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EDITORIAL: ACCURATE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Iosif J. Zhakevich
Ph.D., Harvard University
Associate Professor of Old Testament & Managing Editor
The Master's Seminary

* * * * *

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ delivered a sobering declaration concerning the vital importance of interpreting Scripture accurately. The Lord exclaimed:

> For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:18–19)

In this passage, Jesus articulated several key reminders for those who seek to interpret and teach the Scriptures (cf. Jas 3:1).

First, Christ affirmed that God's Word is inspired, inerrant, infallible, and unbreakable in every part (Matt 5:18). Even "the smallest letter," a *yodh* in Hebrew, or a "stroke," a minute feature to distinguish a letter, will never be undone. The Word of God is eternal in every respect, down to the smallest details. In John 10:35, Christ categorically stated, "Scripture cannot be broken." While this world will pass away, His Word will always remain (cf. Matt 24:35; 1 John 2:17). Because Scripture is the Word of God, the preacher's responsibility to teach it accurately comes with eternal ramifications.

Second, the Lord Jesus declared that a believer who misrepresents the Word of God will be called "least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19a). To mishandle Scripture is to declare that which God did not declare, or to fail to declare that which God has declared. Calling the preacher to avoid misinterpretation of Scripture, Paul charged Timothy with these words: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

Third, Christ promised that believers who teach God's Word accurately and who keep it will be called "great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19b). As heralds of the gospel, they do not preach their own opinions, but speak forth the Word of God,

in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:1–2). In so doing, they imitate the preaching ministry of Christ Himself, who declared the Word of God with clarity and courage. As He explained, "For I did not speak from Myself, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment—what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49; cf. v. 50). Like the apostle Paul, the faithful preacher looks forward to the heavenly reward that awaits him in glory (cf. 2 Tim 4:8).

The focus of the current issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal* is the biblical imperative to teach the Word of God faithfully by interpreting it accurately in order to deliver the divine intent of each passage. In the first article, John MacArthur emphasizes the need to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture and exposit it effectively ("The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching"). This article is complemented by a conversation between John MacArthur and Austin Duncan on the relationship between inerrancy and exposition ("Inerrancy and Exposition: A Conversation with John MacArthur"). Brad Klassen follows this with a study of the relationship between one's understanding of the doctrine of inspiration and one's hermeneutics ("The Doctrine of Inspiration and Its Implications for Hermeneutics"). Michael Vlach then presents key principles of hermeneutics to interpret Scripture in light of the grand biblical story ("Hermeneutical Principles and the Bible's Storyline: A Dispensational Approach"). Tom Pennington proceeds to examine the legitimate and illegitimate roles of systematic theology in expository preaching ("The Pastor and Systematic Theology").

This current issue of the journal also considers several historical perspectives on Bible exposition. Noah Hartmetz reflects on the ministry of John Chrysostom and highlights his appreciation for authorial intent and literal exegesis in Bible exposition ("The Expositional Method of John Chrysostom"). This is followed by republications of two of John Calvin's most important works on exegesis and exposition. In the first piece, which comes with an introduction by W. Ian P. Hazlett, Calvin praises Chrysostom's mastery of Scripture, particularly because Chrysostom taught the plain meaning of the text ("Calvin's Latin Preface to His Proposed French Edition of Chrysostom's Homilies" and "Preface to the Homilies of Chrysostom"). In his second composition, Calvin defines exposition as an explanation of the mind of the author and then exemplifies this by delivering an introduction to the book of Romans ("The Epistle Dedicatory: John Calvin on Exposition and the Book of Romans").

Every preacher will be held accountable for how he handles the Word of God. Those who interpret the Scripture in a haphazard way will inevitably cause great damage. But those who wield the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17) with precision and care will witness its insurmountable power. As the author of Hebrews explained, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

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THE MANDATE OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY: EXPOSITORY PREACHING[1]

John F. MacArthur
Chancellor of The Master's University and Seminary
Pastor of Grace Community Church

* * * * *

The special attention evangelicalism has given to the inerrancy of Scripture in recent years carries with it a mandate to emphasize expository preaching of the Scriptures. The existence of God and His nature requires the conclusion that He has communicated accurately and that an adequate exegetical process to determine His meaning is required. The Christian commission to preach God's Word involves accurately transmitting that meaning to an audience, a weighty responsibility. A belief in inerrancy thus requires, most important of all, expositional preaching that does not have to do primarily with the homiletical form of the message. In this regard, expository preaching differs from what is practiced by non-inerrantists.

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[1] This article was originally presented at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Summit II (November 1982). Later, it was published as John F. MacArthur, Jr., "A Response to Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 817–30. A revised version was published as John F. MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," *TMSJ* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 3–17. Subsequently, this article was published as a chapter in John MacArthur, Jr. "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 22–35; also, in John F. MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *The Master's Perspective on Pastoral Ministry*, The Master's Perspective Series 3, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 142–56; again, in John F. MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, The John MacArthur Pastor's Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 17–26. The article printed here is taken from *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, The John MacArthur Pastor's Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 17–26.

Introduction

The theological highlight of recent decades has without question been evangelicalism's intense focus on biblical inerrancy.[2] Much of what has been written defending inerrancy[3] represents the most acute theological reasoning our generation has produced.

Yet it seems our commitment to inerrancy is somewhat lacking in the way it fleshes out in practical ministry. Specifically, evangelical preaching ought to reflect our conviction that God's Word is infallible and inerrant. Too often it does not. In fact, there is a discernible trend in contemporary evangelicalism away from biblical preaching and a drift *toward* an experience-centered, pragmatic, topical approach in the pulpit.

Should not our preaching be biblical exposition, reflecting our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? If we believe that "all Scripture is inspired by God" and inerrant, must we not be equally committed to the reality that it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17)? Should not that magnificent truth determine how we preach?

Paul gave this mandate to Timothy: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: *preach the word;* be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:1–2, emphasis added). Any form of preaching that ignores that intended purpose and design of God falls short of the divine plan. J. I. Packer eloquently captured the pursuit of preaching:

> Preaching appears in the Bible as a relaying of what God has said about Himself and His doings, and about men in relation to Him, plus a pressing of His commands, promises, warnings, and assurances, with a view to winning the hearer or hearers … to a positive response.[4]

The only logical response to inerrant Scripture is to preach it *expositionally*. By expositionally, I mean preaching in such a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented *entirely* and *exactly* as it was intended by God. Expository preaching is the proclamation of the truth of God as mediated through the preacher.[5]

Admittedly, not all expositors have an inerrant view. See William Barclay's treatment of Mark 5 or John 6 in *The Daily Study Bible Series*. It is also true that not all with an inerrant view practice expository preaching. These are, however,

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[2] Over a ten-year period (1977–1987), the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy held three summits for scholars (1978, 1982, 1986) and two congresses for the Christian community at large (1982, 1987) to formulate and disseminate the biblical truth about inerrancy.

[3] Paul D. Feinberg, "Infallibility and Inerrancy," *Trinity Journal* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 120, crisply articulates critical inerrancy as "the claim that when all facts are known, the scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be without error in all that they affirm to the degree of precision intended, whether that affirmation relates to doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, etc."

[4] J. I. Packer, "Preaching as Biblical Interpretation," *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 189.

[5] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 222.

inconsistencies because an inerrantist perspective demands expository preaching, and a non-inerrantist perspective makes it unnecessary.

Putting it another way, what does it matter that we have an inerrant text if we do not deal with the basic phenomena of communication: words, sentences, grammar, morphology, syntax, etc.? And if we do not, why bother preaching it?

In his much-needed volume on exegetical theology, Walter Kaiser pointedly analyzed the current anemic state of the church due to flock-feeding that is rendered inadequate because of the absence of expository preaching:

> It is no secret that Christ's Church is not at all in good health in many places of the world. She has been languishing because she has been fed, as the current line has it, "junk food"; all kinds of artificial preservatives and all sorts of unnatural substitutes have been served up to her. As a result, theological and Biblical malnutrition has afflicted the very generation that has taken such giant steps to make sure its physical health is not damaged by using foods or products that are carcinogenic or otherwise harmful to their physical bodies. Simultaneously a worldwide spiritual famine resulting from the absence of any genuine publication of the Word of God (Amos 8:11) continues to run wild and almost unabated in most quarters of the Church.[6]

The cure is expository preaching.

The mandate, then, is clear. Expository preaching is the declarative genre in which inerrancy finds its logical expression and the church has its life and power. Stated simply, inerrancy demands exposition as the only method of preaching that preserves the purity of Scripture and accomplishes the purpose for which God gave us His Word.

R. B. Kuiper reinforced this mandate when he wrote, "The principle that Christian preaching is proclamation of the Word must obviously be determinative of the content of the sermon."[7]

Inerrancy, Exegesis, and Exposition

Postulates and Propositions

I would like to begin the main discussion with these logically sequential postulates that introduce and undergird my propositions (as well as form a true basis for inerrancy).[8]

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[6] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 7–8.

[7] R. B. Kuiper, "Scriptural Preaching," *The Infallible Word*, 3d rev. ed., ed. Paul Woolley (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 217. Also see R. Albert Mohler, *Preaching: The Centrality of Scripture* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002).

[8] See Norman Geisler, "Inerrancy Leaders: Apply the Bible," *Eternity* 38, no. 1 (January 1987): 25, for this compact syllogism:

> God cannot err;
> The Bible is the Word of God;
> Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

1. God is (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 14; 53; Heb. 11:6).
2. God is true (Ex. 34:6; Num. 23:19; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 25:10; 31:6; Is. 65:16; Jer. 10:8, 10–11; John 14:6; 17:3; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; 1 John 5:20).
3. God speaks in harmony with His nature (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Rom. 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:13; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).
4. God speaks only truth (Ps. 31:5; 119:43, 142, 151, 160; Prov. 30:5; Is. 65:16; John 17:17; James 1:18).
5. God spoke His true Word as consistent with His true Nature to be communicated to people (a self-evident truth that is illustrated at 2 Tim. 3:16–17 and Heb. 1:1).

Therefore, we must consider the following propositions.

1. God gave His true Word to be communicated *entirely* as He gave it, that is, the whole counsel of God is to be preached (Matt. 28:20; Acts 5:20; 20:27). Correspondingly, every portion of the Word of God needs to be considered in the light of its whole.
2. God gave His true Word to be communicated *exactly* as He gave it. It is to be dispensed precisely as it was delivered, without altering the message.
3. Only the exegetical process that yields expository proclamation will accomplish propositions 1 and 2.

Inerrancy's Link to Expository Preaching

Now, let me substantiate these propositions with answers to a series of questions. They will channel our thinking from the headwaters of God's revelation to its intended destination.

1. Why preach?

Very simply, God so commanded (2 Tim. 4:2), and the apostles so responded (Acts 6:4).

2. What should we preach?

The Word of God, that is, *Scriptura sola* and *Scriptura tota* (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2).

3. Who preaches?

Holy men of God (Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21; Eph. 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:21; Rev. 18:20; 22:6). Only after God had purified Isaiah's lips was he ordained to preach (Is. 6:6–13).

4. What is the preacher's responsibility?

First, the preacher needs to realize that God's Word is not the preacher's word. But rather,

He is a messenger, not an originator (εὐαγγελίζω [*euaggelizō*]).
He is a sower, not the source (Matt. 13:3, 19).
He is a herald, not the authority (κηρύσσω [*kēryssō*]).
He is a steward, not the owner (Col. 1:25).

He is the guide, not the author (Acts 8:31).
He is the server of spiritual food, not the chef (John 21:15, 17).

Second, the preacher needs to reckon that Scripture is ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (*ho logos tou theou*, "the Word of God"). When he is committed to this awesome truth and responsibility,

> His aim, rather, will be to stand under Scripture, not over it, and to allow it, so to speak, to talk through him, delivering what is not so much his message as its. In our preaching, that is what should always be happening. In his obituary of the great German conductor, Otto Klemperer, Neville Cardus spoke of the way in which Klemperer "set the music in motion," maintaining throughout a deliberately anonymous, self-effacing style in order that the musical notes might articulate themselves in their own integrity through him. So it must be in preaching; Scripture itself must do all the talking, and the preacher's task is simply to "set the Bible in motion."[9]

A careful study of the phrase λόγος θεοῦ (*logos theou*, "the Word of God") finds over forty uses in the New Testament. It is equated with the Old Testament (Mark 7:13). It is what Jesus preached (Luke 5:1). It was the message the apostles taught (Acts 4:31; 6:2). It was the word the Samaritans received (8:14) as given by the apostles (v. 25). It was the message the Gentiles received as preached by Peter (Acts 11:1). It was the word Paul preached on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:5, 7, 44, 48, 49; 15:35–36). It was the message preached on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:32; 17:13; 18:11). It was the message Paul preached on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10). It was the focus of Luke in the Book of Acts in that it spread rapidly and widely (6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Paul was careful to tell the Corinthians that he spoke the Word as it was given from God, that it had not been adulterated and that it was a manifestation of truth (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). Paul acknowledged that it was the source of his preaching (Col. 1:25; 1 Thess. 2:13).

As it was with Christ and the apostles, so Scripture is also to be delivered by preachers today in such a way that they can say, "Thus saith the Lord." Their responsibility is to deliver it as it was originally given and intended.

5. How did the preacher's message begin?

The message began as a true word from God and was given as truth because God's purpose was to transmit truth. It was ordered by God as truth and was delivered by God's Spirit in cooperation with holy men who received it with exactly the pure quality that God intended (2 Pet. 1:20–21). It was received as *Scriptura inerrantis* by the prophets and apostles, that is, without wandering from Scripture's original formulation in the mind of God.

Inerrancy, then, expresses the quality with which the writers of our canon received the text we call Scripture.

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[9] Packer, "Preaching," 203.

6. How is God's message to continue in its original true state?

If God's message began true and if it is to be delivered as received, what interpretive processes necessitated by changes of language, culture, and time will ensure its purity when currently preached? The answer is that only an exegetical approach is acceptable for accurate exposition.

Having established the essential need for exegesis, the next logical question is, "How is interpretation/exegesis linked with preaching?" Packer answered best:

> The Bible being what it is, all true interpretation of it must take the form of preaching. With this goes an equally important converse: that, preaching being what it is, all true preaching must take the form of biblical interpretation.[10]

7. Now, pulling our thinking all together in a practical way, "What is the final step that links inerrancy to preaching?"

First, the true text must be used. We are indebted to those select scholars who labor tediously in the field of textual criticism. Their studies recover the original text of Scripture from the large volume of extant manuscript copies that are flawed by textual variants. This is the starting point. Without the text as God gave it, the preacher would be helpless to deliver it as God intended.

Second, having begun with a true text, we need to interpret the text accurately. The science of hermeneutics is in view.

> As a theological discipline hermeneutics is the science of the correct interpretation of the Bible. It is a special application of the general science of linguistics and meaning. It seeks to formulate those particular rules which pertain to the special factors connected with the Bible.… Hermeneutics is a science in that it can determine certain principles for discovering the meaning of a document, and in that these principles are not a mere list of rules but bear organic connection to each other. It is also an art as we previously indicated because principles or rules can never be applied mechanically but involve the skill (*technē*) of the interpreter.[11]

Third, our exegesis must flow from a proper hermeneutic. Of this relationship, Bernard Ramm observed that hermeneutics

> stands in the same relationship to exegesis that a rule-book stands to a game. The rule-book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. The rules are not the game, and the game is meaningless without the rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.[12]

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[10] Packer, "Preaching," 187.

[11] Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 11.

[12] Ibid. See also Jerry Vines and David Allen, "Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Proclamation," *Criswell Theological Review* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 309–34.

Exegesis can now be defined as the skillful application of sound hermeneutical principles to the biblical text in the original language with a view to understanding and declaring the author's intended meaning both to the immediate and subsequent audiences. In tandem, hermeneutics and exegesis focus on the biblical text to determine what it said and what it meant originally.[13] Thus, exegesis in its broadest sense will include the various disciplines of literary criticism, historical studies, grammatical exegesis, historical theology, biblical theology, and systematic theology. Proper exegesis will tell the student what the text says and what the text means, guiding him to make a proper personal application of it.

> Interpretation of Scripture is the cornerstone not only of the entire sermon preparation process, but also of the preacher's life. A faithful student of Scripture will seek to be as certain as possible that the interpretation is biblically accurate.[14]

Fourth, we are now ready for a true exposition. Based on the flow of thinking that we have just come through, I assert that expository preaching is really exegetical preaching and not so much the homiletical form of the message. Merrill Unger appropriately noted,

> It is not the length of the portion treated, whether a single verse or a larger unit, but the manner of treatment. No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the light of the overall context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be said to be expository preaching.[15]

As a result of this exegetical process that began with a commitment to inerrancy, the expositor is equipped with a true message, with true intent, and with true application. It gives his preaching perspective historically, theologically, contextually, literarily, synoptically, and culturally. His message is God's intended message.

Now because this all seems so patently obvious, we might ask, "How did the church ever lose sight of inerrancy's relationship to preaching?" Let me suggest that in the main it was through the "legacy of liberalism."

The Legacy of Liberalism

An Example

Robert Bratcher, a former research assistant with the American Bible Society, is the translator of ABS's *Good News for Modern Man* and also an ordained Southern Baptist pastor. As one of the invited speakers to a seminar of the Christian Life

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[13] This definition has been adapted from John D. Grassmick, *Principles and Practice of Greek Exegesis* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), 7.

[14] Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 41.

[15] Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 33.

Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, he addressed the topic "Biblical Authority for the Church Today." Bratcher was quoted as saying,

> Only willful ignorance or intellectual dishonesty can account for the claim that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. No truth-loving, God-respecting, Christ-honoring believer should be guilty of such heresy. To invest the Bible with the qualities of inerrancy and infallibility is to idolatrize [*sic*] it, to transform it into a false god.[16]

This thinking is typical of the legacy of liberalism that has robbed preachers of true preaching dynamics. I ask, "Why be careful with content which does not reflect the nature of God, or with content whose truthfulness is uncertain?"

False Notions

Bratcher and others who would subscribe to "limited" or "partial" inerrancy are guilty of error along several lines of reasoning.[17] *First*, they have not really come to grips with that which Scripture teaches about itself.

Benjamin Warfield focused on the heart of the issue with this inquiry: "The really decisive question among Christian scholars … is thus seen to be, 'What does an exact and scientific exegesis determine to be the Biblical doctrine of inspiration?' "[18]

The answer is that nowhere do the Scriptures teach that there is a dichotomy of truth and error, nor do the writers ever give the slightest hint that they were aware of this alleged phenomenon as they wrote. The human writers of Scripture unanimously concur that it is God's Word; therefore it must be true.

Second, limited or partial inerrancy assumes that there is a higher authority to establish the reliability of Scripture than God's revelation in the Scriptures. They err by *a priori* giving the critic a place of authority over the Scriptures. This assumes the critic himself is inerrant.

Third, if limited inerrancy is true, then its promoters err in assuming that any part of the Scriptures is a trustworthy communicator of God's truth. An errant Scripture would definitely disqualify the Bible as a reliable source of truth.

Presuppositions are involved either way. Will men place their faith in the Scriptures or the critics? They cannot have their cake (trustworthy Scripture) and eat it too (limited inerrancy).

If the Bible is unable to produce a sound doctrine of Scripture, then it is thus incapable of producing, with any degree of believability or credibility, a doctrine about any other matter. If the human writers of Scripture have erred in their understanding of Holy Writ's purity, then they have disqualified themselves as writers for any other area of God's revealed truth. If they are so disqualified in all

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[16] "Inerrancy: Clearing Away Confusion," *Christianity Today* 25, no. 10 (29 May 1981): 12.

[17] These arguments have been adapted from Richard L. Mayhue, "Biblical Inerrancy in the Gospels," unpublished paper (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), 12–15.

[18] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (repr., Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 175.

areas, then every preacher is thoroughly robbed of any confidence and conviction concerning the alleged true message he would be relaying for God.

The Bottom Line

G. Campbell Morgan, hailed as the twentieth century's "prince of expositors," was a messenger widely used by God. There was a time in his life, however, when he wrestled with the very issue we discuss. He concluded that if there were errors in the biblical message, it could not be honestly proclaimed in public.

Here is the account of young Campbell Morgan's struggle to know if the Bible was surely God's Word:

> For three years this young man, seriously contemplating a future of teaching and ultimately of preaching, felt the troubled waters of the stream of religious controversy carrying him beyond his depth. He read the new books which debated such questions as, "Is God Knowable?" and found that the authors' concerted decision was, "He is not knowable." He became confused and perplexed. No longer was he sure of that which his father proclaimed in public, and had taught him in the home.
>
> Other books appeared, seeking to defend the Bible from the attacks which were being made upon it. The more he read, the more unanswerable became the questions which filled his mind. One who has never suffered it cannot appreciate the anguish of spirit young Campbell Morgan endured during this crucial period of his life. Through all the after years it gave him the greatest sympathy with young people passing through similar experiences at college—experiences which he likened to "passing through a trackless desert." At last the crisis came when he admitted to himself his total lack of assurance that the Bible was the authoritative Word of God to man. He immediately cancelled all preaching engagements. Then, taking all his books, both those attacking and those defending the Bible, he put them all in a corner cupboard. Relating this afterwards, as he did many times in preaching, he told of turning the key in the lock of the door. "I can hear the click of that lock now," he used to say. He went out of the house, and down the street to a bookshop. He bought a new Bible and, returning to his room with it, he said to himself: "I am no longer sure that this is what my father claims it to be—the Word of God. But of this I am sure. If it be the Word of God, and if I come to it with an unprejudiced and open mind, it will bring assurance to my soul of itself." "That Bible found me," he said, "I began to read and study it then, in 1883. I have been a student ever since, and I still am (in 1938)."
>
> At the end of two years Campbell Morgan emerged from that eclipse of faith absolutely sure that the Bible was, in very deed and truth, none other than the Word of the living God. Quoting again from his account of the incident: "This experience is what, at last, took me back into the work of preaching, and into the work of the ministry. I soon found foothold enough to begin to preach, and from that time I went on."
>
> With this crisis behind him and this new certainty thrilling his soul, there came a compelling conviction. This Book, being what it was, merited all that a

> man could give to its study, not merely for the sake of the personal joy of delving deeply into the heart and mind and will of God, but also in order that those truths discovered by such searching of the Scriptures should be made known to a world of men groping for light, and perishing in the darkness with no clear knowledge of that Will.[19]

May God be pleased to multiply the tribe of men called "preachers" who, being convinced of the Bible's inerrant nature, will diligently apply themselves to understand and to proclaim its message as those commissioned of God to deliver it in His stead.

Our Challenge

One of the most godly preachers ever to live was Scotland's Robert Murray McCheyne. In the memoirs of McCheyne's life, Andrew Bonar wrote,

> It was his wish to arrive nearer at the primitive mode of expounding Scripture in his sermons. Hence when one asked him if he was ever afraid of running short of sermons some day, he replied—"No; I am just an interpreter of Scripture in my sermons; and when the Bible runs dry, then I shall." And in the same spirit he carefully avoided the too common mode of accommodating texts—fastening a doctrine on the words, not drawing it from the obvious connection of the passage. He endeavoured at all times to preach the mind of the Spirit in a passage; for he feared that to do otherwise would be to grieve the Spirit who had written it. Interpretation was thus a solemn matter to him. And yet, adhering scrupulously to this sure principle, he felt himself in no way restrained from using, for every day's necessities, all parts of the Old Testament as much as the New. His manner was first to ascertain the primary sense and application, and so proceed to handle it for present use.[20]

The expositor's task is to preach the mind of God as he finds it in the inerrant Word of God. He understands it through the disciplines of hermeneutics and exegesis. He declares it expositorily then as the message which God spoke and commissioned him to deliver.

John Stott deftly sketched the relationship of the exegetical process to expository preaching:

> Expository preaching is a most exacting discipline. Perhaps that is why it is so rare. Only those will undertake it who are prepared to follow the example of the apostles and say, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables.… We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:2, 4). The systematic preaching of the Word is impossible without the systematic study of it. It will not be enough to skim through a few verses in daily Bible

[19] Jill Morgan, *A Man of the Word: Life of G. Campbell Morgan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 39–40.

[20] Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 94.

> reading, nor to study a passage only when we have to preach from it. No. We must daily soak ourselves in the Scriptures. We must not just study, as through a microscope, the linguistic minutiae of a few verses, but take our telescope and scan the wide expanses of God's Word, assimilating its grand theme of divine sovereignty in the redemption of mankind. "It is blessed," wrote C. H. Spurgeon, "to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your spirit is flavoured with the words of the Lord, so that your blood is Bibline and the very essence of the Bible flows from you."[21]

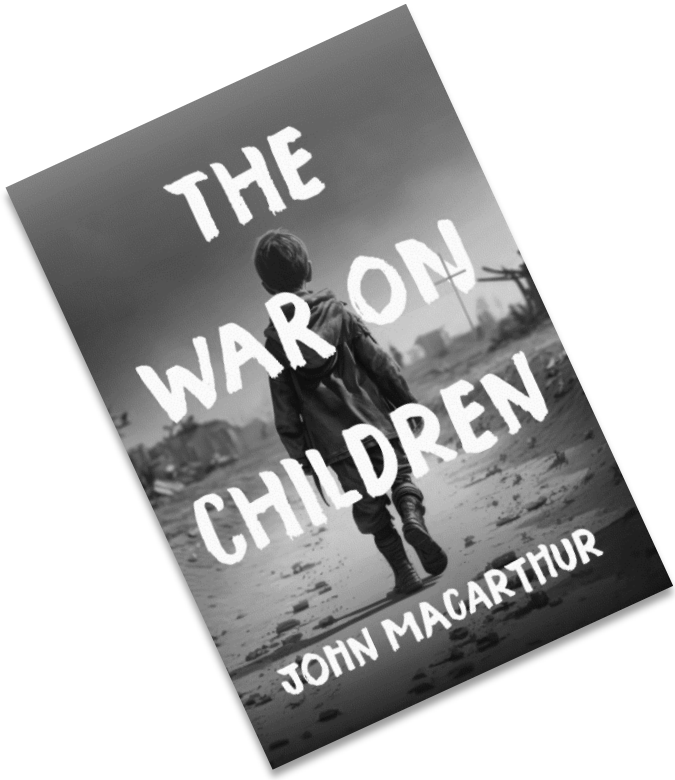
Inerrancy demands an exegetical process and an expository proclamation. Only the exegetical process preserves God's Word entirely, guarding the treasure of revelation and declaring its meaning exactly as He intended it to be proclaimed.[22] Expository preaching is the result of the exegetical process. Thus, it is the essential link between inerrancy and proclamation. It is mandated to preserve the purity of God's originally given inerrant Word and to proclaim the whole counsel of God's redemptive truth.[23]

[21] John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 30–31.

[22] See 1 Timothy 6:20–21 and 2 Timothy 2:15.

[23] These central truths about the inerrant Bible, hermeneutics, exegesis, and preaching reflect the heart of The Master's Seminary curriculum and the faculty's commitment to prepare faithful expositors of God's Word in the twenty-first century.

PROVIDING REFUGE FOR YOUR CHILDREN IN A HOSTILE WORLD



Every day, on a multitude of battlefronts, Satan is deploying weapons of mass corruption against our children. Modern culture has been systematically designed with an agenda that is aggressively anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-Scripture, intended to corrupt and consume young, impressionable hearts and minds. God's people need to be aware of the specific threats this world poses to our children. We need to understand the enemy's battle plan and be ready to spot where the next assault is coming from. And we need to prepare our children for the attacks they will inevitably face from a culture intent on their destruction.

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INERRANCY AND EXPOSITION: A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN MACARTHUR

John F. MacArthur
Chancellor of The Master's University and Seminary
Pastor of Grace Community Church

Austin T. Duncan
D. Min., The Master's Seminary
Director of the MacArthur Center for Expository Preaching
Director of D. Min. Studies and Department Chair of Pastoral Ministries
The Master's Seminary

* * * * *

This dialogue between John MacArthur and Austin Duncan explores the battle for biblical inerrancy and its relationship to biblical exposition. With years of preaching experience and wisdom, Dr. MacArthur provides counsel to pastors seeking to accurately and boldly preach the Word of God. In the previous article (pp. 325–35), Dr. MacArthur explained the inseparable partnership inerrancy has with hermeneutics and expository preaching. In this conversation, Dr. MacArthur reinforces the fact that, as Scripture is the eternal Word of God, so the charge to interpret it accurately and preach it boldly is also timeless.

* * * * *

Throughout church history, the Word of God has faced concerted attacks intended to undermine its authority. Contradicting or misconstruing God's Word is an approach God's enemies have used throughout all of human history, beginning with the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. While God asserted to Adam that if he disobeys, he will "surely die" (Gen 2:17), the Serpent stated to Eve, "You surely will not die!" (3:4). The Apostle Peter later explained that the ungodly distort all of Scripture (2 Pet 3:16).

In response to these assaults, men of God have arisen throughout church history to affirm their commitment to God's Word. The first, and most important, such response was the Jerusalem Council that addressed the question: "What must one do to be saved?" (see Acts 15). Later in history, and outside of the Bible, the Councils

of Nicea (AD 325) and Chalcedon (AD 451) played important roles in confirming the commitment of the Church to the Word of God.

In recent history, the inerrancy of Scripture as it relates to hermeneutics and Bible exposition has been under ongoing attack. To provide a biblical answer, evangelical leaders gathered in 1978 and again in 1982 at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and declared that Scripture in its original form is inerrant, and that proper hermeneutics must be applied to explain the meaning of God's Word. Summit I in 1978 produced the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," and Summit II in 1982 produced the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics."[1] The aim of these two statements was to articulate principles that would aid the preacher to be approved by God "as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

The Doctrine of Inerrancy and Biblical Exposition

Austin T. Duncan (hereafter **ATD**): In November of 1982, you participated in the second summit of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, giving a response on the topic of inerrancy and biblical hermeneutics.[2] Could you explain the reason for this summit and what it intended to achieve?

John MacArthur (hereafter **JM**): When I was in seminary and then a young pastor, the issue that confronted us was, "Is the Bible true? Is it without error? Is it inerrant in the original?" This was a big issue because classic liberalism had assaulted these core beliefs. Neo-orthodoxy, German higher criticism, and all the stepchildren from that movement called into question the integrity of Scripture, the truthfulness of Scripture, and the inspiration of Scripture. They said that the Bible was only partially accurate. But if it's only partially true, then it's only partially authoritative. If the Bible has errors, then there's a greater authority than the Word of God. This was the big battle in defending the inerrancy of Scripture. That led to the summit on biblical inerrancy in '78 and then on hermeneutics in '82. What I said at that second summit was that, because Scripture is the inerrant Word of God, the pastor needs to preach it expositionally. Expository preaching is the best way to bring out the meaning of the text in its entirety and to affirm that all of Scripture is God's Word and is absolutely true.

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[1] See both statements at: https://www.alliancenet.org/international-council-on-biblical-inerrancy.

[2] Originally presented at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Summit II (November 1982), the paper was later published as John F. MacArthur, Jr., "A Response to Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 817–30. A revised version of that paper was published as John F. MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *TMSJ* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 3–17. Subsequently, it was published as a chapter in John MacArthur, Jr. "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 22–35; also, in John F. MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *The Master's Perspective on Pastoral Ministry*, The Master's Perspective Series 3, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 142–56; again, in John F. MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, The John MacArthur Pastor's Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 17–26. The article is also included in this journal (pp. 325–35), and is taken from *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, The John MacArthur Pastor's Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 17–26.

ATD: This seems to be the perpetual attempt of Satan: to question God's Word. Ever since he said in the garden "Did God really say?" he has continued to undermine God's Word. But the entire goal of these summits was to uphold the authority of Scripture and its full exposition. With the challenge before you to explain the link between biblical inerrancy and expository preaching, what was your approach and what was the task of the men involved in this second summit?

JM: Initially, 100 men were invited to participate—ninety-eight of them were seminary professors and the other two were pastors, Dr. James Montgomery Boice and myself. I was still a young preacher, so I was surprised to be invited; but I was thankful and I loved being part of it. Now, even though these were the early years of my ministry, everybody knew where I stood on the issue of biblical inerrancy. I think that's why I was invited. Everyone knew they would get a clear answer from me that Scripture is the inerrant Word of God.

So, the purpose of these summits was to come up with a statement on biblical inerrancy and then on hermeneutics, and I think what they produced are still outstanding and historic statements. After the summit that I was a part of, we were tasked with writing articles and books that explained the necessity of inerrancy to accurately interpret Scripture.[3] The goal was to show people that Scripture is the authoritative Word of God and essentially to instill in believers a high view of Scripture.

ATD: That era saw a direct attack on inerrancy, and you brought this out in an article after that summit: you quoted one of the inerrancy opponents saying that "No truth-loving, God-respecting, Christ-honoring believer" can accept the inerrancy of Scripture.[4] That's how fierce this assault was. But as you look at this battle today, is inerrancy and exposition attacked in the same way now as it was in the past?

JM: I would say that inerrancy *is* attacked today, but not directly. It's attacked indirectly—by watering down Scripture. Today, there are other issues, such as preaching sentimentalism instead of theology. But at that time, inerrancy was the issue. You fight the battle that the times demand that you fight, and at that time, it was defending biblical inerrancy. One thing was true of that summit: everybody was on board. There were a hundred inerrantists, so there weren't any arguments going on. They were just trying to formulate its definition in the best possible way. The fact is, they did a fantastic job. It still stands to this day as a formidable statement on that doctrine.

ATD: You mentioned that the pastor's view on inerrancy affects his view on biblical exposition—that it has real practical implications on how the pastor preaches. If you view every word of Scripture as inspired and inerrant, then you will preach and exposit all of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. As you fought those battles, what was the state of biblical exposition in American churches at that time? What was preaching like forty years ago?

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[3] See MacArthur, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 817–30; John MacArthur, ed., *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020); John MacArthur et al., *One Foundation: Essays on the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Valencia, CA: Grace to You, 2019).

[4] Quoted in John F. MacArthur, "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," *TMSJ* 34, no. 2 (2023): 325–35.

JM: For one, preaching was largely not theological. In some cases, it was expository, at least in a devotional sense. But there was not the marriage of intense biblical exposition with sound doctrine done by expositors who were theologically astute. There were some popular Bible expositors at that time, but their approach was not, from my standpoint, nearly intense enough in the text.

Secondly, the preaching of that day generally failed to draw in Scripture from the rest of the Bible to reinforce a given interpretation. Scripture explains Scripture. The purpose of preaching is to explain the depths of the Word of God, and the pastor achieves this best by showing how a passage he is preaching is supported by all of Scripture.

But there is a third observation here: You cannot preach on twenty-five verses by pulling three points out and then call that an expository sermon. You cannot read a few verses, give a few illustrations and a poem at the end, and call that an expository sermon. If a sermon is going to be expository, it has to rightly divide the Word. That is what it should do because every word of God is pure. Every word of God is true. The doctrine of inerrancy that was so well stated in the inerrancy document had not at that time gripped the pulpit. A right understanding on inerrancy will affect how you preach Scripture from Sunday to Sunday. A real commitment to inerrancy will show up in the exposition of the preacher. That is why I wrote the article on expository preaching and inerrancy.[5] Since the Bible is inerrant, and every word of God is true, then we need to give place to every single word revealed by God.

ATD: You wrote at the end of this article, "The expositor's task is to preach the mind of God as he finds it in the inerrant Word of God."[6] So we can ask: How does the preacher understand the mind of God? You answer this by saying that the preacher "understands it through the disciplines of hermeneutics and exegesis." In other words, you said that "Only the exegetical process preserves God's Word entirely, guarding the treasure of revelation and declaring its meaning exactly as [God] intended it to be proclaimed." The point you were making here is that "Expository preaching is the result of the exegetical process" and that the exegetical process "is the essential link between inerrancy and proclamation. It is mandated to preserve the purity of God's originally given inerrant Word and proclaim the whole council of God's redemptive truth." What have you seen change since you wrote this in 1982 in the field of expository preaching? Have we made progress? What is the state of preaching today?

JM: Well, the accomplishment of the Inerrancy Council, the point I was making in that article, and the work of the Holy Spirit have produced an increasingly growing generation of genuine exegetes and genuine theologians who are doing exposition the way it should be done. Throughout my ministry I have preached the Word and labored to raise men of God who also would preach God's Word. It's the grace of God to see the fruit of this work taking place.

However, because Bible exposition is popular today, there are still many who are calling what they do "Bible exposition" when it isn't remotely related to that. If you haven't exegeted the text, and if you haven't gone to the depth of the authorial

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[5] Reprinted in MacArthur, "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy," 325–35.

[6] MacArthur, "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy," 325–35, and so the remainder of the quotes in this paragraph.

intent of the original writer, then that is not true exposition. If you're preaching on David and Goliath, and your sermon is how to knock off giants with stones of faith, you do not understand anything about the Bible.

So, today it is still popular in many circles to use the Scripture without interpreting the Scripture, and this becomes an abuse of Scripture. The only way you can be faithful to the text is by rightly cutting it down to the bare bones and then explaining its original intention. That requires investigating lexicography, syntax, grammar—all the elements of the exegetical process that brings out the author's meaning of the text. This is why we teach Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek here at The Master's Seminary—so you could study the Word of God in the original languages. True exposition of the biblical text takes into consideration every word in the text.

Coming Challenges to Bible Exposition

ATD: As you consider Bible exposition and evangelicalism today, are you concerned that there will be a move away from expository preaching with an exegetical focus? What do you see as the dangers in the present day and in the future?

JM: The danger for any preacher is to fail to study the Word so as to be approved of God. The danger is to fail to be a workman who is not ashamed and who rightly divides the Word of Truth. The danger is that you depend on your personality or your insights rather than bring out the life from within the text. This is the main danger in every generation.

In the future, I think there will be the temptation to use the Bible but to avoid offending people because the offense is too dangerous. There are people who try to do exposition, but they do not want to expound on certain doctrinal conclusions because they offend people. But to use the Bible as some kind of smorgasbord, where you get to pick and choose what you want, but you stay away from the tough truths—that's not exposition.

And that's already happening in many cases with megachurch guys who do not want to offend anybody. You see this with the popular type of preaching where one of the largest churches in America tells its people to abandon the Old Testament. If you are a preacher and you say, "Forget the Old Testament," as one popular preacher has recently said, or if you say, "Our faith does not depend upon an ancient book," what are you saying about the Word of God? The hubris of that is incredible! It's tantamount to saying, "I'm God! I'm the source of truth." Some even think that evangelism is most effectively done if you never say anything that offends anyone, which is the absolute opposite of the truth. If you have already caved in at this point, and you refuse to preach the truth today, it's only going be harder to take a stand as things get tougher. There will probably be fewer and fewer people who are willing to preach all of Scripture as the Word of God.

ATD: The admonition is always the same then: Preach the vitality of the Word of God—unfiltered. Study it carefully! Do not skip anything! Do not accommodate the culture! Hold nothing back for fear of persecution!

JM: Exactly! The attack keeps coming but it might have a different face. We're living in a time when you could be criticized for saying certain things. But ten years from now, you might be more than criticized. The trend would tell us that the hostility

toward the Word of God is going to escalate. We're seeing homosexuality, social justice, the war on our children, and all forms of wickedness taking over our culture. Godless people pushing all this are not going to tolerate a strong force resisting their agenda. And the strongest force is going to be Christians with convictions based on the Word of God. They're going to be coming for Christians. This is exactly what we saw during COVID. They threw our brothers in Canada in jail. I think it will be Christian fortitude, biblical conviction, and love for the Lord and His Word at any cost that will mark the true expositors. It will take some spiritual strength in the future for men to get into a pulpit and tell the truth. If you're not willing to speak the truth now, then it's very likely that you will not be willing to speak the truth in the future.

Counsel for Aspiring Bible Expositors

ATD: We are just a couple years away from the fortieth graduating class of The Master's Seminary. What do you tell the current generation of expositors? What counsel do you give them in light of these trends?

JM: I tell them the same thing I have told every class for forty years. Do what God has called you to do. Be faithful in preaching the Word, whether it is in season or out of season. There have been times when it was in season; now it is out of season. But that does not change the charge. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and teaching. Your calling is clear.

ATD: As the men fight this good fight, how do they stay faithful in their ministry of the Word?

JM: People talk about courage in ministry, but I think it is not so much courage that causes you to carry out this mandate, as it is trust in the Lord and in the power of His Word. When somebody ceases from unleashing the Word of God, it is because they do not believe that it really is the power. Zechariah said that it was not by might or by power, but by the Spirit of God (Zech 4:6). Isaiah said that the Word of God will not return empty (Isa 55:11). This is also what the Apostle Paul preached: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16). The power of God's work is not in the preacher but in God's Word. This is where it all comes together. Understanding that the Word of God is inerrant and powerful will compel you to preach the Word of God expositorily. The pastor who does this task faithfully is the one who does not need to be ashamed.

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THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HERMENEUTICS

Brad Klassen
Ph.D., The Master's Seminary
Associate Professor and Department Chair of Bible Exposition
The Master's Seminary

* * * * *

The doctrine of inspiration affects biblical hermeneutics. If every word of Scripture is to be affirmed as simultaneously God's Word and man's word in the truest sense, if every portion and element of Scripture equally possess all the qualities of the divine and human intents, if there is no separation to be sought between what was meant by God and what was meant by the human writer, then what method provides the most appropriate principles to study such a text? Because God is the Author of Scripture, the Bible is to be read unlike any other book. Yet, because God has revealed His Word through human biblical writers, the Bible is to be read like other books. The hermeneutical method that best achieves the study of this unique text is the grammatico-historical method.

* * * * *

Introduction

From where do you draw your hermeneutics? The answer to this question ranks as one of the most determinative issues in the study of the Bible, and therefore, in the Christian life. Yet we seldom consider it, much less formulate a definitive reply. The principles we use to understand what the Scriptures mean by what they say are often just assumed, absorbed by us—whether good, bad, or ugly—from those around us.

Indeed, approaches to biblical interpretation are more readily caught than taught, precisely because they are so foundational. This certainly presents an advantage for new believers in a context where the Word of God is handled faithfully by pastors and teachers. But in other contexts it is a different affair. The discouraging statistics portraying the doctrinal confusion of today's professing Christians testify to the flawed hermeneutics being displayed each Sunday from church pulpits. Few ever stop to consider, "Why is my pastor, why am I, reading Scripture this way?"

But as responsible, thinking Christians we must be able to give an answer. Comparing our hermeneutics to presuppositions, we must take to heart what Francis Shaeffer cautioned when he wrote, "Most people catch their presuppositions from their family and surrounding society the way a child catches measles. But people with more understanding realize that their presuppositions should be chosen after a careful consideration of what worldview is true."[1] So where do we start? What must exercise the greatest influence over our choice of hermeneutics?

Our starting point must be *the nature of Scripture* as presented by *Scripture's self-witness*. Out of all the possible influences that exist, what Scripture says about itself—its *autopistia*—must have the first and final say about our choice of hermeneutics. As the definitive means by which Christ exercises his lordship over us, Scripture itself must determine how we interpret and apply it. J. I. Packer summarized this point well when he wrote,

> Jesus Christ constituted Christianity a religion of biblical authority. He is the Church's Lord and Teacher; and He teaches His people by His Spirit through His written Word. . . . [S]ubjection to the authority of Christ involves subjection to the authority of Scripture. Anything short of unconditional submission to Scripture, therefore, is a kind of impenitence; any view that subjects the written Word of God to the opinions and pronouncements of men involves unbelief and disloyalty to Christ.[2]

Packer then identified the implication of this truth: "the Bible itself must fix and control the methods and presuppositions with which it is studied."[3]

Acknowledging this same starting point, Ernest Kevan wrote, "The surest way to an understanding of the true principles of interpretation is to first give attention to what the Scripture itself reveals."[4] More recently, Abner Chou articulated the same maxim: "According to Scripture, the starting point of our hermeneutical responsibility is our view of God's Word. . . . In the logic of Scripture, bibliological indicatives set up for hermeneutical imperatives. To truly uphold biblical hermeneutics, one must embrace the Bible's depiction of itself."[5]

Consequently, our interpretive method is not merely the consequence of our picking and choosing of principles that are most preferable to us, whether according to experience, tradition, or intuition. Instead, *our hermeneutics expose our fundamental convictions about what Scripture says about itself.* As thoughtful Christians, we will strive to identify and employ interpretive principles that can be directly connected to what we have come to understand about the Bible's nature.

