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Editorial

Expository Preaching is an art. It has to be relearned by every generation. The masters of the past inspire us but one cannot blindly copy any of them. The true art of preaching comes from the pressures of the divine and the human on the soul. As with Jeremiah caught in the humiliation of the stocks at the Upper Gate, we, cry out, 'His word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.'

Expository Preaching is at the heart of this struggle to understand God's burning Word in its own context and tell it forth to real people living in real situations with the same passions and conviction with which it was first given to its hearers. But without the direct revelation of the illuminating Spirit this is not possible. Only then is such preaching authentic, convincing and life changing. Without the fusion of the horizons of the truth of the Word, the encultured personality of the preacher and the felt need of the hearer immersed in his or her own worlds it is not expository preaching at all.

Good preaching is more than performing a one act play; rather it is the upward dialogical spiral of revelation and response, of question and answer, of speaking and listening, circling towards the goal of knowing God which is life eternal. It is a divine human encounter which is both personal and communal. Good expository preaching produces good churches which in turn produce good preachers.

Alas, our age has lost this art. Few theological schools and few churches are producing creative, faithful and relevant preachers for the pulpits and for the market-places of our societies. Making the invisible visible is our task. This series of articles and reviews is but a window into God's storehouse available to all who will pay the price that Jeremiah did.

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Biblical Precedence for Contextualisation

John R. Davies

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In this wide ranging article, the author traces the process of contextualisation in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament highlighting the cultural context of each. With numerous examples, he discusses the continuity and the discontinuity between salvation, history and the religious practices of the surrounding cultures. Following Barth, we may say the challenge is to relate the Bible on one hand to the newspaper on the other. He outlines a number of principles and calls for reactive experimentation in cross-cultural context with special reference to Thailand where the author has served as a missionary.

Editor

I OLD TESTAMENT AND CONTEXTUALISATION

Many Old Testament scholars try to find evolutionary patterns in the development of primitive religions into the more sophisticated Judaeo-Christian monotheism. Oesterly and Robinson's book, *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development*, uses 121 out of 417 pages attempting to highlight the relationship of the Hebrew religion to animism, polytheism, and other aspects of primitive religion.

Norman H. Snaith runs counter to the findings of many of these scholars. He questions the supposition that all religions have the same origins and defends the 'distinctiveness' of especially the Hebrew religion. Snaith states:

Our concern is with elements of OT religion which distinguish it from other religions. We recognize the importance of realizing that the Hebrews had many items of belief and practice in common with other peoples of antiquity, but our interest in these common features, is for our present purposes, definitely secondary. We are concerned with them only in so far as the study of them throws into greater and clearer relief the essential differences. Our aim here is p. 198 ... to isolate and emphasize the distinctive elements of OT religion.¹

An illustration of unacceptable elements in pagan religion excluded from (because they would have been unacceptable) the Hebrew religion would be for instance, the Egyptian and Babylonian preoccupation with death and the after-life. They had a sophisticated belief system involving ancestor worship, child sacrifice, preparations for the 'other world', with numerous rites, rituals and ceremonies enacted to bolster their beliefs.

Moses discriminately and deliberately avoids any mention of the after-life, as do most of the writers of the Old Testament.²

The Old Testament reflects an interaction between the surrounding nations. Hebrew culture and the revealed 'Word of God'. When, Yahweh chose Israel ([Ex. 19:6-7](#)) in a special way to be 'My people', he at the same time transformed many extant rituals and cultural forms and utilized them for perpetual implementation by his people. Of course these cultural forms were 'reinterpreted', but there is no doubt that they were already 'there' before Yahweh chose the people of Israel. Few scholars deny now, that many of the rituals Israel adopted had pagan origins. The annual feasts and even circumcision had pagan antecedents or counterparts. Even concepts which conflicted with divine self-disclosure, such as Canaanite concepts of El,³ were p. 199 progressively transformed in meaning as the patriarchal story developed. Bruce Nicholls states that:

¹ N.H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1962), p. 11.

² Oesterly and Robinson cannot conceal their biased presuppositions when wrestling with the issue of the afterlife in Babylonian and Assyrian religions vis-a-vis the Old Testament. They suggest that 'the religion of Babylon was little concerned with the hereafter' and then proceed to prove the opposite by writing ten pages on evidences for the firm belief in the afterlife! They then state concerning the numerous rites, rituals and ceremonies in these religions, that 'there is no indication of the things referred to in the Old Testament', but then without objective evidence proved to posit the reason, i.e., that 'The Old Testament has been edited, worked over by the priestly scribes of later times: and from their point of view much which originally stood in the text has been rightly eliminated' (see p. 79-97). Goldinghay also makes some valuable observations, stating that there are a variety of responses to death in the Old Testament, depending on the time and circumstances. All of the responses are to some extent historically and culturally conditioned and therefore any one of 'these should not be perceived as superior to others in the Canon, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*. (p. 34-35). See also Gottwald's important observations, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 694.

³ Glasser points out that the basic word for deity *per se* in the ancient Semitic world of the Near East, was *El*. This he says, 'was also the proper name for the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon, and frequently

During the pilgrimage of the Israelites as nomads in the Promised Land, followed by their captivity in Egypt, and then during the wilderness journey, undesirable elements of the surrounding culture were progressively weakened and eliminated. Idolatry, pagan sexual immorality, corrupt economic and political practices, came under the judgement of God.⁴

He also states:

In the formation of a covenanted people, God transformed some of these cultural forms such as circumcision to his purposes and rejected others such as idolatry.⁵

Here we see clearly the principle of continuity and discontinuity operating hand-in-hand. The stow of the patriarchs is, on the one hand, a progressive de-culturalisation of undesirable elements, such as idolatry, sexual immorality, corrupt economic and political practices and, on the other hand, it is an 'extension' of other elements from the previous cultural norms or religious forms. The basis of this selection process will be investigated later. It has been said that the Old Testament is largely the record of the ongoing struggle against the syncretistic tendency of the Baalization of Yahweh worship which continued from the Patriarchs until the Exile.

At times of faith and dependence on God, the people of God acknowledged his lordship over their total behaviour and the degree of false cultural conditioning by the neighbouring cultures became minimal and the rebuke of the prophets effective. This acknowledging of God's lordship over history by the covenant people, transformed cultural conditioning from a problem and a curse, to a channel of revelation and grace. The transformed function of circumcision is a case in point, but largely degeneration turned it into a stumbling block to true faith.⁶

H. Wheeler Robinson indicates the principle of both continuity and discontinuity in Israel when he states:

It is this moral intensity, then, which more than anything else, lifted the religion of Israel above that of all its contemporaries, and gave it the power to assimilate foreign contributions without loss of its native strength and continuity. Israel's history is remarkable for the number of influences operating upon it from without. Had it not been for this moral intensity, the nature of worship of Canaan might easily have permanently degraded the religion of Israel to its own low level of sensuality. But the moral instinct of the nation was guided by its leaders to 'take the precious from the vile'; the necessary FORMS OF WORSHIP WERE BORROWED, whilst the immoral features of the Baal-cult, such as religious prostitution, were, at least ultimately rejected. The same selective moral sense worked on the legislation and mythology derived from Babylon, and gave them a NEW VALUE AND MEANING. No better proof of the inherent vitality and moral strength

appears as such in fourteenth century BC Ugarit religious literature. The Israelites appropriated it and gave it new meaning, in much the same way that the Jewish translators of the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint) later appropriated the word Theos from the Greek pantheon and transformed it (not as having shape and form as the pagans conceived god, but as pure spirit to conform God's unique elevation of himself). The Israelite use of El in the plural form (Elohim), but with singular meaning, was not unique in Israel. Abraham identified Melchizedek's "Elohim Most High" with "The Lord" (Gert. 14:18-22). This implied a plurality of powers, of attributes and the personhood, and did not imply a deity that was intrinsically monistic' *The World Among Us*, p. 36. A further valuable contributor to the debate is Shorter, in his *Towards a Theology of Inculturation*, esp. p. 107-112.

⁴ B. Nicholls, *Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Illinois: IVP, 1979), p. 46.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

of the faith of Israel could be given, than this p. 200 power it possessed to assimilate and transform the various elements due to its historical environment⁷ (my capitals).

Robinson may give us some clues here as to the *modus operandi* for the correct application of the principle of 'continuity and discontinuity' within a given culture.

Some scholars, such as H. H. Rowley, interpret the covenant ritual of walking between divided sacrifices in [Genesis 15](#) as a willingness to be dismembered (as the sacrifices) if either party broke the covenant. In the incident recorded in Genesis, however, Abraham stands on one side, and it is Yahweh alone who passes between the pieces. The reason appears to be that Yahweh again takes a familiar ritual belonging to the culture and re-interprets it in a way that must be acceptable to him, and yet still maintain significant resemblances to its former meaning. Dr. Arthur Glasser states in his 'Theology of Mission' lectures:

This ritual was widely used in those days when two contractual parties sealed their covenant commitment to one another by passing between the divided carcasses of sacrificed beasts and thus invoked upon themselves a similar fate should they break their covenanted promise, each to the other. But the covenant God made touching Abraham and his seed was altogether within the Godhead. Abraham was off to the side. A spectator, completely passive, while God in Shekinah presence moved alone between the slaughtered animals. God and God alone was the covenant's initiator. He alone made the promises and he alone would be the guarantor of their being kept.⁸

The sign of the covenant, circumcision, no doubt had pagan precedents. The original rite was probably a transition rite of puberty but it was 'reloaded' with divine content by its use on infants. In an exhaustive study on the subject De Vaux states:

It seems, then, that the Israelites were not distinguished from the Semitic population which they displaced, or with whom they mingled in Palestine, by the fact of circumcision. On the contrary they seemed to have adopted this custom when they settled in Canaan (cf. [Ge. 17:9-14, 23-27](#); [Jos. 45:2-9](#)). But with them the practice took on a particular religious significance. Originally, and as a general rule, circumcision seems to have been an initiation-rite before marriage; consequently, it also initiated a man into the common life of the clan ... The custom must originally have had the same purpose in Israel: the story of the Shechemites expressly connects it with marriage ([Ge. 34](#)); the obscure episode of [Ex. 4:25-26](#) seems to refer to marriage also, for the pretence of circumcising Moses makes him a 'bridegroom of blood'. We may add that the Hebrew words for bridegroom, son-in-law and father-in-law are all derived from the same root, HATAN, which means in Arabic 'to circumcise'. Circumcision, therefore, is regarded as that which makes a man fit for normal sexual life: it is an initiation to marriage. This significance must have died out when the operation was performed soon p. 201 after birth. Above all, religion gave the rite a more lofty significance.⁹

Circumcision, therefore, substantiates the principle of 'continuity vis-a-vis discontinuity'. Parts of the ritual were 'deinvested' of their original meaning (discontinuity) while some parts were a continuation, having similarities to their original purpose and meaning, and re-investing other aspects with new meaning. There would have been no misunderstanding that they were still being used in exactly the same manner and for exactly the same purpose as their previous pagan usage.

⁷ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1964), p. 45.

⁸ Arthur Glasser, 'Theology of Mission', Unpublished class notes, Fuller Seminary.

⁹ R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961). p. 47-48.

From its inception infant circumcision was the distinctive Israelite custom, not derived from Egyptian or other practice and contrasting sharply with the puberty rites of other nations: the latter point to social acknowledgement of adult status, the former to a status before God and a prevenience of divine grace.¹⁰

There is unlimited evidence to substantiate these findings from theologians across the board. Four outstanding books that offer extensive and thorough scholarship regarding this matter are: *Israel* by Martin Noth, *A Survey of Israel's History* by Leon Wood, and *The Tribes of Yahweh* by N. K. Gottwald.

Although such findings may disturb Evangelicals, there should be an acceptance of the fact that in this act, God is validating many important cultural forms which we in a monocultural environment may write off as 'pagan', or even 'demonic'. In conclusion, it is 'out of the blue'—ex-nihilo.

Rev. Alex Moyter, a highly acclaimed Old Testament scholar, admits that there is a difference between the concept of 'borrowing' (from surrounding nations), and 'revelation' where God gives direct instructions to the prophets, yet, even the 'borrowing' by Israel from its pagan surroundings was directly under the control of Yahweh and certainly was not indiscriminate. 'Israel was not born in a vacuum, there were already 8,500 years of history before Moses', so stated K. A. Kitchen in a lecture, 'The Old Testament and Pagan Cultures'.¹¹

If we accept that the God of the Old Testament is portrayed as exercising care and control over not only Israel, but also of Israel's environs, then we ought also to accept that God is the God of all cultures and that there is nothing inherently wrong in cultural borrowing or transfer. Different people groups [p. 202](#) who live in close proximity will always have a certain amount of assimilation and borrowing. Yet amid this cultural mix Israel was not only chosen, but was prepared in a unique way to fulfil God's purposes. It was through Israel that 'all the families of the earth were to be blessed'. We see, therefore, a unique shaping, both of what was essentially Israel's own culture, and also of those aspects borrowed from other cultures.

It is worthy of note that even Israel's main festivals probably had pagan origins. Rowley intimates that aspects of the Passover feast were known among the Arabian tribes and that it was originally a nomadic springtime festival to ward off evil from flock and home.¹² The IVP Bible Commentary suggests that 'Moses quite possibly adapted more ancient ceremonies, Unleavened Bread being an agricultural festival'.¹³ And yet in respect of the Passover, we are told clearly that, 'The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron ... saying this month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you ...' ([Ex. 12:1](#)). In the instructions that follow there are changes in time, function and meaning, but the pagan roots remain.

¹⁰ *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (London: IVP, 1980), p. 1137.

¹¹ It is also interesting to note the striking parallels in forms between the Sinai covenant (which is the heart of Israel's religion) and the international covenants of the second millennium. Kitchen illustrates this in his book *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, p. 92. Further study concerning the sacrificial system of Israel and its parallels among surrounding cultures would be most interesting. This would be beyond the parameters of the present book. Any good theological library would provide adequate resources for such study. See extensive bibliography in Goldinghay's *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*.

¹² Rowley, *Worship in ancient Israel*, p. 37. W. F. Albright also mentions nomadic Arabs having portable 'Tabernacles' parallels to both the OT Tabernacle and the Ark of the covenant. See *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 266.

¹³ *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 1137.

It is also highly probable that the other feasts of Israel were 'reloaded' with new meanings, labelled 'historicised' by Edmond:

It is in the significance of the great feasts that the process of historicisation is most apparent; the Passover, originally the feast of offering of the first-born of the flock, became at a very early date by reference to the Exodus, the commemoration of that event. The New Year Feast, the annual feast *par excellence*, became through the theme of the kingship of Yahweh revealing himself in history, much more the time of renewal of the nation's destiny than the renewal of nature.¹⁴

Edmond again states:

Although much indebted to Canaan, whose ritual and cultic practices it adopted to a large extent, Israel succeeded, through the substitution of history for myth, in breathing a *new spirit into identical forms. Israel's originality in the cultic field is shown by the priority of history over myth and of time over space*¹⁵ (italics mine).

Another remarkable observation concerns the architecture and design of both the tabernacle and the temple. It is generally assumed that these places of worship were unique, since the pattern was given directly to Moses and David by God (see [Exodus 25:8; 1 Chr. 28:11, 19ff](#)). Yet K. A. Kitchen speaks of 'portable pavilions, employing practically the same constructional techniques as the tabernacle to have been in actual use in Egypt long p. 203 before the time of Moses'.¹⁶ This did not mean that the whole structure was exactly the same. The layout, for instance, of the 'holy of holies', was different.

Yahweh's temple had no seating arrangements, but pagan temples did. The layout of some temples, including the entrance to the holy of holies, compares with the Jerusalem temple. That the actual activities within these structures were notably different, is of course self-evident.

Such observations must have far-reaching implications. Whatever else one may deduce, one must accept the fact that Yahweh is in the business of validating all cultures by using what is there and transforming it for his usage. If Yahweh did it, why are his servants (missionaries) so reluctant to follow suit?

It is widely held, even by evangelical scholars, that much of the Biblical Wisdom literature was 'common knowledge' to all cultures. Since Israel lived in such close proximity to their neighbours, it was inevitable that Canaanite stylistic devices with regard to poetic forms would influence Hebrew literature. For instance, [Proverbs 31:1-9](#) is written by a non-Israelite woman. King Lemuel's mother was the Queen Mother of the Arab Kingdom of Masseh ([Gen. 25:14](#)). This advice was passed on to her son and considered important enough to include in the Hebrew canon. Wisdom literature as seen in Proverbs has a distinctly international character. Bauckmann observes:

The sages of Israel belonged to a world of international learning, Because their wisdom was not like the law and the prophets, based on the special salvation history of God's covenant people, but that which was based on common human experience, they readily borrowed from foreign wisdom literature.¹⁷

¹⁴ J. Edmonds, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder, 1958), p. 199-200.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁶ *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p. 1151. Kitchen also writes extensively on the Architectural origins of Solomon's Temple in his book *The Bible in its World*, p. 54.

¹⁷ R. Bauckham, *Using the Bible to Do Politics* (London: SPCK, 1986).

This example suggests four clear points:

1. The Bible itself incorporates common wisdom of mankind irrespective of the cultural context.
2. The material is taken into the Bible when and if it correlates with other biblical material:

The content of the advice correlates very closely with the concerns of their law and the prophets concern for the rights of the weakest members of society, who cannot protect themselves ([Prov. 31:8-9](#)), is required of Israel's political and judicial authorities, both by the law ([Exodus 23:6](#)) and by the Prophets ([Jeremiah 22:2-3](#)). Lemuel's mother expresses a common ideal of kingship in the ancient Near East which was also Israel's ideal ([Psalm 72:12-14](#)) and became the Messianic ideal ([Isaiah 11:4](#)).¹⁸

3. The material is contextualised into salvation history. The kind of concern that Lemuel was to show for this people gains new motivation and there is new p. 204 insight given for their importance, because this is the way Israel's Covenant King behaves towards his people. King Lemuel's concern for the needy, reflects God's concern for the poor, the needy, and the rights of those who are destitute. The Messianic King will come to show solidarity with the poor.
4. The incorporation of this material is important not only for what it reveals concerning God himself, but also concerning his activity within history. History is not an unending cycle, but will push ahead until God's ultimate goals are achieved. When the king behaves in this way, he is not only being wise,¹⁹ but he becomes a model of God's activity which will continue to its climactic *eschaton*.

Israel understood the risk of syncretism but continued to adopt, adapt, transform and re-invest anything from the surrounding cultures, and make it uniquely its own. They knew they could not live in sterile, vacuum-sealed isolation and unashamedly borrowed whatever might further their own purposes. Ringgren observes:

We may ask what elements are part of a common heritage, what elements are really imported in the course of Israelite history, and what elements of tradition are a protest against foreign ideas ... it is important that foreign influence is given its right place: it should neither be flatly denied, nor be exaggerated. Above all, it should be stressed that foreign ideas were never taken over unchanged but were adapted to suit their new Israelite context. The important task of research in this area, therefore, is to assess the Israelite use of the foreign material and the reinterpretation it underwent in the framework of Yahwistic religion.²⁰

If Israel could borrow from OTHER SURROUNDING CULTURES which were familiar to them, why is it wrong for Thai Christians to borrow from THEIR OWN CULTURE? How would the gospel have impacted Thai society from the start had the early missionaries adopted the principles that God seems to have used in the Old Testament? What would have happened to Christian mission in Africa? Why are there now more than six thousand New Emerging Religious Movements (NERMS) in Africa today? Surely the heart cry of the African is to express his worship to God, not in unfamiliar foreign forms and meanings,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ I am indebted to Rev. Tim Marks (Moorlands College) for these insights from an unpublished article, 'Contextualising Taoism Today'.

²⁰ H. Ringgren, 'The impact of the Ancient Near East on Israelite Tradition', D. Knight (ed.). *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, p. 36.

but in local forms that are vital to him because they belong to his own culture; not an imported package which shouts 'foreignness', and includes foreign buildings and architecture with medieval European-style stainedglass windows, foreign music, foreign liturgy, foreign dress, foreign presentation, and worse than anything else, foreign theology! Deep down in the heart of the Thai Christian there undoubtedly must also be this same yearning to be free to [p.205](#) worship God in his own cultural forms.

II CONTEXTUALISATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Undoubtedly contextualisation took place in New Testament times. The apostles were continually involved in contextualising the Christian message. The message came to them in a Semitic language and culture, and they communicated it to those who spoke and thought in Greek patterns. They took indigenous words and concepts, sometimes even transforming their meaning, and used them to communicate in culturally acceptable ways. The Incarnation is a classic case in point. There God 'contextualised' himself in Jesus Christ. He became Emmanuel, God with us—in concepts and language that we understand. The Incarnation had nothing essentially 'foreign' about it. Of course, he was different and yet he was one of us.

The New Testament is not a definitive, systematic theological textbook, although systematic theology may be derived from it. The New Testament says much concerning sociology and anthropology but it was not written as a textbook in these disciplines. What can be stated is that all the events recorded in the New Testament are earthed in real-life situations. Teaching emerges from 'context'. Miracles did not just happen for the sake of it. They were responses to evident needs in real situations. Water was not turned into wine just to show how clever Jesus could be, but to meet a need—'a sign' pointing to the messianic nature of Jesus ministry. Even the few credal statements that may be found in the New Testament ([Philp. 2:1](#); [1 Tim. 2:16](#)) were not intended as 'blanket statements', nor were they comprehensive summaries of the life and ministry of Christ. They were apologetic responses to the need of the hour in that historic context. The Gospels and the Epistles, were written not just as doctrinal statements, but as responses to audiences who had specific needs or questions. The synoptic Gospels were written to different audiences with different literary techniques. Matthew's Gospel was written to a Jewish audience and thus forgoes the traditional chronological treatment in favour of a more Jewish method. The Gospel is broken up into sections of threes and fives and sevens and forms blocks of narrative followed by teaching. Mark most probably wrote for the Romans. His readers were totally unfamiliar with Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives has to be located ([13:3](#)); Jewish customs are explained ([7:2ff](#); [15:42](#)). Certain words needed to be interpreted (from their Aramaic original form) into Greek. Latin words occur which are not in the other records (eg. [6:27](#); [7:4](#); [12:42](#) etc.); his very 'racy' journalistic style, which is simple and direct, all appeal to the Roman mind-set.

Luke's cosmopolitan, universal appeal, with its emphasis on women, and the poor, and John's 'spiritual' approach are not accidental, they reflect a desire to be culturally relevant. One may legitimately state that each gospel reflects 'different Christologies'. Not that these Christologies contradicted each [p.206](#) other, Like a diamond they merely reflect differing colours as observed from varying angles. John does not trace a genealogy from Abraham like Matthew, or from Adam, like Luke but 'out of the blue' introduces a 'precosmic Logos'. John made this emphasis with his audiences in mind and 'reflected' on

what would be most significant about the Christ for them, in terms of their assumptions and world-view.²¹

Although Paul's letter to the Corinthians teaches aspects of universal truth (for instance the resurrection), he nevertheless applies his theology to given contexts.²² His teaching on holiness²³ is due to the danger of sexual immorality in Corinth. The teaching in Galatians arose from a number of issues concerning the problem with Judaisers. This was totally different from the problem at Colossae which was Gnosticism.²⁴

Erickson states concerning the nature of the New Testament:

The dynamic of the New Testament literature consists of its life orientation. Rather than being an abstraction of principles, ideas or dogmatics, it is a treasury of the experiences of the early church. It includes material from the preaching of the apostles, directions from travelling evangelists, and samples of the homilies of the early church ministers. In addition to this there are special types of literature which reflect the ideological and literary customs of the day.²⁵

III SOME EXAMPLES OF CONTEXTUALISATION WITHIN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The prime example of contextualisation in the Christian church centres around the council of Jerusalem. It has been said that, had a wrong decision been made at this council, Christianity would have remained an insignificant, obscure Jewish sect. In fact, if the church had failed to contextualise in this instance, there would never have been a church. The leaders confirmed that they had been led by the Holy Spirit, thus affirming the principle that God **P. 207** himself is in the business of contextualising the Christian faith. The consensus of the church at Jerusalem is simply recorded; 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (**15:28**).²⁶ Two vital issues were at stake. The first was HOW could the

²¹ For a discussion concerning the use of 'redaction criticism', and the use of *midrash* as genre and hermeneutical tool, see Craig Biotaberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester: IVOP, 1987).

