticism, in which the reader recreates his or her own text, and in deconstruction, in which reader and text are deconstructed in the openness resulting from "difference."

   The attack on objective interpretation has a certain validity. Hermeneutic theorists in the past have all too easily ignored the central importance of the reader in the interpretive process. Thiselton finds four levels at which the "illusion of textual objectivism" becomes apparent: (1) Hermeneutically, the phenomenon of preunderstanding exerts great influence in the interpretive act. This subjective element cannot be denied. (2) Linguistically, communication demands a point of contact between the sender and the recipient of a message, and this distanciation provides a major barrier to recovering a text's meaning. The differing situations of the hearers remove any possibility of a purely objective interpretation. (3) These problems are magnified at the level of literary communication, where other factors such as narrative time, plot development, characterization and dialogue enter the picture.

   Before we can interpret, we must note the literary conventions operative in the communication; this is the heart of the debate: whether it

is possible to re-create the original literary context behind a text. (4) Philosophically, meaning is never context free but is based on a large list of unconscious assumptions between sender and receiver (1982:1-4). When these connecting links are not present, “literal meaning” becomes extremely difficult if not impossible, for meaning can never be context free. We dare not ignore either the subjective “life world” of the reader or the “intersubjective social world” of the text. Meir Steinberg provides a good conclusion when he speaks of the results of all too many narrative critics by noting

> the incredible abuse of this resource for over two hundred years of frenzied digging into the Bible’s genesis, so senseless as to elicit either laughter or tears. Rarely has there ever been such a futile expense of spirit in a noble cause; rarely have such grandiose theories of origination been built and revised and pitted against one another on the evidential equivalent of a head of a pin; rarely have so many worked so long and so hard with so little to show for their trouble. (Sternberg 1985:13)

MEDIATING POSITIONS

Robert M. Polzin provides an excellent overview of the situation (1980:99-114). Recognizing many of the problems of structuralism already enumerated (problems I do not believe have been adequately solved in poststructuralism), Polzin correctly realizes that neither diachronic nor synchronic methods by themselves can properly be called scientific disciplines. The two are complementary and interdependent. Polzin's three assertions lead into this section: (1) A historical-critical analysis is necessary for "an adequate scholarly understanding" of what a text means; the extralinguistic context cannot be obviated on the basis of the "intentional fallacy." (2) A competent literary analysis is necessary "for even a preliminary scholarly understanding"; most historical-critical failures stem from a lack of acquaintance with proper literary analysis. In fact, the two (historical-critical and literary-critical) should form a type of hermeneutical circle in which they continually refine one another. (3) Both disciplines uncover lacunae that dispute the supposition that either is hermeneutically scientific, or that either interprets the Bible in the way it interprets itself. This latter point is where Polzin believes the "crisis" exists.

Like Polzin, many other modern scholars are trying to forge a middle ground or mediating position in which all three elements—author, text and reader—play a role.[24] Foremost in terms of influence would be Paul Ricoeur.

1. ***Paul Ricoeur.*** Ricoeur has been central to all of these poststructural enterprises. His opposition to structuralism per se is well known, and the development of Ricoeur's own "poetics of the will" has prepared him for this enterprise. As Ricoeur chronicles his own development (1971:xiii-xvii), he moved from eidetics *(Freedom and Nature)* to phenomenology *(Fallible Man)* to his current preoccupation with hermeneutics *(The Symbolism of Evil, Freud and Philosophy, The Conflict of Interpretations)* and semantics *(The Rule of Metaphor).* Recently he has moved into narrative criticism as well and has applied all of these areas to the task.[25]

   Ricoeur agrees with phenomenologist thinkers that language forms the core of being. Therefore, the act of reading or understanding the

symbolic expression of a text is a moment of self-understanding, and the experience of a meaning event in the act of reading allows one to rise above finitude (1980:234-48). In his still-developing "poetics of the will" he revives the Aristotelian view of metaphor as mimesis (contra Derrida) and argues for a dialectic between metaphor and text. His "semantics of metaphor" redefines the normal rhetorical definition (metaphor as displacing literal meaning with figurative or second-level meaning) in an ontological direction: metaphor takes place at the level of statement rather than word; that is, it deals with the whole statement rather than with the individual term (1975:75-78). For Ricoeur metaphor bridges the gap between "reference" (the objective content of the text) and "sense" (the interpreter's response to the text) by becoming a living entity, a "semantic event." The hermeneutical circle thereby is not an interpenetration of author and reader but an ontological "dialectic between disclosing a world and understanding oneself in front of this world" (1974b:107-8; 1975:81-88).

This world referential aspect of hermeneutics is Ricoeur's answer to the conflict between objective and subjective tendencies in interpretation. Theoretical history (objective) and contemporary relevance (subjective) are essential aspects of interpretation but are inadequate when considered separately. Since the text/discourse is a "work," it contains composition, genre and style; this syntactical configuration causes the author's intention to come to the fore, but in a world referential sense, not as an end in itself or as a hermeneutical text. As a discourse event, a work is also distanced from the author and surpasses itself in the act of coming to understanding. "Distanciation" (the distance between the historical text and the present reader) becomes a barrier between reader and author, but in the text the worlds or horizons come together. Therefore, interpretation is text-centered, not author-centered. Even though the speaker-hearer relationship is missing in written works, one can still share the world of the text. So while objective determination of authorial intent remains always a theoretical construct, the referential world, created by the author, grasps the reader (Ricoeur 1973:135-41; 1975:14-17).

Ricoeur stresses the text rather than the author. As Stephen Prickett says (1986:70), Ricoeur centers on the poetic function of the text, with three basic functions: the autonomy of the text, the textual work as an external force, and the world of the text as a transcendental reality that draws the reader into its "multiple worlds."

At the same time, however, metaphor as a discursive process

contradicts normal interpretation by establishing a semantic incongruence, that is, a new world of meaning that challenges the reader. The literal meaning of the term is disrupted by the metaphor, which forces the hearer/reader out of the normal channels of meaning and draws him or her into the new textual world created by the metaphor. Imagination provides the key to this extratextual new world, assimilating the symbol and reorienting the meaning in a "reality-shaping" mode (Ricoeur 1978:8-10). The role of hermeneutics is to discover this new world, experience it and thereby unite objective meaning with existential relevance by pointing toward the world of the text and the world of the self at the same time. Metaphor disengages readers from their own world and reengages them at the focal point of interpretation.

For Ricoeur the key is to place oneself in front of the text rather than behind it, to allow the textual world to control the hermeneutical process. The interpreter dare not ignore the historical dimension, for the latter draws the reader into the world of the text, forging a unity between the two. To utilize John 3 once again, the historical dimension of the Christ-Nicodemus discourse and of John's editorial clarification forces the readers out of their preconceived world and into union with the message of the text on the "new birth" as an act of divine love. Moreover, the metaphors themselves control the readers' reaction. To this extent Ricoeur would agree with Gadamer. Both accept a limited version of the autonomy of the text from the author.

For Ricoeur interpretation is the appropriation of a text's meaning for current understanding. The internal world of the text is a self-contained entity that has priority over the reader, who is drawn into its sign world and by critical reflection gains understanding (see Bleicher 1980:229-34). Interpretation in this way is a dialectic between two levels of understanding: a preliminary naive understanding and a deepening comprehension. The decomposition of the segments of the text (here Ricoeur follows structuralism) leads to observation of its symphonic arrangement. This leads to self-understanding, as a new event of textual criticism and self-criticism develops and merges (see Jeanrond 1988:49-52). He is similar to Gadamer and Iser in holding that the text is a self-referential world that draws the reader into its literary reality and guides the reader in interpretation, yielding the possibility of understanding. It is autonomous from the author but still referential in a second-order sense by disclosing its own reality and giving the reader a new way to look at the world (see Vanhoozer 1998, 107-8).

2. ***Canon-critical approaches.*** Many recent biblical scholars are wrestling with the proper interdependence between the diachronic and synchronic aspects of the textual interpretation task. Certainly, we must agree with Bernard B. Scott that the "critical essay defining the proper relation between historical and literary criticism has yet to be written" (1982:314). At the same time, there have been great strides forward; Bernard Anderson traces the historical development of a critical perspective, arguing for a "post-critical" stance that remains aware of the results of traditio-historical criticism but deals with the canonical text as a unity. Following Brevard Childs he calls for a "transhistorical" approach that anchors the text in "the concrete particularity and historical referents" of the life of the original community yet recognizes its relevance for future generations. Canon criticism as clarified by rhetorical criticism provides the means for accomplishing this (Anderson 1981:5-21; cf. 1974:ix-xviii).

   There is no need here to describe the process of canon criticism (see pp. 359-61); rather, I will note its implications for the author-text-reader problem. One of Childs's essays in this respect is "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture," in which he discusses the difficulty of discovering the literal sense of the text in light of the separation between the literal sense and its historical referent in historical-critical research (1977:90-93). For Childs, four problems demand a new approach: (1) Identifying literal with historical meaning would destroy the integrity and significance of the former since it would depend on historical research alone. (2) This preoccupation with origins is highly speculative, controlled by innumerable theoretical reconstructions. (3) The community of faith that shaped the traditions is lost. (4) The gap between historical reference and modern relevance cannot be bridged, for the text has been completely anchored in the past. The solution, Childs says, is to recognize that the canonical shaping of the biblical text is the hermeneutical key to later interpretations as one moves from past to present.

   One important difference between Childs and James A. Sanders is apropos to our purpose (see pp. 359-60). Sanders agrees that one must study a passage in terms of its full literary or canonical context rather than merely its original historical context (1977:157-62) but argues that the "historical context that is really important is that of the present (whenever) reader" (1980:180). Sanders would thereby give equal weight to the current community of faith, while Childs stresses more the past community of faith as decisive for the present interpretation. Thus

Sanders stresses the historical shaping as well as the multivalent recontextualizing of the message for today (he calls this "resignification"; 1980:192-93). Childs demurs, arguing that this "does not do justice to the theological role of canon" (1980:201). As a result, Sanders is much more reader-oriented in his hermeneutic.

Raymond Brown, in a chapter titled "What the Biblical Word Meant and What It Means," builds on his earlier contention that the Bible is "a divine communication in human words" (1981:23-44; cf. 1968:606-10). As such, the literal meaning (though not completely aligned with authorial intention) is a valid quest of historical criticism. At the same time, he asserts, one must note several aspects of "meaning": (1) the literal sense it had when it left the author's pen; (2) the sense it took on when later redactors modified it; (3) the sense it had when codified into a canonical relationship with other books; (4) the sense it has for members of later communities. Brown transforms the "canonical sense" into the sum total of these aspects of meaning. This involves a modicum of the autonomy theory, but Brown believes that historical criticism should maintain a controlling force. Nevertheless, the stages of church interpretation from then to now are also formative of meaning. Brown makes three observations to this effect: (1) the church's interpretation might differ greatly from the literal meaning; (2) the role of church authority concerns more what the Bible means than what it meant; (3) the tension produced is a proper one. The church speaks to its own time, but the literal meaning must be in constant dialogue as a control over exaggerations (1981:35-43).

This dichotomy is further demonstrated in David Kelsey's discussion of biblical authority. He argues for a "conceptual discontinuity" between textual meaning and theological formulation, since "translation" is a dynamic act that transforms the "semantic structure" of Scripture first into the church's affirmation and then into the further semantic structure of the contemporary world. It is the "aptness" rather than the accuracy of theological transformations that really counts (1975:186-87, 192-93). Exegesis is thus not decisive for theology, although it is relevant. The decisive factor is one's "imaginative" judgment, which controls the perspective and thereby the creative use of Scripture as normative.[26]

3. ***Wittgenstein and his followers.*** The scholars previously mentioned are united in the view that while intended meaning is possible and is a legitimate goal of historical-critical investigation, such an enterprise cannot be the primary goal of hermeneutics, since the contemporary

world must construct its own meaning. A group of scholars who apply insights garnered from the later Wittgenstein move closer to the centrality of the author/text for meaning. An interesting bridge to this level of interpretation theory is Mary Gerhart's attempt to set Ricoeur and Hirsch side by side via Ricoeur's "Diagnostics," which describes the dialogue between empirical/object language and commonsense/subject language in the pursuit of knowledge, in other words, a hermeneutical circle: objective knowledge is attained through subjective experience and yet provides the data by which that experience is understood. Gerhart notes three stages in text interpretation: (1) a reflective and critical awareness of the text and its literary meaning; (2) a sifting process by which potential meanings are analyzed via the text, thereby reconstructing a model of the text by judging the adequacies of particular possibilities within its multiple "meanings"; (3) the determination of new vistas of meaning, as the "self" (subject pole) and "world" (object pole) encounter existential significance and the text becomes a model not behind but "in front of" (Ricoeur's concept) the reader (1976:137-56). While one could dispute the validity of Gerhart's attempt to blend Ricoeur's phenomenological concerns with Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance, her system itself does mediate between the two, adding an important dimension to the developing dialectical approach to hermeneutics.

The towering figure behind much of the current debate is Ludwig Wittgenstein. As with Heidegger, there is considerable debate regarding the development between the early and later Wittgenstein, between his *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations.* The former can be described as having a "picture" view of language, the latter a "game" theory. [27] The logical positivism of the early period gave way to semantic pluralism, yet with continuity in Wittgenstein's concern to elucidate the limits of language, to define what may be said (objective reality) and what can be "shown" or stated indirectly (subjective experience). In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argued the priority of particular descriptions over general observations. The multifaceted character of language causes it to speak differently in various semantic situations or "games"; therefore, it cannot be expanded to abstract principles or universals but can be applied only to specific contexts (1953:sec. 11). To distinguish the two phases of Wittgenstein's thinking, we might link his early "picture" theory with the referential aspect of meaning and his later "game" theory with the functional aspect of meaning. The actual use of language in

various contexts came to be the key to communication.

Two key figures developed Wittgenstein further. First, J. L. Austin continued Wittgenstein's emphasis that words have meaning not by themselves but when they are embedded in sentences within oral/written contexts. In his critical *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) he posited three levels of language: locutionary, in which meaning is presented ("go home"); illocutionary, in which an action occurs (a command or request); and perlocutionary, in which an effect is caused on the hearer/reader (departure). As a result Thiselton calls his approach "action theory," and the possibility of understanding a communication event is greatly enhanced. Second, John Searle took Wittgenstein and Austin to the next level in his "speech act" theory. His best known statement is, "Speaking a language is engaging in a (highly complex) rule-governed form of behavior. To learn and master a language is *(inter alia)* to learn and have mastered these rules" (1969:12). Knowledge of such a speech act comes from the conventions of communication that author and reader share.

Two recent scholars in particular have applied these insights to biblical hermeneutics. First, Anthony Thiselton emphasizes two aspects of Wittgenstein's theory: (1) language games occur in a dynamic, changing context subject to historical and temporal change; and (2) the meaning of a concept depends on its utilization in specific contexts and so is not fixed or universal (1980:376-78). From this Thiselton develops three "classes" of grammatical utterances. Class one comprises "universal" or "topic-neutral" statements that do not provide information but clarify the concept as a whole, pursuant to the reader's understanding. Class two describes foundation statements that act as "the scaffolding of our thoughts" (Wittgenstein), that is, they are unshakable axioms, theological (for biblical interpretation) rather than cultural or rational in origin. Class three speaks of "linguistic recommendations" that apply "institutional facts" to force a reappraisal of one's views. An example of the latter is the "paradigm case," the shifts in Jewish categories within the universal church of Jew and Gentile. As a result, Thiselton argues, we can no longer maintain a monolithic view of metaphor; it functions differently depending on the language game (pp. 386-407).

Second, Kevin Vanhoozer says, "Wittgenstein, Austin, and Searle respond to the postmodern masters of suspicion by showing how language ordinarily works and by claiming that language ordinarily works well enough" (1998:213). He builds on this by adding the theological dimension, calling his approach a "hermeneutics of humility

and conviction," in particular a "Trinitarian hermeneutic," built of the triadic patterns of author-text-reader; metaphysics, epistemology, ethics; realism, rationality, responsibility; and locution, illocution, perlocution. This stems from the key point that God is primarily a "communicative agent" who has established a "covenant of discourse" in which he speaks to his people.

Postmodern thought has developed an "a/theology" built on the premise that the author/Author is dead, leading to a pluralistic hermeneutic. However, speech act theory in a Christian interpretive approach recognizes that "the Father is the locator, the Son is his preeminent illocution . . . (and) the Holy Spirit—the condition and power of receiving the sender's message—is God the perlocutor, the reason that his words do not return to him empty" (Vanhoozer 1998:455-57).

4. ***The return of the author: Betti, Hirsch, Juhl.*** Thus far we have moved ever closer to the centrality of author-text in the hermeneutical process. For those who wish to anchor meaning specifically in authorial intention, Emilio Betti and E. D. Hirsch have provided the philosophical and methodological underpinning. Betti, the Italian legal historian, challenges the assumptions of Gadamer by calling for a distinction between objective interpretation or exposition *(Auslegung)* and subjective interpretation or bestowing meaning *(Sinngebung).* He believes that hermeneutical rules can control the latter and lead to the former. The text as object can still be a valid goal, for both text and reader share a common transcendental, suprahistorical world (Gadamer 1962:chap. 1; see Palmer 1969:54-60).

   E. D. Hirsch takes a similar tack. He separates "meaning" (the act of comprehending a text on the basis of the whole semantic field) and "significance" (the act of inserting that meaning into different contexts, such as modern culture). Meaning for Hirsch is grounded in the author's choice of language and so is unchanging, while significance applies that meaning to different situations or needs and so it changes. While relativists (he calls them "cognitive atheists") deny such a distinction, Hirsch finds support in Husserl's concept of "brackets." The mind "brackets" alien information until it can work back to it. In this way, Hirsch argues, one can move behind preunderstanding to the text and discover the author's intended meaning (1967:101- 26; 1976:1-13).

   Every text, according to Hirsch, contains "intrinsic genres" similar to Wittgenstein's concept of "family utterances" that link language games. *Genre* is defined in ontological terms as the "type of utterance" that

narrows down the “rules” that apply to a particular speech. Since understanding is itself genre-bound, verbal meaning depends on isolating the particular genre. In answer to Gadamer, who states that the writer’s original generic intention is altered by the interpreter’s interaction with the text, Hirsch believes that intrinsic genre provides “that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part in its determinacy” (1976:86).

The reader, according to Hirsch, must sift through potential interpretations by understanding the “implications” of each possibility. These implications depend on understanding the intrinsic language game behind the choice of terms. These rules, he believes, are inherent in the context; and though several implications are possible, the “purpose” of the genre tells how the writer intended to use the statement. Since generic elements are “historical and culture bound,” interpreters align themselves with the author’s intended message by refusing to force their own rules on the text (pp. 89-126). Hirsch argues that the “intentional fallacy” of W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley was never meant to deny verbal meaning, and that this latter is the proper goal of literary criticism. While a person can never be certain about the author’s intended meaning, he or she can consider the possible interpretations and choose that which has the greatest probability or “validity” (the title of his book). Apart from the author’s meaning, there is no way to achieve consensus.

The problem is that Hirsch does not have a developed method for validating the interpretation chosen or for choosing one particular meaning possibility over others. For Hirsch one selects a possible meaning and then checks it over against the “intended” meaning. However, it is not clear how one goes about finding that elusive author’s meaning. Once the choice is made, Hirsch has four criteria to “verify” it (1967:236; see pp. 235-44): legitimacy (permissible within normal language rules), correspondence (accounts for all textual components); generic appropriateness (follows the rules of the particular genre, such as science or history); and coherence (the interpretation chosen is more plausible on the basis of the previously discussed criteria than are other possibilities). These are all viable principles of interpretation but in themselves do not constitute a verification principle. It is difficult to conceive how this can overcome the problem of preunderstanding or the influence of a reading strategy. Hirsch never quite solves these problems. He needs a much more complex validating procedure and more sophisticated reasoning. Hirsch can lead to possible meaning but it is

difficult to ascertain whether his method produces probable meaning (as he claims).

Further, it is by no means clear how one adjudicates between meaning and significance. Here Hirsch is at his weakest. Since the very act of determining meaning is done from the standpoint of one's preunderstanding (as Gadamer points out), there is no objectively discernible "meaning"; the very act of interpretation has already become "significant." Therefore, how can we separate the two? I will discuss possible solutions to these two problems first in relation to Juhl and then in relation to Kaiser.

P. D. Juhl agrees with Hirsch's purpose but does not agree that we should separate authors from their texts. He asserts "that there is a logical connection between statements about the meaning of a literary work and statements about the author's intention." Therefore, when we determine the intended meaning of the text, we discover the author's intended meaning (1980:12-15). In a lengthy critique of Hirsch, Juhl argues that Hirsch's definition of authorial intention is a recommendation rather than an analytical claim and therefore is not open to falsification. Its rigid objectivity could lead to a distortion of the true meaning of literary works and cannot actually resolve interpretive disagreements since it is a presupposition rather than a method (pp. 16-44). Juhl overcomes this problem by centering interpretation on the text rather than on the author. Nevertheless, he does not deny the centrality of the author. If we remove the author, the text floats in a historical sea of relativity, open to multiple meanings. The author anchors the text in history and makes interpretation of its original meaning possible. Yet Juhl notes that we know the author only to the extent that the text reveals him. We do not know the John behind his Gospel, only what he has said within its pages. In this way Juhl avoids the weaknesses of Hirsch and magnifies his strengths.