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[1] Francis A. Shaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 16.

[2] J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 21.

[3] Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 68.

[4] Ernst F. Kevan, "The Principles of Interpretation," in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 289.

[5] Abner Chou, "The Hermeneutics of the Pastor-Theologian," *MSJ* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2023), 58. For concerns that this approach is guilty of vicious circular reasoning, see John Murray's helpful response in "The Attestation of Scripture," in *The Scripture Cannot Be Broken: Twentieth Century Writings on the Doctrine of Inerrancy*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 52–53.

Furthermore, we will recognize that our hermeneutics are valid only insofar as our bibliological assumptions are true to Scripture's witness.

But this maxim can be refined even further. When it comes to bibliological assumptions, nothing is as definitive for our hermeneutics as is our understanding of *inspiration*—that is, as our understanding of how the biblical text came into being.[6] What we believe about how God worked in and through the biblical writers to produce His Word in human language has an incontrovertible influence on the way we interpret it. How we understand that process of putting knowledge into words (inspiration) affects how we understand the process of putting those words into knowledge (interpretation). A survey of the dominant theories of inspiration that have been proposed throughout history, as well as of the hermeneutics of those who hold these theories, bears this out.

Theories of Inspiration

Millard Erickson has helpfully summarized the dominant theories of inspiration that have been advocated throughout history.[7] He identifies them according to five categories.

First, some advance what is known as *the intuition theory*. According to Erickson, this understanding—popular among liberal scholars—"makes inspiration largely a high degree of insight."[8] Proponents of this view contend that in the composition of the biblical text, the abilities of the biblical writers operate exclusively within their natural domain, without any exceptional supernatural influence. These abilities may indeed be exceptional within human history, but they are still natural. The product they produce is fully human, ontologically equal to other great works of religious or philosophical achievement.[9] Their differences in influence can be attributed to the authority invested in them by any given community.

Second, other theologians advance what is known as *the illumination theory.* As Erickson notes, this view differs from the first in that it does allow for the external influence of the Holy Spirit over the biblical writers, "but involving only a heightening of their normal powers."[10] In other words, the Spirit is active in the mind of the writer to heighten his spiritual perception and empower his intellectual capacity beyond its natural capacity, but not to impart knowledge that is not already accessible to the writer. Erickson likens this activity to the administration of a stimulant. To produce the biblical text, the writer is given a kind of spiritual energy drink—one that enables him to think at a level he would not be able to naturally. Consequently, proponents of this view see the difference between the Spirit's illumination of the writer and the Spirit's illumination of the reader as distinguishable only by degree, not kind.[11]

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[6] As Sinclair B. Ferguson states, "No element is more central to Scripture's testimony to its own nature than the concept of inspiration" ("How Does the Bible Look at Itself?," in *Thy Word Is Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today*, ed. Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013], 1213).

[7] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 174–75.

[8] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 174.

[9] Erickson, 175.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

Erickson's third category is what he labels the *dynamic theory* of inspiration. According to advocates of this theory, the Spirit directly influences the biblical writers to produce their texts, and He does so not only by heightening their spiritual sensitivities and intellectual capacities, but also by imparting to them new knowledge. However, this knowledge is only communicated at the level of *ideas*—not at the level of specific words. The writers are the ones inspired, not their writings. As Erickson states, "The Spirit of God works by directing the writer to the thoughts or concepts, and allowing the writer's own distinctive personality to come into play in the choice of words and expressions. Thus, the writer will give expression to the divinely directed thoughts in a way uniquely characteristic to that person."[12]

The fourth view is *the verbal theory* of inspiration. This view—common in conservative evangelical quarters—contends that the involvement of the Spirit extends from the special heightening of the biblical writer's capacity to the direct impartation of divine knowledge and even to the specific choice of words and word order in the production of the text. This detailed influence is always effectual; it is never resisted, nullified, or distorted by the biblical writer. As Erickson explains, "The work of the Holy Spirit is so intense that each word is the exact word God wants used at that point to express the message."[13] Yet according to this understanding of inspiration, the biblical writer is not a mere channel or arational instrument of the Spirit's agency. Rather, the writer's mind is fully engaged in the process of cognition and composition, such that what he intends and what he composes is at once the Word of God and his own word as well. The Spirit preserves the personal styles of the writers while concurrently communicating through those personalities the Word of God without corruption.[14]

The fifth and final view that Erickson describes is *the dictation theory* of inspiration. As its name suggests, inspiration according to this theory is the process of God dictating His Word to the biblical writers, who then function under the Spirit's control much like secretaries. The human writers contribute little if anything to the composition of the biblical text. They may or may not understand what they record. Erickson summarizes this view as follows: "Passages where the Spirit is depicted as telling the author precisely what to write are regarded as applying to the entire Bible. Different authors did not write in distinctive styles."[15]

Erickson's classification can be expanded in two ways. First, due to the growing influence of *the retrieval movement* (a movement which seeks to return to the interpretive methods and teachings of the Fathers of the early church as the

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[12] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 175.

[13] Ibid.

[14] The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy summarizes verbal inspiration as follows: "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine spiration" (Article VI); and "We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared" (Article VIII). Another helpful definition has been given by Kenneth S. Kantzer: "Biblical inspiration [is the] . . . work of the Holy Spirit by which, without setting aside their personalities and literary or human faculties, God so guided the authors of Scripture as to enable them to write exactly the words which convey His truth to men, and in doing so preserved their judgments from error in the original manuscripts," "The Communication of Revelation," in *The Bible: The Living Word of Revelation*, ed. Merrill. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 180.

[15] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 175.

quintessence of Christian theology),[16] the list of the theories of inspiration can be enlarged to include a model that was assumed by many in that period of church history—that which can be called *the ecstatic theory* of inspiration. As will be described in greater detail below, this view of inspiration sees God's transcendence in the process of revelation and inspiration as so overwhelming that the human writers' comprehension was necessarily precluded from meaningful involvement in composition. In other words, the instrumentality of the human writer can be likened to that of a musical instrument. Although music emanates from it, it is the Holy Spirit alone who plucks the strings or blows the wind. Consequently, this theory extends beyond that of the dictation theory by its decisive limitation of the writer's comprehension of the revelation passing through him. Because of its emphasis on God's transcendence to the obscuring of his immanence, this theory can also be recognized as the exact antithesis to the intuition theory, which emphasizes God's immanence to the exclusion of His transcendence.

Second, Erickson's category of the verbal theory of inspiration—the view that is presupposed in this article—can also be helpfully clarified by describing it as *confluent.*[17] As will be noted below, few writers have contributed to the doctrine of verbal inspiration as has the nineteenth-century theologian Benjamin B. Warfield.[18] His contribution to the discussion lies particularly in his emphasis on the *confluent* or *concursive* nature of the Spirit's inspiration. A helpful summary of this concept is as follows:

> The fundamental principle of this conception is that the whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities which enter it, however, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluently with them; so that the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word and every particular. According to this conception, therefore, the whole Bible is recognized as human, the free product of human effort, in every part and word. And at the same time, the whole Bible is recognized as divine, the Word of God, his utterances, of which he is in the truest sense the Author.[19]

In other words, according to Erickson's fourth category and in light of Warfield's definition, inspiration not only extends to the choice of the very words of Scripture

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[16] For example, see Brian Daley, "The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols, and the Science of Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4 (October 2005), 362–82; Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); Hans Broersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023).

[17] The Scriptural testimony to the confluent nature of inspiration will be explored in future articles.

[18] One of the most thorough collection of writings on the topic of inspiration ever produced is Benjamin B. Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: P & R Publishing, 1948).

[19] Benjamin B. Warfield, "Divine and Human in the Bible," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, Volume 1*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1970), 547.

(*verbal*), it also involves the full, rational participation and understanding of the human writer (*confluence*).

Having identified and summarized each of these theories, the following chart can now be constructed to show how they compare to one another:

THEORIES OF INSPIRATION					
Intuition	**Illumination**	**Dynamic**	***Verbal and Confluent**	**Dictation**	**Ecstatic**
Inspiration as natural human giftedness; what is written is wholly determined by the writer.	Inspiration as divinely heightened ability; the Spirit stimulates the writer to record his thoughts at a level beyond his natural human ability.	Inspiration as divinely revealed ideas; the concepts contained in the text originate in God, but the form of expression originates in the writer.	Inspiration as the confluent activity of the Spirit and the writer; the text produced is truly the Word of God and the word of man.	Inspiration as the dictation of the Word of God to the writer who functions as a secretary.	Inspiration as the overtaking of the human writer to the exclusion of his full rational awareness and participation.
Dominantly human ◄——————————► Dominantly divine					

Divine Transcendence and Immanence

What is helpful to note about these theories of inspiration is that they also reflect critical presuppositions about the transcendence and immanence of God. Out of all the options, the verbal and confluent mode of inspiration is the mode that best affirms both divine transcendence and divine immanence in full, perfect complement. The texts produced by inspiration are taken to be the Word of God in the truest sense—"the oracles of God" (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, Rom 3:2), "God-breathed" (θεόπνευστος, 2 Tim 3:16), originating from His infinite mind and consistent in quality to what He is in essence as its Author (Ps 19:7–9). This acknowledges God's transcendence.

But the texts produced are also the words of men, in the truest sense intended, composed, and comprehended by the minds of their human writers. In fact, the Spirit's superintendence is not limited to the specific act of writing; it began long before the Word of the Lord came to the biblical writers. It began in the intimate shaping of their circumstances, including the determination of their lineage and upbringing (e.g., Jer 1:5–8; Gal 1:15–16). Their thought patterns, vocabulary, idioms, and distinctive personalities—all divinely nurtured through natural means—were fashioned into the ideal instruments for the inscripturation of the knowledge that God determined to reveal through them (1 Cor 2:10–13). This acknowledges God's immanence.

Thus, in the mode of verbal, confluent inspiration alone are both transcendence and immanence fully affirmed and celebrated.[20] Furthermore, as will be discussed below, for those who hold this view and conscientiously attempt to make their hermeneutics reflect it, a grammatico-historical method of interpretation is most compelling. But theories that move increasingly to the left from the view of verbal, confluent inspiration, as listed in the chart above, manifest a growing emphasis on divine immanence to the eclipse of divine transcendence. Conversely, theories that move increasingly to the right of verbal, confluent inspiration demonstrate a growing emphasis on divine transcendence to the marginalization of divine immanence. As these views of inspiration depart from the full affirmation of both divine transcendence and divine immanence, errant hermeneutics result.

An analogy of the errors that develop in our understanding of Scripture and its interpretation when either transcendence or immanence is emphasized to the exclusion of the other is found in the heresies related to the person and nature of Christ. At the outset, we must be quick to acknowledge that an exact parallel between the essence of Scripture and the person of Christ does not exist. Warfield himself was careful to provide this caution to any who might press the analogy too far:

> It has been customary among a certain school of writers to speak of the Scriptures, because thus "inspired," as a Divine-human book, and to appeal to the analogy of Our Lord's Divine-human personality to explain their peculiar qualities as such. . . . But the analogy with Our Lord's Divine-human personality may easily be pressed beyond reason. There is no hypostatic union between the Divine and human in Scripture; we cannot parallel the "inscripturation" of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God. The Scriptures are merely the product of Divine and human forces working together to produce a product in the production of which the human forces work under the initiation and prevalent direction of the Divine . . . . Between such diverse things there can exist only a *remote analogy;* and, in point of fact, the analogy in the present instance amounts to no more than that in both cases Divine and human factors are involved, though very differently.[21]

Nevertheless, basic similarities between Christology and bibliology can be observed in relation to the transcendence and immanence of God. Herman Bavinck, in describing what he calls "organic" inspiration (a notion similar to Warfield's "concursive" inspiration), noted this when he wrote,

> The theory of organic inspiration alone does justice to Scripture. In the doctrine of Scripture, it is the working out and application of the central fact of revelation: the incarnation of the Word. The Word (Λογος) has become flesh (σαρξ), and the word has become Scripture; these two facts do not only run parallel but are

[20] The importance of acknowledging both transcendence and immanence equally is summarized well by C. S. Lewis when he stated, "The relation between Creator and creature is, of course, unique, and cannot be paralleled by any relations between one creature and another. God is both further from us, and nearer to us, than any other being" (*The Problem of Pain* [New York: Harper Collins, 2001], 33). Maintaining this full affirmation, however, is difficult.

[21] Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 162.

> most intimately connected. Christ became flesh, a servant, without form or comeliness, the most despised of human beings; he descended to the nethermost parts of the earth and became obedient even to the death of the cross. So also, the word, the revelation of God, entered the world of creatureliness, the life and history of humanity, in all the human forms of dream and vision, of investigation and reflection, right down into that which is humanly weak and despised and ignoble. The word became Scripture and as Scripture subjected itself to the fate of all Scripture. All this took place in order that the excellency of the power, also of the power of Scripture, may be God's and not ours. Just as every human thought and action is the fruit of the action of God in whom we live and have our being, and is at the same time the fruit of the activity of human beings, so also Scripture is totally the product of the Spirit of God, who speaks through the prophets and apostles, and at the same time totally the product of the activity of the authors. "Everything is divine and everything is human" (Θεια παντα και ἀνθρωπινα παντα).[22]

Getting this relationship wrong has significant ramifications—both for our Christology and for our doctrine of Scripture and its interpretation. For example, by analogy, in the same way that the early heresy of *Docetism* contended that Jesus was a spirit being and only appeared to be a man, thus denying divine immanence, so there are those who deny the immanence of God in Scripture by denying its full human component. Conversely, the early heresy of *Ebionism* denied the incarnation and the deity of Christ, thus denying divine transcendence, so, by analogy, there are those who deny the transcendence of God in Scripture by denying its truly divine element.

The Hermeneutics of Transcendence

A good place to begin tracing how a transcendental view of inspiration—one that minimizes divine immanence—impacts the interpretation of the biblical text is with the Jewish exegete Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC–AD 50). Without question, Philo embraced a "high" view of inspiration. He asserted that the Old Testament writers were superintended by God, and that this influence arose when the prophet's "whole mind" was "snatched up in holy frenzy by a Divine possession."[23] He described the revelatory process in greater detail when he wrote,

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[22] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 434–35. J. I. Packer also sees some legitimacy to the analogy, stating, "The true analogy for inspiration is incarnation, the personal Word of God becoming flesh" ("What Did the Cross Achieve?," in *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement*, ed. J. I. Packer and Mark Dever [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007], 64). Earl D. Radmacher also used this analogy when he wrote, "is it not possible that the claim of authorial ignorance makes the Bible something less than a truly human document? Just as we do not want to describe the person of Christ as less than truly human, so we do not want to describe the scriptures as less than truly human" ("A Response to Author's Intention in Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 436).

[23] Philo, *Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter*, in *Philo*, *Volume III*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library 247 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 233.

> A prophet possessed by God will suddenly appear and give prophetic oracles. Nothing of what he says will be his own, for he that is truly under the control of divine inspiration has no power of apprehension when he speaks but serves as the channel for the insistent words of Another's prompting. For prophets are the interpreters, Who makes full use of their organs of speech to set forth what he wills.[24]

Philo stated elsewhere,

> For no pronouncement of a prophet is ever his own; he is an interpreter prompted by Another in all his utterances, when knowing not what he does he is filled with inspiration, as the reason withdraws and surrenders the citadel of the soul to a new visitor and tenant, the Divine Spirit, which plays upon the vocal organism and dictates words which clearly express its prophetic message.[25]

And again,

> For when the light of God shines, the human light sets; when the divine light sets, the human dawns and rises. This is what regularly befalls the fellowship of the prophets. The mind is evicted at the arrival of the divine Spirit, but when that departs the mind returns to its tenancy. Mortal and immortal may not share the same home. And therefore the setting of reason and the darkness which surrounds it produce ecstasy and inspired frenzy.[26]

Of course, such a transcendent understanding of divine inspiration—one which falls under the heading of the *ecstatic* theory of inspiration according to our chart above—was not new to Philo. Philo incorporated it from the Greek philosopher Plato (c. 428–348 BC) as part of his effort to syncretize Platonic metaphysics with Hebrew theology. For example, Plato himself had stated,

> No man achieves true and inspired divination when in his rational mind, but only when the power of his intelligence is fettered in sleep or when it is distraught by disease or by reason of some divine inspiration. But it belongs to a man when in his right mind to recollect and ponder both the things spoken in dream or waking vision by the divining and inspired nature, and all the visionary forms that were seen, and by means of reasoning to discern about them all wherein they are significant and for whom they portend evil or good in the future, the past, or the present. But it is not the task of him who has been in a state of frenzy, and still continues therein, to judge the apparitions and voices seen or uttered by himself; for it was well said of old that to do and to know one's own and oneself belongs only to him who is sound of mind. Wherefore also it is customary to set the tribe

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[24] Philo, *On the Special Laws*, *Books 1–3,* in *Philo*, *Volume VII*, trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 320 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 136–37.

[25] Philo, *On the Special Laws, Book 4*, in *Philo*, *Volume VIII*, trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb Classical Library 341 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 38–39.

[26] Philo, *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, in *Philo*, *Volume IV*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library 261 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 419.

> of prophets to pass judgement upon these inspired divinations; and they, indeed, themselves are named "diviners" by certain who are wholly ignorant of the truth that they are not diviners but interpreters of the mysterious voice and apparition, for whom the most fitting name would be "prophets of things divined."[27]

Echoing Plato's metaphysics, Philo advocated a view of inspiration that had little room for divine immanence, and thus, for the conscious, intentional involvement of the biblical writer. For all intents and purposes, the writer was *passive*—a mere scribe caught up in a state of *ecstasy* as the Spirit transported him into the transcendent. Describing this concept of ecstasy as it was employed by Platonic philosophy and adapted by Philo, Geerhardus Vos observed the following:

> According to Philo *ekstasis* is the literal absence of the *nous* [mind] from the body. His view of the transcendental nature of God and its incompatibility for close association with the creature necessitated this view. When the divine Spirit arrives in the prophet, he observes, the *nous* takes its departure, because it would not be fitting for the immortal to dwell with the mortal.[28]

The impact this ecstatic, transcendental view of inspiration had on Bible interpretation was unmistakable. The method used to access the knowledge of God revealed through the words of the ecstatic prophets had to go beyond the conventions of human language; the text could in no way be treated as one would treat normal language. Since God's knowledge was conveyed in a transcendental realm, hermeneutics were needed to assist the interpreter to ascend into that same realm. Thus, in the same way that the Greek philosophers employed allegorism to interpret the authoritative writings of their culture, so also allegorism would be employed in the interpretation of the biblical text. Richard Longenecker explains it well:

> In an endeavor (1) to safeguard the transcendence of God against all anthropopathisms, (2) to vindicate Hebrew theology before the court of Grecian philosophy, and (3) to contemporize the sacred accounts so as to make them relevant to current situations and experiences, Philo treated the Old Testament as a corpus of symbols given by God for man's spiritual and moral benefit which must be understood other than in a literal or historical manner.[29]

Gregg Allison concurs: "Just as Plato had stressed the reality of a spiritual world lying hidden behind our tangible, visible world, so Philo emphasized the spiritual

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[27] Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Plato, Volume IX*, trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library 324 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 187–89.

[28] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 225. To emphasize just how much the prophet's mind was believed to be detached from the revelatory process, Vos further notes that the philosophical term *amentia* was sometimes employed in discussions about inspiration—not as synonymous with *dementia* or even *mania*, but as a way to describe the prophet as "without his mind" (*a-mentem*) as he received and recorded divine revelation (226).

[29] Richard N. Longenecker, "Can We Reproduce the Exegesis of the New Testament," *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 (1970), 13.

meaning lying behind the words of Scripture. An allegorical method of interpretation was necessary to discern this deeper meaning."[30]

A case in point can be seen in the way Philo interpreted a text like Genesis 11:1–9. To Philo, the historical genesis of humanity's language problems was simply beside the point. After a highly allegorical, de-historicized, philosophical interpretation of the text, Philo states,

> This is our explanation, but those who merely follow the outward and obvious think that we have at this point a reference to the origin of the Greek and barbarian languages. I would not censure such persons, for perhaps the truth is with them also. Still I would exhort not to halt there, but to press on to allegorical interpretations and to recognize that the letter is to the oracle but as the shadow to the substance and that the higher values therein are what really and truly exist.[31]

Ultimately, eschewing the literal meaning for its historicity and simplicity, Philo makes the Babel account speak of more transcendent, relevant things—like God's arrangement of virtue and His destruction of vice. A survey of Philo's other expositions of the Hebrew Scriptures quickly reveals that Philo's "high view" of inspiration necessitates an allegorical method of interpretation that has little to no place for original language or historical context. Bruce Vawter sums it up well: "Allegorical exegesis is almost infallibly a sign of an oracular conception of Scripture."[32]

This transcendental view of inspiration, and hence, its requirement of allegorical interpretation, was largely carried over into the early church.[33] Naturally, since

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[30] Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 163 fn. 3. See also Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 137; Joseph W. Trigg, "Allegory," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland, 1990), 23; Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 7.

[31] Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, in *Philo*, *Volume IV*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library 261 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 114–115.

[32] Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 14.

[33] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 225–26. A prime example is found in Athenagoras (c. AD 133–190), an Athenian philosopher converted to Christianity, when he writes, "it would be irrational for us to cease to believe in the Spirit from God, who moved the mouths of the prophets like musical instruments," and that the prophets like Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, were "lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds by impulses of the Divine Spirit, uttered the things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute-player breathes into a flute" ("A Plea for the Christians," in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. B. P. Pratten, vol. 2, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885], 132–33).

A similar comment is found in Justin Martyr: "the divine plectrum [pick] itself, descending from heaven, and using righteous men as an instrument like a harp or lyre, might reveal to us the knowledge of things divine and heavenly" ("Justin's Hortatory Address to the Greeks," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. M. Dods, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885], 276).

Consistent with Philo, the second century Montanist movement—with whom Tertullian (AD 155–220) came to side—advocated the view that prophecy by necessity was *ecstasy* in nature. Writing of the movement in the fourth century, Epiphanius of Salamis described the Montanists with these words: "But when the Phrygians profess to prophesy, it is plain they are not sound of mind and rational. Their words are ambiguous and odd, with nothing right about them. Montanus, for instance, says, "Lo, the man is as a

Alexandria was the center for instruction in Greek philosophy in that era, and since it was Philo's own hometown, the early Christian school of Alexandria became the primary proponent of a Philonic-like view of inspiration, and hence, the primary proponent of the allegorical method.

Granted, the Alexandrian school did not hold to all of Philo's views. Origen (c. AD 185–253)—who viewed Philo as his "predecessor"[34]—to some degree walked back Philo's emphasis on ecstatic, arational inspiration, and so also walked back Philo's extreme allegorism.[35] He sought even more to distance himself from the pagan philosopher Plato. He believed that the biblical prophets were not "without their minds" in the reception of communication of divine knowledge.[36] As a result, literal interpretation was much more acceptable to Origen than for Philo: "For the passages that are true on the level of the narrative are much more numerous than those which are woven with a purely spiritual meaning."[37]

Nevertheless, the overwhelming transcendence of the mode of inspiration and of the subject matter communicated required spiritualized reading, one in which the text had to be treated through a process of transcending abstraction. Origen laid down this maxim:

> Now the Holy Spirit took care of all this, as we have said, in order that, when those things on the surface can be neither true or useful, we should be recalled to the search for that truth demanding a loftier and more diligent examination, and should eagerly search for a sense *worthy of God* in the Scriptures that we believe to be inspired by God.[38]

Ultimately, as the argument goes, the literal sense could only benefit the simple, carnal believer. The spiritual sense was for the mature—for those who had learned the process of ascent into the transcendent. He writes,

> Thus, while it was the intention of the Holy Spirit to enlighten those holy souls, who had devoted themselves to the service of the truth, about these and similar matters, there was, in second place, the aim, namely—for the sake of those who either could not or would not give themselves up to this labour and toil so that they might deserve to be taught and come to know things of such value—to wrap up and conceal, as we have said before, in ordinary language, under the cover of some history and narrative of visible things, hidden mysteries. . . . [These mysteries] are woven by the divine art of Wisdom as a kind of covering and veil of the spiritual meanings; and this is what we have called the body of holy

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lyre and I fly over him as a pick" (*The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III*, trans. Frank Williams [Boston: Brill, 2013], 10). Epiphanius seems to suggest that it was the Montanist advocacy of ecstatic prophecy that caused the early church to back away from Philo's views.

[34] See David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), especially chapter 9, "Origen," 157–183.

[35] Martti Nissinen, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 191.

[36] Origen, *On First Principles: A Reader's Edition*, trans. John Behr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 205–206; 3.3.4–3.3.5.

[37] Origen, 268; 4.3.4.

[38] Origen, 262; 4.2.9; emphasis added.

> Scripture, so that even through this, which we have called the covering of the letter, woven by the art of Wisdom, very many may be edified and progress, who otherwise could not.[39]

And again,

> If anyone wishes to hear and understand these words [of the Old Testament] literally, he ought to gather with the Jews rather than with Christians. But if he wishes to be a Christian and a disciple of Paul, let him hear Paul saying that "the Law is spiritual" [thereby] declaring that these words are "allegorical" when the law speaks of Abraham and his wife and sons.[40]

Ultimately, Origen sought to establish a distinctively Christian understanding of Scripture's composition and interpretation but continued to emphasize divine transcendence to the determinant of divine immanence. The result: allegorism. His Philonic—and thus, Platonic[41]—presuppositions about the nature of inspiration led him to minimize and often ignore the human writer and instead pursue a method of philosophical abstraction in which the language and historical context of the writer was ignored.[42]

Although the church pulled away from Philo's extremes, and even from those of Origen, a transcendental view of inspiration (specifically, one which overlooks immanence) held sway in most quarters until the Scholastic era and particularly the Reformation.[43] The extremes of the ecstatic theory of inspiration were jettisoned in favor of a more personal yet still mechanical or dictional understanding of

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[39] Origen, *On First Principles,* 260; 4.2.8.

[40] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus,* in *The Father of the Church* 71, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1981), 6.121–22.

[41] Commenting on Origen's relationship to Plato, Henry Chadwick writes, "He wanted to be a Christian, not a Platonist. Yet Platonism was inside him, *malgré lui*, absorbed into the very axioms and presuppositions of his thinking. Moreover, this penetration of his thought by Platonism is no merely external veneer of apologetic. Platonic ways of thinking about God and the souls are necessary to him if he is to give intelligent account of his Christian beliefs" (*Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1966], 122).

[42] Theodore of Mopsuestia strongly criticized Origen for his reverence for Philo and his embrace of Philo's allegorical method. See his "In Opposition to the Allegorists," in Frederick G. McLeod, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge, 2009), 75–79, esp. 78. Later, John Calvin will provide this summary of Origen's method: "Origen obscures very much of the plain meaning of Scripture with constant allegories" (W. Ian P. Hazlett, "Calvin's Latin Preface to His Proposed French Edition of Chrysostom's Homilies: Translation and Commentary," in *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400–1643: Essays in Honour of James K. Cameron*, ed. James Kirk [Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991], 144). See also Calvin's assessment of Origen in his commentary on Genesis 2:8, where he writes: "We must, however, entirely reject the allegories of Origen and of others like him, which Satan, with the deepest subtlety, has endeavored to introduce into the Church for the purpose of rendering the doctrine of Scripture ambiguous and destitute of certainty and firmness" (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], 114).

[43] One exception would be the Antiochene school of the early church, which evidenced a far greater concern for authorial intent, historical context, and literal interpretation. Space does not permit a discussion here, but see Noah Hartmetz's article, "The Expositional Method of John Chrysostom," in this journal.

inspiration.[44] While God was rightly recognized as the origin of Scripture's words, the human writers were still not accepted as being fully involved; they were viewed instead much like that of stenographers. Consequently, the allegorical method maintained its dominance as the method required by this transcendental view. Vawter explains the connection well:

> Allegorism . . . is always unhistorical and usually antihistorical. It approaches its Scriptures not for the purpose of discerning in them a pattern of historical revelation, but rather as a source of absolutely normative words that can be fitted to any present requirement. The text, in other words, is no longer read with advertence to the historical context that made it a means of communication about persons and things; it is accepted rather for an independent literary value absolute in itself, a medium relevant only to the here and now. It is evident that any exegetical 'method' based on such a conception of the Bible could not fail to be totally subjective, renouncing as it does every access to the minds through which the scriptural words passed and in which they were formulated. It should be equally plain that whenever such an exegetical procedure is dominant no really serious consideration can be given to the factor of the human authorship of Scripture. Whatever protestations may be made to the contrary, in fact to the allegorist the human personalities through which the word was presumably delivered become *anonymous cyphers, relevant only as tools employed by a divine oracle-giver*.[45]

Henri Blocher similarly describes this view of inspiration implied by the allegorical method: the human writers "only spoke and wrote at God's prompting and under his total control [to such an extent that they] could not produce a discourse that is authentically *theirs*."[46] He poignantly captures the consequence: "A fatal rivalry obtains: the more divine, the less human."[47]

More could be added, but the general principle is clear: the more divine transcendence is elevated in the revelatory process to the detriment of divine immanence, the more the human writer's conscious, intentional participation is minimized. The product of such inspiration is a cryptic and mysterious text, one that "appears to be saying X, [but] what it really means is Y."[48] This requires an appropriate hermeneutic in response. The methodology that is consistent with such a view is one that pays minimal attention to the particulars of the human authors—their language and historical circumstances—and instead propels the interpreter beyond the language and historical context into the realm of the transcendent

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[44] Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, 23, 96; William Lane Craig, "'Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke from God' (2 Peter 1:21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration," in *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology*, vol. 2, *Providence, Scripture, and Resurrection*, ed. Michael Rea (New York: Oxford Press, 2009), 161.

[45] Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, 31–32; emphasis added.

[46] Henri Blocher, "God and the Scripture Writers," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 522.

[47] Ibid.

[48] James L. Kugel, *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 18.

through allegorical abstraction. If the interpreter is to get the Bible right, he cannot treat it as any other book.

The Hermeneutics of Immanence

On the left side of the chart presented above are those views of inspiration which represent an emphasis on divine immanence to the limitation of divine transcendence. The milder form of these views is the dynamic theory of inspiration—the theory that recognizes that the revelatory process involved the supernatural communication of knowledge from God to the human writer but asserts that the human writer is solely responsible for the choice of words to express that knowledge. God's extraordinary involvement extends to the writer, but not to the writer's writings. In the extreme form, the intuition theory, inspiration is understood as synonymous with natural human giftedness. The product of such inspiration—the text in terms of both content and form—is wholly the choice of the writer. No extraordinary, external influence has affected him. For this view, divine transcendence is all but denied.

Unlike the transcendental theories of inspiration which have a long ancestry, theories that elevate divine immanence to the exclusion of divine transcendence are more recent in expression. Originating in the era of the Enlightenment, they come to full expression by the nineteenth century in theological liberalism and its skepticism toward the Bible's infallibility and hermeneutics of higher criticism. An example of this line of thinking can be found in the skepticism of the English writer and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834):

> I have frequently attended meetings of the British and Foreign Bible Society, where I have heard speakers of every denomination. . . . and still I have heard the same doctrine,—that the Bible was not to be regarded or reasoned about in the way that other good books are or may be; . . . What is more, their principle arguments were grounded on the position, that the Bible throughout was dictated by Omniscience, and therefore in all its parts infallibly true and obligatory, and that the men, whose names are prefixed to the several books or chapters, were in fact but as different pens in the hand of one and the same Writer, and the words of God Himself.[49]

After his death, Coleridge's writings opened the door for many to question the transcendent nature of the Bible, particularly its veracity.[50] Such skepticism reached a more sophisticated expression in the Oxford scholar Benjamin Jowett (1817–1893). In an infamous article that was instrumental in making higher criticism the standard for British scholarship, Jowett stated,

> The word inspiration has received more numerous gradations and distinctions of meaning than perhaps any other in the whole of theology. There is an inspiration

[49] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1841), 79–80, cited in John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 122.

[50] Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 123.

> of superintendence and an inspiration of suggestion; an inspiration which would have been consistent with the Apostle or Evangelist falling into error, and an inspiration which would have prevented him from erring; verbal organic inspiration by which the inspired person is the passive utterer of a Divine Word, and an inspiration which acts through the character of the sacred writer; there is an inspiration which absolutely communicates the fact to be revealed or statement to be made, and an inspiration which does not supersede the ordinary knowledge of human events; there is an inspiration which demands infallibility in matters of doctrine, but allows for mistakes in fact. Lastly, there is a view of inspiration which recognizes only its supernatural and prophetic character, and a view of inspiration which regards the Apostles and Evangelists as equally inspired in their writings and in their lives, and in both receiving the guidance of the Spirit of truth in a manner not, different in kind but only in degree from ordinary Christians. Many of these explanations lose sight of the original meaning and derivation of the word; some of them are framed with the view of meeting difficulties; all perhaps err in attempting to define what, though real, is incapable of being defined in an exact manner. *Nor for any of the higher or supernatural views of inspiration is there any foundation in the Gospels or Epistles*.[51]

For Jowett, there was little if any biblical testimony to inspiration, and as such, it was an inconsequential matter. True, he would contend, God had His hand in Scripture's production, but not unlike He had with other great literary works of human history. The Bible was the product of God's immanent influence; his transcendence was imperceptible. Thus, the Bible was to be interpreted just like any other book, without exception. He states,

> If the term inspiration were to fall into disuse, no fact of nature, or history, or language, no event in the life of man, or dealings of God with him, would be in any degree altered. The word itself is but of yesterday, not found in the earlier confessions of the reformed faith; the difficulties that have arisen about it are only two or three centuries old. Therefore the question of inspiration, though in one sense important, is to the interpreter as though it were not important; he is in no way called upon to determine a matter with which he has nothing to do, and which was not determined by fathers of the Church. And he had better go on his way and leave the more precise definition of the word to the progress of knowledge and the results of the study of Scripture, instead of entangling himself with a theory about it.[52]

In reaction to these and other such influences, B. B. Warfield arose to sound the alarm and provide exegetical, theological, and historical responses to these "low" views of Scripture. In his survey of the landscape, Warfield concluded,

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[51] Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1860), 345; emphasis added.

[52] Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 351.

> The task has come to be to distinguish between God's general and God's special revelations, to provide the possibility of and actuality of the latter alongside the former, and to vindicate for it a supernaturalness of a more immediate order than that which is freely attributed to all the thought of man concerning divine things.
>
> In order to defend the idea of distinctively supernatural revelation against this insidious undermining, it has become necessary, in defining it in its highest and strictest sense, to emphasize the supernatural in the mode of knowledge and not merely in its source. When stress is laid upon the source only without taking into account the mode of knowledge, the way lies open to those who postulate immanent deity in all human thought to confound the categories of reason and revelation, and so practically to do away with the latter altogether.[53]

Essentially, Warfield believed that the new ideas of inspiration being promoted by liberalism reflected *radical immanency*. He stated that while the challenge of the eighteenth century was with Deism, "In the nineteenth century it was rather with *Pantheism*."[54] He continues, "When the natural is defined as itself supernatural, there is no place left for a distinguishable supernatural."[55] Surveying the revisionist literature being published at the time, he concluded, "Throughout all these modifications the germinal conception persists that it was man and man alone who made the Bible."[56] Jeffrey Stivason provides a helpful summary of Warfield's concerns: "Nineteenth-century theologians began to teach that God was so immanent that even their thoughts were divinely inspired. All one needed to do to connect with the deity, said one prominent nineteenth-century theologian, was to develop or submit to the conscious feeling of absolute dependence."[57]

As always, one's hermeneutics reflect what one presupposes about the nature of the biblical text—specifically, about how that text came into being. The views of radical immanence in inspiration developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries required a hermeneutic of skepticism. It was now believed that God had identified Himself with the biblical writers in all their imperfections. He had submitted Himself to their freedoms. He accommodated Himself to their misunderstandings. Consequently, it was to be expected that their texts contained mistakes, contradictions, and even immoralities—for to be truly human, it was argued, is to err. In response to such a kind of writing, an array of critical tools was put forward to judge the veracity of each text and to sift the wheat from the chaff.

Examples of these immanentist theories of inspiration have continued to multiply since the nineteenth century. One example today is Peter Enns. Enns specifically claims to advocate a view of inspiration that embraces both God's

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[53] Benjamin B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, vol. 1, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 39.

[54] Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005), 1.26; emphasis added.

[55] Warfield, 1.27.

[56] Warfield, 1.545.

[57] Jeffrey A. Stivason, *From Inscrutability to Concursus: Benjamin B. Warfield's Theological Construction of Revelation's Mode from 1880 to 1915*, Reformed Academic Dissertations (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2017), 4.

transcendence and His immanence, even titling his key work on the topic *Inspiration and Incarnation.*[58] He states,

> On the one hand, I am very eager to affirm that many evangelical instincts are correct and should be maintained, for example, the conviction that the Bible is ultimately from God and that it is God's gift to the church. Any theories concerning Scripture that do not arise from these fundamental instincts are unacceptable.[59]

However, Enns' affirmation of God's transcendence in Scripture appears to end there. He goes on to stipulate that in the end, he is beholden to what scientific and philosophical findings dictate. He writes, "On the other hand, how the evangelical church *fleshes out* its doctrine of Scripture will always have somewhat of a provisional quality to it. . . . [A]t such a time when new evidence comes to light, or old evidence is seen in a new light, we must be willing to engage that evidence and adjust our doctrine accordingly."[60]

In other words, evidence outside of the Bible—not its own *autopistia*—must determine how Christians view the nature of the biblical text, and therefore, how they interpret it. He argues that "scientific evidence showed us that the worldview of the biblical authors affected what they thought and wrote, and so the worldviews of the biblical authors must be taken into consideration in matters of biblical interpretation and formulating a doctrine of Scripture."[61] He admits at the outset that his goal is to "reassess" how Christians define the Bible's *uniqueness*, *integrity*, and *interpretation*.[62]

Enns specifically claims the incarnation of Christ as the analogy for understanding the doctrine of inspiration: "*as Christ is both God and human, so is the Bible*. . . . In the same way that Jesus is—*must be*—both God and human, the Bible is also a divine and human book. . . . Christ's incarnation is analogous to Scripture's 'incarnation.'"[63] But as Enns develops his argument, it becomes clear that he is more concerned about "scriptural Docetism" than "scriptural Ebionism." His incarnational analogy turns out to be reductionistic and one-sided. As John Frame points out, Enns "shows an unwillingness, curious for an evangelical, to say anything about the relation of inspiration to historical factuality."[64] In order to protect the full humanity of the biblical text, which Enns assumes to be inescapably prone to err, Enns limits the influence of divine transcendence. He believes that God has so

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[58] Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015). Another example that could be mentioned here is Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). For his discussion in inspiration, see especially chapter 7, "The Genres of Divine Discourse," 229–59. Believing the Bible to be a work of predominantly human composition, Sparks calls upon his readers to embrace higher critical methodologies as the appropriate response to the Bible's nature.

[59] Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 1–2.

[60] Enns, 2; emphasis original.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Enns, 4.

[63] Enns, 5–6; emphasis original.

[64] John Frame, "Review of Enns' *Inspiration and Incarnation*," *The Works of John Frame and Vern Poythress,* May 28, 2012, Accessed August 22, 2023, https://frame-poythress.org/review-of-enns-inspiration-and-incarnation.

accommodated Himself to the trappings of the biblical writers and their worlds that He allowed factual errors and inconsistencies to be recorded as Scripture.

Such one-sidedness suggests Enns has seriously misunderstood the incarnation, assuming the analogy. While he continually spotlights the humanity of Scripture, he relegates its divine nature to a place backstage. As Stivason argues, Enns allows "concerns for the humanity of Scripture to eclipse a biblical balance between the divine and human elements and thus warp the incarnational analogy."[65] He notes that Enns attempts "to strike too hard a balance between the divine and human elements, thereby putting both aspects on equal footing and so distorting the primacy of the divine in the divine and human relationship in both the person of Christ and the Scriptures."[66] In the end, a kind of "scriptural kenoticism" results, wherein Scripture's divine qualities have been suspended or self-emptied.[67] Herman Bavinck noted this same tendency a century before Enns, and so the censure he provided in his day can equally be leveled today:

> The incarnation of Christ demands that we trace it down into the depths of its humiliation, in all its weakness and contempt. The recording of the word, of revelation, invites us to recognize that dimension of weakness and lowliness, the servant form, also in Scripture. But just as Christ's human nature, however weak and lowly, remained free from sin, so also Scripture is "conceived without defect or stain"; totally human in all its parts but also divine in all its parts.[68]

Once again, more could be added, but the principle can already be observed: the more divine immanence is allowed to eclipse divine transcendence, the less the Bible is seen as reflecting the transcendent qualities of God. The biblical text is viewed as accommodated to the human writer and his world to such an extent that it incorporates factual mistakes, human misunderstandings, and internal inconsistencies. The syllogism is simple: the Bible is truly human; to be human is to err; therefore, the Bible must err.

This assumption about the nature of the biblical text requires a particular hermeneutic. The methodology that is consistent with such a view of inspiration is one that interprets the text with critical skepticism. According to this view, if the interpreter is to interpret the Bible correctly, he must interpret it "like any other book, by the same rules of evidence and the same canons of criticism."[69]

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[65] Stivason, *From Inscrutability to Concursus*, 205.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.435.

[69] Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," 375. Jowett insisted upon this principle but did not assert that the Bible was not unique. For example, he stated, "When interpreted like any other book, by the same rules of evidence and the same canons of criticism, the Bible will still remain unlike any other book; its beauty will be freshly seen, as of a picture which is restored after many ages to its original state" (375); and "*Interpret the Scripture like any other book*. There are many respects in which Scripture is unlike any other book. These will appear in the results of such an interpretation" (377; emphasis original). However, it must not be missed that for Jowett, the Bible's *transcendent* or *divine* qualities cannot be believed *a priori*—based on Scripture's self-witness alone. Instead, its transcendent qualities must only be

THEORIES OF INSPIRATION					
Intuition	**Illumination**	**Dynamic**	***Verbal and Confluent**	**Dictation**	**Ecstatic**
Inspiration as natural human giftedness; what is written is wholly determined by the writer.	Inspiration as divinely heightened ability; the Spirit stimulates the writer to record his thoughts at a level beyond his natural human ability.	Inspiration as divinely revealed ideas; the concepts contained in the text originate in God, but the form of expression originates in the writer.	Inspiration as the confluent activity of the Spirit and the writer; the text produced is truly the Word of God and the word of man.	Inspiration as the dictation of the Word of God to the writer who functions as a secretary.	Inspiration as the overtaking of the human writer to the exclusion of his full rational awareness and participation.
Dominantly human ◄——————————► Dominantly divine					
Higher Critical ◄——————————► Allegorical					

believed as they are proven through the application of the "canons of criticism." This is the same position emphasized by Enns and Sparks.