²² Hollenweger earths the message of Corinth into its social and cultural matrix by developing what he calls 'narrative exegesis'. He states, 'It is well known that the writings of Paul are not merely theological documents, if in fact such a thing exists at all. His theological ideas are inseparable from the so-called non-theological traditions and concepts of his culture. That in fact is the case in all theological struggles from Marcion to the Reformation and Northern Ireland. They always have been at one and the same time theological, political and cultural struggles. See *Old Testament Conflict in Corinth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 66.

²³ For a discussion concerning the nature of 'holiness' (*hagitotes*, *haglasmos* and *hagiosyne*) and its usage by Paul in the Corinthian epistle, see Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (London: SPCK, 1977) p. 263. The cultic significance has little relation to Paul's usage, where the concept carries with it more the sense of being morally clean, pure, innocent chaste, etc.

²⁴ There is now debate whether or not Paul really was writing to refute Gnosticism, but this does not alter the fact, that he *was* writing into a context that was essentially different from the Galatians context. See H. Berkhof, *De Katholiciteit der Kerk*, 1962, pp. 61ff, I. J. Du Plesis, *Christus as Hoof*, pp. 116ff, from Berkhof *op. cit.*, 391.

²⁵ Erickson, *Theology and Mission*, p. 71.

²⁶ Hesselgrave observes 'the four categories mentioned in **Acts 15:20** correspond to regulations in the Old Testament law against the pollution of idols (**Lev. 19:4** cf. **1 Co. 10:20-21**), fornication (**Lev. 18:6-18**), eating that which has been strangled, and eating blood (**Lev. 17:10-14**). These are obviously issues of dietary or ritual cleanness and not primarily ethical matters. That omission seems to have been considered by some early interpreters. Accordingly variant readings (most in the 'D' or 'Western Group' of texts) of the

Gentiles receive salvation, and the second, WHAT were the conditions of fellowship between Jewish believers in Messiah?

In regard to the 'HOW', it seems that the Jewish faction was attempting to impose two Jewish requirements on the Gentiles; the rite of circumcision, and keeping the Law of Moses (v.5).

In regard to 'WHAT'—what were the conditions of fellowship? Acceptance of Christ was not sufficient in the mind of many Jews. They must also meet certain regulations before the right hand of fellowship could be offered. (There seems to be a familiar ring about this!) There was also the conviction that since all truth had 'once and for all' been delivered to the Jew' IT MUST BE, AS FAR AS THEY COULD UNDERSTAND, SUPRACULTURAL AND THEREFORE BINDING ON THE GENTILES. So how could the Gentiles possibly be accepted, except by total conformity to their prerequisite? There are, of course, all sorts of modern counterparts to this position, the most scandalous being the concept of apartheid, taken supposedly from the book of Genesis. F. F. Bruce states:

Centuries of devotion to the laws governing food and purity bred (in many Jewish Christians) an instinctive revulsion from eating with Gentiles which could not be immediately overcome. Gentiles quite happily ate certain kinds of food which Jews had been taught to abominate, and the laxity of Gentile morals, especially where relations between the sexes were concerned, made the idea of reciprocal hospitality between them and the Jewish Christians distasteful.²⁷

The conclusions reached by the council were far-reaching. *First*, the Gentiles were not compelled to observe circumcision or the Law of Moses; *second*, the Jewish Christians were not compelled to STOP circumcision, nor to stop observing the law; *third*, the acceptance and fellowship with Gentiles was ratified. In the practical sense, the 'middle wall of partition' had now been taken down in a practical sense and the way was open for true cross-cultural fellowship.

In [I Corinthians 8:1-10:22](#), Paul is again dealing with the problem of food offered to idols, which had already been addressed in the letter from the Jerusalem Council. Since, [p. 208](#) however, the audience was different, Paul in his wisdom does not even mention the letter from Jerusalem, fearing perhaps that the Corinthians may rebel against some new law, imposed at a distance by a Jewish church upon Gentiles. His argument is far more relevant than some remote letter from a distant council, although the conclusion is the same. Here Paul reasons with the Corinthians in a way that would be acceptable to them. *First*, that an idol has no real existence in the world ([8:4](#)). He qualifies this later by saying that what a person really worships when he worships an idol, are demons, and that food has no intrinsic religious value ([8:8](#)). *Second*, that the table of the Lord is authentically what the idol banquet purports to be ([10:16](#)) and that worshipping anything but God himself is in effect again worshipping demons ([10:19](#)). The conclusion is that you 'cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of the demons at the same time' ([10:21](#)). Here is a clear sense of 'discontinuity' or, what Luzbetak calls 'cultural surgery'.

Paul does differentiate in these chapters between 'form' and 'meaning'. If the meaning is intrinsically contrary to Christian perception of truth, no Christian may participate. If, however, a practice is wrong only in the view of some people, then the Christians must abstain only in their presence, in order not to be a stumbling block. One person's 'liberty' must not be another person's stumbling ([8:7-13](#)). Is there some inconsistency in Paul's

admonition in [15:20](#) include the prohibitions against idolatry, fornication and murder, and a negative formulation of the Golden Rule (see Didache 1; 2). D. Hesselgrave and E. Roman, *Contextualisation, Meaning, Models and Methods* (Leicester: Apollos, 1989), p. 11.

²⁷ Erickson, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

arguments here? The answer could be in the affirmative. This is because Paul saw no incongruity or inconsistency between writing to the Galatians about circumcision saying ‘those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised ... circumcision is nothing’ ([Gal. 6:11–14](#)) and then taking Timothy and having him circumcised ([Acts 16:3](#))! He saw no inconsistency between enjoining others not to keep the Law, and then undertaking a vow—‘to show that you yourself keep the law’ ([Acts 21:21–24](#)). He even saw no inconsistency theologically (it seemed) between the once-for-all, sufficient sacrifice of Christ upon the cross and his paying expenses for sacrifices for him and others in the Temple!

Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses so that they can have their heads shaved ... the next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the sacrifice would be made for each of them ([Acts 21:23–26](#)).

The overriding principle was that of ‘contextuality’. Erickson states:

The pinnacle of Paul’s enculturation is expressed in [I Corinthians 9:19–21](#). He accepts—for the sake of evangelisation—the life-style (enslaved), ideological mold (Judaistic or lawless), and personal deficiencies (weak conscience) of the people to whom he ministers.²⁸

Erickson also points out a further illustration of contextualisation by Paul from the various epistles he wrote. The frequent occurrence of *haustafel* (a Roman-type household structure which included master and p. 209 slaves) shows that Paul addresses an immediate situation in a local church, quite unlike the Jewish context. In fact Paul’s whole teaching on slavery is ‘situational’. To the Corinthians he indicates that they should not bother about being slaves ([7:21](#)). He encourages Philemon to treat a slave as a brother in the Lord (v. [16](#)). On the other hand he warns slaves in his letter to the Colossians to serve their masters ‘as to the Lord’ ([3:23–25](#)).

It has been noted that even baptism as a form, previously used in Judaism, pagan religions, and by John the Baptist, is taken by Jesus and given another meaning. He did not create some new type of ritual, but transformed what was there into something distinctively Christian. There were resemblances to other forms, but Christian baptism maintains a unique meaning.

The ‘principle of continuity’ is further illustrated by the use of the word ‘LOGOS’ in John’s Gospel and Epistles. John does not take a ‘foreign’ word to express the nature of Christ or his pre-existence. He takes a word, long used in Greek philosophy, to express his meaning. Not all agree on this controversial word and some maintain it was Hebrew in origin. Even if that were the case, John ‘reloads’ the word and builds into it a unique concept of who Christ is. The context of the usage of the word is the loading apparatus for its new meaning. It must be added that John’s use of the term is not to engage in deliberate syncretism, as some may suppose or propose. Dr. Christopher Wright contributes to the debate in an article in *Themelios*:

John (and even more obviously Paul, in Colossians) is resisting the syncretistic tendency by deliberate assimilation of current vocabulary into a thoroughly Christian (OT based and Jesus-centred) theology. In this he differed greatly from what the Apologists were trying to do. If A=the revealed truth of the gospel and B=the ‘target’ culture (in this case Greek popular philosophy and religion), it is one thing to say, with John, ‘I will use vocabulary from B because it can be used to make A intelligible to people in culture B, but

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

A remains the unique distinctive and governing truth which will give the vocabulary fresh shades of meaning'. It is quite another to say 'I will use vocabulary B because B (or the best in it) is in reality the same as A, such that people unconsciously believe A any way'. Secondly, talk of the logos as the 'non-incarnate Christ' easily becomes abstract and divorced from the unique particularity of the incarnation. The historical Jesus becomes 'The Christ principle'; the once-for-all atoning death of Jesus becomes 'the pattern of the cross' etc. Such worthy-sounding concepts fit easily into the syncretistic soup and nicely avoid the 'sandal of particularity'. However, it can easily be seen that though this process may use the Johannine logos as a tag, it is fundamentally incompatible with John's intention in his Prologue, which is to lead relentlessly up to the climax: 'The Logos became flesh'. Whatever you may do with the concept of logos, you cannot syncretise or abstractify the flesh of the man Jesus.²⁹

Perhaps the most significant evidence for the principle of contextualisation comes from the Acts of the [p.210](#) Apostles. A comparison between Peter's message on Pentecost (to Jews: [Acts 2:134-26](#)) and in the house of Cornelius (to Romans: [10:34-43](#)) reveals a completely different emphasis. The same thing happens in Paul's messages to monotheistic Jews and Gentile God-fearers in the synagogue of Antioch ([13:16-41](#)), and polytheistic devotees on Mars' hill. In Paul's two messages to polytheistic audiences he clearly contextualised his message according to his receptors' categories, not his own. For instance, why does Paul mention the fact that it is God who gives rain from heaven and crops in season in chapter [14](#) and not in [17](#) And why does Paul exhort them 'to turn from these worthless things to the living God' in chapter [14](#) but in chapter [17](#) says 'The God whom you ignorantly worship, Him I declare to you'? If we hope to be sensitive to our audience's needs we must be sensitive to these questions.

Joslin examines the content and structure of three of Paul's sermons recorded in Acts noting various differences.³⁰

Don Richardson also helpfully illustrates the background to Paul's preaching on Mars' hill. Apparently about 600 BC there had been a devastating plague in the city of Athens. The people of Athens offered sacrifices to their 30,000 gods asking them to intervene and halt the plague but the plague raged on. Epimenedes was summoned to help resolve the problem. Since the gods were silent he felt there must be another God who would be great enough to help. He called for a flock of sheep to be let loose on a sacred spot on Mars' hill. He commanded the men to follow the sheep, and call upon this 'unknown god' to cause the sheep to lie down on the spot where the 'god' wanted a lamb to be sacrificed. On that spot the Athenians built an altar and inscribed on it 'To an unknown god'. Subsequently the plague lifted and the city was delivered. Six centuries later, Paul takes the story of this 'pagan' altar, and states 'Him who you worship I declare unto you'. Richardson adds:

Others remarked 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods'. In other words, Paul, whoever you are, we already have 30,000 gods here in Athens, and you are bringing us the message of still another god? We need another god like we need a hole in our heads! We've got so many gods here in Athens we can't keep track of them all! Who would have the audacity to proclaim another god in that context? How does he respond to the charge that he is advocating some superfluous or nuisance god in the city already afflicted with 30,000 or more of them? ... Paul was in effect saying: 'Foreign God? No! The God I proclaim is that God who did not consider himself represented by any of the idols in the city so many hundreds of years ago, but who delivered your city from the plague when you simply acknowledged your ignorance of him. But why be ignorant of him any longer, if you can

²⁹ Chris Wright, 'The Christian and Other Religions, The Evidence', *Themelios* 9:2 (Jan. 94).

³⁰ Roy Joslin, *Urban Harvest* (Welwyn Evangelical Press, 1982), pp. 160-161.

know him'. In this way Paul used that familiar Athenian altar as an eye-opener to get to first base. Then he went on to try to turn his listeners from the darkness of idolatry to the light of God's truth. And this God has left himself a [p. 211](#) witness in hundreds of other cultures around the world.³¹

Wright correctly points out that Paul is not congratulating the Athenians on their polytheism; rather he is saying, 'despite your religiosity, you don't know the true God at all, though you could and should do, for the knowledge of him is available before your eyes, but you have obscured it with your "very religious" temples and idols':

Taken thus, it fits perfectly with what Paul writes concerning the availability but suppression of the knowledge of God in [Romans 1](#). God is not, in fact an 'unknown God' it is the Athenians who are ignorant of Him.³²

There remains a fear for those of us committed to contextualisation that in applying these principles we may fall short of communicating distinctive Good News and instead leave a hotchpotch of diluted Christianity with a large dose of paganism as the principal ingredient. We should take courage on three accounts. *First*, it has been clearly proven that God initiated and inspired this principle of contextualisation in Scripture. *Second*, the result was not a mixed up 'soup' of religion, but a unique revelation of Person and purposes applied to the historical context. *Third*, that both the Word of God and the Spirit of God have been given to guide and ensure what the appropriate parameters of contextualisation will be. Contextualisation is as great a risk for the servant of God as exercising faith and trust in him.

In conclusion, there will always be the danger of syncretism; in fact all expressions of Christianity are in some ways culture-bound and therefore by definition syncretistic to some degree. The key is to discern between 'legitimate, critically-determined syncretism', and 'uncritical syncretism'. The former will be authentic, resulting in an unambiguous application of the Good News. The latter will be confusing, destructive both to Scripture and culture, leaving no scriptural Good News. With the assurances already indicated, our task must be to contextualise for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

CONCLUSION

Before a new product is launched, feasibility studies and market research must be done. The same must be done with some of the proposals in this article. Experimentation and investigation may reveal some of what has been proposed as impractical or ineffective. On the other hand, the writer feels that the church has nothing to lose by testing some of the radical innovations suggested. Only the results can determine whether they will be effective or not.

This article is not a final answer but merely an introduction to the task of contextualisation. The general principles suggested must be beaten out on the anvil of creative experimentation by the hands of those more qualified for the task—Thai Christian leaders. This subject needs much more research both in [p. 212](#) detail and depth. One important area that needs further investigation is the relationship of biblical studies to contextualisation. The following are some areas that require further research.

The Development of 'Local Theologies'

³¹ D. Richardson, 'Finding the Eye Opener', in *Perspectives of the World Christian Movement*, p. 424.

³² Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

At one end there is 'Traditional Theology' which Tissa Balasuriya defines as 'culture-bound, church-centered, male-and-age dominated, pro-capitalist, anti-communist, over-theoretical and unrelated to the social contexts in which it is developed'.³³ At the other end there is 'Planetary Theology', where the planet Earth in its entirety is the context. In the middle are 'Local Theologies'. The problem arises, how 'local' should they become? To develop a contextualised theology for the church in Thailand, further research should be done in Laotian, Cambodian, Burmese and Vietnamese contexts. Such experimentation will help in the development of an authentic Thai theology, since each of these countries has similar folk Buddhist belief systems. Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies* is definitive, and gives invaluable guidelines in this whole area.

An in-depth analysis of Thai rites, rituals and ceremonies

A problem arises in that Thai national leaders are generally not prepared to engage upon this delicate operation themselves, but neither the writer nor any other expatriate is qualified either. The alarm warning that SOMETHING MUST BE DONE has been sounded. The type of Christianity introduced by the early missionaries created a 'black hole' leading to social alienation and loss of cultural identity for those who became Christians. It is easy to see that unless something is done soon, Thailand will be added to the list of countries with New Emerging Religious Movements, because the climate is now ripe for this phenomenon to occur. It is therefore imperative that Thai leaders address the issue at a national level immediately. Certain rites and ceremonies should be adapted and new methods of communication developed. There is nothing to be lost, and Thailand to be gained!

Cognitive processes of communication

Systematic theology is a distinctively western approach to theology and is derived in its cognitive process and forms from the ancient Greek philosophers and is a distinctively western approach to theology.³⁴ p. 213 Alternative methods of communication have been discussed here, but the 'content' of local theologies needs to be packaged in local 'forms'. One must address the question, does Thailand have a nonlinear 'oral' culture? If it does, then our present methods of communication need major changes. Hollenweger points out:

Oral theology operates through the medium of story, not statement. It does not use definitions, but descriptions. It operates with songs, not systematic statements. It is not based on an Aristotelian framework of logic but on the cohesion of the tradition in a community.³⁵

³³ Tissa Balasuriya, *Planetary Theology*, (London: SCM, 1984), pp. 3–10.

³⁴ Hesselgrave, Kraft, Hollenweger, and others have raised serious doubts about the superiority of the western way of thinking, especially from the biblical point of view. See Hesselgrave, *op. cit.*, p. 228. Although some of the New Testament is couched in more western thought patterns, dearly the Old Testament and the Synoptic Gospels bear the stamp of non-western ways of thinking. 'It seems quite clear that the Hebrews can be classified as concrete relational thinkers. The Hebrews never developed a systematic theology, and it was not until the time of Moses Miaminides in the 12th century AD that any doctrinal statement was drawn up, and it never gained universal acceptance'. See H. D. Leuner, 'Judaism in the Worlds Religions'. J. N. D. Anderson (ed.), *Christianity and World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p.59

³⁵ Hollenweger, *The Future of Mission and the Mission of the Future*, Selly Oak Occasional Paper No. 2 Birmingham: (Selly Oaks College, 1989), p. 9.

Suffice it to say the communication process in Thailand needs to be predominantly oral. This would mean that local theologies should be developed and communicated within Thai oral traditions. Thai song styles, such as the 'joī' and the 'so', together with Thai 'pop' and folk music, should be used as effective media of a communication. It would be profitable to research what Stroup terms 'Narrative Theology'.³⁶ This of course does not necessarily mean we adopt an 'either or' philosophy, for, 'Christian theology' has always been oral AND literary. The Gospels belong to the oral genre. The Epistles to the literary genre. Academic theology so far has not developed sophisticated oral theologies.³⁷

Culturally appropriate expression of Christian Spirituality

There is always the danger of analyzing belief systems and worldviews in a detached academic fashion, emphasizing what people believe while overlooking how they behave. When one observes both the dedication and the devotion of a sincere Buddhist, one must ask, what has the Christian to offer? Sad to say, many Christians live below the standard set by many Buddhists. Wan says,

If we live simply as those who have given themselves to the service of God, I believe people will receive us gladly because Thai people already have faith in, and admiration for, this kind of life, that is, the life of sacrifice. All those in Buddhism whom they admire, whether abbots or priests or Buddha himself, are people of sacrificial lives. If Christians present themselves like Jesus, it will certainly reinforce what they say.³⁸

What is needed is a spirituality which has a 'mystical' dimension as well as the practical. Such a 'prophetic-type-spirituality' is appealing since it addresses BOTH man's inward condition AND his outward p. 214 environment. This would reflect the balance of inward and outward spirituality portrayed in the nature and role of the 'Servant' in the Old Testament, and perfected in Christ's own life and ministry. The practical application of a culturally-attractive Christian spirituality still needs to be seriously addressed. The idea of 'Christian Community' also needs consideration. Since the temple (*wat*) is a place of Buddhist community, ought there to be some Christian 'functional equivalents' for these life-styles and structures?

The issue of Power Encounter'

'Power Encounter' is an effective means of communication of the 'Good News' to Thai people. This should not reflect the importance of the subject. Although controversial, the subject of *stoicheia*, and 'principalities and powers' must be addressed. The responsibility of developing suitable 'local theology' in this area falls mainly to Thai Christian leaders since the tendency of the western observer is to oversimplify and theorize.

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³⁶ George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (London: SCM, 1984).

³⁷ Hollenweger, *The Future of Mission*, p. 10.

³⁸ Wan Phetsongkhram, *Talks in the Shade of the Bo Tree* (Bangkok: Thai Gospel Press, 1975), p. 141.

Hermeneutics for Preachers

Steve Motyer

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In this essay the author relates the hermeneutical issues of our time to preaching. He responds to the question 'how does the Bible teach us the truth?' He shows the role of the preacher's heart and imagination, his knowledge, fellowship and culture in good expository preaching.

Editor

This essay gives some idea of the scope and complexity of the issues raised by that innocent question, 'How does the Bible teach us the truth?' Of course we must not complicate what is essentially simple, or obscure the truth behind clouds of incomprehensibility—God forbid! But even the simplest craft can float over unfathomable depths. If leading a church is compared to driving a car, then (crudely) preaching is like filling up with petrol, and keeping the oil and air pressures right for smooth movement forward. Preaching—feeding on the word of God—keeps church life empowered. On this analogy, hermeneutics is the study of *how* petrol, oil and air empower and sustain the inner working of the engine—in fact, how the engine works.

You can drive a car without knowing how it works! In the same way you can lead a church and engage in a preaching ministry without ever asking 'hermeneutical' questions. But deeper understanding makes better drivers. You can cope better in a roadside emergency if you know what goes on under the bonnet. Similarly a pastoral and preaching ministry will have an extra depth and confidence, if you have worked through at least some of the hermeneutical issues and questions.

How *does* the Bible teach us the truth? This question simply refuses to go away and lie down. Wherever we look, whatever we do, it pops up. We answer it implicitly—and either consciously or unconsciously—every time we use the Bible in pastoral ministry. Every use of the [p. 216](#) Bible rests upon a theory about its effectiveness ([2 Tim. 3:16](#)) and upon a view about *how* the Bible will actually *function* with people, or 'teach, rebuke, correct and train' them.

In this essay I focus on preaching—one of the most widely-held answers to the question (although what I write is relevant to all forms of Bible ministry). A visitor from Mars, observing the prominence we give to preaching in our services, would conclude that we regard it as crucial within the whole hermeneutical process. But it is not the only way in which the Bible teaches the truth to the church, quite patently. At the time of writing I have just returned from Spring Harvest at Minehead, where one of my tasks was to lead a seminar on the doctrine of the Trinity. One of the basic questions I had to tackle was, How did the Bible teach this doctrine to the church, when it does not specifically appear in its pages? Not through expository preaching, that is for sure. The long process of debate and conflict which finally led to the universal adoption of this doctrine at the council of Constantinople in 381 AD teaches us some vital things about hermeneutics—things which are not irrelevant for preaching, as we shall see.

Firstly, we see the church grappling for the right *words* to express what God must be like, if he has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, as the gospel says. Secondly, we see the church (especially its leading theologians) exercising powerful *imagination* in order to conceive of the reality which the words were meant to express—even if, in the long run, they had to say that words were inadequate (I love Augustine's comment that

the word 'person' was used, not to express the truth about God, but so that the truth might not be left wholly unexpressed).

Thirdly, we see the whole discussion take place within the context of *Scriptural worship, faith and fellowship*—in fact this became a touchstone of orthodoxy. Those who separated themselves from the church of the apostles by self-definition could not hold apostolic faith. And fourthly, we see the church being motivated by a powerful desire, not just to understand but also to *explain* the truth of God in language and thought-forms appropriate to the dominant Greek culture of the day.

All four things go together—language, imagination, fellowship and communication. Hermeneutically, we can say that the Scriptures taught the truth to the church as, in a context of shared worship, Christians sought to understand the God who had revealed himself to express their worship and understanding in contemporary language. It took 350 years to reach formal agreement.

The hermeneutics of preaching has much in common with this story of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, as I shall now try to explain. Inevitably, what follows is a personal statement. I am a great lover of preaching, and have been thinking about hermeneutics for many years, and the two come together as I seek to put into a nutshell *what I believe we preachers may learn from the ongoing p. 217 debate about hermeneutics in the church.*

I TRUTH AND PERSONALITY—THE PREACHER'S HEART

We owe to Jim Packer, I believe, the definition of preaching as 'truth mediated through personality'. Some preachers, missing the point of this excellent definition, seek to exclude themselves as people from the preaching activity, as though they were only a disembodied 'voice crying in the wilderness'. So they avoid personal allusions or illustrations, fearing that these will distract attention from the Lord.

This is a misunderstanding! In fact John the Baptist was far more than just 'a voice'. His whole character and personality had been shaped by God to fit the prophetic ministry he undertook—and everything about him, including his dress, formed part of the message he communicated.

Hermeneutical theory underlines the significance of this. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1832), justly called the father of modern hermeneutics, was the first to emphasize the *role of the reader* in the hermeneutical process. Our goal as readers, he said, is actually to understand the biblical authors better than they understood themselves. How can this remarkable claim be justified? Schleiermacher gave two reasons: (a) We have the benefit of historical distance, so that we can set the biblical authors into the wider context of which they were unaware when they wrote. But this understanding of the *language* of the biblical authors is only the preliminary to something much more important, for (b) understanding is essentially *personal*, and we need to seek an instinctive, intuitive grasp of what is really going on, a person-to-person leap across the centuries which collapses the historical distance and indeed jumps behind the language of the biblical text to the heart, mind and experience which it expresses.