When interpreting a text, Juhl continues to say, we must apply the criterion of coherence or complexity, since as we judge various theories regarding the meaning of a work, we move closer to the author's "likely" intention: "Even an appeal to the rules of language in support of a claim about the meaning of a work is an implicit appeal to the author's intention" (p. 113). In fact, Juhl states, even aesthetic considerations, such as poetic devices, gain meaning only insofar as the evidence they provide bears on the intended meaning. Therefore, each work does have a correct interpretation, and it is the critic's responsibility to sift through alternate readings and select that interpretation that is the most likely one

(pp. 114-52, 196-238).

Walter Kaiser addresses the second problem, Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance (1981:33-36; see also 1978:123-41). He argues that the latter rightly makes significance the secondary act but has not sufficiently developed it along the lines of contemporary application. Kaiser identifies significance with the literary question, Can we understand the author better than he understood himself? Kaiser narrows the question from the author's psychological make-up to the written text itself. The first step is a comprehensive understanding of the text, which is theoretically achievable if the author expresses himself with sufficient clarity. Since we cannot go beyond this, an interpreter cannot gain "better understanding" by creating new meaning but only by going deeper into the subject matter, primarily in terms of its significance for other cultures or situations. Most important for Kaiser, this application gains authority only in the extent to which it is derived from the author's original, intended meaning. Therefore, Kaiser would first ferret out the intended meaning in its original context and then would base its derived "meaning" or significance for today on that "single meaning."

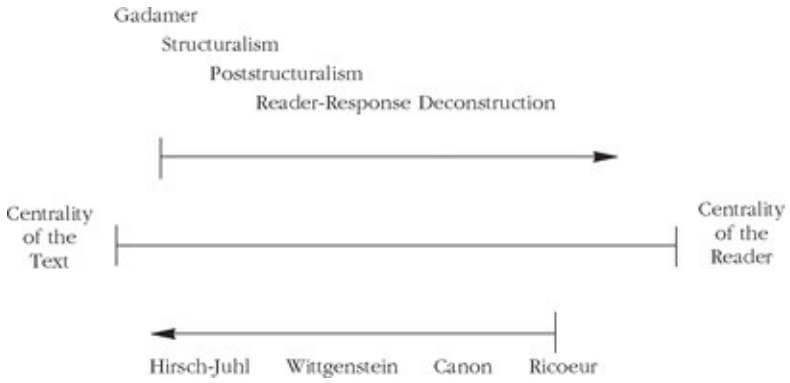
Thiselton goes a step further, noting four models for this tension: (1) The historical-critical school has discussed "past" (the re-creation of the historical referent) and "present" (theology) meaning, but that leaves an "unbridgeable gap" between exegesis and theology and never develops the relation between the two (as in Kelsey). (2) Hirsch's meaning-significance separation is not developed sufficiently. (3) Gadamer (and reader-response critics) go to the other extreme and posit an ontological unity between meaning and significance. Yet they leave the interpreter with no guidelines for a responsible interpretation that avoids relativism. (4) Thiselton posits an "action model" developed from Searle's "speech act" theory (see pp. 502-3) (1985:109-11). Such an approach allows the text itself to guide. Assertive or propositional texts tend to carry their messages across intact while nonassertive or exhortatory passages need to be recontextualized. I would blend Kaiser and Thiselton. I am not so skeptical as Thiselton about the possibility of delineating the author's intended meaning and then recontextualizing that meaning for the contemporary context. At the same time his action model provides the basis for doing so. This will be the subject of appendix two.

SUMMARY

In the first two sections of this appendix, I have taken a deliberately synthetic approach in order to demonstrate the two directions in which narrative hermeneutics is moving. On the one hand, a growing number of avant-garde interpreters are taking a "probing approach" in which they seek to break new ground in developing a reader-oriented hermeneutic. The basic argument of all these schools is simple: the theory that it is possible to discover the author's intended meaning in a text is a self-deluding myth. All the philosophical or literary systems have produced is a series of arguments or interpretations that have satisfied their own adherents; no "covering laws" have been forthcoming. In other words, they prove the existence of reading strategies but not of objective or intended meaning. Therefore, these critics argue, we must stop pretending that there is any first-order system that will unlock the meaning of texts. Rather, all works are aesthetic productions that are open to one extent or another (depending on the school) to the reader's "freeplay" on the playground of the text, and polyvalence (multiple meanings) is the necessary result.

On the other hand, many others, somewhat in reaction to the extent of the disappearance of the author-text, take a more cautionary approach as they seek both to bring the author-text back into the hermeneutical process and to interact positively with the results of the former, that is, to modify the purely diachronic methods of historical criticism. Furthermore, while the concerns of both groups are similar (to combat the artificial and static results of purely objective historical criticism), they are moving in opposite directions simultaneously. We might diagram the two in terms of author-text and text-reader (fig. 19.1).

Figure 19.1. The place of text and reader in recent hermeneutical study


Gadamer
Structuralism
Poststructuralism
Reader-Response Deconstruction
Centrality of the Text
Centrality of the Reader
Hirsch-Juhl
Wittgenstein
Canon
Ricoeur

Appendix 2

The Problem of Meaning

TOWARD A SOLUTION

It is interesting to note how American literary criticism has become very influenced by continental poststructuralism while American philosophy has been strongly affected by British analytical philosophy. This is true in both the social sciences and religion. In addition, the two all too rarely engage in fruitful dialogue. Attending a philosophical conference and a literary colloquium in successive weeks is almost like walking into different worlds or dimensions of reality. However, there are growing signs of rapprochement, especially between phenomenology and analytical philosophy. In this section I would like to continue the dialogue and use it to suggest a solution for the author-text-reader dilemma.

MEANING AND REFERENCE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY

The analytical philosophy school developed out of the logical positivism of Bertrand Russell, the early Wittgenstein and their followers in three stages. First, A. J. Ayer built on Rudolf Carnap and the Vienna Circle in developing the verifiability principle in *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1946:34-37, 114-20). For Ayer language is a formal set of syntactical relationships and must be "analyzed" to discover its logical validity. Further, a statement can be "verified" only by empirical data from the physical world. This, of course, rules out both metaphysics and theology. The problem is that the verification principle itself cannot be verified, and a view limiting language to the merely syntactical or contextual is inadequate (see Weitz 1967:1:103-4). As a result of such criticism, Ayer modified his principle in the preface to the second edition. Nevertheless, metaphysics as God-talk was still viewed as meaningless because it belonged to the noncognitive realm.

The second stage came with the falsification principle of Antony Flew (1955:96- 99). He posited that no truth statement can claim veracity unless it can be falsified, that is, unless one can prove that the reverse cannot be true. If claimants can provide no criteria that could theoretically force them to change their minds, the assertion has no meaning. Once more, religious statements are placed in the noncognitive realm, and the theist is commanded to be silent.

The gauntlet had been thrown, and proposed solutions flowed quickly. Several appeared in the same volume with Flew's essay. R. M. Hare agreed that God-talk is noncognitive but noted that life is built on such unverifiable "bliks." While not "assertions" as such, they are a "world-view" and thus are meaningful (1955:99-103). Basil Mitchell argued that theological statements are falsifiable but faith keeps them from being ultimately so. For instance, the fact of evil counts against the goodness of God, but faith overcomes the problem (1955:103-5). On the other hand, I. M. Crombie posited that theological assertions can be decisively falsified, but such a final test can occur only after death. Only then will the full picture be known (1955:109-30). All the responses argue that religious assertions are meaningful, though not cognitively meaningful. Nevertheless, they can be verified. On the basis of his radical separation between the cognitive and

noncognitive realms, Flew stated in response that these attempts are falsified by their own subjectivity (1955:106-8).

Frederick Ferré represents the third stage, arguing that the more developed verification principle is still too narrow in limiting the concept of "fact" to empirical data (1961:42-57). "Paradox," when used of nonscientific explanations, does not mean "logical contradiction" but simply points to a reality beyond empirical reach. One cannot separate cognitive statements from value content. Further, Ferré asserts that God-talk centers on ontological reality rather than on pure empirical logic, and thereby can be accorded "meaning." Therefore, empiricism proves itself wrong "either in verbal rules (if the proposition is analytic) or in equivalent statements referring to actual or possible sense-perception (if the proposition is synthetic)" (p. 53). The answer is to ground "reality" in rational thinking rather than in mere sense perception. Analogy, not picture language, is the basis of an interpretive description of reality. Ferré points to imperative, performative and interrogative functions of speech as equally valid for analytical thinking (p. 55).

We might call this "interpretive realism" or "functional analysis" (with Ferré), which means that the verifiability test accords with the "use" of language in its own context (Wittgenstein's "language game"). It is important to note that this in no way denies the basic validity of the verifiability principle. Instead, analytical philosophy restricts it to its own realm or language game, namely, the cognitive realm of sense data. Empirical verification is valid for scientific experimentation but does not render metaphysics meaningless. Since religious language belongs to a metaphysical worldview, it is analogical (symbolically interpreting a wide range of experience), interpretive (presenting the intrinsic meaning of the facts) and confessional (resulting from personal beliefs). Thereby it is personal rather than scientific language. Arthur Holmes calls this the "language of mystery" (1971:155-62) and Ian Ramsey labels it "odd-talk" (1963:11-54). Since it delves into deep-seated paradoxes and truths beyond purely cognitive reasoning, the criteria for verification must be structured accordingly. [1]

With J. L. Austin's important *How to Do Things with Words*, analytical philosophy entered the hermeneutical arena. Austin argues that language has a performative function as well as an assertive dimension. He develops this in terms of three aspects of speech acts (1962:101-19): the *locutionary* act is what a sentence means at the propositional level; the *illocutionary* act is what the sentence accomplishes (assertion, promise, prediction); the *perlocutionary* act looks to the intended effects of the speech act (teaching, persuasion). Most actual utterances, according to Austin, contain all three components to one degree or another, and the truth content of the utterance is judged at all three levels.

John Searle's influential *Speech Acts* deepens and expands Austin's position. Searle argues that a false equation of meaning with use has given rise to several fallacious positions on the part of analytical philosophers.[2] Therefore, the basis of analytical theory should be language as referential rather than performative. His basic thesis is: "speaking a language is engaging in a (highly complex) rule-governed form of behaviour" (1969:77, 80). By nature speech partakes of "expressibility" and therefore enables us to judge individual statements by established rules for linguistic meaning. For Searle the sentence is an intentional device whereby one brings hearers into the proper arena so that they might apply the correct rules and recognize the meaning.

Searle builds the bridge from utterance to meaning via three "axioms" of reference: (1) the axiom of existence, which assumes that the object referred to exists in the rules of the language game (such as in the real world or in fiction); (2) the axiom of identity, which assumes that the predication is true of an object if it is true of anything identical with that object "regardless of what expressions are used to refer to that object"; (3) the axiom of identification, which assumes that "the utterance of that expression must communicate to the hearer a description true of, or a fact about, one and only one object, or if the utterance does not communicate such a fact the speaker must be able to substitute an expression, the utterance of which does" (1969:80, see pp. 19-21, 42-50, 77-80). The context of the "illocutionary act" will provide preparatory conditions or presuppositions as well as "excluders" that help the listener to identify the referential meaning on the basis of the linguistic relationships (pp. 44-56).

Searle's theory provides an important basis for reflecting on the relationship between sender and receiver or (in a historical act of communication) between text and reader. While a referential act of understanding (such as the recovery of the original meaning of Jn 3) is difficult, it is not impossible. The debate again is whether the identification of an utterance in the way Searle argues is indeed a possible enterprise.

Yet the basic difficulty is that Austin and Searle are dealing with spoken language while the issue here is written texts. Can the gap between the two be bridged? Does speech-act theory cover biblical texts? Several respond affirmatively. Donald Evans applies Austin's insights to biblical assertions (1963:158-64). The alien-ness or odd-ness of biblical assertions is vitiated by this new view of language as a performative act. This is especially true when one adds the "self-involvement" of the reader. The believer's faith becomes an "onlook" that opens up new logic possibilities for accepting scriptural statements according to their own rules. The statement's commissive/performative force correlates with the theory of revelation as self-involving at heart. When we

clarify this via Searle's reformulation of utterance as referential in essence, we can no longer radically separate biblical assertions from the possibility of meaning.

Kevin Vanhoozer, building on Searle, sees four illocutionary factors in biblical literature: proposition (the data communicated), purpose (the reason for the prepositional content), presence (the genre or form of the author's message), and power (the illocutionary force of the message). By noting these factors, Vanhoozer argues, we can interpret a text's intended meaning (1986:91-92). He believes that there are also four areas of agreement among speech act theologians: (1) language is more than reference; it is transformative and so must be studied for pragmatic as well as semantic qualities. (2) Language is not indeterminate, and the author is an important to the process of interpretation. (3) Action, not just representation, is the essential component, and the proper paradigm for biblical communicability is promise and covenant. (4) Readers are not free to manipulate texts to their own ends (2004:164- 7). The key is to develop a "model of communicative action" that recognizes the place of both author and reader in the interpretive process. This will involve language use more than words as signs that must be decoded, speech as discourse rather than binary opposites at the level of the individual word.

This leads to the "action model" of Roger Lundin, Anthony Thiselton and Clarence Walhout, which seeks to "reclaim the importance of reference and the nonlinguistic world" from deconstruction theory (Lundin et al. 1986:42). Three principles form the core of their approach (pp. 43-49, 107-13). First, written texts are objects as well as instruments. As objects they are not autonomous, for they are produced by action. Thus they can be understood only via a theory of action that recognizes them as objects resulting from action and instruments producing action. Second, the meaning or sense of a text depends not just on the semantic development of the terms but also on the action or functioning purpose (illocutionary force) of the sentence in its context. Third, we must identify the temporal sequence of the actions in the text as a whole that defines the function of the particular sentence in its context. The result of these factors leads to the "intention" of the text.

However, for these authors, there are multiple functions of a text, and these can lead to one type of "multiple meanings." Yet these are not free renderings but are based on what the text itself intends to do (again its illocutionary purpose). For instance, a parable narrates but also informs, directs, challenges and persuades. In short, a text itself performs speech acts and is open to questions of intentionality. Nevertheless, while the author is an important component of the text, he provides only one aspect of textual interpretation

because the reader must assimilate and come to understand the textual communication.

One major objection to the use of analytical philosophy from poststructuralist concerns is the dichotomy between speech and writing. Since writing codifies speech and removes it from the arena of dialogue, the performative or referential dimensions may no longer apply. However, I do not believe that this is the case.

Most current studies about the relationship between mind and language assume that there is no conceptual gap between them. Gottlob Frege's work on sense and reference has argued forcefully for this essential unity by showing that concepts which are critical to a description of language are integral to mental acts (1980:56- 78). Frege's theory of truth contains three basic maxims: (1) The meaning of individual terms depends on their contribution to the meaning of sentences in the language. (2) The meaning of sentences depends on recognizing the conditions under which the sentences are true; this meaning determines the truth value of the sentence. (3) Propositional attitudes such as belief, knowledge or assertion depend on one's assigning senses to words and sentences. Sense is the meaning value assigned to the terms within the sentence, reference to the real world behind the sentence. Sense relates to the meaning of a term in its relation to other terms in the context.

As Peter Cotterell and Max Turner explain, this occurs at several levels, each more complex (1989:78-82). At the sentence level, *sense* concerns the semantic relationship of the words to one another. At the paragraph level we must discern the complex relationship of the propositions to one another (the structural development of the paragraph). This structural development is even more difficult to determine at the discourse level. Here rhetorical criticism comes into play as we trace the developing argument of the entire discourse. Naturally, at each level the task of delineating the original or literal sense becomes more complex, and scholars become more doubtful as to the possibility of discovering such.

Reference provides even greater problems. It is one thing to "understand" a description of the holy of holies (Ex 25) and quite another to know what the "cherubim" at the two ends of the mercy seat (vv. 17-22) denote. Since *reference* refers to the exact thing signified by the term, there is no way to know the reference of "cherubim," since scholars themselves are uncertain what exactly it connotes. Similarly, it is impossible to know the referential reality behind apocalyptic symbolism such as the many-headed beasts or the locust plague in the book of Revelation, or of certain biblical towns like Emmaus in Luke 24:13, of which no known evidence exists regarding its exact location. On the other hand, in many passages the referential dimension is essential. For instance, is

Jesus using “Son of Man” about himself (most critics) or another figure (so Bultmann)? Does the term denote a circumlocution for *I* or a Danielic glorified figure or both? In the same way, scholars are constantly trying to identify the opponents in such epistles as 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians or 1 John. In a very real sense all historical questions are questions of reference. Moreover, they are valid questions.

Postmodernists center on the uncertainty and inconclusiveness of historicist issues and deny the validity of seeking the referential reality behind a statement. In fact many, like Fish and Ricoeur, have redefined the terms. The *sense* is the meaning of the terms but no longer is connected to the original situation, and *reference* denotes the world of the text rather than the extratextual reality behind the text. This, however, is an antirealist position, and the realist (one who accepts the viability of a real world behind assertions) rightfully questions the viability of such skeptical assertions. Sense and reference are essentialist components of any theory of meaning, and more than that they are viable and possible goals of research. At times one can go no further than the sense, but both aspects must be considered in exegetical study.

Here I have sought to demonstrate the validity of religious language (both oral and written) as well as other types of discourse as employing sense and reference and therefore as open to verification analysis via criteria of adequacy. The importance of the community of scholars is crucial for the latter and also for analytical philosophy. However, I would argue that this does not entail the fusion of reader and text into a single entity but that the distanciation between reader and text provides a perspective for viable interpretation. Readers are both part of the referential world (by means of commitment) and separate from it (by means of historical distance). As a result they stand both within and outside the text and engage it in a meaningful dialogue. However, I admit that this does not yet allow us to go so far as to posit intentionality. That is the subject of the ensuing sections.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE, PARADIGM STRUCTURE AND INTENTIONALITY

1. ***Sociology of knowledge.*** An essential aspect of hermeneutics is the effect of cultural heritage and worldview on interpretation. The sociology of knowledge recognizes the influence of societal values on all perceptions of reality. This is a critical factor in coming to grips with the place of preunderstanding in the interpretive process. Basically, sociology of knowledge states that no act of coming to understanding can escape the formative power of the background and the paradigm community to which an interpreter belongs. The tremendous changes in the philosophy of science in recent years have forced all the sciences (social science as well) to rethink the entire process of theory formulation and change.

   The "critical hermeneutics" of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas are instructive here (see the description in Bleicher 1980:146-80). Both take an anthropological and sociological approach to knowledge. Apel accepts Gadamer's historicality of knowledge but goes one step further, arguing that the sociology of history makes genuine communication extremely difficult. Apel means that communication theory must concern itself with a "critique of ideology," that is, the tendency of individuals to manipulate or control others via the act of communication. The social environment is a critical factor that Gadamer and his successors tend to overlook. As a result the interaction between text and interpreter is not idealistic, for the text itself is the product of a social world and seeks to force the reader to enter into and emulate that worldview. Apel demands cognizance of these factors and suggests a dialectic between basic hermeneutics and the sociology of knowledge, with the latter transcending the what to the why. When the interpreter becomes involved in this interplay of forces, the text and its thought world are seen in a new light. Apel turns to psychoanalysis for a model, especially its stress on a heightened self-understanding via a critical interaction between subject and object (1971:7-44, especially pp. 41-44).

   Habermas goes even further with the importance of a sociologically

aware hermeneutics. He argues for three fields of knowledge: *science,* which utilizes technical information derived directly or analytically from the sense world; *history,* which interprets language along the lines of Gadamer; and the *social sciences,* which use reflection to free or "emancipate" people from the domination of historical forces. The third type provides the solution for Habermas, who weds Marx and Freud to overcome the control of interpretation by ideologies derived from the struggle between the classes. Therefore, Habermas must counter Gadamer's claim that hermeneutics has a universal thrust because it centers on language, arguing that language itself is dominated by social forces and that the only answer is a "critique of ideology" at the heart of hermeneutics. Like Apel, he finds his model in psychoanalysis. In the same way that Freudian psychoanalysis isolates "systematically distorted communication," so must hermeneutics liberate understanding from ideology. This is accomplished by "scenic understanding," which analyzes and then explains the previously inaccessible forces behind a particular language game. One can then critique these forces in terms of their competence and viability.[3]

Habermas has indeed noted one of the basic weaknesses of Gadamer, his Heidegerrian assumption that language encompasses all meaning and that therefore hermeneutics has universal implications. At the same time, Habermas's critique of ideology is a good introduction to the importance of the sociology of knowledge as an interpretive tool. Although his Marxist-Freudian basis must be challenged, his basic thrust is important.

Ideological forces do indeed control hermeneutics for most of us. Whether Calvinist or Arminian, Reformed or dispensational, process or liberation theologian, each faith community has given us certain ideological proclivities that guide our interpretation. William Larkin notes four challenges from the sociology of knowledge for biblical interpretation: (1) Divine revelation itself is culturally conditional since it was communicated to diverse cultures and comes to us with the indelible stamp of those cultures. (2) To understand the Bible we must comprehend the "categories of meaning" behind the messages; these are fragmentary and often assumed by the biblical writers, so they are difficult to unearth. (3) Our contemporary social context is also multiplex and changing, which affects our interpretations. (4) No unified worldview or preunderstanding can lead to a fusion of horizons, so often the normative message of a text is the product of our perspective rather than of the texts themselves (1988:67-69).