While Jowett's maxim, "interpret the Scripture like any other book," became a dogma for critical scholarship, it is widely scorned by theologians on the side of radical transcendence. Yet inconsistencies abound. For example, Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm state, "Among the slogans that set the agenda for much modern study of the Bible, the prescription that it should be read 'like any other book' seems singularly unhelpful" (*Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 1). They go on to refer disparagingly to "academics blithely bent on reading the Bible 'like any other book'" (2). But such criticism should not be assumed as a rejection of the "canons of criticism." To the contrary, Westerholm and Westerholm are quite comfortable in entertaining interpretive conclusions that can be reached only through the application of higher critical methodology—such as the denial of Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (2 fn. 3; 34 fn. 18). Another example of this inconsistency is found in David Steinmetz's article, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37, no. 1 (April 1980) 27–38. Steinmetz argues, "The medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical text [consequences of radical transcendence], with all its undoubted defects, flourished because it is true, while the modern theory of a single meaning, with all its demonstrable virtues, is false. Until the historical-critical method becomes critical of its own theoretical foundations and develops a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting, it will remain restricted—and deserves to be—to the guild of the academy, where the question of truth can endlessly be deferred" (27). Yet Steinmetz himself was comfortable with higher critical methodology, evidenced in part by his open support of "the new criticism" in the same article in which he calls for a return to "pre-critical methodology" (36–38). For a good number of these theologians the real target is not higher criticism. They are actually quite comfortable with the canons of criticism and in the schools and societies that promote them. Instead, their targets are the concepts of authorial intent, single meaning, and literal interpretation.

But we need not get caught between Scylla and Charybdis, in the false dilemma of having to sacrifice either divine immanence or divine transcendence in order to uphold biblical inspiration. It is here where Warfield once again provides much needed insight.

As the popularity of higher criticism increased in the nineteenth century, Warfield recognized that the danger the church faced in that day was to be traced to a flawed understanding of the relationship of God's transcendence to His immanence. In 1881, together with his colleague Archibald Alexander Hodge, Warfield wrote,

> The only really dangerous opposition to the Church doctrine of Inspiration comes either directly or indirectly, but always ultimately, from some false view of God's relation to the world, of His methods of working, and of the possibility of a supernatural agency penetrating and altering the course of a natural process.[70]

Warfield believed that one of the factors contributing to the church's weakness in its defense against liberalism's radical immanentist thinking was its failure to articulate a robust doctrine of inspiration. The church had not adequately thought through God's relation to the world in His act of inspiration. Warfield contended that while the church had always upheld the centrality of the doctrine, it had simply concluded that the *mode* of inspiration was "inscrutable."[71] Of the Reformed churches on this matter he states, "They content themselves with defining carefully and holding fast the *effects* of the divine influence, leaving the *mode* of its divine action by which it is brought about draped in mystery."[72] In contrast, Warfield believed that God *had* testified in His Word to the mode of its inspiration, and since He had, that witness needed to be exhaustively expounded.[73]

Warfield set out to do just that, and to this day his works provide some of the most exhaustive treatments of Scripture's *autopistia* on inspiration ever written.[74] As he delved into the matter with meticulous study, he believed that the scriptural evidence overwhelmingly pointed to the concept of "concursive" or "confluent" inspiration. He explained it as follows:

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[70] A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration," *The Presbyterian Review* 2 (1881): 227.

[71] Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 420.

[72] Warfield, 420–421. The title of Stivason's excellent dissertation on Warfield's views of inspiration, *From Inscrutability to Concursus*, is intended to capture Warfield's efforts to take what was assumed as *inscrutable* and define it precisely in terms of *concursus.*

[73] Stivason writes, "The fact that Warfield had done some thinking on the inscrutable tells us something about Warfield. He was an exegetical theologian who believed that if Scripture revealed something, then it was, in fact, revealed; it was no longer a mystery, and therefore it was open to investigation" (*From Inscrutability to Concursus*, 40).

[74] Summarizing the church's indebtedness to Warfield on this doctrine, Andrew McGowan writes, "Warfield was undoubtedly a spiritual and theological giant whose work on Scripture is very important. . . . His work is of such quality and detail that he has left the church in his debt" (*The Divine Spiration of Scripture* [Nottingham: Apollos, 2007], 86–87). Similarly, Timothy Ward states that Warfield's writings "have set the agenda for many debates on Scripture in the last century, especially in the United States" (*Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009], 18).

> The fundamental principle of this conception is that the whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities which enter it, however, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluently with them; so that the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word and every particular. According to this conception, therefore, the whole Bible is recognized as human, the free product of human effort, in every part and word. And at the same time, the whole Bible is recognized as divine, the Word of God, his utterances, of which he is in the truest sense the Author.[75]

This articulation of what was previously considered "inscrutable" was published by Warfield in an 1894 article entitled, "The Divine and Human in the Bible."[76] In it Warfield built his argument around three tenets related to the relationship of the divine and human intents in the inscripturation of God's Word. Warfield's first tenet was fundamental: "In the first place, we may be sure that [the divine and human intents] are not properly conceived when one factor or element is so exaggeratingly emphasized as to exclude the other altogether."[77] Warfield acknowledged that in the past "there arose in the Church, under the impulse of zeal to assert and safeguard the divinity of Scripture, a tendency toward so emphasizing the divine element as to exclude the human."[78] This mechanical theory of inspiration "denied that the human writers contributed any quality to the product, unless, indeed, it might be their hand-writing."[79] This view emphasized divine transcendence to the detriment of divine immanence. But the growing problem in his day, of course, was the opposite extreme. He writes, "Nothing, indeed, is more common than such theories of the origin and nature of the Scriptures as exclude the divine factor and element altogether, and make them purely human in both origin and character."[80]

For his second tenet Warfield stated,

> We may be equally sure that the relation of the divine and human in inspiration and in the Bible are not properly conceived when they are thought of, as elements in the Bible, as lying over against each other, dividing the Bible between them; or, as factors in inspiration, as striving against and excluding each other, so that where one enters the other is pushed out.[81]

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[75] Warfield, "Divine and Human in the Bible," 547. Warfield's Dutch counterpart, Herman Bavinck, used the term "organic" to describe this concursive mode of inspiration: "The activity of the Holy Spirit in the writing process, after all, consisted in the fact that, having prepared the human consciousness of the authors in various ways (by birth, upbringing, natural gifts, research, memory, reflection, experience of life, revelation, etc.), he now, in and through the writing process itself, made those thoughts and words, that language and style, rise to the surface of that consciousness, which could best interpret the divine ideas for persons of all sorts of rank and class, from every nation and age" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, 438).

[76] The article first appeared in the May 3, 1894 edition of *Presbyterian Journal*. It is reprinted in *The Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1973), 2.542–48.

[77] Warfield, "The Divine and Human in the Bible," 543.

[78] Ibid

[79] Ibid.

[80] Warfield, 544.

[81] Warfield, 545.

Warfield explains further, "This hopelessly crude conception seems to have become extraordinarily common of recent years."[82] His reference, of course, was to higher criticism. Whereas the earlier tendency was to neglect the human intent, now it was to push out the divine. Warfield observed the tendency of theologians to assume that the two intents involved in the production of Scripture cannot be in harmony—that for a true, humanly-intended meaning, the text must be free of God; or, for a true, divinely-intended meaning, the text must be free of man. When this happens, Warfield argued, biblical interpretation becomes an effort "to go through the Bible and anxiously to separate the divine and human elements."[83]

Warfield stated his third tenet as follows:

> Justice is done to neither factor of inspiration and to neither element in the Bible, the human or the divine, by any other conception of the mode of inspiration, except that of concursus or by any other conception of the Bible except that which conceives of it as a divine-human book, in which every word is at once divine and human.[84]

Warfield argued that the only mode of inspiration that fully embraces God's transcendence *and* His immanence is that of *concursus* or *confluence.* He wrote,

> The Biblical basis of it is found in the constant Scriptural representation of the divine and human co-authorship of the Biblical commandments and enunciations of truth; as well as in the constant Scriptural ascription of Bible passages to both the divine and the human authors, and in the constant Scriptural recognition of Scripture as both divine and human in quality and character.[85]

He continued,

> The human and divine factors in inspiration are conceived of as flowing confluently and harmoniously to the production of a common product. And the two elements are conceived of in the Scriptures as the inseparable constituents of one single and uncompounded product. Of every word of Scripture is it to be affirmed, in turn, that it is God's word and that it is man's word. All the qualities of divinity and of humanity are to be sought and may be found in every portion and element of the Scripture. While, on the other hand, no quality inconsistent with either divinity or humanity can be found in any portion or element of Scripture.[86]

Warfield concluded his article with this most valuable summary:

> On this conception, therefore, for the first time full justice is done to both elements of Scripture. Neither is denied because the other is recognized. . . . And

[82] Warfield, "The Divine and Human in the Bible," 545.
[83] Warfield, 546.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Warfield, 546–47.
[86] Warfield, 547.

> full justice being done to both elements in the Bible, full justice is done also to human needs. 'The Bible,' says Dr. Westcott, 'is authoritative, for it is the Word of God; it is intelligible, for it is the word of man.' Because it is the word of man in every part and element, it comes home to our hearts. Because it is the Word of God in every part and element, it is our constant law and guide.[87]

Conclusion

This begs the question: which interpretive principles best reflect this verbal, confluent mode of inspiration? If every word of Scripture is to be affirmed as simultaneously God's Word and man's word in the truest sense, if every portion and element of Scripture equally possess all the qualities of the divine and human intents, if there is no separation to be sought between what was meant by God and what was meant by the human writer, then what method serves as the most consistent response?

Perhaps John Calvin, in the epistle dedicatory of his commentary on Romans, already provided a good, initial answer: "The chief excellency of any expounder consists in *lucid brevity.* And, indeed, since it is almost his only work to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain, the degree in which he leads away his readers from it, in that degree he goes astray from his purpose, and in a manner wanders from his own boundaries."[88]

God is the Originator of Scripture, and in the process of expressing His knowledge in human language He has ensured that its form and content truly reflects Him as the *Auctor primaries*. As such, the Bible is to be read unlike any other book. Yet as the God who has drawn near in astonishing considerateness, He has made His Word accessible to His intended audiences, doing so by ensuring it was understood first by its original human recipients—*the biblical writers*. As such, the Bible is to be read like other books. These two realities need not be construed as mutually exclusive.

The path to understanding this Word, therefore, goes through these writers—not around them. The need, then, is for a method of interpretation that seeks their intent, for it is that intent which was intended by God; it is that intent which is accessible to

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[87] Warfield, "The Divine and Human in the Bible," 547–48. This conclusion paralleled of that Herman Bavinck's "organic" view of inspiration: "Inspiration should not be reduced to mere preservation from error, nor should it be taken in a 'dynamic' way as the inspiration of persons. The view that inspiration consists only in actively arousing religious affections in the biblical authors, which were then committed to writing, confuses inspiration with regeneration and puts Scripture on par with devotional literature. At the same time a 'mechanical' view of inspiration fails to do justice to the role of the biblical writers as secondary authors. One-sidedly emphasizing the divine, supernatural element in inspiration disregards its connection with the author's gifts, personality, and historical context. God treats human beings, including the biblical writers, not as blocks of wood but as intelligent and moral beings. Neither a 'dynamic' nor a 'mechanical' view suffices. The proper view of biblical inspiration is the organic one, which underscores the servant form of Scripture. The Bible is God's word in human language. Organic inspiration is 'graphic' inspiration, and it is foolish to distinguish inspired thoughts from words and words from letters. Scripture must not be read atomistically, as though each word or letter by itself has its own divine meaning. Words are included in thoughts and vowels in words. The full humanity of human language is taken seriously in the notion of organic inspiration" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, 388–89).

[88] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), xxiii.

readers.[89] The method that best encompasses this reality is the *grammatico-historical method*: the "study of inspired Scripture designed to discover under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the meaning of a text dictated by the principles of grammar and the facts of history."[90] Or as stated by Article X and Article XV of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics:

> We affirm that Scripture communicates God's truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms. We deny that any of the limits of human language render Scripture inadequate to convey God's message.[91]

> We affirm the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text. We deny the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.[92]

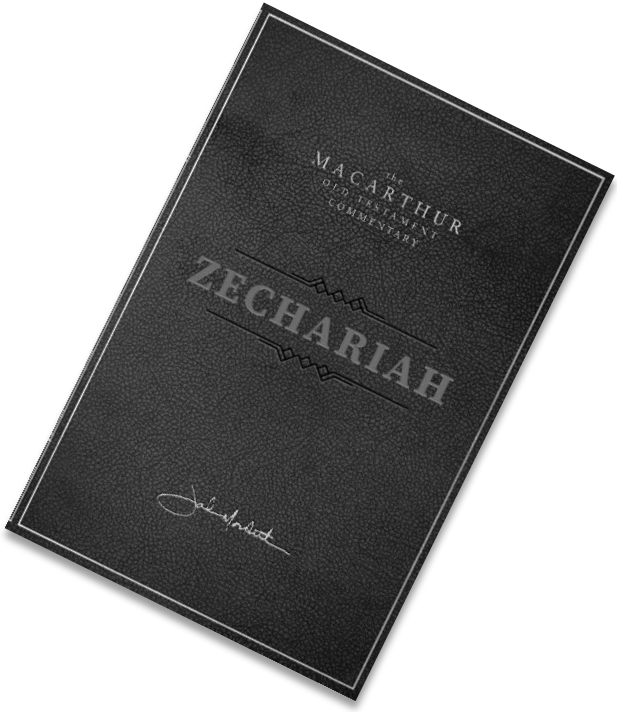
[89] An emphasis on authorial intent logically leads to an emphasis on single meaning. However, the immutability and singleness of a text's meaning does not extend to its *significance*. An inspired text does have a myriad of applications and relationships beyond what the writer originally could have possibly intended.

[90] Robert L. Thomas, *Introduction to Exegesis* (Hurst, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2014), 24.

[91] "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," *JETS* 25, no. 4 (1982): 399.

[92] "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," 400.

"YAHWEH WILL BE KING OVER ALL THE EARTH." —ZECHARIAH 14:9



No eschatology is complete or true which does not embrace the prophecy of Zechariah. Written to comfort Israel after the remnant's return from Babylon, Zechariah's message assured the Israelites that the Lord had not abandoned His people.

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HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES AND THE BIBLE'S STORYLINE: A DISPENSATIONAL APPROACH

Michael J. Vlach
Professor of Theology
Shepherds Theological Seminary, Cary, NC[1]

* * * * *

This article addresses the issue of interpretation principles for understanding the Bible's storyline from a dispensational perspective. The particular questions discussed are the (1) consistent use of grammatical-historical hermeneutics in all Scripture; (2) consistent contextual interpretation of Old Testament prophecies; (3) passage priority; and (4) Jesus as the means of fulfillment of the Old Testament. Application of these principles leads to a proper understanding of the Bible's grand narrative from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22.

* * * * *

Introduction

The Bible's storyline and hermeneutics are inherently connected. As Mark Yarbrough rightly notes, "When teaching the story of the Bible, people inevitably ask, and rightfully so, about hermeneutics—or the nature of interpretation."[2] This means, "One must resolve to tell the story of the Bible in adherence to basic principles of interpretation."[3] Yarbrough is correct.

Dispensationalism is a theological system that addresses how the Bible's storyline unfolds from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. It focuses on God's plan to establish a righteous earthly kingdom through Jesus the Last Adam and Messiah, who fulfills the kingdom mandate given to man in in Genesis 1:26–28 to rule and subdue the earth for God's glory. Dispensationalism also emphasizes the role of the biblical covenants in

[1] The contents of this article are found in Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensational Hermeneutics: Principles that Guide Dispensationalism's Understanding of the Bible's Storyline* (Cary, NC: Theological Studies Press, 2023). Used by permission.

[2] Mark Yarbrough, "Israel and the Story of the Bible," in *Israel the Church and the Middle East*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 56.

[3] Ibid.

all their dimensions and the place of Israel, nations, and the church in God's plans. At the heart of dispensational theology is its hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

This article explains four key principles associated with dispensational hermeneutics that contribute to Dispensationalism's understanding of the Bible's storyline: (1) consistent use of grammatical-historical hermeneutics to all Scripture; (2) consistent contextual interpretation of Old Testament prophecies; (3) passage priority; and (4) Jesus as the means of fulfillment of the Old Testament. These are not the only principles associated with dispensational hermeneutics, but they are important to how dispensationalists understand the Bible's grand narrative.

Before surveying these four principles, we want to clarify that Dispensationalism believes its hermeneutical principles are rooted in God's character and how God created language to work for His image bearers. These principles also relate to the Bible's self-understanding and how the Bible writers used and quoted other Scriptures. Thus, dispensationalists believe the hermeneutical principles they abide by arise from God and Scripture and are not imposed on Scripture. In the end, what is most important is having the right hermeneutic for understanding God's Word. We refer to "dispensational hermeneutics" because the principles discussed summarize how dispensationalists believe the Bible should be interpreted. This designation categorizes the interpretation principles of Dispensationalism and how these differ from non-dispensational systems.

Consistent Use of Grammatical-Historical Hermeneutics in All Scripture

Dispensationalism believes that the proper approach to understand a Bible text and all of the Bible is through the consistent use of grammatical-historical hermeneutics, which also is known as literal hermeneutics. This point is foundational for the other points.

Much debate has occurred over the meaning of grammatical-historical interpretation, so we will explain what Dispensationalism means by this. There are several components to a proper grammatical-historical interpretation.

Interpretation

One key issue is interpretation. Interpretation involves discerning the original intended sense of a speaker or writer.[4] And Bible interpretation concerns grasping the original intent of a biblical author. Mark Snoeberger refers to an "*originalist* method of hermeneutics" that accords binding authority to the "intentions" of a document's author.[5] At a foundational level, understanding the Bible is about interpretation—discerning the authorial intent of a Bible writer in his text.

[4] See Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Dallas, TX: Paul Lee Tan, 2010), 29.

[5] Mark A. Snoeberger, "Traditional Dispensationalism," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 153. Emphases in original.

Grammar, History, Genre

Interpretation involves the contexts of grammar, history, and genre. These are vital for understanding the intent of an author in a text. *Grammar* concerns words and syntax. As Blaising notes, "words are nuanced by grammar to combine in larger syntactical structures." And syntax involves "recognizing that sentences and paragraphs are the primary level of meaning."[6] So, understanding an author's intent in a text involves understanding grammar and how words, sentences, and paragraphs are used.

Concerning *history*, human authors write within specific historical settings, and they use the language and writing norms of their day. Thus, there is a need to be aware of the historical situations of the Bible writers because that is the context in which they wrote.[7]

Genre involves the type of literature the Bible writers used in their respective books. Blaising notes, "Interpretation of a text requires an understanding of the kind of literature in which a passage is located and the literary relationship it has to its surrounding context."[8] Thus, proper interpretation involves understanding the various genres used by the Bible writers—narrative, legal, wisdom, prophetic, apocalyptic, gospel, epistle, etc.

In sum, the contexts of grammar, history, and genre are central to grammatical-historical interpretation. Dispensationalism accounts for these. Since Bible interpretation is a skill, properly accounting for these elements takes great effort.

The Link with Literal Interpretation

Grammatical-historical interpretation has been closely connected with "literal interpretation." The non-dispensationalist, Vern Poythress, notes, "Moreover, in the history of hermeneutical theory, the term *sensus literalis* ("literal sense") has been associated with grammatical-historical interpretation."[9] This is true for Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism links "grammatical-historical interpretation" with "literal interpretation." Elliott Johnson observes, "Today, dispensationalists would agree that literal interpretation is a grammatical, historical interpretation."[10]

This issue of "literal interpretation" has been controversial in the debate with non-dispensationalism. As Poythress notes, "In a sense nearly all the problems associated with the dispensationalist-nondispensationalist conflict are buried beneath the question of literal interpretation."[11] Some have argued that "literal interpretation" is a slippery designation that can mean different things. Others think it can lead to wooden literalism

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[6] Craig A. Blaising, "Israel and Hermeneutics," in *The People, The Land, and The Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 154.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Blaising, 154–55.

[9] Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 84.

[10] Elliott E. Johnson, "A Traditional Dispensational Hermeneutic," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 64.

[11] Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 78.

or other errors like giving words meanings apart from context. But this is not what Dispensationalism believes. Johnson points out that the "literal" in literal interpretation "is what an author intends to communicate through a text."[12] Ryrie adds, "Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation. This means interpretation that gives to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking."[13]

For Dispensationalism, literal interpretation means grammatical-historical interpretation.[14] Dispensationalism agrees with Article XV of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics which states, "The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed."[15] To summarize, Dispensationalism uses "literal interpretation" for the original intent of an author, and it is used synonymously with "grammatical-historical interpretation."

Figures of Speech

Language is colorful with many different ways to make a point. This includes figures of speech. Dispensationalism affirms that literal interpretation accounts for all figures of speech and literary forms. As Ryrie notes:

> Symbols, figures of speech, and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader.[16]

Dispensationalism, thus, affirms Article XV of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics which says, "Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text."[17]

To clarify, literal interpretation is not "literalistic interpretation" or "wooden literalism." It accounts for metaphors and similes. When Jesus likened Himself to a "door" in John 10:7, He was not claiming to be a six-foot high wooden door. When John the Baptist told the crowds, "You brood of vipers" in Luke 3:7, he was not saying the crowds were reptiles that crawled on the ground. If a Bible writer or person uses a figure of speech and an interpreter takes it in a woodenly literal way, that is not real interpretation. Why? The interpreter did not interpret what the author intended correctly. When Jesus refers to His followers as sheep, He uses a metaphor. If someone says Jesus means the animal—sheep, this is not literal interpretation. Dispensationalism rejects wooden literalism and literalistic interpretation. These are not equivalent to "literal interpretation," which understands figures of speech.

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[12] Johnson, "Dispensational Hermeneutic," 67.

[13] Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 86.

[14] Ryrie says, "It [literal interpretation] is sometimes called the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations." *Dispensationalism Today*, 86–87.

[15] See, "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," Accessed September 30, 2022, https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_2.pdf.

[16] Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 87.

[17] "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics."

Symbols, Types, Analogies

Literal, grammatical-historical interpretation adequately considers communication techniques like symbols, types, and analogies. As Paul Feinberg states, "Historical-grammatical interpretation allows for *symbols*, *types*, and *analogies*."[18] Those devices are part of language and behind each is a single, specific meaning that can be discerned by grammatical-historical interpretation.

According to Dispensationalism, symbols in the Bible represent literal things that can be understood. Symbols have specific literal referents. For example, the sun, moon, and eleven stars in Genesis 37:9–10 refer to Jacob, Rachel, and Joseph's eleven brothers. The immediate context makes this known. The statue with the head of gold in Daniel 2 represents Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon—"You [Nebuchadnezzar] are the head of gold" (Dan. 2:38). The symbolism of the seven golden lampstands in Revelation 1:12 refers to the seven churches of Asia Minor (see Rev. 1:20). About thirty times in Revelation, "the Lamb" refers metaphorically to Jesus. Scripture often explains the meaning of a symbol in the immediate context. Literal, grammatical-historical interpretation discerns the meanings of these symbols.

A consistent grammatical-historical approach also accounts for types which reveal divinely intended patterns in the Old and New Testaments. For example, Adam is a type of Christ according to Romans 5:14. We will discuss types in much detail later, but Dispensationalism believes types and their significances can be discovered and understood through the literal method of interpretation.

Dispensationalism grasps the significance of analogies. Jesus is likened to a door in John 10:7 and a shepherd in John 10:11. In Revelation 1:14–16 several similes are used of Jesus. Jesus' head and hair were "white like white wool, like snow." His eyes were "like a flame of fire." Jesus' feet were "like burnished bronze." His voice was "like the sound of many waters." Jesus' face was "like the sun shining in its strength."

Literal, grammatical-historical interpretation considers symbols, types, and analogies in Scripture since all symbols, types, and analogies point to specific referents that can be discerned by context. That is why there is no need for "symbolical interpretation," "metaphorical interpretation," "simile interpretation," "typological interpretation," "analogy interpretation," or other interpretations. We do not have to create a new hermeneutical category for each figure of speech, symbol, or other language device in Scripture. With his criticism of Dispensationalism, Samuel Waldron is in error when he states, "Well, *please*, one would have thought the presence of symbols would have *exactly* meant that some symbolical interpretation is necessary."[19] But the presence of symbols does not call for symbolical interpretation; instead, it calls for a contextual interpretation of the symbols.

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[18] Paul D. Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 123. Emphases in original.

[19] Samuel E. Waldron, *MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto: A Friendly Response* (Owensboro, KY: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2008), 77. Emphases in original.

Prophetic and Apocalyptic Genres

The grammatical-historical method properly recognizes prophetic and apocalyptic genres in the Bible. There are Bible passages that predict or prophesy coming events, persons, and things. Sometimes prophetic passages use straightforward language to describe coming events. Deuteronomy 30, for example, predicts Israel's future possession of the land of promise, expulsion from the land, and then salvation and restoration with a new heart. Zechariah 14 predicts a coming siege of Jerusalem by the nations that is defeated by the returning Messiah who rescues Israel and sets up His kingdom on earth. The New Testament also contains many prophecies.

Sometimes predictions about the future come in the form of symbols. Prophetic books and passages with symbols often are linked with the genre known as *apocalyptic*. Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation are examples of this. There is much debate over what really constitutes apocalyptic literature, but for our purposes we are linking apocalyptic with prophecies in the form of symbols. For example, the beasts of Daniel 7 represent coming Gentile powers (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome). The "flying scroll" of Zechariah 5:2 refers to the Law of Moses. The symbols in these texts can be understood contextually with the grammatical-historical method. No reason exists to abandon grammatical-historical-literal interpretation because of symbols. Dispensationalism accounts for symbols, and if we use the literal method correctly, we can understand apocalyptic sections.

Dispensationalism does not, however, believe symbols should be interpreted in a wooden or literalistic manner. For example, the beast arising from the sea in Revelation 13:1 is not an actual sea monster stepping out of the ocean. The woman on the beast in Revelation 17 is not an actual female human being but a symbol that represents false religion connected with Babylon. Criticisms of Dispensationalism often focus on Dispensationalism's alleged lack of understanding of genres in the Bible. But Dispensationalism understands differing genres in the Bible, including the apocalyptic genre with its symbols.

Types

The Bible contains several typological connections between Old and New Testament realities (persons, events, places, things). These reveal patterns in Scripture and connect the messages of the Old and New Testaments. Dispensationalism believes grammatical-historical interpretation detects these types and typological connections. Adam was a type of Jesus (see Rom. 5:14). The Mosaic Law was a shadow of the New Covenant (see Heb. 10:1). The feasts of Israel point to Jesus and events in His life. For instance, Jesus is the ultimate Passover (see 1 Cor. 5:7). In addition, events in David's life correspond to events in Jesus' life. Judas's betrayal of Jesus corresponds to a betrayer in David's life (see John 13:18).

Dispensationalism accounts for types and their significances in the Bible. No need exists for a "typological hermeneutic" or "typological interpretation" to understand types. A grammatical-historical hermeneutic will discover the types that exist in Scripture.

The Literal Method and Jesus

Some non-dispensationalists believe using the grammatical-historical method alone means missing Jesus. Allegedly, one must adopt a Christocentric hermeneutic or something similar that goes beyond grammatical-historical hermeneutics to fully see Jesus in the Bible. But Dispensationalism does not agree with this perspective. Properly using the literal method of interpretation means capturing the significance of the person and work of Jesus. This includes seeing Jesus in the many messianic predictions in the Old Testament (see Gen. 3:15; 49:8–12; Isa. 9:6–7; Psalm 110; Mic. 5:2). He is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52–53 and the Last Adam who will fulfill the kingdom mandate for man to rule the earth (see Gen. 1:26, 28). Jesus' session at the right hand of God before He rules the nations from Jerusalem is foretold in Psalm 110. All promises and covenants in Scripture relate to Jesus.

If one applies sound contextual hermeneutics to all Scripture, he will see Jesus in it and perceive how all of God's purposes are related to Him. More will be said on this issue later.

The Literal Method and Consistency

Is literal interpretation unique to Dispensationalism? In one sense the answer is "No" since non-dispensationalists also use the grammatical-historical method for much of Scripture. They apply it to historical narratives, legal literature, wisdom literature, the gospels, and the epistles. But the answer is "Yes" in another sense. Non-dispensationalists often abandon literal or grammatical-historical hermeneutics concerning Old Testament prophecies, particularly restoration prophecies about Israel. They often will call for "symbolical interpretation" or "typological interpretation" or "a different kind of literal" or "spiritualization" of Old Testament prophecies.

What makes Dispensationalism unique is its attempt to be *consistent* with the literal method of interpretation, even with Old Testament prophecies about national Israel. Dispensationalism believes these are to be taken literally like other texts of Scripture. No need exists to shift to another hermeneutical method for Old Testament prophetic texts. Ryrie notes that what makes Dispensationalism unique is its attempt to *consistently* apply literal hermeneutics to all Scripture:

> Of course, literal interpretation is not the exclusive property of dispensationalists. Most conservatives would agree with what has just been said. What, then, is the difference between the dispensationalist's use of this hermeneutical principle and the nondispensationalist's? The difference lies in the dispensationalist's claim to use the normal principle of interpretation consistently in all his study of the Bible. He further claims that the nondispensationalist does not use the principle everywhere. He admits that the nondispensationalist is a literalist in much of his interpretation of the Scriptures but charges him with allegorizing or spiritualizing when it comes to the interpretation of prophecy. The dispensationalist claims to be consistent in his

use of this principle, and he accuses the nondispensationalist of being inconsistent in his use of it.[20]

Answering Criticisms

Sometimes a literal or grammatical-historical hermeneutic is criticized for placing "letter" over "Spirit." Or it is linked with a historical-critical or Enlightenment hermeneutic that removes the Holy Spirit's involvement with Scripture. Such reasoning is faulty. Grammatical-historical interpretation is not an invention of the Enlightenment. It is the way God designed His image bearers to understand communication. And it is the way God wants people to understand His Word. Dispensationalists use the grammatical-historical hermeneutic because that is how God made human language to work and that is the way to understand the Scriptures. Abandoning grammatical-historical interpretation opens the door to interpretive subjectivity.

The realities of the Bible's inspiration and grammatical-historical hermeneutics are compatible. Dispensationalists affirm the Holy Spirit's role for understanding and receiving what Scripture says. A proper contextual hermeneutic does not elevate man's reason over God's revelation—it respects it. It also honors the divine element in Scripture.

The concept of "literal interpretation" is controversial. Some mock it. Others think it should be abandoned. Some think it is too simplistic to be helpful. We also understand and welcome nuanced discussions of how language works and how this involves the categories of author-text-reader. But the designation "literal" or "literal interpretation" should not be dropped or avoided. This wording communicates the idea that the meaning of a passage is found with the original authorial intent in that passage. And it means that a passage's meaning should not be spiritualized, allegorized, or reinterpreted by other passages. While various nuances can be added to this explanation, these points are at the heart of what Dispensationalism means by "literal interpretation."

As a dispensationalist, Yarbrough makes a comment that many dispensationalists would affirm: "I approach hermeneutics from a historical, grammatical, and literary perspective that leads to my conviction, on a technical front, to embrace a dispensational premillennial understanding of Scripture."[21]

Consistent Contextual Interpretation of Old Testament Prophecies

The point in this section is related to the previous discussion above about the importance of grammatical-historical interpretation for all Scripture. Here we emphasize the importance of consistent contextual interpretation for Old Testament prophecies. This, too, is a key part of dispensational hermeneutics.

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[20] Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 89. "Even though the grammatical-historical hermeneutic is used by all evangelicals, many believe that only dispensationalists attempt to apply it consistently from Genesis to Revelation." Thomas Ice, "Dispensational Hermeneutics," *Article Archives* 115, 2009, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/115.

[21] Yarbrough, "Story of the Bible," 56.

Many acknowledge the necessity of contextual hermeneutics for most Scripture, including Old Testament narratives, the gospels, Acts, and the epistles. But many do not believe literal interpretation should apply to Old Testament prophetic sections, particularly prophecies about Israel's restoration. Allegedly, these should be subject to different interpretation principles and interpreted typologically, symbolically, or christologically. Benjamin Merkle stated "…that certain prophecies, especially Old Testament restoration prophecies regarding the nation of Israel, should be interpreted symbolically."[22] Anthony Hoekema argued that while "many Old Testament prophecies are indeed to be interpreted literally, many others are to be interpreted in a nonliteral way."[23]

A dispensational approach, though, calls for a consistent contextual interpretation of Old Testament prophetic sections. Just as we use literal and contextual principles for other portions of Scripture, we should use literal and contextual principles for Old Testament prophecies, including restoration prophecies about Israel. No good reason exists to avoid this. After all, prophecies about corporate Israel's curses and dispersion occurred literally. Why then should prophecies about corporate Israel's coming blessings and restoration not be taken literally?

By applying the literal-contextual method to Old Testament prophecies we will grasp the intended authorial meanings from these texts. As Paul Feinberg puts it, "The sense of any OT prediction must be determined through the application of historical-grammatical hermeneutics to that text."[24]

What does this mean practically? If Old Testament passages predict certain events regarding Israel, nations, earth, land, etc., we should expect their literal fulfillment. Those matters are not "types" in need of transformation, nor should they be "symbolically" interpreted. When Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 predict that the Lord will reign from Jerusalem and make decisions for nations during a time of international harmony, then we should expect this to happen. When Ezekiel 20:33–38 reveals that God will meet with Israel in the wilderness for judgment like He did at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19) to see who enters kingdom blessings, then we should expect that to occur. When Daniel 9:27 predicts a coming antichrist figure who will commit an abomination in a Jewish temple but will then himself be destroyed, we should accept this. In reference to the coming Abomination of Desolation Jesus pointed to Daniel—"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)" (Matt. 24:15).

A dispensational approach calls for taking Old Testament prophecies for what they seem to say. This principle, explained by J. C. Ryle in reference to Israel and land, is affirmed by dispensationalists:

> Time would fail me, if I attempted to quote all the passages of Scripture in which the future history of Israel is revealed. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea,

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[22] Benjamin L. Merkle, "Old Testament Restoration Prophecies Regarding the Nation of Israel: Literal or Symbolic?" *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no.1 (2010): 15. This statement was offered as the purpose of this article.

[23] Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 172.

[24] Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," 123.

> Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah all declare the same thing. All predict, with more or less particularity, that in the end of this dispensation the Jews are to be restored to their own land and to the favor of God. I lay no claim to infallibility in the interpretation of Scripture in this matter. I am well aware that many excellent Christians cannot see the subject as I do. I can only say, that to my eyes, the future *salvation* of Israel as a people, their *return* to Palestine and their national conversion to God, appear as clearly and plainly revealed as any prophecy in God's Word.[25]

Saucy represents the dispensational view when he notes that "when interpreted on the basis of the principles above, the plain meaning of the Old Testament prophecies is retained in their New Testament fulfillments."[26]

The Ethical Nature of Promises and Covenants

A hermeneutic of consistent, contextual, literal interpretation of all Scripture rightly detects the serious nature of God's promises concerning the content and audiences of the promises. Non-dispensational approaches often view promises involving Israel, land, and physical blessings as types that are transformed in the New Testament. The church allegedly becomes the new or true Israel in Jesus that replaces or fulfills national Israel. And land and physical promises are spiritualized or realized in a different way. Non-dispensationalists might call this a "better" fulfillment, but this is not real fulfillment. This approach violates the content of God's promises and removes the significance of the original audience. If God promises land and physical promises to Israel, but theologians reinterpret these to be something else, this violates the integrity of God's promises.

Understanding the nature of promises is important and something Dispensationalism takes seriously. Promises involve three things: (1) the promise-maker; (2) the content of a promise; and (3) the audience to whom a promise is made. Promises also contain an ethical component. The *one making a promise* is ethically bound to keep the *content* of the promise with the *audience* to whom the promise was made.

These three components of a promise relate to God's promises. God is a promise-maker who promises specific content with specific audiences. With the Noahic Covenant of Genesis 8–9, for example, God established a covenant with all creation involving stability of nature and human government in a post-flood world. In Genesis 15 God bound himself to the Abrahamic Covenant when He walked through the bloody animal pieces while Abraham was asleep. This showed how serious God was about fulfilling the details of the covenant, a covenant that involved promises of land, descendants, and blessings for both Israel and Gentiles. With the Davidic Covenant, God promised David a kingly line that would lead to a worldwide kingdom over Israel and all nations of the world. The New Covenant promises Israel a changed

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[25] J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready for the End of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 9; reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 9. We are not saying Ryle was a dispensationalist although his eschatology views are consistent with dispensationalism. Emphases in original.

[26] Robert L. Saucy, "The Progressive Dispensational View," in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 165.

heart and the enablement to obey God along with physical and spiritual blessings in the land of Israel. These blessings would also involve Gentile blessings (see Isa. 52:15) and Gentile incorporation into the people of God (see Isa. 19:24–25).

These promises are multi-dimensional, involving many spiritual and physical matters and blessings. The audiences of these covenants involve persons like Noah, Abraham, and David. And they include the corporate, national entity of Israel. All aspects of these promises and the audiences of these promises matter. In Galatians 3:15 Paul said covenants cannot be changed once they are made: "Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it."

Paul appealed to the authority of Old Testament texts in their own contexts when he stated, "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place" (Acts 26:22). In Matthew 5:17–18, Jesus declared that everything in the Law and Prophets must be "accomplished." A dispensational hermeneutic allows the Old Testament and its prophecies to contribute to the storyline of Scripture. It does not defang them and remove their voice.

Passage Priority:
The Meaning of Any Bible Passage Is Found in That Passage

Where does meaning of a Bible passage lie? Is it found in that passage or in other passages? Non-dispensationalists often state that the real meaning of Old Testament passages is found in the New Testament. Allegedly, the New Testament and the "broader canon" give the real meanings of Old Testament texts, which can be different from the original meanings. This leads to the issue of "testament priority." Is there New Testament priority over the Old Testament? Is there Old Testament priority over the New Testament? Or is there passage priority in which the meaning of a passage is found in that passage no matter where it is found?

Dispensationalism asserts "passage priority." This means that the meaning of any Bible passage is found in that passage. The meaning of Joel 3 is found in Joel 3. The meaning of Psalm 2 is found in Psalm 2. The meaning of Matthew 17 is found in Matthew 17. The meaning of Revelation 20 is found in Revelation 20, and so on. Wherever it is found, a passage contributes to God's purposes in its own context. That is why God placed that text in the Bible. Later revelation might comment on a passage, draw principles or significances from it, or connect a promise in the Old with fulfillment in the New, but later revelation does not reinterpret or change the meaning of earlier revelation. Meaning in a text is found in that text, via grammatical-historical interpretation that discovers the original authorial intent. And when all meanings of all Bible passages are understood correctly, we will find that they harmonize. Divine inspiration guarantees this.

This has implications for how Dispensationalism views the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Dispensationalism affirms the integrity and authority of both testaments. Dispensationalism does not believe one testament determines the meaning of the other. The Old Testament does not determine the meaning of New Testament texts, nor does the New determine the meaning of Old Testament passages. Of course, the New Testament offers new information, but both testaments harmonize

with each other. The New builds upon the Old but it does not change the Old. Also, at times, later revelation will offer commentary on or draw principles and significances from previous Bible texts. For example, Peter tells us that David was a prophet who looked ahead and explicitly predicted the resurrection of the Messiah in Psalm 16:10 (see Acts 2:25–32). In this case, Peter tells us what David meant in Psalm 16:10. The unity of Scripture applies to the relationship between the Old and the New.

In addition, the New Testament reveals Jesus as the Messiah and Savior who brings all promises, prophecies, and covenants together (see 2 Cor. 1:20). Jesus is the hinge who unites the two testaments. The Old Testament predicted a Savior and Messiah, and the New Testament shows who He is and how He works to bring all things to completion. Jesus fulfills the messianic hope so dominant throughout the Old Testament.

But significantly, *later Scripture passages do not transform or change the meaning of earlier passages*. *Nor does the New reinterpret the Old*. All Scripture is inspired and contributes to God's story. And since God is the Author of all Scripture there is cohesion and harmony inherent in all Bible texts. Since God got it right with all Scripture the first time, there is no need for later Bible passages to reinterpret earlier Bible texts. There is no "canon-within-a-canon" with the Scripture. Jesus said everything in the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) must be "accomplished" (see Matt. 5:17–18). Since all Scripture is inspired by God and perfectly harmonizes, no Scripture passage transforms other Scripture. As Paul Feinberg notes, "If both Testaments are granted their integrity, their message will harmonize, since there is the single divine mind behind both."[27]

Dispensationalism, thus, asserts that the meaning of any passage of Scripture is found in that passage wherever it is found in the Bible. This includes the entire Old Testament, Old Testament prophecies, and the Book of Revelation. This approach is not Old Testament priority or New Testament priority. It is "passage priority" since the meaning of any passage is found within the passage in question, not in other passages.

If later revelation overrides the meaning of earlier revelation, what was the purpose of the earlier revelation? What was the integrity of the earlier revelation? John Feinberg observes that New Testament writers do not claim to cancel the original Old Testament meanings:

> NT application of the OT passage does not necessarily eliminate the passage's original meaning. No NT writer claims his new understanding of the OT passage cancels the meaning of the OT passage in its own context or that the new application is the only meaning of the OT passage. The NT writer merely offers a different application of an OT passage than the OT might have foreseen; he is not claiming the OT understanding is now irrelevant.[28]

John Feinberg notes how the principle of passage priority, found with Dispensationalism, contrasts with non-dispensationalism: "Nondispensationalists begin with NT teaching as having priority and then go back to the OT.

[27] Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," 127.

[28] Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 77.

Dispensationalists often begin with the OT, but wherever they begin they demand that the OT be taken on its own terms rather than reinterpreted in the light of the NT."[29] Key here is Feinberg's assertion that the Old Testament should be understood on its own and not reinterpreted. Saucy observes that it is unlikely that the New Testament writers viewed themselves as offering reinterpretations of the Old Testament:

> There is no reason to believe that the New Testament writers, whose hope rested on these eschatological promises, saw them as no longer valid, unless they clearly indicate that they are no longer in force or that they have been reinterpreted. In short, the Old Testament predictions of the future times of the Messiah on to the total cosmic recreation should be understood as still valid unless the New Testament positively indicates otherwise. Rather than doing so, we will see that the New Testament writers, in broad strokes, give positive evidence of their belief in the continuing validity of the Old Testament predictions.[30]

Sometimes Dispensationalism is accused of asserting Old Testament priority over the New. But dispensationalists are not calling for Old Testament priority over the New Testament. Paul Feinberg accurately states, "[T]he OT economy must not be forced upon the New. There must be the allowance for genuine progress in divine revelation and salvation history. On the other hand, it is equally as egregious an error to impose the NT on the Old, as though there was some need to 'christianize' it."[31] Instead, what Dispensationalism argues for is "passage priority" in which the meaning of each passage is found in that passage. And each passage has a voice. It gets to speak to the issue it addresses with no need for reinterpretation. Practically, this means that when you are studying a text, no matter where it is, you can study it in its own context, knowing that its meaning is found there and that its meaning contributes to God's purposes. Plus, that meaning harmonizes perfectly with later revelation and the Bible's storyline as a whole.

Jesus as the Means of Fulfillment of the Old Testament

Jesus is the "Yes" to all Old Testament promises (see 2 Cor. 1:20). He fulfills the Old Testament. But not all agree on what "fulfillment in Jesus" means. Outside of Dispensationalism, there is a common idea that Old Testament promises somehow disappear or are transformed because of Jesus. Allegedly, Jesus "fulfills" the Old Testament in a way that makes prophetic details about Israel, Israel's land, a structural temple, physical blessings, an earthly Davidic Throne, and other things vanish or disappear in Jesus in some way. For example, the amillennialist, Kim

[29] Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 75.