This jump of intuitive 'understanding' is made *by us*, said Schleiermacher, on the basis of the common language and humanity we share with the biblical authors, so that we turn out to be vital participants in the discovery of the 'meaning' of the Bible. Schleiermacher has been criticized for a certain romanticism in his emphasis on the role of intuition in interpretation, but in different ways this insight has remained to the present day. For instance, the so-called 'New Hermeneutic', associated with the names of theologians Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, picks up his emphasis and tells us that we need to be *grasped*

by the Word if the meaning of the Bible is to be real for us. What exactly Fuchs and Ebeling mean by this is not entirely clear, but they are very keen to underline that we do not sit *over* the Scriptures as critics and analysts (and expositors), but *under* them, to be ourselves not the *subjects* of Bible study (*we study it*), but the *objects* of it (*it studies us*)!

This is another way of saying that Bible study involves us in a personal relationship from which we cannot distance ourselves. A relationship in which one person does all the disclosing, and the other never reveals anything about themselves, is no relationship at all. It is doomed to p. 218 failure. We need to beware of forming such a relationship with the Scriptures—thinking of the process of interpretation as a purely technical one in which we employ the right ‘methods’ in order to hear the message of the text. This would turn us into preachers who are just heads repeating the words of the Bible. But in reality we are heads and hearts together, *whole people* who have fallen in love with a friend and been transformed by him and by his words to us.

Another way of saying the same thing puts it like this: as preachers we need to *model a response* to the message in the way we proclaim it (and in our lives subsequently!). Just as the discussions about the Trinity could not be separated from the *experience* of the gospel, and thus from the worship of God in Christ, so preachers need to be ready to display their own experiences to the Lord, their vulnerability and humanity and repentance and saved-ness and faith, in order to model for their hearers the *relationship* with Christ, and with the Scriptures, which they want their hearers to develop.

Richard Brigg’s essay on ‘The Role of the Reader’ in this issue of *Evangel* delves into some of the complexity surrounding this topic in contemporary discussion. Clearly we need to define exactly what our role is, in the dialogue-relationship we enjoy with Holy Scripture, and our role has been wrongly understood by many. But Richard is surely right when he suggests that ‘reader-response criticism’ serves a good and positive purpose if it underlines for us that ‘meaning’ may actually be located in the response of the hearers in terms of what it makes them do’.

I think I would simply want to expand Richard’s last word a little: ‘the meaning’ of the Scriptures is located not just in what we do, but also in what we think, feel, decide and say within that dialogue relationship with them.

‘Meaning’ is a function of persons, a personal quality, experience or process, and not some objective dictionary definition! And that’s where the preacher’s personality comes in (actually, it can’t be pushed out). Few things in the church are more tragic than a boring sermon in which the preacher’s head is engaged but not his or her heart. Probably not even the heads of hearers will be penetrated. But few things, correspondingly, are more exciting than a sermon which glows with personal engagement, and which admits the hearers to the heart of a speaker gripped by the truth, as well as to the heart of the passage which it tells.

I want to be that kind of preacher.

II TRUTH AND HISTORY—THE PREACHER’S IMAGINATION

The last point drew upon Schleiermacher’s notion of *intuition* as the basis of interpretation. But for him this was inseparable from a careful analysis of the language used by the biblical authors. Just as we need to listen carefully to each other in conversation, as the essential basis of mutual understanding, so we need to listen very carefully to the exact P. 219 language used by the biblical authors. Otherwise understanding will fail.

Schleiermacher had, as the goal of interpretation, the rediscovery of the mind and intention of the human authors, to which first a study of their language and then personal

intuition would give us access. Some of those who have followed in his train have not laid emphasis on rediscovery of authorial intention. For instance, the renowned French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, a contemporary giant in the field of hermeneutical theory, makes a distinction between ‘explanation’ and ‘understanding’ which runs parallel to Schleiermacher’s distinction between *language* and *intuition*. But for Ricoeur, ‘understanding does not mean *rediscovering what was*, but uncovering the potential of the text to evoke responses, particularly through responding to its symbols and metaphors. We might well ask, what kind of control can be set over responses to the biblical text, if the intervention of the biblical authors has vanished from view?

Different modern readers will respond to the same symbols and metaphors in radically different ways, but on Ricoeur’s theory their responses would be equally valid. For instance, readers of a homosexual orientation and practice could feel themselves affirmed by the powerful picture of ‘the disciple who Jesus loved’ lying in physical contact with him in [John 13:23–25](#). Others would react strongly against such an interpretation. But if the *function* of the text is reduced to the *effect* of its symbols and metaphors, to its evocative power, then both contradictory reactions are equally valid.

The trouble with Ricoeur’s hermeneutic is that it does not *allow the text to be itself*—that is, specifically it ignores the *historical rootedness* of our biblical texts. As a matter of fact, John’s Gospel (to continue the example above) is not a series of disembodied symbols looking for incarnation in our responses. It comes to us from a very specific set of historical claims on all who approach it. We cannot therefore interpret [13:23–25](#) until we have equipped ourselves with knowledge about seating arrangements at Passover meals, and more specifically about Jesus’s relationships with his disciples, and about John’s presentation of the beloved disciple—not to mention background knowledge about homosexuality in the ancient world and among Jews.

We have moved back from the pulpit to the study! That’s where what Tom Wright calls ‘the hermeneutic of love’ needs to be exercised: the hermeneutic which applies ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ to the relationship between us and the biblical text. It’s essential. Unless we preachers are motivated by an altruistic desire to let the text shine in all its true colours, then we will be employing Ricoeur’s hermeneutic, willy-nilly. We will find ourselves simply corresponding at the level of our imagination to an exciting symbol, picture or idea. One recent writer comments that, generally speaking, that is as far as preachers go in their work on the text. They will study it just until [p. 220](#) something ‘sparks’, and then they are off—away from the text down the line of imagination. Ricoeur would be pleased.

But I am not saying that the use of imagination is wrong. In all love-relationships imagination is vital. It is that faculty which enables us to stand sympathetically in someone else’s shoes. Trained, it is the capacity which enables counsellors to read their clients from the inside. In the realm of theology, it is the capacity which leads us to find the doctrine of the Trinity in the diverse and fascinating statements of Scripture about Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And it is crucial in the ‘hermeneutic of love’ we seek to employ with the scriptures.

‘Critical realism’ is the name given to it by the American New Testament scholar Ben Meyer. It involves two things: distance and engagement. Both are vital in any intimate relationship. *Distance* means conceiving the other as an object to which we devote our total interest and attention, seeking only to discover what is really there. This is what Meyer means by ‘critical’. So we employ all the technical tools we can—Greek grammars, encyclopedias, commentaries, and all the forms of ‘criticism’ which will enable us to hear the authentic voice of the text.

But running through all this activity will be our personal *engagement* with the text as an object of our love, and we will be hearing it within the context of the relationship we already have with it. This is what Meyer means by ‘realism’. Realism is the opposite of *idealism*. We are not seeking some ideal, perfect or final interpretation, but that interpretation which (alone) is possible for me, granted the capacities of my intellect, heart and imagination. I know that I do not know, and that I cannot know fully—and this is true of my relationship with my wife, as well as the Scriptures. But I want to know *truly*, and to know as *fully* as possible, and the key to growth in all relationships is *questioning*. So I question the text, allowing the questions to be shaped by the text itself. Why is there a ‘beloved disciple’ in John? Why does John record the incident in [13:21–30](#) in such detail, underlining the *private* exchange between the disciple and Jesus? Why does John mention that the question came from Peter?

Please note that all these questions begin with ‘Why’! That is the vital three-letter word which upsets the *status quo*, reveals the unexpected, stimulates the imagination, and tumbles self-confidence. It is the question which, on a macro-scale, underlay the whole process whereby the church argued its way through to the doctrine of the Trinity. Why do the Scriptures not present Jesus as an angelic messenger and deliverer? Why is the Spirit called ‘the Life-Giver’ ([Jn. 6:63](#)) only a few verses after Jesus has been cast in this role ([6:57](#))? Why is the Spirit of God dramatically called the Spirit of Christ ([Rom. 8:9](#), [1 Pet. 1:11](#))?—etc, etc! The church wrestled with these questions, using all the capabilities of imagination at their disposal.

I want to be that kind of preacher. [p. 221](#)

III TRUTH AND UNTRUTH—THE PREACHER’S KNOWLEDGE

In his essay in this *Evangel*, Peter Cotterell takes the example of the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel to illustrate the point that we, the readers, are involved in the construction of ‘meaning’. We can give answers to all the questions Peter asks about the story—but we cannot be certain that any of them is correct. The technical name given to such uncertainties is ‘narrative gap’: the story leaves us, its readers, to fill in these gaps, and we are faced with the challenge of them *as soon as we try to re-tell the story in our own words*.

Retelling the story in our own words ... That is what preaching is all about. This idea of the ‘narrative gap’ applies not just to stories, but in principle to all biblical literature. For biblical texts constantly face us with questions about their meaning. If this were not so, the commentary-industry would not have been born. Commentators, like preachers, seek to answer the questions and to reexpress the text, achieving if possible even greater clarity than the biblical authors themselves.

But the sheer variety of attempts induces humility (or should do!). That *final* re-statement of biblical truth eludes the church. Even Paul felt that his grasp of the truth was imperfect. ‘We know in part’ he wrote, urging the Corinthians to see that the only *full* knowledge we experience is the knowledge of *which we are the objects, not the subjects*—God’s knowledge of us. A day is coming when our limited *subjective* knowledge will be transformed: ‘then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known!’ ([1 Cor. 13:9–12](#)). If Paul’s knowledge was imperfect, then how much more ours?

Yet his awareness of the imperfection of his knowledge did not make Paul hesitant or tentative in his preaching. Why? Because his confidence was not in himself, but in God. ‘My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power ...’ ([1 Cor. 2:4](#), NIV). In other words, he preached not out of the conviction that he *knew* (fully, finally), but out of the conviction that he *was known* and owned by God.

Here's a remarkable piece of Christian theology, underlined by what hermeneutics tells us about the relation between language, culture and truth: as soon as a form of words acquires quasi-canonical status as a statement of truth, *it becomes untruth*. And conversely, only insofar as our words arise out of the glad awareness that we have been *grasped and known* by God in Christ, do they express the truth.

This is a great comfort to incompetent preachers like me. I can never know for sure whether I have rightly interpreted the passage. Sometimes it will be right to share my uncertainty with the congregation, sometimes not. But always I can be certain that God will take my 'own' words when I express the *partial* truth I have understood out of total loyalty to Christ ([1 Cor. 2:2](#)), with 'weakness and fear' ([1 Cor. 2:3](#)) and in total dependence upon the Holy Spirit ([1 Cor. 2:4](#)).

I want to be that kind of preacher. [p. 222](#)

IV TRUTH AND COMMUNITY—THE PREACHER'S FELLOWSHIP

Some scholars writing in the area of hermeneutics have been particularly interested in the *community dimensions* of interpretation. As a fact to be observed, it is undeniable. We are all influenced in our reading of the Scriptures by the 'fellowship'; to which we belong, and in this context 'fellowship' can refer to a local church, a communion (e.g. Anglicanism), a cause (evangelicalism), a coterie (biblical scholarship), a confession (Protestantism, the charismatic movement), or a constituency (Western Christianity, as opposed to Eastern). We will have our individualist. Of course, we need to be as clear and conscious as we can about the influences that continue to shape us, or else we will simply be driven and will not 'own' the ideas we reproduce. Hermeneutics is the discipline which reflects on *the role of presuppositions* in interpretation, which is another way of referring to *the fellowship* within which we operate.

But what about a Martin Luther? Church history seems to hinge around crucial individuals who have stood against the flow, and rejected the presuppositions of the church around them. To be sure, their lasting influence in the church depends upon the fact that others, discerning the hand of God, responded to their leadership and formed a fellowship around them. Church history also tells the story of many powerful individuals who stood against the flow but failed to convince—and have been forgotten.

What is the role of private judgement in preaching and in theology? The Catholic answer to this is, officially, 'no role at all': teachers must toe the party line. But actually, of the three points made so far at all are true, private judgement plays a crucial role, both in theology and in preaching. We seek the truth, we engage with it, and then passionately touched, we proclaim it. Simply passing on conventional truth will produce sterility and death. And the Catholic church is discovering painfully that private judgement is here to stay. Protestantism testifies dramatically to its power, presenting a bewildering variety of churches and doctrines, often associated with the charismatic ministry of certain individuals—and shading off, of course, both into the liberalism of David Strauss and Wilhelm Wrede, and into the sectarianism of Joseph Smith and Charles Taze Russell.

Theology asks after the legitimacy within all this diversity. Where are the lines to be drawn? To the aid of theology comes hermeneutics, which can provide the raw material to enable this judgement to be made. For, like the word of God itself, hermeneutics probes 'the thoughts and attitudes of the heart' ([Heb. 4:12](#)). It reveals the *pride* at the heart of all the above-named—situational, if not felt: that is, the effect and thrust of their teaching was deliberately to undermine and to reject the fellowship of the church at large, and to do so openly and apparently without concern. Yes, of course there may be new insights, even revolutionary new interpretations of the Scriptures. Please God! But hermeneutics

notices the difference between a Luther on the one [p. 223](#) hand, who argued for his position using the tools of common discourse, and never renounced his commitment to the church of Christ both past and present, and a Wrede on the other hand, who planted himself firmly in the soil of intellectual anti-supernaturalism and expected the church to join him there.

What is the fellowship within which biblical teaching is set? It is wider than the local church which listens. Potentially, it is as wide as biblical preaching. For when we rise to preach, we join in the company of *all* who, like us, have sought to hear, to absorb and to communicate the word of God. Potentially therefore, we may learn from them in the task, and they from us. This fellowship is signalled by the bookshelves in the preacher's office, where (hopefully!) a great cloud of witnesses from every generation and denomination surround the desk, sharing the fruits of their wisdom and experience, and urging him or her on to even deeper insight, with eyes fixed on Jesus.

Preaching crosses denominational boundaries, because the Book on which it focuses belongs to the whole church. What a tragedy, then, when denominational teaching forms an interpretative *grid* through which the text of Scripture is sieved. God's word is greater than all poor attempts to explain it in our own words, and the magnificent calling of the preacher is to let it speak with its own authentic voice, even if (especially if) it challenges our presuppositions.

I want to be that kind of preacher!

V TRUTH AND PEOPLE: THE PREACHER'S CULTURE

But preachers are not just members of the church. They are members of a human society which needs to be reconciled to God. The Puritan pastor Richard Baxter is famous for his comment that pastors need to know the book of the human heart as well as they know the book of the Lord God. We could put this another way and say that preachers need to understand their own cultures deeply, from the inside, so as to be able to relate the gospel appropriately to the needs of the world they serve.

And this is not just a matter of knowing what to say when it comes to 'the application' at the end of the sermon. It is more complex. To formulate the doctrine of the trinity, the church had to discover language to express the thoughts after which the imagination grasped. It was Tertullian who first used the expression 'Trinity', and who conjured up the words 'person' and 'substance' as *metaphors* to help us understand what kind of God we worship, if he really has acted in Christ as the gospel describes. Tertullian's use of these words (in Latin) was then refined and developed as Greek equivalents were explored and discussed by others.

Words were being drawn from the contemporary language-stock, already laden with meaning, and brought into new usage in connection with God. Many have already commented on the process involved here, which affected not just the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, but the whole re-expression of the biblical gospel in terms appropriate [p. 224](#) to Greek culture and thought-forms. Christians *needed* the doctrine of the Trinity for themselves, simply because they needed to know whom they were worshipping; but its development was part of a broad *missionary* movement out into Greek (and Latin) culture.

The church has been doing the same, ever since. Particularly in the modern period, with its great missionary movements, we have become familiar with the challenges and problems of *contextualisation*. This is a subject right at the heart of *hermeneutics*, based as it is on the Greek work *hermeneuo*, to 'interpret'. Hermeneutical discussion in this area centres on the question of *the relation of substance to expression*: we can glibly say that we

are in the business of expressing the unchanging gospel in ever-new language related to the changing needs of the world, but what is that ‘unchanging gospel’? Is it possible to put it into words? Or will it not be true that *every* set of words used to express it will be *less* than the truth it seeks to convey, and in fact chosen to express the truth for a particular time and culture?

This is an uncomfortable thought, but its truth is illustrated by the great attempts of the past to distill the essence of the gospel into succinct statements. They seem so dated now! and are so obviously in need of *expansion*, at least, to bring them into connection with the needs of our age.

Karl Barth, of course, applied this same thought to the Bible, also. It too, he maintained, is a culturally relative expression of God’s Word, a *witness to it* rather than an *expression of it*. Evangelical preachers will want to resist downgrading the status of the Scriptures in the church, but even so it is clear that God in his providence has given us words from himself deeply rooted in time and place. The preacher stands at the heart of the hermeneutical process, bridging the gap between then and now, and seeking the words which will re-express for people *now* the word that was so crucially spoken *then*.

This is challenging! And difficult. It is easy to fall back on accepted patterns, language tried and true, the clichés of Zion which reassure the faithful but puzzle outsiders. The challenge is to *understand so deeply* (point 1 above), and to *study so carefully* (point 2), and to *depend so humbly* (point 3), and to *reflect so widely* (point 4), and to *know so intimately* (this point), that new words will come freshly to express the grace and love of God with power for today.

‘Exposition’ is a great word. It speaks of *exposure* of the revelation of something that would otherwise be hidden. We preachers need to make sure that the *methods* we choose match the *goal* we seek—that of enabling the church and the world in our generation really to see the Christ who has gripped and won our hearts.

Thinking about hermeneutics has been a great help to me in my own preaching ministry, and it is my prayer that this essay will serve a similar purpose for brothers and sisters with the same great calling.

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Four Horizons in Preaching

Paul Windsor

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The author argues that relating the text to the people through the Preacher calls for the merging of four horizons, a task dependent on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He follows up this brief article with his own course outline for expository preaching which he uses in his classes.

Editor

It is not yet in our dictionaries, but one day it will be. *To re-invent*: ‘to return to the classical and redefine it in a way that demonstrates its usefulness in a contemporary context: to breathe life into a dying form ...’

Right back in the 1870s Phillips Brooks invented *the* classic definition of preaching: ‘the bringing of truth through a personality’. While today’s shaky convictions about preaching may suggest its imminent demise, it might be better for us to seek a re-invention—beginning with Brooks.

THE TRUTH

Brooks viewed the truth to be the fixed dimension in preaching. Whether it be in the form of the living word or as the written word, this truth imprisons us. The Christ-adoring explanation of biblical truth will never be eclipsed. ‘God still speaks through what he has spoken.’

For the preacher, the text is the ‘boss’. It sets the agenda as it did for Jesus on the road to Emmaus, for Ezra in the square before the Water Gate, and for Peter on the Day of Pentecost. It is the soil in which the digging is done and in which all thoughts are rooted. It is the file to open and then be ‘backed-up’ in the lives of all who process it.

The text is not so much the springboard from which we dive as the swimming pool into which we dive—and swim.

THE PERSONALITY

Brooks was right! There is more to preaching than explaining the truth. Such a one-dimensional vision must **P. 226** be buried. Preaching involves the preacher. With the media age spawning so many competitors for people’s senses, it is more critical than ever that a preacher’s explanation of the text transmit a personality that is compelling in its authenticity.

We need not be intimidated by this. It does not matter whether we live in 1870 or 1995, nothing will ever grab people’s ears more than someone who simply believes what they are saying and can communicate it with passion. The sterile reading of a manuscript with a monotonous voice is not good enough—not with people accustomed to the Peter Montgomerys of this world.

So as we preach, we must involve more of *ourselves* in our sermons. We need to dredge our life experience for stories of our encounters with God and with every human emotion and then in creative ways bring those into our preaching and thereby *bear witness* to the living God at work in the ragged edges of our lives.

THE LISTENER

The re-invention requires an expansion. Listeners are no longer the captive audience they were in 1870. In mind and in body, they are more prone to wander. How can they be engaged? In spirit and in emotion they are more inclined to self-absorption. How can they be lifted beyond themselves?

Audience-analysis becomes a key ingredient. We *will* need to work harder at introductions and conclusions as well as illustration and application. We *may* need to be briefer, less analytical, utilise fewer notes as well as the OHP, and include sermon ‘talkbacks’.

Truth no longer fascinates listeners. The biblical literacy index has never been lower, the theological instinct never more blunt. Never has systematic catechesis been needed more; and yet, sadly, never has it been wanted less by the people in our churches.

However, the more things change the more they remain the same. In every group of listeners in every era there will be the unconverted to be wakened, the self-satisfied to be humbled, the enquiring to be counselled, the convicted to be led to Christ, the young to be built up, the mature to be encouraged, and those in trouble to be directed.

Nothing accomplishes this diverse range of ministries better than faithful biblical preaching from a 'peopleperson' preacher. Whatever effort it takes to explain the text carefully, an equal amount will be required to earth it creatively in the lives of today's listeners.

THE WORLD

From the explicit to its implicit assumptions, the world is a different place from what it once was. The globe has shrunk. The fresh flush of the scientific revolution has paled. Information superhighways, satellite dishes (they are watching Oprah in village India even as you read), and ethnic mixing lubricates a pluralistic world in which tolerance replaces truth as the highest virtue.

Idolatry looks different now. Paganism is no longer tribal and [p. 227](#) syncretism no longer half-naked. A privileged position for Christianity in the market place of ideas has gone. Christendom is over. The preacher no longer features on the 'top twenty' list of most trusted professions, let alone heading it!

It has been said that when people stop believing in God it is not that they believe nothing, they believe *anything*. Ne'er a truer word! For the postmodern, individual conversions come easy and often—be it for toothpaste or for 'truth'.

Brooks knew none of this. Never has Bonhoeffer's call for 'worldly' preaching been more urgent, or Barth's 'Bible in one hand, newspaper in the other' maxim more in need of re-invention! But it begins not so much with what is in our hands as how it is with our eyes. Like Paul at Athens who saw the tragic amidst the tourist, like Jesus who saw the harassed amidst the crowds, we too must see and perceive. Today, preachers must be thinkers with good eyesight.

When confronted with crisis, the church too quickly looks to update its techniques rather than strengthen its trembling convictions. Such has been the case with preaching. Preaching is no longer a bringing of truth through a personality. It is the bringing of truth through a personality in a way that engages listeners living in our world.

Preaching is multi-dimensional. While exegesis begins with the text and is controlled by the text, it must extend to the preacher, the listener, and the world. All four must be exegeted. While God's story provides the main plot-line, there are three other stories to weave into the narrative.

Preaching's impact occurs as its four component horizons fuse together in the course of the sermon under the direction of the Spirit. After all, it is the Spirit who inspires the text, anoints the preacher, illuminates the listener and convicts the world.

An Apologetic for Expository Preaching

- I. Some definitions that explain exposition**
- II. A biblical basis that endorses exposition**
 - A. a notion revived ... through exposition: [Nehemiah 8](#)
 - B. a duo restored ... through exposition: [Luke 24](#)
 - C. a church ignited ... through exposition: [Acts 2](#)
- III. An historical record that illustrates exposition**
various case studies: Chrysostom, Puritans, Charles Simeon etc
- IV. The theological convictions that undergird exposition**
 - A. a conviction about God
 - B. a conviction about Scripture
 - C. a conviction about the Church *p. 228*
 - D. a conviction about the Pastorate
 - E. a conviction about Preaching
- V. The re-visioning that updates exposition**
{NB This is the section in which I develop my Four Horizons material}
 - A. the truth
 - B. the personality
 - C. the listener
 - D. the world
- VI. The needs, in the church, that require exposition**
 - A. where there is division, exposition will help build harmony
 - B. where there is superficiality, exposition will help build maturity
 - C. where things are stagnant, exposition will help initiate ministry
 - D. where things lack direction, exposition helps establish an authority
- VII. The freedoms, in the pastor/teacher, that accompany exposition**
 - A. The freedom of being restricted to biblical truth
 - B. The freedom to address sensitive pastoral issues
 - C. The freedom to cripple our hobbyhorses
 - D. The freedom from unnecessary counselling
 - E. The freedom to be personally restored
 - F. The freedom to be faithful, rather than successful
 - G. The freedom to see our congregation enthusiastic about the Word
 - H. The freedom to be prophetic
- VIII. The pain, in our post-christian society, that aches for exposition**
- IX. The variety of biblical genre that diversifies exposition**
 - A. Exposition which is deductive
 - B. Exposition which is inductive
 - C. Exposition which is story
- X. The observations that reveal exposition**
 - A. A Sight
 - B. A Sound
 - C. A Movement
- XI. A bibliography that further enriches convictions about exposition**

The Devotional Use of the Bible

Walter C. Kaiser Jr.