Sociology of knowledge highlights the distanciation between the biblical author's intended meaning and the modern reader's act of interpretation. Yet it is not entirely a negative factor, for it allows interpreters to identify with precision their cultural and religious heritage. This conscious identification is a critical factor in placing one's presuppositions in front of rather than behind the text, in allowing the text rather than ideological factors to guide the interpretive process. So long as we assume the absolute validity of these beliefs, they do indeed control interpretation. Only by identifying them for what they are—theological and cultural approximations of truth—can we keep them in perspective. The further problems of identifying the societal factors of the text and of uniting our perspective with that of the text have been dealt with in the body of this book (see chaps. 5, 17).

2. ***Paradigm change and paradigm communities.*** The major issue, of course, is the validity of the theories of the sociology and philosophy of science for the social sciences. While a final answer is almost impossible, we must begin with Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[4] At the outset, it is a sociological and historiographical study rather than a philosophical treatise. Kuhn rejects the traditional view that science develops via inductive research and posits that scientific "paradigms" or supertheories control in the scientific community. A "paradigm" designates the set of beliefs and assumptions shared by a particular scientific community. His view is that paradigms shift more due to inadequacies in existing models than to the superiority of the new model. The reason is that scientific communities engage in problem solving more than path-breaking enterprises. Change occurs when the community of scholars with their shared values comes to consensus on the validity of the new paradigm (Kuhn 1970).[5] In other words science, like all disciplines, has a subjective, community-directed aspect.

   Garry Gutting states that the social sciences have no grounds for placing themselves within Kuhn's system, since they never demonstrate the universal consensus that is necessary to qualify for paradigm shifts (1980:2-15). On the other hand, as Gutting (pp. 15-19) and Frederick Suppe admit, a proper "philosophy of science must come squarely into contact with the basic issues in epistemology and metaphysics; and the attempt to do epistemology or metaphysics without regard to science is dangerous at best" (Suppe 1977:728). Furthermore, while complete

consensus is seldom if ever achieved, the type of scholarly agreement that results in paradigm shift for the majority has often occurred, such as in recognizing that Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds must be considered together in New Testament research. Few today (after Hengel and others) would consider only Judaism or Hellenism applicable to Paul. This is indeed a paradigm shift for history of religions research. Many doubt Kuhn's pessimism about truth-seeking in philosophy and science as well as his resultant claim that science and art unite in their primary concern with puzzle solving. In reality, both science and art/social sciences consider and evaluate truth claims.

For our purposes we will center on Ian Barbour's attempt to apply Kuhn's concept of theory choice to religious paradigms. He agrees with the importance of the shared paradigm within a community (note the parallels with reader-oriented criticism and analytical philosophy) and that observations are paradigm dependent (parallels with phenomenological preunderstanding), but he believes that the categories are too simplistic. There is a continual dialogue between paradigm communities and more often "microrevolutions" rather than full paradigm shifts result. Most important, competing claims are critically examined and discarded for rational reasons. Kuhn admits in his second edition that communication or critical dialogue can and does take place between competing paradigm groups. However, the problem of individual judgment from within a paradigm does not rule out purely rational decision making.

Barbour himself constructs a "model" for theory construction based on observation, theoretical models, research traditions and metaphysical assumptions. He argues that (1) although all data are value laden, rival theories are not incommensurable; (2) though paradigms resist falsification, observation maintains some control; (3) while no rules for paradigm shift exist, there are independent criteria of assessment. Therefore, even metaphysical assumptions are not immune to change. When applied to religious paradigms, several crucial aspects must be noted, such as the importance of the community (note similarities to Fish) and of the formational historical events (similar to Gadamer), which Barbour calls "revelatory" events. Most important, he stresses that religious commitment can and must be combined with "critical reflection" based on such noncognitive criteria as social or psychological needs, ethics and simplicity or coherence. While the subjective features in the act of interpretation (influence of preunderstanding, resistance to

change, absence of rules for paradigm choice) predominate over objective features (common data between disputants, cumulative effect of evidence, criteria that are not paradigm dependent) in distinction from scientific theory, the objective features are still present (1980:223-45, see also Mitchell 1981:75-95).

In other words, while the act of interpreting the truth content or validity of a statement is difficult, it is not impossible. If the attempt is sophisticated and aware, the objective features can enable one to decide between competing theories.

The primary barrier to a valid interpretation is, as already stated, our preunderstanding. On the basis of differing presupposed systems, one interpreter may see coherence and adequacy in a particular theory of meaning while another may reject it. Is there any way out of the impasse? In many cases there is not, for the competing preunderstandings are often not open to a critical dialogue. In this case the original meaning can never be recovered, and Fish in this instance is correct. However, this need not be the case. D. A. Carson notes a semantic shift between two types of preunderstanding: (1) A "functional non-negotiable" is an accepted position that remains open to the evidence; if Scripture should so dictate, the position will change. (2) An "immutable non-negotiable" is not open to correction but twists the data to cohere with the preconceived theory (1984c:12-15). I would add another category: a "negotiable" that seeks challenge and, if necessary, correction in order to ascertain truth.

All these categories are valid, depending on the issue. Moreover, these are not self-contained units. For instance, few would say they remain closed to the corrective force of Scripture itself, but they may be closed to the corrective impact of other paradigm communities. The critical interaction between competing systems is essential for a pluralistic approach to truth, for preunderstanding makes it quite difficult to identify weak points in our own system. The criticisms of others highlight these anomalies and enable us to move closer to the text. The key is to create within one's self an attitude of openness to truth that allows us to welcome challenge from other interpretive communities because we know that "they may be right" and "this will drive me back to the text to discover the 'truth.' "

3. ***Intentionality.*** The paradigm communities described here share several common features, especially the centrality of the community, the issue of preunderstanding and the possibility of dialogue in a pluralistic setting.

The question to which I turn now is whether polyvalence is the natural result or whether some view of intentionality is not only possible but necessary to the interpretive task. As I noted in the survey of mediating positions, a growing number would like to combine the two, either under "what the Bible meant—what it means" categories or under a distinction between meaning (the text's intended/original meaning) and significance (what the text means, or polyvalence). To summarize the arguments thus far, I believe that philosophy works functionally in terms of reference rather than empirically in terms of sense data and so we must consider religious statements in terms of a metaphysical worldview rather than in terms of positivistic empiricism. This metaphysical worldview is fact-oriented rather than logic-oriented and proceeds on the basis of ontology rather than on logical necessity. Paradigm communities critically interact on the basis of the criteria of adequacy and coherence, testing their truth claims. The Bible, seen as a revelatory communication from God, makes all this possible, for it provides the objective data for judging these truth claims. Let us apply this to the basic debate on intentionality.

The modern debate on intentionality began with the classic essay "The Intentional Fallacy" by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley. They argued "that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1976:1). The problem of deriving the author's intention, especially if that is not effective in the written work, causes intentionality to repudiate itself. The highly negative cast of this theory has led to a great deal of acrimony and attempts at reformulation, to the extent that Graham Hough states, "This critical movement has by now disintegrated, as a result of its own internal contradictions, of direct assaults on it, and of more philosophical consideration of meaning and intention in a non-literary context."[6] Yet it has not led to the demise of the problem of getting back to intention, and if anything the intensity of the denial has increased today, as evidenced in appendix one.

Analytical philosophers, such as J. L. Austin, have continually addressed the problem of intentionality. The classical statement is G. E. M. Anscombe's *Intention,* which addresses the issue through the thought of her own teacher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. She took a phenomenological approach, arguing that intention is a form of description that answers the question, Why? Therefore, it is connected to practical knowledge and deals with actions (Anscombe 1963:83-89). Several recently have extended this to textual interpretation, taking a position similar to Juhl.

They assert: “Illocutionary acts are intentional, so in interpreting a text we are recovering the author’s intention.”[7]

I would like to extend this discussion in two directions: the issues of genre and probability (see sec. 4 on probability theory). Genre determines the extent to which we are to seek the author’s intention. For instance, the French “new novel” (Derrida’s major proof text) demands that the interpreter break the normal bounds of established reading and interact on a new level.[8] Of course, I am cognizant of the debate regarding the validity of genre as a classificatory device rather than as an epistemological or ontological tool. However, as I have argued in my essay on “Genre Criticism-Sensus Literalis” (1983:1-27), these are not mutually exclusive categories. Thus I believe that generic considerations determine the rules of the language game (see the discussion of Wittgenstein and Hirsch on pp. 493-95) and therefore help one to discover the author’s intention. In many types of poetry and narrative the text itself is multilayered in terms of meaning, but that in itself is the author’s intended message.

4. ***Probability theory.*** Probability theory is another complex issue. It has increasingly come to the fore in discussions of meaning transference and truth claims. My thesis is that any delineation of criteria for meaning depends on adequacy, coherence or synonymy (Dummett 1975:97-122) and demands some theory of probability.

   In separate articles in the 1967 issue of *Philosophy Review,* R. Firth (1967:3-27) and J. L. Pollock (1967:55-60) argue for the priority of probability theory over the quest for necessary knowledge. They state that the demand for certitude negates the quest for knowledge before it can even begin. Further, Ernest W. Adams provides an extremely relevant study of the connection between truth and probability in terms of one of the most difficult types of utterances, the conditional statement (1965:69-102). He argues that the pragmatic criterion of adequacy can be met only by probability theory.[9]

   W. V. Quine’s study of “The Nature of Natural Knowledge” attempts to refine knowledge theory in similar ways. He asserts that “similarity structures” stand behind both inductive and deductive logic. The starting point of theory formulation is the “observation sentence,” stating an occasion that is both “subjectively observable” and “generally adequate . . . to elicit assent” from the witnesses present (1975:73; see pp. 67-74). This occasion sentence becomes a theoretical or standing sentence via

query and evidence, as reference leads to predication (note the similarities to Searle at this point). While Quine recognizes the "formless freedom for variation" in theory formulation, at the same time he concludes that they function within "a narrow spectrum of visible alternatives" that interact to revise a theory and thereby make for "the continuity of science." The basis of such is "refutation and correction" (p. 81; see pp. 74-81). Moreover, the very process of refutation depends on a recognition of probability as the basis for decisions.[10]

James Ross applies these theories to "Ways of Religious Knowing." His basic thesis is that no actual "infirmities" prevent religious knowledge. Religious discourse is inherently intelligible and accessible because there is continuity "from one meaning-differentiated occurrence to another" via analogy, relatedness and semantic contagion (1982:83-87). Ross believes that the content of religious discourse is indeed "craft-bound," internal to the life of the community and not fully accessible to those who will either study or immerse themselves into the community. Furthermore, faith and reason are not incompatible, and criteria for the proof of truth claims does exist alongside faith. Ross, along with Alvin Plantinga and others, believes that such criteria are accessible to the philosopher by the analogy theory of meaning and by participation in the community. Truths can be demonstrated and theories can be formed.[11]

I would go one step further. As the believing communities interact and debate truths, the same criteria of coherence and adequacy enable them to challenge and correct one another. Systems are not self-contained and mutually exclusive. If this were the case, "truth" would be relative, and Buddhist, Islamic and Christian claims would all be true. While such is indeed the case within the various systems, this is not true in any final sense. David Wolfe denies the adequacy of relativism and calls for a critical "testing" of truth claims (1982:43-69). The criteria utilized of course depend on the nature of the project, but there must be internal consistency (lack of contradiction), coherence, comprehensiveness (enveloping all experience) and congruity (the theory fits the evidence) in any general formulation of theory. These are utilized to test systems from within (self-criticism) and without (debate). The interrelations between internal (consistency and coherence) and external (comprehensiveness and congruity) criticism is critical, for these allow us to move beyond multiple meaning. Many interpretations are possible and fit the four criteria mentioned earlier, but not all are as probable. Through a critical

openness to truth, based on probability theory, a person within one system can allow the evidence to challenge and then change the interpretive scheme.

G. B. Caird provides an excellent discussion of “The Meaning of Meaning” (1980:37-61). He states that intentionality allows us to separate sense from reference, public meaning (the linguistic aspect, dealing with definition, etymology, sound and feeling) from private (the user’s) meaning (that aspect of speech dealing with context, tone, referent and intention). With respect to intention, Caird argues that (1) words have the sense the speaker or writer intended them to have; (2) the speaker’s intention determines the type of language used and therefore the rules of the game; and (3) a word has the referent that the speaker intended it to have. It is at the referent level that Caird allows a meaning beyond the author’s intention, for statements in Scripture vary between nontransferable specifics (such as historical detail) and universally transferable generalities (axioms, proverbs). The issue is whether we are to connect the original meaning with the later meanings (similar to Hirsch’s “meaning” and “significance”). Is there continuity or discontinuity between sense and reference? We will turn back to this shortly.

I would posit to Ross and Caird the likelihood that these meaning theories are based on probability, and that even nontransferable specifics can be deciphered in terms of their original meaning. In part, later redefinitions and development of themes highlight the original intent by showing change or development. Certainly faith can give theories an aura of certitude, but within the community even the most established views are open to clarification and reformulation. Religious theories are open to all the probability arguments adduced in criteria for verification. Although admittedly this occurs primarily within the community, I would agree with David Tracy that the growing pluralism and dialogue between communities is opening up many formerly closed groups to fruitful interaction. This I believe is a major step toward solving the problem of intertextuality by driving us back to the text and its meaning.

Probability theory has enormous potential for breaking the impasse between competing theories regarding intentionality. The conclusion of this study thus far would indicate that the theory of knowledge based on sense and reference would make possible the goal of deriving the intended or original meaning of a work, depending on generic considerations as previously noted. My argument would proceed in this

fashion: since one can detect the probable intention of a text, and if internal considerations within particular texts make it important to do so, then it is critical to seek the intended meaning.

5. ***Critical realism.*** *Realism* is defined as the belief that there is something "real" in the text to be discovered, and that it must be ascertained via "critical" research. N. T. Wright separates this from positivism or "naive realism" (the belief that we have definite or objective knowledge of a thing) and phenomenalism with its pessimistic view (stressing the inaccessibility of final knowledge), saying that critical realism occurs when "initial observation is challenged by critical reflection but can survive the challenge and speak truly of reality" (1992:36, cf. pp. 32-37). It proceeds by four steps—observation leading to hypotheses that are refined by critical reflection and then conclude with verification/falsification. Thorsten Moritz believes Wright makes a significant advance on Hirsch's view of intentionality in the sense that it provides a "more refined ontology of meaning" and a stronger "narrative epistemology" (2000:178-84). The movement from hypothesis to verification/falsification assumes there is something there to be discovered and that the search for meaning is a viable goal. "Storied knowledge occurs" when the interpreter's hypothetical recreation best fits the narrative itself.

   The process of critical realism (see pp. 398-99) can be seen as a series of criteria (see Hiebert 1985:5-10): the criterion of *coherence* (provides a better "fit" than other hypotheses), of *comprehensiveness* (puts together all the data not just parts of it), of *adequacy* (provides a better harmony of both the outside data and the inside text), of *consistency* (forms a viable pattern in putting together the data), of *durability* (has staying power and is recognized by others), and of *cross-fertilization* (accepted by more than one school of thought). Built on probability theory and with the safeguards of the hermeneutical process developed in the preceding chapters, this becomes the means by which critical hypotheses of intended meaning are formulated and verified. As a critical process it is essential for discovering truth (see the lengthy discussion in Wright).

PROPOSITIONAL TRUTH AND THE LOGIC OF NARRATIVITY

It remains to consider whether intratextual factors within the Bible demonstrate the need for intentionality. In this regard we must consider the possibility of assertive sentences and propositional truth claims in Scripture. It is increasingly popular today to deny that the Bible contains such, undoubtedly as a reaction to the rigid historicizing of many who build on its supposedly propositional content. At the same time, we must note the presence of indicative and imperative sentences in the Scriptures and grapple with its didactic content even in narrative portions. An extremely interesting paper read at the Northwestern Conference on Semiotics (1982) was John Morreall's "Religious Texts and Religious Beliefs." He argued that the semiotic disregard for questions of reference to reality in the Bible undermines the very nature of religious belief. The extra dimensions of religious faith derive from assent to propositions, and without propositional content it would be without meaning or faith content. While the language of the Bible is indeed the speech act, the critical speech act is assertion, which entails reference to facts about this world and God's relation to it. If the autonomy thesis applies, no referential dimension and no set of assertions call for belief. Belief in the Bible demands that Scripture makes assertions and that they are true. It is this referential dimension that makes other central speech acts like command and promise possible. The three levels—locution (propositional assertion), illocution (command, promise) and perlocution (decision and obedience, the reader's responses)—flow together to produce the biblical speech act.

Of course, not all speech acts in Scripture take propositional form. In fact, biblical narrative often goes the other direction, using a fictive type of genre to draw the reader into a narrative world of plot, dialogue and characterization. However, the reader should note the positive contribution of redaction criticism, which demonstrates the link between this narrative world and the intended theological assertions of the individual authors. In other words, the plot and structure of biblical narrative do indeed function at the levels of assertion as well as command and promise.

Anthony Thiselton notes the "unhelpful polarization in the debate" and points

out that the question of dynamic versus static concepts of biblical truth claims is not an either-or (1980:411-15, 433). His valuable discussion of the variety of language games within which "truth" occurs in Scripture is a case in point (1978:874-90). On the basis of our previous discussion we must allow the text to decide how we are to interpret its statements. Caird notes four explicit clues that point to nonliteral meaning: (1) descriptive terms that label the narrative a parable or similitude or allegory; (2) the alternation of metaphor with simile to draw attention to its use; (3) the use of a genitive or other defining term to demonstrate the referent of a metaphor ("sword of the Spirit," "good fight of faith"); (4) the use of a qualifying adjective ("heavenly Father," "true bread") (1980:183-97). Implicit pointers to figurative discourse would be an impossible literality (a clear metaphor), low correspondence with the sense (such as anthropomorphic language about God), high development (poetically expanding the language on a topic), juxtaposition of images (Hebraic style), and originality (live metaphors are more easily detected). The major point here is that the text itself often intends and points to figurative meaning. Metaphors often disrupt.

Figurative speech does not of itself entail polyvalence (see the discussion of metaphor and referentiality on pp. 387-91). Redaction criticism should teach us that. Even the parable was placed within its context for a purpose. Most polyvalent interpretations fail to consider the context, and I must say that the multiple meanings of parables like the prodigal son still have an amount of specificity in their canonical context. Of course, there are levels of meaning, for instance, the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 in its original creedal context (christology) and in its setting in Philippians 2 (paradigm for humility). The point is that the broader definition of original/intended meaning covers such aspects as tradition development in a canonical context. Further, I would not wish to deny out of hand a sense of prepositional content for the nonliteral statements of Scripture. The parables were meant to elicit particular responses from their hearers and on the basis of probability theory we can approximate the contextual message and emphases. We can delineate static (prepositional assertion) and dynamic (active or parenetic) material from one another.

There are two aspects to the single act of interpretation, and the latter (significance) must flow out of the former (intended meaning). In short, we must fuse our exegesis of the Word to an exegesis of our world. I do not wish to quibble terminology, to differentiate too radically between the phrase "meaning and significance" and the phrase "what it meant—what it means." The major point I would stress is that the latter in each pair should be connected to the former.[12]

It is now time to apply this to the issue of hermeneutics. Since narrative

provides the most difficult example for general laws of hermeneutics, I will use it as a test case. Christopher Morse argues that “historical knowing takes, indeed requires, narrative form” (1979:98; see pp. 97-108). It gains historical meaning as it expresses *following* (as organization/scheme, which moves toward a goal), *interest* (speaking to human needs) and *conclusion* (a definable outcome or goal). A narrative qualifies as history rather than fiction or myth when it meets four criteria: the picture is located in space and time; it is consistent with itself; it is related to evidence; and it has an emphatically public character (1979:106).

Although many say there are no generic indicators to separate history from fiction, Clarence Walhout says “authorial stance” makes the difference, namely, the fictive stance of the fiction writer and the assertive stance of the historian, that is, “the historian claims—asserts—that the projected world (the story) of the text together with the authorial point of view counts as a story and an interpretation of events as they actually occurred” (1985:69). He provides three further criteria: (1) the world represented in the text is factually accurate (the events truly occurred); (2) the authors’ “techniques of presentation” (e.g., traditional phrasing, genealogical catalogs, etc.) fit the state of affairs at that time; (3) the authors and readers connected to the story provide an atmosphere of history (that is, it is used for factual history) (1985:72- 73). For instance, pure fiction will have few recognizable historical figures and events, historical fiction will have many but will contain dialogue and events that go beyond the historical, and historical narrative will seek to “tell it like it was.” Wolterstorff speaks of the world projected in the text as a “mood-action” established by the author as the agent producing the text. In fiction the author presents certain states of affairs for reflection, but the historian takes an assertive stance, making truth claims about the world in the text (1980:222-31).

While the nearly insurmountable problem of theology and history is beyond the scope of this discussion, a few remarks may be made. First, the empirical foundation of the criterion of analogy proposed by Ernst Troeltsch and still present in many today can be debated.[13] If we follow the analytical concept of sense and reference, we must allow the biblical claim some credence, and there is no question that the Bible intends to portray the acts of God within history. If philosophy, including a philosophy of history, works functionally rather than empirically, we would agree with Marc Bloch that history is known by the “tracks” or effects it has on people. Since the past progressively changes as people reflect on it, the evidence must be sifted and categorized.[14]

Arthur Holmes calls for a realistic metaphysical historiography based on three factors: (1) It will aid the historian in avoiding both historical skepticism and

idealistic optimism, since no possibility will ever be “closed.” (2) It will provide a rational (built on coherence and self-criticism) and properly empirical (demanding functional and actual adequacy) control on both metaphysical schemes and the subjectivity of the historian. (3) It will explicate its a priori principles and ground them in rational coherence and empirical adequacy (1971:78-84). For us this will involve an “action” or “speech act” model for intended meaning (including the historical veracity and theological truths embedded in narrative material).