[30] Saucy, "The Progressive Dispensational View," 161.

[31] Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," 127.

Riddlebarger, wrote that Old Testament prophecies "vanish in Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled them."[32] But is this what fulfillment in Jesus really means?

Dispensationalism does not think so. Jesus does not make Old Testament prophecies "vanish." Paul Lee Tan notes, "This concept is a lopsided one."[33] Instead, Dispensationalism believes "fulfillment in Jesus" means the literal fulfillment of God's plans. This includes the literal fulfillment of all Bible prophecies, covenants, and promises. To go further, this relates to two main things. First, Jesus literally fulfills messianic prophecies about Himself. And second, Jesus is the means for the accomplishment and literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, covenants, and promises.

First, Jesus directly and literally fulfills messianic prophecies about Himself. Jesus referred to this in Luke 24:44 concerning His suffering, death, and resurrection:

> Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

This reveals that "all things written about" Jesus in the Old Testament must be fulfilled. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was predicted in Micah 5:2 and was literally fulfilled. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey literally fulfilled Zechariah 9:9 (see Matt. 21:4–5). Peter affirmed that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus' death: "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18). With Luke 22:37 Jesus declared that the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53:12 must be fulfilled with Him: "For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'And He was numbered with transgressors'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." So one major way Jesus fulfills the Old Testament is that He accomplishes messianic prophecies about Himself.

Second, Jesus is the *means* for the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, promises, and covenants. Jesus is a person, but there are prophecies and predictions about other persons, things, institutions, events, etc. There are predictions about a coming antichrist, temple, Israel, nations, destruction and rescue of Jerusalem, battles between nations, the Day of the Lord, kingdom, resurrection, judgment, etc. While not Jesus, these matters are significant to God's purposes, and Jesus is involved with their fulfillment. These things do not vanish or dissolve into Jesus in a metaphysical way. As the One who is at the center of all that God is doing in the world, Jesus works to make sure everything predicted in the Old Testament happens. The matters mentioned above cannot happen without Him. Jesus is the *means of fulfillment* of the Old Testament since He makes sure all God's plans are accomplished.

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[32] Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 70. Emphases mine. His full statement is: "The New Testament writers claimed that Jesus was the true Israel of God and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. So what remains of the dispensationalists' case that these prophecies will yet be fulfilled in a future millennium? They vanish in Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled them."

[33] Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, 105.

Matthew 5:17–18 is relevant to this point. Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to "fulfill" them. Jesus' mention of "Law" and "Prophets" together means the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus also explained what "fulfill" means when He declared that everything predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures must be "accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). Thus, "fulfill" in this context means "accomplished." Jesus actively makes sure everything in the Hebrew Scriptures happens as stated. Jesus is the means for the literal fulfillment of the Old Testament. Blaising notes that fulfillment in Jesus can mean "through Him": "Actually, 'in Him' is a thick concept in Scripture that includes 'through Him.' It includes multiple aspects of the relationship of Christ to the redeemed creation."[34]

Jesus also fulfills His role concerning the covenants of promise. Jesus is the ultimate seed of Abraham (see Gal. 3:16) who brings salvation to both believing Jews and Gentiles (see Galatians 3). He is the ultimate Son of David of the Davidic Covenant who will reign as King (see Matt. 25:31). He is the One who establishes the New Covenant in His blood (see Luke 22:20). The earthly mediatorial kingdom task first given to Adam (see Gen. 1:26, 28) will be accomplished through Jesus when He rules from and over the earth. Thus, Jesus is at the center of all God's kingdom and covenant plans. What Jesus does with the Old Testament is much grander than making its details vanish or dissolve. Below, we discuss more about how Jesus and fulfillment relate to Israel and the temple.

Israel

I once heard someone say he did not believe in a future restoration of national Israel because Matthew 2:15 presents Jesus as the true "Son" and "Israel." Allegedly, if the New Testament identifies Jesus as "Son" and "Israel," this must mean that national Israel was no longer theologically significant. Making a similar claim, Robert Strimple said, "It is Christ, not the Hebrew people, who is the subject of the Old Testament prophets."[35] For Strimple, the Hebrew people are not a major subject of Old Testament prophecy because only Christ is the subject. These two examples reveal a narrow understanding of how Jesus relates to certain things. They represent "either/or" thinking when a "both/and" perspective is better. The logic is: "Jesus is Israel so national Israel is no longer theologically significant." But this is not right. This is a theology of subtraction and replacement.

With the first example above, the person thought a choice had to be made regarding who Israel is. It is either corporate Israel or Jesus—and he chose Jesus. Supposedly, if you think "Israel" as a corporate entity is significant then you are not giving proper justice to Jesus. After all, who wants to avoid missing Jesus for something else? In the second case, Strimple presents a false choice concerning whether the Hebrew people or Jesus is the subject of Old Testament prophecy. Strimple chooses Jesus while others mistakenly choose corporate Israel. But is this choice a legitimate one? It is not. A person can rightly see the entire Old Testament

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[34] Craig A. Blaising, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's, *Kingdom Through Covenant*: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2015), 124.

[35] Robert B. Strimple, "Amillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 87.

as related to Jesus and also grasp the significance of corporate Israel in God's plans. Why? Because Scripture does this. Jesus is the subject of many Old Testament prophecies, and all things relate to Him in some way. There are many messianic passages such as Genesis 49:8–10; Deuteronomy 18:15–18; Psalm 2; 110; Isaiah 11; Zechariah 14, etc. But Israel is also a major subject of Old Testament prophecy.

In Scripture, Israel has three meanings, based on context. First, Israel is an ethnic, national, territorial, corporate entity. Most references to "Israel" address Israel as a corporate entity. Second, "Israel" can refer to the believing remnant of Israel as in Romans 9:6—"they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel." And third, "Israel" can refer to the ultimate representative of Israel—Jesus. Jesus is not explicitly called "Israel" in the Bible, but Isaiah 49:1–6 presents Jesus as the Servant of Israel who saves national Israel and brings light to the Gentile nations. Scripture also links events in Israel's history with events in Jesus' life to show that Jesus is Israel's Messiah and Savior. In Matthew 2:15 Jesus' coming out of Egypt is linked with Israel's coming out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. In Matthew 2:16–18 the slaughter of infants in Bethlehem connects with the Babylonian captivity of the young men from Jerusalem. This last example reveals hope in the context of a negative event. Jesus is the corporate representative of Israel who brings hope to Israel.

That Jesus is the ultimate representative of Israel does not end the significance of national Israel. Passages like Zechariah 12 and Romans 11 reveal that Jesus is the reason for the salvation and restoration of corporate Israel. Jesus, the ultimate Israelite, saves and restores the national entity of Israel. In sum, the concept of "Israel" involves both the corporate entity (the believing remnant) and Jesus, with Jesus being the reason for the salvation of the former. We should avoid simplistic either/or scenarios. There are multiple senses of "Israel," and all senses are significant. Dispensationalism affirms a comprehensive and biblical view of Israel and Jesus' relationship to Israel.

Temple

Non-dispensationalists sometimes claim that when temple language is used of Jesus this means God no longer has any purposes for any structural temples. Strimple, for example, stated, "Since Christ is the *true* temple, we are to look for no other."[36] Allegedly, since temple language is used of Jesus, there is no need for a future structural temple. Strongly against the idea that there could be a future structural temple in God's purposes, Sam Storms declared,

> It would be an egregious expression of the worst imaginable *redemptive regression* to suggest that God would ever sanction the rebuilding of the temple. It would be tantamount to a denial that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It would constitute a repudiation of the Church as the temple of God and thus an affront to the explicit affirmation of Paul here in 2 Corinthians 6 and elsewhere.[37]

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[36] Strimple, "Amillennialism," 99. Emphases in original.

[37] Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2013), 21. Emphases in original.

Dispensationalists, though, believe this thinking is too simplistic and does not fit the biblical data. Either/or thinking is in play when a both/and is more accurate. Two assertions of this kind, however, can both be true: (1) Jesus and the church can be likened to "temple"; and (2) structural temples can still be part of God's plans.

First, Jesus applied "temple" to himself in John 2:19–21 when referring to His death and resurrection:

> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

And 2 Corinthians 6:16a likens believers to this temple—"For we are the temple of the living God."

Yet two decades after Jesus' First Coming, Paul referred to a structural temple—"the temple of God" in connection with the coming Day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:4). A coming "man of lawlessness" will go into this structural temple of God and declare himself to be God. Jesus will then destroy this individual who will have violated the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:8). So, with 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul refers to both a structural "temple of God" and Jesus in the same context. This means a future structural temple of God will exist alongside Jesus. A future "temple of God' also is referred to in Revelation 11:1-2. Here the "temple of God," in the "holy city" of Jerusalem, is to be measured and will be trampled for forty-two months. Again, a structural temple of God is significant in New Testament prophecy.

While Jesus is greater than any structural temple (see Matt. 12:6), structural temples still have a purpose. We do not have the right to tell God, "Jesus is temple so there are no other temples," if God still has purposes related to a coming structural temple. Scripture, not someone's opinion of what should be the case, is what matters. Strimple's claim that we should not expect another temple because of Jesus is not consistent with the New Testament. And Storm's declaration of "*redemptive regression*" is not for him to make if God has determined otherwise.

There are many areas where Jesus is the "ultimate" or "true" reality in Scripture, but this does not always evaporate the meaning of other things. Jesus is the ultimate King, but the saints will also reign as kings (see Rev. 5:10; 22:5). Jesus is the ultimate Priest, but we are a priesthood (see Rev. 5:10). Jesus is the ultimate Man (see 1 Cor. 15:45), but we are part of mankind. Also, Jesus is the true Son, but we are sons in Him. Likewise, Jesus is the ultimate Temple, but other temples exist too in God's plans. We do not have to make false distinctions between Jesus and other things. Jesus can be the ultimate representation of something, but that does not dissolve the significance of other things if God wants them to have significance.

Fulfillment in Jesus must be understood accurately. Jesus should not be used to deny the literal fulfillment of biblical prophecies and covenants. Jesus himself does not do this. Jesus fulfills messianic prophecies and is the means of literal fulfillment for other prophecies, promises, and covenants.

Dispensationalism and Christ-Centered Interpretation

Much discussion and debate about hermeneutics today concerns the issue of "Christ-centered" or "Christocentric" interpretation and how Dispensationalism relates to it. A full discussion of this topic is beyond our purposes,[38] but some comments are necessary.

Some think grammatical-historical interpretation is not sufficient for understanding Christ's central role in Scripture. Allegedly, the grammatical-historical way will not allow one to see Christ enough. A Christocentric approach must be used to see Christ in every Bible passage even if the context does not indicate this. And refusal to interpret the Bible in a "Christocentric" way means dishonoring Christ, promoting moralism, elevating Israel over Jesus, or something else.

Three Affirmations

Dispensationalism often is criticized for not using a Christ-centered hermeneutic. So what is the dispensational view on Christ-centered interpretation? The dispensational view can be summarized in three points. First, Dispensationalism proclaims the central role of Christ's person and work in Scripture and God's plans. Second, Dispensationalism asserts that the proper way to see Christ's central role is through consistent use of grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Third, Dispensationalism believes that the non-dispensational Christocentric approach can lead to misunderstanding Bible passages, both by reading meanings into Bible texts that are not there and by missing the real meaning of Bible passages.

Concerning the first point, Dispensationalism affirms the centrality of Christ. As Abner Chou says, "No one should say that dispensationalists do not believe in the centrality of Christ simply because we insist on consistently holding to a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic. In fact, it is the opposite."[39] *The Scofield Reference Bible* declared, "The Central Theme of the Bible is Christ."[40] Paul Lee Tan also represents the dispensational view: "Christ is the central figure and focus of all history and prophecy."[41] Blaising points out "The first principle" of American Dispensationalism stemming from the Niagara Bible Conference, "was *Christocentricity*."[42] Which means "All Scripture points to Christ and is interpreted correctly only with respect to Christ."[43] Thus, Dispensationalism believes all Scripture relates to Christ. Jesus is at the center of God's kingdom and covenants as

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[38] For a robust dispensational explanation of and response to the non-dispensational understanding of the Christocentric hermeneutic see Abner Chou, "A Hermeneutical Evaluation of the Christocentric Hermeneutic," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 113–39.

[39] Abner Chou, "'They Were Not Serving Themselves, But You': Reclaiming the Prophets' Messianic Intention," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2022): 212.

[40] *The Scofield Reference Bible*, ed. C. I. Scofield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), vi.

[41] Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, 104.

[42] Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 18.

[43] Ibid.

well as the promises and prophecies of Scripture. Dispensationalism rejects the assertion that it misses Christ in Scripture.

With the second point, Dispensationalism believes the best way to capture the central role of Christ is through applying consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutics to all passages of Scripture. Many Old Testament texts express a messianic hope of a coming Seed, Curse-remover, King, and Savior. (see Gen. 3:15; 5:28–29; 49:8–12; Isaiah 11; 49; Zechariah 12:10; 14). Many texts also show how Jesus is at the center of God's kingdom and covenant plans (see Psalms 2; 72; 89; 110; Gal. 3:16). He unleashes the Day of the Lord that leads to judgment of the wicked and then His righteous earthly kingdom (see Isaiah 24–25; Rev. 6:1; 19:15; 20).

In addition to specific prophecies about Jesus, God's plans involve many entities like the universe, earth, land, covenants, people, angels, Israel, nations, the animal kingdom, and many other things. The Bible also records many historical events like creation, the fall, the flood, the spread of nations, the career of Israel's patriarchs, the exodus, Israel's conquest of the land, the captivities of Israel, and the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. Because God's creation is multi-dimensional and history involves these matters, Scripture addresses many of these things even though they are not Jesus. So yes, a passage about various persons, things, and historical events in the Old Testament may not be specifically about Christ, but they all are related to Him. These entities and events are part of God's story, and they all relate to Jesus eventually who restores all things (see Acts 3:20–21).

Dispensationalism promotes a Christocentric view of interpretation *if* understood correctly. But since "Christocentric" has come to mean reading Jesus into every Bible text, perhaps the more helpful designation today is "Christotelic." The Greek term *telos* means "purpose" or "end." Thus, a Christotelic approach asserts that all Scripture is related to the person and work of Christ, even though Christ is not found in every passage. All Scripture is not Jesus, but all Scripture relates to Him. Dispensationalism is Christotelic since it believes that the correct use of grammatical-historical hermeneutics will lead to seeing the importance of Jesus for all aspects of creation and history. If one is concerned that the dispensational view of grammatical-historical hermeneutics will lead to "missing Jesus," he need not worry! Dispensationalism captures the significance of the person and work of Jesus to all aspects of God's creation, kingdom, and covenantal purposes.

Third, Dispensationalism believes the Christ-centered approach of non-dispensationalists can lead to erroneous or artificial understandings of Bible passages. Inserting Jesus into a passage that is not referring to Him is not giving glory to Christ. It is a misunderstanding of that text. One might miss the real meaning God intended in a passage. In short, the Christ-centered approach can lead to (1) reading meanings into texts that are not there, and then (2) missing the real meanings in Bible passages.

Also, Christ-centered interpretation, when wrongly applied, often negates tangible realities in the Bible that should not be negated. This includes entities like Israel, Israel's land, structural temples, a literal throne of David in Jerusalem, and other matters. It is not a coincidence that those who most strongly espouse Christocentric interpretation often deny the continuing biblical significance of national Israel, the land of Israel, an earthly Davidic throne, and a coming earthly kingdom. Christ-centered interpretation is not helpful when it is used to miss, subtract, or replace realities that are still relevant in God's purposes. Ironically, the

Christocentric approach of non-dispensationalism can result in the removing of important realities where Christ is involved.

A Proper Understanding of Christ and Bible Interpretation

Dispensationalism asserts that when every Bible passage is properly interpreted and harmonized with other passages, one will see the central role of Christ in God's plans. So, there is a "Christ-centered" element to interpretation with Dispensationalism if understood correctly. But "Christ-centered," for Dispensationalism, does not mean adding a hermeneutical move beyond grammatical-historical hermeneutics to find Christ. It is not true that grammatical-historical interpretation only gets one so far and then "Christocentric" hermeneutics must take over to really find Jesus in the Bible. Instead, a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, properly applied, discovers Jesus and His significance in both testaments. Abner Chou asks the relevant question, "So if one desires to preach Christ in His full glory, how should he do it?" He then rightly states, "The answer is grammatical-historical hermeneutics. This is the hermeneutic prescribed by Scripture, and this is the hermeneutic that leads to a full exposition of Scripture's message that honors Christ."[44]

To avoid misunderstanding the dispensational view we offer some further clarifications. A true Christ-centered approach means interpreting the whole Bible with Christian presuppositions. We do not approach the Old Testament like an unbeliever, nor do we lay aside our understanding of Christ. We live in the New Covenant era and that must affect how we view the Old Testament. For instance, when studying the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament we know that the Law was a tutor that leads to Christ (see Gal. 3:24). We also know that messianic prophecies about a Suffering Servant and Reigning King are fulfilled in Jesus. We realize that Jesus is the One who brings all prophecies and all details of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants to fulfillment. And Jesus is the Last Adam who will rule from and over the earth in fulfillment of God's command for man to rule and subdue the earth (see Gen. 1:26–28).

A proper "Christ-centered" approach also considers details of what God is accomplishing through Christ. While the non-dispensational view of Christocentric hermeneutics focuses almost exclusively on sin and individual salvation, Dispensationalism detects Jesus' role in restoring all things. This includes prophecies about the earth, land, animal kingdom, Israel, nations, physical blessings, spiritual blessings, temples, etc. The dispensational view accounts for all Jesus is doing. Tan rightly states, "The proper concept of the centrality of Christ takes into consideration the *whole* aspect of the person and work of Christ in history and prophecy."[45] Also, "Christ is central in the sense that in His person, prophecy and history come into fruition. His person enables all future events to eventuate and be realized."[46]

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[44] Chou, "Christocentric Hermeneutic," 135.

[45] Tan, *The Interpretation of Pro*phecy, 105. Emphases in original.

[46] Ibid.

A dispensational hermeneutic avoids a false Christocentric hermeneutic and embraces a biblical one. Horner is correct when he says we need, "A Christocentric Hermeneutic for the Hebrew Scriptures," and not "A Christocentric Hermeneutic against the Hebrew Scriptures."[47] When Horner says we need a Christocentric hermeneutic for the Hebrew Scriptures, he means we must grasp all that the Hebrew Scriptures address, including Israel, land, physical blessings, and other tangible matters. Jesus is involved with fulfilling all these matters too.

Chou offers a proper concluding perspective concerning the Christocentric hermeneutic of non-dispensationalism and the necessity of grammatical-historical hermeneutics promoted by Dispensationalism:

> Contrary to the Christocentric hermeneutic, one does not need a new grid to see connections between previous revelation and the Savior but to see what the authors have established. This is at the heart of grammatical-historical hermeneutics and by doing this, we can preach Christ.[48]

Conclusion

Dispensationalism uses certain hermeneutical principles that guide its understanding of the Bible's storyline from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. Four of these principles are: (1) consistent use of grammatical-historical hermeneutics to all Scripture; (2) consistent contextual interpretation of Old Testament prophecies; (3) passage priority; and (4) Jesus as the means of fulfillment of the Old Testament. When applied accurately, these principles contribute to a proper understanding of all Scripture in a way that honors what God is accomplishing through Jesus in history.

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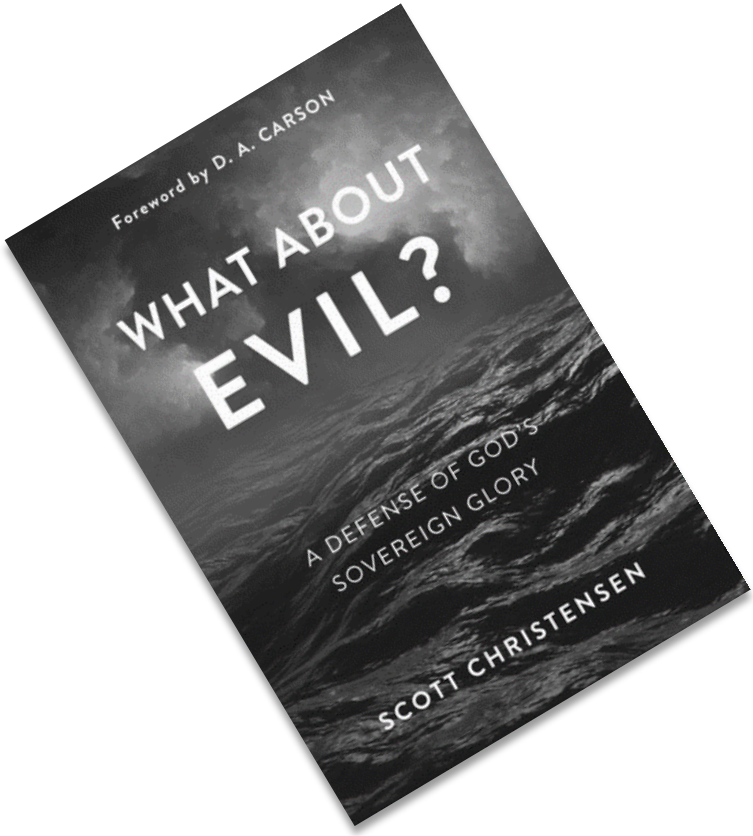
[47] Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 186, 195.

[48] Chou, "Christocentric Hermeneutic," 135.

"WHEN I HOPED FOR GOOD, EVIL CAME."
—JOB 30:26



Reconciling the existence of God and evil has been a long-standing conundrum in Christian theology, yet a philosophical approach—rather than a theological one—dominates the discussion. Turning to the Bible's grand storyline, Scott Christensen examines how sin, evil, corruption, and death fit into the broad outlines of redemptive history. He argues that God's ultimate end in creation is to magnify his glory to his image-bearers, most notably by defeating evil through the atoning work of Christ.

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THE PASTOR AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Tom Pennington
D. Div., The Master's University
Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, TX

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Pastors committed to expository preaching often fail to grasp in theory and execute in practice the legitimate use of systematic theology in studying the biblical text and in crafting the sermon. Some tend to downplay its importance in the interest of being biblical, while others give systematic theologies, creeds, or confessions too exalted a role in both exegesis and exposition. Part of the path forward is to understand the scriptural guidelines for the illegitimate and legitimate use of systematic theology in the normal pattern of consecutive exposition.

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Introduction

Historically, a tenuous relationship has existed between Bible exposition and systematic theology. For many pastors, their struggle over the legitimate interplay between these disciplines began in seminary during debates with fellow students. Others attended schools where they observed an obvious tension between the professors and departments specializing in these two fields of study. Many seminaries have chosen to emphasize just one of these disciplines, focusing their training on one to the detriment of the other. In addition, the pastor's own giftedness and interests play a role in determining which side he defends, influencing the resources he reads, directing the content he includes in his sermons, and even shaping the methodology he uses to study Scripture.

Unfortunately, many pastors have never thoughtfully considered the role of systematic theology in the crucial exegetical decisions at the heart of pastoral ministry—the weekly, consecutive exposition of God's Word. The practical result is often an unhealthy imbalance in their stewardship of Scripture. Some pastors, desiring to be "biblical rather than confessional," have denied or downplayed the legitimate role and value of systematic theology. For others, the harmful tendency is to elevate the role of systematics to such an extent that it becomes the lens through

which they read and interpret every passage of Scripture, or at least the primary tool in the exegetical process.

The purpose of this article is to find the balance—to identify the legitimate and illegitimate uses of systematic theology in exegeting the scriptural text and crafting an expository sermon, and to do so from Scripture.

The Nature of Expository Preaching

In expository preaching, the sermon is primarily the explanation of one passage of Scripture, and the content of the sermon comes primarily from that text. The form of the message is not what defines expository preaching. Rather, expository preaching is defined primarily by the source of the message and the process by which it is prepared.

Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as "the presentation of biblical truth, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, Spirit-guided study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit applies first to the life of the preacher and then through him to his congregation."[1] Merrill Unger writes,

> No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the overall context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be said to be expository preaching.[2]

Several ramifications can be drawn from these definitions. To be an expository message, the sermon must begin with a biblical text—the Word of God must be its sole source. The preacher must conduct a careful exegesis of that text to arrive at the author's original intention. He must interpret the text literally and in its context. Finally, he must prepare and present a message that in a clear and orderly way explains the original intent of the passage and applies it to the contemporary listener.

During the Reformation, John Calvin emphasized that the primary duty of the preacher is to discover and teach the biblical author's intended meaning:

> Since it is almost his only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author…. It is presumptuous and almost blasphemous to turn the meaning of Scripture around without due care, as though it were some game that we were playing. And yet many scholars have done this.[3]

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[1] Haddon W. Robinson, "What Is Expository Preaching?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 57; cited in Richard L. Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 9.

[2] Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 33; cited in Richard L. Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 9.

[3] John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1.

Puritan theologian William Ames (1576–1633) also underscored the importance of single-meaning for Bible exposition, writing, "There is only one meaning for every place in Scripture. Otherwise the meaning of Scripture would not only be unclear and uncertain, but there would be no meaning at all—for anything which does not mean one thing surely means nothing."[4]

In order to discover that "one meaning," the expositor needs *hermeneutics*, which Johann A. Ernesti (1707–1781) defined as "the science which teaches [us] to find, in an accurate and judicious manner, the meaning of an author, and appropriately explain it to others."[5] Following this same logic, Walter Kaiser more recently has written that "the sole objective of the expositor is to explain as clearly as possible what the writer meant when he wrote the text under examination. It is the interpreter's job to represent the text, not the prejudices, feelings, judgments, or concerns of the exegete."[6]

Thus, the essence of expository preaching is to unfold the meaning and significance of the biblical text. In other words, the role of a faithful preacher is twofold. First, it is to understand the objective revelation of God—the single meaning the human author and the Holy Spirit intended in the passage. This first role is that of a detective—carefully analyzing every clue, in dependence on the Spirit's illumination, to discern what the Spirit-borne writer intended to say. This is what comprises *exegesis*—the discovery of the truth of God once-for-all revealed in the biblical text. The second role is to communicate that revealed truth clearly and passionately, in dependence on the Spirit's enablement, to persuade listeners to action. This is what comprises an *expository sermon*. In describing his own preaching ministry, Paul contrasts "adulterating the word of God" and delivering a "manifestation of the truth" (2 Cor 4:2).[7] Expository preaching is a manifestion of the truth. Furthermore, expository preaching is also *systematic*—it moves section by section, paragraph by paragraph through a book of the Bible, intentionally following the pattern of divine revelation.

Exegesis involves careful analysis of the preaching text, using all available tools and resources to examine the details of the text in order to arrive at its meaning. Its goal is to discover what the original writer intended to communicate. Its objective is to answer the question, "What does this really say?" The answer is most often found in a simple, straight-forward handling of the text. As Luther wrote, "The Holy Ghost is the all simplest writer that is in heaven or earth; therefore his words can have no more than one simplest sense, which we call the scriptural or literal meaning."[8] John Calvin expressed it in a similar way: "It is the first business of an interpreter to let the author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say."[9]

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[4] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim, 1968), 188.

[5] J. A. Ernesti, *Elements of Interpretation*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Moses Stuart (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1824), 4:2, cited in Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 25.

[6] Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 45.

[7] The Greek word for "manifestation" is φανέρωσις, meaning a disclosure, display, or exposition.

[8] Martin Luther, cited in Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation: Bampton Lectures 1885* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 329.

[9] John Calvin, cited in Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 347.

Jim Shaddix, in his book *The Passion Driven Sermon*, illustrates the importance of pursuing the author's intended meaning:

> Several years ago, one of the great Bible expositors of our day was teaching a pastors' training school on the value of using various Bible study tools for sermon preparation. During a discussion time a young man posed an important question to him, "Sir," he asked, "don't you think it's important for me just to get alone with God and find out what the Holy Spirit is saying to me?" The preacher's answer was shocking. "Young man, he replied, I'm not interested in what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. In fact, you may be surprised to know that I'm not interested in what the Holy Spirit is saying to me. Then he explained. All I'm interested in is what the Holy Spirit is saying, and the Holy Spirit has been saying the same thing through a passage of Scripture since the day He inspired it. And I'm going to use every available means that I have to find out what that is."[10]

At its simplest level, *exegesis* is inductive Bible study—an approach to Scripture that starts with the details of a text, and from an understanding of those details arrives at a comprehension of the meaning of the passage as a whole. Luther is known for describing the process in his typically colorful way: "First I shake the whole tree, that the ripest [fruit] may fall. Then I climb the tree and shake each limb, and then each branch and then each twig, and then I look under each leaf." The goal of the expositor is to discern the author's intended meaning, and he can discern that meaning only by examining his words and grammar, by using the normal principles of interpreting literature, and by understanding the times in which the author wrote. To do the opposite, of course, is *eisegesis*, which is to lead or put meaning into the text.

In light of the necessity and nature of exegesis, and the danger of eisegesis, it is imperative for the biblical expositor to carefully consider how systematic theology relates to exposition.

The Role of Systematic Theology in Expository Preaching

The Illegitimate Uses of Systematic Theology

As the Main Content of the Weekly Sermon

A pastor may legitimately decide to preach an extended series of sermons that follows the order of biblical doctrines as organized in systematic theology, or an individual sermon that is primarily a systematic explanation of a biblical doctrine. But consistently preaching the summary propositions of systematic theology, creeds, or confessions as the main content of the weekly ministry of the Word is an illegitimate approach to preaching for several reasons.

First, *it ignores the structure and pattern of biblical revelation*. Consecutive exposition driven by the grammatical-historical method flows naturally from the biblical doctrine of inspiration. God chose to give us His Word in cohesive,

[10] Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 152.

consecutive units we refer to as books, which in turn consist of sections, paragraphs, sentences, and words. Both the truth a book contains and the order and form it follows are the product of the Holy Spirit's inspiration. And this pattern of divine inspiration should inform and direct our approach to preaching.

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul explains the nature of *revelation* (vv. 6–10), *inspiration* (vv. 11–13), and *illumination* (vv. 14–16). In proclaiming the gospel of Christ crucified (v. 2), Paul was speaking a secret wisdom that God had revealed: "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory" (vv. 6–7). By "mystery," Paul means truth that was unknown and undiscoverable by human ingenuity, but that God had revealed to him and the apostles through the Spirit. He continues,

> The wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (vv. 8–9).

Many interpret this to mean that we cannot yet know all that awaits us in heaven. This is true but it is not what Paul means here. In verse 10 he adds, "For to us, God revealed them through the Spirit." Paul came to know God's hidden wisdom in the gospel because God revealed it to him by the Spirit. The Spirit was able to reveal the mind of God to the apostles because the Spirit is God, so He knows the mind of God, just as our spirit knows our mind (v. 11).

The Spirit revealed this truth through the supernatural work of inspiration: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit, who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (vv. 12–13). The Spirit taught the authors of Scripture not only the thoughts of God, but also the exact words to use to communicate those thoughts. Paul's point is that both the thoughts and the words of Scripture are ultimately not the human authors' sole creations, but rather the product of the Spirit's teaching (cf. 2 Pet 1:21). In other words, Paul summarizes here what is known as plenary, verbal inspiration. Thus, only someone who has the same Spirit can truly understand the Scriptures, because ultimately the thoughts and the words are God's (v. 14).

Scripture, then, reveals the thoughts of God in the words, order, and form the Spirit inspired. How can we improve on this? The doctrine of inspiration compels us to practice consecutive, expository preaching—preaching the text as God revealed it and the Spirit inspired it. This does not mean we should never preach a topical sermon. But we best reflect the contours of divine revelation when the consistent pattern of our teaching reflects the flow of divine inspiration.

Secondly, preaching the truth propositions of systematic theology, creeds, or confessions as the main content of the weekly sermon *ignores the pattern of consecutive*

expository preaching recorded in Scripture.[11] Christian worship finds its roots in the rich soil of the worship of Israel, which was centered in the reading and preaching of God's Word. God demanded that His Word be taught at both the tabernacle and the temple and assigned this responsibility to the descendants of Levi. Speaking of the Levites, Deuteronomy 33:10 says, "They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob and Your law to Israel." The Levites had other responsibilities as well, but a crucial part of their job description included teaching the people the Word of God. Leviticus 10:11 documents this part of the priest's job description: "To teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses" (cf. Mal 2:7).

Some Levites also served as scribes, who were responsible to archive and copy the Law. The most famous was Ezra, whose ministry provides a model for the proper use of the Word of God in worship: "Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord and to practice it and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). As one of the Levites, this threefold task of study, practice, and teaching was his responsibility, but he lived in a time when this duty had been neglected. Thus, he set out to correct it, and the record of his reform is recorded in Nehemiah 8:1–8. As he read the Law of God, the Levites "explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (vv. 7–8).

They read God's Word and *translated*. The verb could mean that they translated from Hebrew to Aramaic, but more likely, it describes the act of *explaining* the meaning of what was read. Regardless, we know that they did explain the Word because that is what God had called them to do. Ezra and the Levites established a pattern for all those God has assigned to lead the corporate worship of His people. They read the text and explained the text. The practice at the Feast of Booths was to read through the Book of the Law (likely, the entire Pentateuch) consecutively and to explain it. That was the pattern of Old Testament corporate worship.

Corporate worship in the synagogue followed the same pattern.[12] In the first century, the weekly Sabbath service centered on reading and explaining the Scripture. James describes the regular practice in Jewish synagogues: "Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). Alfred Edersheim writes, "The main object of the synagogue was the teaching of the people. This was specially accomplished by the reading of the Law…. The reading of the Law was followed by a lesson from the prophets…. The reading of the prophets was often followed by a sermon or address, with which the service concluded." [13] Often, the readings and the related sermons followed the order of the Scripture, and the reading was intentionally consecutive. Week after week, the teacher read the next portion of Scripture and explained it.[14]

Consecutive exposition was the primary pattern of our Lord's teaching ministry. Hughes Oliphant Old writes,

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[11] For a thorough defense of exposition including sequential exposition as a biblical model, see Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[12] Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 1:94–105.

[13] Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 277–79.

[14] Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 1:99–100.

> Jesus was preeminently a preacher of the Word…. His three-year ministry was above all a preaching ministry. Those who continued his ministry, the apostles, were preeminently preachers as well, as evidenced by the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles. Christianity from its earliest beginnings was a preaching religion. At the center of its worship was the reading and preaching of Scripture.[15]

A key part of Jesus' ministry was teaching in synagogues on the Sabbath. Matthew 4:23 records that "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom." Jesus told Pilate, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret" (John 18:20). Mark often records that Jesus preached in synagogues (Mark 1:21, 39; 3:1–6; 6:2), and Luke tells us that this was Jesus' regular practice: "He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea" (Luke 4:44).

Examine the earthly ministry of Jesus and you will find a consistent pattern. It is true that He often taught during the week from boats in the Sea of Galilee, on the temple grounds in Jerusalem, and at many other venues. But the primary focus of His ministry, week in and week out, was preaching in the synagogues, where He participated in the normal routine of synagogue worship—the consecutive reading and exposition of the Word of God. Jesus was a sequential expositor!

Jesus also trained His disciples to be preachers. Mark records that "He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3:13–14). As is typical with miraculous gifts, Jesus gave His disciples power to cast out demons to confirm the truthfulness of their message. But the focus of their ministry was *preaching*—just as they had witnessed from their Lord. Jesus prepared them to follow in His footsteps. Consequently, this same pattern—that of consecutive exposition of Scripture—is required of New Testament shepherds (2 Tim 4:1–2).[16]

Finally, the method of preaching that routinely replaces genuine exposition with systematics *unwittingly places the confidence of God's people in their confession or systematic conclusions and weakens their reliance on the authority of Scripture*. Although this kind of ministry teaches biblical truth, it fails to build the truth on the exposition of Scripture where the congregation can see its clear meaning in the flow of the context of Scripture. Thus, the tragic result of routinely preaching the systematized truth of Scripture rather than the Scripture itself is that our real anchor—the Scripture—is obscured in the listeners' minds, and their confidence rests in truth propositions from which it is much easier to drift.

As many have observed, that drift normally happens in a church in a subtle and unintentional—but frightening—way. The first generation of leaders is typically committed to teaching biblical truth in scriptural language and to tying the truth taught directly to the Scripture. However, without an intentional commitment to maintain that approach, the second generation of leaders often continues to teach the

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[15] Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 1:111.

[16] See Tom Pennington, "The Lost Legacy of Expository Preaching," preached at Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, TX, July 24, 2022, https://countrysidebible.org/sermons/20220724a-128723.

truth of Scripture but no longer in its biblical context or with biblical language. Without a clear connection to the Scripture itself, the third generation of leaders often abandons key elements of the truth. If the church's leaders do not intentionally work to alter this pattern, a church can easily depart from scriptural truth within three generations of leaders because the members have lost the biblical foundation for what they believe. The state of many confessional churches and denominations today illustrates this tragic decline.

As a Substitute for Careful Exegesis

Rather than using a grammatical-historical hermeneutic to interpret the authorial intent of the preaching text, some pastors study that week's preaching text at a cursory level to identify the key theological issue addressed therein. They then spend the balance of their study researching that theological issue in their systematic theologies. Their study and the resulting sermon are focused more on the theological issue in the text than on the syntax, grammar, and words of the preaching text. This approach also unintentionally undermines Scripture's authority and grants greater authority to human conclusions about the Scripture.

First, such an approach *ignores the foundational principle of biblical hermeneutics that the author's intended meaning is the Scripture*. A text or passage may have many legitimate implications and applications, but it always has only one meaning. As Henry Virkler stated, "The primary presupposition of hermeneutical theory must be that the meaning of a text is the author's intended meaning."[17] This principle is foundational in all human communication. If we receive a letter, we do not look for many different meanings.[18] Our chief goal is to understand what the person writing meant to say. In the same way, the biblical text has only one, single, unchangeable meaning that is determined by the intent of the author as he was borne along by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Pet 1:21). Such meaning is clearly expressed in the text by means of words, grammar, and syntax.

Jesus and the writers of the New Testament affirmed the principle of authorial intent. In Matthew 22:29, Jesus answered the religious leaders of his day, saying, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God." Jesus accused the Jewish leaders of having misunderstood what the Scripture writer intended to communicate. He affirmed the fact that a given passage has one meaning and that single truth can be understood by the mind. In John 5:39, Jesus also stated, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me." Likely, "search" was not an indicative but an imperative: "Search the Scriptures!" Jesus demanded that the religious leaders go back and "search" the Scripture because they had missed the authorial intention of a number of passages.

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[17] Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 76.

[18] This illustrates the bankruptcy of postmodernism. It simply cannot work in the real world of letters, signs, and contracts. Its intended use—and only functional use—is in theology and epistemology as a tool to destroy propositional truth and all metanarratives.

In his defense before Agrippa, Paul declared that he had proclaimed "nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place" (Acts 26:22), affirming that his preaching was consistent with the author-intended meaning of Old Testament texts. And on his part, Peter writes, "Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:15–16). Peter argues that Paul's letters must be interpreted in keeping with Paul's intended meaning, and to reach any other conclusion than what Paul intended distorts the Scripture to one's own destruction.

This is foundational; the heart of our job as expositors is to discover what the biblical author intended to communicate. When we fail to truly study and teach the author's meaning in a passage using the grammatical-historical method, we have compromised our stewardship of God's Word—even if the sermon is filled with biblical truth. If we make a passage of Scripture say anything it does not say—even if what we teach is taught elsewhere in Scripture—the resulting message is not faithful to the text of Scripture. If we misinterpret the text, we are not truly teaching that Scripture! The correct meaning of Scripture is the Scripture.

Secondly, preaching systematics as a substitute for exegesis *forgets the true nature of confessions and the conclusions of systematic theologians*. It is crucial to remember that the best confessions and systematic theologies are studied, informed human conclusions about the meaning of biblical texts. These conclusions can be useful in serving as the exegete's teachers and instructors. But they provide biblical insight and instruction about the meaning of Scripture in the same way preachers and commentaries do. Therefore, while we can glean much from them, we can be no less diligent with our favorite theologians and theologies than the Bereans were with the apostle Paul. Paul's physician and co-laborer commended those believers: "These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Thirdly, *it undermines the foundational responsibility of every pastor to be a diligent student of Scripture*. Paul admonished Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). This is a call for every pastor to engage in careful exegesis of the text, and it underscores the Reformation principle that individual believers were responsible to read and understand the Bible for themselves.

Because of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, pastoral engagement in exegesis was a revolutionary idea in the 16th century. The Council of Trent explains why the Church opposed it:

> To check unbridled spirits it [this council] decrees that *no one*, relying on his own judgment shall in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, *presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which Holy Mother Church* to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation

> has held or holds or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published.[19]

In other words, according to the Roman Catholic Church, the Magisterium alone has the right to interpret the Bible. The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reaffirms what Trent teaches in even clearer language: "The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him."[20]

This issue was at the core of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther, at the Diet of Worms in 1521, stated it clearly,

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience…. Here I stand. God help me![21]

The presupposition behind the responsibility of every believer—and particularly every pastor—to interpret Scripture is that God has given his people a book they can understand. Of course, this does not mean everything in Scripture is *easy* to understand. Peter admits that in places Paul's writings are "hard to understand" (2 Pet 3:16). Nor does this concept exempt the student from diligent study using the best tools available (2 Tim 2:15). But as the Westminster Confession stresses, "not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them."[22]

The principle of personal interpretation does not mean we can come to a right knowledge of Scripture or grasp its richness in true faith without the illumination of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14). Most importantly, this principle does not imply we are free to come up with our own interpretation without consideration of the larger church or church history. As Charles Hodge writes,

> If the Scriptures be a plain book, and the Spirit performs the function of a teacher to all the children of God, it follows inevitably that they must agree in all essential matters in their interpretation of the Bible. And from that fact it follows that for an individual Christian to dissent from the faith of the universal Church (i.e., the true body of believers), is tantamount to dissenting from the Scriptures themselves.[23]

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[19] Council of Trent, Session IV, Decree Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books, April 8, 1546. Emphasis added.

[20] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 30.

[21] Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, April 1521; quoted in Stephen J. Nichols, *Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 41–42.

[22] *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), 1:7; *The Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689), 1:7.

[23] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1:184.

What we deny is the notion that Christ has appointed an individual or a group—beyond His apostles—as those to whom we are bound to submit as the final authority in the interpretation of the Bible. This is true whether that interpretation comes in a sermon, a commentary, a systematic theology, a creed, or a confession.

God commands and praises his people for evaluating what they hear and read against the teaching of Scripture (e.g., Deut 13:1–3; Acts 17:11). In no uncertain terms, Paul writes to the Galatian believers, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed" (Gal 1:8–9). Consequently, God's people have the biblical responsibility to evaluate the teaching even of an apostle or angel, and they have the infallible rule to use in that evaluation—the apostolic testimony contained in the Scriptures. Of the warning Paul gives in Galatians 1:8–9, Charles Hodge writes, "If, then, the Bible recognizes the right of the people to judge of the teaching of Apostles and angels, they are not to be denied the right of judging of the doctrines of bishops and priests."[24] On what basis? Hodge states, "The Bible is a plain book. It is intelligible by the people. And they have the right and are bound to read and interpret it for themselves; so that their faith may rest on the testimony of the Scripture, and not on that of the Church."[25]

A pastor who fails to do the hard work of exegeting his preaching text but defaults instead to teaching the theological conclusions of others—whether those conclusions are found in a commentary, a confession, or a systematic theology—has failed in his most basic stewardship of being faithful in handling the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1–2).