Reprinted with Permission from An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics by Walter C Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva.

This article draws attention to the importance of Inductive Bible Study as foundational to personal piety and application to one's everyday life. This devotional use of the Scriptures is widely used among evangelicals for personal devotion, in small group discussions and for neighbourhood evangelism. Its function is to let the text speak to the reader rather than the reader mastering the text. The author emphasizes the need for confidence in the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit and in belief in the perspicuity of Scripture sufficient for salvation and growth in Christ. Learning to meditate on the Scriptures is becoming a lost art and must be recovered. Perhaps it is the churches in Asia that will pioneer the skill of meditating upon the Word of God.

Editor

The art and discipline of using the Bible in one's life is fast becoming a lost habit of the heart, mind, and soul. For those who still do attempt to maintain daily devotional practice, it may frequently involve reading a half page of heavily illustrated comments in a devotional guide printed on very small pages, easily digested in a matter of minutes, and ostensibly centred on a verse, clause, or phrase of Scripture. Unfortunately, the biblical portions, meagre as they are, are frequently detached from their scriptural contexts and often reflect little or no connection with the purpose that they originally held in their canonical settings.

If this problem is more acute in recent years than before, it certainly is not a new issue for the body of Christ. Near the beginning of this century, Wilbert W. White, founder [p. 230](#) of a seminar in New York, spotted this same weakness in the Bible reading and study habits of that day. In an attempt to meet that need, he developed what has become known as the inductive method of Bible study. Dr. White's principal goal was to train readers of the Bible in developing for themselves, a way that they could independently gather from the text of Scripture original ideas that would help them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, it was his hope that those who had discovered this new method of systematically and inductively gathering from the text of Scripture its teachings would go out and teach others also, thereby causing the benefits of this new devotional use of the Bible to expand.

In time, this inductive method became quite famous, so that today there are a host of users of this approach, many of whom perhaps have not so much as heard of Wilbert White. Without it being called the inductive method today, it is especially noticeable in the parachurch ministries of the last four or five decades and in several Bible study guides, especially those that have been aimed at the campus ministries in the western world. This method has honed the special patience of the reader, who carefully sits with a text and steadily observes it until the text has mastered the observer, rather than the observer mastering the text. Whether a strict inductive method is followed or not, believers ought to give serious attention to their devotional use of the Scripture.

DEFINITION

The devotional method of studying the Bible is rooted in a strong desire to find in the scriptural texts solid applications to one's everyday life. Such study is not motivated by intellectual, historical, or critical curiosity; instead, it involves a strong commitment to seeing changes in one's own attitudes, values, and actions.

The terms *devotion* and *devotional method* are linked with the verb *to devote*, which in *Webster's Dictionary* is defined as a solemn act of dedication involving the giving of one's self wholly, and the focus of one's attention is centred completely on the other. Thus the major goal in the exercise of the devotional reading of Scripture is not the mastery of God but God's mastery of the reader, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as each reader uses the Word of God as a challenge to making progress in Christian growth and fruit.

One volume that has had an enormous amount of influence in the very area being discussed is by Merrill C. Tenney, the late dean and professor of New Testament at Wheaton Graduate School of Theology: *Galatians: Charter of Christian Liberty*. In this wonderful anthology of the different ways one may approach the study of the biblical text, Tenney defined the devotional study of the Bible as 'not so much a technique as a spirit; it is the spirit of eagerness which seeks the mind of God; it is the spirit of humility which listens to the voice of God; it is the spirit of adventure which pursues earnestly the will of God; it p. 231 is the spirit of adoration which rests in the presence of God.'¹

The Bible itself urges believers to enter into regular discipline of approaching the Word of God in order that each person might be daily refreshed by the instruction, encouragement, rebuke, and guidance that is to be found in that Word. Perhaps the best-known text encouraging this kind of exposure to the Word of God is the Word the Lord gave to Joshua as he took over the reins of leadership: 'Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you might be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful' ([Josh. 1:8](#)). This text practically defines the devotional approach in its entirety. Devotional study must be regular ('day and night'), reflective ('meditate on it'), retentive ('be careful to do everything written in it'), and regulated ('do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth').

The Scripture was not intended to be the special province of scholars and professional clergy; it was directed to the people themselves. Indeed, one of the central issues in the Reformation itself was the issue of the clarity of the Scriptures and their availability to all readers.

THE CLARITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

If all believers are encouraged to use the Bible devotionally, there must be a presumption that the words of Scripture are perspicuous, or clear, enough that all can understand what they say without needing the counsel of a scholar at their elbow to instruct them. Is this a reasonable presumption? Can we ensure that such readers will not fall into error when they wander off into the full canon of Scripture, reading the text for themselves and according to their own insights and understandings?

No one was more forceful in taking a stand that the Bible is plain in its meaning, and that it should therefore be accessible to all, than Martin Luther. His most vigorous affirmation of this principle can be found in his book *On the Bondage of the Will* written in response to a work entitled *On the Freedom of the Will* by the highly respected scholar Erasmus. According to Erasmus:

¹ Merrill, C. Tenney, *Galatians: Charter of Christian Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), pp. 207–8.

There are some things which God has willed that we should contemplate, as we venerate himself, in mystic silence; and, moreover, there are many passages in the sacred volumes about which many commentators have made guesses, but no one has finally cleared up their obscurity; as the distinction between the divine persons, the conjunction of the divine and human nature in Christ, the unforgivable sin; *yet there are other things which God has willed to be most plainly evident*, and such are the precepts for the good life. This is the Word of God, which is not to be bought in the highest heaven, not in distant lands overseas, but it is close at hand, in our mouth and in our heart. These truths must be learned by all, but the rest are more properly committed to God, and it is more religious to worship them, being unknown, p. 232 than to discuss them, being insoluble.²

Though Luther at first seemed to disagree violently with Erasmus, implying that everything in Scripture was plain and equal available, he eventually settled down and allowed that there were certain kinds of obscurities in Scripture. 'I admit, of course, that there are many texts in the Scriptures that are obscure and abstruse, not because of the majesty of their subject matter [as Erasmus had argued], but because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar; but these texts in no way hinder a knowledge of the subject matter of Scripture.'³

In the end, the argument between Luther and Erasmus was not over the application of learning and scholarship, or even over whether the texts of Scripture were sufficiently clear so that the main message of the Bible could be understood by the average reader. At the bottom of all this debate was this question: To what degree was the average reader, indeed the whole church, obliged to submit to tradition and the official pronouncements of the pope for the proper exposition of scripture? To this question the Reformers shouted a loud, 'None, for the essential meaning of the message of the Bible!' There was no need of anyone's history of tradition to interpret the Scriptures; the Bible is sufficiently perspicuous without it.

What, then, was meant when the Scriptures were declared to be clear and perspicuous for all? Simply this: the Bible was understood to be clear and perspicuous on all things that were necessary for our salvation and growth in Christ. It was not a claim either that everything in the Bible was equally plain or that there were no mysteries or areas that would not defy one generation of Bible readers or another. If readers would exert the effort one generally put into understanding a literary work, it was asserted that they would gain an understanding that would be adequate and sufficient to guide them into a saving relationship and a life of obedience with their Lord.

This definition on the of Scripture was represented in many Protestant works shortly after the Reformation. The best known is paragraph 7 on the doctrine of Scripture in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; *yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation*, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them (my emphasis).

More is indeed at stake here than the mere understanding of the words in and of themselves. Even when ordinary laypersons are able to gain an adequate and sufficient understanding of what is being said in the Bible, there is the other dimension of the

² E.G. Rupp *et al.*, eds., *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, LCC 17 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), pp. 39-40 (my emphasis).

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

reception and application of these matters to one's D. Leuner, 'Judaism in the World Religions'. J. N. D. Anderson (ed.), *Christianity and World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 59. [p. 233](#) own life and heart. Does this not have an effect on the issue of the clarity of Scripture?

THE ILLUMINATING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

One of the key texts that must be considered here is the pivotal statement of the apostle Paul in [1 Corinthians 2:14](#): 'The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.' While working on my doctoral program, a most unusual experience took place in one of the seminars I attended that graphically sealed this text on my heart and mind.

A distinguished professor, recently retired from Yale University, was offering a special seminar entitled 'Origins of Christianity' at the university I was attending on the East coast. One day the class sidetracked the professor into discussing his understanding of the meaning of [Romans 1-5](#). With unusual eloquence and masterful exegesis, he walked through these chapters with a precise deftness, affirming that everyone in the class had sinned and therefore had come short of the glory of God. But those who would believe in God's sacrifice of his Son for their sins, 'would not just be made righteous' no, they would be declared righteous by a God who justified sinners, 'much as a judge did who dismissed a case that had failed to prove its defendant guilty'. Rarely have I ever heard such a bold and fair treatment of this text of Paul.

After two hours, however, the spell was suddenly broken when one of the Jewish students in the class who, along with many others, had sat uncomfortably through this long and, to them, seemingly parochial tirade, blurted out (amid all the nervous smoking that was going on in the seminar by now), 'Do I get the impression that the professor of this class believes this stuff?'

Immediately the professor responded in a scoffing tone, 'Who said anything about believing it? I am just arguing that this is what Paul said. I'm sick and tired of hearing the younger neoorthodox scholars say, 'This is what this or that text means to *me*.' I was trained under the old liberal theology; we learned what *Paul* said. We just don't happen to believe what Paul said!'

I then began to perceive what Paul was driving at in [1 Corinthians 2:14](#). This professor did not 'welcome' (as *dechetai* could be translated) the things that he knew well enough to teach, practically without a flaw, for almost two hours. It is thus clear that the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit, in illuminating the hearts and minds of those who hear spiritual truths, is not to be treated lightly in this whole area of biblical interpretation, especially in the area of the application of those things that are taught in the Bible.

Some have felt that there might be two separate types of logic in the world: one for the believer and the other for the unbeliever. But Paul makes it clear in [Romans 1-2](#) that those who are unconverted understand the essential truth about God well enough to condemn themselves, since they have not acted on [p. 234](#) what they do know about God. And [1 Corinthians 2:14](#) adds the thought that, without the indwelling ministry and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, such persons will neither welcome nor embrace the realities found in the biblical text. Thus, one of the unique roles of the Holy Spirit is to convict, convince, and arouse sluggish hearts by applying the truths perceived in the text of Scripture to the lives of individuals. As a further aid to placing oneself in a position where the ministry of the Holy Spirit can work more effectively, Scripture calls upon the reader to ponder and meditate carefully on what is being said in the biblical text.

THE ACT OF MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE

The art and practice of meditating on the Scriptures plays an important role in one's devotional use of the Bible. Meditation is presented in Scripture as an act of worship, one that involves communion with God. Instead its being an avenue of escape, wherein the individual is swallowed up, absorbed, or mingled with the divine in some sort of unspecified mystical process, as it so frequently is taught in many eastern religions or some of the modern western cults, meditation in Scripture can be carefully defined as to its objects, its methods of practice, and its results.

We can get a good idea of the meaning of meditation by examining the contexts where the concept and words of meditation are found. Especially prominent is [Psalm 77](#), with references to meditation in three of its verses. The psalm falls into two parts: verses [1-9](#) express Asaph's sorrow and distress; verses [10-20](#) report how he rose above these problems. In the time of his distress, and through sleepless nights, he mused or meditated on the Lord (v. [3](#)). In his disquietude, the psalmist recalled happier days in the past (v. [5](#)), and in the long night hours his heart mused (or meditated, v. [6](#)) on what he had learned of God from his Word during the good times of life. Would God cast him off forever? he wondered. But then in verse [10](#) he suddenly recalled God's former deeds. At that point he decided that he would 'meditate on all [God's] works and consider [or ponder, meditate on] all [God's] mighty deeds' (v. [12](#)). Thus, the psalmist's deep despondency gave way to praise for God's deliverance when he focused on meditating on the works of God. This is exactly the desired outcome of all devotional reading of the text of Scripture.

Meditation is a function of the heart, that is, of the whole person. Such meditation is stressed in [Psalm 19:14](#); [49:3](#); [Proverbs 15:28](#); and [Isaiah 33:18](#). The goal of meditation, according to [Psalm 49:3](#), is understanding, not, as is so frequently stressed in Oriental religions and some of the cults of our day, self-abnegation. In order to meditate, one must not try to be emptied of oneself, so that allegedly the divine can flow through one's being almost in a pantheistic way. Rather, one is to bring one's whole person—body, soul, and mind—to focus on God, his works, and especially his Word, which tells about both his person and his work. [p. 235](#)

Based on the sheer number of references, it would appear that the meditation encouraged by Scripture finds its basic focus in the Word of God. As we have noted, [Joshua 1:8](#) commands meditation on the book of the law all through the day and the night. The Psalter itself begins with a blessing for the person who delights in the law of the Lord and who meditates on that law day and night ([Ps. 1:1-2](#)). Repeatedly, [Psalm 119](#) urges its readers to 'meditate on [God's] precepts' (v. [15, 78](#)), his decrees (v. [23, 48](#)), his law (v. [97](#)), his statutes (v. [99](#)), and his promises (v. [148](#)). The mind of the meditator is not to be blank and empty; it is to be filled with Scripture, the Word of God. Accordingly, when the law of God is in one's heart, that person's feet do not slip, because 'the mouth of the righteous man utters [or ponders] wisdom' ([Ps. 37:30-31](#)). That is what it means to meditate on the Word of God as it is read devotion-ally. The result is that the Word of God remains constantly in the heart of believers in every situation that they find themselves in: when they sit down in their houses, get up to walk, lie down in the evening, or get up in the morning ([Deut. 6:6-9](#); [Prov. 3:22-24](#); [6:22](#)).

CONCLUSION

No one method of studying the Bible can claim exclusive rights over all other methods. In fact, Howard Vos identified some seventeen different approaches to studying the Bible in

his book *Effective Bible Study*.⁴ True, some of his seventeen methods involved more than one approach; however the point is that one may undertake one's devotional study of the text using approaches such as the biographical method, the topical method, the doctrinal method, the inductive method, or the analytical method. No one method is a magical wand that removes the need for using one's mind or for accepting the hard discipline that is needed in all these methods.

In fact, it would be well for readers of Scripture to vary their devotional use of Scripture from time to time. One should never be so bound that there is nor room for freedom of experimentation and enlarging the sphere of one's investigation. The only caution needed is that one should always be careful to let the text first say what it wants to say before we attempt to apply that text into our contemporary situations. It will always be helpful if we use a pen or pencil to pull together what it is that we think we are seeing in the text. A notebook recording our observations will complete the tools required, especially if we are going to draw together the various pieces into some organization that gives us larger overviews of what we are looking at.

Finally, one of the best ways to continually mull over a text is to select one or more verses from the passage we are reflecting on and to commit it to memory. There in the memory it can be stored for further moments of thought and reflection to be called upon for application in the various vicissitudes of life.

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The Use of Typology in Preaching

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In this article the author notes that there is a renewed interest in typology in scholarly circles but little in preaching. He shows that from the early Fathers to today typology has been rightly used and wrongly abused. He charts the difference between Typology and Allegory and suggests four essential characteristics of its right use, ending with a discussion use of typology in selected Psalms.

Editor

No interpretive principle in 20th century preaching has been more neglected than typology. One has to strain the memory to find any mention or example of it from the pulpit today. Reasons for this omission are varied, although one major factor is the deficiency of teaching the method to seminarians. Frankly, most students of the Bible have no idea what typology is, and the way it affects biblical interpretation is mostly ignored. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the reader to typology and to demonstrate its

⁴ Howard Vos, *Effective Bible Study*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956).

importance for the proper exegesis of Scripture. In addition, although the last few decades have seen a significant increase in interest in typology in scholarly circles,¹ that concern has not found its way to the pulpit. We hope to stir some pastoral interest in it. We begin our p. 237 study with a presentation of a definition of typology.

DEFINITION OF TYPOLOGY

The Greek term *tupos* (from the verb *tupto*), from which the word ‘type’ is derived, occurs sixteen times in the New Testament.² It principally signifies an impression left by a thrust or blow.³ That meaning is clearly demonstrated in [John 20:25](#), in which Thomas refuses to believe in the resurrection of Christ ‘unless I see the nail *tupon* (imprints left by a blow) in his hands’. From that central signification, several New Testament usages arise. The word *tupos* is used of statues which are ‘copies’ or ‘patterns’ of gods (see, [Acts 7:43](#)). It is also frequently employed to indicate a believer’s lifestyle as a ‘pattern’ or ‘example’ for another’s (especially see, [Philp. 3:17](#); [1 Thess. 1:7](#)). Finally, *tupos* is used of Old Testament persons, events, or things which prefigure or fore-shadow New Testament persons, events, or things. The judgments on Israel during the wilderness wanderings are typical warnings of what will happen to the Christian if he behaves in like manner ([1 Cor. 10:6–11](#)). *Tupos* maybe either the primary pattern or the secondary image of the pattern, although ‘type’ is normally applied to the pattern and ‘antitype’ to the copy. Thus, Adam is a type of Christ, and Christ is the antitype of Adam.⁴

Based on a study of scriptural usage, a type may be defined as follows: it is ‘a preordained representative relationship which certain persons, events, and institutions bear to corresponding persons, events and institutions occurring at a later time in salvation history’.⁵ In other words, the New Testament writers often see in certain Old Testament persons, events and institutions, prefigurations of New Covenant truths. Thus, the New Testament teaches that Jonah ([Matt. 12:39–41](#)), Adam ([Rom. 5:14](#)), Solomon ([Matt. 12:42](#)), David ([Lk. 6:3–4](#)), and Moses ([Heb. 3](#)) are all types of Jesus Christ. In addition, Jesus is understood as the new tabernacle (see [In. 1:14](#), in which the common translation ‘dwelt’ is literally ‘tabernacled’; cf, also, [Rev. 21:3](#)), the new temple ([Mk. 14:58](#)), and the new manna ([In. 6:32](#)).

During the wilderness wanderings, the people of Israel, because of their rebellious hearts, repeatedly murmur against God and Moses (see, for instance, [Exod. 14:11–12](#);

¹ Recent studies on the subject of typology include E. Earle Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981 reprint); R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1971); L. Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982 reprint); G. W. H. Lampe, ‘Typological Exegesis’, *Theology* 56 (1953): 201–208; G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology* (London, 1957); and H. A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981). I would like to thank Jessie Bible of Westminster Theological Seminary for reading an earlier draft of this article.

² [John 20:25](#) (2); [Acts 7:43](#); [7:44](#); [23:25](#); [Rom. 5:14](#); [6:17](#); [1 Cor. 10:6](#); [10:11](#); [Philp. 3:17](#); [1 Thess. 1:7](#); [2 Thess. 3:9](#); [1 Tim. 4:12](#); [Heb. 2:7](#); [Heb. 8:5](#); [1 Pet. 5:3](#).

³ Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, p. 126.

⁴ The LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament from the 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.) understands *tupos* in the same way. It is used, for example, in [Exod. 25:40](#) where God commands Moses to fashion the tabernacle after the ‘pattern’ shown him on Mount Sinai. Clearly, the Lord provided Moses with some type of blueprint or example which was to be copied in the making of the Tent of Meeting.

⁵ Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, p. 184. In reality, the basic thrust of this definition was first presented by Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974 reprint), p. 336.

[16:2-3](#); [17:2-3](#)). As a result God sends 'fiery' serpents to bite many of [p. 238](#) the people so they would taste the bitter fruits of their treasonous spirits ([Num. 21:4-9](#)). Eventually, through divine grace, Moses is commanded by Yahweh to set up a pole or standard in the middle of the Israelite camp upon which he was to affix a bronze serpent. Whoever was bitten by a serpent needed only look up to the bronze serpent, and he would be healed.⁶ Jesus teaches in the New Testament that this Old Covenant event is typical of his own death on the cross. He states: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in him have eternal life' ([In. 3:14-15](#)). The points of correspondence between the two events are evident: (1) The raising up of both the serpent and Jesus on a standard; (2) the life given to those who respond to the object raised up.⁷

Another striking example of typology appears in [Matthew 12:39-41](#), when Jesus answers the scribes and the Pharisees who ask him for a sign:

An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Jesus is here claiming that the Old Testament story of Jonah the prophet is typical of his own work and ministry during New Testament times. The point of the correspondence between the experience of Jonah and that of Christ is the Prophet's three day ordeal inside the fish and his miraculous deliverance. This serves as a prefiguration of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. However, the typology consists of even more, as R. T. France explains:

The transition to the preaching of Jonah and the repentance of the Ninevites is not a *non sequitur*: Jonah was a 'sign' to the Ninevites in that he appeared as one delivered from death. It was the knowledge of this which attested his preaching and caused their repentance. The point of the comparison with Jonah lies, therefore, in 'the authorization of the divine messenger by deliverance from death'.⁸ Jesus' preaching, which his hearers are rejecting, will in due course be attested by a still greater deliverance; therefore their condemnation will be the greater.⁹

The trials and temptations of the Israelites in the wilderness and their failures to remain faithful are foreshadowings of the New Testament temptation account of Jesus ([Matt. 4:1-11](#)). Satan's three testings of [p. 239](#) Jesus in the Judean wilderness are specific antitypical references to the three trials which the Israelites underwent in their wilderness wanderings. The first temptation is an appeal to Jesus' physical desires and, specifically, his need for food ([Matt. 4:1-4](#)). Observe that Jesus answers the tempter by quoting [Deuteronomy 8:3](#), a passage Moses had used to warn Israel when she rebelled against God because she lacked food. Jesus, therefore, suffers the same trial as Israel did

⁶ This is an instance of dramatic irony, in which the very image of what punished the people (serpents) is set up to be the channel through which divine grace and healing may flow down.

⁷ See, Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, p. 237.

⁸ The quote is from Joachim Jeremias, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: 1964), p. 409.

⁹ France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, pp. 44-45.

in the wilderness; yet, unlike Israel Jesus does not rebel or murmur. Instead, Christ trusts that God will provide food in his own time and own way. In the second temptation, Satan challenges Jesus to throw himself off the temple and thereby be spectacularly saved by God ([Matt. 4:5-7](#)).¹⁰ Jesus replies by quoting [Deuteronomy 6:16](#), a passage Moses had used in reference to Massah where the Israelites put God to the test because they had no water. Again, Jesus is tempted in the same manner as Israel, yet he does not yield to temptation as Israel did. He remains firm. Finally, Satan offers the world's riches if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus responds by quoting Moses in [Deuteronomy 6:13](#), 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'. Moses had spoken these words against Israel's idolatry of the golden calf at Mount Sinai. Jesus is tested with idolatry just as Israel had been, but he does not worship riches or Satan—he remains faithful to the One True God.

The principal teaching of the above type is Jesus' fulfilment of what Israel failed to keep. Whereas Israel rebelled in the wilderness and did not trust in Yahweh, Jesus in his wilderness tribulations remained faithful to God. Jesus is thus able to claim victory over Satan.

Much more typology may be gleaned from the Scriptures. A major problem for the preacher is how to recognize typological references when they occur. But just as important is how to recognize when the principle of typology is not valid for interpretation. Such discrimination is crucial because without it one may be easily led into erroneous exegesis. Danger lurks at every bend. Therefore, the interpreter needs to be armed with clear-cut distinctives of the nature of typology—and that is what we now turn to consider.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE

Four principal characteristics of a type may be identified.¹¹ First of all, typology must be firmly grounded in history; both the type and the antitype must be actual historical **P. 240** events, persons, or institutions.¹² The historical aspect of typology distinguishes typology from other literary genre, particularly allegory. Whereas typology is historically oriented, allegory teaches that the literal, historical sense of a passage does not exhaust the divinely-purposed meaning of a passage. According to the allegorist, each passage in Scripture has a deeper spiritual and mystical sense than the mere literal, historical meaning.¹³ For example, Herod's massacre of Bethlehem's children, recorded in [Matthew 2:16](#), is allegorized in the following manner: 'The fact that only the children of two years

¹⁰ As an aside, Satan here quotes [Ps. 91:11-12](#) out of context. If one reads the following verse (v. [13](#)), it is apparent that [Ps. 91](#) calls for Satan's (serpent's) own destruction.

¹¹ Frankly speaking, what specific qualities are inherent to a type is a matter of scholarly debate. Few theologians agree on the necessity of each attribute. See, for example, Terry, *Hermeneutics*, p. 338, who argues that an essential aspect of typology is prediction or prophetic revelation. More recent studies, such as France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, pp. 39-40, and D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* (Downers Grove: Inter-varsity, 1976), p. 258, deny that the typology is prophecy in any form.