The same arguments apply to other types of biblical genre. We can indeed test interpretational schemes for scriptural material on the basis of adequacy and coherence. The intended meaning of the text is not only possible but on the basis of the prepositional intent of Scripture is a necessary goal. As Vanhoozer argues, there is an ethical mandate that we consider the intended meaning of a text. This is especially true of texts that demand to be understood on the propositional level. The Bible demands assent and goes to great lengths to insist that the reader understand its assertions (such as Paul in Romans). We do not have to take one of the extreme positions: the autonomy position, which studies “the text and nothing but the text,” or the historicist position, which wants only “what it meant” and psychologizes back to the author’s (or authors’) mind. Any proper hermeneutics must study the text both diachronically and synchronically, in terms of the past, present, and future dimensions.

The basic solution is a trialogue between the author, the text and the reader. The author has produced the text and given it certain meanings that are intended to be understood by the reader. The text then guides the reader by producing certain access points that point the reader to the proper language game for interpreting that particular illocutionary act. The reader thereby aligns him- or herself with the textual world and propositional content, thus coming to understand the intended meaning of the text. It remains now to demonstrate how this works out in detail.

A FIELD APPROACH TO HERMENEUTICS

Before attempting to integrate the various arguments of this appendix into a theoretical construct for hermeneutics, I must reintroduce the problem of the reader, so crucial to the negativism of postmodern scholars. All of the research I have done has tried to come to grips with the whole issue of reader and text. Several considerations point to a solution that will integrate the major aspects of the trialogue, author-text and text-reader. The polarities that have clouded the hermeneutical debate—dynamic versus static views of inspiration, propositional versus encounter theology, word versus sentence versus discourse models of communication, assertive versus poetic approaches to literature, the author versus the text versus the reader as the generating force of meaning—are not contradictory but are interdependent parts of a larger whole. Disjunctive thinking has created the crisis. Propositional content, sense and reference, intended meaning—all are viable and indeed necessary components of the hermeneutical enterprise. It remains now to provide a hermeneutical grid for demonstrating this, to add praxis to theoria.[15]

1. A close reading of the text cannot be done without a perspective provided by one's preunderstanding as identified by a "sociology of knowledge" perspective. Reflection itself demands mental categories, and these are built on one's presupposed worldview and by the faith or reading community to which one belongs. Since neutral exegesis is impossible, no necessarily "true" or final interpretation is possible. There will always be differences of opinion in a finite world. However, this does not demand polyvalence. Probability theory allows critical interaction and movement toward the intended meaning, however elusive it may prove at times, so long as the communities are open to critical dialogue. Here I want to stress that preunderstanding is primarily a positive (and only potentially a negative) component of interpretation. Preunderstanding only becomes negative if it degenerates into an a priori grid that determines the meaning of a text before the act of reading even begins.
2. I must distinguish *presupposition* from *prejudice.* The key is to follow Ricoeur's suggestion and place ourselves "in front of" rather than

"behind" the text, so that the text can have priority. This allows us to determine which types of preunderstanding are valid and which are not as the text challenges, reshapes and directs our presuppositions. The fact-value dichotomy, as many philosophers have noted, cannot be used too stringently in assessing adequacy of criteria. Presuppositions can be external (philosophical or theological starting points) or internal (personality, pressure to publish) but must be recognized and taken into account when studying the text. My basic point is that they can be identified. When prejudices become subconscious and are taken for granted, the interpreter never examines them and they become the major hermeneutical tool, determining the meaning of the text. While this often happens and does indeed obfuscate the possibility of discovering the original meaning of a text, this is not a necessary occurrence. The text can address and if necessary change a presupposed perspective.

3. We must seek controls that enable us to work with presuppositions (the positive) rather than to be dominated by prejudices (the negative).

    - We must be open to new possibilities. Positivistic theologians interestingly were open on dogmatic issues but closed to new philosophical insights. Peter Stuhlmacher calls for an "openness to transcendence" from his vantage point as a German historico-critical scholar. I would expand this to include all possible perspectives. We need a polyvalent attitude, an openness to many meaning possibilities, allowing the text and new critical ideas to interact as they challenge our perspectives. We must desire truth rather than confirmation of our preexisting ideas.
    - We must understand the dangers of merely assuming our presuppositions. Graham Stanton, Brevard Childs and Gerald Sheppard provide good examples from the history of exegesis. The "Rule of Faith" in the Middle Ages developed out of the patristic desire to gain control over subjective exegesis, then became a victim of its own ascendancy! Stuhlmacher speaks of an "effective-historical consciousness," by which he means the realization that we must consciously differentiate between the original "locale of interpretation" (the *Sitz im Leben*), the historical development of dogma and hermeneutics (these lie between us and the text, shaping our approach) and our own interpretative stance within both culture and our specific community of faith.

- The interpreter must not only address the text but must allow the text to address him or her (the hermeneutical circle). In exegesis, our presuppositions/preunderstanding must be modified and reshaped by the text. The text must have priority over the interpreter. At the same time, the text must address the reader's contemporary *Weltanschauung* ("worldview"). The commissive force of Scripture must never be lost. The task of hermeneutics is never finished with original meaning but can only be complete when its significance is realized.
- Polyvalent interpretations per se are unnecessary, but a pluralistic or polyvalent attitude is crucial. Again, my approach is an "interpretive realism" that is in constant dialogue with the various communities of faith in order to refine and reformulate theories on the basis of further evidence or more coherent models. Pure polyvalence lacks this rigorous dialectic because it tends to relativism, that every theory is as good as the next. There is little possibility for the growth of the store of knowledge when rugged individualism is in control of the theoretical process! Of course, we want to be open to the possibility that the polyvalent school is describing "the way it is" (to use Gadamer's expression). However, I have attempted to demonstrate why I do not believe this is the case.

4. We must allow good hermeneutical principles to shape our exegesis and to control our tendency to read our prejudices into the text. Critico-historical exegesis will make us aware of the need to consider biblical backgrounds and data (the historical dimensions); grammatico-historical exegesis allows the original or intended meaning to be the focus (the semantic dimension); and literary criticism keeps the text itself central (the literary dimension). All three integrate to allow preunderstanding to be a positive rather than a negative tool, to guide us to the original meaning of the text rather than to form a barrier to meaning. Stuhlmacher demands "methodological verifiability." The subjectivity of much of modern exegesis must be brought under control, lest truth be forfeited.

    - Consider the genre or type of literature (chaps. 6-14) and interpret each according to the proper rules of their particular language game. This is where the propositional and illocutionary aspects come into play. If the biblical statement is informative, we give it

intellectual assent; if commissive, we react with obedience. A good example of this is Vanhoozer's distinction between infallibility and inerrancy: "Logically . . . infallibility is prior to inerrancy. God's Word invariably accomplishes its purpose (infallibility); and when this purpose is assertion, the proposition of the speech act is true (inerrancy)." In other words, each passage guides the interpreter in its intended direction, whether belief/assent or action.

- The structural development of the passage (chap. 1) provides a control against artificial atomistic exegesis (the error of most historical approaches). Rhetorical and narrative approaches have moved away from the parts to the whole. Meaning (the author's intended meaning) results from the symmetry of the passage as a whole and not from the isolated parts. Moreover, the context of the whole controls the meaning of the parts and adjudicates between competing interpretations. The passage as a whole provides parameters so that the interpreter can choose between alternative proposals.
- Semantic research (chap. 3) further helps the reader to discover the sense and reference of the passage. In the past linguistic word studies centered on etymology and linguistic roots. Today, however, all recognize that semantics is based on synchronic and structural considerations. The background of a word is a valid aspect only when this is a deliberate allusion to a past use, as in the New Testament use of the Old Testament. Meaning is determined on the basis of the congruence of two factors, semantic field (the number of possible meanings at the time of writing) and context (which tells you which of the possible meanings is indicated in the passage). We select the meaning that best fits the context.
- A judicious use of background information (chap. 5) helps us avoid the opposite error, namely, ignoring the historical aspect in favor of the poetic. Postmodernists so stress the intratextual dimension that they deliberately "deconstruct" the passage from its historical moorings and thus twist its meaning in an internal direction. The tendency is to say, The text contains all the meaning there is, or to assert, The reader's response is the meaning. The problem with these, however, is that the biblical author shared certain assumptions with his readers, and these are

often open to the interpreter. In fact, background, along with the author, provides a major access point to the historical dimension of the text. The interpreter needs to discover these underlying "givens" for properly understanding the text.

- The implied author and the implied reader in the text (chap. 7) provide an indispensable perspective for the intended meaning of a text.[16] While postmodernists separate the real author from the implied author, I would not. The implied author is the conscious representation of the real author in the text. As such it provides an access point to the historicality of the text and its message, anchoring interpretation in the ancient period. The implied reader was the focus of the conscious direction of the text and as such provides the access point to the fusion of horizons. The original author had a certain audience in mind, and the text addresses itself to these implied readers. The real reader, by uniting with this textual configuration, can contextualize the text to discover the significance of the text's message for today (see chaps. 17-18). Thereby the intended meaning of the text (the historical aspect) and the multiple significances of the text for today (the contemporary aspect) are fused in the act of interpretation.
- The question of verification of competing interpretive possibilities is essential for any system, such as the one espoused herein. In a very real sense, every chapter of this book is part of the verification process. My argument is that this is a threefold process: (1) Inductively, the interpretation appears not from an inspired "guess" but from the structural, semantic and syntactical study of the text itself; in other words, it emerges from the text itself, which guides the interpreter to the proper meaning. (2) Deductively, a valid interpretation emerges by testing the results of the inductive research via a comparison with other scholars' theories and historical or background material derived from sources outside the text. One deepens, alters and at times replaces his or her theory on the basis of this external data, which is tested on the basis of coherence, adequacy and comprehensiveness. (3) Sociologically, this proceeds via a critical realism that governs an ongoing dialogue between the paradigm or reading communities. The continual challenge and critique from opposing communities drives the individual reader back to a reexamination of the text and his or her reading strategy. As a result the text continues to be

the focus and leads one to the true intended meaning.

After twenty years of research into the process of communication, Vanhoozer makes seven conclusions: (1) There is a “design plan” to language that is “inherently covenantal,” that is, that establishes a promise between sender and receiver. (2) The true “paradigm for a Christian view of communication is the triune God in communicative action.” The missions of Jesus and the Spirit center on the theme of the *“word sent,”* and the purpose of the mission was as much “transformative” as informative. In the same way language is inherently “intentional action,” and this occurs not at what an author plans to do but what he actually does, that is, not at the level of the sign system but at the level of the completed act of communication. The reader then “cooperates” with the text and discovers its “relevance” and allows it to “modify [his or her] cognitive environment.” (3) “Meaning” results from the communicative action as the author uses “certain words at a particular time in a specific manner.” The author’s illocutionary act of communication establishes a promise and a “covenantal relation” with a receiver and through her imaginative structure of the text can effectively pass on the message. The resultant text contains both “propositional content” and “illocutionary force.” (4) So “the literal sense of an utterance or text is the sum total of those illocutionary acts performed by the author intentionally and with self-awareness.” The reader then identifies with this action and discovers its relevance, allowing it to alter his or her cognitive awareness. (5) Understanding takes place when one recognizes the illocutionary acts. Both authors and readers are communicants who participate in the action of the text and are “citizens of language,” with ethical responsibility to allow the process to take place. (6) Thus interpretation becomes “the process of inferring authorial intentions and of ascribing illocutionary acts.” The reader both infers and imputes the intentions of the author by observing the speech acts and judging what the author has done and intended to say, both in terms of the illocutionary intention and the perlocutionary effect on the reader. (7) Any action that produces a perlocutionary effect on the reader “other than by means of understanding counts as strategic, not communicative, action.” The author is also ethically responsible not to manipulate the reader by his or her speech acts. The communicative power of texts must be centered on truth not manipulation, and the reader is bound to discover that truth and react to it (2004:167-88). I would add that the

means of discovery centers on the processes already discussed, namely, the hermeneutics of critical realism and the spiral from text to meaning.

The reader is a positive, not negative, force in interpreting a text. I have argued here that the original meaning of a text is not a hopeless goal but a possible and positive and necessary one. A text invites each reader into its narrative world but demands that the person enter it on its own terms. The creation of a new text is of course often (perhaps even usually) the result, but it is not a necessity. Throughout this book I have elucidated principles for determining the intended meaning of a text, specifically of the Bible. These principles apply to other texts besides Scripture, but my purpose is to restrict the discussion to the one body of literature that above all demands to be understood in terms of its original intended meaning. I agree with R. T. France's call for

> the priority in biblical interpretation of what has come to be called "the first horizon," i.e., of understanding biblical language within its own context before we start exploring its relevance to our own concerns, and of keeping the essential biblical context in view as a control on the way we apply biblical language to current issues. (1984:42)

This task is not merely a possible goal but is a necessary one. In short, in these two appendixes I have tried to lay the philosophical foundation for the spiral from text to meaning; this book as a whole attempts to show how the spiral may lead to understanding.

Notes

Introduction

1 I am aware of the debates as to whether Mk 13 or 2 Thess 2 are actually apocalyptic, but I am using the traditional consensus for illustrative purposes.

Chapter 1: Context

1 In some ways the delineation of the historical context first may defeat the purpose of the logical or inductively derived context, since it immerses the student already in other people's ideas. The key is to keep this information at the preliminary stage rather than to assume its validity. The purpose of this approach is to remind the student from the start of the ancient situation behind the book and to ensure that he or she seeks always the original intended meaning rather than the significance of the passage only from a modern perspective.

2 Of course, I recognize that paragraph divisions differ widely from version to version. However, for the purpose of this preliminary method, such decisions can await the deeper level of exegesis. Here we want only to chart the basic structural development of the book as a whole.

3 Here I am adapting the earlier outline in Osborne and Woodward 1979:29.

4 Of course, the beginning student will naturally take longer, while the experienced one will take less time. The time mentioned here denotes a median level.

5 In the summer of 1983 I taught a doctor of ministry course on the book of Revelation. In the audience were pastors and denominational heads from quite different persuasions, with dispensational, historical premillennial and amillennial positions represented. I faced the course with much fear, wondering if the chemistry of the group would cause an explosion. Instead, we discovered a common area of agreement at this very level of theological theme. In spite of our hermeneutical and perspectival disagreements, we could unite at the level of theological meaning. It was one of the most satisfying experiences I have had in teaching!

6 In addition to clauses, I would indent important prepositional or participial phrases. I have two criteria for deciding whether or not to indent phrases: (1) Is it important enough to be a separate main heading in my sermon outline? (2) Is it lengthy and complicated? Both criteria make these two prepositional phrases worthy of indentation here.

7 When I encounter pastors who no longer use their Greek in the pulpit, most tell me that time was the crucial factor in their surrender. Exegesis professors are too idealistic, giving their students too many time-consuming steps to accomplish before the practical results of using their Greek can be realized. One of the major sources of discouragement is diagramming. The average pastor has seven to ten hours (if he or she spends twenty hours a week in study for two to three messages—Sunday morning, evening and perhaps midweek) to prepare, and diagramming can take up to two hours of that time if the passage is of any length.

8 Some inductive Bible study methods allow the student to alter the order of the text and to place all subordinate clauses under the main clause. I prefer to maintain the order of the text (in order to avoid confusion later) and to utilize arrows to show which clause they modify. The student of course is free to choose which method seems more comfortable.

9 The last three coordinating conjunctions (therefore, for, so) can also introduce a minor clause. We must examine the context and ask whether the conjunction introduces a parallel or subordinate idea. Kaiser (1981:80-86) provides a good breakdown of coordinating conjunctions into connective conjunctions (and, or, nor, for, but, neither-nor, either-or, both-and, not only-but also), adversative conjunctions (but, except), emphatic conjunctions (yea, certainly, in fact), inferential conjunctions (therefore, then, wherefore, so) and transitional conjunctions (and, moreover, then). See also Traina (1952:49-52), Jensen (1963:39-42), Osborne and Woodward (1979:68-72) and Liefeld (1984:60-72). These lists are more extensive and do not attempt to collapse the classification into basic units.

10 Apposition (v. 10) and content clauses (v. 11) do not modify and therefore are indicated by a bar rather than by an arrow.

11 I am aware of the attempts to deny the incarnational setting of Phil 2:6-8 (see Dunn 1980:114- 21). However, the arguments are not convincing, and Hawthorne (1983:81-84) is certainly more correct in affirming the traditional interpretation.

12 Muilenberg's justly lauded SBL presidential address of 1968, "Form Criticism and Beyond" (1969:1-18), looked to rhetorical criticism as the wave of the future. Indeed, it has proven to be so. However, in many studies (as noted by Kessler) it is linked with genre criticism, and that confuses the issue.

13 Meyer and Rice (1982:156-57) and Nida (1983:22-45). In addition, see the discussions in Kuist (1947:80-86), Traina (1952:49-52), Jensen (1963:39-42), Osborne and Woodward (1979:68-72) and Liefeld (1984:60-72). These lists are more extensive and do not attempt to collapse the classification into basic units. Of the two, the former is more syntactically correct, but the latter cannot easily be subsumed under it, so the best solution is to combine them (the first four belong to Meyer and Rice).

14 Many believe (see Longenecker 1975:175-80) that it is based on the similar set in 4QFlorelegium, one of the scrolls from Qumran. There the Essenes collected 2 Sam 7:10-14; Ps 1:1; 2:1-2, while the rest of the text in 4QFlorelegium has been lost.

15 Meyer and Rice separate these two relationships, but since they are syntactically similar I will bring them under a single rubric. The one distinction is that the latter has "some overlap in topic content between the problem and the solution" (Meyer and Rice 1982:157).

Chapter 2: Grammar

1 Jeanrond is absolutely opposed to any possibility of objective interpretation but argues that the interpreting community continually interacts and discovers "ever new interpretations of the text of Christian tradition" (1988:130). I would argue that these developing understandings are not "ever new" but must be anchored in the text's own statements. In other words, our interpretations spiral upward toward the intended meaning of the text.

2 See Würthwein 1981:12-15 and Aland 1987:48-71 for the history of the transmission of the Old Testament and New Testament texts respectively.

3 Most Old Testament text critics would avoid the terms *text types* or *text families* for Old Testament manuscripts, preferring instead to refer to "major textual traditions."

4 In addition, some Septuagint books (for example, the Pentateuch, portions of Isaiah) are more accurate than others and have greater weight in text-critical decisions.

5 Aland 1987:67 states unequivocally that only the Alexandrian, Koine (Byzantine) and D (Codex Bezae) texts are "incontestably verified." Western, Caesarean and Jerusalem text types are "purely theoretical."

6 Aland in fact goes so far as to say, "The primary authority for a critical textual decision lies with the Greek manuscript tradition. . . . Furthermore, manuscripts should be weighted, not counted, and the peculiar traits of each manuscript should be duly considered" (1987:275-76). Again, the New Testament external evidence is somewhat stronger and more clearly defined than that of the Old

Testament, but on the whole scholars are optimistic with both.

7 Würthwein states (in order of relative value) that after the Masoretic Text one should consult the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, Aquila's translation, Symmachus's version, Theodotian's revision of the Septuagint, the Peshitta, the Targums, the Vulgate, the Old Latin versions and so forth.

8 A commentary series by Murray Harris (published by Eerdmans) is trying to remedy the imbalance by addressing grammatical issues more directly. The first volume on Colossians and Philemon (1990) exemplifies the promise of this series.

9 I would recommend using these better grammars as reference tools. Look in the scriptural indexes and find where your passage is discussed, then use these as minicommentaries on your text.

10 However, there is enough truth in the statement to justify an overhaul of exegesis courses. We need less grammar and a more balanced approach, particularly emphasis on holistic syntax and historical-cultural backgrounds. The instructor must always have in mind the seven to ten hours maximum that the average pastor can spend on a single sermon.

11 An excellent article titled "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament" by Murray Harris (1978:1171-1215) will help immensely and provide a valuable resource tool in a proper delineation of the preposition in the New Testament.

12 Barr himself admits that his critique is addressed not so much against the characteristics themselves as against the linguistic basis for such. The evidence must be drawn from the theology of the biblical books and from Greek philosophy rather than from the respective languages. My studies lead me to affirm the first and third but doubt the second. While the Old Testament does not contain as much stress on ethics, the abstract qualities of love, trust and so forth are seen in the vertical dimension (such as the human's relationship to Yahweh),

especially in the poets and prophets. The horizontal dimension (ethics) is seen in preliminary form in the Wisdom literature (such as Proverbs). Both abstract and concrete are found in Hebraic thought.

Chapter 3: Semantics

1 For a more detailed discussion, see esp. Gibson 1981:47-96; Nida 1964:70-99; Louw 1982:50- 60; and Thiselton 1978:1127-29.

2 See also Gibson 1981:42-44, 165-75, where he challenges the absolute distinction between sense and reference posited by Caird (1980:9). Gibson argues, for instance, that proper nouns do have an aspect of sense and that predicates do have reference. See also Nida 1964:70-82, where he uses referential meaning in a more dynamic way, which would include our sense and reference. Gibson would argue for a more strict usage of the terms.