As the Primary Tool of Exegesis

A common temptation, especially for pastors who personally love and gravitate toward systematic theology, is to use it as a grid to lay over every preaching text. The conclusions of their favorite systematic theologians, textbooks, and confessions become the lens through which they examine every passage. Ultimately, their conclusion about the meaning of the preaching passage is determined less by a careful analysis of the syntax, grammar, and sense of the biblical words and more by systematics or their theological system. This is a great danger for the expositor, as Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays observe:

> One major influence that can skew our interpretive process and lead us away from the real meaning in the text is what we call *preunderstanding*. Preunderstanding refers to all of our preconceived notions and understandings that we bring to the text, which have been formulated, both consciously and subconsciously, *before* we actually study the text in detail.[26]

[24] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 185.

[25] Hodge, 183.

[26] J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 139–40.

Of course, this does not mean that we should, or even can, approach the biblical text with a blank slate. Duvall and Hays add,

> Our approach to preunderstanding, however, does not suggest that we read and interpret the Bible in a completely neutral manner, apart from any foundational beliefs, such as faith. Total objectivity is impossible for any reader of any text. Neither is it our goal. Striving for objectivity in biblical interpretation does not mean abandoning faith or trying to adopt the methods of unbelievers. Trying to read the Bible apart from faith does not produce objectivity…. We define preunderstanding and foundational beliefs as two distinct entities that we deal with in two quite different ways. We must let our preunderstanding change each time we study a passage. We submit it to the text and then interact with it, evaluate it in light of our study, and, one would hope, improve it each time. Foundational beliefs, by contrast, do not change with each reading. They are not related to particular passages but to our overall view of the Bible.[27]

John Murray argues that reversing the priority of exegesis and systematics is a fatal failure: "Systematic theology has gravely suffered, indeed has deserted its vocation, when it has been divorced from meticulous attention to biblical exegesis…. Systematics becomes lifeless and fails in its mandate just to the extent to which it has become detached from exegesis."[28] Walter Kaiser has also noted the priority exegesis must have with systematics:

> In no way may a theological grid be arbitrarily dropped over the text as a substitute for a diligent search for a unifying theological principle through the process of induction. Simply to impose a theological grid on a text must be condemned as the mark of a foolish and lazy exegete. Further, the facile linking of assorted Biblical texts because of what appears on *prima facie* reading to be similar wording or subject matter (usually called the proof-text method) must also be resisted since it fails to establish that all of the texts being grouped together do indeed share the same theological or factual content.[29]

He then adds,

> The Reformers courageously argued that all faith and practice must be based on Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). But the Scripture still had to be interpreted. The Reformers' solution was to announce that "Scripture interprets Scripture" (*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*)…. There has been confusion resulting in past and current abuse of the principle. Many have forgotten that *analogia fidei* as used by the Reformers was a *relative* expression especially aimed at the tyrannical demands of tradition…. [It did not] mean what Mattias Flacius, the Hebrew professor at Wittenberg and Jena, wrote in his *Key to the Scriptures*

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[27] Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 146.

[28] John Murray, "Systematic Theology," in *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:17; cited in MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 38.

[29] Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 134.

> (1567): "Everything that is said concerning Scripture, or on the basis of Scripture, must be in agreement with all that the catechism declares or that is taught by the articles of faith."[30]

Calvin himself reminds us of the responsibility to weigh the decisions of church councils against the Scripture:

> Whenever a decree of any council is brought forward, I should like men first of all diligently to ponder at what time it was held, on what issue, and with what intention, what sort of men were present; then to examine by the standard of Scripture what it dealt with—and to do this in such a way that the definition of the council may have its weight and…provisional judgment, yet not hinder the examination which I have mentioned…. Thus, councils would come to have the majesty that is their due; yet in the meantime Scripture would stand out in the higher place, with everything subject to its standard. Willingly embrace and reverence as holy the early councils, such as those Nicaea, Constantinople…Chalcedon, and the like, which were concerned with refuting errors—in so far as they relate to the teachings of faith.[31]

J. I. Packer summarizes the point well: "Scripture must have the last word on all human attempts to state its meaning, and tradition, viewed as a series of such human attempts, has a ministerial rather than a magisterial role."[32]

As Proof-texts Divorced from Context

Proof-texting is the common practice of using verses to make a theological point without first determining the meaning of those verses in their scriptural context. The most common form of proof-texting occurs when a preacher recalls verses he has memorized or that are popularly cited in isolation to support a doctrinal assertion that when studied in context do not speak to that issue. Certainly, it is necessary to assemble passages to systematize what Scripture teaches about a topic, as Paul does in Romans 3 regarding the doctrine of depravity.[33] But for this systematization to be legitimate, each verse must be used in keeping with its meaning in its original context.

However, inadvertent proof-texting also occurs when a preacher passes along scripture references found in a systematic theology without carefully considering their context. Although the best systematic theologians are also careful exegetes, they may come to different exegetical conclusions. A pastor's regular careful exegesis, using the literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic, can lead to different conclusions about the meaning of passages than even the best systematic theologies.

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[30] Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 134–35.

[31] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4:9:8.

[32] J. I. Packer, "The Comfort of Conservatism," in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church*?, ed. M. S. Horton (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 288.

[33] In Romans 3:10–11, Paul quotes from Psalm 14:1–3 and 53:1–3; in Romans 3:13, he quotes from Psalm 5:9 and 140:3; in Romans 3:14 he quotes from Psalm 10:7; in Romans 10:15–17, he quotes from Isaiah 59:7ff; and in Romans 10:18, he quotes from Psalm 36:1.

The most obvious examples fall in the areas of ecclesiology and eschatology. But the same problem can arise with other doctrines as well.

For example, Paul states in Romans 8:3–4 that "What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." In what sense does Paul mean that "the Law might be fulfilled in us"? Two viable options divide scholars: 1) Christ fulfilled the Law for us by keeping it perfectly; or 2) Christians fulfill the law by righteous lives of obedience in the power of the Spirit, not as the means of our justification but as the result. The pastor cannot follow a systematic theologian in using Romans 8:4 to make one of those points without due consideration, or he risks proof-texting.

Of course, some theologians justify a non-contextual proof-texting approach by claiming that the New Testament writers used Old Testament texts contrary to their context. In response, Walter Kaiser states,

> In all passages where the New Testament writers quote the Old to establish a fact or doctrine and use the Old Testament passage argumentatively, they have understood the passage in its natural and straightforward sense. This is not to say they did not cite the Old Testament for other purposes. They did; for example, they at times borrowed its language without appealing to its argument, they used it for illustrative purposes, and they drew on its word pictures. But such practices were avoided when the New Testament writers were engaged in serious exegesis.[34]

If we are genuine believers, our exegesis of Scripture will never change our bedrock convictions about the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith: the nature of God, the person of Christ, the truth of the gospel, or the source of our authority in Scripture alone (cf. 1 John 4:1–6). Because of what John calls "the anointing," we may stray from the truth in lesser ways, but we will never abandon those foundational saving truths (cf. 1 John 2:19–20, 27). However, the result of our exegesis may affect our perspective on other issues. Our study may confirm the theological grid we have been taught and embraced, further refine that grid, provide new insights, and on occasion change our views entirely on non-essential points of doctrine.

The Legitimate Uses of Systematic Theology in Expository Preaching

As a Prerequisite Qualification for the Preacher

Before he presumes to study and teach God's Word to others, every pastor must first have an informed, systematized understanding of Scripture to be biblically qualified to teach. Scripture—specifically the Pastoral Epistles—explains and defines what "able to teach" means and how to determine if a man meets this qualification. The expression "able to teach" in 1 Timothy 3:2 emphasizes that a man has the skills to teach. The expression in Titus 1:9 is "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine

[34] Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 57.

and to refute those who contradict." This latter requirement implies that the man not only has the skills to teach but also has a sufficient knowledge of Scripture and doctrine to exhort believers and to refute error. Thus, a man is "able to teach" only when he has the necessary skills to exegete and communicate God's truth accurately and clearly, and when he has a sufficient knowledge of Scripture and its doctrine to exhort in sound doctrine and refute error. He must have an essential grasp of the content *and* the theology of Scripture, and he must be able to defend it biblically.

Paul describes the man who is qualified to teach as "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching" (Titus 1:9). To "hold fast" means "cling to, hold fast to, be devoted to."[35] "The faithful word" refers to teaching that is faithful or trustworthy, and Paul identifies this faithful word as "in accordance with the teaching." In other words, this message is faithful when it is consistent with what was taught by the apostles and ultimately by Christ Himself.

Faithful preaching is in keeping with the apostolic teaching and with Scripture. Titus 1:9 explains its importance: "*so that* he will be able to exhort in sound doctrine" (emphasis added). "Sound doctrine" is literally "healthy teaching"—teaching that produces spiritual health. So, to be able to teach means a man must know the content *and* the theology of Scripture and how to defend it biblically.

In addition, the faithful preacher must understand the primary scriptural and theological errors and be able to refute them. Paul continues: "so that he will be able…to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). An elder must hold fast to the scriptural truth he has received, so that he will be able to identify error and refute it. The reason is apparent: "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain" (v. 10).

Usually, such deceivers twist or distort Scripture. Paul warned the Ephesian elders about this when he stated, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse [twisted] things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29–30). Peter similarly warned that Paul wrote in his letters "some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:16). But then he exhorted, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness" (v. 17). An elder must understand the primary scriptural and theological errors (historical, contemporary, and local) and be able to refute them from Scripture. Paul instructs Titus that a man's ability to teach must be evaluated based on his knowledge not only of the content of Scripture, but also of systematic and historical theology. It is a prerequisite qualification for the preacher.

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[35] William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 87.

As a Protection against Errant Exegetical Conclusions

Although systematic theology should never be the dominant tool a pastor uses to exegete a given passage, it still serves a crucial role during the work of exegesis. It functions as guardrails to keep the exegetical process and its preliminary decisions about the meaning of the text from straying outside the boundaries of orthodoxy. Or to use a different metaphor, a biblically grounded systematic theology serves as a fence to keep the exegete and the exegetical process within the larger boundaries of the overall teaching of Scripture.

A simple example is the apostle John's assertion, "No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him" (1 John 3:6). Interpreting those words using the grammatical-historical method could potentially lead to the faulty theological conclusion of Christian perfectionism. However, knowing that Scripture as a whole teaches the reality of the believer's ongoing struggle with sin because of the flesh protects the exegete from arriving at that flawed exegetical conclusion. Not only does 1 John 1:8–10 make that point, but many other texts throughout Scripture do as well.[36] Thus, having a systematized theological understanding of what all Scripture teaches about the believer's new relationship to sin guards against a wrong exegetical conclusion of the preaching text. In this way, it is a great help to the expositor.

As a Resource for Understanding Theological Concepts

A key step in the pastor's weekly preparation for consecutive exposition is to establish the theological context of the preaching passage. As Iain Murray writes of expository preaching: "To expound is not simply to give the correct grammatical sense of a verse or passage, it is rather to set out principles or doctrines which the words are intended to convey. True expository preaching is, therefore, doctrinal preaching."[37] But how can we legitimately use systematic theology as part of our exegesis on a weekly basis?

First, identify any significant theological issues in the preaching passage. For example, if the preaching text is James 1:13–18, there are several key theological concepts: the holiness of God, the impeccability of Jesus Christ, sanctification, original sin, and the relationship of the flesh to the new nature of the believer. Romans 1:1–7, as another example, touches on the role of an apostle (v. 1), the hypostatic union and the kenosis (v. 3), the eternal Sonship of Christ (v. 4), the nature of saving faith (v. 5), and the effectual call versus the general call (v. 6).

Second, study those theological concepts in the rest of Scripture and in other theological resources. Those resources may include theological dictionaries[38] that

[36] E.g., Romans 7:14–25; 13:14; Galatians 5:16–25; Ephesians 4:17–32; 1 Peter 2:11; 5:8.

[37] Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939–1961* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 2:261; cited in Richard L. Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 9.

[38] E.g., Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Bradford, United Kingdom: Emerald House, 2003); Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, eds., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017).

offer brief summaries as well as thorough systematic textbooks.[39] Our theological method is exegetical, not confessional, biblical, not historical. However, as John MacArthur notes, "As [the expositor] carefully examines every detail of the text in preparation to expound it, systematic theology allows him to also view conclusions from church history but also the progress of revelation culminating in the complete revelation of God."[40]

Thirdly, decide how much of that theological concept must be explained to your congregation for the meaning of the passage to be clear. Explaining biblical doctrines in this way, over time, builds a theological grid that will build up your people and protect them from error. This approach also keeps us as preachers from distorting the full teaching of Scripture. For example, a passage that rightly stresses that sanctification always follows justification could lead, without the balance of other Scriptures, to confounding the two, as Roman Catholicism does.

As a Final Check of Our Interpretation

This step is the final step in inductive Bible study: the evaluation of our interpretation of the passage. The biblical basis for this step is the fact that there is only one, divinely-intended meaning for every text, and that meaning has never changed. Since that text was written, the Holy Spirit has been giving illumination to believers so they could understand its meaning. Therefore, it is highly unlikely—in fact, *impossible*—that we will be the first to understand that passage. So, it is important to check our final interpretation against those who are either more skilled than we are, more godly, or both.

There are three primary ways to evaluate our interpretation. First, we should compare our interpretation of all the minor supporting passages we intend to cite in our sermon against several good study Bibles. This level of evaluation is an absolute minimum to ensure that we are not guilty of proof-texting—of using a passage to prove a point it is not making in its original context. This is an efficient and effective way to check our interpretation of cross-references that we have not studied as our primary text. Secondly, it is essential to compare our interpretation of the primary preaching text and any major supporting passages we intend to cite against the best commentaries for that biblical book. A third way to evaluate our interpretation is to compare any theological conclusions we have derived from the preaching text against the best systematic theologies. This will not only provide a check against novel or erroneous interpretations, but also additional insights and other related biblical passages.

Conclusion

The proper role of systematic theology—including the use of creeds and confessions—in the preparation for preaching is to provide a systematized, historical understanding of what Scripture teaches, allowing faithful men from other

[39] E.g., MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, expanded (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2021).

[40] MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 36.

generations to serve as our teachers of biblical truth. It serves as a fence that keeps us from straying from the realm of orthodoxy, and it deepens our grasp of what the entirety of Scripture says about the biblical doctrines. Both historical and systematic theology serve as checks against erroneous exegetical conclusions in the same way commentaries do. And both serve to confirm that other gifted teachers have come to the same exegetical conclusions and interpretations regarding a specific passage that we have.

Systematic theology is a helpful tool—a tool that regular exegesis must gently hone and sharpen. Exegesis of a passage should never overturn the foundational, cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith, but it should continue to sharpen our understanding of those doctrines and hone and shape our view of secondary doctrines and conclusions.

On the other hand, systematic theology is not the Protestant version of the Magisterium—it should never decide the meaning of any passage or dictate our interpretation apart from careful exegesis. It does not have the authority to remove our right, privilege, and responsibility to employ the grammatical-historical method to discover the author's meaning. It is a witness to the truth and not a weapon—a tool and not a tyrant.

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THE EXPOSITIONAL METHOD OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Noah Hartmetz
Pastor, Girard Bible Church
Th.M. Student, The Master's Seminary

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This article recognizes Chrysostom as a noteworthy expositor in the early church and examines the key aspects of his technique. After surveying Chrysostom's life and training, the article explores Chrysostom's view on the inspiration of the Bible, the effect of biblical inspiration upon his hermeneutics, and the particular elements of his hermeneutical and homiletical methodology. Chrysostom's method defined his exposition of the biblical text such that his homilies were a clear explanation of the literal sense of Scripture.

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Introduction

Planning to publish a French translation of John Chrysostom's homilies,[1] John Calvin wrote a preface to commend the work to the reader.[2] He considered it a worthy project due to its importance, for "a pastor of the Church knows what the nature of the ancient form of the Church was, and that he is equipped with at least some

[1] "The nickname [Golden-mouthed] was applied to several admired orators, and to John in the east and the west generally, from the fifth century." J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom: Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 4, n. 11.

[2] This article is adapted from a paper presented to the BI 830 History of Biblical Interpretation I seminar, "The Hermeneutics of John Chrysostom," July 2022. For Chrysostom's influence on Calvin, see Paul A. Hartog, "Calvin's Preface to Chrysostom's Homilies as a Window into Calvin's Own Priorities and Perspectives," *Perichoresis* 17, no. 4 (2019): 57–71; Jeannette Kreijkes-van Esch, "Sola Scriptura and Calvin's Appeal to Chrysostom's Exegesis," in *Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Scripture, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hans Burger, Arnold Huijgen, and Eric Peels, vol. 32, Studies in Reformed Theology (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 260–75; Najeeb George Awad, "The Influence of John Chrysostom's Hermeneutics on John Calvin's Exegetical Approach to Paul's Epistle to the Romans," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 4 (2010): 414–36; John R. Walchenbach, *John Calvin as Biblical Commentator: An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

knowledge of Antiquity."[3] Further, God's blessing of edification rested on the church through gifted servants.[4]

But Calvin's interest in promoting Chrysostom was grounded in more reasons than church history. First, Calvin noted that Chrysostom was seeking to teach the "general run of men" through his use of language and method for preaching, something Calvin sought to do, too.[5] Second, Chrysostom's homilies were devoted to interpreting Scripture, which "no one of sound judgement would deny that our Chrysostom excels all the ancient writers currently extant."[6] Most of all, Calvin noted that "he took great pains everywhere not to deviate in the slightest from the genuine plain meaning of Scripture, and not to indulge in any license of twisting the straightforward sense of the words."[7] In Chrysostom, Calvin saw an interpreter who did what he was seeking to do: explain the literal sense of Scripture's words.

This is not to say Chrysostom was without his faults. Calvin noted that he had an "excessive tendency" toward emphasizing the freedom of the will and its impact on human ability for good works. This resulted in obscuring "the grace of God in our election and calling and the gracious mercy which follows us from our calling to the very moment of death."[8] Furthermore, Chrysostom struggled with interpreting the Old Testament because of his lack of facility in the Hebrew language.[9] These exceptions notwithstanding, Calvin believed that an attentive reader would not be led astray by Chrysostom's expositions because of his overall attention to the text.[10]

Calvin's preface to his planned translation of Chrysostom's homilies offers a springboard to Chrysostom's bibliological presuppositions and exegetical principles. These convictions about Scripture and his method of exposition show a correlation that is worthy of examination for today's text-driven expositors. This article seeks to show a correlation between Chrysostom's expositional method, his presupposition about Scripture's inspiration, and his hermeneutical presuppositions. After a brief overview of his life and influences, this article explores Chrysostom's view of Scripture, his principles of hermeneutics, and his practice of exposition.

Life and Influences

Chrysostom lived in the Christologically contentious times between the First Council of Nicaea (AD 325) and the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). Born ca. AD

[3] W. Ian P. Hazlett, "Calvin's Latin Preface to His Proposed French Edition of Chrysostom's Homilies: Translation and Commentary," in *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400–1643*, ed. James Kirk (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 143. Calvin adds, "From [his homilies] you will gain insight into the kind of office and authority bishops had at that time …." (p. 150). That continuity with the ancient church was a concern for Calvin, see John Calvin, "Reply by John Calvin to Letter by Cardinal Sadolet to the Senate and People of Geneva," in *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge, vol. 1 (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 37–39.

[4] Hazlett, "Calvin's Latin Preface," 141; Hartog, "Calvin's Preface to Chrysostom's Homilies," 61–64.

[5] Hazlett, "Calvin's Latin Preface," 142.

[6] Hazlett, 144.

[7] Hazlett, 145–46.

[8] Hazlett, 146.

[9] Hazlett, 144. This means that whenever Chrysostom explains an Old Testament text, he is likely using a Greek translation to do so.

[10] Hazlett, 146.

349[11] in Syrian Antioch, Chrysostom was likely baptized on Easter Sunday, 368, by the bishop Meletius. While living at home during this time, he and a few friends sat under the instruction of renowned Antiochene interpreter Diodore of Tarsus (d. 390). Following an appointment to be a reader in the church in 371, Chrysostom used the opportunity to master the Old and New Testaments.[12] In 375 he was made a deacon of the church. As a deacon he began to write on various subjects until 386 when he was ordained a priest in Antioch. For more than a decade thereafter Chrysostom was the leading and unrivaled preacher in Antioch.[13] In 397, Chrysostom was summoned to Constantinople where he was unexpectedly named the new bishop. His preaching did not endear himself to the wealthy since his messages decried their lavish lifestyles.[14] Before completing his fifth year in the city, he was temporarily exiled twice in 402 and permanently in 403. He died in 407 after four years of difficulty and deprivation in exile.

Two training schools played influential roles in Chrysostom's formation and in his practice of Bible interpretation. The first was his educational training.[15] Beginning with grammar school, Chrysostom was taught "correct reading."[16] This educational curriculum "involved the investigation of the 'story' presented in the text being studied."[17] Significantly, Chrysostom was trained to read a text as an exercise of observation, to follow the author's line of thought without entering his own opinions into the text's interpretation. Next, he entered rhetorical school where a text was studied for how its subject-matter was presented through the style and vocabulary of its author. Students also analyzed how an author's presentation produced an effect on his audience, with "the intention of the author … taken to be the production of that effect."[18]

While Chrysostom's educational training prepared him as a reader and preacher of the Bible, his exegetical training under Diodore refined his interpretation of the text.[19] According to Diodore, Antiochene interpretation intended to explain the

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[11] Dates and events throughout this section are cited from O. C. Jr. Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

[12] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:74. Edwards records that this period of Chrysostom's life was devoted to an ascetic lifestyle, which afforded him the time for study. However, he was unable to maintain this lifestyle because of physical frailty.

[13] Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 57.

[14] For a selection of Chrysostom's sermons on the topic, see Catharine P. Roth, trans., *St. John Chrysostom: On Wealth and Poverty* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981).

[15] Lauri Thurén, "John Chrysostom as a Rhetorical Critic: The Hermeneutics of an Early Father," *Biblical Interpretation* 9, no. 2 (2001): 183. Chrysostom began rhetorical training under Libanius at age twelve.

[16] Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 77. Young elaborates on this education: "Reading a classic in school meant analysing its sentences into parts of speech and its verses into metre, noting linguistic usage and style, discussing different meanings of words, elucidating figures of speech or ornamental devices" (p. 78).

[17] Young, 79–80.

[18] Young, 81.

[19] Hill identifies Diodore as "the man who would be responsible (after Lucian, martyred in 312) for developing the distinctive exegetical and hermeneutical method subsequently associated with Antioch." Robert C. Hill, *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 6. Alongside Chrysostom, Diodore also trained Theodore (ca. 350–428), another important Antiochene and future bishop at Mopsuestia. NB: this training background is absent any explicit philosophical foundation.

historia—the story presented in the text[20]—and the *lexia*—the plain literal sense.[21] This accords with seeking the meaning of the biblical text.[22] Francis Young adds that explaining the text came in the form of "summary and paraphrase" so that an explanation of the text's main idea would cohere with the text's context. Antiochenes achieved this by following the *akolouthia*—the sequence of the argument or story.[23] Next, Antiochene interpretation considers the *theoria* of the text—insight into the text.[24] This activity seeks the significance of the text.[25] Diodore is careful to explain the difference between these two categories of interpretation. He writes, "History is not opposed to *theoria*. On the contrary, it proves to be the foundation and the basis of the higher senses." Furthermore, "*theoria* must never be understood as doing away with the underlying sense; it would then be no longer *theoria* but allegory."[26] Miriam DeCock elaborates that Antiochene interpretive principles rested on the unity of Scripture, the ability of Scripture to interpret Scripture, and that nonliteral interpretation is indicated both in the text and by the text in accordance with its

Wallace-Hadrill writes, "Antiochene Christianity was in its essence unphilosophical…[since he] characteristically thought in terms of history and Scripture…. We may look in vain for [a basis] upon a logical or metaphysical foundation derived from Aristotle. The Antiochenes appear to have been unaware of the possibility of such support or uninterested in making use of it" (D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 102–103). Hill concurs, "The Antioch Fathers in their tradition of the faith show little explicit indebtedness to philosophy, though often credited with being Aristotelian" (Hill, *Old Testament in Antioch*, 8). This disinterest in a philosophical school for hermeneutical influence commends Chrysostom and his Antiochene colleagues' convictions about interpreting the biblical text. Their commitment to literal interpretation removed the necessity for appeal to a philosophical school.

[20] Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 80. Martens glosses *historia* as the text's subject matter (Peter W. Martens, ed., *Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures: An Antiochene Handbook for Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford Early Christian Texts [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 23).

[21] Karlfried Froehlich, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 85. Young understands *lexis* to refer to "the actual wording" (Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 175).

[22] Chou defines "meaning" as "the particular ideas of the original author in the text." Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 32.

[23] Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 172; Martens, *Adrian's Introduction*, 47; Peter W. Martens, "Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures and Greco-Roman Rhetorical Theory on Style," *The Journal of Religion* 93, no. 2 (2013): 213. Speaking of another Antiochene exegetical instructor, Martens adds, "This insistence for Adrian on identifying a biblical book's purpose or basic subject matter was not an exercise without consequence for the commentary that followed. It was intended to govern this exegesis by providing readers with a basic framework that helped them not get lost in the minutiae of the text or wander away from the topic so that they foisted 'random and disconnected explanations' onto Scripture" (Martens, *Adrian's Introduction*, 47).

[24] Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation*, 85. Diodore includes the term *anagoge* but does not explain it any further.

[25] Chou defines "significance" as "the various valid repercussions, inferences, or implications stemming from the author's meaning. Significance can include (but is not limited to) the ramifications of a text's meaning on our lives today or its bearing on a theological topic." Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 32.

[26] Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation*, 85. Young clarifies that the terms *anagoge* and *theoria* "are not about 'senses' of the text so much as activities of the exegete." That is, the interpreter first studies the text and then "probe[s] the narrative and by 'insight' (*theoria*) and 'elevation' (*anagoge*) perceive[s] the moral and spiritual import built into the text's wording and content" (Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 175).

context.[27] In short, Antiochene interpretive methodology involved reading the text's *historia*, *lexia*, and *akolouthia* for its meaning and considering the ramifications of the text according to the activity of *theoria* for its significance.

This rich training background set up Chrysostom for a fruitful and extensive expository ministry in Antioch and Constantinople. His education in the rhetorical schools provided him with a foundation to study and explain texts according to the author's intent. His training in the Antiochene exegetical school developed those skills and applied them to the biblical text. These training influences offered a solid basis for exposition, but it was Chrysostom's view of Scripture that provided him the necessary presuppositions for a consistent expository ministry.

Inspiration of Scripture and Exposition

An important consideration in studying the history of biblical interpretation concerns how bibliological presuppositions inform hermeneutical and homiletical method. Put another way, one's hermeneutic and homiletic are directly linked to one's views on the nature of Scripture.[28] For Chrysostom, his view of Scripture informed his literal-historical interpretation of Scripture. The following will consider the Antiochene preacher's view on Scripture's inspiration and how that understanding of inspiration led him to his approach to exposition. The section will conclude with a contrast between the Antiochene and Alexandrian interpretive approaches.

Inspiration

Chrysostom reflected his views on the divine inspiration of Scripture as he explained the final verses of Genesis 2: "They are not simply words, but words of the Holy Spirit, and hence the treasure to be found in even a single syllable is great.… Consider … the fact that we are listening to God speaking to us through the tongue of the inspired authors."[29] Chrysostom affirmed the divine origin of Scripture and God's employment of human writers. Both elements are developed below.

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[27] Miriam DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John in Antioch and Alexandria*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series (Atlanta: SBL, 2020), 60–62. DeCock defines "nonliteral" interpretation as "interpretation that follows an explicit exegetical move beyond the narrative to provide additional insight or contemplation" (p. 24). This explanation coheres with a contemporary definition of significance. For Antiochenes this "exegetical move" was indicated by the text itself. For example, Theodore stated that additional insight into the text is appropriate when the text leads the interpreter toward it through "hyperbolic language" or a correspondence between a narrative and its significance. However, a text's significance must cohere with the text. That is, according to DeCock, nonliteral interpretation "must reflect the narrative itself" (p. 67–68).

[28] Brad Klassen, "Premillennialism and Hermeneutics," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 29, no. 2 (2018): 153–154, n. 117; Chou, *Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 28–29. See also Richard Holland, "Expository Preaching: The Logical Response to a Robust Bibliology," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 22, no. 1 (2011): 19–39; Jonathan Anderson, "The Presuppositional Hermeneutic: An Argument for Interpreting and Preaching the Bible with Authority" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019).

[29] John Chrysostom, "Homily 15 Gen 2.20–22," in *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. Robert C. Hill, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America

First, a key passage for all the Antiochenes on Scripture's inspiration is the opening of Psalm 45.[30] Robert C. Hill notes that the Psalm's first verse "provided a classic text for enunciating their theology of scriptural inspiration."[31] Commenting on the term *exereugomai* ("to erupt, belch"), which appears in 45:1 (Heb. 45:2; Gk. 44:2), Chrysostom writes:

> After all, since in what he had to say there was nothing human, and on the contrary he was about to describe heavenly and spiritual things, not as a result of his own discovery but from divine impulse, he presents it under the term *belch*.… The psalmist accordingly, to show that what he says is not the result of human effort but of divine inspiration moving him, called his inspired composition belching.

Chrysostom considered this psalm to be a product of divine inspiration.

Second, inspiration means that God employed the human authors in writing the biblical text. Chrysostom's comments above might be understood to mean that the human authors' rational involvement in the writing of the Word was mitigated because "we do not belch when we choose to."[32] However, rather than being mindless seers,[33] Chrysostom contends the writers of Scripture were coherent in their writing because "the Holy Spirit…allows the heart to know what is said."[34] This statement affirms that the Bible's human authors understood what they were writing. Notably, Chrysostom claims the text supports this conclusion: "I mean, if the psalmist did not know, how could he have said *good news*?…. The Holy Spirit…renders those who receive him sharers in his purpose, and with them understanding him he reveals what he has to tell."[35] That is, the Holy Spirit reveals His word so that the writers comprehend the revelation.

Further, the words of the text were the writers' words. Chrysostom states, "What works does he refer to? Inspired composition [*propheteia*].[36] You see, as it is the work of a smith to make a tool, of a builder to build a house, of a shipwright to build

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Press, 1986), 195. This statement from Chrysostom supports Hill's general comments about his view of inspiration, "Chrysostom's doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is unfailing and deep-seated" (Robert Charles Hill, trans., *St. John Chrysostom: Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1 [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998], 76, n. 61).

[30] Robert C. Hill, "Psalm 45: A *Locus Classicus* for Patristic Thinking on Biblical Inspiration," *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993): 95–100.

[31] Hill, *St. John Chrysostom*, 1:285, n. 5.

[32] Chrysostom, 1:258.

[33] Ibid. Chrysostom explains that seers "utter everything without their mind understanding anything of what is said; rather, it is like a flute sounding without a musician to play a tune."

[34] Chrysostom, 1:259.

[35] Ibid; emphasis original.

[36] Hill, "Psalm 45," 99.

a ship, so too is it an inspired composer's job to produce inspired composition."[37] The writers wrote their own words and what they wrote was what God intended.[38]

Not only did they write what they intended to write, but their meaning was also according to their intent. In another place Chrysostom states, "The prophets then knew the cross, and the cause of the cross and that which was effected by it, and the burial and the resurrection, and the ascension, and the betrayal, and the trial, and described them all with accuracy."[39] At the same time, the writers are mindful of the Holy Spirit's work in their words: "It is the Spirit who moves the mind, there is no obstacle; instead, just as a flood of water moves forward under the impulse of a mighty torrent, so too the grace of the Spirit moves forward with great speed, carrying everything in its path with utter force, with complete ease."[40] These comments show that the biblical writers wrote with intent and understanding of the inspiration of their writings.

Chrysostom's articulation of dual authorship of the inspired Scriptures may have been ahead of its time. Hill suggests the patristic position on the manner of inspiration shows "a diversity of position about the role of the human author, from the mechanical to the utterly voluntary," but "about the Spirit's contribution there is little uncertainty."[41] Chrysostom's contribution to the doctrine of inspiration in the patristic period pressed toward an understanding of divine confluence in inspiration. That is, Scripture's dual authorship maintained compositional integrity of both the human and divine author.[42] Although he qualified his statements,[43] he showed how Scripture could be described as the product of both God and man without compromising either's role in its composition. This shows that while Chrysostom may have been ahead of his time, he was also trying to catch up to where Scripture already was.

In sum, Scripture is from God, who utilized men in writing Scripture. These men were conscious of what they wrote, and their written words conveyed their intended

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[37] Hill, "Psalm 45," 99. Garrett concurs with this analysis, "It is clear that [Chrysostom] did not believe that the personality of the prophet was obliterated by inspiration" (Duane A. Garrett, *An Analysis of the Hermeneutics of John Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8 with an English Translation*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity [Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992], 179).

[38] John S. Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place: The Doctrine of Scripture*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 228.

[39] John Chrysostom, "Homily on the Passage (Matt 24:29), 'Father If It Be Possible Let This Cup Pass from Me,' Etc., and Against Marcionists and Manicheans," in *Saint Chrysostom: On the Priesthood, Ascetic Treatises, Select Homilies and Letters, Homilies on the Statues*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 9 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 203.

[40] Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:259.

[41] Hill, "Psalm 45," 99. Hill considers Chrysostom's position as inconsistent "but not illogical." However, it may be better to consider that Chrysostom sought to express how inspiration results in the dual authorship of Scripture, which was still being defined during his day. Hill seems to suggest this when he writes that Chrysostom went beyond his contemporaries "to represent inspired composition as even deliberate, workmanlike labour where the activity of the Spirit is anything but that spontaneous irruption denoted before by 'belching.'"

[42] Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1948), 94; Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 201–208; John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 184–86.

[43] Hill writes, "Chrysostom himself is perhaps aware of the extreme (but not illogical) position he has taken on inspiration, because he immediately qualifies it …." Hill, "Psalm 45," 99.

meaning.[44] These elements articulate an understanding of inspiration that is in accord with the divine confluence theory of inspiration.

Inspiration and Exposition

One's view of inspiration is often confirmed or denied by the subsequent explanation of the text. In several ways, Chrysostom's expositions demonstrated that his expositional method cohered with his view of inspiration.[45] Two are developed here. First, his adherence to a text's context showed that the whole of the text needs to be considered in interpretation. In a sermon on Jeremiah 10:23, Chrysostom unpacked a principle related to the context of a text. He stated that close attention to context will avoid the perils of wrong interpretive conclusions. There are three ways that context is ignored: by "lifting the words out of context," by outright distortion of the text, and by adding something to the text which is not there.[46] Chrysostom's remedy for the malady of ignoring context is to "learn how [the text] is written."[47] He explains, "Not only should a text not be taken out of context: it should actually be proposed in its entirety, with nothing added."[48] In other words, context is adhered to when the whole of the text is considered and explained without addition or subtraction.[49]

Second, his interpretation of inspired Scripture explicitly sought to explain the author's intent. As noted above, Scripture is the product of dual authorship, which the patristics consistently affirmed in principle.[50] Furthermore, it was explained that Chrysostom pressed the doctrine of inspiration toward an understanding of its divine confluence—the human and divine authors were fully engaged in the process of writing, and neither compromised the integrity of the other.[51] This view of inspiration bore fruit in Chrysostom's rule that interpretation is to be in accordance with

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[44] Chrysostom's view here speaks to the debate over theories about the interpretive implications resulting from Scripture's inspiration, specifically the issue of *sensus plenior*. Brown defines *sensus plenior* as "that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation" (Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* [Baltimore, MD: St. Mary's University, 1955], 92). The quotations above reflect Chrysostom's contention that the biblical writers were aware of the meaning of their writings. While they may not have known the full significance of their words, they were aware of what their words meant since they understood, comprehended, and conveyed the meaning the Holy Spirit gave them. Furthermore, de Margerie's comments on Antiochene *theoria* also apply to Chrysostom's view of inspiration and its implications for the understanding of the writers: "The prophet, according to the Antiochene exegetes, is fully aware of the figurative value of the primary object his words intend to convey." Bertrand de Margerie, *The Greek Fathers*, vol. 1, An Introduction to the History of Exegesis (Petersham, MA: Saint Bede's, 1993), 167–68.

[45] The following section on Chrysostom's principles of exegesis will demonstrate this coherence further.

[46] John Chrysostom, "Homily 1 On the Obscurity of the Old Testament," in *St. John Chrysostom: Old Testament Homilies*, trans. Robert Charles Hill, vol. 3 (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2003), 9–12.

[47] Chrysostom, 11.

[48] Ibid.

[49] This agrees with the general Antiochene position of following the text's sequence to ascertain and explain its argument. See Martens, "Adrian's Introduction," 213; Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 172.

[50] Hill, "Psalm 45," 95; Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 194–95.

[51] Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*, 228.

authorial intent.[52] Chrysostom lays down this rule of interpretation when he comments on Galatians 1:17: "It is not the right course to weigh the mere words, nor examine the language by itself, as many errors will be the consequence, but to attend to the intention of the writer. And unless we pursue this method in our own discourses, and examine into the mind of the speaker, we shall make many enemies, and every thing will be thrown into disorder."[53] In other words, interpretation is controlled by the author of the text. The author has control over the meaning of his own text. It is not the reader, and neither is it the text apart from its author that determines meaning. Instead, the author has sole authority to dictate his meaning by his words.

Although his interpretation of the Old Testament suffered from his lack of facility with Hebrew,[54] nevertheless Chrysostom's commentary on Isaiah 1–8 finds the Antiochene practitioner regularly appealing to the biblical writer. For example, Chrysostom explains the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:2–6 as teaching Scripture's own rule of interpretation about when allegorizing is appropriate. He understands the author to be in control of the meaning of his text, even when it is to be taken allegorically:

> The interpretation of the allegory does not lie in the whim of the readers, but Ezekiel himself speaks, and tells first what the eagle is and then what the cedar is [in Ezekiel 17]. To take another example from Isaiah himself, when he raises a mighty river against Judah [in Isaiah 8:7–8], he does not leave it to the imagination of the reader to apply it to whatever person he chooses, but he names the king whom he has referred to as a river.… Therefore, when Isaiah speaks in [Isaiah 5:2–6], he gives us the meaning of the vineyard.[55]

This explanation demonstrates the extent to which Chrysostom held to the principle of authorial intent in his interpretation of the inspired biblical text.

Chrysostom's view of inspiration correlated with his method of interpretation, which was followed by his pattern of exposition. He considered "the reading of the Scriptures [to be] an opening of the heavens."[56] As Hill notes, his unfolding of the Scriptures "is both demonstrated and assisted by the method of exegesis he consistently employs: he adheres to the literal meaning of the text and refuses to move on till he has wrung the last drop of meaningfulness from it."[57] This is because the inspired Word

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[52] Chase calls this an interpretive rule since "the fact that [it finds] incidental expression is all the clearer proof that [it has] gained a hold on the interpreter's mind." Frederic Henry Chase, *Chrysostom: A Study in the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1887), 157.

[53] John Chrysostom, "St. John Chrysostom: Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. 13 (New York: Christian Literature, 1889), 11.

[54] See again, Hazlett, "Calvin's Latin Preface," 144.

[55] Garrett, *Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8*, 110–11.

[56] Quoted in Robert C. Hill, "St John Chrysostom's Teaching on Inspiration in 'Six Homilies on Isaiah,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968): 33.

[57] Ibid.

was "a saving truth."[58] Therefore, his preaching in submission to authorial intent exercises a present effect upon hearers because of the text's divine inspiration.[59]

Inspiration, Exposition, and Differences in Interpretive Philosophy

Chrysostom's understanding of inspiration and its effect upon exposition contrasts with the Alexandrian interpretive school. Christopher A. Hall writes, "For some fathers, especially those trained in the school of Alexandria, it was more than appropriate to approach the New Testament with the expectation that it would speak on different levels."[60] Although considering the Scriptures to be "the result of a collaborative effort" between divine and human authors, the Alexandrian interpreter Origen (ca. 185–253) argued that meaning was determined by the divine author.[61] Often, this meaning is hidden from readers "because divine things are conveyed to human beings in a somewhat more obscure manner and are hidden in proportion as one is either unbelieving or unworthy."[62] Further, human weakness "is not able to trace out the obscure and hidden meaning in each single word, for the treasure of divine wisdom is hidden in the paltry and inelegant vessels of words."[63] This suggests that Scripture's inspiration is witnessed by its obscurity.

With this understanding of Scripture's inspiration, Origen understood the divine intent to benefit its readers with a meaning tailored specifically for their level of spiritual maturity. Whether a reader is "simple," making progress, or "perfect" in his spiritual maturity, he "may be edified" by that meaning which accords to the "body," "soul," or "spirit" of Scripture, which is "granted by the divine bounty for human salvation."[64] These different meanings do not cohere with the text's literal sense or narrative or argument in context, but instead are indicated by "impossibilities" in the text.[65] In order to understand the hidden meaning, the reader locates these impossibilities in a passage, discerns the extent to which the passage refers to either a true or untrue element, and then allegorical interpretation is to be applied to derive its true meaning.[66]

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[58] Hill, "Chrysostom's Teaching," 35.

[59] Hill, 30. Hill writes, "His vision of inspiration is two directional: instructing the flock on the sacred text he not only looks back from it to this first moment but sees as well a continuing activity affecting forever the recipient (and medium) of the initial revelation whensoever it be propounded (again by word of mouth), such as in his own homilies on the word." The effect of the text on hearers occasionally led Chrysostom to consider it to transcend the wording of the text. For example, he considered Paul's confrontation with Peter in Galatians 2:11–14 to have only the appearance of an accusation of hypocrisy. See Chrysostom, "Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians," 18. It is conceivable that instances such as this were a product of his education in the rhetorical schools. See Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 81.

[60] Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 136.

[61] Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, 195. Martens writes, "[Origen] relied heavily on Scripture's divine authorship for determining the 'will,' 'intent,' or 'aim' of this collection of writings."

[62] Origen, *Origen: On First Principles: A Reader's Edition*, trans. John Behr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 242 [4.1.7].

[63] Origen, 243 [4.1.7].

[64] Origen, 252 [4.2.4].

[65] Origen, 261 [4.2.9].

[66] Origen, 270 [4.3.5]; DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John in Antioch and Alexandria*, 54.

Although there are similarities in terminology between the Antiochenes and Alexandrians, the differences in interpretive product were clear. The Alexandrians assumed hidden meaning in the biblical text because of their prioritization of divine authorship and they sought hidden meanings using allegorical interpretation. The Antiochenes objected to this approach.[67] Significantly, Chrysostom's view of inspiration and interpretive method carried an inherent objection to Alexandrian interpretation because the literal sense of the text was beneficial for all believers, regardless of maturity level, because of its inspired clarity.[68] In his second homily on the Gospel of John, Chrysostom states that this Gospel is "God-inspired" as witnessed by his "mingl[ing] so much simplicity with his words that all he said was clear, not only to men and scholars, but even to women and children." Therefore, it is not only "true and useful for all his hearers" but those "who listen to [his words] prefer to part from our life rather than from the teachings he has given us."[69] These bibliological presuppositions are why Chrysostom's interpretation and exposition could focus on explaining the dual authors' intended meaning of the biblical text.

Principles of Hermeneutics

For traditional hermeneuticians, hermeneutics refers to the principles of interpretation for understanding an author's intended meaning of a text.[70] These interpretive principles include technical terms that exegetes utilize throughout their study. As a biblical interpreter during the patristic era, Chrysostom referred to many technical hermeneutical terms of his day in explaining the meaning of the biblical text.[71] This section surveys four hermeneutical terms that reveal his bibliological presuppositions at work in his expositional method.