¹² C. H. Dodd, in 'A problem of Interpretation', *Studiorum Novi Testament; Societas II* (1951): 17, comments: 'The writers of the New Testament, then, by their attitude to the older Scriptures, authorize an historical understanding of them as an indispensable element in their interpretation and application to contemporary situations.'

¹³ Allegory is often understood to say that each passage of Scripture has a four-fold sense: 'The letter shows things done; what you are to believe, the allegoric; what you are to do, the moral; what you are to hope, the anagogic.'

old and under were murdered while those of three presumably escaped is meant to teach us that those who hold the Trinitarian faith will be saved whereas Binitarians and Unitarians will undoubtedly perish.¹⁴ Such are the speculations which arise from the use of allegory, which is ahistorical, unlike typology.

A *second* essential trait of typology is notable resemblance or similarity in one or more ways between the type and the antitype. The correspondence 'must be both historical (i.e., a correspondence of situation and event) and theological (i.e., an embodiment of the same principle of God's working)'.¹⁵ Lack of real correspondence either historically or theologically reduces typology to allegory. Good examples of this reduction are capricious allegorizations found for [Song of Solomon 1:13](#), which says, 'My beloved to me is a pouch of myrrh which lies all night between my breasts'. Rashi believes the passage really refers to the tabernacle which lies between the two cherubim. No, says Bernard, the crucifixion of Christ is represented here, where Jesus hangs between the two criminals. Cyril disagrees, arguing that the verse clearly alludes to Old and New Testaments with Christ in the middle. In truth, none of these interpretations holds any correlation, either historically or theologically, between the [Song of Songs 1:13](#) and its supposed fulfilment.¹⁶

On the other hand, consider [1 Corinthians 5:7b](#) which demonstrates a real correspondence between a type and an antitype. The verse says, 'For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed'. The apostle is here claiming that the Old Testament event of Passover ([Exod. 12](#)) is typical of the New Testament [p. 241](#) event of Christ's death on the cross. At the Passover event, lamb's blood was shed and smeared on the doors of the Israelite houses, so that when God came to smite the Egyptians he would pass-by or pass-over the Israelites. The blood of the lamb thus served to cover the Israelites from God's wrath and fury. The points of resemblance between this Old Testament event and Christ's death on the cross are clear: (1) the actions of the shed blood of the Paschal lamb and of Christ covered Israel (i.e., the 'true Israel') from God's hand of justice and wrath (historical); (2) the lamb's blood provided deliverance for both Old Covenant Israel as well as New Covenant Israel (theological). Only when there exists both a historical and a theological correspondence, as in the above example, can typology be identified correctly in Scripture.

A *third* requisite quality of typology is the antitype's intensification of the type. As L. Goppelt points out, 'things are to be interpreted typologically only if they are considered to be divinely ordained representations or types of future realities that will be even greater and more complex. If the antitype does not represent a heightening of the type, if it is merely a repetition of the type, then it can be called typology only in certain instances and in a limited way.'¹⁷ Thus, the idea that Jesus' death is a typological fulfilment of the Exodus passover event is feasible because the salvation Jesus wrought on the cross is much greater and more complete than God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Israel's redemption from the bondage in Egypt is merely physical and temporary, but the New Testament believer's redemption from the bondage of sin is physical, spiritual, and eternal.

¹⁴ Lamp and Woolcombe, *Essays on Typology*, pp. 31–32.

¹⁵ France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, p. 41.

¹⁶ Another example is cited by France: 'The lack of real historical correspondence reduces typology to allegory, as when the scarlet thread hung in the window by Rahab is taken as a prefiguration of the blood of Christ' (*Jesus and the Old Testament*, p. 4).

¹⁷ Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, p. 18.

The *fourth* and final necessary feature of typology is ‘there must be evidence that the type was designed and appointed of God to represent the thing typified’.¹⁸ Van Mildert explains it in the following way: ‘It is essential to a type, in the scriptural adaption of the term, that there should be competent evidence of the divine intention in the correspondence between it and the antitype—a matter not to be left to the imagination of the expositor to discover, but resting on some solid proof from Scripture itself.’¹⁹ There is, however, debate among scholars as to what precisely constitutes scriptural evidence of typology. On one extreme are those who agree with Bishop Marsh’s famous view that only those persons, things, or institutions are to be regarded as typical which are specifically designated [p. 242](#) in the New Testament.²⁰ On the other hand are some interpreters (‘hyper-typers’) who see typology on almost every page of Scripture.²¹ The majority of commentators hold to a more moderate view: ‘For a resemblance to be a type there must be some evidence of divine affirmation of the corresponding type and antitype, although such affirmation need not be formally stated’.²²

In summary, the four essential characteristics of a type are: (1) the type and the antitype must be historical persons, events, or institutions; (2) there must be some notable points of correspondence between the type and the antitype; (3) there must be an intensification of the antitype from the type; and, (4) some evidence that the type is ordained by God to foreshadow the antitype must be present. These are unchanging distinctives which provide proper exegetical boundaries in typological interpretation. Without these four features in a passage, the pastor must be aware that typology is not likely present.

DIVISIONS OF TYPOLOGY

Different types or prefigurations in the Bible may be classified according to three major categories, as follows:

1. Types of Persons. In this category, we are primarily concerned with the typological application of Old Testament individuals, particularly as it pertains to Jesus Christ. For example, Solomon as the son of David and a great teacher of wisdom is a type of Christ, who is the greatest teacher of wisdom ever (see, [Matt. 12:42](#)). Adam is also regarded as a type of Christ. ([Rom. 5:19](#)). Jesus is as well foreshadowed by Melchizedek ([Heb. 7:1-17](#)), Jonah ([Matt. 12:39-41](#)), Elisha ([Matt. 14:15-21](#)), Elijah ([Lk. 4:24-27](#)), and Isaiah ([Matt. 13:13](#); [Heb. 2:13](#)). Others in the New Testament are the subjects of typical relations, such as John the Baptist (see, [2 Kings 1:8](#) and

¹⁸ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 337. Patrick Fairbairn comments regarding this characteristic: ‘It must not be any character, action, or institution occurring in Old Testament Scripture, but such as only had their ordination of God, and were designed by him to foreshadow and prepare for the better things of the Gospel’ (*The Typology of Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963 reprint], p. 46).

¹⁹ W. Van Mildert, ‘An Inquiry into the General principles of Scripture Interpretation’, Sermon at the University of Oxford, 1814. Quoted by Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 337–338.

²⁰ Bishop Marsh, *Lectures on the Criticism and Interpretation of the Bible* (London: 1838), p. 373.

²¹ In this regard, the writings of A. W. Pink should be considered. Although much of Pink’s work with typology is quite good, there are times when he imagines a type that was never meant to be. For example, in his *Life of David* (Swengal, PA: Reiner, 1976 reprint), pp. 216–218, Pink sees portrayed in the actions of the Egyptian slave in [1 Samuel 30:11-15](#) as ‘a beautiful type of a lost sinner saved by Christ’. In reality, there is no indication that typology is at work in this scene. Pink is reading into the text at that point.

²² Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 186.

- cf. [Matt. 3:4](#)) and Judas (see, [Acts 1:20](#), in which the traitor is typified by David's enemies in the Psalms).
2. Types of Events. Under this heading are simply Old Testament events that foreshadow or adumbrate New Testament events. Thus, the episode of God bringing Israel out of Egypt in order to bring her to Canaan ([Hos. 11:1](#)) is a type of God calling the youthful Jesus from Egypt to Palestine ([Matt. 2:15](#)). The Passover in [Exodus 12](#), which served to deliver Israel out of bondage, is a foreshadowing of Christ's death that delivers the 'true Israel' out of bondage to sin p. 243 ([1 Cor. 5:7](#)). As already mentioned, the raising of the brazen serpent in [Numbers 21](#) is typical of Christ's death on the cross ([Jn. 3:14-15](#)). The plagues that God hurled against Egypt ([Exod. 7-12](#)) prefigure the plagues God will bring on the wicked in the end-times ([Rev. 8:7-12](#)).
 3. Types of Things. This category includes Old Testament offices and institutions that adumbrate later New Testament offices and institutions (especially those foreshadowing the person and work of Jesus). One example is Jesus serving as the eternal high priest ([Heb. 9:11](#)). Another instance is the apostle Peter's identification of the church as the New Israel ([1 Pet. 2:9-10](#)). Regarding the office of prophet, Moses is a type of Christ ([Deut. 18:15](#)).

EXAMPLES OF THE PREACHER: TYPOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Examples of typology based upon prefigurations from the Book of Psalms abound in the New Testament. In fact, no book from the Old Testament has been typologically interpreted by the apostolic authors as frequently as the Psalter. We will limit ourselves here to a brief discussion of only a few instances in the Psalms in order to give the reader a mere taste of the richness of the material.

Psalm 2

[Psalm 2](#) is a royal Messianic psalm which appears to celebrate the recent coronation of the Israelite king on Mount Zion. Many nations who have been subjects of Israel see an opportunity to rebel against a new king with little experience. So the nations plan, plot, and devise how to succeed in revolution (v. [1-3](#)). The psalmist warns that such thoughts and actions will come to nought, for it is God who is the true sovereign of Israel; indeed, it is he who installed the king and gave him 'the nations (as) your inheritance' (v. [8](#)). Finally, the countries are exhorted to yield and not to attempt such foolish endeavour. Rather, they should submit to and worship the Holy One of Israel (v. [10-12](#)).

Who is the king that the Lord installs on Mount Zion? And, who are the nations that rebel against his rule? Can the historical context of [Psalm 2](#) be accurately determined? The first thing to take into account is that the Scriptures teach that David authored [Psalm 2](#). Consider the following Lukan account:

Who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say,

**'Why did the Gentiles rage,
And the peoples devise futile things?
The kings of the earth took their stand
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord, and against his Christ'**

(Acts, [4:25-26](#)).

Here the disciples introduce a quote of [Psalm 2; 1–2](#) with the straightforward declaration that David had written it. On that basis one might rightly conclude that David is speaking of himself in [Psalm 2](#).

There is no evidence in [Psalm 2](#) that it is primarily prophetic in [p. 244](#) nature. It appears to have been composed by David to speak to a situation in which he was immediately involved. However, there are three major prefigurations or foreshadowings that New Testament authors see in the passage that indicate that [Psalm 2](#) is, in fact, a prophetic, Messianic piece. The first type appears in verses [2–3](#). Here the plotting of the nations is verbalized in which the leaders openly pronounce their intention of revolution. The rulers pointedly declare that they will throw off ‘the bonds’ and ‘the ropes’ that God and his ruler have placed on them. Because the nations are not literally bound with ropes and cords, the leaders are employing a metonymy: for these chiefs the figures of ‘bonds’ and ‘ropers’ represent Israel’s dominion and control over them. The heathen simply desire autonomy.

The New Testament applies the rebellion of [Psalm 2](#) explicitly as a type of the heathen conspiracy against Jesus Christ. After Peter and John are released by the Sanhedrin, the disciples glorify God in the following manner:

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, ‘O Lord, it is thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say,

**Why did the Gentiles rage,
And the people devise futile things?
The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord, and against his Christ.**

For truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy purpose predestined to occur’ ([Acts 4:24–28](#)).

Note that Luke understands the gathering together of the persecutors of Jesus as having been typologically predicted in [Psalm 2](#). In other words, the plotting and revolt of the heathen nations against the Davidic king in [Psalm 2](#) serve as a prefiguration of the scheming of Herod and others to kill the Son of David, the true king of Israel.

A second adumbration is found in v. [7](#), in which the newly consecrated king claims that his kingdom has been established because God has decreed his sonship. The king is the heir of the Holy One of Israel. This sonship is underscored by the Hebrew for ‘I have brought you forth’ (v. [7c](#)). The verb here used (*yalad*) literally means ‘to bear, beget’ and it is often used of parents giving birth to a child (cf., [1 Kings 3:17–18](#)).²³ Therefore, it must be [p. 245](#) realized that when nations revolt against the king of Israel, they are really rebelling against the son of the living God and, indeed, against God himself.²⁴

²³ Some authors, such as Paul Gilchrist (see *yalad* in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. D. Harris, G. L. Archer, and B. K. Waltke [Chicago: Moody, 1980 pp. 278–279], argue that an actual father/son relationship is not being represented in [Psalm 2](#). Rather, they say that the verbal form of the word in [Psalm 2](#) (Qal) represents a more generalized relationship than father to son. Such a contention is unconvincing, since many occurrences of *yalad* in the Qal stem depicts a parent/child relationship. See, for instance, [Gen. 4:18](#) (*yalad* used three times in the Qal); [Gen. 4:2](#), [2 Kings 19:3](#).

²⁴ H. K. LaRondelle makes an interesting remark: ‘Such solemn words are known from extra-biblical sources—e.g., the code of Hammurabi (192)—as the ancient adoption formula in courts of justice. They

The New Testament authors understand this verse to be typological of the glorious resurrection of Christ Jesus. In the Book of Acts, Luke records the sermon of the apostle Paul which makes the typological connection: 'And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, as it is also written in the second Psalm. "Thou art my Son; today I have begotten thee" ' ([Acts 13:32-33](#)). The typological correspondence between the Davidic king ascending the throne and the resurrection of Christ are clear: both events mark the time when God's chosen heir takes the throne and receives the inheritance. Further supporting passages for this foreshadowing can be seen in [Romans 1:14-4](#), [Hebrews 1:5](#) and [5:5](#).

Verse [9](#) is also a prefiguration of the work of the coming Messiah. The Davidic king is told by God that he will rule rebel nations with an iron rod and smash them as a piece of pottery breaks. The first colon is a synecdoche that symbolizes an ironfisted discipline that the king will have over the nations. The second line is a simile. As a piece of pottery or earthenware breaks easily when dropped or hit, so the nations will be pulverized by the king of Israel. The Davidic king is able to rule over and destroy his enemies because he is God's appointed son, heir, and king.

The apostle John employs [Psalm 2:9](#) as a type in the Book of Revelation. It is used in reference to the work of Christ.

And he is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; And his name is called the Word of God, and the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following him on white horses. And from his mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it he may smite the nations; and he will rule them with a rod of iron; and he treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty ([Rev. 19:13-15](#)).

Jesus Christ will rule over and destroy the nations in the same way that the Davidic king in [Psalm 2](#) was commanded to smash the nations. Yet how much greater is Christ's victory! Whereas the Davidic king will merely shatter the rebellious nations immediately threatening Israel, Christ will conquer Satan and the wicked nations who follow him.

[Psalm 2:9](#) is further manifested in the Book of Revelation as a typological promise to all believers in Christ Jesus. What God pledges to the Davidic king in [Psalm 2:9](#) is pledged to us as believers. Jesus proclaims:

Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come and he who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I [p. 246](#) also have received authority from my Father' ([Rev. 2:25-27](#)).

Christ will share his rule with Christians, as the Father shared it with him. Thus, [Psalm 2:9](#) is typical of or prefigures our future rule over the heathen nations.

Psalm 41

The superscription of [Psalm 41](#) ascribes it to David. It is the distressful cry of the shepherd/king to God because his enemies slander him (v. [5](#)), speak lies behind his back (v. [6-7a](#)), and plot his physical destruction (v. [7b-8](#)). Even the psalmist's 'close friend' (literally 'man of my peace, my welfare, my friendship') has 'lifted up his heel'²⁵ against

were pronounced on the occasion someone legally adopted a child as his own son'. See his *Deliverance in the Psalms*. (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983), p. 55.

²⁵ The metaphor 'lifting the heel' has been variously interpreted by modern scholars. Some suggest that it is a metaphor often used of a horse lifting up a hoof preparatory of kicking (thus demonstrating disdain to the recipient). Others, such as R. E. Brown (p. 554), believe that to show the bottom of one's foot in the Near East is a special mark of signification of contempt. There really is no biblical evidence to support either

him (v. 9). This very person ‘who ate bread’ at David’s table, a sign of close fellowship, now has only contempt for him. Because the psalmist has been estranged from all those around him and is in great danger, he seeks God’s intercession, protection, and justice.

The betrayal scene pictured in [Psalm 41:9](#) is designated in the New Testament as typical of an episode in Christ’s life. At the Last Supper the apostle John reports Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet ([Jn. 13:5–11](#)). After concluding the actual cleansing, Jesus explains the act to the disciples that it represents the servantlike attitude they should have for one another. Then John records a caveat of the Saviour: ‘I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, he who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against me’ (v. 8). Clearly, Jesus sees in [Psalm 41](#) a prefiguration of his betrayal at the hands of his close friend and disciple Judas.

If one merely read [Psalm 41](#) without knowing the New Testament there would be no indication of direct verbal prophecy that would later be fulfilled by the coming One. [Psalm 41](#) simply sets out a pattern that is later repeated in the life of Christ. The two episodes have direct correspondences: (1) David and the Master are both suffering persecution at the hands of enemies; (2) they are, as well, sustaining unnatural treachery from a close friend (one who eats at the table with them). David’s tribulation is also a type of the Holy One because the latter’s suffering was to be so much greater and more meaningful.

Psalm 118

[Psalm 118](#) has no superscription to indicate its authorship. It is generally understood as a Thanksgiving Hymn of the nation of Israel, one which is expressed by the king or the nation [p. 247](#) itself.²⁶ The psalm describes a stressful situation in which Israel is surrounded and afflicted by her enemies (v. 10). She calls on the name of the Lord, and is then delivered by his mighty hand (v. 13–14). The climax of Israel’s deliverance is stated in verses [22–23](#): ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord’s doing, it is marvellous in our eyes.’ The first part of the passage (v. 22) is a hypocatastasis, in which the word ‘stone’ is a figure representing the nation of Israel. The meaning of the hypocatastasis is clear: Israel has been rejected by all the nations of the earth, yet God has seen fit to establish her as the ‘cornerstone’ of the building of his kingdom on earth.

The New Testament writers view Israel in [Psalm 118:22–23](#) as a foreshadowing of Christ Jesus (see, [Matt. 21:42](#); [Mk. 12:10–11](#); [Lk. 20:17](#); [Eph. 2:20](#); and [1 Pet. 2:7](#)). Thus, for example, Peter’s sermon to the Jews in [Acts 4](#) quotes [Psalm 118](#) in reference to Christ saying, ‘He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone’ (v. 11). The correspondence between Israel and Jesus is plain: (1) they are both rejected and despised; and (2) they are both foundational to the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. How much greater is the antitype, however, because he has secured the eternal, imperishable kingdom!

Both direct verbal prophecy and typology are prophetic in nature, but they convey prophecy by different and distinct means. In other words, they differ in form but not in essence. This is true because the New Testament authors do not distinguish between the two but acknowledge the prophetic nature of both methods. It would be worthwhile for

contention. The meaning of ‘lifting the heel’ is best interpreted when the use of the noun heel (*aqeb*) is investigated in Scripture. It is derived from the word *aqab*, which means ‘to trip, to take by the heel, to supplant’ ([Gen. 27:36](#); [Jer. 9:4](#)). The metaphor ‘lifting the heel’ probably reflects the verbal meaning, the idea being that David’s adversary is exerting himself to trip David and throw him to the ground (in a symbolic sort of way).

²⁶ R. T. France, *op. cit.*, p. 56, and C. A. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 402ff.

the reader to consider the following two passages—[Matthew 1:22–23](#) and [Matthew 2:15](#). The first is directed verbal prophecy and the second is typology, but they are both treated equally by the inspired writer.

IMPORTANCE OF TYPOLOGY IN PREACHING

There are two principal reasons for the absence of typology in preaching today. The first is easily identified as the basic ignorance of the modern church regarding typology.²⁷ Frankly, not only are the laymen at a loss in this respect, but most pastors are typologically illiterate. Ultimately, I suppose the problem lies at the thresholds of seminaries and faculty who refuse to or cannot teach such basics of proper biblical interpretation. How many seminary preaching classes teach the integration of typology into sermon preparation?

The second reason is that many [p. 248](#) church leaders do not see the importance of typology in preaching. They may understand the concept, but they are probably unaware of its application and the message it sends in one's preaching. So, why is it important to preach typology? Why bother making such connections of pattern between the testaments to a modern church audience?

First of all, and most importantly, typology underscores the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. It teaches that the Lord has sovereignly planned history with a unified purpose so that what God has done in the past becomes the measure of the future. He has simply designed history in such a way that certain patterns repeat themselves. In other words, God has directed history so that foreshadowings occur. And, since God has designed history that way, the biblical expositor has an obligation to search the Scriptures diligently to uncover typology. Furthermore, he has a duty to share that material with a congregation because *it reflects God's plan of history*.

Secondly, recognition of typology affirms the doctrine of the immutability of God. Typology demonstrates that God is unchanging. Thus, in the revelation of the Old Testament God is portrayed as unchanging ([1 Sam. 15:29](#)); when he is further revealed in the New Testament he is the same and unchanging. Certainly more is revealed and intensified, but it is the same immutable Creator. The typological patterns show that the way God dealt with people in the past is the way he will deal with them now and in the future. The Christian congregation can take great solace in those patterns because God will treat his people today in a similar fashion. It is incumbent upon the pastor to point out these eternal truths to his flock.

Thirdly, the principles of typology reflect the unity of Scripture. Many congregations view the Scriptures as fragmented because they have difficulty seeing how one section of the Bible relates to another. How do the poetic books relate to the gospels? Is there any association between the apocalyptic vision of John's Revelation and the Pentateuch of Moses? Such questions can be answered in the affirmative because the biblical system of typology provides homogeneity between the testaments. From every section of the Old Testament patterns are set which are later repeated and fulfilled in the New Testament.

Finally, typology adds depth and richness to the preaching message. It reveals material rarely studied or seen before, and it helps to make the Scriptures come to life. For example, the typological implication of [2 Kings 4:42–44](#) on the message of the Feeding of

²⁷ In this regard, the church has changed dramatically over the centuries. During the days of the Puritan divine Jonathan Edwards (18th century) it is difficult to find a sermon without at least one typological reference. Edwards himself was a serious student of typology. See his 'Types of the Messiah', *The Works of Jonathan Edwards II* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), pp. 642–675.

the Five Thousand in [Matthew 14:14–121](#) or [John 6:5–14](#) are quite profound. Note the following correspondences between [2 Kings 4](#) and the gospels:

1. In each case there is a crowd of hungry people;
2. A few loaves of barley bread are the principal part of the meal ([Jn. 6:9](#));
3. Both Elisha and Jesus say, 'give them that they may eat'; [p. 249](#)
4. In each case an objection is made by the servants ([Jn. 6:9](#));
5. Finally, in both instances a surplus remained after the people had eaten.

On that basis, it is clear that Jesus' feeding of the multitudes was patterned after or modelled upon Elisha's miraculous feeding of his audience. To Jesus' listeners the point of the correspondences was also evident: before them was a mighty prophet of the Lord much in the same vein as Elisha. The task of Jesus was like that of Elisha who brought physical and spiritual sustenance to a famine-ravished land.

Understanding and recognition of typology is absolutely essential for biblical preaching. We shun it in the pulpit only at the risk of not declaring the great bounty and fertility of God's holy and inspired word to our congregations. Rather, we should be like Paul when he said that he 'did not shrink from proclaiming the whole counsel of God' ([Acts 20:27](#)).

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Preaching from the *Song of Songs*. Allegory Revisited

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Traditionally, the Song of Songs has been interpreted as an allegory of the soul's longing for God. The author of this article draws attention to modern interpretations which take a more literal view of the Song as a love story that is explicitly sexual. While extolling the joys of physical love, the Songs point to the pain and loss of certainty. He argues that the Songs point to the eternal and to the covenant relationship of God with his people—an erotic equivalent!
Editor

INTRODUCTION: VARIETIES OF INTERPRETATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS

The *Song of Songs* has traditionally been interpreted by both Christian and Jewish commentators in allegorical terms.¹ In recent years, however, this has been supplanted with naturalistic understandings which whilst being more faithful to the text, have made the question of the application of the *Song of Songs* harder to answer. When the *Song of Songs* was seen as a description of the soul's longing for God it was relatively straightforward for mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux to preach from it without embarrassment because they did not have to engage with the plain terminology about thighs and breasts. Modern commentators like Marvin Pope² and G. Lloyd Cart,³ however, have shown beyond reasonable doubt that the language of the *Song of Songs* is first and foremost that of erotic rather than spiritual love. This being the case, the question of application, particularly P. 251 in preaching, becomes more problematic.