3 For sources on synonyms in the Old Testament, see Girdlestone 1897; and in the New Testament see Trench 1880; Berry 1897 or Custer 1975.

Chapter 4: Syntax

1 Jeanrond (1988:121-23) criticizes evangelical/fundamentalist hermeneutics at exactly this point, the tendency to provide meaning at the word or sentence level without determining its place in the whole of the context.

2 For other examples, see Beekman and Callow 1974:342 (on Philem 4-7), Liefeld 1984:51-52 (on Rom 5:1-11), and for comparative purposes see Louw 1982:84-87 (on Phil 1:3-5).

3 For more extensive discussion of the sources of figures of speech, see Bullinger 1898; Mickelsen 1963:179-81; and Caird 1980:156-59.

4 Although Lincoln (1981:139-68) has made an excellent and provocative case for the literal meaning of this term, I remain convinced that the figurative sense fits the context better.

5 In this section I am discussing only the positive side of Ricoeur's theory. For his presupposition of polyvalence (multiple meaning) and the metaphorical force of all language, see app. 1. For excellent discussions of Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, read Perpich 1984:130-33 and Vanhoozer 1990.

6 Caird (1980:136-37) discusses this as a type of metonymy (see 5.1 in the text), but it has a different rhetorical function so we are considering it separately.

7 Following the chiasm of vv. 14-17 (discussed under v. 16) another outline is possible, keeping the middle pair together: I. Command to Rejoice (v. 14); II. Reasons for Rejoicing (vv. 15-16); III. God's Promise and Love (v. 17).

8 This prophecy was probably given before the sudden cessation of Assyria as a world power after Ashurbanipal died in 626 B.C.

9 The reader will note the absence of contextualization or application in this discussion, but that is the subject of a later chapter. My purpose here is to illustrate how the exegetical techniques unite in the study of individual passages.

10 Only Romans has as many, and no other book contains it more than twice.

11 In recent years I have read through the Psalms using Peter Craigie's commentary (Word) and through Ecclesiastes using Tremper Longman's commentary (NICOT), and I have enjoyed both tremendously. In fact I have edited a New Testament commentary series (IVP New Testament Commentary) for InterVarsity Press that adds contextualization to the exposition of the text (see also the NIV Application Commentary series).

12 Some may be asking why we should worry about exegetical exactness in a devotional experience. However, as chaps. 17-18 will argue, contextualization in the sermon (or devotional experience) needs to be based on *God's* message rather than our own. A lack of concern for the divinely inspired message has led many Christians astray. Moreover, studying deeply is like mining for gold. There are treasures under the text just waiting to be dug out!

13 In addition to the works by Chomsky already mentioned, we can find excellent summaries of his thought in Lyons (1968:247-69; 1981:124-29, 228-35, 242-47) and Arens (1975:500-510). The latter goes beyond Chomsky to describe the school that he began and provides a valuable integration of the syntactical and semantic components.

14 For excellent discussions of rhetoric in ancient Greece, see Golden, Berquist and Coleman 1983:35-92; Foss, Foss and Trapp 1985:1-10; and Mack 1990:25-48.

15 Mack (1990:34-35) notes that the Greeks developed two subtypes under each major category. Judicial rhetoric concerned either accusation or defense, deliberative consisted of persuasion or refutation, and epideictic concerned praise or blame. All six types are found in the New Testament, often several of them brought to bear on an issue simultaneously. Most recent rhetorical study centers on tracing the patterns in a given passage.

16 Rhetorical criticism in this sense from an Old Testament perspective is a more difficult perspective, due to the much longer period envisioned and consequent multiplicity of cultural influences. However, a paper by David Howard, “Is Biblical ‘Rhetorical Criticism’ Really Rhetorical Criticism?” (1994:87-104) argues cogently for the switch from style to persuasion in Old Testament rhetorical study as well.

17 What follows is discussed in Kennedy (1984:23-25); Watson (1988:20-21); and Mack (1990:41-48).

18 In this section I am interacting with Kennedy’s discussion of the Sermon on the Mount as a deliberative speech (1984:39-72) as well as Mack’s outline (1990:82-85)

19 Kennedy (1984:55, 57) considers this to be the second half of the “proof” of the proposition, with Mt 5:21-48 constituting the first half. According to him, Mt 5:21-48 is characterized by ethos and pathos (emotional appeal) while the second (Mt 6:1-18) is a series of enthymemes with supporting argument. A similar outline (but more likely) is Mack’s. He finds two theses in Mt 5:17-20, with Mt 5:21-48 supplying examples for the first (Jesus fulfilling the law) and Mt 6:1-18 examples for the second (demanding a more perfect piety). However, Mt 6:1-18 is more central to the entire sermon than this, and I believe it is better to see it as the *partitio*.

20 Within this section, Mt 6:19-24 states the major thesis (seek treasure in heaven); Mt 6:25—7:6 provides a series of prohibitions (don’t worry, judge or share truth with those unworthy); Mt 7:7-14, two injunctions (on prayer and entering the narrow gate); and 7:15-23, two warnings (against false prophets and

trying to enter heaven unworthily).

21 The *refutatio* here is not a separate section but is found in virtually every paragraph from 5:21—7:27.

22 There is a distinct tendency among many practitioners to take rhetorical criticism in a postmodern direction (see app. 1). For instance, Wuellner (1987:460-61) says it "takes us away from a traditional message- or content-oriented reading of Scripture to a reading which generates and strengthens ever-deepening personal, social, and cultural values." The emphasis is no longer on propositional truth but on the "dynamics of personal or social *identification* and *transformation*" (p. 461). He sees in this an alignment of the new rhetorical criticism with feminist and non-Western modes of criticism.

23 I am in the process of doing a major commentary on Matthew and am quite discouraged by the unbelievable plethora of suggestions regarding the outline of the book. I am even more discouraged over how many of them sound plausible!

24 There is no such detailed program developed for Old Testament rhetorical criticism, undoubtedly because the rhetorical techniques were developed primarily by the Greeks. No such patterns were available from Akkadian, Sumerian, Egyptian, Babylonian or Persian sources. However, the steps previously outlined are still generally applicable to Old Testament texts. After finishing this excursus, I received an excellent Old Testament counterpart to Kennedy and Mack: Dale Patrick and Allen Schult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990). They present a good general program for going beyond stylistics to the rhetorical power of the text of the Old Testament.

25 D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 15.

26 Ibid.

27 It was hardly the first. The NRSV and REB came out in 1989, the CEV in 1995, and the NLT in 1996. [28]Mark Strauss, "Do Literal Bible Versions Show Greater Respect for Plenary Inspiration? (A Response to Wayne Grudem)," unpublished paper read at the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting (Valley Forge, Penn.: Nov 16, 2005), p. 1, tells of an article in the *San Diego Union Tribune* on October 28, 2004, in which thousands of Spanish voter guides had to be recalled because they had been translated word-for-word from the English and were laughable in their clumsy Spanish. Back translating one sentence: "People that are registered 29 to 15 days before an election will be commanded a brochure." The point is that languages differ from one another too greatly to be woodenly translated.

29 Craig L. Blomberg, "*Today's New International Version:* The Untold Story of a Good Translation," 2003 <www.tniv.info/quickfacts.php>, 21-23, responds to four common objections to the plural replacing "he": (1) The "masculinity" of God's Word is not "muted" (the subtitled of Poythress and Grudem) because many of the world's languages do not even contain a generic masculine singular form, and it would be useless to demand such a form (the same is happening in English). (2) Inclusive language is not grammatically or stylistically incorrect (e.g., "Anyone bringing *their* textbooks . . ") because stylistic conventions are determined by current consensus, and modern textbooks on style are encouraging such changes. (3) While such changes depart from a literal translation, they are in reality the goal of functional translations and so, while inappropriate for NASB or ESV, fit well into TNIV or NLT. (4) The use of plurals hardly destroys the individual application of texts (e.g., "If you [Gk 'anyone'] hear my voice . . . " [Rev 3:20 NLT]) because the average person hears such a rendering and thinks individually; in fact, the problem in the West is the opposite due to rugged individualism. No one thinks corporately any more. [30]Blomberg (2003:16-19) shows that all the famous gender role passages (1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33- 38; 1 Tim 2:11-15; 3:11; Eph 5:21-33; Rom 16:1, 7) have hardly been altered at all by the TNIV and are in keeping with complementarian beliefs. This is a far cry from the label "dangerous" given to it by its opponents!

31 Wayne Grudem, "Are Only *Some* Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God? Why Plenary Inspiration Favors 'Essentially Literal' Bible Translations," in *Translating Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), pp. 19-56, esp. pp. 25-30.

32 The rules for the TNIV and the NLT are clear: male terms used of the Godhead are retained (e.g., *Father, Son of Man*). When *son of man* in Ps 8:4-6 and Heb 2:6-8 is translated “mortal,” it is because it is not meant as a christological title in either passage (see the majority of Hebrews commentaries) but is speaking of mankind (as also throughout Ezekiel). Also, when a male term speaks of males in the ancient culture, that is also retained (e.g., Lk 20:9, “a man planted a vineyard”); but when a male term *(he, man)* refers to all people, clarity of translation demands a change (e.g., “What good is it for you [literally “a man”] to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul” [Mk 8:36 TNIV]).

Chapter 5: Historical and Cultural Backgrounds

1 Ayers 1983:135-36 and Neusner 1983:99-144 agree that the Hillel school of the Pharisees was the precursor of the second-century rabbis.

2 Howard Clark Kee would add other types of study: social dynamics and social roles, tracing leadership roles within societal structure; anthropological analysis and group identity, which studies the symbol system behind the social organization; and sociology of knowledge, which analyzes internal and external social pressures on the belief system (1989:32-64). These add further detail to the broad category of “sociological interpretation.”

Part 2: Genre Analysis

1 For a more detailed discussion of the criteria for genre identification, see Horst 1978:122-23; Baird 1972:387-88; Osborne 1983:6-7, 24-25; and Longman 1985:61-67.

Chapter 6: Old Testament Law

1 Some believe it comes from *yara*, "throw, shoot," but that is not as likely.

2 Alt 1967:101-71, first established the two types: apodictic laws with absolute commands telling "you" to do something, and casuistic or conditional laws employing an "if . . . then" formula. This form-critical approach is generally accepted today, though his labels are questioned and some find it reductionistic and simplistic. See also Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (1982:170-75).

3 J. W. Marshall 2002:171-82. Marshall and Block demonstrate the suzerainty form in the Decalogue: (1) the preamble (Ex 20:1; Deut 20:1-5) identifies the suzerain and sets the stage; (2) a historical prologue (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6) states the former relationship between the two parties; (3) the stipulations or covenant principles (Ex 20:3-26; Deut 5:7-21) state the obligations of the vassal to the suzerain; these are absolute and must be obeyed or the covenant is broken and the covenant curses invoked; (4) provision is made for depositing the document in a sacred place and for regular reading of the document—this is done later (Deut 10:5; 31:10-11); (5) witnesses (see Josh 24; Deut 32); (6) blessings and curses (Lev 26; Deut 28); (7) an oath or description of the people's response (Ex 20:18-21; Deut 5:22-33) tells how the people accepted it as revealed from God.

4 See Alexander 1999:2-20; and 2003:94-101; Carmichael 1992). Carmichael believes the Book of the Covenant was written in the sixth century B.C. when Deuteronomy was written (p. 248). Alexander follows Marshall 1993, who shows the Book of the Covenant reflects "a dimorphic pastoral and agrarian society of the early Iron I period (1200-1000 BC)" (p. 100).

5 Selman 2000:502; Averbeck 2003a:816-17; Durham 1987:350-53.

6 Averbeck 1997c:907-8. Kiuchi 2003:524, says the two sections flow from the outer to inner aspects of worship, first “from the material side to the human heart expressed outwardly” (Ex 25—Lev 16) and then “to the human heart expressed in obedience to the laws and decrees” (Lev 18—26).

7 For a summary of attempts to date Deuteronomy as a seventh-century document written during Josiah’s reform, see McConville 2003:185-87. They should be judged as a failure.

8 Craigie 1976:41-42. Block 2005:16, calls this “the voice of a pastor” more than of a prophet or priest, namely Moses as he is about to leave his people.

9 Levinson 1997:149-52. He believes Deuteronomy was a seventh-century product of revisionary writers intended not just to revise the previous laws but to replace them. See Block 2005:14-15, for a positive yet cautious acceptance of Levinson’s “revision” theory (but without the late dating).

10 Christenson 2001:lxxiv-lxxvii; and Craigie 1976:68-69.

11 As McConville shows (2003:187-91), these emphases could as easily have come early in the life of the nation as late and do not demand a seventh-century date for the writing of Deuteronomy.

12 Hartley 2003:421, following Moberley 1992:24-25.

13 Harrison 1980:122-26. Fee and Stuart 2003:177-78, say the prohibited foods are (1) more likely to cause disease in the arid Sinai climate, (2) cost prohibitive in the Canaan region, (3) foods favored by the surrounding pagan cultures, and (4) sources of allergies in the region.

14 Noth 1966:56-57. Fee and Stuart 2003:178-79, give an excellent example, the law against cooking a young goat in its mother’s milk (Deut 14:21). The Canaanites used this as a fertility rite, believing that such a practice would entice

the gods into blessing the flock.

15 Douglas 1966:51-54; Wenham 1979:23-25, 169-71; Wenham 1981:6-15.

16 Milgrom 1963:288-301; Milgrom 1991.

17 Scurlock and Anderson 2005:70-73, argue that Hansen's Disease (leprosy) was in fact a problem in the ancient Near East.

18 See the excellent work by John Oswalt (1999).

19 It always surprises me that students and church members will use any commentary they can find (when they think to use them at all!) without considering their quality. There is a wide disparity (as in every item we buy), and it is important to use the better ones. The others often give you false information.

20 Averbeck 2003:707-8, from Douglas 1999:15-65.

21 Wenham 1979:52-57; Averbeck 2003:712-13; Anderson 1992:877-78.

22 Wenham 1979:67-72; Averbeck 2003:713-15.

23 Wenham 1979:74-81; Averbeck 2003:715-17; Anderson 1992:878-79.

24 Wenham 1979:87-96; Averbeck 2003:717-20; Anderson 1992:879-80.

25 Wenham 1979:104-11; Averbeck 2003:720-22; Anderson 1992:880-81.

26 Enns 2005:94, calls this a "dynamic quality" in the legal system, that is, it is open to critical reflection like what truly constitutes holiness before God.

Chapter 7: Narrative

1 Collins (1982:47-48), denies this, saying, “The rediscovery of biblical narrative has been largely a consequence of the negative results of historical research. This point has theological importance. Many conservative biblicists have invoked literary criticism as a way of avoiding unwelcome historical conclusions. . . . It should be clear that such evasions will not work. . . . ‘Story’ is not ‘history.’ It is essentially fiction, material which in some measure has been invented.” However, this is clearly a biased statement, for many literary critics do in fact combine the historical and the “fictive” dimensions of literary analysis.

2 See Marshall 1970; Martin 1972; Smalley 1978; France 1989.

3 Krieger 1964:3-70. Krieger argues that the historical (windows) and the literary (mirrors) are interdependent aspects of literary analysis.

4 See Pratt 1983:158-59. R. Alan Culpepper provides a more critical use of the imagery to suggest that we view the text as a mirror more than a window, since the latter is open only to the specialist who can separate tradition from redaction (1983:3-4). Yet a historical approach does not demand only a reconstruction of the event, and historical background provides a valid aspect of literary interpretation. Moreover, the historical data is available through the better commentaries and books on background. Thus it is readily accessible to the nonspecialist. On the text as “portrait” see Guelich 1982:117-25.

5 Adele Berlin says that “poetics is to literature as linguistics is to language. That is, poetics describes the basic components of literature and the rules governing their use” (1983:15).

6 See Sternberg 1985:89; compare pp. 89-91. However, I must demur from Sternberg's language, "choice to devise." This is part of his argument that Old Testament narrative is ideological rhetoric designed as propaganda for an omniscient God. I would explain the biblical language as due to the author's awareness of divine inspiration rather than as deliberate rhetoric.

7 However, I disagree with those critics who string together these "seams" and asides into what amounts to a "subtext" behind the surface text. This results from the radical separation of the implied author from the real author, a theory that I reject. Instead, the editorial comments provide the author's commentary on the significance of the story he is narrating. These two elements—story and commentary—stand together in the narrative.

8 See Culpepper 1983:20-34; Petersen 1978:97-121; Kingsbury 1986:32-36; Rhoads and Michie 1982:36-44. From the side of pure literary criticism see Uspensky 1973:8-100; Genette 1980:161-86; and Chatman 1978:151-58.

9 The nonevangelical considers the "inside" information an artistic creation of the author, while the evangelical believes that divine inspiration is behind the material, and that the information was gleaned in many different ways but is historically accurate.

10 Lundin, Thiselton and Walhout 1985:69. Walhout develops four criteria for detecting a historical work (pp. 72-76): (1) the world in the text is factually accurate, (2) the point of view taken by the author often contains indicators of a historical perspective, (3) the use of the text by its readers and the circumstances behind its production point to its genre (whether history or fiction), and (4) the uses of the text by the author himself (Is he making claims of an actual situation in the world behind the text?) point to a real or fictive world in the text.

11 For a good narrative analysis of John 9 see Resseguie 1982:295-303.

12 Culpepper 1983:161, from Aristotle's *Poetics* 1454a. Most make a distinction between "flat" (characters with only a single trait) and "round" (many traits)

characterization. I prefer Berlin's categories (1983:23-24): a "type" (a static character with only a single trait), an "agent" (a mere functionary with no trait at all) and a "full-fledged" character (a realistic personage on whom the action turns).

13 See Chatman 1978:107-388 and Kingsbury 1986:9-10 for more detailed discussion.

14 Sternberg 1985:186-89. Fowler calls this "the rhetoric of indirection" (1983:53). The text provides the clues to help the readers discover the proper path through the story but uses these gaps to involve them in the author's actual message.

15 Many scholars separate the implied reader from the "narratee" (see fig. 7.1 in the text). The narratee corresponds to the narrator and is the literary figure to whom the text is explicitly directed. For instance, Luke-Acts is directed to Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1). Most of the time, the narratee is designated by specific asides or explanations in the text, guiding his or her understanding. The implied reader would be the implicit audience, "that set of values that is capable of bringing this work to its aesthetic completion" (Keegan 1985:101). However, I agree with Kingsbury that for all intents and purposes the narratee and implied reader are synonymous in biblical narrative. We could separate Theophilus (the narratee) and the church of Luke's time (the implied reader), but such would be artificial, for the explanations and summaries are addressed to both simultaneously.

16 Fowler (1983:32-49) provides a helpful discussion of the issue as to whether the "implied reader" is ensconced in the text (so Wayne Booth) or created by the real reader from the text (so Wolfgang Iser). Fowler uses the phrase "ideal reader" (Stanley Fish) as the better term for the latter and develops this in his *Semeia* article (1985:5-21), in which he gives priority to the ideal reader and identifies the latter with an informed real reader. I would give priority to the implied reader of the text, since the ideal reader leads to a reader-response orientation in which the readers create their own meaning rather than discover the author's intended meaning (see the apps. to this book for further discussion).

17 Reader-response critics argue that polyvalence (multiple meanings) controls the interplay between text and reader. This assumption is challenged in the appendixes of this book, which argue that it is not only possible but mandatory to recover the author's meaning.

18 Culpepper 1983:209. Culpepper does not give "intended meaning" the central place that I do; nevertheless, his statement is applicable. Joanna Dewey shows how "point of view" helps one detect the "implied reader" in Mark and thus to discover the "double identification" with both Jesus and the disciples (as well as the tension in the actual reader that this creates) in Mark (1982:97-106). In other words, these techniques combine to guide the reader to the text's meaning.

19 I would not isolate the "commissive" dimension from the other aspects (such as intended meaning) already discussed. Meaning and significance (the static and dynamic sides of interpretation) are intertwined.

20 A good example is Alter 1981:3-12, 107-12, whose excellent studies of Genesis 37—39 have almost gained the status of classic work.

21 Most current biblical narrative specialists—like Sternberg, Berlin or Culpepper—see tradition and literary criticism as complementary rather than opposed. Nearly all, however, recognize the paucity of results (in terms of understanding the text) from tradition criticism. Form and redaction critics too often are more interested in reconstructing the history and theology of the early church than in understanding the text itself. Source criticism is helpful as a supplement to narrative analysis. However, when the identification of sources becomes an end in itself, it tends to be speculative (such as the many unbelievably complex theories on the Synoptic problem) and detracts from the text's meaning.

22 Sternberg 1985:70. Modern literary critics take strong exception to Sternberg's statement here, and indeed it is true that the antihistorical position is alive and well. Nevertheless, I believe that Sternberg makes a good point, for the earlier "heyday" of this opposition to the historical element in a text is indeed a thing of the past.

23 While Rhoads and Michie deny the validity of the former, they recognize the value of background material: “None of these considerations means that our general knowledge of the first century is not helpful in the interpretation of the story; indeed it is often crucial” (1982:4).

24 See the summary in Gillespie 1986:199-203, who tries to walk a middle path between authorial intention and total textual autonomy. A degree of autonomy is required, Gillespie argues (following Ricoeur), by semantic ambiguity (the impossibility of seeking clarification from the author).