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[67] Dockery explains, "The passage, according to the Antiochenes, had only one meaning, the literal (extended by *theoria*), and not two as suggested by the allegorists." David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 119.

[68] Focusing on the interpretation of the Gospel of John, DeCock writes, "For Chrysostom, again unlike Origen, who argued that John's Gospel was difficult even for the most mature interpreter, John's Gospel is beneficial in that it lies open to all due to its simplicity and clarity, and its corrective and transformative benefits are available to all Christians, regardless of spiritual maturity" (DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John*, 59). Observing how an Antiochene author's handbook for interpretation addressed places of obscurity in Scripture, Martens writes, "For Adrian, then, the central and recurring problem with the scriptural text was not its recalcitrant *content* that required the allegorist's symbolic transformation, but rather its perplexing *wording* that demanded the grammarian's rhetorical expertise. The scriptural message had been obscured by stylistic peculiarities…. As a result, the task of the scholar was… to remove this obscurity by rewriting the passage with a clear, straightforward, and unadorned prose" (Martens, *Adrian's Introduction*, 52).

[69] Sister Thomas Aquinas Goggin, trans., *St. John Chrysostom Commentary on Saint John, the Apostle and Evangelist: Homilies 1–47*, vol. 33, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1969), 16, 18.

[70] Robert L. Thomas, *Introduction to Exegesis* (Hurst, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2017), 34; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 2–4.

[71] DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John*, 24–25; Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 187–89.

Synkatabasis

Flowing from the inspiration of Scripture is its *synkatabasis*. This refers to God's "considerateness," His "making allowance," His "taking account," His "adaptation," or His manner of self-revelation in Scripture and in His dealings with humanity.[72] Put another way, it indicates the revelation of God's concern for mankind's understanding of Himself as witnessed by His adoption of "human forms of expression."[73]

If God looks upon humanity as considerate of their weakness, then He tailors His Word to them according to their vocabulary and thought patterns. However, God's considerateness did not limit His ability to clearly communicate His Word to accomplish His purposes. Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm explain, "It is a mark of divine 'considerateness' that God addresses people where they are, with the measure of truth that they are capable of receiving or that will render them amenable to the reception of further truth."[74] Neither does this mean that the contents of divine revelation in Scripture are inaccurate. Duane Garrett writes, "For Chrysostom…[considerateness] does not call into question the accuracy of revelation."[75] Scripture takes human limitations into consideration without compromising its own integrity.

Practically, God's *synkatabasis* in Scripture leads Chrysostom to reflect on how God reveals Himself in the biblical text. It explains how Isaiah could have seen God when John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time."[76] It accounts for "both the mode and manner of revelation [as] conditioned by the day in which it was given."[77] It clarifies why God revealed Himself in a variety of ways to the prophets. Chrysostom writes, "When he reveals himself he condescends, now in one way, now in another way, to the prophets. He alters the visions in ways appropriate to the circumstances."[78]

For the purposes of exposition, this hermeneutical principle promotes explanations of the biblical text that accord with authorial intent. In contrast to an Alexandrian understanding of revelation and authorship, *synkatabasis* leads toward interpreting the text as it stands rather than an interpretation away from the text.[79] Chrysostom affirms that God is ultimately incomprehensible. But *synkatabsis* means

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[72] R. C. Hill, "On Looking Again at Sunkatabasis," *Prudentia* 13 (1981): 4; Garrett, *Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8*, 176; Robert C. Hill, trans., *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 18; Bradley Nassif, "Antiochene 'Theoria' in John Chrysostom's Exegesis" (PhD diss, Fordham University, 1991), 170; David Rylaarsdam, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of His Theology and Preaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29–30. Hill specifies that Chrysostom sees God's dealings with humanity ultimately expressed in the Incarnation (Hill, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, 18).

[73] Hill, "On Looking Again at Sunkatabasis," 5; Hill, *St. John Chrysostom*, 1:33. Garrett adds, "The word expresses the essence of what the Antiochenes understood God's revelation to be: an act of divine condescension" (Garrett, *Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8*, 176).

[74] Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 116.

[75] Garrett, *Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8*, 178.

[76] Garrett, 176.

[77] Garrett, 176–77.

[78] Garrett, 124.

[79] See again Origen's "impossibilities" in the text. Origen, *On First Principles*, 252, 261 [4.2.4; 4.2.9].

that God has transcended human limitation by taking it into account so that His Word is comprehensible to mankind and remains true.[80]

Akribeia

Another key element in Chrysostom's hermeneutical principles is the concept of "precision."[81] This refers to a characteristic of the biblical text.[82] The reason for Scripture's precision is linked to its *synkatabasis*, that is, since Scripture is God's self-revelation to humanity, that self-revelation is inherently precise. However, Hill notes that "[Chrysostom's] own attention to every precise detail is due to another presupposition, namely, that *there is nothing idle or accidental in Scripture*—there is a purpose in everything."[83] This means Chrysostom considers Scripture to be precise in its overall detail, its purpose, the age of biblical characters, names, numbers, times, and specific word choices.[84]

Akribeia also refers to an obligation of the biblical interpreter for deriving meaning.[85] That is, interpretation ought to be precise because the Bible is precise.[86] As Hill notes, this implies that Chrysostom's "general rule…is that Scripture provides its own interpretation."[87] Precise interpretation was a general rule for Antiochene interpretation. A fifth century Antiochene handbook on interpretation expresses it this way, "But it is especially necessary to cling faithfully to the sequence [of words]. Someone who properly grasps this sequence…with a view to attaining the precise meaning, cannot miss the fitting sense."[88] That is, following the text's wording leads to proper interpretation because the text allows for such precision. Simultaneously, deriving meaning from the text requires the interpreter to analyze the specifics of the text.[89]

One example of Chrysostom's use of *akribeia* finds him discussing the particle "but" in Genesis 2:20. He concludes that the particle highlights the fact that no helpmate was found for the man after the creation of the animals because none were

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[80] Hill, "On Looking Again at Sunkatabasis," 5. Chrysostom writes on the phrase "Who is like the Lord our God who dwells on high and looks down on things that are below": "He gradually makes the comparison, though of course God surpasses all things and is therefore incomparable…he adjusts the language to suit the limitations of his listeners. His anxiety, you see, is not to ensure at the time that what he says is in keeping with the respect due to God but that it can be grasped by them."

[81] The Greek term *akribea* can be glossed "exactness," "exactitude," "meticulous attention," and "scrupulousness." See Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. ἀκρίβεια; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), s.v. ἀκρίβεια.

[82] Hill, *St. John Chrysostom*, 1:24. See also Robert Hill, "Akribeia: A Principle of Chrysostom's Exegesis," *Colloquium* 14 (1981): 32–36.

[83] Hill, "Akribeia," 34 (emphasis original).

[84] Hill, 33.

[85] Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 1:24.

[86] Hill, "Akribeia," 35. One of numerous examples is found in a sermon on Jeremiah 10:23, "Hence the need to give precise attention to the text" (Chrysostom, "Homily 1 On the Obscurity of the Old Testament," 9).

[87] Hill, "Akribeia," 35.

[88] Martens, *Adrian's Introduction*, 48.

[89] Ibid.

according to his kind.[90] Throughout his exposition, he calls his congregation to "notice…the precision of Sacred Scripture"[91] and "notice the precision of the teaching."[92] Finally, Chrysostom exhorts his people to exercise care while interpreting all of Scripture with such diligence: "Let us act so as to interpret everything precisely and instruct you not to pass by even a brief phrase or a single syllable contained in the Holy Scriptures."[93] Chrysostom's expositions were marked by this kind of precision because it characterized Scripture and it was to be characteristic of the Scripture's expositor.

Historia

Patristic hermeneutical principles included the identification of a text's genre. For a text to be *historia*—history—it had to deal with deeds and events that happened in history.[94] Chrysostom's mentor, Diodore, defined *historia* this way: "*Historia* is the pure account of an actual event of the past."[95] It was these accounts of events that undergirded the doctrines of the Christian faith.[96]

In addition to identifying a text, *historia* was also part of the interpretation of a text. It was not the pursuit of the facts of history behind the story, but "the investigation of the story being presented in the text being studied."[97] Thus, *historia* concerned both the biblical text itself and a principle of interpretation for determining its meaning. For the Antiochenes, *historia* grounded interpretation in the history presented by the text.[98]

In line with his Antiochene colleagues, Chrysostom understood the Bible to be a historically rooted text, and he believed that its history could not be separated from its interpretation without doing violence to the Scriptures. For Chrysostom in particular, Scripture's historicity was a non-negotiable conviction for faithful interpretation. Hill writes of the Antiochene preacher, "The only way to detect the distortion is to trace the verse back to its historical context."[99] Further, "He insists that, in quoting the Bible, they need to take account of the historical and literary context of individual verses."[100]

By contrast, this attention to *historia* is not the case for an allegorical hermeneutic. As a proponent of allegory, Origen downplayed *historia*. Hall notes, "In fact, Origen asserts, not all events portrayed as history by biblical writers actually occurred."[101]

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[90] Hill, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, 195. Hill calls this "a classic instance" of Chrysostom's use of precision (p. 195, n. 2).

[91] Hill, 196.

[92] Hill, 198.

[93] Hill, 195.

[94] Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 166.

[95] Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation*, 91.

[96] Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 167. Young also notes that the text's *historia* is also why the Antiochenes objected to the application of allegorical interpretation to the text.

[97] Young, 80. See also Martens, *Adrian's Introduction*, 23.

[98] DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John*, 24.

[99] Hill, *Old Testament in Antioch*, 144.

[100] Hill, 143. For example, Chrysostom appeals to the historical nature of the Bible as the way to correct a faulty interpretation of Haggai 2:8. He writes, "When in fact the Jews returned from the foreign land, and were bent on rebuilding the Temple and restoring it to its former magnificence…." (p. 144).

[101] Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 146.

Quoting Origen, Hall writes that "these things indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, and not literally."[102] The historical details that are unacceptable for the allegorist serve as "a 'stumbling block' to goad the interpreter to deeper musings."[103] As a result, historical details became trivial issues that served as avenues for entering into allegory, which is where spiritual edification was found. This approach was unacceptable for Chrysostom because the text's *historia* was the ground for its edification. If that was disregarded, then the attempt to draw out significance from the text was undermined as arbitrary. However, because the biblical text is God's Word, it had to be useful for God's people.[104] Another interpretive strategy had to be employed to develop this significance.

Theoria

The last hermeneutical principle addressed here is the Antiochene strategy for developing contemporary significance from the text called *theoria*. Both Alexandrian and Antiochene schools used *theoria* in interpretation, for the term had already been in use since the fourth century BC when it was adopted by Plato and Aristotle to describe and legitimize their philosophical pursuits.[105] While neither interpretive school appealed to the philosophical schools in their use of the term, this background of the term's usage is useful for defining *theoria*. In the fourth century BC, *theoria* referred to a civic institution where a city would send an ambassador to observe oracles and religious festivals and return with eyewitness reports. Plato used this to conceptualize his journey of detachment from the world to see metaphysical realities which serve as the basis for responses of political and social action. Aristotle removed the element of bringing his wisdom into the practical life of the world and made *theoria* an end in itself and for its own sake.[106]

This historical usage provides background for how the term was used in biblical interpretation from the second to the fifth century AD. For Alexandrian interpretation, *theoria* was one element of interpretation that provided additional insight into the meaning of the biblical text.[107] While Antiochene interpretation shared this general view, its distinction consisted in how it established coherence with the text's *historia*.[108] Diodore described the Antiochene understanding of *theoria* as Scripture's development of "a higher vision of other but similar events" to the biblical

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[102] Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, 146.

[103] Hall, 147.

[104] DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John*, 216.

[105] See Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[106] Wilson Nightingale, 3–7.

[107] DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John*, 24.

[108] Dockery identifies allegorical exegesis as depending "on accidental similarity of language between two passages" while Antiochene interpretation "depended on a historical interpretation of the text" (Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 119). Perhai adds, "Allegorizing looks merely to atomistic symbols in discourses and thereby misses the intentions of the A/author" (Perhai, *Antiochene Theoria in Theodore and Theodoret*, 265). Thus, allegorical interpretation inserts a wedge between the text and its historical referent, essentially making the interpreter the arbiter of spiritual truth. As Chrysostom himself wrote, "We ourselves are not the lords over the rules of interpretation, but must pursue Scripture's understanding of itself" (Garrett, *Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8*, 110).

text, yet without disregarding, repudiating, or abrogating "the underlying prior history."[109] Diodore refers to Galatians 4:21–31 as an example where Paul maintains "the historical account as his firm foundation, [developing] his *theoria* on top of it; he understands the underlying facts as events on a higher level. It is this developed *theoria* which the apostle calls allegory."[110] In other words, *theoria* builds or develops a text's significance for the contemporary audience without compromising its meaning according to its historical context.[111]

To do this, the Antiochene interpreter had to put all his interpretive tools to work. For Chrysostom, this meant maintaining his principles of *synkatabasis*, *akribeia*, and *historia*.[112] In general, this process involved the interpreter analyzing the text's structure and following how it develops the narrative.[113] This ensures the "coherence" of the text while it is probed for "the moral and spiritual import built into the text's wording and content."[114] In other words, "The story retains its integrity, while pointing beyond itself."[115] Thus, in interpreting the biblical text, *theoria* refers to the exercise of insight by an inspired biblical author or illumined interpreter into the significance of the biblical text for the spiritual benefit of the contemporary audience that maintains the integrity and coherence of the text's argument or narrative.[116]

Chrysostom's use of the term *theoria* is rare in his homilies and commentaries. Out of over six hundred extant homilies and many other written works, he uses the term only 192 times.[117] According to Bradley Nassif, Chrysostom uses *theoria* in three basic ways. First, he understands it as part of the process of divine revelation to

[109] Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation*, 88.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Another Antiochene instructor subordinates *theoria* to Scripture's meaning by drawing an analogy between a person's body and a robe wrapped around the body. Martens explains, "The exegete's main goal is to grasp the διάνοια [meaning] of Scripture, that is, to describe the body itself in close and patient detail, and not the garment that drapes it (θεωρία)" (Martens, *Adrian's Introduction*, 283, n. 4). This vivifies Diodore's framework for *theoria*, showing that more attention is paid to the text's meaning so that the text's contemporary significance is validly drawn from its meaning.

[112] Nassif, "Antiochene 'Theoria' in John Chrysostom's Exegesis," 295.

[113] Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 172, 175.

[114] Young, 173, 175.

[115] Young, 180.

[116] See Nassif, "Antiochene 'Theoria' in John Chrysostom's Exegesis," 212; Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 111; Richard J. Perhai, *Antochene Theoria in the Writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret of Cyrus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 113; Walter Kaiser, "Psalm 72: An Historical and Messianic Current Example of Antiochene Hermeneutical Theoria," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 2 (2009): 257; Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 172–80.

[117] Nassif, "Antiochene 'Theoria' in John Chrysostom's Exegesis," 199. Cf. DeCock's note that in her study of Alexandrian and Antiochene interpreters on selected portions of the Gospel of John, Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376–444) uses the term most often (DeCock, *Interpreting the Gospel of John*, 25–26, n. 77). This relative rarity from Chrysostom was partly due to his pastoral care for his church. On occasion he would mention that there was significance to the text that he would have explained if he was convinced his people could understand it. As Nassif explains, "Since *theoria* often refers to the deeper theological truths of Scripture, Chrysostom rarely applies it to his congregation because they were spiritually unprepared for receiving it" ("Antiochene 'Theoria'," 299–300). One could argue that, having noted their spiritual sluggishness, Chrysostom should have pressed forward with his *theoria* since Hebrews 5–10 follows a similar route of initial hesitancy and warning to subsequent explanation of contemporary significance regarding the high priesthood of Christ.

the biblical authors in their writing of Scripture.[118] Second, it is part of the interpretation of the literal sense by a Spirit-illumined interpreter.[119] That is, *theoria* considers a text's historical background,[120] the author's purpose for writing, and the contemporary significance for the church.[121] Third—and distinguishing him from his Antiochene colleagues—*theoria* is part of the activity of preaching.[122]

Chrysostom's second and third uses of *theoria* essentially summarize the whole of the matter in interpretation. As the Spirit-illumined interpreter studies the text according to its historical background while adhering to its wording and structure, he not only grasps the meaning of the biblical text, but he also perceives its significance for the contemporary church. In this move of *theoria* the discoveries of exegesis are merged with the issues and circumstances of the contemporary scene. In this way, as Nassif notes, *theoria* has much in common with expository preaching. Quoting Haddon Robinson's stated goal for 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," Nassif concludes, "This is an excellent definition of Chrysostom's use of *theoria* in his preaching ministry of the Word."[123] While in practice Chrysostom "proceeded more by exhortation than by exposition,"[124] his use of *theoria* provides exposition with a path from ancient text to contemporary application.[125]

Thus, *theoria* served as the capstone to Chrysostom's hermeneutical principles. Drawing on the text as God's *synkatabasis* to mankind—His considerateness of human limitation in accessing and understanding divine truth—Chrysostom studied the biblical text according to his conviction that it was *akribeia* and that it demanded *akribeia* from him. That is, it is a precise text that requires precise interpretation. This interpretation adhered to the biblical text as *historia*, both as a genre that recorded an accurate account of past events and as an overall method for investigating the text according to how the history is presented in the narrative or argument. This led him

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[118] Nassif, "Antiochene 'Theoria' in John Chrysostom's Exegesis," 296. "Chrysostom utilizes theoria to describe the nature of the prophetic experience as an inspired revelation of heavenly realities or of deeper Christian truths. Such revelations were written down by a biblical author which resulted in its inclusion in the Scriptural canon (inscripturation)."

[119] Nassif, 329.

[120] Nassif, 297. Nassif writes: "Chrysostom's veneration of the historical nature of the narrative, and profound respect for the reality of the Incarnation, leads him to pursue the spiritual content of the text before him through historical, linguistic, and theological inquiry. What separates Chrysostom's single-meaning hermeneutic from Alexandrian *theoria* is the emphasis Chrysostom places on history as a medium of revelation and the context of God's saving activity. By placing the textual control on the historical plane of exegesis, Chrysostom allows the ordinary public meaning of the words themselves to govern the distance between the literal and spiritual significance of Scripture without dichotomizing the text."

[121] Nassif, 298, 314–15. Nassif explains: "An author's intention should not be viewed as a trivial or entirely irrelevant objective under the assumption that what a text says for the present far outweighs what an author meant in the past. On the contrary, it is primarily through a discovery of the author's past original intent (divine through the human), expressed in the textual features which convey the historical and cultural idioms in which he wrote, that a text's present significance can be most fully realized."

[122] Nassif, 326–28.

[123] Nassif, 328; quoting Haddon Robinson, *Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 30.

[124] Nassif, "Antiochene 'Theoria' in John Chrysostom's Exegesis," 329.

[125] The NIV Application Commentary Series is one example of contemporary efforts to merge exegesis with exposition. Another example is Abner Chou's recent work *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*.

to consider the contemporary significance of the text using the concept of *theoria*. While maintaining the historical grounding of the text, *theoria* connected the text's meaning with its significance for today. Chrysostom brought all these interpretive principles to bear upon his expositional task.

Expositional Method

Chrysostom's views about the nature of Scripture led to an expositional method that adhered to the author's intended meaning and developed contemporary significance from that meaning. This means that his bibliological presuppositions and hermeneutical principles flowed naturally into an expositional method that merged the ancient meaning with contemporary significance. This section highlights three characteristics of his expositional method.[126]

First, his preaching provided sound and consistent exposition for the church. Chrysostom makes this point in his exposition of Romans 1:4: "What is said has been made obscure by the close-folding of the words, and so it is necessary to divide it."[127] Furthermore, this expositional ministry was profitable for the church because it exposed and refuted false teaching. Chrysostom writes, "It remains that we must fortify ourselves with [the ministry of the word], that we may not be smitten by the arrows of the enemies, and that we may smite them. Wherefore we must be greatly concerned, that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly."[128] Corresponding to this, the church profited from sound and consistent exposition because it provided the opportunity to hear exhortations to live in accordance with the truths of the gospel from men who were models of such a life. Chrysostom reflects upon the association between the life of the pastor and his teaching when he writes, "When he speaks of the priests: 'Let the presbyters who rule well, be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and doctrine.' For this is the most perfect method of doctrine, when by what they do and what they say they conduct their disciples to the blessed life which Christ ordained."[129]

Second, his preaching was clear and direct. His primary emphasis in application was ethical since "his one overriding interest was in persuading the people of God to live consistently with their calling."[130] At times, this meant that his exhortation had only the slightest connection to the text.[131] However, many times his exhortation

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[126] This section draws from the author's paper presented to the BI 832 History of Biblical Preaching seminar, "The Homiletics of John Chrysostom," May 2022.

[127] John Chrysostom, "Homily I Rom 1:1, 2," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 11, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 340.

[128] John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, trans. B. Harris Cowper (London: Williams and Norgate, 1866), 4.3.

[129] Chrysostom, 4.8.

[130] Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:80.

[131] For example, in *Homily IX* on Romans 4:23–5:11 Chrysostom concludes an exposition of God's love as demonstrated in the giving of His Son by exhorting his congregation to "love with this love (for there is not anything equal unto it) both for the sake of things present and for the sake of things to come. Or rather, more than for these, for the nature of the love itself." See John Chrysostom, "Homily IX Romans 4:23," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. 11 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 400–401.

develops implications of the text that result in profound and direct application. For example, in a sermon on Hebrews 1:5–2:4, Chrysostom discusses the issue of spiritual gifts from multiple angles, including contentment with the gifts God has given, the primary practice of love over the pursuit of gifts (cf. 1 Cor 13), and exhortations to those who desire the gift of teaching. To state his applications in the form of questions, he asks those ambitious for this gift, "What stewardship are you faithfully fulfilling now?" He presses it further, asking, "Where can you speak now?" That is, you have opportunities to speak with friends, neighbors, family, so exhort them in private and, thus, prove your gifting and grow in its skillful use.[132] This exhortation based on his exposition of the gifts is an example of what this article seeks to demonstrate. His overarching bibliology leads him to teach and apply the text. His interpretive method guides his explanation of the text and lands him on the issue of spiritual gifts at the end of his selected passage.[133]

Third, his preaching was doctrinal and practical. One example is found in the first sermon of his series on Acts.[134] He introduces his exposition of the book with his desire to "draw to [the Book of Acts those who] do not know it, and not let such a treasure as this remain hidden out of sight."[135] He intends to "note in the very facts the bright evidence of Truth which shines in them…and then, besides, there are doctrines to be found here, which we could not have known so surely as we now do, if this Book had not existed, but the very crowing point of our salvation would be hidden, alike for practice of life and for doctrine."[136] Therefore, he exhorts, "Let us not hastily pass by it, but examine it closely."[137] Note that in the opening moments of his sermon, Chrysostom emphasizes the profitability of the Book of Acts for believers' lives and that he intends to explain the meaning of it toward that end. This explains how his presuppositions and principles were able to consistently produce expositions that benefited his churches.

Conclusion

The expositional method of John Chrysostom has several lessons to teach today's expositor. His strengths teach at least three positive lessons. First, his presuppositions about the nature of Scripture set a strong foundation for a consistent and sound interpretive method. Second, his confidence in the historical value and

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[132] John Chrysostom, "Homily III Hebrews 1.6–8," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 379–81.

[133] While it is curious that Chrysostom does not go back to Hebrews 2:1 for his exhortation, a survey of his homilies show that it was his normal custom to exhort the church from something related to his last point. Nevertheless, this example shows Chrysostom's expositional method at work. He has a grasp of Paul's theology of the gifts and a NT theology on love, including teaching from both Jesus and Paul. This is significant because Chrysostom moves from Paul to Jesus exegetically, looking to John 13–17 for support of his exegesis of Paul's expositions on the gifts and the role of love in their exercise. All this suggests that Chrysostom believes Paul got this love principle from Jesus.

[134] John Chrysostom, "Homily I Acts 1.1, 2," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 11, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 1–10.

[135] Chrysostom, 1.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Chrysostom, 2.

reliability of Scripture kept him from falling into the temptations of allegorical interpretation. Third, his commitment to the usefulness of Scripture pressed him to follow the text's meaning to Spirit-illumined perception and insight into the contemporary relevance and application of the text.

Five hundred years ago, Calvin recommended Chrysostom's interpretive method as a model of faithfulness to the literal sense of Scripture's words. This article has sought to build upon Calvin's recommendation by showing the correlation between Chrysostom's view of inspiration, his hermeneutical principles, and his expositional method. Scripture's inspiration necessitated his literal approach to interpreting the biblical text. This approach to interpretation produced expositions that explained the single meaning of the Scripture's dual authorship, and demonstrated the abiding significance of that meaning for the contemporary church. Rather than allowing himself hermeneutical freedom, he bound himself by conviction to submit to the hermeneutical authority of the author. That conviction steered him toward expositions with an abiding impact today. Contemporary expositors find in Chrysostom a man who held deep convictions about Scripture, interpretation, and exposition. Because of this, they will find in the "Golden-mouthed" preacher a model to follow and to study.[138]

[138] For specific reading on Chrysostom's expositional method, see Frederic Henry Chase's *Chrysostom: A Study in the History of Biblical Interpretation* and Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm's chapter on Chrysostom in *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation*. For general reading on Antiochene biblical interpretation, see Robert C. Hill's *Reading the Old Testament in Antioch*. Corresponding to this work but adding to it a comparison and contrast with Alexandrian interpretation, see *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* by Frances M. Young. For an extended treatment of the similarities and differences between Antioch and Alexandria, see Miriam DeCock's *Interpreting the Gospel of John in Antioch and Alexandria*. Finally, there is no better way to get acquainted with Chrysostom than to read his homilies and treatises. The Nicene-Post Nicene Fathers series is available on public domain, so there are many avenues for obtaining inexpensive copies of his homilies. The "Writings from the Greco-Roman World" series provides fresh translations alongside Greek texts of Chrysostom's homilies on Philippians, Colossians, and his treatment of problem passages in Paul's epistles (Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom,* Homilies on Philippians; Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom,* Homilies on Colossians; and Margaret M. Mitchell, *John Chrysostom on Paul: Praises and Problem Passages*). Chrysostom's series on the Gospel of John is recommended since it shows both his depth of study and breadth of expositional ability. Perhaps the best place to begin is with Chrysostom's favorite biblical writer and perhaps his favorite epistle of the New Testament, the apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans.

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CALVIN'S LATIN PREFACE TO HIS PROPOSED FRENCH EDITION OF CHRYSOSTOM'S HOMILIES: TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

W. Ian P. Hazlett[1]

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The contribution below consists of two parts. First, Ian Hazlett offers a helpful introduction to Calvin's preface on Chrysostom and the value Calvin saw in this preacher with a "golden mouth" (p. 434). The second part is the actual preface by Calvin to the homilies of Chrysostom. In his preface, Calvin indicates that while he affirms the priority of Scripture, he also recognizes the benefit of resources that help interpret Scripture. He turns particularly to Chrysostom to feature him as an example of a preacher who explained the plain meaning of the text and who would be profitable to the study of Scripture. Thus, Calvin defends the use of secondary resources specifically for the goal of accurately expositing the Word of God.

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Introduction

I

One of the traditional puzzles in Calvin studies has been Calvin's proposed and supposedly French edition of the sermons of the Greek Church Father, John Chrysostom.[2] The date, circumstances, and precise scope of this project have always

[1] The current article appeared originally as a preface written by John Calvin, and it was later translated into English by W. Ian P. Hazlett (which is the version included here, along with an introduction by Hazlett). W. Ian P. Hazlett, trans., "Calvin's Latin Preface to His Proposed French Edition of Chrysostom's Homilies: Translation and Commentary," in *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400–1643: Essays in Honour of James K. Cameron*, Studies in Church History Subsidia 8, ed. James Kirk (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 129–50.

[2] Literature on Calvin and the Fathers in general, or on Calvin and Chrysostom in particular: A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's use of the Fathers and Medievals," *Calvin Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 149–205; H. O. Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich, 1975), 141–49; P. Polman, *L'Element historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVIe siècle* (Gembloux, 1932), 65–94; M. Réveillaud, "L'autorité de la

been uncertain, chiefly because the only evidence for the plan is a substantial fragment of a prefatory introduction in Calvin's own hand. As yet, no mention of or allusion to it has been found in any other contemporary source. The fact that all we have is a preface, or the first draft of one, suggests that the scheme was abortive. At any rate, no such work was published by Calvin, though that does not prove that he never actually got round to translating the Homilies. It is just as conceivable that no publisher would take it on.[3] But it is likely that the combination of Calvin's other extensive literary commitments and the heavy demands and vexations of what was a pioneering local and cosmopolitan ministry simply hindered him from realizing his intention.

Whatever the problems surrounding this Calvin fragment, its contents are a transparent testimony of the relationship between Christian humanism and the Reformation; between the rediscovery of the sources of Christian (and Jewish) Antiquity by reform-minded Catholics, which accompanied the Renaissance, and the theological and religious revolution initiated by Luther; and between patristic tradition and Scripture in the mind of a Reformer. Calvin's document is a miniature, embodying one of the most distinctive and potent amalgams of these forces.

II

At the head of the manuscript has been written by a sixteenth-century hand other than Calvin's: "Praefatio in edition[em] Hom(i)liarum Chrysostomi a D[octore] Calv[ino] medidatam q[uae] tam[en] n[on] extat. Interponit aut[em] hic suu[m] tu[m] de Chrysostomo tu[m] de ali[qu]is quos illi comparat ecclesiae doctorib[us] iudicium appositum." That is: "The preface to an edition of Chrysostom's Homilies contemplated by Master Calvin, but which does not exist. Here however he puts forward his due opinion both on Chrysostom and on other doctors of the Church, whom he compares to him." After the word *editionem* has been inserted above the line by a third hand the word *gall*[*icam*], and then deleted. This is a reminder that Calvin does not state explicitly in the Preface that he intends to translate the Homilies into French. Further, it might seem strange that a preface to a popular edition should be in Latin. Yet it should also be borne in mind that even in those times, Latin could still be referred to as a vernacular.

Yet the case for believing that Calvin was envisaging a French translation is very strong. He refers to his project as "unconventional." At a time when large quantities of new Latin translations of patristic literature were being published by Erasmus, Oecolampadius, Capito, Musculus, and many others,[4] Calvin would hardly have used

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tradition chez Calvin," *La Revue réformée* (1958), 24–45; J. Koopmans, *Das altkirchliche Dogma in der Reformation*, trans. H. Quistorp (Munich, 1955), 36–41; A. Gancozy and K. Müller, *Calvins handschriftliche Annotationen zu Chrysostom* (Wiesbaden, 1981); J. R. Walchenbach, "John Calvin as Biblical commentator. An investigation into Calvin's use of John Chrysostom as an exegetical tutor," (Pittsburgh, Ph.D. dissertation, 1974), 23–35, 201–206; R. J. Mooi, *Het kerk-en dogma historisch element in de werken an Johannes Calvijn* (Wageningen, 1965), 13–14, 30–38, 90–94, 273–80, 344–46; *Calvinus ecclesiae Genevensis custos*, ed. W. Neuser (Frankfurt, 1984), 163–64.

[3] The publishers of the second edition of the *Institutes* (1539) had complained that it was not selling well: see *Correspondance des réformateurs dans le pays de langue française*, ed. A. L. Herminjard (Geneva, 1866–1897), 6, 156.

[4] Earlier humanists had had a special interest in Chrysostom; cf. C. L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington, 1985), 226–34.

the word "unconventional" if he had been thinking of yet another Latin translation. And translations of the Fathers in the languages of the people were very rare, and in fact were to remain so for a long time. Anyway, in his text Calvin concedes that cultural reality means that not all pastors and teachers are competent in the classical languages, so that they too could benefit from a translation. As for the point about the Preface being in Latin, a look at the original manuscript shows that what we have is a first draft, with its errors, corrections, deletions, interlinear and marginal insertions, sometimes minor, sometimes major, its extensive abbreviations, and so on. This would subsequently have been translated into French. Like most people from his background, and especially with his humanist training, the natural mode of Calvin's scholarly and theological written thought would be in Latin. Composing literary pieces in the less formally structured vernacular would not have come so easily. And so it can be neither a surprise nor a mystery that this first draft of Calvin's Preface is in Latin.

III

A justification for translating this Preface into English is necessary, since it was translated a quarter of a century ago by John H. McIndoe (published in the *Hartford Quarterly*, 5 (1965): 19–26). An inter-library loan search in British libraries revealed that no copy of this was available, or known to be available. Fortunately access was gained to a copy in the Trinity College Collection of Glasgow University Library, where its location is almost certainly due to the fact that J. H. McIndoe was an alumnus of Trinity. Anyway, it seemed appropriate to make a translation of Calvin's Preface more readily available on this side of the Atlantic.

Further, while McIndoe's translation is perfectly reasonable and worthy, there seemed to me to be enough dubious and occasionally inexplicable renderings to warrant a fresh translation. Also, that translation is confined to a bare rendering of the Latin text in the *Corpus Reformatorum*. Variant readings in the various transcripts are not taken into account. And comparison of the *CR* text with the original shows that the former is not infallible either. None of the textual problems is of major or crucial significance. But some of them are problematical. Most of these textual discrepancies are indicated below in the first critical apparatus.

Lastly, the *Hartford Quarterly* text is completely devoid of an introduction and helpful footnotes. There are virtues in this, but there are also dangers. Many of the references, associations, and allusions in Calvin's text would remain arcane and cryptic. And so generous annotation of the text is provided below to illustrate fully the operations of Calvin's mind as he considered the dire problem of Christian and theological education among the people of the Church, whom he considered deprived of their inheritance.

IV

Dating: Estimations range from 1535 to 1559. That of 1559, proposed by Walchenbach, seems to be the least likely, as it is based on conjectures and assumptions which seem untenable. The first is that Calvin's reference to the "generation of twenty years ago," when most people were ignorant of Christ, that is of the Bible, means before 1534 to 1535, when the French Bibles of Lefevre and Olivétan appeared. That,

however, would have been twenty-five or more years ago. Elsewhere in the document, however, Calvin refers to "*our age*, when [Scripture] has begun once again to be circulated." This must surely refer to the mid- to late-thirties, when modern translations of the whole Bible became available. "Twenty years ago" would then refer to before 1522, when Luther's German New Testament appeared. In addition, Calvin refers to protests raised when it was suggested that the Bible be read by the public. The most renowned expression of such a suggestion was that of Erasmus in 1516, the full positive consequence of which was there for all to see twenty years later.

Secondly, Walchenbach's dating also rests on the hypothesis that Calvin's familiarity with patristic commentaries implies that he was well advanced in writing his own commentaries, late in his career. But it is just as likely that he was familiar with patristic commentaries before he embarked upon writing his own, the first of which appeared in 1539.

Thirdly, Walchenbach adduces as circumstantial evidence Calvin's revised edition of his Isaiah commentary in 1559, and the preface to Edward VI of England. It is claimed that this contains themes similar to Calvin's Chrysostom Preface. I think this must be dismissed. Apart from the preface to Edward VI being a reprint of the one in the first edition of 1551, there are no thematic parallels suggesting a striking relationship with the Chrysostom Preface. There are echoes of basic concerns, such as the necessity of Scripture study for reforming and building up the Church, and of its dissemination among the people at large, but this can be found in many of Calvin's writings. Therefore, there is little convincing, and nothing decisive, in the case for 1559. And so internal evidence suggests the thirties.

Although he does not discuss the question, Mooi consistently cites 1535 when he refers to the Preface. This may derive from the editors of the text in the *CR*, who suggest as one possibility 1535, before Calvin left France. Their other suggestion is before Calvin embarked upon his New Testament commentaries, meaning before 1538 to 1539. They end up proposing 1540, which was before Calvin's return to Geneva. This corresponds to the note on the Zurich transcript in the *Simler-Sammlung: circa annum 1540*.

Palaeographic and forensic evidence corroborates this almost beyond doubt. In the handwriting of the Preface manuscript, distinctive is the visual dominance of Calvin's initial and medial long "s" in a word like "sensus." This is elongated, almost vertical, like a swan's neck, with a small, crescent-shaped crotchet at the top right. To make this "s," his quill has made two movements instead of one. This is typical of Calvin's handwriting until 1540. Thereafter, the idiosyncrasy no longer appears. Moreover, the watermark in the paper on which the Preface is written is a Basle crozier, a kind that first appeared there in 1538. Not only that; it is the same watermark which is found in Calvin's letters written from Basle and Strasburg in 1538 to 1540, but not in letters from 1541 onwards, when he had returned to Geneva.[5] While this is conclusive, another piece of circumstantial evidence supporting 1538 to 1540 may be cited. Ganoczy and Müller have produced a study of Calvin's personal copy of the 1536 Paris edition of Chrysostom's works, which contains his own marginal notes and underlinings and so on. These concentrate not so much on the exegetical as the didactic part of Chrysostom's Homilies, on the moral instruction elements relating to the Christian life

[5] For decisive assistance in this matter I am grateful to friends and former colleagues at Geneva, Irena Backus, Alain Dufour, and Professor Pierre Fraenkel; and to Professor R. Lyall in Glasgow.

of the individual and the ecclesial body.[6] It would seem that Calvin was using Chrysostom as a means of learning how to preach sermons with practical relevance. As a timid academic who found himself in the ministry with no pastoral or homiletic training, and whose first short ministry in Geneva had been a failure, it would have been perfectly natural for Calvin to seize on Chrysostom as a self-improving model to follow in the more benign atmosphere of Strasburg. Following his admiration of Chrysostom's exegesis and preaching, it is no wonder that Calvin would have the idea of translating him into French in the period 1538–1540.

V

With regard to the content of Calvin's Preface, it is first and foremost a vindication of not just the propriety, but the desirability of circulating secondary aids to assist with the study and interpretation of Scripture. Secondary aids, in this case, means biblical commentaries. Just as Scripture itself is now available to ordinary people in their own languages, so also the best of biblical commentaries should be popularly accessible, and not confined to scholars who have the privilege of a classical education. Just as the Word of God belongs to the people of God, so, too, the tradition of interpretation guided by the Spirit is theirs as well. Those who are regrettably hindered because of linguistic limitations ought to be provided with translations. This is desirable not only for ordinary people, but also for similarly handicapped pastors and teachers in the Church; these in particular need access to the thought and practices of the Early Church, since the Church at that time was closer to the mind and will of Christ. The interpreter and presenter of the Word *par excellence* in Antiquity is John Chrysostom, whose Homilies and exegetical skill excel those of any other Church Father. And the fact that Chrysostom was clearly committed to communication with and instruction of the common people makes it important that his voice be transmitted again for the benefit of the Church at large.

Calvin admits, however, that Chrysostom is not as sound as he ought to have been in the matter of justification, that in the doctrines of election, free will, good works, grace, and so forth, he makes too much concession to human capacity and virtue. But this is no reason to ignore Chrysostom, who was no more infallible than any other teacher of the Church. Anyway, Chrysostom's position on these doctrines is largely explained by circumstances and pressures to which he was subject. (The matter of Chrysostom as an important patristic testimony to the spiritual supremacy of the see of Rome is ignored by Calvin.) The original manuscript shows how Calvin composed and drafted his thoughts; the most revealing feature of it is that his critique of Chrysostom, as well as the extenuating circumstances to which Calvin appeals, occurs to him as an extended afterthought. Textually, it has the form of an appended insertion.[7] For Calvin, then, his admiration for Chrysostom had priority over his criticism of him. Lastly, Chrysostom's writings can be read with profit because of their instructive historical value, the insight they offer into the life, worship, discipline, and organization of the Early Church—an example to be followed.

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[6] Ganoczy and Müller, *Annotationen*, 19, who refer to Calvin's "paränetischaszetische Motiv."
[7] Fols 161v–2v.

VI

The Preface is a testimony to Reformation theology in Christian, more particularly Erasmian, humanist clothes. Calvin's belief that the reform of the Church as the people of God, in respect of right living (regeneration) as well as right thinking (justification by Christ alone), is dependent on two things: firstly, the restoration of original Christianity (*ad fontes!*), and, secondly, the liberation of the Word of God from the "spiritual estate," that is, from the clergy and the theologians, and its restoration to its rightful heirs, the body of Christians as a whole and the common man. The latter must be made aware of and appropriate his inheritance by ways and means that he can understand. Even morons, idiots, and ignoramuses must somehow be brought to share in the gift of heavenly wisdom.

Related to this notion of the democratization of the Gospel is that of "accommodation."[8] At the theological level this is analogous to God's condescension to humanity in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In terms of the concepts and communication technology of humanism, the means of accommodation and getting through to all and sundry is provided by rhetoric, particularly erudition, persuasion, and decorum. Properly applied, these will help bring about change of behaviour and mental attitude more in line with the will of God. If in our times the meaning of "decorum" has been contracted to refer to what is appropriate in polite society and solemn occasions, the Erasmian Christian humanists used it to mean what is appropriate for any sort or class of people on any occasion. As the essential function of rhetoric, "decorum" is that which bridges the gap and alienation between humans. The language of teachers and preachers must be flexible enough to meet the needs of different individuals and societies; there must be "accommodation" to one's audience for the sake of "persuasion," and motivation to change. The learned textbook or general statements of doctrine are not effective among those who are educationally deprived, which in Calvin's time was the majority of people, including most women, as he notes in his preface to Olivétan's Bible.[9] Calvin may well also have been influenced by the popular rejection of the *Confession of Faith* in Geneva in 1537–1538. The person on the street was simply unmoved by it. Elsewhere Calvin pointed out that the failure of Job's friends to console him was due to their lack of decorum, that is, they were not on the same wavelength as he. And so it is no wonder that Calvin should turn to Chrysostom as a model to be learned from. "He of the golden mouth"' had been educated in classical rhetoric at Antioch, if not by the most noted pagan rhetorician of his day, Libanius, at least in his school.

The Preface is also a testimony to the Catholic Calvin, with his strongly ecclesial concern and sense of the communion of saints.[10] Strengthened rather than weakened by the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, this way of thinking expresses itself in Calvin with his conviction that contemporary and earlier Christians have a mutual interest, namely the service of Christ in the common Christian and ecclesiastical ministry; that while the Word of God in Scripture is the sole authority,

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[8] Especially illuminating on Calvin's application of this notion is W. J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: a Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York, 1988), 113–27; cf. R. Stauffer, *Dieu, la création et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin* (Berne, 1978), 54–56.

[9] In John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 edition*, rev. ed., ed. F. L. Battles (London, 1986), appendix IV, 373–77.

[10] Cf. A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. D. Foxgrover and W. Provo (Edinburgh, 1988), 308ff.

the tradition of interpretation or "prophesying" among those guided by the Spirit in the past is for the edification of everyone in the Church in all ages. And so, following from this Catholic ecclesial thrust in his thought, Calvin is far removed from approving of individualist subjectivism, Scripture-unrelated spiritualism, and speculative theory of a human philosophical kind.