Initially, the recognition of the naturalistic element in the *Song of Songs* led to its being treated as typology, representing either God's relationship with Israel or Christ's relationship with the church according to Jewish and Christian commentators respectively. More recently, commentators have seen the *Song of Songs* as a loosely related collection of love poems or as a drama in poetic form which is then generally interpreted as a celebration or endorsement of human love and sexuality. Some modern writers, particularly American evangelicals, have treated it as a sort of 'Marriage Guidance' manual—a 'Gospel According to James Dobson'.⁴ Others, such as the feminist Phyllis Trible, have found in it a treatise on female emancipation.⁵

Studies of the *Song's* structure have gone some way towards establishing its unity and identifying its themes. David Dorsey⁶ in particular, drawing on the earlier work of J. C. Exum and W. Shea, argues plausibly for a sevenfold chiasmic structure.⁷ However, even given the attractiveness of his presentation, an understanding of the *Song's* structure does little to unlock the secrets of its intended application. The most it seems to tell us is that the *Song* is a carefully crafted work rather than a compendium of otherwise unrelated snippets and that therefore we do well to pay attention to it. Dorsey's article itself makes no attempt to move from analysis to application.

Those commentators who insist that we first see the *Song* as a depiction of human eroticism are no doubt right. The difficulty for the preacher is knowing how to move on from here. Do we simply unwrap its metaphors to catalogue the delights of sexuality? Or do we, as the Americans suggest, use it as a critique of our own relationships? Do we perhaps see it as a critique of Solomonic hedonism? Or do we simply enjoy it as an island of unalloyed pleasure in a biblical sea of woe and trouble?

¹ G. I. Carr, *The Song of Solomon, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: IVP, 1984) p. 125 argues that Jewish commentary has generally been typological rather than allegorical in recognizing two levels of meaning, the 'plain' and the 'occult'. However, most reviewers speak of early Jewish approaches as being allegorical.

² M. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977).

³ *Op. Cit.*

⁴ S. G. Glickman, *A Song for Lovers* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1976), provides a typical example of this approach.

⁵ P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

⁶ D. A. Dorsey, 'Literary Structure in the Song of Songs', *JSOT* 46 (1990), pp. 81–96.

⁷ *Ibid.*, but cf, for example, Carr's five-fold structure, *op. cit.*, p. 45

THE SONG OF SONGS AS SONG

If we are to preach the *Song of Songs* usefully we need to hear it first and foremost in the form in which it presents itself to us, namely as poetry—indeed as *Song*. Only in this way will it address us correctly. The proper question to ask of poetry initially is not ‘What is it for?’, but *What does it do?* The language of poetry moves us at a different level from prose, not *beneath* words but beyond the outward *sum* of words. As music is to sound, so poetry is to prose. We may be moved by the story of Ruth or instructed by the Proverbs, but something else happens, and is meant to happen, as we read the *Song of Songs*. P. 252

Nevertheless, there need to be controls.⁸ We need to hear it *properly* to be moved by it to a right response. Here we return to the question of interpretation. As we read the *Song* are we to be inspired by thoughts of Christ’s love for us, to rejoice in the pleasures of human sexuality, to resolve to have better marriages or to encourage the development of ‘strong women’? All these applications and more have been suggested. To discern between them we need to look not merely at the form but at the context within which it presents itself.

THE SONG OF SONGS AND SOLOMON

Brevard Childs points out that the ascription of the *Song of Songs* to Solomon ‘performs a different and far broader role from that of establishing authorship in the modern sense of the concept’.⁹ At very least, he argues, it establishes the *Song* as belonging to the genre of ‘Wisdom literature’. However, we would want to go still further. The several references to Solomon ([1:1, 4](#); [3:7, 9, 11](#); [8:11–12](#)) and the absence of direct references to ‘Wisdom’ per se suggest that it is *Solomon himself* who provides an important key to the *Song of Songs*’ intention.

In this respect, what is important is not whether it was written within the reign of Solomon, much less whether it was written by Solomon himself. It is not even of final significance what role Solomon plays as one of the characters in the *Song of Songs*. What matters is *the context of Solomon*—specifically to his ‘Golden Age’. This was the zenith of the outworking of God’s salvation blessings in the history of mankind, a time of ‘angels bending near the earth’. Many of the items used as metaphors for, or accompaniments to, lovemaking in the *Song* are amongst the commodities depicted as typifying the abundance of wealth during Solomon’s reign in [1 Kings 3–10](#). As we read the opening line, ‘The Song of Songs which is Solomon’s’, we are surely meant to travel in our imagination back to that era when, ‘all the vessels in the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold’, when ‘silver ... was not considered as anything’, when ‘once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks’ and when ‘the whole earth brought ... garments, myrrh, spices ... year by year’ ([1 Kgs. 10:21–22](#)). Michael Fox writes: ‘... the images [of the *Song of Songs*] ... combine to form a cohesive picture of a self-contained world: a peaceful, fruitful world, resplendent with the blessings of nature and the beauties of human art ... a rich and blessed world.’¹⁰ Surely the *sitz im leben* of the

⁸ J. Moye, ‘Song of Songs—Back to Allegory? Some Hermeneutical Considerations’, *AJT* 4:1 (1990), pp. 120–125, writes that even the allegorical interpretation of Bernard of Clairvaux was controlled by a ‘worshipping community that received, shared and tested his interpretation’ p. 121.

⁹ B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 573.

¹⁰ M. V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Lover Songs* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 329–330.

Song p. 253 of *Songs* corresponds to that time when 'Judah and Israel dwelt in safety ... every man under his vine and under his fig tree' ([1 Kgs. 4:25](#)). Of what, then, does it sing to us?

THE MELODY OF THE *SONG OF SONGS*

It locates itself at the apogee of biblical salvation experienced as physical blessing. It is the time of 'shalom' *par excellence* ([1 Kgs. 4:24](#)). To what does the biblical spirit aspire from these heights? It is helpful to be reminded here of the psychologist Abraham Maslow's concept of the 'Hierarchy of Needs'. According to this, when physical needs for food and shelter have been met, human beings look to the satisfaction of other needs such as companionship or status, each in order of basic priority. As each need is met so the meeting of other, less fundamental but equally pressing, needs claim their attention and energy.

The 'Golden Age' of Solomon was a time when, in terms of Maslow's hierarchy, not merely the basic needs but many of the higher needs of the inhabitants of Israel had been more than adequately met. What is the need, in such a context of satisfaction, which nevertheless might remain unmet? The answer the *Song of Songs* gives is unequivocal: 'If a man offered for *love* all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned' ([8:7b](#)). Indeed, although according to the *Song of Songs* Solomon may have obtained the valuable vineyard at Ba'alha'mon through his abundant wealth, the lovers of the *Song of Songs* are entirely content with their own 'vineyard' of love: 'My vineyard, my very own, is for myself' ([8:12](#)).¹¹ It thus presents love between a man and a woman as the final 'need' to which one might aspire even during such an era of blessing as Solomon's 'Golden Age'.

We must not underestimate the astonishing nature of this proposition. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the 'chief end' (or, we might say, the ultimate need) of man is, 'to glorify God and to enjoy him forever'. This is not apparently the answer given by the *Song of Songs*! We might reasonably expect that a book in the Bible presenting the final horizon of human blessing to be transcended by those who have everything else would point to the Temple and to worship. Instead, it seems we are pointed to the bedroom and to sexual intercourse! Are we not in a hermeneutical blind alley with little apparent connection between our theological expectations and what the *Song of Songs* is evidently saying?

CLUES TO THE MESSAGE

A. The Absence of the Cultic

The answer to our question lies, we would suggest, in three distinctive elements of the *Song*. The first element, which has been noted by many commentators, is the *absence of cultic language*. Not only is there p. 254 no mention of God¹² or the events of salvation history, but even the most basic theological terms such as 'truth', 'blessing', 'glory' or 'wisdom' are absent.¹³ The impression one gets is not simply that the *Song* fails to use these terms but *that it has been deliberately stripped of them*. We should certainly ask why

¹¹ This passage suggests, incidentally, that Solomon is not the male lover in the *Song*. cf. Carr, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

¹² Bar a disputed reference in [8:7](#). See Carr, *idem*, pp. 170–171 for a discussion of this.

¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 42–44 for a fuller examination.

this is so, especially when we compare it with [Psalm 45](#).¹⁴ This is clearly a love Song sharing many words in common with the *Song of Songs* but it also contains many explicitly cultic terms. It is thus not simply the case that the biblical authors avoided mixing erotic and religious language. But one probable factor in the omission of cultic language is to distinguish the *Song* from similar love poetry from the Ancient Near East which draws heavily on such terms. It is, in this sense, *anti-cultic*. It specifically avoids being recruited to advocate sexuality as a form of liturgical expression.

However, there is another possible factor involved, for when God is located nowhere specifically it may not be because he is *completely absent* but rather because he is *everywhere present*: 'I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the almighty and the Lamb' ([Rev. 21:22](#)). Paradoxically, it may be that God is not mentioned because he is *assumed*. The Divine is located nowhere specifically because it is present everywhere generally. The *Song* then confronts those who would dissociate the erotic from the sacred. The deliberate emptying from it of cultic language may be because the writer is both discouraging us from confusing sexuality with cultic worship and yet encouraging us to see God in and through sexuality.

B. The Presence of Loss

The second important element, again noted by many writers, is the dimension of *loss*. On the one hand there are the so-called 'Dream Sequences' where the girl searches anxiously for her beloved ([3:1-5](#), [5:2-8](#)). On the other hand there is the defiant declaration in [8:6](#) that 'love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave'. According to Childs, these words 'are unique in the book because they represent a clear example of reflective generalization, which is characteristic of wisdom literature'.¹⁵ The sentiment in this verse is clearly one we should note. Furthermore, as H. Fisch writes, 'the terror of loss and emptiness ... are more central to the poem than fulfilment itself or descriptions of beauty'.¹⁶ It seems to be telling us that though the joys of erotic love correspond to and appear to satisfy the ultimate need we may confront, they cannot, *even in this world at its best*, provide a secure answer. Both temporal uncertainty and the separation of [p. 255](#) death makes this impossible. And this is of profound significance, for if we cannot guarantee that our highest need can be met then life is ultimately unreliable. Yet the experience of erotic love itself points us beyond the grave to 'something else' akin to what C. S. Lewis wrote about 'Joy': 'considered only in its quality ... [it] might almost equally be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief ... [but] I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world'.¹⁷ Though its eroticism is stripped of cultic elements which might tempt some to use the *Song* as an excuse for orgiastic worship, yet through the theme of loss it is invested with a noumenal quality which confronts us and points us towards the eternal.

C. The Use of Metaphor

This brings us to the third element, which is the *Song's* use of metaphor. Fisch points out that metaphor and simile blur and combine with subtle effect. In [2:1](#) the Shulammitte

¹⁴ Cf. Carr, 'The Old Testament Love Songs and their Use in the New Testament', *JETS* 24:2 (June 1981), pp. 97-105.

¹⁵ Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 578.

¹⁶ H. Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 85.

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Fontana, 1959), p. 20.

declares 'I am ... a lily of the valleys'. But immediately the love turns metaphor into simile: 'As a lily among brambles so is my love among maidens' (2:2). She who *is* a flower stands out like a flower amongst thorns. And as metaphor and simile interchange, the one closing the distance between reality and image, the other opening it, so (Fisch argues) image and referent become confused. Is A being compared to B or B to A? In extolling the virtues of the Shulammite in 4:12–15 the *Song* 'becomes a poem about a garden rather than a girl'.¹⁸

The same characteristic has been noted by other writers. Ellen Charry, reviewing Phyllis Tribble's work, writes, 'By use of garden and plant metaphors, the erotic garden of the *Song* becomes the woman herself'.¹⁹ The overall effect is that the *Song of Songs* turns into a poem about a fantastic land and its flora and fauna as much as a poem about two lovers: 'Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices' (8:14).²⁰ Fox comments:

... The metaphors offer little information about how the lovers look, often seeming actually to interfere with the formation of a mental picture of them ... For me it is the imagery itself that makes the sharpest, most enduring impression, and I think that this is the author's intention.²¹

Thus according to Fox, a major aim of the *Song* is to give a picture of the land as well as the lovers. And here, Fisch argues, it finds its point of contact with the rest of Scripture, for both the land of Israel and its people are elsewhere the beloved p. 256 bride of the LORD: 'My delight is in her' (Hephzibah), and your land 'Married' (Beulah); for the LORD delights in you and your land shall be married' (Is. 62:4). Finch comments that in the *Song of Songs*, 'There is a kind of imaginative overspill, as the rapture of the lovers overflows into the sphere of geography, transforming the whole land into an object of love'.²²

Taking these three elements (the absence of cultic references, the theme of loss and the identification of the lovers with the land) together, we are now in a position to suggest how the *Song* may be preached. To do this we must note three final considerations.

THE MESSAGE OF THE SONG OF SONGS

First, the absence of cultic references is not totally complete. The mention of Jerusalem (1:5; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8, 16; 6:4; 8:4) forms a significant exception. Jerusalem seems to be the home of the maiden (cf. 5:7–8) and is a metaphor for her beauty, 'You are ... comely as Jerusalem' (6:4). In the *Song of Songs* as a whole the bounty of the land provides the primary source of metaphors. However, the reference to Jerusalem reminds us that it is *the* land which is in view—the land which God promised to Abraham, which is one pole of the Covenant promise and which is both a fulfilment and a foretaste of the eschatological hope. This is the cultic and theological centre of the *Song of Songs*. Thus even the progress of love is paralleled with the seasonal development of the land, from its awakening in

¹⁸ Fisch, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁹ F. T. Chatty, 'Female Sexuality as an Image of Empowerment. Two Models', *SJOT* XXX 3 (June, 1987), pp. 201–218 (my emphasis).

²⁰ Cf. Mazer, 'The Song of Songs or the Story of Stories?', *SJOT* (1900), pp. 1–29 ... the modifying component extends and transforms into an enlarged, independent image, not bound anymore to its initial metaphorical system in which it was of secondary moment (Fn. 24, p. 10).

²¹ Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

²² Fisch, *op. cit.*

springtime (2:10–13) to its consummation in the summer garden (4:16). We are meant to identify the lover of the couple with the quintessence of the land, and through that with the God of the Covenant and the Covenant of God.

Secondly, the love referred to is specifically that of 'eros'.²³ It is a sexual passion, physically expressed in the realm of kisses and caresses, lips and eyes, thighs and breasts, which is the point of similitude between the covenant²⁴ of the lovers and the land of the Covenant. For the writer, sexual love between a man and a woman is 'heaven on earth'.

Thirdly, the note of loss prevents us stopping at the human experience, for the human experience can never be either certain or permanent. We are carried by metaphor from the lovers to the land. We are driven by harsh reality from the world to God. And yet what do we find in God but our Divine lover? 'Let me sing for my beloved a love Song concerning his vineyard'—not now words from the *Song of Songs* but from Isaiah concerning Israel (5:1). Admittedly Israel proved to be a faithless bride, but in Christ the church finds a husband who will not only cleanse her but keep her for the great day of their wedding (Eph. 5:25–27). The allegorists were right p. 257 in this—that they went beyond the surface message to a transcendent message of the relationship of God with his people. (Interestingly, as Bernard McGinn points out, '... the Song was probably the most commented book of the Bible in the Christian Middle Ages ... it was only with the growth of modern Protestant 'biblical theology [i.e. the historical-critical approach] that the Song was relegated to a marginal position in biblical research.'²⁵) The Allegorists were wrong only, and yet crucially, in that they tried to avoid the erotic offence of the *Song*.

If our analysis is correct, then in our preaching we should rather take up and extend this theme as pointing to the Covenant relationship of God with his people, for whilst the *Song of Songs* is certainly a celebration and endorsement of human eroticism it is surely also in some sense a sacralization of it. The marriage of Christ and the church need not be understood as concretely sexual, but if it is to be a marriage in any meaningful sense at all it cannot be devoid of what we might call 'erotic equivalence'. Conversely, if we are to understand ourselves and our proper place within the world which God has made, then in the light of the *Song of Songs* we would be hard pressed to overestimate the significance of our own sexuality in general or of erotic love in particular.

CONCLUSIONS

It is unlikely that the *Song of Songs* will form the basis of more than the occasional sermon in most churches. Perhaps it could usefully be explored in groups for married or engaged couples. It is more likely to be useful, however, not so much in direct preaching as in informing our preaching and our view of God generally. We need to ask whether we have really come to terms with the erotic as an aspect not only of the human personality but of the world around us as it reflects the nature and intentions of God. Do we endorse it, incorporating it into our 'spirituality' as the *Song of Songs* seems to do? Or do we consign it to the merely 'temporal' like those Christians who swiftly (and with apparent relief) declare there is 'no sex in heaven'?

The allegorizing of the *Song of Songs* no doubt arose out of and contributed to the church's discomfort with human sexuality based on a false dichotomy between the physical and spiritual. Its rescuing from allegory, however, has not yet meant its

²³ Though see Cart (1984), pp. 60–63 who points out that *eros* is not, in this sense, exclusive of *agape*.

²⁴ In marriage.

²⁵ B. McGinn, 'With the "Kisses of the Mouth", Recent Works on the Song of Songs', *JOR* pp. 269–275.

rehabilitation into Christian preaching. At the same time, the theological agenda on sexuality is increasingly dominated by non-biblical ideology. On the one hand the traditional limitations on sexual expression are attacked and dismantled; on the other hand we are told that God is 'beyond gender' and that sexuality is merely a matter of biology or convention. The *Song of Songs*, rightly interpreted, could provide an essential corrective, but it may require a revolution in our own thinking before we are able to preach what it teaches.

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Preaching on the Psalms

W. H. Velema

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INTRODUCTION BY ALLAN M. HARMAN

The interconnection between faith and experience continues to be a challenge to Christians today, just as it has in the past. The cognitive aspects of the Christian faith cannot be isolated from the experiential elements. There has to be a balance maintained between the intellectual assent to the gospel and the practical outworking of its truths in individual and communal Christian living. The vitality of the Reformed faith now and in the future depends upon adherence to biblical patterns of faith and experience.

The term 'spirituality' is of modern usage in Protestantism, though it is a term which is well-known from Catholicism.¹ Its origin goes back at least to North Africa, where the church fathers used the Latin word *spiritualitas* to describe all of a Christian's life originating from the work of the Holy Spirit. The Reformers used the expression 'piety' (*pietas*) more commonly,² though this expression (at least in English) has now been debased and taken on a pejorative meaning. The Puritans used the term 'godliness' as a comprehensive description of piety, while the Methodists spoke of 'holiness'. Probably the most common descriptive term used in Reformed circles in the past has been 'sanctification'. I find no difficulty, however, in using the term 'spirituality', as long as it is clearly defined. I am using it in the sense that it is God's revelation, believed and acted upon. p. 259

When we turn to the Psalms we see frequent expressions of trust in the Lord. Those whose trust is in him display an entire self-commitment to him, along with obedience to

¹ For some comment on the use of the term, see Owen Chadwick, in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, edited by Peter Brooks (SCM Press, 1975), pp. 205–206.

² For Calvin's use of the term, see H. W. Simpson, '*Pietas*' in the '*Institutes of Calvin*', *Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation* (Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1984), p. 179–191.

his word and commands. A wide variety of language is used to describe this relationship. The people of God are said to act in certain ways including 'believe', 'trust', 'take refuge in', 'rely upon', 'wait for', and 'wait patiently for'. Some of these expressions are used in contrast to putting trust in substitutes like military weapons, princes, idols or even man himself ([Ps. 44:6](#); [135:15-18](#); [52:7](#)).

In all their experiences the psalmists were relying on the character of God as he had made it known. There was no special word of revelation to help them in their time of need. Because there was no personal message they had to rely simply on God's love and mercy revealed previously. In times of great perplexity it was knowledge of God's revelation which broke through and brought light into a dark situation. Thus in [Psalm 73](#) the psalmist was in turmoil about the prosperity of the wicked until he came into God's house and then he understood the end of the wicked ([Ps. 73:16-17](#)). Faith in the book of Psalms is like faith elsewhere in the Bible; it is reliance on God and his character as he has revealed it.

CONCLUSION

At its strongest periods the Reformed faith has kept a balance between adherence to biblical doctrine and the experiential appropriation of that doctrine in the lives of individuals. In a period of church history which has seen such rapid changes in belief and practices, we need to maintain a commitment to that balance. Maintaining apostolic doctrine and apostolic experience go hand in hand. Reformed spirituality must be nourished, for it is vital for our witness to the world concerning the gospel. As part of that nourishment the continued use of the psalter has an important role to play.

PREACHING ON THE PSALMS¹

PURPOSE

It is our intention to consider to what extent the religious experience of the psalmist can or should become the religious experience of the congregation. Can we draw a straight line from the experience of the past to that of the present? Is it permissible to equate the psalmist with those who now listen to the sermon? We are concerned here with the religious experience in the preaching of the psalms. Yet, before we enter into that subject, we would first like to say something about the **P.260** Psalms as a specific sort of preaching material.²

The Bible contains various forms of style. The Holy Spirit also equipped poets to understand the true character of the psalms. We should not analyse the phenomenon of poetry first in order to offer a homiletic view on biblical poetry afterwards. In that case homiletics is filtered through analyzing the phenomenon of lyric poetry. On the contrary

¹ This article is an abridged version of the original Dutch article: W. H. Velema, 'Preken over Psalmen', in *Theologia Reformata* 30 (1987), pp. 217-230. Translated by Drs. Susan van der Ree.

² Of the Dutch literature on the different types of preaching, we would like to mention: T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde Homiletiek* (Amsterdam, 1973), 2nd ed., pp. 316-352, with special reference to pp. 352-377: The particular form of preaching material; S. F. H. J. Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, P. J. Roscam Abbing (ed.), *Handboek voor de prediking* (Amsterdam, 1948), K. Dijk, *Dienst der prediking* (Kampen, 1955) discusses a classification of the different 'materials' of the Old Testament on pp. 194-252, and the different 'materials' of the New Testament on pp. 253-308. C. W. Mönnich, F. J. Pop (ed.), *Wegen der prediking* (Amsterdam, 1959) makes a subdivision according to themes of the different chapters.

the poetic form is subservient to that which the Holy Spirit reveals in that specific psalm. The subordinate character of poetry should appear to full advantage in the homiletic discussion of it.

THE EXPOSITIONS OF SOME OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARS

We recall Von Rad's exposition. He wrote about Israel's answer to Yahweh, which is given in praise.³ He relates that Israel has met the reality of the beauty in its higher form in the cult and in praising the deeds and the appearance of Yahweh.⁴ The very nature of Israel's poetry is positioned in relation to religion, although this can hardly be made transparent from a scientific point of view. Religion shapes both the form and style of Israel's poetry.⁵ His conclusion is quoted in full:

We summarize what has been said in a few provisional propositions: (1) For Israel beauty was never something absolute, existing in its own right, but was always a thing unceasingly bestowed on the world by God. (2) Beauty was therefore a datum of faith. (3) Enjoyment of this beauty of God is truly present as early as the hymns, and it is most certainly present in the utterances of the prophets as something anticipated, that is, it is oriented towards an eschatological fulfilment: it is perception in faith and faith perceived. (4) Israel perceived splendour even in the workings of the divine *kenosis* and hiddenness. (5) For Israel beauty was something that happened rather than something that existed, because she understood it as the result of God's action and not of God's being.⁶

Here we are concerned with a vision that is based on Israel's belief. The poetry is subordinated to that belief. This is a special means of expressing this belief. When we regard the relationship between revelation and experience as a standard here as well, we can say p. 261 that belief, together with its experience, creates revelation.⁷ With Walter Zimmerli we come across the enlightening remark that all supplications of the Old Testament prayer, as rendered in the Psalms, presuppose the first commandment. God is not the unknown God. He is the God who revealed himself to Israel in his saving grace. Hence the psalmists' praying of lamentations is also governed by the third commandment. The praise is based on believing the God who revealed and is still revealing himself. 'Every cry for help is stated personally: "You Yahweh." In this form of address the Old Testament faith pays homage to its God even when it cries out from the abyss of despair and is dominated by "why" and "how long?".'⁸ In the poet's experience what we have is an appeal to the revelation of God. There is indeed talk of revelation, but I would call it indirect revelation. It comes to us by means of the poet's appeal to it.

Claus Westermann talks about three stages in the origin of prayer in our sense of the word. He discusses this subject in the part of his book that deals with 'the response'. Here

³ Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Volume 1—The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions, Tr. D. M. G. Stalker (Oliver & Boyd: Edinburgh, 1962), pp. 356–370.