25 Obviously, I do not agree with McKnight in rejecting “plot, technique, character development.” However, his basic point, that we be wary of modem approaches, has some validity.

26 Kingsbury 1986:9. In one sense this hardly needs to be stated, for as said earlier, the central theme of plot by definition is always conflict. However, in Matthew the conflict between God and the machinations of his enemies (who attempt to disrupt his redemptive plan) is particularly central.

27 See Walker 1977:76-93; Osborne 1979:305-22 and 1991; and McKnight 1988:83-95; as well as the bibliography in these works, for further material on redaction techniques.

28 There is considerable debate as to whether the Olivet Discourse can be classified as “apocalyptic.” Many believe that the absence of esoteric symbolism and other apocalyptic features in Mark 13 makes it doubtful that Jesus was employing Jewish apocalyptic here.

29 On misunderstandings in John see Carson 1982:59-91 and Culpepper 1983:152-65. Carson stresses the historical side, Culpepper the literary. I see them as complementary rather than contradictory.

30 Greidanus 1988:148-54. He points to four advantages: (1) It is closer to the biblical form and so is less likely to distort the biblical text. (2) It creates interest by keeping the sermon moving forward to a climax. (3) It involves the hearers more holistically, reaching the intuitive and emotional side as well as the cognitive and rational side. (4) It communicates with the hearers indirectly and obliquely and so engages them more deeply by getting around their defenses.

31 For the differences between didactic and narrative sermons see Greidanus 1988:144-54.

Chapter 8: Poetry

1 LaSor, Hubbard and Bush (1982:604-5) describe the types of love poetry: descriptive songs, in which each lover extols the other's beauty (Song 4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-7; 7:1-9); songs of admiration (Song 1:9-11; 4:9-11; 7:7-9); songs of yearning (Song 1:2-4; 2:5-6; 8:1-4, 6-7); search narratives, in which the woman passionately seeks her lover (Song 3:1-4; 5:2-7); the game of love (Song 5:8-6:1, following the search of Song 5:2-7); teasing songs that detail the banter between the lovers (Song 2:14-15; 5:2-3); boasting songs praising the beloved (Song 6:8-10; 8:11-12); invitations to love (Song 2:5,17; 4:16; 7:11-13; 8:14). Many scholars believe that this love poem originated in the marriage ritual and liturgy. While such cannot be proven, it has merit.

2 Kaiser 1981:215. Most scholars consider it a musical term, the meaning of which has been lost. Therefore, it has little value in structural considerations.

Chapter 9: Wisdom

1 Zimmerli (1933:179) calls this the central concept in the appropriation of wisdom.

2 Nel (1982:62-64) argues that even in cases without motivation clauses (he discusses Prov 23:12; 27:2; 31:8-9) the latter is implicit. However, I do not find the argument convincing. He finds the motivation in Prov 20:18 in the first half ("Make plans by seeking advice") but on formal grounds that do not state a consequence but rather a general admonition applied specifically in the second half ("if you wage war, obtain guidance"). There is no true motivation clause in such statements (see also Prov 17:14; 20:19; 24:27, 29).

3 A form similar to the allegory, the fable, is frequent in Near East wisdom but not found in the Old Testament. Therefore I do not discuss it here.

4 Crenshaw 1974:255-560. I do not wish to intimate that these are not historical. "Imagined speech" is a formal category not a historical judgment.

5 Note that the believer is commanded to "submit" both to government (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 4:13- 17) and parents (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20). The principle is the same.

6 Kaiser (1979:passim; 1981:73) argues that the refrain "Eat, drink, and find enjoyment in your work, for this is the gift of God" (Eccles 2:24-25; 5:18-20; 8:15) marks the four sections of Ecclesiastes and embodies a basically positive outlook on life. However, it is debatable whether these indeed demarcate the four sections of the book, and while there are positive glimpses (note also God's omnipotence in Eccles 3:14 and the necessity of fearing God in Eccles 8:12) it

seems more likely that much of the book intends to show the complete futility of a life centered only on the things of this life.

7 While many have argued that the epilogue is secondary (Sheppard; Gordis 1968:349-50) due to the third-person style, which does not occur elsewhere in the book, most of the terms are found elsewhere in the book and the switch in style could easily be calculated to draw attention to the importance of the concluding section.

8 For the strongest arguments for a developed system from a wisdom perspective, see Hermisson 1968:97-136, and from a general perspective, see Riesner 1984:123-99.

9 See Sheppard 1988:1077. Blenkinsopp (1983:11-14) posits a series of scribal schools built on the Egyptian mode to educate the elite in Israelite society. While such is certainly possible, there is insufficient evidence to support the likelihood of such an enterprise. Thompson (1986:243, 245) posits that children may have been taught to read, though not in formal schools but through the family (or private homes) and in some cases in scribal academies. For instance, Isaiah 10:19 speaks of trees as being “so few that a child could write them down” and Isaiah 28:9-10 may draw an analogy from children writing the alphabet. However, these are elusive and do not demand a very high degree of literacy in Israel.

Chapter 10: Prophecy

1 Yet this too has become a source of vigorous debate. Michael Fishbane (1985:435-40) examines the prophetic interpretation of the Torah and concludes that direct authority lies not in the prophetic oracle but in the legal "tradition" of Moses behind it. Since the prophets contextualized the thrust of the "authoritative text" (the Mosaic and Deuteronomic traditions), the prophets, according to Fishbane, developed on "aggadic exegesis," a tradition that reflected on the theological implications of the received tradition and applied them to new contexts and situations. However, the two (direct revelatory inspiration and aggadic exegesis of the Torah) are not mutually exclusive. The prophets called the people back to Torah and covenant. As such the prophetic exegesis of the sacred texts is indeed aggadic, but the theological contextualization they utilized came directly from God.

2 Lindblom 1962:69-70; Sawyer (1987:18-19) posits prophetic guilds on the basis of Near Eastern parallels (such as the 450 prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18).

3 Clements (1975:88) doubts that any such role of "covenant mediator" or "law speaker" can be substantiated. However, this is largely due to his acceptance of redaction-critical conclusions regarding the secondary nature of the covenant passages discussed later in this book. I find a certain circular reasoning in the whole process. For instance, Clements (1975:43-45) accepts H. W. Wolff's conclusion that Deuteronomic redactors added the covenant emphases in Hosea and Amos. At the same time Clements believes Hosea played a formative role in the development of the Deuteronomic tradition itself. Yet if Hosea himself developed the emphases there is no need to posit a lengthy redactional process behind the book. I concur with Craigie's criticisms (1986:140-43) regarding the basic theory of Deuteronomic redactors in the prophetic period.

4 Contra Tucker (1985:339), who speaks for several (Wolff, Warmouth) when he

says “the prophets functioned primarily to announce the future as the word of God; they were not first of all preachers of repentance.”

5 It is unfortunate that Tan (1974:201-2) calls Mickelsen “non-literal” and hints that he denies any historical link. I would call myself a “literalist” but would argue that Mickelsen’s cautions in fact are similar to Tan’s, who agrees that prophecy should not be allowed to exceed “the limits of what present history can attest” (p. 206) and that it should never be used to set dates or to spiritualize the text (pp. 208-9).

6 See the list in Kuenen 1969:98-275 and the shorter discussion in Crenshaw 1971:51-52. Crenshaw (pp. 14-15) builds on Johannes Hempel’s influential essay (1930:631-60), which viewed unfulfilled prophecy as causing a crisis of faith when some failed to come to pass. This led the prophets to adapt their message to new situations, exemplified especially in “Deutero-Isaiah’s” reworking of the Cyrus prophecy (Is 44:28; 45:1) into the servant songs when Cyrus refused to recognize Yahweh as the basis of his victory over the Babylonians. This and similar theses, however, are unnecessary and speculative. There is simply no textual evidence for such a transformation. There was a “crisis of faith,” but it was caused by the growing apostasy of the nation and the signs of divine punishment that accompanied it.

7 For a fairly complete list of formulas and passages in which they are found, see Mickelsen 1963:81-84.

8 In fact, John Sawyer considers both types under the general category of “oracle” and specifically “messenger speech” (1987:25-29).

Chapter 11: Apocalyptic

1 Aune (1986:86-87) proposes three aspects: form, content and function. All of these, however, relate more to genre or formal features.

2 For instance, Sanders posits an “essentialist” definition that attempts to find the “most striking point of Jewish apocalypses,” which he argues is the “revelation which promises reversal and restoration” (1983:456-58). The other elements, such as transcendence or pseudonymity, Sanders finds predominant in other types of literature as well. However, the promise of restoration is also a revelatory feature of prophetic writing. Again, there is no pure genre and the identification of apocalyptic is dependent on an accumulation of characteristics rather than on traits peculiar to this genre alone.

3 For instance, I disagree with Morris (1972:35-36) that the prophet had the sense of “standing in the council of God” (Jer 23:18) while the apocalyptist did not. In many visions the apocalyptic writer is in the very presence of God (such as the throne vision of Rev 4—5, and the perspective in this sense does not differ appreciably from that of the prophet.

4 John Collins makes this category the basis of his breakdown of apocalyptic works into two types: those that include an otherworldly journey and those that do not (1979:12-13). Collins places three subtypes under each major category: those with a review of history and an eschatological crisis, those without such a review but still predicting a public triumph of God, and those with an emphasis on a personal rather than corporate deliverance.

5 H. H. Rowley goes so far as to state that Daniel established the pattern for pseudonymity in apocalyptic works (1963:40-42). However, others dispute this. On behalf of the traditional view of the authorship and date of Daniel, see

Roland Harrison 1969:1110-27.

6 Russell 1964:132-39; R. H. Charles believes that this was due to the close of the canon (1913:38-46).

7 An interesting counter view is that of Stephen Cook who posits that in the case of Daniel, Ezekiel and Joel the postexilic apocalyptic movement occurred within groups in power in order to call the people to rally around the central leadership (1995:55-84). This is viable, but it was still a time of crisis (as Cook admits) and so on the whole the theory still stands.

8 Sanders 1983:456; Sanders lists passages where themes of reversal and restoration are found: Daniel 7-12; 1 Enoch 83-90; 91-104; Jubilees 23; 4 Ezra 11-12 and so on (pp. 456-57).

9 See Russell 1964:308-23. The idea of a two-Messiah doctrine is debated. Rowland accepts it (1982:263), but A. J. B. Higgins doubts that such a belief was held (1966-1967:211-39). A balanced perspective can be found in Longenecker 1970:63-66, who says that early in the life of Qumran such a view was held but that by the first century the lay Messiah became the sole repositor of the Messianic office.

10 For the superiority of Domitian's reign over that of Nero, see Osborne 2002:6-9.

11 Hanson's larger thesis is more questionable. He argues that there is a development from "Second Isaiah" (chaps. 40-55) to "Third Isaiah" (chaps. 56-66); in the latter work a group of visionaries struggling with the priestly party for religious revival surrender all hope in present historical processes and turn to a cosmic vision of direct divine intervention in the future. However, the exegetical evidence for such a hypothesis is not strong, and I fail to see such major changes in the text.

Chapter 12: Parable

1 Again the goal is to discover the intended meaning of the text, that is, those details that the *author* allegorized rather than the desired meaning of the reader (see further apps. 1-2 on this).

2 Dan Via points out how easily we can allegorize even when denying allegory, using Ernst Fuchs as an example (1967:19-21).

3 Marshall 1978, Fitzmyer 1983 (on Luke), and France 2002 (on Mark) believe that the birds refer to Gentiles coming into the church, on the basis of Jewish parallels where birds refer to Gentile proselytes. Blomberg points to the possibility that Ezekiel 17:23 (in which the birds [the peoples of the earth] rest in the branches of the cedar of Lebanon) is behind the imagery (1990:285). However, he cautiously states that there is no proof from context that Jesus intended such an allusion. Yet in the next section (Mk 5:1-20) Jesus deliberately goes to a Gentile region and casts demons from the Gadarene demoniac. Thus in Mark as well as Luke there is an aspect of the Gentile mission in the context.

4 Jan Lambrecht detects a three-stage process: (1) The future is made visible and a new authentic existence is offered. (2) The hearer must reverse his direction and break with the past. (3) A far-reaching decision must be made in the present, involving a total commitment to the new reality (1981:16-17). This is the power of the parable.

5 The question as to whether the parable refers to the nations' treatment of the disciples or to the disciples' treatment of others is not endemic to my point. The parable itself would favor the first; the context of Matthew 24-25, the second. Most scholars opt for the former (see France 2000:189-93; Blomberg 2004:205-15).

6 The double invitation is a common oriental practice, consisting of the sending of an invitation then of servants to fetch the guests. Interestingly, Matthew in his version (22:1-10) does not stress the double invitation but includes a double refusal. Luke adds a further double invitation to the surprise guests. Clearly Matthew stresses Jewish guilt and Luke divine benevolence. As Pheme Perkins says, Matthew highlights refusal, anger and judgment, Luke the offer of salvation (1981:95-96).

7 Although many believe that the audience and historical settings of the parables in the Gospels are the work of the Evangelists, I do not believe such is necessary (see Blomberg 1990). Snodgrass (2004:189-90) says, “What is obvious in the works surveyed is that the more one cuts the parables from their contexts in the Gospels, in the life of Jesus, and the theology of Israel, the more one promotes subjectivity and lack of control in interpretation. The theology of the evangelists has been removed, but the ideology or the sociology of the interpreter has been introduced. Scholars have read their own agenda into the parables as frequently as did the patristic church.”

8 For the historicity of the two settings see Carson 1984:123-26; Marshall 1978:243-45. I believe that Jesus used the same parable form (each given 10-5-1 with the last hiding his money) in these two situations and that each Evangelist chose that which best fit his needs.

9 However, Ken Bailey’s attempts to find complicated chiastic structure in nearly all of Luke’s parables greatly exceeds the limits of likelihood.

10 Stein 1981:80. However, Sidney Greidanus adds an important critical cautionary note that the modern retelling can actually detract from the meaning of the text and draw attention only to the creative (and highly entertaining) re-creation (1988:226). It is usually easier (and hermeneutically better) to retell the original story, using background information to unlock misunderstood aspects.

11 Tolbert 1979:83-89. Blomberg clusters the parables into “simple three-point

parables," "complex three-point parables," "two-point and one-point parables" (1990).

12 Contra Robert Guelich, who characterizes a growing number who state that the internal structure of the parable centers on the seed rather than on the soil and that only the later interpretation (vv. 14-20) centers on the soil (1989:196-97). I would argue that the debate is disjunctive and we have a both-and situation, that is, both seed and soil are central, though in the parable itself and its interpretation, the soils are at center stage.

13 Some have tried to solve this by arguing it is a historical story, since it is the only "parable" naming a character. However, it begins exactly like the previous parable of Lk 16:1-8, "There was a rich man who," and Lazarus is named rather than the rich man because a name gives a person significance (in contrast the rich man has no name and thus no significance!), and *Lazarus* means "God helps," a major theme of the parable (see Bock 1996:1365-66).

Chapter 13: Epistle

1 One such is the whole question of normative vs. cultural commands, an issue discussed in chap. 17; Fee and Stuart devote a second chapter on the Epistles to this topic.

2 See Doty 1966:411-51; White 1982:5-12; Knutson 1982:15-22; Fitzmyer 1982:25-40; Dion 1982:59-71, 77-84; Pardee 1978:321-44.

3 See Deissmann 1909:146-232; Roller 1933; Doty 1966:51-62; 1973; White 1982:89-104; Blaiklock 1979:545-52; Longenecker 1983:101-2.

4 Martin (1977:233-34) follows Sanders (1962:348-52) in asserting that Paul was following the patterns of the Qumran hymns and Jewish liturgical prayers. Thus his prayers are not spontaneous but were carefully crafted for the church.

5 David Aune notes that the term *sermon* or *homily* is inaccurate to describe the literary genre of such epistles as Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 1 Clement or the Epistle of Barnabas (1987:197- 204). He traces those Hellenistic features (forensic, deliberative and epideictic [praise and blame], diatribe) and Jewish types (synagogue homily) behind the Epistles.

6 The passage on the Jerusalem decree in Acts 15:19-29, asking the Gentile Christians to respect the religious sensibilities of their Jewish brethren, does apply to this. However, 1 Corinthians 8-10 does not.

7 I do not wish to specify which are and which are not allowable. Each believer must prayerfully decide that alone.

Chapter 14: Old Testament in the New Testament

1 There is difficulty in identifying criteria for distinguishing quotes from allusions. Richard B. Hays (1989) calls for three categories: quotations, allusions and echoes. Yet Stanley E. Porter (1997:80-83) shows how difficult it is to define these terms properly and to develop criteria for identifying them. We will consider a *quotation* to be a near verbatim rendering of a passage, an *allusion* to be the use of several words or phrases, and an *echo* the use of a theme or a couple of terms from a passage. An echo can be conscious on the part of an author or not.

2 Kaiser 1985:2-3. In Revelation there are no formal quotes yet anywhere from 400-600 allusions.

3 Jobes and Silva 2000:46-56. They see five stages: an original translation; early recensions (Theodotian, proto-Lucian et al.); the revisions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian; Origen's recension (the fifth column in the Hexapla); and Lucian's recension.

4 Ibid., pp. 193-4. Pfeiffer (1962:511) estimates that 80 percent of the quotations stem from the Septuagint. This is too high but still shows the importance of the Septuagint for the early church.

5 D. M. Smith 1972:5. He goes on to say that this does not mean the early church adopted the Alexandrian canon.

6 This was mostly eighteenth-century scholars like J. E. Grabe and J. S. Semler (see Dunbar 1986:428).

7 Longenecker 1975:38-39.

8 Jeffrey S. Rogers (1989:28-43) finds eight types of activities in Qumran: they are conservators preserving an artifact, readers understanding written communication, revisers contributing to a living literary tradition, elaborators spinning a variation on a theme, liturgists enacting the drama of worship, codifiers developing rules for faith and practice, commentators gazing in a mirror on the present, and visionaries peering through a window at the future.

9 Stendahl 1968. He especially saw similarities with the Habakkuk scroll at Qumran.

10 Longenecker 1975:160-61; Yadin 1958:36-55; Hughes 1977:14.

11 Craig Evans (2004:132) lists as examples Mark 12:10-11 (use of Ps 118:22-23); Mark 14:27 (use of Zech 13:7); Acts 2:17-21 (use of Joel 2:28-32).

12 The term *appropriation techniques* is taken from Moo, who means by this the techniques by which Jews and Christians appropriated Old Testament texts for their new community situations (1983:25).

13 See Foulkes 1958:38-39; Moo 1983:31; Baker 1991:187-89.

14 In this section, I am again building on Moo 1983:34-51.

15 Steve Moyise (2000:14-15) shows the term was developed by Julia Kristeva in 1969 and first used in biblical studies in 1989 in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings,* ed. S. Draisma; and in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* by Richard B. Hays.

16 Moyise restricts it to “intertextual echoes” for some reason, but it functions the same for quotations and allusions as well (2000:17). I will use it for all three

types of Old Testament uses in the New.

17 Enns 2005:132-34. He says there, “It would take a tremendous amount of mental energy to argue that Matthew is respecting the historical context of Hosea’s words, that is, that there actually is something predictive in Hosea 11.”

18 For a good example of this see Gathercole 2004:126-45, who traces Lev 18:5 through Second Temple Jewish writings (Philo, *Prem. Studies* 86-87, Bar 4:1, Let Aris 127; Pss Sol 14; 1QS 4; CD 3:14-16; Tg Ezek 20:11, 13, 21; 4 Ezra 7:21; m. Mak. 3:15) and the New Testament (Lk 10:25-37; Mk 10:17-22; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12) to show the error of the New Perspective in denying that Judaism believed eternal life was dependent on observing Torah.

19 Ellis 1991:110; cf. 110-16. Longenecker (1975:93-95) brings together the four aspects of typology—corporate solidarity, correspondence in history, eschatological fulfillment and messianic presence.

20 Stendahl 1968:183-202. Longenecker (1975:142-43) also sees a pesher style of exegesis in Matthew.

21 So Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, lvi-lvii. G. M. Soares-Prabhu (1976:104) calls them “free Targumic translations made from the original Hebrew by Matthew, in view of the context into which he has inserted them.”

22 See Evans 2004:140-41. See also Carson 1988:248-49.

23 In Genesis 1:1 Evans (2004:141) sees a connection with *Tg. Neof.* Gen 1:1, “From the beginning with wisdom the Word *[memra]* of the Lord perfected the heavens and the earth,” with the Word as the divine intermediary.

24 Carson 1988:249, building on Moo1983:233 n4.

25 Fitzmyer 1998:90-91. Hans Hübner (1992:1101) considers only whole quotations and says there are “slightly more than twenty.” Longenecker (1975:86-87) lists twenty-seven, all but two in the sermons of the first fifteen chapters (eight with Peter, nine with Stephen, one with Philip, one with James, seven with Paul).

26 Barrett (1988:238-39) lists under “preaching” Acts 2:17-21, 25-28, 34-35; 3:22-23, 25; 7:3, 5, 18, 27-28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 40; 8:32, 33; 13:22, 33, 34, 35, 41. He adds that Acts 4:25, 26 could be listed under “prayer” or “preaching.”

27 I. H. Marshall (1970) calls this the major theme of Luke-Acts.

28 Bock 1997:825. The formative article on this was Bowker 1967:96-111.

29 Silva 1993:631. This list includes the disputed epistles.

30 Stanley (1989:19), building on his *Paul and the Language of Scripture* (1992:252-64). He argues that in the ancient world scribes were expected to be commentators and not just copiers, so such adaptation was part of the social environment.