Calvin's characteristic hermeneutical and exegetical principles also manifest themselves in the Preface, especially when he assesses the biblical work of the various Fathers: Christ as the goal sought for in Scripture; paracletic exegesis, that is, the interpreter should be guided not so much by human canons and criteria as by the Spirit; the only valid exegesis is that which is profitable, useful, and edifying for the Church—in the sense of 1 Corinthians 4; the clarity and plain meaning of Scripture should not be departed from in pursuit of allegorical and mystical deep meanings, so that the genuine, straightforward, and authentic sense of the words prevail; lucidity and conciseness should be aimed for; the "circumstances of the times" should enable elements of relativity to be identified and understood[11]—Calvin invokes these principles in the excuses he offers for Chrysostom's dogmatic unsoundness. On the whole, Calvin represents here the Antiochene tradition of exegesis, which was largely adopted by the Reformation. He is convinced that Chrysostom embodies these principles—in contrast to Luther, who found Chrysostom to be a blether for whom he had little time, a writer of a "chaotic heap of words without substance…argumentative and garrulous," who sacrifices (dogmatic) substance to form and rhetoric.[12] It is striking how, in this respect, Calvin's opinion of Chrysostom is much more magnanimous and tolerant than that of Luther. As a fellow humanist, Calvin shared the views of Erasmus, Bucer,[13] and Zwingli[14] in this respect, whereas, again, Luther comments that everything he finds objectionable in Chrysostom pleases Erasmus, that loquaciousness and verbosity are the curse of Gentile theologians "like Bucer and Chrysostom."[15]

Calvin's Preface also clearly shows the issue over which Christian humanism and the Reformation went different ways, notably in anthropology and justification. Following the dispute between Luther and Erasmus in 1525 over free will, Christian humanists had to take sides. Calvin, of course, followed Luther, but he would not allow Chrysostom's semi-Pelagianism to dismiss him altogether. Further, while Calvin's Preface embodies his adhesion to basic Erasmian humanist principles in respect of the dissemination of religious knowledge, it also represents a break with an elitist form of humanism with which he had also experience in France. This is the

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[11] Cf. H. J. Kraus, "Calvins exegetische Prinzipien', *ZKG*, 79 (1968), 329–41; A. Ganoczy and S. Scheld, Die Hermeneutik Calvins. Geistesgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen und Grundzüge (Wiesbaden, 1983), 90ff.

[12] See *Tischreden*, *WA*, 2:516; 4:286, 652.

[13] 11 Cf. F. Krüger, *Bucer und Erasmus. Eine Untersuchung zum Einjluss des Erasmus auf die Theologie Martin Bucers (bis zum Evangelienkommentar von 1530)* (Wiesbaden, 1970), 3–68; Nicole Peremans, *Erasme et Bucer d'après leur correspondance* (Paris, 1970), 28–33. On certain aspects of Calvin's indebtedness to Erasmian humanism see Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Rhetoric and Reform: Erasmus's Civil Dispute with Luther* (Cambridge, MA: 1983), 43–46.

[14] Cf. A. Schindler, *Zwingli und die Kirchenväter* (Zurich, 1984), 61.

[15] Cf. n. 12.

kind represented by Bude and Sadolet.[16] They argued that the religious unrest which was among the ordinary people, and allegedly threatening the stability of society, was a consequence of theology falling into the hands of the ignorant and uneducated. Calvin turned this argument on its head: there was religious unrest and instability because the people were being denied that which was their right and inheritance, and only total exposure to Christian doctrine would solve the problem.

Lastly, the Preface shows incontestably that while Calvin learned the basic principles of humanism, Christian or otherwise, in France, and can hardly have been uninfluenced by the country's leading Catholic Evangelical humanist, Lefevre d'Etaples;[17] the most immediate and identifiable formative influences in this respect are those of Erasmus and Bucer. The footnotes to the text of the Preface illustrate the many obvious substantive parallels in those writers. Bucer, in particular, is Calvin's model for the wedding of Christian humanism and Reformation, with its characteristic notion of the reform of theology, Church, society, and the individual, as well as its concern for ethical amelioration. And since Calvin was working with Bucer in Strasburg when he composed this piece, his intimate relationship with, and relative dependence on, him as a Reformer who also held hands with humanism is hardly surprising. Further, Calvin had also sojourned in Basle, which had been effectively the city of Erasmus.

PREFACE TO THE HOMILIES OF CHRYSOSTOM

MANUSCRIPTS

Autograph:
Geneva, Bibliothèque publique et universitaire, fr. 145, fols 160r–2v.

Transcripts:
Geneva, Bibliothèque publique et universitaire, fr. 145, fols 180r–iv.
Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, *Simler-Sammlung* V 48–1540, 183.
Bern, Staatsarchiv des Kantons, B III 62 (*Epistolae virorum clarorum*, vol. VII, 33 des Konvents-Archivs), 12–25.

PRINTED EDITION

CR, Calvini opera omnia, 9, cols 831–8.

TRANSLATION

/col. 831/ Considering that this kind of work which I am now publishing is unconventional,[18] I think it will be worth my while to explain briefly the point of my

[16] Cf. J. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin. Studien zur Gedankenwelt des französischen Frühhumanismus* (Graz, 1950), 127–30.
[17] Cf. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, 85, 178–81.
[18] Until then a patristic writing translated into the vernacular was extremely rare.

project. For I am aware of what nearly always happens in the case of innovation, that there will be no lack of people who will not only condemn this work of mine as unnecessary, but also are of the opinion that it ought to be rejected out of hand as being of no particular benefit to the Church.[19] I am optimistic that these very people will be sympathetic towards me, should they pay heed for a moment to my reasons.

We know what kind of protests were raised initially by backward people when it was suggested that the Gospel should be read by the public.[20] For they reckoned it to be an outrage that the mysteries of God, which had been concealed for so long by priests and monks, be made known to ordinary people.[21] Indeed, this just seemed to be sacrilegious profanation of the temple[22] of God.

Yet even among those to whom this idea was so repugnant we now see that all such objections have been transformed into approval.[23] For it was obvious that the

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[19] Cf. Martin Bucer in the Preface to his commentary on the Synoptic Gospels: "One has to deplore the arrogance of those who disdain to read the writings of not only the holy Fathers but also of modern commentators which offer to explain the Word of God;" *Enarrationes perpetuae* (1530), fol. A 7b; see also Bucer's marginal comment in the same commentary (fol. 100b): "They tempt the Lord who aspire to knowledge of Scripture without a great deal of study." A literalist application of the "Scripture alone" principle gave rise to this anti-academic attitude. It was found among some of those committed to alternative Reformation, e.g. Thomas Müntzer and Andrew Carlstadt. The former referred to the Wittenberg theologians as "mischievous Scripture thieves" (verschmitzte Schriftstehler) and "spiteful biblical scholars" (gehässige Schriftgelehrten) who are the modem Pharisees. See his *Hochverursachte Schutzrede* in *Thomas Müntzer. Schriften und Briefe*, ed. G. Wehr (Gütersloh, 1978), 108–109; cf. n. 67 below.

[20] The most influential call to have the Bible translated into modern languages had been that of Erasmus in 1516, in the *Paraclesis* of his *In Novum Testamentum Praefationes*: "I disagree absolutely with those who are reluctant to have Holy Scripture, translated into the vernacular, read by the laity, as if Christ taught such complex doctrines that they could only be understood by a very few theologians, or as if the strength of the Christian religion consisted in people's ignorance of it … Christ wishes his mysteries to be published as openly as possible … For it is not fitting that … doctrines alone should be reserved for those very few whom the crowd call theologians or monks … is he a theologian, let alone a Christian, who has not read the literature of Christ? Who loves me, Christ says, keeps my Word … Only a few can be learned, but all can be Christian, all can be devout, and, I shall boldly add, all can be theologians." See *Erasmus von Rotterdam. Ausgewählte Schriften … Lateinisch und Deutsch*, 3, ed. G. Winkler (Darmstadt, 1967), 15–23.

[21] Traditionally, the Church did not on principle ban the translation of the Bible, but she rarely encouraged such ventures for fear of facilitating heretical notions. But there were traditionalist individuals who openly opposed translations, and Calvin summarizes the debate with them in his Latin preface to Olivétan's French Bible in 1535: "But the ungodly voices of some are heard, shouting that it is a shameful thing to publish these divine mysteries among the simple common people. … "How then," they ask, "can these poor illiterates comprehend such things, untutored as they are in all liberal arts?" … Why don't these people at least imitate the example of the Fathers to whom they pretend to be so deferential? Jerome did not disdain mere women as partners in his studies. … Why is it that Chrysostom contends that the reading of Holy Scripture is more necessary for common people than for monks, [especially since the former] are tossed about by waves of care and business?" See *CR*, *Calvini opera*, 9, cols 787–88. English: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, *1536 edition*, ed. Battles, appendix IV, 373ff.; cf. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 129–30.

[22] That is, Scripture. Lat. *sacrarium*, meaning also sanctuary or shrine. *Oracula dei* is the phrase normally associated with Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.9.14, and before him Bucer, *Enarrationes*, fol. A 5b, 7b. The use of sacrarium illustrates that, for Calvin, Scripture as the Word of God is in a sense theophanic. But he was also to qualify this by saying that Scripture is no more than the *living image* of God; similitude, not identity. See also Stauffer, *Dieu, la création et la providence*, 54.

[23] By this time a number of translations of the New Testament or the whole Bible by Catholic authors were available, e.g. in French by Lefevre d'Etaples (1530), in German by Emser (1527), Dietenberger (1534), and Eck (1537), in Italian by Brucioli (1534) and Zacharia and Marmochino (1538). But that attitudes in the Old Church were slow to change is suggested by the fact that in his preaching, Calvin continued to denounce roundly the closed-shop treatment of Scripture. See Stauffer, 57–59.

people of God had been deprived of the supreme repository[24] of their salvation—with Scripture lying hidden in the libraries of a select few, inaccessible to the general public. Accordingly, anyone nowadays with a modicum of religion recognizes that through the remarkable favour of God it came about that the sacred Word of God was restored to the entire Church. For in this way has Christ, the *sun of righteousness*,[25] shone upon his people—[the Christ] whom we only then truly take delight in after we have recognized his power, and embrace him when offered to us through the Gospel by God the Father.

And yet those who were in a position to observe the state of the world in the generation of twenty years ago[26] remember that, among the vast majority of people, there was almost nothing remaining of Christ except his name; any recollection of his power which did exist was both rare and scanty. This shocking situation, which is the worst possible, had undoubtedly occurred only because people—as if it were no business of theirs[27]—had left the reading of Scripture to the priests and monks. This is the reason /col. 832/ why we take pride in our age, when that repository, in which Christ is displayed to us with all the wealth of his benefits, has begun once again to be circulated among all the children of God;[28] that [namely, Scripture] is the specific means by which our heavenly inheritance[29] is authenticated, the very temple[30] where God exhibits to us the reality of his deity.

But just as it is of great concern to us not to be denied this wholesome knowledge, by which[31] our souls are nourished for eternal life,[32] so once it is available to us, it is just as necessary to know what one ought to look for there, to have some sort of goal[33] towards which we may be guided. In the absence of this, we will[34] undoubtedly end up roaming aimlessly for a long time with little to show for it. And therefore it is my belief that the Spirit of God is certainly not only the best, but also the sole guide, since without him, there is not even a glimmer of light in our minds enabling us to appreciate heavenly wisdom;[35] yet as soon as the Spirit

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[24] Lat. *thesaurus*, meaning also treasury or storehouse.

[25] Mal. 4.2.

[26] That is, pre-1520.

[27] *quum sit commune filiis Dei* + *CR*, but deleted in MS Geneva, fr. 145, fol. 160r.

[28] In German, there was Luther's Bible (1522–1534), and the Zurich Bible (1529), in English, Tyndale's version (1525–1531) and Coverdale's (1535), in French, Olivétan's Bible (1534). Modern translations were also available in Dutch, Low German, Danish, Swedish, Czech, and Hungarian before 1540.

[29] Cf. Eph. 1.14, 18; Heb. 9.15.

[30] Cf. n. 22.

[31] Retaining *CR* and Zurich *qua*, instead of MS Geneva, fr. 145, fol. 160r, and other copies, *quibus*.

[32] Cf. John 6.54ff.

[33] Lat. *Scopus*—a nautical and astronomical term, which can refer either to the instrument by which a "sighting" like a star is found, or the star itself. It was Erasmus, following his familiarity with the Greek Fathers, who had reintroduced this use of the word in his *Ratio seu compendium verae theologiae*, ed. Winkler (1518), 200–201: "We must not corrupt the heavenly philosophy of Christ. … May that goal remain intact … May that north star never be darkened for us, may that sure sign never be missing by which we, tossed about in the waves of error, will find the right course again." Cf. Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto, 1977), 4ff.

[34] MS Geneva, fr. 145, fol. 160r and copies *continget*, instead of *CR, contingat*.

[35] Cf. 1 Cor. 2.10–14. The expression "heavenly wisdom" is characteristic of Calvin, and very much echoes Erasmian humanist usage; cf. J. Boisset, *Sagesse et sainteté dans la pensée de Calvin, Essai sur l'humanisme du réformateur français* (Paris, 1959).

has shed his light, our minds are more than adequately prepared and equipped to grasp this very wisdom.

Since, however, the Lord, with the same consideration by which he illuminates us through his Spirit,[36] has, in addition, granted us aids, which he intends to be of assistance in our labour of investigating his truth, there is no reason for us either to neglect them as superfluous, or even to care less about them as if irrelevant.[37] For what Paul said ought to be borne in mind, that *though everything belongs to us, we however belong to Christ*.[38] Therefore, let those things which the Lord has provided for our use be of service to us.

The point is, if it is right that ordinary Christians be not deprived of the Word of their God, neither should they be denied prospective resources, which may be of use for its true understanding. Besides, [ordinary Christians] do not have the educational attainment. As this in itself is a considerable privilege, so it is not granted to everyone.[39] It is obvious, therefore, that they should be assisted by the work of interpreters, who have advanced in the knowledge of God to a level that they can guide others to as well. For what justice would there be in men of higher learning having that good fortune as well, whereas those deprived of all such resources /col. 833/ are lacking even that very [knowledge] which, out of everything, was their one entitlement? Because if it is a religious duty to help the weak, and to assist them all the more diligently the greater their need, let those who will censure this work of mine beware of being charged with an uncaring attitude. All I have had in mind with this is to facilitate the reading of Holy Scripture for those who are humble and uneducated.[40]

I am certainly well aware of what objection can be made to me in this business. This is what Chrysostom,[41] whom I am undertaking to make known to the public, aimed his studies at the intelligentsia only. But yet, unless both the title [of his work][42] and [its] style of language deceive, this man specialized in sermons which he delivered to a wide public. Accordingly, he plainly adjusts both [his] approach and language as if he had the instruction of the common people in mind.[43] This being

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[36] This section is an allusion to Calvin's doctrine of the "internal testimony of the Holy Spirit."

[37] Cf. Erasmus, *Prefationes: Methodus*, ed. Winkler, 68–70: "Someone may ask: 'What? Do you regard the Holy Scripture as so straightforward that it could be understood without commentaries?'…the work of the Ancients ought to relieve us of some of the labour." Also *Praefationes: Apologia*, ed. Winkler, 96–97, where Erasmus writes that "The Holy Spirit is never absent, but he reveals his power in such a way that he leaves us with a share of the work [of interpretation]." Behind this way of thinking is the Pauline notion of "prophesying" and the gift of interpretation. Cf. n. 19.

[38] 1 Cor. 3.21, 23.

[39] At this time, only about 5 percent of the population of Europe was effectively literate.

[40] Cf. Calvin in his preface to Olivétan's Bible, ed. Battles, 374: "I desire only this, that faithful people be permitted to hear their God speaking and to learn knowledge from [him] … When therefore we see that there are people from all classes who are making progress in God's school, we acknowledge His truth which promised a pouring forth of His Spirit on all flesh."

[41] d. 407, successively bishop of Antioch and Constantinople.

[42] Calvin is alluding to the fact that the bulk of the exegetical material in known Chrysostom *opera* was presented in the form of homilies.

[43] The points made by Calvin here echo those made by Erasmus in the Preface to his Chrysostom edition of 1530, a preface which was republished in the Paris edition of 1536 used by Calvin, e.g., "Among the various gifts of the Spirit [in Chrysostom], teaching ability is preeminent…for who teaches more

the case, anyone maintaining that he ought to be kept in seclusion among the academics has got it wrong, seeing that he did go out of his way to cultivate a popular appeal.

That I share a common[44] concern with Chrysostom is unquestionably more than adequate justification for me, because I am just imparting to ordinary people what he wrote specifically for ordinary people. Nor was he the only one to do this. As a matter of fact, others of the Ancients as well devoted the bulk of their studies to the people in this way when they composed homilies. For they rightly kept that guideline of Paul's, that all the endowments which God has conferred on his servants ought to be utilized for the edification of everyone.[45] They also knew that the more anyone was in need of their services, the greater the obligation on them. For in view of the fact that after Paul *had been caught up in the third heaven* and *had seen secrets unutterable to man*,[46] but yet still declared himself under an obligation to the simple and uneducated, how could [the Ancients] exempt themselves from that stipulation? Therefore, just as they would have very inadequately discharged what was their duty if they had not put to common use the skills they had received from God, so, too, would we be invidious by failing to impart to the people of God what is theirs.[47] Likewise, the people themselves would be lacking in gratitude, were they not eager to take up the gift of God offered to them.

In addition to this point, there is a further consideration: among us it does not always happen that those charged with the ministry of the churches are sufficiently versed in Greek and Latin as to be able to understand the ancient writers in the original.[48] Yet I think it is widely recognized how important it is that a pastor of the Church knows what the nature of the ancient form of the Church was, and that he is equipped with at least some knowledge of Antiquity. And so in this respect, too, this work of mine could be fruitful, as everyone may admit; for no one denies that it is proper for all those responsible for Christian education to be familiar with this kind of writing. Yet there will maybe be some people around who will only manage this with the help of a translation. But to avoid /col. 834/ giving the impression of dragging on about such a sensitive issue, I will not press the point further.

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clearly?...for all his great erudition and eloquence, there is in almost everything he wrote an incredible concern to be helpful; he adapted to the ears of the people, with the result that he brought the essence of a sermon down to the level of their comprehension, as if he were a schoolteacher speaking child-talk with an infant pupil." *Chrysostomi omnia opera*, fols. 9bE–10bG; cf. Stauffer, *Dieu, la création et la providence*, 54–56; and Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 124ff.

[44] Reading *communem* with *CR*, Zurich, and Berne, instead of MS Geneva fr. 145, fol. 160v, and Geneva transcript, *coniunctam*.

[45] Cf. Eph. 4.11f.

[46] II Cor. 12.2–4.

[47] Cf. Bucer, *Errarrationes*, fol. 5a: "My chief aim with this commentary has been to be of assistance to the very uneducated brethren, of whom you will find many … and to whom Christ our Lord is beginning to reveal himself again."

[48] Cf. Erasmus, *Praefationes: Methodus*, ed. Winkler, 42–43: "Our first concern should be with the thorough learning of the three languages, Latin, Greek and Hebrew … to achieve a working knowledge, sufficient for exercising judgement." Bucer, *Enarrationes*, fol. 3b, also regrets that "there are a great number of those entrusted with the office of teaching in the Church who … bar many people from the Evangelists ... due to linguistic incompetence." See also Krüger, *Bucer und Erasmus*, 95–96.

My reason for selecting Chrysostom as the most preferable needs likewise to be dealt with in passing.[49] From the outset, the reader ought to bear in mind the kind of literary genre it is in which I prefer him to others. Although homilies are something which consist of a variety of elements, the interpretation of Scripture is, however, their priority.[50] In this area, no one of sound judgement would deny that our Chrysostom excels all the ancient writers currently extant.[51] This is especially true when he deals with the New Testament. For the lack of Hebrew prevented him from showing so much expertise in the Old Testament. And so to avoid giving the impression of either making an ill-considered judgement on such an important matter, or doing an injustice to other writers, I will summarize my reasons for bestowing on him the praise he deserves.

Among the Greeks whose works are extant today, there was no one [of distinction] before him or even in his own age, except Origen,[52] Athanasius,[53] Basil,[54] and Gregory.[55] Yet Origen obscures very much the plain meaning of Scripture with constant allegories. With the [other] three there can be no comparison, because we do not possess any complete commentaries of theirs which may be compared with those [of Chrysostom]. But from the fragments which do survive, one may suspect that the latter two had more of an aptitude for oratory than for literary exposition.

Of those in the generation after that, the foremost is Cyril,[56] an outstanding exegete indeed, and someone who among the Greeks can be rated second to Chrysostom. He cannot, however, match him. Theophylact[57] cannot be better assessed than with the observation that anything commendable he has he took from Chrysostom. There is no need to review more [writers], about whom there can be no dispute.

As regards the Latin writers, works by Tertullian[58] and Cyprian[59] of this kind have perished. Nor do we possess many of Hilary's works.[60] [His] commentaries on the Psalter do little towards an understanding of the mind of the prophet. [His]

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[49] Bucer had stated that early Church exegetes had indulged far too much in allegorical and mystical interpretations "with the one exception of Chrysostom": *Enarrationes*, fol. 4a.

[50] Cf. T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God. An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London, 1947), 13–21.

[51] A view still maintained in modern times, e.g. "No Church Father expounded the sacred text so thoroughly and at the same time in such a practical manner [as Chrysostom]": B. Altaner and A. Stuiber, *Patrologie. Leben, Schriften und Lehre der Kirchenväter*, 8th ed. (Freiburg, 1978), 324. See also Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon. A guide to the Literature and its Background* (London, 1983), 154–59, and F. H. Chase, *Chrysostom, A Study in the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1887).

[52] d. 254, lay head of the famous Catechetical School in Alexandria.

[53] d. 371, Bishop of Alexandria.

[54] d. 379, Bishop of Caesarea.

[55] d. c.390, Bishop of Nazianzus.

[56] d. 444, Bishop of Alexandria.

[57] d. c.1108, more of a medieval Byzantine writer than a Church Father, Archbishop of Ochryda (Bulgarian, Yugoslavia), his commentary on the Gospels was edited by the Basle Reformer, Oecolampad, in 1524.

[58] d. c.220, lay theologian in Carthage.

[59] d. 258, Bishop of Carthage.

[60] d. 367, Bishop of Poiciers.

canons[61] on Matthew certainly contain more of consequence. But there too the most important faculty of an interpreter is missing: lucidity.

What Jerome[62] wrote on the Old Testament has deservedly very little reputation among scholars. For he is almost completely bogged down in allegories, by which he distorts Scripture with too much licence. [His] commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew and on two[63] Epistles of Paul are tolerable, except that they savour of a man not sufficiently experienced in church affairs.

Better and more profitable than him is Ambrose,[64] even if he is very laconic. There is no one after Chrysostom who comes closer to the plain sense of Scripture. /col. 835/ For if he had been equipped with a learning commensurate with his pre-eminence in natural acumen, judgement, and subtlety, he would perhaps be reckoned as the prime expositor of Scripture.

It is beyond dispute that Augustine[65] does surpass everyone in dogmatics. He is also a very scrupulous biblical commentator of the first rank. But he is far too ingenious. This results in him being less sound and reliable.

The chief merit of our Chrysostom is this: he took great pains everywhere not to deviate in the slightest from the genuine plain meaning of Scripture, and not to indulge in any licence of twisting the straightforward sense of the words.[66] I am only saying what will be acknowledged by those who are both in a position to make a correct assessment and who will not hesitate to state the fact.[67] I admit there are also things in him in which he is inferior to others and which deserve criticism, even if they are not compared with the writings of others.

But since we know that *while all things are ours, we belong to the one Christ*,[68] let us by all means make use of this favour of the Lord. I am saying: let us make a frank assessment of everything which has been written, but respectfully and

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[61] This unusual term in this context Calvin derives from Erasmus's Hilary edition—*Lucubrationes*—of 1523, in which the commentary on Matthew is entitled *In Evangelium Matthaei canones, seu commentarius.* The term's implausibility is discussed by Migne in his *Admonitio* preceding his edition of the commentary in *PL* 9, cols 912, Xl–914, XIV. Cf. *Hilaire de Poitiers, Sur Matthieu*, ed. J. Doignon, *SC*, 254 (1978).

[62] d. 420, lay biblical scholar and translator, chief mediator of Origenist/Alexandrian allegorical exegesis to the Latin West.

[63] A slip by Calvin here, since Jerome commented not only Galatians and Ephesians, but also Philemon and Titus.

[64] d. 397, Bishop of Milan. It is more likely that Calvin had the Ambrosiaster (pseudo-Ambrose) in mind, rather than Ambrose himself, although Erasmus's edition in 1527 had distinguished between the two.

[65] d. 430, Bishop of Hippo.

[66] In other words, Chrysostom is a representative of the anti-allegorical Antiochene exegetical tradition. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. (London, 1968), 75ff.

[67] Cf. n. 48.

[68] Cf. 1 Cor. 3.21–23. Calvin writes in his Epistle to the King of France, at the beginning of the *Institutes*, ed. Battles and McNeill, *LCC* 20, 1, 18–19 [*Calvini opera selecta*, ed. P. Barth and W. Niesel (Munich, 1926–1936), 3, 17–18]: "We are so versed in the writings [of the Fathers] as to remember always that all things are ours, to serve us, not to lord it over us, and that we all belong to the one Christ, whom we must obey in all things without exception. He who does not observe this distinction will have nothing certain in religion." Cf. Luther, *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519–1521), *WA*, 5, 280–81: "Since Scripture and God's Word must have a single and unchangeable meaning, [we must] avoid turning the sacred text into a 'wax nose' … [we should] not accept something read in any of the famous Fathers as an oracle … some make a habit of this, shredding Scripture with diverse meanings, so that we almost have as many opinions as there are syllables."

impartially, and let us not accept anything unless it has been subjected to scrutiny.[69] For all the servants of Christ certainly did not intend what they wrote to be exempt from the rule which Paul fixes even for the very angels.[70] And to enable this work of Chrysostom to be read with less disfavour and more benefit, I will indicate in passing aspects with which I am not entirely happy, so that alerted readers may be more readily on their guard against them.

By being unrestrained in asserting human free will, and in claiming the merits of works, he obscures somewhat the grace of God in our election and calling, and thereby the gratuitous mercy which accompanies us from our calling right up to death.[71] Firstly, he attempts to link election to some consideration of our works. Scripture, though, proclaims everywhere that there is nothing by which God may be moved to elect us except our pathetic condition, and that he does not base his decision to come to our aid on anything except his own goodness.[72] Secondly, to some extent [Chrysostom] divides the credit for our calling between God and ourselves, though Scripture consistently ascribes the whole of it to God without qualification.

On free will he speaks in such a way as if it were of great importance for the pursuit of virtue and the keeping of the divine law.[73] Yet on the evidence of his Word, the Lord everywhere deprives us of all capacity for doing good, and leaves us with no virtue other than what he himself supplies through his Spirit. Therefore, he also ascribes more to works than is right, since he appears to base our righteousness in the eyes of God on them to some extent. Yet there is nothing which Scripture so strongly emphasizes as that one should ascribe to God the entire credit for justification, since our achievements and everything which is ours have been condemned as incapable of acceptance. Consequently, not only is he himself just, but by his gratuitous

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[69] Cf. Erasmus, *Praefationes: Methodus*, ed. Winkler, 68–70: "One must of course read [the Ancients] critically and with discrimination. They were human beings, some things they did not know, and in some things they let their minds wander. Occasionally they were fast asleep." And Bucer, *Enarrationes*, fols 7a–b: "We are all human beings, and until now God has revealed that due to considerable lapses great men are mortal, lest honour should be given to them instead of him … the blindness of those people is to be deplored who on reading something produced by a human being, treat it like oracles of God. It is the mode of the Holy Spirit that while one or the other prophesies, others make an assessment. We acknowledge this mode [at work] in some people, and they should acknowledge it in us."

[70] Cf. 1 Cor. 6.3.

[71] Calvin can do no other than to distance himself from Chrysostom's views on grace, works, merit, election, justification, etc. Standing firmly within the Reformation version of the radical Pauline and Augustinian revival, he could have little sympathy with a theology which, in fact, represents the entire Greek patristic tradition. The latter proceeded on the basis of the semi-Pelagian notion of a mutual approximation between God and humanity, whereas the former posited a chasm and polarity between God and humanity, which can only be bridged by divine initiative and operation. In the 1559 *Institutes*, 2.2.4, Calvin writes: "The Greeks above the rest—and Chrysostom especially among them—extol the ability of the human will." And Bucer, in his *Romans Commentary* of 1536, ed. D. F. Wright, *Common Places of Martin Bucer* (Abingdon, 1972), 154: "Chrysostom is most assiduous in championing man's will and capability for godly living." See also Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 352. On the Augustinian revival see H. A. Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: the Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe* (Cambridge, 1981), ch. 6; cf. A. E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: a History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1986).

[72] E.g., Gen. 3; Jer. 31.18–20; Ezech. 36.26–27; Joh. 8.34–38; Rom. 4.2ff., 8, 9, etc.

[73] E.g., as in Chrysostom's *De proditione Iudae homilia*, I, 3: *PG* 49, col. 377. Also his homilies on Genesis 19.1; 53.2; 25.7: *PG* 53, col. 158; 54, col. 468; 53, col. 228.

goodness he justifies his followers, not on account of any worth or merit belonging to works, rather by faith in Jesus Christ.[74]

Yet it is hard to believe that [Chrysostom] was so naïve about Christian teaching as not to be aware either of the afflicted condition of humanity /col. 836/ or of the grace of God, which is the sole remedy for its distress.[75] But the reasons which forced him into that position are clear: We are aware how the teaching handed down by the Scriptures about the blindness of human nature, the perversity of the heart, the impotence of the mind, and the corruption of the entire character accords little with common sense and the opinions of philosophers.[76] And there were philosophers at that time who used to censure that very much[77] about our religion[78] with the aim of alienating some people from it.[79] Our Chrysostom considered it his duty to rebut their scoffing and crafty stratagems. But since no better method of answering them was available, he modified his own opinion in such a way as to avoid being at too great a variance with public opinion.[80]

This, therefore, seems to be the main reason why he both talked very vaguely about predestination, and conceded so much to our free will. The intention of this was undoubtedly to deny all opportunity for the Sophists'[81] slanders. Their explicit aim was to pour scorn on what were straightforward assertions on these matters in accordance with God's Word. That was not at all, I grant, a sufficiently good reason for him to depart from the plain meaning of Scripture. For it is certainly not right for God's truth to make way for human opinion. To the former, all human thinking ought to be subjected as if captive, and all minds ought to be made consciously obedient to

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[74] Calvin wrote *ex fide Iesu Christi*. The unusual form of this phrase, with Jesus Christ in a *genitivus objectivus*, appears only once in the Greek and Latin New Testaments, in Gal. 3.22.

[75] Cf. Bucer, *Romans Commentary*, ed. Wright, 152: "Scripture ascribes all the credit for salvation to the grace of God and universally condemns every part of our nature as utterly ungodly."

[76] Cf. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* III, 5, 2–3. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* III, 36, 87–88. Seneca, Epistle 90 to Lucilius. See also Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.2.

[77] Reading *minis modis* instead of MS Geneva fr. 145, fol. 162r and *CR*, *modis* only, and *modo* of copies.

[78] MS Geneva fr. 145, fol. 162v in *nostram religionem*, instead of *CR* and copies in *nostra religione*.

[79] Calvin's analysis of the situation recalls that of Bucer in an excursus on free will in his *Romans Commentary* (1536), ed. Wright, 153–54. But there is an important difference of perception. Whereas Bucer explains the views of the Fathers, including Chrysostom, as a response to divergent interpretations of Scripture within the Church, Calvin understands the position of someone like Chrysostom as a response to pagan critiques of Christianity. There does not, however, seem to be much evidence in mainstream pagan anti-Christian polemics, as in Celsus or Porphyry, or in pagan apologetics as found in Saloustios or Libanius (under whom Chrysostom reputedly studied) that free will was an issue. Cf. P. de Labriolle, *La Réaction paienne: Etude surla polémique antichrétienne du Ierau Vle siècle* (Paris, 1934). It is more likely that Chrysostom had Christian sects or heresies in mind which denied free will or its relevance, e.g. Marcionite Gnostics, Montanists, Manichaeans, etc. Anyway, the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus had long since refuted Stoic philosophical deterministic denial of free will.

[80] Cf. Calvin in his *Des Scandales* (1550), ed. O. Fatio, *Textes Littéraires Français* (Geneva, 1984), 76–77: "Would to God that the ancient teachers had not been so taken aback by the opposition of [the philosophers], since by taking the trouble to appease them, they have left us with a lifeless and counterfeit theology. To avoid annoying them, [Chrysostom *et al.*] have confused heaven and earth … they look for a way more in conformity with human opinion by selling out to free will, and allowing some natural virtue in men." In a sense, then, Calvin's notion that Chrysostom embodies an accommodation to secular philosophy in the matter of free will adumbrated the "Hellenization of Christianity" theory.

[81] A term of abuse to designate reputedly anti-Christian philosophers, usually employed by Calvin to describe the Scholastics.

it. But since it is true that [Chrysostom's] objective was simply to free himself from the enemies of the Cross of Christ, an undoubtedly good intention such as this, for all its lack of success, is still deserving of some sympathy.

But in another respect he was under even more pressure; for there were many people in the Church whose lives were shameful and licentious. When confronted by their pastors, they had a ready pretext for their slackness. This was that it could on no account be imputed to them that they lived in accordance with their carnal desires, since, in fact, they were compelled to sin necessarily by the defectiveness of their nature. As long as they were not assisted by the grace of God, it was not in their power [they argued], to surmount that relentless compulsion. In addition, with typical evasiveness, they had the irreligious and dishonourable habit of putting the blame for their sins, which lay within themselves, on to God—the author of all things good, and certainly not the cause of anything evil. There were also some individuals who used to prattle about "fate."[82]

This holy man [Chrysostom] had every reason to challenge shirkers of this kind. But since he was not very sure about the means of subduing them, whereby he might shake them out of their complacency and deprive them of every excuse, he had the habit of saying the following: that "no person was prepared for spiritual benefit by the grace of God in such a way as to preclude some contribution of his own as well."[83]

Such a formulation is not particularly consistent with the Holy Spirit's manner of speaking. But this is just what I indicated initially:[84] that [this] trusty minister of Christ did deviate somewhat from the right way, although he had the best of intentions. /col. 837/ Yet just as lapses of this kind in such a great man are easily excused, so it is important that a devout reader is reminded not to be diverted from the plain truth by [Chrysostom's] authority.

Furthermore, apart from that careful concern for straightforward and authentic interpretation which I have mentioned, you will find in those Homilies much historical material. From this you will gain insight into the kind of office and authority bishops had at that time, as well as the precepts by which the populace was kept duty bound; what sort of discipline there was among the clergy, and what kind among the people themselves; how responsible the former was, precluding an irresponsible abuse of the power entrusted to them; /col. 838/ how much respectfulness there was in the latter, avoiding the semblance of any degree of contempt for a regime so greatly commended by the Lord; what sanctity characterized [their] meetings,[85] and how greatly they were frequented with the

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[82] The reference here is to pseudo-Epicureans and fatalistic Stoics. The latter were forced into ethical indifference by a pessimistic determinist view of human nature. Cf. Bucer, *Romans Commentary*, ed. Wright, 153; "The one thing the Fathers sought to guard against was a person's shifting the blame for his own ungodliness on to God's shoulders." See also E. Osborn, *Ethical Patterns in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge, 1976), 134–35, who includes Manichaean and Marcionite dualists as Chrysostom's target.

[83] A fair summary of Chrysostom's position. Cf. Anthony Kenny, "Was St. John Chrysostom a Semi-Pelagian?" *Irish Theological Quarterly* (1960), 16–29. As a Reformation theologian, Calvin would find Chrysostom reminiscent of the doctrine of late medieval Nominalist theologians, against which the Reformers reacted so strongly, namely, "God does not refuse grace to those who do what lies within them." Cf. H. A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1986), 84–103.

[84] MS Geneva fr. 145, fol. 162v and copies *principio*, instead of *CR*. *praecipio*.

[85] Latin *quid habuerint sacri conventus*, taking *sacri* not as a nominative plural adjective, but as a parritive genitive noun.

spread of religion; what kind of ceremonies there were, and to what end they were instituted; unquestionably [these are] things really worth knowing about.

In fact, if we want helpful discussion on the welfare of the Church, no more appropriate way is to be found, at least in my opinion, than to resort to the model from the early Church.[86] On the other hand, whenever both[87] in ecclesiastical …[88]

University of Glasgow

[86] Typical Christian humanist idealization of the Early Church, corresponding to the Renaissance view of Antiquity. For some modern studies on Calvin's relationship to humanism and tradition in general, see R. White, "Fifteen Years of Calvin Studies in French (1965–1980)," *Journal of Religious History* 12 (1982): 140–61.

[87] MS Geneva fr. 145, fol. 161v and copies *et*, omitted in *CR*.

[88] The rest is missing.

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THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY: JOHN CALVIN ON EXPOSITION AND THE BOOK OF ROMANS[1]

John Calvin to Simon Grynæus[2]

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The contribution below consists of two parts. The first part ("A Man Worthy of All Honour") is a letter that Calvin wrote to another scholar and friend Simon Grynæus, describing to him the practice of Bible exposition. Calvin noted that the goal of exposition is to explain the mind of the author to the reader, both with simplicity and brevity. The second part ("Epistle to the Romans: The Argument") is Calvin's introduction to Romans in which Calvin moved through the book chapter by chapter in summary form. Calvin thereby illustrated exposition by demonstrating how Paul advances through his argument in the epistle. The ultimate purpose of Calvin's work is to mature the believers in their love for Christ.

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A Man Worthy of All Honour

I remember that when three years ago we had a friendly converse as to the best mode of expounding Scripture, the plan which especially pleased you, seemed also to me the most entitled to approbation: we both thought that the chief excellency of an expounder consists in *lucid brevity*. And, indeed, since it is almost his only work to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain, the degree in which he leads away his readers from it, in that degree he goes astray from his purpose, and in a manner wanders from his own boundaries. Hence we expressed a hope, that from

[1] John Calvin's letter to Simon Grynæus and his introduction to the commentary on the book of Romans were originally printed for the Calvin Translation Society (Edinburgh, 1849) and later reprinted by Baker Books (Grand Rapids, 2005).

[2] The account given of *Grynæus* by *Watkins* in his Biographical Dictionary, taken from *Moreri*, is the following: "A learned German, born at Veringen, in Hohenzollern, in 1493. He studied at Vienna, after which he became Rector of the school at Baden, but was thrown into prison for espousing the Lutheran doctrines. However, he recovered his liberty, and went to Heidelberg, afterwards to Basil, and, in 1531, he visited England. In 1536 he returned to Basil, and died there in 1540." It is somewhat singular, that in the same year, 1540, another learned man of the same name, John James *Grynæus*, was born at Berne, and was educated at Basil, and became distinguished for his learning. —*Ed*.

the number of those who strive at this day to advance the interest of theology by this kind of labour, some one would be found, who would study plainness, and endeavour to avoid the evil of tiring his readers with prolixity. I know at the same time that this view is not taken by all, and that those who judge otherwise have their reasons; but still I cannot be drawn away from the love of what is compendious. But as there is such a variety, found in the minds of men, that different things please different persons, let every one in this case follow his own judgment, provided that no one attempts to force others to adopt his own rules. Thus it will be, that we who approve of brevity, will not reject nor despise the labours of those who are more copious and diffused in their explanations of Scripture, and that they also in their turn will bear with us, though they may think us too compressed and concise.

I indeed could not have restrained myself from attempting something to benefit the Church of God in this way. I am, however, by no means confident that I have attained what at that time seemed best to us; nor did I hope to attain it when I began; but I have endeavoured so to regulate my style, that I might appear to aim at that model. How far I have succeeded, as it is not my part to determine, I leave to be decided by you and by such as you are.

That I have dared to make the trial, especially on this Epistle of Paul, I indeed see, will subject me to the condemnation of many: for since men of so much learning have already laboured in the explanation of it, it seems not probable that there is any room for others to produce any thing better. And I confess, that though I promised to myself some fruit from my labour, I was at first deterred by this thought; for I feared, lest I should incur the imputation of presumption by applying my hand to a work which had been executed by so many illustrious workmen. There are extant on this Epistle many Commentaries by the ancients, and many by modern writers: and truly they could have never employed their labours in a better way; for when any one understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture.

Of the ancients who have, by their piety, learning, holiness, and also by their age, gained so much authority, that we ought to despise nothing of what they have adduced, I will say nothing; and with regard to those who live at this day, it is of no benefit to mention them all by name: Of those who have spent most labour in this work, I will express my opinion.

Philipp *Melancthon*, who, by his singular learning and industry, and by that readiness in all kinds of knowledge, in which he excels, has introduced more light than those who had preceded him. But as it seems to have been his object to examine only those things which are mainly worthy of attention, he dwelt at large on these, and designedly passed by many things which common minds find to be difficult. Then follows *Bullinger*, who has justly attained no small praise; for with learning he has connected plainness, for which he has been highly commended. In the last place comes *Bucer*, who, by publishing his works, has given as it were the finishing stroke. For in addition to his recondite learning and enlarged knowledge of things, and to the clearness of his mind, and much reading and many other excellencies, in which he is hardly surpassed by any at this day, equalled by few and excelled by still fewer—he

possesses, as you know, this praise as his own—that no one in our age has been with so much labour engaged in the work of expounding Scripture.[3]

As then it would have been, I know, a proof of the most presumptuous rivalry, to wish to contend with such men, such a thing never entered my mind; nor have I a desire to take from them the least portion of their praise. Let that favour and authority, which according to the confession of all good men they have deserved, be continued to them. This, however, I trust, will be allowed—that nothing has been done by men so absolutely perfect, that there is no room left for the industry of those who succeed them, either to polish, or to adorn, or to illustrate. Of myself I venture not to say any thing, except that I thought that my labour would not be useless, and that I have undertaken it for no other reason than to promote the public good of the Church.

I farther hoped, that by adopting a different plan, I should not expose myself to the invidious charge of rivalry, of which I was afraid in the first instance. *Philipp* attained his object by illustrating the principal points: being occupied with these primary things, he passed by many things which deserve attention; and it was not his purpose to prevent others to examine them. *Bucer* is too diffuse for men in business to read, and too profound to be understood by such as are simple and not capable of much application: for whatever be the subject which he handles, so many things are suggested to him through the incredible fecundity of his mind, in which he excels, that he knows not when to stop. Since then the first has not explained every passage, and the other has handled every point more at large than it can be read in a short time, my design has not even the appearance of being an act of rivalship. I, however, hesitated for some time, whether it would be better to gather some gleanings after these and others, by which I might assist humbler minds—or to compose a regular comment, in which I should necessarily have to repeat many things which have been previously said by them all, or at least by some of them. But as they often vary from one another, and thus present a difficulty to simple readers, who hesitate as to what opinion they ought to receive, I thought that it would be no vain labour, if by pointing out the best explanation, I relieved them from the trouble of forming a judgment, who are not able to form a judgment for themselves; and especially as I determined to treat things so briefly, that without much loss of time, readers may peruse in my work what is contained in other writings. In short, I have endeavoured that no one may justly complain, that there are here many things which are superfluous.

Of the usefulness of this work I will say nothing; men, not malignant, will, however, it may be, have reasons to confess, that they have derived from it more benefit than I can with any modesty dare to promise. Now, that I sometimes dissent from others, or somewhat differ from them, it is but right that I should be excused. Such veneration we ought indeed to entertain for the Word of God, that we ought not to pervert it in the least degree by varying expositions; for its majesty is diminished, I know not how much, especially when not expounded with great discretion and with great sobriety. And if it be deemed a great wickedness to contaminate any thing that

[3] There were at least two other Reformers who had written on the Epistle to the Romans: but whether they were published at this time the writer is not able to say. There is by *Luther* an Introduction to it, which has been much praised, and has attained the name of the golden preface. Peter *Martyr* wrote a large comment on this Epistle, which was translated into English early in Queen Elizabeth's reign, in the year 1568. It is rather remarkable that there was no commenter among our English Reformers, while on the Continent there were a great many commentators. —*Ed*.

is dedicated to God, he surely cannot be endured, who, with impure, or even with unprepared hands, will handle that very thing, which of all things is the most sacred on earth. It is therefore an audacity, closely allied to a sacrilege, rashly to turn Scripture in any way we please, and to indulge our fancies as in sport; which has been done by many in former times.