⁴ Von Rad, *op. cit.*,

⁵ Von Rad, *op. cit.*,

⁶ More comments on Von Rad can be found in B.J. Oosterhoff, *Feit of interpretatie* (Kampen, 1967).

⁷ More comments on Von Rad can be found in B. J. Oosterhoff, *Feit of interpretatie* (Kampen, 1967).

⁸ Walther Zimmerli, *Grundrisz der alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln-Mainz, 1975), 2nd ed., p. 134.

it is specially meant as 'The Calling to God in the Old Testament'.⁹ The first stage is the short crying out to God, which originates immediately from a specific situation. Some examples given by him can be found in [Exodus 18:10](#), [Judges 15:18](#) and [2 Samuel 15:31](#). In the second stage these separate utterances of prayer, which can be found in numerous places in the Old Testament have been united into a song. 'All these calls of prayer can without exception become parts of a Psalm. They go into the Psalms as into a form which is made into a whole.'¹⁰ The third stage is that of the long prosaic prayers, like [1 Kings 8](#), [Ezra 9](#) and [Nehemiah 9](#). Likewise, we are faced with revelation here as well, but in the shape of the believer's answer to God's revelation. This revision took place in view of the liturgy.¹¹ It would lead too far to discuss the various types of psalms. Likewise, it would be too much to point out the discussion about all these types.¹²

HOW DO REVELATION AND EXPERIENCE RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER IN THE PSALMS?

After these explorations which by no means aim at being complete, we get to the actual theme, namely, the experience of the psalmists as subject-matter for the preaching. How are experience and revelation related in the Psalms and how can this experience, as included in the revelation, be preaching material?

Our point of departure is God's revelation which is present in the [p. 262](#) Psalms. Very particularly, we are faced with the answer of human beings to God's revelation to Israel. The answer is given in the struggle to feel God's hand and to be allowed to go his way and to receive light in the dark.

As a matter of fact, we come across similar reactions all through the Bible. Just to mention the extremes: Adam's reaction to God's appearance in the garden of Eden ([Gen. 3:10](#)), to the Bride's prayer for the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the Bible ([Rev. 22:17](#) and [20](#)). With this we do not want to say that revelation takes, structurally speaking, the form of a dialogue.¹³ Much as the Bible is the book of encounters and much as God's revelation is geared to man and requires his response, God still has the first and the last word. H. Jonker phrases this properly: 'Without doubt God has the first and the last word, but in between he allows people to talk, hears their objections, takes them seriously and sometimes breaks off the conversation ('Speak no more to me of this matter') or guides, as a wise father, the foolishness of the people up to a point where wisdom from heaven manifests itself all of a sudden.'¹⁴ God reveals his truth to us, also in the form of a conversation. Revelation does not always take the form of a conversation. There are many words which are directly spoken to men, without their answer being heard. Yet in such words the situation of people is gone into as well. They are addressed right where they are. Sometimes their reactions are reported, but this is not always the case. We may recall the words of the Lord Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is an example of a situation where

⁹ Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1982), p. 153-154.

¹⁰ Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

¹¹ See Westermann, p. 187 and his two works, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1965) and *The Psalms, Structure, Content, & Message* (Minneapolis, 1967), 1974, 3rd ed.

¹² Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1978), p. 153

¹³ H. Jonker, *En toch preken* (Nijkerk, 1973), p. 48 says that the truth of the Word of God is always the truth in the context of dialogue.

¹⁴ Jonker, *op. cit.*, p. 48 (Quotation translated).

people are addressed, while their responses are scarcely voiced. As an exception to this one may look at the final verses of [Matthew 7:21–23](#). Here the questions asked by men serve to emphasize the seriousness of Jesus' words.

There are, however, also many instances of conversations in very different circumstances, in which both the reactions of people and Jesus' words together determine the conversation.¹⁵ Striking examples are the conversation with the woman of Samaria ([Jn. 4:4–26](#)) and the one with Simon, the Pharisee ([Lk. 7:36–50](#)). There are many more instances of similar conversations. The words of people are components of what Jesus says. Jesus' words are determined also by the answers given by people. Without those answers the conversation would simply not be there at all! In that case, Jesus' words would have been different from those which have been recorded! They have been included in what Jesus wants to pass on and have been made subordinate to his words. In all those conversations Jesus has the first and the last word.

How can one explain the use of reactions of human beings by the revealed word? Revelation is aimed [p.263](#) at people and requires the reaction of people (in faith). In his condescending goodness God gets so near to people that he even incorporates their reactions, so that his word can get across so much more powerfully and clearly. The fact that answers of human beings are given a place in God's revelation does not mean that human beings are co-partners in constituting that revelation. The essence of that word is that it is intended for people, So, that intention is given extra emphasis because the answers of human beings are—from time to time, not always—included in the revealed word, without the sovereign and authoritative character of that word being infringed upon. God has the first and the last word. For that reason, words of people are of a different nature from the word within which they may have been embedded. Utterances of human beings, in this context, serve to strengthen and underline God's word.

REMEMBERING THE WORKS OF THE LORD BY SPEAKING ABOUT THE PSALMS

In this respect one can also understand that the psalms acquired their position in the worship of Israel. In those psalms it is not just the human experience which is at stake, such as when men were in doubt and how they were able to carry on. What could be the power of such a song for future believers? It would not have had more than a historical or a devotional value. On the contrary, the works of the Lord are remembered in the psalms. One should watch how often an appeal is made to God's deeds of the past, especially in the psalms of despair and darkness.

Thus a powerful consolation is radiated for the Israelite in remembering the works of the Lord. This presents him, time and time again, with the foundation for a new hope and a prospect for the future, even if it is dark both within and around him. To him, remembering the works of the Lord means being guided by it, living out of it and continuously drawing consolation and strength from it. Consequently, it is something different from just meditating on what the Lord did in the past. It means living in the present out of the revelation given by Him.¹⁶

¹⁵ See J. H. Bavinck, *Menschen rondom Jesus* (Kampen, 1936).

¹⁶ B. J. Oosterhoff, 'De daden des Heren gedenken' in *Woord en Kerk*, Theological contributions by the professors of the Theologische Hogeschool der Christlike Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Hogeschool (Amsterdam, 1969), p. 23. (Quotation translated).

Thus whatever comes to pass within such psalms, is also happening to the psalmists themselves. Reading and singing those psalms is a way of remembering the works of the Lord. That is why Israel was able to begin to sing both the individual lamentation and community hymns of praise during worship-time, without this singing having an historical-religious meaning only! Here Israel had to do with revelation, with the works of the Lord which were put into words under the guidance of the Spirit! In this way the singing of psalms is a form of remembering the works of the Lord. What stands out here is that God's works from [p. 264](#) the past are reported, in order to let them be experienced in the present as well, in the midst of doubt and darkness. As a result of that, this song itself is included in the line of God's works which have to be remembered by the congregation.

In the preaching too, one should focus on the works of the Lord. Distinction has been made between formal preaching on the one hand and experiential preaching on the other hand.

The works of the Lord should be the object of preaching, as revealed to us in both the Old and New Testament. And these should find a personal response with us. They should teach us to get to know God in His judgements, when we do not turn towards Him in truth. But, above all, they should teach us to get to know Him in His boundless grace, love for sinners and unmovable loyalty to His covenant, lest we should wait for Him and, as poor sinners, wait on Him alone. The works of the Lord are ever and again a source for faith, hope and charity.¹⁷

As such, the psalms prove to be preaching material as well.

To underline what has been said so far, we would like to point out that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews prefaces quotations from the Psalms by referring to the Spirit as the author.¹⁸

Likewise, it can be understood that texts from the psalms refer to Christ. It is the Spirit of God who prompted those poets.¹⁹ So one has to conclude that what Peter said about the prophets in [1 Peter 1:10-12](#) is true for the psalms as well. Once more we use the distinction between revelation and experience. It is not true that the psalmist's experience plays an equal part in constituting the revelation. The revelation is not dependent on experience; nor is that the case with Jesus' words. His word is sometimes a reaction to the answers of people, either negatively or positively. Their answers are part of the word that he speaks, 'as one having authority, and not as the scribes' ([Matt. 7:29](#)). The experience of believers in the psalms can therefore never be preached without that experience being viewed within the framework of God's revelation through this psalm.

EXPERIENCE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF REVELATION

In our opinion experience is sometimes brought in too early. In that case the sermon starts off with despair. The preacher highlights modern man's despair and sometimes wants to talk his congregation into that despair or exhort it as a 'must'. Anyone who deals with this matter in this way, is guilty of identifying experience as revelation. However much one does not want to, [P. 265](#) that doubt is in fact a normative revelation. The very same thing

¹⁷ Oosterhoff, *art. cit.*, p. 29. (Quotation translated).

¹⁸ See [Hebrews 3:7-11](#), referring to [Psalm 95:7-11](#); [Hebrews 4:7](#) referring to [Psalm 95:7-7](#).

¹⁹ See [Hebrews 1:5-8](#) referring to [Psalm 2:7](#); and [Psalm 104:4](#); [Psalm 45:7-8](#), [Psalm 102:26-28](#) and [110:1](#). Also [Hebrews 2:6-8](#) referring to [Psalm 8:5-7](#), [Hebrews 2:12](#) referring to [Psalm 22:23](#). These quotations can be found in Simon Kistemaker, *The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Amsterdam, 1961), pp. 96-133.

can happen when preaching on psalms of praise. The intonation is different, but the structure is the same. One tends to forget that joyful or sad human experience is included in God's revelation.

One should preach on the psalms as one preaches on parables, that is from the turning-point of the parable, where the crux of the matter or the essential message about the kingdom of God is illustrated by the image itself. One could also put it like this: a parable should be preached from the revelation, from the disclosure. When preaching on the psalms, one should not start with the experience. The starting-point should be that which is revealed about God in the psalms. We can put it like this: by the poet's belief and by the appeal to God in the midst of despair, God is still saying to us today: I am still there. Someone who is afflicted by temptation will never call on me in vain!

Of course, the situation of the psalmist has to be mentioned and it has to be outlined in the sermon. But the situation is not the issue of comparison, let alone of application. The message of a sermon on a psalm should be who God wants to be in that darkness, how God wants to be called upon, how God wants to be trusted and believed in, in difficult circumstances.

THE PSALMS IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

The next step is to draw the line from the psalms to Christ in the New Testament. The Lord, the covenantal God, is the Father of Jesus Christ. He is at work. Grace, mercy, goodness and forgiveness have got a christological colouring and contents. It is impossible to think of these qualities without taking the fulfilment of God's promises of Christ Jesus in the Old Testament into consideration. It is important to see how in Luke I the coming of Christ and his forerunner, John the Baptist, is linked to the above-mentioned root words of the Old Testament. If we come across such words in a psalm, we may extend them to Christ. In that case we preach on the psalms in a christological way. Are we allowed to say, along with Dijk, that a poet identifies with the Man of Sorrows in suffering? We would rather not use that expression here. What we do want to say is that the poet appeals to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ; that he asks for help and salvation for the sake of the work which God wills his Son to do on this earth.

The salvation of God in the psalms is determined in a christological sense, even though there is not clarity yet on the person of Christ. We do get more information on this from the prophets.

The suffering of certain poets has got a typological meaning. In it we can see something of what Christ had to undergo. Examples of this are psalms [22](#) and [69](#). Does this mean that these poets were aware of the fact that they depicted, by means of their own martyrdom, Christ's own way to the cross? There are not easy answers to such questions. Who knows what they knew or saw of their own suffering in relation to that of Christ? Here [p. 266](#) again, we would like to refer to [1 Peter 1:10-12](#). Amongst the psalmists there have been prophets of whom may be said that they 'prophesied of the grace that should come unto you'. Then again, the search for ways and the times of the Spirit who was with them, applies to them as well. They testified of the suffering which was to befall Christ and the glory thereafter. The remarkable thing about this text is that these prophets spoke words of which they could not fully grasp the historical effect. Bolkestein writes:

Already before His coming in the flesh His (=Christ's) Spirit was moving. This Spirit was the secret of the prophets, though they were not aware of it. It does not matter how much

or how little these prophets themselves knew about it. Yet, in reality, Christ's Spirit spoke and worked within them. One could speak of a certain pre-existence of Christ here.²⁰

EXCHANGE OF SUBJECT

Once more we would like to raise the question of the relationship between experience and revelation. How is it possible to do justice to the experience, which is included in the revelation, without raising experience itself to revelation? We already said: whoever wants to start from the experience and wants to convey it, undervalues the revelation. He starts at the bottom, with the human being. That is no true preaching, as that has to start from God's side. There is a theological priority or revelation in preaching.²¹ This has to be respected in preaching on the psalms.

Does this imply that man and his temptations and doubt should be ignored? Again we take the words and works of our Lord Jesus Christ as an example. Those who preach on conversations or miracles of Christ, cannot but include the people concerned in the sermon. How can we do that? They are not the subject of history. They are—if we are allowed to express it like this—the indirect object. Christ is concerned about the service he renders to them in work and deed. That is exactly the position of the poet and his people in the psalms. He speaks in the first person, singular or plural. In the first instance he is the subject, but he who looks at the state of affairs from a theological-homiletic point of view, must come to the conclusion that there is an exchange of subject. The poet calls for God. He speaks, makes supplications and cries out. The psalm is included in the Bible in order to hear the answer which the poet expects from God. Then it is God who speaks and acts. The poet, who was the subject, becomes the addressee, the beneficiary. The speaker becomes the one who is addressed. Only if we carry out this exchange of subject, can we avoid the danger of regarding the poet's experience as a revelation in sermons. From a theological-homiletic point of view [p. 267](#) we are obliged to do so. Then we do justice to the fact that God has the first and the last word, also in a sermon on the psalms, however much man is speaking, both in the Bible and in the sermon.

We can add to that, that calling for God, making supplications in faith, pleading on God's promises and deeds is the way along which the Spirit lets people share in the salvation of Israel's God. We speak about Christ, veiled in the shadows of the old dispensation. As we speak of a christological line in the psalms, we can speak of a pneumatology. It is not proclaimed in terms of man, but as the way in which the Spirit provides support in God when man is in severe doubt. We can repeat what the poet said only if we have first been addressed ourselves by God's revelation in this psalm.

CONCLUSIONS

In summarising the above-mentioned, we reach the following conclusions:

1. One is inclined, when preaching on the psalms, to begin with that which the poet experienced and which becomes apparent in his utterances of doubt, trust and expectation in the process of his struggle of faith. This would mean that the poet's experience would be preaching material. In that case we are preaching on faith as experience, which cannot simply be the intention.

²⁰ M. H. Bolkestein, *De Brieven van Petrus en Judas* (Nijkerk, 1963), p. 42. (Quotation translated).

²¹ For the theological priority of revelation in relation to the discussions on commandment and situation ethics, see my *Wet en evangelie* (Kampen, 1987), pp. 113–115.

2. The Psalms have been included in the Bible as God's revelation. The purpose is to receive the revelation concerning God and mankind, as it is offered to us in the psalms, as the contents of the sermon.
3. God's revelation comes to us in the psalms by means of the incorporation of the believing poet's words. That is the special thing about the psalms. As a matter of fact we come across words spoken by men, which have been included in Jesus speeches, in other parts of the Scriptures, as well as especially in the gospels.
4. When preaching on the psalms we should be aware of the need for an exchange of subject. The psalm has been given a place in the Bible because of the answer which the poet expects from God. One who reads and discusses the psalms, should first grasp what the poet expects and hears from God. In this way he himself becomes the addressee and only then can he talk of the poet's experience in his sermon
5. In the psalms God's virtues and deeds are called on. In that appeal we find God's revelation about himself in the poet's situation.
6. The poet plus his experience can be given room in a sermon, provided that all emphasis is on that which God reveals about himself by means of the appeal of the poet-believer towards God. From the poet's experience it becomes evident in what way the Holy Spirit works in the lives of God's children.

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Book Reviews

EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS TOGETHER: TOWARD A COMMON MISSION

Edited by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus

Dallas, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1995 pp. xxxv, 236. Paperback \$14.99

Reprinted with Permission from International Bulletin of Missionary Research, October 1996.

(Reviewed by Joan Delaney)

This volume brings together not only the statement of the meeting of North American Catholics and evangelicals held in September 1992 but also elaborates some of the main issues raised. Charles Colson, an evangelical, and Richard Neuhaus, a Catholic, both felt it was necessary for Catholics and evangelicals to come together to discuss some of their common concerns: cooperation in prison ministry, pro-life issues, the charismatic renewal, and the conflicts surrounding evangelization in Latin America.

In the essays included, Charles Colson treats the influence of the Enlightenment on American religious life. George Weigel discusses the effect of various Supreme Court decisions as imposing a government-enforced secularism on American public life. Mark Noll describes the historical and religious standoff between evangelicals and Catholics from the Reformation to the end of World War II and the dramatic shift that occurred after that time. Avery Dulles expresses the view that of the six models of unity he summarizes, that of spiritual ecumenism and solidarity in action would seem the most appropriate. J. I. Packer attempts to dispel some of the concerns expressed by evangelicals and lays out the basic tenets of evangelical belief. In the final essay Richard Neuhaus details the theological convergences and differences surrounding the doctrine of justification.

If a future meeting is envisioned, it would seem necessary to include some of the issues that have not been treated. First, while the emphasis on the issue of abortion is important, it should occasion a wider discussion of the cluster of pro-life issues. Second, there is a need to examine in greater [p. 270](#) depth the problem of proselytisation. Third, this initiative should be related to the work that has gone before. One looks in vain for a reference to *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, 1977-1984*, edited by Basil Meeking and John Stott (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdroans, 1986). Finally, Catholics—and indeed some evangelicals—may be uneasy with some of the negative references to

the wider ecumenical movement. One may wonder if the minimizing of the bilateral dialogues and of cooperation with the World Council of Churches is the price of this evangelical-Roman Catholic dialogue. If this is the case, some Catholics may feel it is too high a price to pay.

HOLY SCRIPTURE: REVELATION, INSPIRATION AND INTERPRETATION

by Donald G. Bloesch

Carlisle: Paternoster/Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994 Hardback, 384 pp. index
ISBN 0 85364 589 2

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Holy Scripture is the second volume in a new systematic theology series, *Christian Foundations*, being published by Donald Bloesch, emeritus professor of theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. (For the first, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, see ERT 17:4 October 1993, 509–512). In tackling critical elements of the doctrine of Scripture in this expanded form, Bloesch consolidates and refines his position as expressed in earlier writings, especially *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. Expounding his distinctive ‘progressive evangelicalism’, his main concern is to steer between two equally unacceptable and increasingly polarised options. On the one hand, there is a rationalistic biblicism which treats Scripture as if it were a legalistic text or even an oracle: on the other, a ‘latitudinarianism that plays fast and loose with the biblical texts’. Bloesch’s preference is for a view which sees Scripture as the written Word of God which is ‘by virtue of its divine inspiration a reliable witness to the truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ’. However, ‘it becomes the living Word when it actually communicates to us the truth and power of the cross of Christ through the illumination of the Spirit’.

The first part of the book sets the topic in its contemporary scholarly and church context with emphasis on ‘the crisis in biblical authority’, and then proceeds to a detailed discussion of revelation and inspiration. Bloesch rightly sees the approach to Scripture as crucial for all other theological issues. Although he holds a high view of Scripture and its authority, he rejects the idea that the Word of God can be identified simply with the text of the Bible. Instead, he sees it as a ‘mediate source of divine revelation’; the ‘ultimate source is the living Christ, who speaks to us by his Spirit’. Following on the theme of his earlier volume, Bloesch affirms ‘the paradoxical unit of Word and Spirit so that the reception of the Word is both a rational apprehension and a redeeming experience’.

Bloesch’s comprehensive approach is seen in a chapter on tradition in which he discusses the complex relationship between Scripture [p. 271](#) and the church, including tradition, canon and the role of the believing community for the proper reception of the power of Scripture as the Word of God. He affirms the need to recognize that ‘church tradition is not the container of the truth of the gospel but the sign and witness of the forward movement of this truth in history’. However, he warns that the gospel is ‘imparted in such a way that it is never our possession but always our goal and hope’.

The second half of the book, which is more tightly constructed than the first, turns to the important issue of hermeneutics. A general discussion of the topic is followed by a chapter devoted entirely to ‘Rudolf Bultmann: An Enduring Presence’. Bloesch regards Bultmann as one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century in regard to biblical studies and especially hermeneutical issues. This judgment is reinforced in the concluding chapters on the Bible and myth, and biblical and philosophical perspectives on truth. Bloesch recognizes that the Bible contains various literary forms, some of which may be described as ‘mythopoetical’ by which he means an ‘imagistic language describing the dramatic interaction between divinity and humanity ... that cannot be captured in

literal or unequivocal language'. However, this does not imply that the 'reality that this language describes is mythological' and nor does it limit the ability of Scripture to convey the truth of God's word. Nevertheless, Bloesch asserts that the forms must be taken seriously since we only have access to the Word in its literary form. But the 'transformative and informative' truth of God's Word is to be found in obedient faith rather than in assent to some rationalistic concepts or being caught up in some moral or mystical experience.

Bloesch's dependence on key mentors such as Barth and P.T. Forsyth is once again clearly apparent, as are his skilful presentations of insights from historical theology and his creative integration of theological insights with spiritual realities. Similarly, crucial interpretative concepts such as paradox and Christological gospel-centred hermeneutics are used extensively. Bloesch devotes special attention (sometimes in appendices attached to the relevant chapters), to topical issues such as theological method, inerrancy, narrative theology and the status of the Apocrypha. These, and discussions of some prominent evangelical positions, together with extensive documentation, combine to make this volume an important point of reference for the thinking of one of evangelicalism's most respected senior theologians.

THE POST-EVANGELICAL

by Dave Tomlinson

London: SPCK Triangle, 1995 pb. 151 pp. ISBN 0 281 04814 2

A PRIMER ON POSTMODERNISM

by Stanley J. Grenz

Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996 pb. 199 pp. ISBN 0 8028 0864 6

(Reviewed by David Parker)

In his short paperback, Dave Tomlinson tackles the problem of evangelical p. 272 Christians who acknowledge that their evangelical faith helped them when first converted but discover to their grief that it seems to let them down as they mature and grow. The author found that little had been written on the topic which is perhaps more widespread than might be thought. But as he investigated the problem he noticed that many people recognized the phenomena through their own personal experience. He distinguishes this situation from 'ex-evangelical' and from liberalism by explaining that 'To be post-evangelical is to take as given many of the assumptions of evangelical faith, while at the same time moving beyond its perceived limitations.'

Even allowing for the complex history and the apparent successes of the modern evangelical movement, Tomlinson argues that the post-evangelical is not simply suffering from a lack of faith, defective understanding or personal problems, but it is the product of a different culture from the one in which evangelicalism was born and developed. Drawing attention to some of the more legalistic, moralistic and rationalistic aspects of contemporary evangelicalism, he points out that even though the movement has been dramatically transformed in recent years through the recovery of social responsibility, greater intellectual integrity and a deeper appreciation of spirituality, the advent of a 'postmodern' culture calls for further changes at a fundamental level.

Tomlinson has himself moved from early involvement in a highly conservative form of evangelicalism through leadership in the charismatically inclined 'New Church' (or House Church) movement to his current work amongst 'people who were either on the edges of evangelical and charismatic churches or who had fallen off the edge altogether'.

This work is focused in an experimental church meeting on a week-night in a London pub, characterized by an informal and unconventional approach to worship, Bible study and fellowship.

He illustrates his case by discussing several critical issues which distinguish the contemporary world from that which shaped evangelicalism. One is the post-modern criticism of the dogmatic 'big picture' or meta-narrative, and its preference for the imaginative, individualized perspective. Closely related to this are concepts of truth, how truth may be apprehended and especially the role of language and symbolism in this process. In fact, Tomlinson contends that 'the shift from evangelical to post-evangelical is not primarily about surface culture, about moral standards or styles of worship; it is first and foremost about a difference in the perception of truth'.

In a major chapter, he tackles the implications of this for the understanding of Scripture as the Word of God and its interpretation; he argues that for the post-evangelical the inerrancy debate is 'a monumental waste of time' and that the 'Word of God' should be understood in metaphorical and symbolic terms making full use of the imagination through such techniques as meditation, story-telling and recitation. Another major chapter comes to similar radical conclusions about the [p. 273](#) Christian's relation to the world, culture and environment.