31 Longenecker 1975:115-26. See also Cohn-Sherbock 1982:117-32.

32 The first number is from Lane 1991:cxvi; the second number from G. H. Guthrie 1997:842.

33 Longenecker 1975:167; also Guthrie, “Old Testament in Hebrews,” p. 842. Lane (1991:cxvi) says the Pentateuch has 12 quotations/10 allusions, and the Psalms have 17 quotes/16 allusions. Obviously the definition of quote and allusion differs considerably between Longenecker and Lane (a common problem!).

34 Lane 1991:cxviii.

35 See Sowers 1965; and R. Williamson 1970. Sowers accepts the Alexandrian hypothesis; Williamson argues against it. Hanson (1988:292-95) concludes, “as far as exegesis of Scripture is concerned Philo and our author have very little in common.”

36 Yadin 1958:36-55; C. Spicq 1952-1953; Longenecker 1975:160-61.

37 See esp. Hurst 1990; Evans 2004:144.

38 Much of this section comes from my “Recent Trends in the Study of the Apocalypse” (2004:491-95). Kistemaker 2001:17 lists fourteen partial quotes—Rev 1:7; 2:27; 4:8; 6:16; 7:16, 17; 11:11; 14:5; 15:3a, 3b, 4; 19:15; 20:9; 21:4, 7. Regarding allusions, Beale (1998:77 n.16) points out that UBS has 394; NA, 635; Kilpatrick, 493; Swete, 278; and Charles 226. The great difference in number is due to the difficulty in determining partial quotations, allusions, echoes and the number of passages to include in the echoes.

39 See Beale (1998:5-59) for extensive review of the seven major monographs by himself on Daniel in Revelation, J. M. Vogelgesang and J.-P. Ruiz on Ezekiel in the book, J. Fekkes on Isaiah in the book, R. J. Bauckham in *Climax of the Covenant*, and Moyise on the book as a whole.

40 Beale 1999:79-80, from L. A. Vos 1965:37-40.

41 Moyise 1994:110-11. In his “The Old Testament in the New: A Response to Greg Beale” (1999:54-58), he says the New Testament does give new meanings to the Old Testament by taking the passages out of context. Meaning is not just in the author but also in the reader.

42 See Beale (1999:84-85) where he interacts with several considered noncontextual uses and shows that they indeed are faithful to their original

context (Ezek 43:2 in Rev 1:15; Ezek 37:3 in Rev 7:14; Ezek 37:10b in Rev 11:11; Is 22:22 in Rev 3:7), arguing for changes of application but not disregard for original context.

43 This combines material from Beale 1998:60-128; 1999:86-96; and Fekkes 1994:70-101.

Chapter 15: Biblical Theology

1 Turner and Green (2000:8-9) give seven factors for the renewed interest in the discipline: (1) the collapse of modernity's "objectivity," removing the dichotomy between the facts of exegesis and beliefs/theology; (2) the critical-realist realization that theological study no longer threatens academic integrity, even in the academy; (3) realizing that the great amount of time spent on such short works as the Epistles can only be justified if the study is related to contemporary issues and truth claims; (4) the subject matter of the Bible is theological and so invites theological reflection; (5) the biblical books were read canonically from the start and so the assumption has always been on the basic unity of the Bible as a whole; (6) throughout history Bible reading has always occurred in dialogue with theology; (7) the reader-response movement has opened the way to a plurality of readings in the interest of the reader's theological perspective. Some of the factors (nos. 1 and 7) are postmodern in perspective, but these provide a valid set of arguments for a biblical theology.

2 In a sense we have come full circle. Under modernism the proponents of historical criticism rejected the viability of theological reflection, and now under postmodernism the proponents of a confessional, polyvalent approach are rejecting the viability of historical reflection. The argument of this chapter is that the two are interdependent and must work together in a true biblical theology.

3 Contra D. A. Carson, who argues that the process of unifying themes belongs within the realm of systematic theology and thus biblical theology is primarily a descriptive discipline (1983:69- 70). As I will argue, the task of collating themes properly belongs under biblical theology, which seeks not only the theology of a book but also the theology of Israel and of the early church.

4 Gaffin 1976:44-45, following John Murray. The tendency to exaggerate differences between biblical writers must be controlled by a more holistic

consideration of the biblical material. Guthrie argues similarly that intertextual considerations demand that the Bible be treated as more than merely another human work (1981:34-36). [5]This builds on the fourfold scheme of Geerhardus Vos, who follows the classical division of exegetical theology, historical theology, systematic theology and practical theology (1948:12- 13). He believes that exegesis and biblical theology belong to the same division, but I believe that they are sufficiently distinct to warrant assigning them a separate place in the process of interpretation.

6 I disagree with those who, like Paul Achtemeier, extend inspiration to later interpretive communities as well as to the biblical authors. In no sense could competing theologies be said to be "inspired" of God in a canonical sense. This of course is the classical debate between Roman Catholic and Protestant ideas regarding the "magisterium" or authority of the church to establish dogma. I would use the term *illumination* (see 1980:540-41) for the dogma of the church, for it is a human approximation that attempts to collate and logically summarize scriptural truth for the believing community rather than to establish new canonical authority.

7 In this sense Horton (2005:294) notes four dangers in a historical-theological approach: (1) "golden-age thinking" that occurs when a movement selects one period or hero to emulate and makes that the entire source of their theological perspective, (2) a "timeless view of church dogmas," in which one fails to recognize that the models drawn from the past were the product of particular social and cultural factors and treats them as God-given truths, (3) "Biblicism," in which the interpreter identifies their particular understanding with Scripture itself and adopts a "thus sayeth the Lord" stance, (4) "speculative tendencies," in which the tradition or logic of the interpreter is the origin of the belief rather than Scripture.

8 Bernhard Anderson assigns just this role to the commentary, stating that one should approach the text first and then use the commentary to gain an appreciation for the history of the interpretation of the text (1982:342-47). This will aid contemporary interpretation and application. Yet while this is true in theory, very few commentaries provide such a historical perspective (an excellent exception is Philip Hughes's commentary on Hebrews).

9 On the basis of the Roman Catholic dialogue on tradition and exegesis, Joseph Blenkinsopp says that the exegete must “make his way between the Scylla of philology and semantics and the Charybdis of an (unconsciously) autonomous biblical theology. It is his job to provide his colleague with the material necessary for his synthesis” (1964:84).

10 Richard Gaffin argues that biblical theology, by focusing on God’s revelation in history, forces systematic theology to be true to the process of revelation and thereby to the intended (historical) meaning of the text itself (1976:42-50). In this way biblical theology regulates the results of exegesis and controls the subjective tendencies of dogmatics.

11 As Hughes remarks, Guthrie “is writing something more like a systematic theology of the New Testament than anything else. . . . Certainly the themes with which dogmatics and New Testament theology deal are similar, but this does not mean a New Testament theology has to be *structured* thematically. . . . By ignoring individual theologies in the New Testament, there is a sense in which some of the theological message has slipped through the cracks in Guthrie’s topical grid” (1982:112-13).

12 C. K. Barrett correctly notes that biblical theology “may be characterized by the word process,” systematics “by the word result” (1981:5). Systematic theology is that discipline which “involves the relation between unchanging biblical truth and varying philosophical modes.”

13 Marvin Tate goes a step further and considers “biblical preaching” to be a path *toward* a proper biblical theology, since of necessity preaching demands a new appreciation for the whole of Scripture (1981:179-80). He especially lauds Childs’s attempt to provide a canonical method for doing this.

14 Walter Bauer produced the classical work on diversity, arguing that what is called heresy in the New Testament was actually considered orthodox originally but lost out to the stream of tradition developed by Paul and his followers. The

modern work with the greatest impact is Dunn 1977, who accepts Bauer's thesis that "there was no 'pure' form of Christianity that existed in the beginning which can properly be called 'orthodox' . . . [but] only different forms of Christianity competing for the loyalty of believers" (p. 3). After tracing the myriad of competing theories regarding the different communities of the New Testament period, Dunn concludes that the only unifying strand was the continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith (pp. 369-72). It is indeed strange that the single source of unity is an issue that has arisen only in the last century!

15 David Aune states that the New Testament has a variety of viewpoints but no outright contradiction (1973:10-15). When we recognize the analogical nature of biblical language, we can recognize themes behind the diverse expressions.

16 Dunn 1982:18-21 and Sanders 1972:17-20. Paul Achtemeier makes tradition one of three key components (tradition, situation, respondent) that interrelate to form the locus of inspiration, stating that "the traditions are the building materials out of which the community continues to construct itself and to shape its present and its future" (1980:126; see pp. 124-26). In each renewed situation divine inspiration was present and so theology must remain cognizant of the whole process as well as of the final form of the text.

17 Gese 1981:15-25. Gese sees the center point of biblical theology in each renewed situation that divine inspiration was present, and so theology must remain cognizant of the whole process as well as of the final form of the text to be the process of divine revelation centering on Sinai (Old Testament) and Zion (New Testament).

18 See Hasel 1982:66-67; Hayes and Prussner 1985:244, 262; Reventlow 1986:150-54.

19 James Sanders 1980:187-91. See also *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 16 (1980), which is devoted to Childs's canon criticism.

20 For other examples of canonical criticism, see Outler (1980:263-76), who

applies it to the New Testament, and Brueggemann (1982:1-13), who uses it as a "model" for a similar traditioning process in church education.

21 For an attempt to blend Childs' canonical approach with an evangelical hermeneutic, see Charles Scalise (1994), although he unfortunately "corrects" Childs via Gadamer and Ricoeur rather than via an evangelical hermeneutical framework.

22 See also Childs 1977:80-93. For a helpful critique of Childs along the lines proposed here, see McKnight 1987:23-24.

23 Dunn 1982. See also Dunn 1977:374-78, where he argues that the very diversity that is "canonized" in Scripture allows this to occur. I agree with Dunn that this approach to doctrine is normal in theological circles but disagree that it is appropriate. Indeed this whole chapter is intended to demonstrate the hermeneutical necessity of doing biblical theology from the whole of (a united) Scripture rather than from the perspective of a "canon within the canon."

24 Carson 1983:91. He states, "Can we safeguard our exegesis from an untoward usage of systematic theology? The answer, I fear is, 'not entirely.' "

25 Ebeling 1955:212-14. Dan Fuller argues similarly that for the Reformers dogmatic "keys" from their "faith" formed the basic hermeneutic, and Reformation theology reverted "to a scholasticism not unlike the medieval sort" (1978:200).

26 Barr 1974:282. Barrett uses the New Testament as a model for this crisis in authority, stating that the false claims of conservatives parallel the legalistic authority of the law that Paul countered with his doctrine of grace (1981:16). For Barrett biblical authority cannot be linked to rigid, unchallengeable ecclesiastical utterances or to a "formulated set of dogmatic propositions." Rather, it is creative, not dependent on a static doctrine of inspiration but on its "apostolic effectiveness" in accomplishing its task.

27 Nineham 1976:257-71. Douglas Knight takes a tradition-critical approach, querying whether authority rests on the literature or on the community that shaped it and invested it with authority (1980:140-41). Social, political and economic factors gave rise to the religious aura that produced a sense of canon and therefore are a critical aspect of the text's authority.

28 See Marshall 1970; Martin 1972; Smalley 1978; and France 1989 on history and theology in Luke, Mark, John and Matthew respectively. See also Meyer 1979, Gruenler 1982 and Osborne 2003 on the larger issue of detecting history in the Gospels. Graham Stanton asserts that the Gospels were biographies to the same degree as were other ancient works (1972:191-204). The lack of interest in chronology, the scarcity of historical background and the failure to provide a personal portrait were common to all ancient historians. In fact, there is more interest in these aspects in the Gospels than in comparable Jewish writings of that period.

29 See the brilliant essay by Alvin Plantinga (2003:19-57), in which he shows the failure of historical-biblical criticism: "We do not have anything like assured results (or even well-attested results) that conflict with traditional Christian belief in such a way that belief of that sort can continue to be accepted only at critical cost; nothing like this has happened" (pp. 56-57).

30 Hermann 1981:142, 150-52. Wolfhart Pannenberg (1968:125-33) presents the strongest case for the centrality of history for revelation. By defining history as "the totality of reality," Pannenberg argues that it must be open to transcendence. In this he is correct, for the divine element must always be a possible part of history if history details the experiences of human beings. Nevertheless, I prefer to label the concept "revelation *in* history" rather than to accept Pannenberg's overly rational "revelation *as* history."

31 Bultmann 1963:50-75 and Baumgärtel 1963:134-59, who adds that the Old Testament has been abolished in Christ since its promise has been realized.

32 For further discussion, see Hasel 1978:186-96; Fujita 1981:107-8; and Carson 2000:97-98. Walther Zimmerli similarly points out, "The fundamental faith of

the Christian community necessitates a thoughtful correlation of individual biblical statements in view of the whole because it contends that the two testaments do not witness to two different gods, but to one single Lord" (1982:95).

33 See Baker 1976, an excellent work that explicates this relationship in depth.

34 For an excellent example of this, see Marshall (1969), who examines the doctrine of perseverance as it develops through all the strata of the Bible, thereby allowing the doctrine to emerge along lines of the progress of revelation.

Chapter 16: Systematic Theology

1 Wells (1991:175-78) says contemporary theology has reduced the factor to two —Scripture and experience, because reason has disappeared due to the effects of Kant and Freud, while tradition /community was replaced by the centrality of the Spirit speaking directly to the people. However, neither argument is convincing, for reason helps to organize the doctrines, and tradition is not magisterial but provides a guide to understanding the interrelationships in dogma.

2 Of course this hardly means that one should not appeal to Scripture in developing or "proving" a theological position. Rather, the resultant theological stance should take account of *all* the relevant texts, those which are used by the opposing side as well as those which support your own position.

3 See Gordon Kaufmann (1991:397-415) and his *The Theological Imagination* (1981) for an elaboration of these themes.

4 Farley and Hodgson 1985:72-80. Here they closely follow Kelsey (1975), who presents a functional model of biblical authority, that Scripture is used by God to transform human existence and to guide the community.

5 See Tracy 1981:99-135, where he defines a theologian as "the interpreter of religious classics" (p. 130). While the Bible is the archetypal Christian "classic" (by which he means a literary work that transcends its own environment to transform existence in every culture and setting), the theologian works with the classics of every age in constructing a relevant modern theology.

6 McGrath (2000a:141-42) gives two reasons for being suspicious of tradition: (1) it is a human construct as opposed to the Word of God, and Catholicism has

given it a weight equal to the Word of God; (2) it too easily becomes "traditionalism," locking us into the past way of thinking and doing things. Yet neither need be a part of a proper paradigm for tradition in theology.

7 Tradition critics like Achtemeier (1980) and others apply this same criterion to Scripture. However, the traditions behind Scripture dealt with revelatory events and were much more closely linked to the originating events than were the ecclesial traditions of the third and fourth centuries.

8 This hardly means that a technical knowledge of tradition is necessary, as if only a Ph.D. scholar can do theology. Instead I am saying that everyone consciously or unconsciously is part of an ongoing tradition and interprets Scripture from that inherited perspective. As Gadamer has pointed out, theological reflection is by nature a historical act. Churches need to do a better job of teaching their tradition to their members and helping their members separate the authority of Scripture from that of tradition.

9 We must distinguish the role of the community or context in determining the meaning of Scripture from its role in shaping the very questions asked in theological reasoning. Theoretically, only Scripture should determine theological truth, but all too often not only the agenda but the results are determined by community needs. The former (question shaping) is valid but the latter (theology determining) is dangerous.

10 For the best application of reader-response theory to theological construction I have found, see Jeanrond 1988:104-28.

11 Tracy 1981:339-64. In one sense Tracy's discussion of the "situation" belongs under the rubric of "community." However, I include it here because Tracy is discussing the effect of context on religious experience.

12 See Holmes 1968:131-38; Montgomery 1970:276-79; Feinberg 1979:267-304.

13 Paul Feinberg (unpublished material) gives six reasons for taking abduction as the most appropriate method for theological decision making: (1) it more accurately describes how theologians do in fact practice their craft; (2) it retains the best aspects of both inductive and deductive reasoning; (3) it provides a broader evidential base for verifying a dogmatic formulation; (4) it strengthens the staying power of theological assertions by pointing out anomalies that need further study; (5) it maintains the distinction between biblical teaching and interpretations of it, thus producing humility in the theologian; and (6) it leaves open the possibility of better formulations of doctrine, thereby leading to a continual process of contextualization rather than the naive assumption that one's formulation is inerrant.

Regarding fig. 16.1, Montgomery (1970:274) borrows this model from L. K. Nash, *The Nature* of *the Natural Sciences* (1963), to illustrate how knowledge is "generated by endless cyclical renewal."

14 This hardly means that these are the *only* components in theological construction. Truth in any field is relevant for doing theology. Most of the disciplines (such as psychology for the doctrine of man or sociology for a theology on society and the world) are valid for constructing particular theological models. However, these five are the components classically noted.

15 For instance, Barr says, "There is no 'the Bible' that 'claims' to be divinely inspired, there is no 'it' that has a view of itself. There is only this or that source, like 2 Timothy or 2 Peter which makes statements about certain other writings, these rather undefined" (1977:78).

16 Among many others, see Grudem 1983:19-59; Ferguson 1988:47-66; and Marshall 1982:19-30.

17 See, for instance, Marshall 1982; Carson and Woodbridge 1983 and 1986 as well as the many works on the issue of inerrancy. Gabriel Fackre states that the issue is so important that rather than discuss revelation in volume two (his original intention) he plans to devote the entire third volume to that topic (1987:347).

18 Soskice 1985:43-51. For instance, the aspects of a “bear” that relate to the man in the sentence “The man is a bear” will differ depending on whether the context is that of a wrestler or a Wall Street broker. The whole utterance controls the metaphor’s meaning, not simply the interaction between subject and metaphor.

19 McFague 1982:37-41. Following Black and Ricoeur she uses the example “war is a chess game” to demonstrate the world-changing yet reality-depicting value of metaphor. The dissimilarity between war and chess leads the reader to a new understanding of war. Both concepts are altered by their interaction, and new meaning results.

20 See Gerald Casenave, who argues that metaphor in this way becomes an indispensable part of “language as disclosure” (1979:21-24).

21 One voice of opposition is John Searle, who says that when using metaphors a speaker means something different than what he says (due to the semantic opposition established in the metaphor) and so the true meaning must be explicated in literal terms to be understood (1979:81- 82). Therefore, three situations are necessary for communication via metaphors (p. 112): shared strategies so the hearer can recognize that the utterance is not intended literally, shared principles so the hearer can understand the possible uses of the metaphor, and shared knowledge to enable the speaker and hearer to communicate the actual use of the metaphor in the particular speech act.

22 See also Miall 1982:xiii, xviii; Moore 1982:3-6; Tourangeau 1982:24-27.

23 Binkley 1981:149. See also Soskice 1985:83-96. Binkley finds three distinctions between literal and metaphorical language: (1) The ability of a sentence to be understood does not depend on literal vs. metaphorical distinctions. (2) Metaphor is a poetic device but not exclusively so, since it is also employed in propositional statements. The terms *literal* and *metaphorical* refer to the *way* sentences mean not *whether* they mean. (3) One should not confuse the meaning of a metaphor with the explication of its meaning. Metaphorical language imparts information in its own right and is

understandable *as* metaphor.

24 See Gunton 1989:34-36. He argues further (pp. 37-38) that metaphor may well be a better device for communicating God and the world since both can be known best indirectly. As such metaphor takes its place in the referential process in helping us understand and address both the world around us and the presence of God in it.

25 McFague 1982:39-41. See also Roger Hazelton, who says that metaphorical statements about God are kept "as free and open as possible, rather than becoming locked into a particular theory" (1978:169). New images respond to and criticize each other and even replace one another when a better metaphor (more apt for a particular new situation) is created.

26 McFague 1982:41-42. The example she uses for this "metaphorical" rather than literal theological truth is substitutionary atonement, which she obviously sees as viable for one stage of Christianity but not for all.

27 Alston 1980:133-36, 145-48. He goes even further and says that metaphorical truth claims *must* be translated to be verifiable. For him literal predictability is necessary for knowledge acquisition in a meaningful sense.

28 John Feinberg goes in a different direction when he states that the very demarcation between metaphorical and literal language is misguided (1989:180-81). If metaphor is analogical then it is similar to literal communication, since an analogy is a literal link between two corresponding ideas. To say "God is love" goes beyond pure metaphor, for the assertion means that God is literally a loving God. Yet if one accepts the dynamic model of metaphor there is no need to find an analogical element. The metaphor communicates as metaphor and not as analogous to a literal statement. The metaphor on the incomprehensible divine love does not simply compare it to the finite human experience of love. God's love is in tension with and transcends the human experience, so the very meaning of *love* is transformed by being used to describe God. In other words, the phrase does not just express a literal truth (God loves) via human metaphor (our concept of love), it dynamically pictures a God who "loves" perfectly and

thus redefines the meaning of love as well as redescribes God. Yet it is not thereby a partial and incomplete image, for as a referential concept the metaphor is both binding and authoritative.