But we ever find, that even those who have not been deficient in their zeal for piety, nor in reverence and sobriety in handling the mysteries of God, have by no means agreed among themselves on every point; for God hath never favoured his servants with so great a benefit, that they were all endued with a full and perfect knowledge in every thing; and, no doubt, for this end—that he might first keep them humble; and secondly, render them disposed to cultivate brotherly intercourse. Since then what would otherwise be very desirable cannot be expected in this life, that is, universal consent among us in the interpretation of all parts of Scripture, we must endeavour, that, when we depart from the sentiments of our predecessors, we may not be stimulated by any humour for novelty, nor impelled by any lust for defaming others, nor instigated by hatred, nor tickled by any ambition, but constrained by necessity alone, and by the motive of seeking to do good: and then, when this is done in interpreting Scripture, less liberty will be taken in the principles of religion, in which God would have the minds of his people to be especially unanimous. Readers will easily perceive that I had both these things in view.

But as it becomes not me to decide or to pronounce any thing respecting myself, I willingly allow you this office; to whose judgment, since almost all in most things defer, I ought in everything to defer, inasmuch as you are intimately known to me by familiar intercourse; which is wont somewhat to diminish the esteem had for others, but does not a little increase yours, as is well known among all the learned. Farewell.

STRASBURGH, *18th October* 1539

EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

The Argument

With regard to the excellency of this Epistle, I know not whether it would be well for me to dwell long on the subject; for I fear, lest through my recommendations falling far short of what they ought to be, I should do nothing but obscure its merits: besides, the Epistle itself, at its very beginning, explains itself in a much better way than can be done by any words which I can use. It will then be better for me to pass on to the Argument, or the contents of the Epistle; and it will hence appear beyond all controversy, that besides other excellencies, and those remarkable, this can with truth be said of it, and it is what can never be sufficiently appreciated—that when any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.

The whole Epistle is so methodical, that even its very beginning is framed according to the rules of art. As contrivance appears in many parts, which shall be noticed as we proceed, so also especially in the way in which the main argument is

deduced: for having begun with the proof of his Apostleship, he then comes to the Gospel with the view of recommending it; and as this necessarily draws with it the subject of faith, he glides into that, being led by the chain of words as by the hand: and thus he enters on the main subject of the whole Epistle—justification by faith; in treating which he is engaged to the end of the fifth chapter.

The subject then of these chapters may be stated thus—that man's only righteousness is through the mercy of God in Christ, which being offered by the Gospel is apprehended by faith.

But as men are asleep in their sins, and flatter and delude themselves with a false notion about righteousness, so that they think not that they need the righteousness of faith, except they be cast down from all self-confidence—and further, as they are inebriated with the sweetness of lusts, and sunk in deep self-security, so that they are not easily roused to seek righteousness, except they are struck down by the terror of divine judgment—the Apostle proceeds to do two things—to convince men of iniquity, and to shake off the torpor of those whom he proves guilty.

He *first* condemns all mankind from the beginning of the world for ingratitude, because they recognised not the workman in his extraordinary work: nay, when they were constrained to acknowledge him, they did not duly honour his majesty, but in their vanity profaned and dishonoured it. Thus all became guilty of impiety, a wickedness more detestable than any thing else. And that he might more clearly show that all had departed from the Lord, he recounts the filthy and horrible crimes of which men everywhere became guilty: and this is a manifest proof, that they had degenerated from God, since these sins are evidences of divine wrath, which appear not except in the ungodly. And as the Jews and some of the Gentiles, while they covered their inward depravity by the veil of outward holiness, seemed to be in no way chargeable with such crimes, and hence thought themselves exempt from the common sentence of condemnation, the Apostle directs his discourse against this fictitious holiness; and as this mask before men cannot be taken away from saintlings (*sanctulis*—petty saints), he summons them to the tribunal of God, whose eyes no latent evils can escape. Having afterwards divided his subject, he places apart both the Jews and the Gentiles before the tribunal of God. He cuts off from the Gentiles the excuse which they pleaded from ignorance, because conscience was to them a law, and by this they were abundantly convicted as guilty. He chiefly urges on the Jews that from which they took their defence, even the written law; and as they were proved to have transgressed it, they could not free themselves from the charge of iniquity, and a sentence against them had already been pronounced by the mouth of God himself. He at the same time obviates any objection which might have been made by them—that the covenant of God, which was the symbol of holiness, would have been violated, if they were not to be distinguished from others. Here he first shows, that they excelled not others by the right of the covenant, for they had by their unfaithfulness departed from it: and then, that he might not derogate from the perpetuity of the divine promise, he concedes to them some privilege as arising from the covenant; but it proceeded from the mercy of God, and not from their merits. So that with regard to their own qualifications they were on a level with the Gentiles. He then proves by the authority of Scripture, that both Jews and Gentiles were all sinners; and he also slightly refers to the use of the law.

Having wholly deprived all mankind of their confidence in their own virtue and of their boast of righteousness, and laid them prostrate by the severity of God's judgment, he returns to what he had before laid down as his subject—that we are justified by faith; and he explains what faith is, and how the righteousness of Christ is by it attained by us. To these things he adds at the end of the *third* chapter a remarkable conclusion, with the view of beating down the fierceness of human pride, that it might not dare to raise up itself against the grace of God: and last the Jews should confine so great a favour of God to their own nation, he also by the way claims it in behalf of the Gentiles.

In the *fourth* chapter he reasons from example; which he adduces as being evident, and hence not liable to be cavilled at; and it is that of Abraham, who, being the father of the faithful, ought to be deemed a pattern and a kind of universal example. Having then proved that he was justified by faith, the Apostle teaches us that we ought to maintain no other way of justification. And here he shows, that it follows from the rule of contraries, that the righteousness of works ceases to exist, since the righteousness of faith is introduced. And he confirms this by the declaration of David, who, by making the blessedness of man to depend on the mercy of God, takes it away from works, as they are incapable of making a man blessed. He then treats more fully what he had before shortly referred to—that the Jews had no reason to raise themselves above the Gentiles, as this felicity is equally common to them both, since Scripture declares that Abraham obtained this righteousness in an uncircumcised state: and here he takes the opportunity of adding some remarks on the use of circumcision. He afterwards subjoins, that the promise of salvation depends on God's goodness alone: for were it to depend on the law, it could not bring peace to consciences, which it ought to confirm, nor could it attain its own fulfilment. Hence, that it may be sure and certain, we must, in embracing it, regard the truth of God alone, and not ourselves, and follow the example of Abraham, who, turning away from himself, had regard only to the power of God. At the end of the chapter, in order to make a more general application of the adduced example, he introduces several comparisons.

In the *fifth* chapter, after having touched on the fruit and effects of the righteousness of faith, he is almost wholly taken up with illustrations, in order to make the point clearer. For, deducing an argument from one greater, he shows how much we, who have been redeemed and reconciled to God, ought to expect from his love; which was so abundantly poured forth towards us, when we were sinners and lost, that he gave for us his only-begotten and beloved Son. He afterwards makes comparisons between sin and free righteousness, between Christ and Adam, between death and life, between the law and grace: it hence appears that our evils, however vast they are, are swallowed up by the infinite mercy of God.

He proceeds in the *sixth* chapter to mention the sanctification which we obtain in Christ. It is indeed natural to our flesh, as soon as it has had some slight knowledge of grace, to indulge quietly in its own vices and lusts, as though it had become free from all danger: but Paul, on the contrary, contends here, that we cannot partake of the righteousness of Christ, except we also lay hold on sanctification. He reasons from baptism, by which we are initiated into a participation of Christ, (*per quem in Christi participationem initiamur*;) and in it we are buried together with Christ, so that being dead in ourselves, we may through his life be raised to a newness of life.

It then follows, that without regeneration no one can put on his righteousness. He hence deduces exhortations as to purity and holiness of life, which must necessarily appear in those who have been removed from the kingdom of sin to the kingdom of righteousness, the sinful indulgence of the flesh, which seeks in Christ a greater liberty in sinning, being cast aside. He makes also a brief mention of the law as being abrogated; and in the abrogation of this the New Testament shines forth eminently; for together with the remission of sins, it contains the promise of the Holy Spirit.

In the *seventh* chapter he enters on a full discussion on the use of the law, which he had pointed out before as it were by the finger, while he had another subject in hand: he assigns a reason why we are loosed from the law, and that is, because it serves only for condemnation. Lest, however, he should expose the law to reproach, he clears it in the strongest terms from any imputation of this kind; for he shows that through our fault it is that the law, which was given for life, turns to be an occasion of death. He also explains how sin is by it increased. He then proceeds to describe the contest between the Spirit and the flesh, which the children of God find in themselves, as long as they are surrounded by the prison of a mortal body; for they carry with them the relics of lust, by which they are continually prevented from yielding full obedience to the law.

The *eighth* chapter contains abundance of consolations, in order that the consciences of the faithful, having heard of the disobedience which he had before proved, or rather imperfect obedience, might not be terrified and dejected. But that the ungodly might not hence flatter themselves, he first testifies that this privilege belongs to none but to the regenerated, in whom the Spirit of God lives and prevails. He unfolds then two things—that all who are planted by the Spirit in the Lord Jesus Christ, are beyond the danger or the chance of condemnation, however burdened they may yet be with sins; and, also, that all who remain in the flesh, being without the sanctification of the Spirit, are by no means partakers of this great benefit. He afterwards explains how great is the certainty of our confidence, since the Spirit of God by his own testimony drives away all doubts and fears. He further shows, for the purpose of anticipating objections, that the certainty of eternal life cannot be intercepted or disturbed by present evils, to which we are subject in this life; but that, on the contrary, our salvation is promoted by such trials, and that the value of it, when compared with our present miseries, renders them as nothing. He confirms this by the example of Christ, who, being the first-begotten and holding the highest station in the family of God, is the pattern to which we must all be conformed. And, in the last place, as though all things were made secure, he concludes in a most exulting strain, and boldly triumphs over all the power and artifices of Satan.

But as most were much concerned on seeing the Jews, the first guardians and heirs of the covenant, rejecting Christ, for they hence concluded, that either the covenant was transferred from the posterity of Abraham, who disregarded the fulfilling of the covenant, or that he, who made no better provision for the people of Israel, was not the promised Redeemer—he meets this objection at the beginning of the *ninth* chapter. Having then spoken of his love towards his own nation, that he might not appear to speak from hatred, and having also duly mentioned those privileges by which they excelled others, he gently glides to the point he had in view, that is, to remove the offence, which arose from their own blindness. And he divides the children of Abraham into two classes, that he might show that not all who

descended from him according to the flesh, are to be counted for seed and become partakers of the grace of the covenant; but that, on the contrary, aliens become his children, when they possess his faith. He brings forward Jacob and Esau as examples. He then refers us back here to the election of God, on which the whole matter necessarily depends. Besides, as election rests on the mercy of God alone, it is in vain to seek the cause of it in the worthiness of man. There is, on the other hand, rejection (*rejectio*), the justice of which is indubitable, and yet there is no higher cause for it than the will of God. Near the end of the chapter, he sets forth the calling of the Gentiles and the rejection of the Jews as proved by the predictions of the Prophets.

Having again begun, in the *tenth* chapter, by testifying his love towards the Jews, he declares that a vain confidence in their own works was the cause of their ruin; and lest they should pretend the law, he obviates their objection, and says, that we are even by the law itself led as it were by the hand to the righteousness of faith. He adds that this righteousness is through God's bountiful goodness offered indiscriminately to all nations, but that it is only apprehended by those, whom the Lord through special favour illuminates. And he states, that more from the Gentiles than from the Jews would obtain this benefit, as predicted both by Moses and by Isaiah; the one having plainly prophesied of the calling of the Gentiles, and the other of the hardening of the Jews.

The question still remained, "Is there not a difference between the seed of Abraham and other nations according to the covenant of God?" Proceeding to answer this question, he first reminds us, that the work of God is not to be limited to what is seen by our eyes, since the elect often escape our observation; for Elias was formerly mistaken, when he thought that religion had become wholly extinct among the Israelites, when there were still remaining seven thousand; and, further, that we must not be perplexed by the number of unbelievers, who, as we see, hate the gospel. He at length alleges, that the covenant of God continues even to the posterity of Abraham according to the flesh, but to those only whom the Lord by a free election hath predestinated. He then turns to the Gentiles, and speaks to them, lest they should become insolent on account of their adoption, and exult over the Jews as having been rejected, since they excel them in nothing, except in the free favour of the Lord, which ought to make them the more humble; and that this has not wholly departed from the seed of Abraham, for the Jews were at length to be provoked to emulation by the faith of the Gentiles, so that God would gather all Israel to himself.

The *three* chapters which follow are admonitory, but they are various in their contents. The *twelfth* chapter contains general precepts on Christian life. The *thirteenth*, for the most part, speaks of the authority of magistrates. We may hence undoubtedly gather that there were then some unruly persons, who thought Christian liberty could not exist without overturning the civil power. But that Paul might not appear to impose on the Church any duties but those of love, he declares that this obedience is included in what love requires. He afterwards adds those precepts, which he had before mentioned, for the guidance of our conduct. In the next chapter he gives an exhortation, especially necessary in that age: for as there were those who through obstinate superstition insisted on the observance of Mosaic rites, and could not endure the neglect of them without being most grievously offended; so there were others, who, being convinced of their abrogation, and anxious to pull down superstition, designedly showed their contempt of such things. Both parties offended through being too intemperate; for the superstitious condemned the others as being despisers of God's

law; and the latter in their turn unreasonably ridiculed the simplicity of the former. Therefore the Apostle recommends to both a befitting moderation, deporting the one from superciliousness and insult, and the other from excessive moroseness: and he also prescribes the best way of exorcising Christian liberty, by keeping within the boundaries of love and edification; and he faithfully provides for the weak, while he forbids them to do any thing in opposition to conscience.

The *fifteenth* chapter begins with a repetition of the general argument, as a conclusion of the whole subject—that the strong should use their strength in endeavours to confirm the weak. And as there was a perpetual discord, with regard to the Mosaic ceremonies, between the Jews and the Gentiles, he allays all emulation between them by removing the cause of contention; for he shows, that the salvation of both rested on the mercy of God alone; on which relying, they ought to lay aside all high thoughts of themselves, and being thereby connected together in the hope of the same inheritance, they ought mutually to embrace one another. And being anxious, in the last place, to turn aside for the purpose of commending his own apostleship, which secured no small authority to his doctrine, he takes occasion to defend himself, and to deprecate presumption in having assumed with so much confidence the office of teacher among them. He further gives them some hope of his coming to them, which he had mentioned at the beginning, but had hitherto in vain looked for and tried to effect; and he states the reason which at that time hindered him, and that was, because the churches of Macedonia and Achaia had committed to him the care of conveying to Jerusalem those alms which they had given to relieve the wants of the faithful in that city.

The *last* chapter is almost entirely taken up with salutations, though scattered with some precepts worthy of all attention; and concludes with a remarkable prayer.

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REVIEWS

Adam J. Howell. *Ruth: A Guide to Reading Biblical Hebrew*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022. 318 pp., $32.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by Iosif J. Zhakevich, Associate Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary

Adam J. Howell is an Assistant Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Boyce College and serves on the editorial review board for *Bulletin of Biblical Research*. Howell is the host of Daily Dose of Hebrew, which is designed to help students and pastors keep and cultivate their engagement with the Hebrew Bible in its original (https://dailydoseofhebrew.com/).

In line with Howell's commitment to make the Hebrew Bible an accessible and a manageable resource, *Ruth: A Guide to Reading Biblical Hebrew* is intended to assist intermediate students of Hebrew read through Ruth in Hebrew and glean exegetical and theological insights from the text. This textual aid is divided into reasonable—though not small—portions of the text from Ruth, so that the student is able to set a study schedule to go through this text over a certain period of time. Howell's division of the book is as follows: 1:1–5; 1:6–15; 1:16–18; 1:19–22; 2:1–3; 2:4–13; 2:14–23; 3:1–5; 3:6–16; 3:17–18; 4:1–6; 4:7–12; 4:13–17; 4:18–22. The beauty of this arrangement is that, if the student wishes to move at a slower pace, these sections are broken into verse-by-verse discussions. Thus, the book is flexible to the preferences of the student.

Each larger division of the book (e.g., 1:1–5; 1:6–15; etc.) begins with the Hebrew text of that section and with an English translation done by Howell. The value of Howell's translation is that it leans toward a more literal sense, which serves the students of Hebrew well by helping them recognize the word-for-word structure of the passage. For example, Howell renders Ruth 1:1 as follows: "It came about in the days of the judging of the judges…" (וַיְהִי בִּימֵי שְׁפֹט הַשֹּׁפְטִים). Howell translates the expression שְׁפֹט הַשֹּׁפְטִים as "the judging of the judges," whereas in other English translations this phrase is often "the judges governed" (NASB), "the judges ruled" (ESV), or, capturing the entire first clause, as "During the time of the judges" (HCSB). Howell nicely brings out the fact that the roots of these two words are the same, indicating that this era of "judging" was known as such because during these times it was "the judges" who were the leaders.

In his discussion of the verses, Howell analyzes morphology (e.g., נתן, see p. 37; נכר, see p. 172), syntax (e.g., the interrogative *heh*, see p. 136; fronting, see p. 259),

accentuation (e.g., the *rebia*, the *athnach*, the *tiphcha*, the *silluq*, see p. 173), and even textual criticism (e.g., יעשׂה vs. יעשׂ in 1:8, see pp. 42–43; קניתי vs. קניתה in 4:5, see pp. 259–60), among other aspects of Hebrew.

Howell could either be commended or criticized for his treatment of various questions in Ruth. For example, one of the more common issues concerns Ruth 3:7, specifically the statement "uncovered his feet and lay down" (וַתְּגַל מַרְגְּלֹתָיו וַתִּשְׁכָּב) (p. 204). Howell makes no mention of the discussion many commentators raise here—whether this is to be taken literally or as a euphemism. He rather systematically moves through the grammar and the syntax of the verse and gives no attention to the interpretative concerns in the verse.

Another example pertains to the significant text-critical question in 4:5 (קניתי vs. קניתה, see pp. 259–60), which Howell acknowledges but to which he gives very little attention in his discussion. To his credit, Howell does not simply ignore this textual issue, but raises it and at least begins a conversation about it. However, for understandable reasons, he does not discuss the specifics. Upon raising the difficulty in the text, Howell moves straight to his preferred conclusion and says, "However, the *qere* helps clarify the intended meaning, I believe" (i.e., he prefers to read the text as קניתה "you shall acquire"; p. 260). At the same time, Howell does include a footnote that directs the student to further discussion on this matter (i.e., Brotzman and Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 176–78; Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 76–77). In light of Howell's goal in this book to help the reader move through the Hebrew text—as opposed to discuss the various textual or interpretative considerations—Howell ought to be commended for his approach to introduce the questions that exist in the text, to address some of the key points of discussion, and to offer his own conclusions, without getting bogged down by the details.

In addition to the actual study of the text, Howell also provides a helpful glossary (pp. 301–308) as well as a chart of Masoretic accents at the end of the book (pp. 310–13). Ultimately, this resource promises to be beneficial in a variety of contexts: it could be used independently by an ambitious student seeking to work through Ruth after semester one or year one of Hebrew grammar; it could be used by professors as a reference in class; or it could be used as a resource for curious minds working through Ruth in Hebrew on their own.

Paul D. Miller. *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022. 266 pp., $30.00 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Gregg Frazer, Professor of History & Political Studies, The Master's University

Paul Miller's *The Religion of American Greatness* was destined to be a bestseller, as it both contributes to the cottage industry of anti-Trump books and taps into the current craze over Christian nationalism. As it seems with everyone writing about it, Miller has his own conception and definition of Christian nationalism. He spends about five chapters discussing it, but his definition essentially whittles down to: "Christian nationalism is, in effect, identity politics for tribal evangelicals who

confuse their particular culture for the nation as a whole" and who consequently lobby "for power and prestige" for their preferred culture (6). When accusations of this sort invoke the name of Christ, they must be carefully reviewed through the lens of Scripture. While Miller claims in the preface to this book that "this is a work of Christian political theory," the reality is that this book is neither about true Christianity nor about political theory.

The first half of the book is a sort of flyover of the concepts of nationalism, culture, and identity politics and is not, in and of itself, particularly objectionable. It does, however, introduce some pervasive problems with Miller's methodology and evidence that loom over the second half. In sum, the book is filled with broad, sweeping, unsupported generalizations that are based on assumptions, loose mixing of terminology, and Miller's obsessions with race and with the evils of Donald Trump.

Miller begins with his own idiosyncratic definitions of common terms that facilitate the mixing of them in order to make the otherwise arguably indefensible arguments. His operational definitions of "Christian" and "Christianity" are far from biblical (cf. Luke 9:23; John 14:6, 15, 21, 23–24), but rather reflect a worldly cultural identification. This allows him to agree with Frederick Douglass that the United States is "overwhelmingly populated by Christians" and that Christians were responsible for the existence of slavery and for "sustaining slavery and segregation" – not *some* Christians or *a few* Christians or *nominal* Christians or Christians by the world's definition, but, simply, Christians. There are few qualifying descriptors in this book. Central to his argument is a definition of "evangelical" that is *explicitly* not religious or theological, but "cultural, tribal, and political (13)." He then says that "White evangelical" and "conservative White Christian" are synonymous terms (13) and calls this cultural political group "Christians" throughout the book (cf. Matt 7:21–23).

Miller persistently uses "Christian," "evangelical," and "Protestant" as interchangeable and identifies movements and groups as "Christian" whether or not they are churchgoing or religious (e.g. 13, 189). Keep in mind that "evangelical" is a strictly cultural term in his lexicon. Functionally, then, "Christian" is also merely a cultural term for Miller. This cultural definition enables him to scold "American Christianity" for "its failure to make justice and antislavery central to its gospel message" (253). Never mind that justice and antislavery are not part of, much less central to, the gospel message according to the Bible and the apostles (cf. Rom 1:16; Rom 3:22; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11; Gal 3:28).

In his penchant for making broad generalizations, Miller constantly lumps different groups together and presents what may be true of some as indicative of the whole. At points, he admits that we cannot know or even "estimate" how many evangelicals are "religious," but associates them with Christianity without any qualification on the basis of poll numbers from "strong Christian nationalists who did not attend church regularly" (205, 189). On what basis or by what standard should these respondents be considered by the pollster or by us as "Christian" and representative of Christianity? He does not say.

This leads to another problem running throughout Miller's argument: questions about methodology. He regularly cites poll numbers and survey results in support of his arguments. But he never reports the questions that were asked so that one may evaluate whether they were balanced or "loaded." He never provides

the criteria used to draw the conclusions that he cites; we are expected to accept whatever conclusions the pollsters drew without knowing their definitions of terms or their own biases, assumptions, and evaluative methods. Those who have looked at some of the polls that Miller cites have found that standard Christian positions on various issues were assigned nefarious motivations and attitudes. A reader might be excused for questioning Miller's choice of studies given his admission that "the argument I am making here benefits from insights generated from CRT [critical race theory] scholarship."

It is not surprising that Miller would look to critical race theory "scholarship," as his work reveals that he is preoccupied with race. He insists on including the adjective "White" with "Christians" and "Christianity" throughout the book – even when the subject at hand has nothing inherently to do with race. He neglects the fact that true Christianity is defined by and revolves around the person of Christ, not the race of any one person (cf. Phil 1:21). Without any evidence that they had made such a calculation, he declares that "Christian activists" do not use "racist and sectarian language" because it "no longer wins elections." He criticizes Christian conservatives for not making "systemic racism" a priority and for being "uniquely blind to the realities of racial inequality and a racialized society." For the most part, he merely assumes the existence of systemic racism in a country that elected a black president for two terms, has had black men and women hold every high office in the land, and has elected black mayors and police chiefs in almost every major city – including those particularly singled out as systemically racist. But, again, the essence of Christianity is not the race of a person but the commitment of the person to Christ (Luke 9:23). One might question who is "racialized" – the one who does not emphasize race or the one who sees everything in racialized terms?

Miller points to "inequality" in schools, but instead of considering various possible explanations such as teachers' unions blocking school choice (favored by all races) and the fact that the issue of inequality is more valuable to politicians than solutions to the problem, he merely assumes that the cause is racism on the part of "White Christians." He suggests that the Bob Jones tax exemption case was "an early mobilizing cause" for the Christian Right because of its racial element. In reality, of course, dozens of amicus briefs were filed not to protect racial discrimination but because of the danger of setting a precedent that a religious organization could lose its tax-exempt status. Again, the issue had nothing to do with race, but Miller made it all about race. Miller casually quotes a pollster who concluded that "White Christians" embrace "a host of racist and racially resentful attitudes." He does not, of course, delineate what those attitudes are, or the questions asked to draw out those attitudes or the standards by which such an astounding conclusion was drawn. How is "White Christian" defined in the study? How are "racial attitudes" defined? By what standard is an attitude determined to be "racist?" Does the pollster have an impartial or interested standard? Does the pollster use commonly accepted terminology and definitions or are they idiosyncratic and designed to "push" in a desired direction?

After claiming that there is something distinctly racially pernicious about the combination of Whiteness and Christianity, Miller declares this claim to be "one of the major arguments of this book and *one of the major interpretive lenses I have used throughout* [my emphasis]." He immediately follows by demonstrating his disdain

for "evangelical pastors and theologians and their flock in the pews," who are apparently not sophisticated or educated enough to understand that they are inherently racist. But, he says: "This claim is likely to be uncontroversial, even obvious, to historians or political scientists, for whom the cultural and historical particularity of White Protestant Anglo-American culture is a given." I have a degree in history and a PhD in political science and this claim is not at all obvious to me, and I find it very controversial.

According to Miller, the problem with the hoi polloi is that they base their views on what the Bible teaches, while those more sophisticated know that the Bible does not have a universal meaning; it is all a matter of cultural "particularity" [context]. He bemoans the fact that the evangelical movement has become "unmoored" from *Christianity Today* and the National Association of Evangelicals and is reluctant to "defer to elite evangelical opinion." Christians, however, might bemoan the fact that those evangelical "institutions" have become unmoored from the Bible and might well wonder when we signed up for any obligation to these two "institutions" or to "elite" opinion. Christ condemned the Pharisees precisely because they had abandoned the Word of God and had replaced it with the traditions of man (Mark 7:1-8; Isa 29:13).

Through Miller's "interpretive lens," "[t]he Bible is universal truth, but our interpretations of it are always historically and culturally conditioned." This leads to Miller's theological predilections – in particular, his views concerning the Bible and biblical theology.

For Miller, the fact that different people interpret the Bible differently does not indicate that some interpretations are correct while others are incorrect (cf. 2 Pet 3:15–16). Rather, he suggests that everyone comes to the Bible with an agenda and a self-serving hermeneutic. Consequently, Miller argues that we need a consensus view of what the Bible says. To be valid, though, that consensus view must be: "republican" by *his* definition; not too spiritual; social justice conscious; socially activist; and somewhat dependent on tradition, other denominations, and the views of "other Christians" around the world.

Miller is clear that we cannot truly understand what the Bible says in the sense of understanding its message (cf. Deut 30:11–14). From his perspective, there is no message from God in the Bible; rather, there are messages – and those depend on what one wants to find. We are effectively free to make the Bible say whatever we wish, as long as it is not politically incorrect or "quietist" (socially passive). Interpretations are not "straightforward" if "others reading the same Bible do not read it that way." By that standard, almost nothing in the Bible is clearly true. As was mentioned above, it is all "historically and culturally conditioned" and "it is impossible, epistemologically, to achieve a universal vantage point." For some reason, however, Miller thinks it appropriate to pass judgment on various interpretations and views and to elevate his own.

Particularly offensive to Miller is the habit of White Christians to "stress a gospel of individual, inward, spiritual salvation from sin, death, and hell with no implications for salvation here and now from worldly suffering or injustice" (191). In his view, this gospel "functions as a prop for whatever injustices exist in the world" because "it tells would-be activists that their efforts are effectively meaningless and even futile" (191). He declares this "outlook" to be "closer to Buddhism" (191). He

cites approvingly a source that says: "White conservative Protestants believe that sinful humans typically deny their own personal sin by shifting blame somewhere else, such as on 'the system'" (184). His attack on the gospel is particularly important to understand, for he is effectively rejecting the gospel of Christ and preferring a different gospel (1 Cor 1:22–25; Gal 1:6–9).

What does Miller find more palatable and appropriate for those with enlightened sensibilities? Why do White Christians have racist attitudes? He quotes the following approvingly: "Although African Americans and Whites read from the same Bible, the meaning of the text is socially constructed in different ways in the two traditions. Most black churches interpret the Bible as a book of liberation, equality, and social compassion" (186). Miller apparently does not think to ask whether that is what the Bible actually *is*? Is that what the authors of Scripture and the Holy Spirit who inspired them meant to say (2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16)? Is one a racist if one takes the Bible for what it is and for what it says? Were the writers of the Bible racist? They were after all moved by the Holy Spirit; the words of Scripture are God-breathed. Are interpreters of the Bible with such an approach infallible? Are they immune from having their own agenda and self-serving hermeneutic? How does one explain the black pastors who use the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic and come to the same conclusions as the white pastors who use that hermeneutic?

Fundamentally, why should anyone care about the Bible if we can all make it say whatever we wish? Truth and reality are apparently unimportant or unattainable in Miller's view. Like Machiavelli, Miller seeks *effectual* truth—"truth" that is preferred and useful.

All of this leads up to Miller's real concern: Trumpism; and his real target: anyone who voted for Donald Trump. He assumes that everyone who voted for Trump is a Christian nationalist, buys into all that such a label entails, and supports everything that Trump promoted. That, of course, is sheer nonsense.

First, as Miller admits on page 142, most American Christians do not *have* a political philosophy. They do not act consistently or with a well-thought-out philosophy in mind. They have not read Nigel Biggar or Yoram Hazony or R.R. Reno; nor have they even heard of them. They embrace what to Miller are inconsistent positions.

Second, Donald Trump's candidacy did not exist in a vacuum. Is Hillary Clinton a better person? Is Joe Biden? Which is more important: a candidate's personal qualities or what they will do in office? Was there a perfect choice for voters, or were they left to choose between flawed candidates? Should this not call into question the conclusion that they are necessarily rabid nationalists?

Third, Miller assumes that Trump's voters were motivated by concern for their own tribal group power, clout, and influence. He declares that "most White American evangelicals voted as nationalists, prioritizing group power over republican principles"—but he provides no evidence whatsoever for this astounding claim (200). He provides quotes by Trump, but no evidence that what Trump said in those quotes was determinative for a single voter—much less for "most" voters. If we asked them, how many would say they were motivated by "power" and how many would say they were motivated by "principle?" Were there no differences between the candidates on issues of critical importance to evangelical Christians, such as abortion and religious liberty?

Miller clearly does not share the same passion as conservative Christians do concerning these issues, as he downplays both the recent threats to religious liberty and the importance of judicial appointments when it comes to religious liberty and matters of life and death. In his accounting, conservative Christians voted for Trump for "nostalgic" reasons or for nationalist or racist reasons or to protect the "political and cultural fate" of "their tribe" (205). According to Miller: court appointments, religious liberty, school choice, securing the border, strengthening the military, the sanctity of marriage, gender issues, deregulation, criminal justice reform, and moving the American embassy to Jerusalem are merely examples of some people going "out of their way to find things to praise about the president [Trump]" (208). These cannot be heartfelt, central values issues because they are not so for Miller. Furthermore, in his view, some of them are explained by the inherent racism in the evangelical community.

Miller particularly draws a bright line between the voting of White Christians and Black Christians regarding Trump because "Black Christians…understood the promise of restoration [by Trump] was not aimed at them." He does not explain why more than 1,400,000 black people voted for Trump's *re*-election in 2020 *after* seeing what his policies did for the black community in his four years as president.

Mark David Hall contacted three of the authors that Miller focused on as advocates of Christian nationalism (Nigel Biggar, R.R. Reno, and Yoram Hazony) and reported in his review of the book that they all reject Miller's characterization of them as advocating Christian nationalism. Another individual he emphasizes – Samuel Huntington – has been dead for fifteen years. There are, of course, some who believe that America was founded to be a Christian nation, who conflate the destiny of the United States with Christianity, who believe that the only solution to our problems is to return the country to its supposed Christian roots, and who are actively trying to achieve that goal. Miller claims to be talking about a contemporary movement, but Jerry Falwell is the only one of that group discussed by Miller beyond the mere mention of his name. Falwell has been dead for nearly sixteen years, and Miller's only references to his work are from a book that he wrote forty years ago. Perhaps Miller did not talk more about actual contemporary Christian nationalists because they are so few in number and inconsequential in influence.

Miller does not just berate Christian nationalists and their supposed pied piper Donald Trump. He also offers solutions. The problem is that his "solutions" are completely unrealistic and utopian. He advocates establishing a balanced view of America's history, recognizing English as America's "public" language, teaching and incorporating "the American Creed," promoting an "open" notion of American exceptionalism, revitalization of federalism, changing the concept of diversity away from skin color toward real diversity, and promoting the common good instead of "our own tribe's power and privilege." These proposals could fairly be called a Conservative wish list, but Progressives would use every weapon in their prodigious arsenal (dominance in the educational system, dominance in the media, and often control of the government) to block them at all costs.

In the end, Miller fundamentally misrepresents Christianity as being a political worldview consumed with preserving its racial dominance, while utterly failing to recognize Christianity for what it truly is: a commitment to follow Christ (Luke 9:23). As noted at the opening of this review, the first line of the preface is: "This is a work

of Christian political theory." But the truth is that this book is not about anything distinctly "Christian" and not primarily about political theory.

Jim L. Wilson, *Illustrating Well: Preaching Sermons that Connect*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022. 197 pp., $19.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by David M. Cummings, Senior Pastor of Lake Hills Community Church, Castaic, CA

Author of over thirty books, Jim L. Wilson is a teaching pastor in Corona, CA and serves as the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, CA. His books are primarily devotional or related to preaching, such as his six-volume series called *Fresh Illustrations*. He has a Bachelor of Arts from Wayland University and a Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

In *Illustrating Well*, Wilson sets out to help pastors and teachers examine the use of illustrations and seeks to guide his readers in using illustrations effectively. Throughout his discussion, he provides helpful warnings to his readers. For example, he cautions that improper use of illustrations can dilute the message rather than enhance it. He also warns about a particular pitfall of using personal illustrations that may result in a shift of focus from the message to the messenger. These are common problems that have derailed more than a few messages. To avoid these pitfalls, and others, Wilson seeks to get his readers to focus on transmitting the meaning of the text to the listener and using illustrations wisely to help their congregations understand and apply the teaching of the Scriptures.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first section addresses "Using Sermon Illustrations Effectively" (pp. 17–29). Wilson uses *four metaphors* to help his readers grasp the value of sermon illustrations. The first metaphor is "building a bridge from the familiar to the unfamiliar" (p. 17). The second is the metaphor of "windows" (p. 21) that let in the light and allow fresh air to circulate in the sermon. The third he describes as "light" (p. 24) that helps the audience to see the meaning. And the fourth is "pictures" (p. 28) to help make an abstract concept more concrete in the listener's understanding.

Wilson then gives *four characteristics* of an effective sermon illustration (pp. 31-54). The illustration should be *familiar*, *clear*, *interesting*, and *appropriate*. By *familiar*, he is arguing that the subject matter of the illustration should not be an obscure topic of interest only to the preacher or a special few, but one to which the entire audience can relate. When he speaks of *clear*, he is seeking to provoke his readers to illustrate in a pithy way, which is concise enough to communicate the idea without becoming bogged down in extraneous details. He asserts that illustrations should be *interesting* by painting compelling pictures and using stimulating allusions that help keep the attention of the hearer. To demonstrate helpful examples of this, he points to the sermons and writings of the Puritans. He also cautions that any illustration must be *appropriate* to the audience being addressed. Developing this, he warns that the trend to be provocative, coarse, or even for some, vulgar is counterproductive. A valuable admonition he notes in this discussion is the need to

maintain confidentiality in the use of illustrations. As he closes out the first section, he devotes a chapter to showing where sermon illustrations should be used in a message and how they might function.

The second main section of the book focuses on "Using a Variety of Illustration Types Well" (pp. 79-182). Wilson performed a study, although unscientific in nature, of online sermon manuscripts, and he then divided the illustration types that were used into eight main categories. In this research, he identifies four categories of illustrations which are used more frequently: *Personal Illustrations*, *Fresh Illustrations* (current events, contemporary events, and pop culture references), *Biblical Illustrations*, and *Hypothetical Illustrations*. In addition to these, he notes four other categories which he found to be used more sparingly. These include *Historical Illustrations*, *Classic Illustrations* (common and older stories which are often overused illustrations), *Fictional Illustrations* (fabricated stories), and *Object Lessons*.

Those who preach and teach will find value in reading this book regardless of one's perspective on the use of illustrations. His list of questions to ask yourself when using personal illustrations (pp. 96–97) is worth the price of the book alone. Throughout *Illustrating Well*, Wilson offers some thought-provoking insights which help the preacher to think through his own use of illustrations. These can help the preacher (or teacher) to analyze and critique his own use or lack of use of illustrations in his messages. As noted above, he also provides several valuable cautions which will help the expositor to avoid common pitfalls in the use of illustrations. In the end, this book will give the reader much food for thought as he seeks to effectively communicate the Word of God so that his hearers can better understand and apply the text.

R. B. Jamieson. *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021. 216 pp., $30.00 Paperback.

Reviewed by Noah C. Hartmetz, Pastor, Girard Bible Church, Th.M. Student, The Master's Seminary

The Paradox of Sonship is an exegetical treatment of the Christology presented in the Letter to the Hebrews. R. B. Jamieson, a pastor on staff at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington D. C., argues that Hebrews' Christology may be summarized as "the Son who became the Son" (20). Although noting that some recent scholars have touched on this thesis, he knows of "no modern author [who] has offered a full-dress defense" of it (20). This book seeks to offer that defense through exegesis and comparison with early church biblical interpretation.

Jamieson's argument is that the divine Son became the messianic Son by becoming a man. This argument contains three theses: Jesus is the divine Son of God, Jesus is the messianic Son of God, and Jesus can be both because of the incarnation (20–21).

Chapter one identifies "six classical Christological concepts and reading strategies" for engaging Hebrews and modern scholars (24). This "toolkit" helps exegetes "say coherently all that Hebrews says about who Jesus is" (23). These tools include three questions: "Who is he?" (25); "What is he?" (27); and "When are we

talking about?" (29). The answers to these questions are: Who? The Son is a single divine subject; What? Jesus is one person with two natures; When? The Son's existence in eternity must be distinguished from, but without being divided from, His incarnation in time. The other three tools are strategies that synthesize the previous concepts for an accounting of all that the biblical text says about the Son. These include, first, "partitive exegesis," which identifies whether a text speaks of the Son's incarnation or deity (31–33). Second, "twofold or reduplicative predication" provides the ontological basis for asserting a distinction between the Son's incarnation and deity without denying the reality of either (36–39). Third, "paradoxical predication" synthesizes all the tools to assert that "seemingly incompatible predicates of divinity and humanity not only can but must be ascribed to…the single person of the Son" (39). One such example includes Ignatius' statements "the blood of God" and "the suffering of my God" (39). Throughout the book, Jamieson appeals to Cyril of Alexandria as a model of patristic use of the toolkit.

With this toolkit explained as the framework for explaining Hebrews' Christology, chapter two argues that Hebrews uses "Son" to designate Jesus' mode of divine existence as being God yet distinct from the Father. That is, Jesus is the divine Son. Chapter three examines Hebrews' presentation of the Son's incarnation, using the classical toolkit to sequentially trace the Son's incarnate mission from taking on flesh to death, resurrection, and exaltation in heaven. Stated another way, Jamieson uses the three questions and three strategies to arrange Hebrews' presentation into a particular sequence of the Son's incarnation such as is found in the creeds. This bridges the conceptual gap between the Son's divinity and messianic exaltation, demonstrating the necessity of the incarnation (76–77). Chapter four argues that "Son" is a designation of the messianic office to which Jesus was appointed at His exaltation (99). That is, Jesus is the Son who became the Son. Chapter five argues that the office of Messiah can be filled only by the God become man. Therefore, Jesus alone is qualified to be the Messiah because He alone is the divine Son incarnate (122). In addition to synthesizing the three theses of the book—that Hebrews' Christology asserts that the Son is the divine Son who became the messianic Son through the incarnation (148–49)—the conclusion compares Hebrews with the Chalcedonian definition, and considers Acts 2:36 and Romans 1:3–4 as teaching the same Christology as Hebrews.

The Paradox of Sonship contributes to the field of biblical studies by its exegetical treatment of the Christology of Hebrews 1–2 and draws upon the history of biblical interpretation with its appeal to early Christian interpretive method. Jamieson models how to argue for a thesis based on sound exegetical principles and reasoning. At the same time, he shows how exegetes from the past serve as a model in drawing sound interpretive conclusions and developing lasting theological conclusions as a result. This combination of the exegetical, theological, and historical relative to Hebrews is needed in the field and advances the discussion on Christology.

Jamieson's thorough exegetical treatment leaves little content to critique. Because he writes to help exegetes "see something [they] have been trained not to see," namely, that Hebrews and Chalcedon "say the same thing" (156), his goal is to show the viability of the theological conclusions and coherence of the Nicene Creed and Chalcedonian definition. With those limitations in mind, the following serves as a suggestion from a more Biblicist-oriented reviewer. As a reminder, Jamieson's

argument involves the exegetical demonstration that Hebrews arrived at its conclusion about the Son based on Psalm 110 in connection with the reality of the Incarnation. Furthermore, classical interpreters arrived at the same conclusion, and followed those conclusions with developing exegetical tools that could be employed in further exegesis of Trinitarian and Christological passages. Thus, the classical exegetes observed the arguments and reasoning of the NT authors, arrived at the same conclusions on Christology, and then crafted the Christology into a statement that affirmed the biblical teaching and identified the borders between orthodoxy and heterodoxy (see esp. 134–42). This process is akin to the elders of a local church crafting a Statement of Faith for their flock. While grateful for the clarity with which the creeds speak on vital Trinitarian and Christological issues, from a Biblicist's perspective, a section on the inspiration of the Scriptures would clarify the difference between the creeds and the biblical text. *Paradox* positively considers inspiration in two footnotes, but nothing more on the topic (41, n. 61 and 155, n. 37). Again, Jamieson is writing to address the ongoing reluctance of historical-critical scholars to see Scripture's coherent and cohesive theological program and the value of Patristic biblical interpretation. However, Scripture and the mainstream of church fathers also said the same thing in principle about inspiration (e.g., see Robert C. Hill, "Psalm 45: A *locus classicus* for Patristic Thinking on Biblical Inspiration," *Studia Patristica* 25 [1993]: 95–100). In this agreement, Scripture and the Patristics also stand contrary to historical-criticism. Making inspiration foundational to the argument would strengthen the main claim and potentially appeal to Biblicist-oriented scholars.

This suggestion aside, *The Paradox of Sonship* calls for careful reading as an example of rigorous exegesis and thorough argumentation. The pastor-scholar studying Christological issues or preparing to preach through Hebrews will profit from its exposition that Jesus is the Savior we need because He is the Son who became the Son.