29 Since Romans 9 is a diatribe, it is indeed possible to argue that Paul is not describing the divine process of salvation but rather is utilizing the Old Testament metaphor of predestination metaphorically to stress God's sovereignty. At this point I have not studied Romans 9 sufficiently to state unequivocally that this is indeed the case, but my preliminary study suggests that it may be so.

30 McFague 1987:34. Previously she defined a model as "a dominant metaphor, a metaphor with staying power" (1982:23).

31 Soskice 1985:101-3. She notes two types of models: one in which the source and subject are identical (a model airplane), and one in which they differ (billiard balls utilized to model the properties of gases).

32 I disagree with those who say titular models become dead metaphors. *Yahweh* maintains its rich metaphorical meaning throughout the biblical period.

33 See Barbour 1974:34-38, for his excellent presentation of these approaches.

34 On the basis of his book I do not believe that van Huyssteen himself intended his statement to be interpreted this way.

35 Of course these models by necessity are general and representative rather than specific. Every step within each model is debated by scholars of that particular persuasion. I have attempted to reproduce areas of general consensus while recognizing that individuals may well differ at one point or another. In fact the very necessity of making this caveat is proof of the heuristic nature of theological models.

36 Most would say that the two (regeneration and belief) are simultaneous but that God's act of regeneration is logically the causative agent that produces belief. Therefore, in the diagram regeneration is placed before belief.

37 Note how the order is reversed from the Calvinist system.

38 Tracy 1981:130-32. See also Werner Jeanrond 1988:129-50 for a sympathetic redescription of Tracy's scheme.

39 See van Huyssteen 1989:47-67 and Vern Poythress 1988:39-63 for a positive assessment; and John Feinberg 1989:176-79 for a strongly cautionary assessment. See also my interaction in app. 2.

40 This means not only collecting all the passages that support one's position but also including (with equal weight) those utilized to support competing positions. Millard Erickson hypothesizes six levels of authority, each depending on the degree of certitude one can expect from the scriptural underpinning: (1) those derived from direct statements of Scripture, (2) those stemming from direct implications of Scripture, (3) those coming from probable implications of Scripture, (4) inductive conclusions from Scripture, (5) conclusions derived from general revelation, (6) outright speculations, often derived from biblical hints (1983:79-80). Of course, even at the top level Erickson warns that we must be "certain that we are dealing here with the teaching of Scripture, and not an interpretation imposed upon it." The problem is that we can never be absolutely certain, and so we must always be open to further clarification and arguments. Nevertheless, we can make probability decisions and these have great authority; we need never retreat to a full-blown relativism.

41 Obviously these percentages are based on my own estimation of the clarity of the biblical teaching on each issue as well as my assessment of the viability of my opponents' challenges. My colleagues undoubtedly would have quite different percentages depending on their own degree of sureness regarding these issues.

42 This hardly means that it is impossible to attain a high degree of probability or even certainty (for cardinal doctrines) regarding which theological systems or doctrines are correct or to demonstrate this to others. However, I am calling for a "hermeneutics of humility" that leads the competing communities to listen and learn from each other. We do not decide doctrinal truth on the basis of consensus or majority but rather on the basis of which position best coheres with the whole of scriptural teaching. For that we all need opposing schools to drive us away from our own "logical" systems and back to the biblical text.

43 For excellent discussions of the relationship of critical realism to theology, see Hiebert 1985a:5-10; van Huyssteen 1989:142-97; and especially N. T. Wright 1992.

44 For an excellent survey of the biblical and church historical data, see Tucker and Liefeld 1987.

45 A slightly different list was provided by Bernard Ramm (1973:152f, as in Vanhoozer 2000:68): (1) be students of Scripture; (2) understand the structure of evangelical theology and center on the major doctrines; (3) know the cultural climate and communicate the gospel clearly in it; (4) continually rethink the God-world relation; and (5) study linguistics, philosophy, and communication, from which the next theological movement will come.

46 One such attempt is Lewis and Demarest (1987), but their *Integrative Theology* is more innovative in method (moving from the theological problem to church history to the biblical data to other relevant doctrines and competing models and finally to current life situations addressed; see pp. 7-13) than in actual organization and construction. It is a step in the right direction, but not exactly what I am talking about.

47 Good examples are the current ongoing dialogues between covenant and dispensational scholars and between amillennial and premillennial proponents. All sides have changed their positions slightly as a result of these dialogues (e.g., the development of progressive dispensationalism).

Chapter 17: Homiletics I: Contextualization

1 Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:chap. 11. William Larkin relates three "roots" behind the crisis in biblical authority in nonevangelical missiology, following the World Council of Churches 1971 Louvain statement on "The Authority of the Bible": (1) Modern society's rebellion against authority mitigates against acceptance of Scripture as a standard, and this is compounded by the tendency to treat the Bible like any other book. (2) The contradictions within Scripture (according to the historical-critical method) make it difficult to choose which aspect is authoritative. (3) The historical and cultural distances between the ancient text and the modern context cause many to doubt whether the Bible has any relevance whatsoever for our day (1988:136).

2 See the excellent recent study of contextualization in the New Testament conducted by New Testament scholar and missiologist Dean Fleming (2005), who traces early church contextualization in Acts, Paul and his letters (esp. Corinthians and Colossians), the Gospels and Revelation (in order), concluding, "The gospel is a rich and compelling song capable of being sung in many variations and in different keys" as the writings "model for us a process of doing theology in context, of engaging their cultures and offering their audiences a fresh and fitting articulation of the good news" (p. 296).

3 See the discussion of this in René Padilla 1979:90-91. These are positive cultural elements that are "analogous" to the gospel and can become the means for contextualizing the gospel in that culture. Padilla clarifies this in "The Contextualization of the Gospel" (1978:12-30).

4 Eugene Nida and William Reyburn say it is "essential to distinguish" not only form from content but also between various levels of form (1981:6). "Form" includes transliteration, morphological structures, phrase structure, rhetorical devices, poetry, figurative language, discourse structure and literary genre. The

more optional (such as transliteration) can be changed easily. The more significant (such as genre) probably will not.

5 See also Olthuis 1987:11-52, where he develops a “hermeneutics of ultimacy,” arguing that “certitude” is found at the deep level of principial meaning rather than at the surface level of culture-bound symbols.

6 Kraft lists “the existence of God, human sinfulness, God’s willingness to relate to humans on certain conditions, the necessity of a human faithfulness response to God as preconditional to salvation” (1979:189). Details for Kraft become case studies that should be contextualized.

7 See also Padilla 1979:84-102. He places four elements within the circle: the interpreter’s historical situation, the interpreter’s world-and-life view, his theology, and Scripture. I would clarify this further by placing the first three under my category of “interpreter.” It is too easy in Padilla’s diagram (p. 99) for Scripture to be overwhelmed by the others. Instead, it must transform them; the true dynamic in the fusion process is provided by the text, which forces me out of my own situation in life.

8 In actuality there is a reversal of roles. The preacher/missionary is the receptor in the first step but the source in the second step. See Nida and Reyburn 1981:20 for more on this topic.

9 Larkin 1988:314-16. See also J. Robertson McQuilkin (1984:217-40), who provides the underpinning for Larkin’s thesis.

10 See p. 315 where he says that the two sides describe “the same application process but with different ernphases.”

11 See also Alan Johnson’s critique of McQuilkin (1984:255-82), for further detailed argumentation along these lines.

12 McQuilkin 1980 and 1984:230-40, 113-24; Larkin 1988:118-25, 314-15. McQuilkin develops seven criteria for detecting a scripturally limited command: (1) if the context of the passage limits the application (such as celibacy in 1 Cor 7:8), (2) if subsequent revelation limits it (as in such Old Testament laws as divorce, food laws and the sacrificial system), (3) if the teaching conflicts with other biblical passages, which limits both to their proper sphere (such as the Nazirite vow [Num 6:5] vs. the necessity of short hair on males [1 Cor 11:14]), (4) if the basis for the teaching is explicit and is treated as normative (such as woman's silence in 1 Cor 14:34), (5) if the specific teaching and the principle behind it are normative (such as sexual sins like homosexuality or adultery), (6) if the Bible treats the historical context as normative (such as the Logia Jesu), (7) if the Bible treats the cultural context as limited.

13 See Alan Johnson's critique of McQuilkin (1984:255-82).

14 See Harvie Conn's more responsible statement: "A belief in the validity of other cultures does not obligate one to approve of such practices as cannibalism, widow burning, infanticide, premarital sex, polygamy, and the like. But it does insist that *one take such customs seriously within the cultural context in which they appear* and attempt to appreciate the importance of their function within that context. Understanding is not acceptance!" (1984:329).

15 See Osborne 1977:337-52. I am updating the list found here with more recent literature. Here I must render my appreciation to Guth (1981:chap. 2), who has done a great deal of this for me.

16 See also Larkin 1988:334-56; McQuilkin 1984:230-40.

17 See Fee 1976:113 and Scott 1979:75. This is similar to Kraft's distinction of general vs. specific categories, since moral truths by definition are nonspecific.

18 Gunther (1976:2:576, 578-79) points out that while polygamy is mentioned, it is not truly countenanced and monogamy "occupies the central position" (such as Gen 1:26-27; 2:18- 24; Deut 17:17). Furthermore, polygamy was practiced

among Jews even in New Testament times—Herod, for example, had ten wives—and it was common among the aristocracy. Interestingly, it was allowed only by the Jews and was not allowed in Greco-Roman society generally.

19 In one sense contextualization could virtually be identified with hermeneutics, since the exposition of a text's meaning is also a "contextualization" of its message. This indeed is how the term is used in missiological circles. However, I am using it in a more restricted sense, that of determining the significance or application of the biblical meaning for this modern age.

20 Dietrich 1981:30. However, his dialogue with popular religion and ideologies fails to meet his own criteria, for they are given prominence over the biblical worldview.

21 Hiebert 1987:109-10. See also Conn 1984:211-60, who argues for doing this in a covenantal context. Conn argues for six criteria: (1) a biblical-theological concept of "revelation-as-process," (2) a covenantal dimension demanding faithfulness in word and deed, (3) a culture-specific theology, (4) theology as an ever-renewed evangelistic response to contextual needs, (5) the unity of the church in developing communal faith statements, (6) a prophetic function in challenging cultures and ideologies. [22]See the excellent discussion in Fee and Stuart 1982:46-49.

Chapter 18: Homiletics II: The Sermon

1 Note the excellent and extensive discussion of the relation of the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods to the sermonic process in Greidanus 1988:24-101.

2 In these four points, I am building on the excellent discussion in Greidanus 1988:159-66.

3 John Bettler (1986:344-47) speaks of a "funnel," as preaching moves from the general ("pray") to the particular ("pray sincerely") to the concrete ("pray in secret").

4 Robinson 2001:159. Jay Adams adds four principles for a proper use of stories or illustrations (1986:361-65): (1) Make certain that the story is drawn from and appeals to the shared background of the congregation (e.g., agricultural allusions in a farming community. (2) If you utilize stories new to the congregation, explain them carefully and colorfully. (3) Tell the familiar example in a new, startling way (such as Jesus' "I am" sayings in John's Gospel). (4) Avoid trite, well-worn clichés. Above all, involve all the senses of the congregation as you open their eyes, ears and total being to the truth of the text.

5 I must thank an ad hoc committee that met at the Third Congress for Missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in May 1982 for developing a preliminary form of this. The committee consisted of Alan Andres, Canadian director of Navigators; Timothy F. Conklin, Grace Bible College; Roger S. Greenway, Westminster Theological Seminary; Robert H. Matzken, the Netherlands; Timothy Monsma, Reformed Bible College; Edward C. Pentecost, Dallas Theological Seminary; and myself.

6 Adams (1986:354-55) calls vivid language “sense appeal” or utilizing “evocative language.” He calls for sense-oriented language that evokes emotional response as well as a vivid use of sounds and gestures to punctuate the points.

7 For a good summary of the historical development of rhetoric with application to preaching, see De Koster 1986:303-30.

Appendix 1: The Problem of Meaning: The Issues

1 See Gadamer 1965:460-91; compare Bleicher 1980:117-27.

2 Frei 1974:86-104. See also the more succinct survey of Childs 1977:80-90.

3 Frei 1974:323. Paul Ricoeur traces three stages in the development of hermeneutics (1973:112- 41). The classical period depended on a classification method that utilized a genre-based approach to the text. Then Schleiermacher and the neo-Kantian movement along with Dilthey erected an epistemological base for hermeneutics, characterized by a diachronic interest in history. Finally, Heidegger along with Gadamer took an ontological approach, centering on the synchronic problem of being. The search for meaning partakes of that "alienating distanciation" (Gadamer) that characterizes human reflection and so present hermeneutics faces a dilemma of understanding that demands a new approach.

4 Thiselton 1980:103-5 aligns this with one's "preunderstanding."

5 Gadamer 1965:258-78. Mark C. Taylor believes that this disclosure of futurity is Gadamer's major concern (1982:48-49). However, as he himself admits, this comes more from Heidegger than Gadamer. Nevertheless, while not explicated fully by Gadamer, it does emerge logically from his system. The text does open up future potentialities for appropriation.

6 The number of works detailing this school can hardly be listed here. See Harari's bibliography (1979:443-63), which deals with nonbiblical areas, and Patte 1976. See also the introduction and conclusion of Kurzweil 1980 and Harari 1979:17-72. For conservative biblical critiques, see Thiselton 1978:329-

35 and Stancil 1980:4-59. An excellent survey of the issue can be found in Perpich 1984.

7 Edith Kurzweil provides an illuminating (to those of us more acquainted with its biblical counterpart) portrait of the early movement (1980:227-45). She distinguishes semiotics as a later development rejected, in fact, by Levi-Strauss, who derided its lack of social involvement and preoccupation with linguistics. Semiology developed with Barthes as a literary-critical movement and semiotics with Derrida as a philosophico-linguistic enterprise.

8 Most biblical scholars also utilize V. I. Propp's functional analysis (he developed thirty-one basic "functions" or characteristic plot developments that determine all stories); A. J. Greimas's actantial analysis (performative features and disjunctive sequences by which the binary opposites interact in the story); and Todorov's theory of narrative discourse (which deconstructs the grammatical sequence and reconstructs the text in terms of its propositional sequence).

9 Regarding the death of structuralism see Kurzweil 1980:229-30, 240-45 and Detweiler 1978:166. Of course I do not pretend that it was ever a unified movement. However, the consensus has clearly shifted away from the earlier model.

10 In addition to Tompkins 1980, Frei 1974 and Childs 1977, see Peterson 1978:24-26; Perrin 1976:168-81; Derrida 1979:82-120; Ricoeur 1974a:250-66.

11 Barthes 1975:27 as quoted in Taylor 1982:47. I recognize, of course, the semantic difference between my use of *text* and Barthes's use of *author.* By text-related interpretation, I mean an act that is concerned with historical intentionality. Therefore, analysis of *text* in my system includes what Barthes means by the *author.*

12 Intertextuality, as Detweiler points out, has become a major issue in the postformalist debate (1980:10-11). "The text is its own interpretation . . . and reveals itself as insufficient for *serious* analysis, so that one turns to playfulness

with the text as a way of encountering it" (p. 11).

13 Again, we are forced to juxtapose two different ways of considering *text.* "Reader-response" criticism uses *text* to distinguish the historical production of the author from his or her intended meaning. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, utilizes *text* to depict that autonomous entity which separates itself from the author and completes its meaning only in the act of reading.

14 As Tompkins points out, the problem here is that the "self as an independent entity vanishes" (1980:xxiii).

15 For good surveys of this, see Freund 1987 (esp. chap. 1); Jeanrond 1988:105-15; and Porter 1990. Van der Weede (1991:132-42) separates reader-response types into psychological models of understanding (Holland and Bleich), with meaning depending entirely on the mental situation of the reader; social models (Culler and Fish), with reading conventions inherited from a community determining meaning; and intersubjective models (Iser, Jauss, Rosenblatt), with both the inner mental preunderstanding and the social conventions interacting to produce meaning.

16 Fish 1980a:13. For a good discussion of Fish's influence on biblical studies see Moore 1986:707- 19.

17 See Eagleton 1983:85-90 and Jeanrond 1988:111-15, both of whom recognize the problem of arbitrariness in this approach.

18 English translations: *On Grammatology,* trans. G. Chakravorty (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976); *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Good discussions of his thought are found in the introductions. Derrida himself says that one should read the first half of *On Grammatology* (on the history of the notion of the sign) as an elaboration of themes scattered through *Writing and Difference* (Bass 1978:x).

19 Nietzsche 1982:46-47.

20 See Norris 1982:24-32, 46-47, for an excellent discussion of this.

21 Derrida 1978:29-30. Gayatri Spirak, in her preface to *On Grammatology,* states, “In Derrida’s reworking, the structure preface-text becomes open at both ends. The text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the ‘text’ is a preface to the next” (p. xii).

22 Harari 1979:37. Derrida considers the “metaphysical opposition of calculus and genesis” (of intention and writing), which produces a “lever of disorganization” with respect to “the authority of an ‘author’ over his very ‘own’ corpus” (1980:47-49). In other words, the relationship between the author and his creation has been deconstructed or erased.

23 Michel Foucault argues that the individualization of the author and the separation of an author from his work is a product of modern culture (1979:141-60). Writing has “freed itself from . . . the confines of its interiority” and become “identified with its own unfolded exteriority” (p. 142). As a result, writing has become “its author’s murderer” because “the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality” (pp. 142-43). The unity of author and writer effaces the former and transcends him or her, so that the author disappears. All that remains is a name.

24 See also Keck 1980:115-28, who argues that a plurality of methods, including historical-critical reconstruction, is necessary to the survival of the church’s canon.

25 See Vanhoozer 1990 for an excellent analysis of this development in Ricoeur’s thought.

26 Kelsey 1975:197-207. See also Lynn Ross-Bryant 1981, who argues that “imagination” creates possible “meanings” in the dialogue between reader and

text.

27 Thiselton shows that the *Tractatus* was a product more of the Viennese neo-Kantian school than of British empiricism and so should not be radically separated from his later work (1980:358-59).

Appendix 2: The Problem of Meaning: Toward a Solution

1 Ramsey believes two aspects of religious language give it an empirical character: “odd discernment” and “total commitment.” Most today, however, no longer claim an “empirical” foundation for God-talk.

2 Searle 1969:131-56. These fallacies are the naturalistic fallacy, which argues that descriptive statements cannot entail evaluative statements; speech act analysis, which depends on an analogous relationship between words and performative verbs; and assertion, which confuses “the conditions for the performance of the speech act of assertion with the analysis of the meaning of particular words occurring in certain assertions.”

3 Habermas 1971:190-203; see Gadamer’s response in Apel 1971:283-317.

4 For a good recent discussion see Poythress 1988.

5 See Hocking 1980:1-5 and Poythress 1988:39-49.

6 Hough argues that “the presented surface of the text” and “the inferred intention of the author” are not mutually exclusive goals but are complementary (1976:224; see pp. 222-23). See also Peckham, 1976:139-57 and Fowler 1976:242-55.

7 Hough 1976:225. He mentions two who have proclaimed this: A. J. Close, “Don Quixote and the ‘Intentionalist Fallacy,’ ” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 12, no. 2 (1972); and Quentin Skinner, “Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts,” *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972).

8 It is interesting that Derrida uses one of the new novels (Maurice Blanchot's *La Folie du jour*) as a paradigm of genre mixture to prove his case that the intermixing of genre demonstrates that no genre class can control the text and that thereby the nonclosure of the text declasses genre. See his "The Law of Genre," *Glyph* 7 (1980): 210-13. In actuality, this demonstrates the validity of genre because Blanchot's work was written to illustrate that very point. In other words, the argument is circular.

9 See also Ayer 1972:54-88. For a defense of necessity, see Plantinga 1974, and for a recent attempt to present a modified version of logical empiricism centering on "causal models," see Glymour 1980.

10 For an important work developing these themes, see Maxwell and Anderson 1975, especially the discussion of Bayesian methods by Hesse and Maxwell and the essay on probability and reference by Kyburg.

11 Paul Helm argues that the major reasons for believing that the Bible is the Word of God are "religious," concerned with "a person's bounden allegiance to God" (1983:303-20). Further, the evidence one adduces to prove the point is "internal," the claims of the text itself, rather than external. On the basis of Jesus' own claims, one takes a stand and views objections rationally from within that stand. This stance is further anchored in the life and experience of the one who takes that stand.

12 I. Howard Marshall says, "The point is that the meaning of a text is constant and objective, whereas its significance may vary for different readers. The significance depends on both the text and the readers, and is a function of their mutual interaction. Change the context, and you change the significance. . . . (Yet) it is of special importance to recognize that the significance flows out of the meaning. There can be no by-passing of exegesis on the way to exposition and significance" (1980:5). I find this article to be an excellent, concise study of the problems Caird considers at greater length.

13 Troeltsch, on the basis of positivistic developments in historiography, argued that historical claims (such as miracles) could be accepted only if they were

analogous or cohered to modern experience.

14 Bloch 1954:48-75. R. G. Collingwood states that the inductive approach and the formulation of general laws are crucial (1965:35-36). Only the examination of evidence according to previously determined guidelines can produce viable history.

15 Stanton 1978:60-71; Stuhlmacher 1977:83-90. See also Braaten 1966:50-52 and Bultmann 1960:289-96. In this discussion I will interact with several scholars, especially Graham Stanton and Peter Stuhlmacher.

16 While one could argue that these concepts are a twentieth-century product of literary criticism, I would respond that they fit ancient texts as well as modern ones.

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