Tomlinson concludes that such radical refocusing of evangelicalism is necessary if it is to survive in the 'real' contemporary world rather than take a reactionary view or simply try to reinforce the traditional perspectives. In this book he concentrates on the theoretical basis of the problem and its solution without offering much insight as to how a post-evangelical church might function in practice. There is, for example, only a brief reference to his own pub church and he closes the book with a generalized picture of 'Christianity for a new age'.

While he takes great care to distinguish his approach from classical liberalism, it may be questioned whether he has been successful in remaining within the 'assumptions of evangelical faith' which he identifies. For example, he seems to reject a simplistic version of the normal evangelical view of the atonement in favour of the classic moral theory. Then in response to what are sometimes admittedly unattractive and even hollow displays of evangelical assurance of faith and confidence in the veracity of Scripture, he makes a virtue out of doubt and uncertainty instead of pointing to a deeper and more satisfactory certitude grounded in personal faith and discipleship. This stems from his understanding of truth as 'provisional and symbolic' and his assertion that 'language is inherently ambiguous' leading to his view of Scripture as 'the symbolic location of divine revelation'.

Tomlinson has undoubtedly raised important issues for Christian life and witness in a post-modern age where the traditional presentation of the gospel as a 'dogmatic grand scheme' is not favoured. As the author is ready to affirm, much more work is needed on these topics in the future.

One such attempt is provided by Stanley Grenz in *A Primer on Postmodernism* who, true to his title, concentrates on the essential features of postmodernism as an introduction for those who need to understand the contemporary cultural context. In so doing, Grenz, a prolific author from Carey Theological College and Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, offers a detailed yet highly readable account of the main features of postmodernism together with a lucid exposition of the intellectual and cultural movements which have led up to it. His presentation, which covers both the post-modern ethos and its impact on pop culture as well as a history of the rise of the modern world and the prelude to postmodernism, culminates in a lengthy chapter outlining the influence of three

prominent 'Philosophers of Postmodernism', Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty.

In strong contrast with Tomlinson, Grenz, in his closing chapter on 'The Gospel and the Postmodern Context', does clearly advocate 'standing our ground' by 'rejecting the rejection of the metanarrative'. Yet, in company with others, he points out that certain features of the postmodern critique of modernity can be welcomed by evangelical Christians, including the over-reliance on human reason and the objectivity and necessary goodness of knowledge. However, p. 274 his brief suggestions about the 'contours of a postmodern gospel', (viz, that it should be post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric) do not provide much specific help in dealing with the problems evidenced in Tomlinson's programme. What is needed is a detailed treatment of the doctrines singled out by Tomlinson in the light of postmodern concerns but firmly within the framework of evangelical assumptions.

But perhaps the difficulty really lies in the nature of postmodernism itself. As Grenz puts it, 'postmodern intellectuals have generally not sought to provide any constructive new proposals. Their goal has primarily been to set forth a stinging critique of the Enlightenment project on the basis of its own underlying principles.' Such a criticism may well be justified, but is insufficient on its own. That being the case, evangelicals might be well advised to look to constructing a viable expression of the gospel for the period *following* postmodernism, for surely such a philosophy can hardly be expected to survive unchallenged for very long.

A PATHWAY INTO THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

by Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (ed.)

Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994 Pb viii + 344pp Indexes
ISBN 0-8028-4078-7

(Reviewed by David Parker)

A Pathway into the Holy Scripture is a collection of papers (in revised form) delivered at the Jubilee conference of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research held in July, 1994. This meeting coincided with the 500th anniversary of the birth of William Tyndale, after whom the Fellowship is named. It is appropriate then that the opening paper (by David F. Wright) should celebrate both William Tyndale and the Tyndale Fellowship itself and that the title of published essays should be the name of Tyndale's own publication (AD 1530).

In addition to the introduction, there are thirteen essays in the volume on a wide range of topics, but all touching on the question of biblical interpretation in some form or other. Following on from the introduction, Carl R. Trueman draws attention to the importance of the Scripture in Tyndale's work; A. Morgham Derham and H. G. M. Williamson offer mini-papers on theological research from the viewpoint of the church and of the academy. Craig L. Blomberg reviews critical issues in NT scholarship, while Brian S. Rosner discusses Paul's view of Scripture and Carl E. Armerding proposes 'story exegesis' as a way to overcome some of the difficulties in the use of the OT. I. Howard Marshall and Gerald Bray turn to relations between Scripture and Systemic Theology in their papers while David F. Wright uses the doctrine of baptism as a case study on Scripture and evangelical diversity. In the concluding paper, Anthony N. L. Lane re-examines the slogan, *Sola Scriptura*. Other topics covered are the contemporary doctrine of Scripture (Keven p. 275 Vanhoozer), conservatism and orthodoxy (Nigel M. de S. Cameron) and experience (Thomas A. Noble). Anthony C. Thiselton's paper is a set of proposals to develop a more creative approach to the issue of biblical authority and hermeneutics.

Short summaries introduce each chapter, while subject, author and scripture indexes provide access to the main topics, but there is no bibliography and little information about the contributors, only some of whom are well known. As a collection of essays, this volume provides a useful sample of contemporary evangelical scholarship (mostly British) on approaches to biblical interpretation, revealing it to be rigorous, devout and alert to the vital importance of Scripture for the life of the church.

MODELS FOR INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

by John Goldingay

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995 Pb x + 328pp Abbreviations, Bibliography, Indexes

ISBN 0-85364-643-0

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Building on an earlier work from the same publishers (*Models for Scripture, 1994*), John Goldingay, Principal of St John's Theological College, Nottingham, presents a richly developed and finely argued programme for interpreting Scripture which takes full account of recent developments in hermeneutics, literary criticism and theology. At the same time, it is sensitive to the practical needs of the church, being directed towards making Scripture available to the preacher. Accordingly, the final chapter is on expository preaching, and it concludes with useful 'Guidelines for the Expositor'.

Apart from the insightful interaction with a vast range of contemporary scholarship, the most distinctive and profitable feature of the book is the way it recognizes the diversity of Scripture and incorporates this characteristic into the hermeneutical process. Thus instead of trying to force Scripture into a singular framework and to impose upon it a rigid interpretative scheme, it is presented as a source from which the believer and church may draw sustenance in many different ways.

The heart of this approach lies in the four models which the author explores, corresponding to four different literary genres which are to be found in the canon: Scripture as witnessing tradition (narrative); Scripture as authoritative canon (torah); Scripture as inspired word (prophecy); Scripture as experienced revelation (apocalypse, testimony and theological statement). As the author puts it, 'Scripture has a variety of ways of speaking, and the process of interpretation requires a variety of hermeneutical approaches, corresponding to this variety in types of text'.

This 'multiplex' approach to understanding the biblical text recognizes that Scripture has a variety of forms corresponding with the [p. 276](#) fundamental forms that communicative statements take, and the fact that speech is used for a variety of purposes. It follows that various forms of responses are required, and that the meaning of the different parts of Scripture and the canon as a whole must be sought in ways that are appropriate to the forms and purposes that are employed. Thus, 'Different genres bring to the surface different questions about interpretation' and so 'an eclectic methodology' or a 'critical pluralism' of hermeneutical method is required.

This approach can be taken further, in the view of Goldingay, to enrich preaching, when it is realized that the variety of forms and usages in Scripture also calls for different ways of preaching that are appropriate to the particular form. Thus, popular expository preaching which presents the central meaning of a passage may be suitable for doctrinal texts, but narrative passages demand another method, while psalms, which are often 'models of prayers' rather than doctrinal treatises on the subject of prayer, invite us to pray and 'to test our prayers by theirs'. So 'What could be involved in expounding the

Psalms is to pray them oneself in order to draw the congregation into praying them—to preach by praying’.

In each of the four parts of the volume, Goldingay engages in a detailed discussion of the particular form of Scripture under consideration, its nature, methods of interpretation and its function as Scripture with a focus on how its meaning and significance can be made available to readers and through preaching. In treating narrative, for example, he refers to the form and structure of the story, the role of the audience, and how narrative acts as a witness to God’s deeds more than our obligations (with some reflections on Liberation hermeneutics); he concludes with a discussion of ‘how stories preach’.

The final part, dealing with ‘Scripture as experienced revelation’, is possibly the most suggestive and innovative (in comparison with narrative, canon and historical word). It deals with apparently disparate sections of Scripture (apocalypses, Psalms, wisdom books and the epistles) but in the author’s analysis, these are more unified than might at first be suspected because they all involve the human experience in response to revelation. So ‘Interpretation [of these genres] needs to work with the differing potentials of revelation, experience and reflection’. The discussion ranges over such questions as myth, interpretive traditions, confessional, academic and human contexts and the subjective/objective experience.

This is also perhaps the most important section because, as Goldingay indicates in his conclusion, the task of expounding the biblical text ultimately involves unfolding the meaning of Scripture in such a way that it brings the hearer’s experience into relationship with God’s purpose and activity. Referring especially to Paul’s use of contemporary symbols, he states, ‘Our job [as interpreters and preachers] is to paint a portrait of the reality that expiation, justification, or propitiation refers to, in such a way that we get in touch with p. 277 our own and other people’s experience of the breaking down and renewal of relationships and can thus also be put in touch with what is going on and could go on between us and God’. Goldingay’s book, which is dedicated to the students and staff of the Evangelical Theological House of Studies (ETHOS), Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, is a stimulating and comprehensive exploration of the issues involved in achieving this goal, and as such is highly commended.

HEARING THE NEW TESTAMENT: STRATEGIES FOR INTERPRETATION

by Joel B. Green (ed.)

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995 Pb xvi + 444pp Indexes ISBN 0–8028-0793–687-2

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Under the guidance of Joel Green, who was a co-editor of *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 19 writers (13 from the United States, and 6 from the United Kingdom) provide an authoritative manual on NT hermeneutics. The 20 chapters cover the full range of disciplines, including textual criticism, linguistics, and discourse and genre analysis, as well as tradition, historical, narrative, rhetorical and social-scientific criticism.

There are also chapters offering an historical overview of subject and an historical review of presuppositions in NT study, while others discuss the background of Jewish and Roman literature, the relationship of the Old and New Testament, canonical context and the role of the reader in NT interpretation. Material on theology and ethics is also included, as are two more wide-ranging chapters (with women authors, or coauthors) covering global perspectives in interpretation and feminist hermeneutics (the latter being adapted from a previous publication).

This encyclopedic scope together with the well-ordered structure of *Hearing the New Testament* makes it ideal as a text or reference book. The material is set out in a logical manner, with clear paragraphing and definitions of terms; each chapter concludes with an extensive section devoted to suggestions for further reading. Furthermore, in each chapter, the discussion of general principles, together with background and related issues is supported by illustrations of the hermeneutical method under review as applied to any of five sample texts nominated by the editor and drawn from different parts of the New Testament.

In his opening chapter, the editor introduces 'the challenge of hearing the New Testament' by drawing attention to the fact that reading the New Testament is an act of communication involving an interaction with the original authors and their communities by means of the text. As such it will involve various elements, including the addresser, the addressee and the context, message and medium, which all have to be taken into account. The very nature of language itself is important, as is the need to read *behind-the-text*, *in-the-text* and *in front of the text*. The various disciplines discussed in p. 278 the body of the book relate to these factors. However, what must be kept in mind is that 'the act of reading the Gospel of Luke [for example] is always, at least potentially, an encounter with the Evangelist as a partner in the conversation'. Furthermore, 'as an *act of communication* our reading is not simply dispassionate, 'for information only', but has the capacity to shape us in some way.

This opening chapter is matched by his closing chapter, 'the practice of reading the NT', which is 'an invitation to consider how the material of this volume might inform our use of the NT'. Green sees this in a broad perspective, arguing that the book points to the fact that 'the practice of reading the NT, then, will interact with the content of that reading, but also with its mode of communal and cultural discourse, its ways of engaging authorities and interacting with cultural mores'. The process thus involves the Christian communities in which the New Testament is read and the practices of these people in their various contexts as they are fostered by the New Testament. In fact he believes the aim of reading the New Testament is that 'We join in the exploration of how our lives as God's people might be "constructed via narratives that are historically set in another time and place but display redemptive power here and now" '.

These are important objectives, and *Hearing the New Testament* is a rich and easily accessed resource of factual and methodological information to facilitate the serious student in the process of achieving them.

EXPLORATIONS IN EXEGETICAL METHOD: GALATIANS AS A TEST CASE

by Moisés Silva

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996 Hb 236pp Bibliog., Indexes ISBN 0-8010-1123-X

(Reviewed by David Parker)

In an unusual and innovative book, Silva, Professor of NT Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, uses the epistle to the Galatians as a case study for exegetical method. Intended as part of a larger project which would have involved an exhaustive, multi-volume study of Galatians, *Explorations* is divided into three parts, language and literature, history and Pauline theology.

The first part deals with issues such as text, vocabulary, syntax and literary structure. The second begins with some discussion on the background and context of the book, especially in sociological perspective and then moves to an analysis of earlier discussions about historical matters and the relation between Acts and Galatians, concluding with the notes on the dating. The final part ranges widely over the distinctiveness and coherence

of Paul's message, his use of the Bible (the Old Testament) and the specific treatment of eschatology and law in the Epistle.

As the author points out in the introduction, the purpose of this volume is not 'to provide a comprehensive treatment of any one topic ... nor to come up with a full interpretation of Galatians' but to provide the advanced student with 'a p. 279 strategy' that can be applied to any problem or issue in the interpretation of this epistle or any other biblical book. This book has had a long gestation period and several parts have already appeared in modified forms in various journals and other books. The main question that has motivated the study has been, 'Why is it that competent scholars reach different exegetical conclusions even when they seem to be applying mutually agreed upon principles to the same set of data? What factors are really at play when they make a decision? And which factors ought to be determinative?' These questions suggest to the author that there is a need to 'develop a self-conscious approach to interpretation'.

In proposing answers to these methodological questions, Silva has gone beyond the general principles of hermeneutics as found in the textbooks and investigated the selection, application and interaction of those and other principles in the actual process of exegesis. He suggests, for example, that in using the works of other commentators, attention should be paid to how they come to their conclusions themselves. Furthermore, he points out that commentators' works themselves need to be exegeted to take account of their own context and purpose so that their comments about the meaning of the biblical text can be seen in proper perspective. He also warns that modern commentators are inheritors of an interpretative tradition which must be used critically rather than naively or negatively.

This raises important questions about the relation between the original text and its meaning in that context and its interpretation and relevance in the context of later readers. The focus here, according to Silva, is on the epistle rather than upon its historical meaning, i.e., 'concern for relevance affects the use—and therefore the interpretation—of Scripture. It is unhelpful to draw too sharp a distinction between such an application of the Bible, on the one hand, and the question of historical meaning, on the other.'

The relationship between the meaning of the original text and authorial intention on the one hand and the meaning, relevance and use of the text by the later reader on the other is one that Silva returns to in the concluding chapter. He concedes that he has not succeeded in his original intention of presenting 'a fully integrated description of exegetical method, that is, a method in which *relevance* would be treated not as a tacked-on subject more or less in the form of a postscript, but as a concern that should inform the hermeneutical process from the beginning to the end'. (One reason for his failure, he claims, is the 'theoretical complexities of the topic' the literature of which is 'almost suffocating'!) however, he does advance the proposal that 'readers *produce* at least part of the meaning of the text' and that this 'does not necessarily undermine the principle of authorial meaning'.

This issue, the connection between exegesis and relevance or between meaning and application, which he describes as 'perhaps the most pressing question in contemporary p. 280 hermeneutical thought', is once again explored by reference to specific examples from Galatians; the focus is on the question of accurately identifying both the original context and the context of the proposed modern application of the text. Silva points out, for example, that the reader is always involved in the exegetical process and such involvement should be used to 'sensitize' the exegete 'to certain aspects of the text that would otherwise escape us'. In other words, he suggests (without proposing it as a definitive solution) that it is possible for the reader's own situation to 'enrich' rather than 'taint' the exegetical process.

He takes this understanding further in arguing that systematic theology should self-consciously inform exegesis, not least because of the unity of Scripture and the 'analogy of faith'. He believes that it is easier to identify (and correct) misunderstandings of the text if the readers' contribution to interpretation is recognized than if it is denied. Thus it follows that authorial intention and the historical meaning are more likely to emerge if the reader's role is acknowledged.

Silva's detailed and erudite work tackles important issues in a creative manner, and in the process provides many useful and practical insights into the process of exegesis, much of which would be transferable to the exegesis of other texts. However, it requires a detailed knowledge of and interest in Galatians before the value of those insights can be adequately appreciated, thus rendering the book less useful as a general exegetical guide than would otherwise be the case.

AN INTRODUCTION OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

by Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994 Hb 298pp Glossary, Annotated Bibliography, Indexes ISBN 0-310-53090-3

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Intended as a overdue replacement for Bernard Ramm's popular but forty-year old, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, this volume combines the labours of two writers who do not always agree in their understanding of the topic. Claiming that their work is thereby unique and urgently needed due to the 'catastrophic' changes in the discipline since Ramm's day. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (both at Gordon-Conwell) offer not 'a party line' but the opportunity for readers to 'come up with their own conclusions after eavesdropping on a vibrant conversation between two writers who dare to disagree (at a few critical points) agreeably'. (According to the authors, the differences lie mainly in whether or not the significance of a text for its readers should be included within the process of discovering the meaning of the text; they believe they actually agree on more points than they disagree, including the authority of Scripture!)

Although this results in a somewhat p.281 disjointed presentation, the negative effects are softened by the identification of each author's contribution (9 chapters by Kaiser, 6 by Silva), though not in the table of contents! Furthermore, it is disclosed in the introduction that the differences between them are most apparent in the material dealing with prophecy and the theological use of the Bible (Kaiser) over against Calvinistic hermeneutics (Silva). To assist the reader further, each chapter is prefaced by a full page outline of the argument; many have summarising conclusions and there is a short glossary and annotated bibliography.

While Part 2 of this book contains the type of material on the methods of interpreting various categories of biblical literature (narrative, poetry, gospels, epistles, prophecy) that is commonly found in text books on hermeneutics, its main value is to be found in other sections. Part 3, for example, consists of three chapters discussing the devotional, cultural and theological application of the Bible, which are important, but often overlooked, aspects of the way the Bible is used on a day-today basis by Christians and in the church. These chapters not only provide technical background on topics such as 'ethnohermeneutics', 'acculturation' and 'the analogy of faith', but they also undergird the discussion with theological concepts and offer wise advice of a practical nature on the personal use and exposition of the Bible.

The opening section sets the scene for the complexities of using and interpreting the Bible in the contemporary context. (Two chapters in the final section on the history of interpretation seem to repeat unnecessarily some of this material.) Silva provides two chapters on the need for hermeneutics and the use of (biblical) language, but the heart of this section is Kaiser's chapter which consists of a simple introduction to recent developments in hermeneutics, stressing the importance of meaning, or 'the meaning of meaning'. He summarises briefly the work of Gadamer, Ricoeur and Hirsch and four models for understanding the Bible (proof-texting, historical-critical, reader-response and syntactical-theological) before going on to a discussion of 'meaning' itself. Here he covers meaning as the referent, meaning as sense, meaning as intention and meaning as significance.

While recognizing the value of these 'revolutionary concepts' in understanding the biblical text more 'deeply and creatively', Kaiser warns that this in no way reduces the need to understand it 'correctly'. He thus follows Hirsch's emphasis on the importance of authorial intention, although without wanting to lose the wider meaning and significance of the text for its later readers. In short, he urges that 'the five so-called meanings we have discussed separately for the purpose of analysis must now be restored to one holistic way of looking at the text when we come to interpreting it'.

This conclusion is strongly apparent in the final chapter of the book, where Kaiser argues that the central issue of biblical interpretation, the meaning of the original author, has not changed in the last century and a half. Rather, the intense discussion p. 282 of the topic, at least in evangelical circles, has revealed that the issue is one of application rather than of interpretation *per se*. Accordingly, in what is the most useful thrust of the book, he claims that 'One of the largest gains, and unusual benefits' of recent discussion has been that 'the hermeneutical task is not finished until we, as the contemporary audience, have applied the meaning that we think the author is communicating'. Rigorous attention to this principle would mean the end of the 'yawning gap' between what the text meant and what it means, an 'academic convenience' which has no rightful place in church.

EVANGELICAL DICTIONARY OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

by Walter A. Elwell, Editor

Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996 Hb x+ 933pp Scripture Index

ISBN 0-85364-690-2/0-2049-2

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Walter Elwell and his publishers, Baker Books and Paternoster, have made another useful contribution to the reference material available to students in the form of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, which covers both old and New Testaments in a single volume without requiring the use of the original languages. 128 authors contribute more than 500 articles on biblical books, individuals, theological ideas and concepts ranging from 'Aaron' to 'Zephaniah'. Longer articles carry bibliographies, referring mostly to currently available material in English. Almost all of the contributors come from North America; a number of well known senior scholars are included in the list, but they are joined by many new ones.

'Biblical Theology' is understood by this dictionary as 'an attempt to articulate the theology that the Bible contains as its writers addressed their particular settings ... biblical theology labors to arrive at a coherent synthetic overview without denying the fragmentary nature of the light the Bible sheds on some matters, and without glossing over tensions that may exist'. According to the author of the article on the subject, Robert W. Yarborough, such a study assumes the inspiration and reliability of Scripture and its

unity centred in witness to Christ. Thus exception is taken to those forms of the modern discipline of 'biblical theology' which attempt to separate God's word from Scripture's words' and instead air 'personal critical convictions rather than laying bare the theology of the writings themselves'. Hence, practitioners of 'biblical theology' need to 'know, love, and submit to the God of the Bible rather than the ideologies of the age'. Although this does not mean ignoring scholarship, it does 'recognize that God's word, if living and true, calls for a substantially (but not totally) different approach than post-Enlightenment academic theology'.

For these reasons, this Dictionary emphasizes the theological content and significance of the topics under discussion and avoids historical, social, geographic and biographical matter; writers were also 'instructed p.283 to steer away from the complexities of current academic debate' due to the transient and esoteric nature of such material. Thus the article on 'Romans, Theology of' is mainly a section by section outline of the theological contents with no reference to critical or interpretative issues; there is however an article on Rome giving a description of the city and its history. (Articles on biblical books are invariably on the 'theology of' the book in question.) The article on 'Kingdom of God' does canvass the various interpretations that have been given to the terms (political, spiritual, future, realized) followed by the short outline of the biblical material and concluding discussion of the implications, emphasizing the proper response of believers and disciples. But 'The Fall' discusses theological matters with little attempt to analyse the literary or historical issues involved in the biblical text.

Such a tight focus of an objective statement of the theology of the biblical writer turns this Dictionary into an encyclopedia of biblical themes after the manner of at topical Bible. This is a policy that begs many questions about the Bible itself and the most appropriate hermeneutical approach to it (there is no article on hermeneutics or interpretation although the authority and the canon of the Bible are covered). While this is a useful approach as far as it goes, students will need to turn to other reference works as well if they are to understand fully the meaning of the biblical material in its own setting and its meaning as the Word of God.

PLAYING BY THE RULES: A BASIC GUIDE TO INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

by Robert H. Stein

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994 Pb 219pp Glossary, Bibliography, Indexes ISBN 0-8010-8366-4

(Reviewed by David Parker)

True to the title, Robert Stein, of Bethel Theological Seminary, has provided another useful handbook for students, this time in the area of hermeneutics. It differs from other books in several ways. First of all it is, as he intends, basic, presenting the issues and methods in 'a nontechnical way'—no mean achievement in this field. The four opening chapters are introductory, covering the 'general rules of interpretation' and basic definitions of terms. This is assisted by useful diagrams, clear layout of the text and helpful paragraph divisions. The study questions accompanying each chapter, and the short glossary and bibliography at the end of the book assist in clarifying the presentation.

The second section of the book, chapters 5 to 13, discuss the 'specific rules' for each of nine, 'individual games' or types of literature and writing which are to be found in Scripture. These 'games' range from wisdom, prediction, rhythm and jargon to exaggeration, comparison, stories and correspondence which cover all the usual categories of proverb, prophecy, parables, narrative, epistles and so on. The final chapter is on treaties, laws and songs. Numerous samples of biblical writing are referred to

throughout, and in many cases, diagrams, charts p. 284 and tables are used to good effect. In each case, the author covers the relevant issues competently, taking account of particular problems and identifying guiding principles clearly.

The other major distinctive feature of this book is Stein's commitment to the principle that hermeneutics seeks to discover 'what the biblical authors meant by their writings'. He acknowledges his debt to E. D. Hirsh, Jr and his book, *Validity in Interpretation* for this, realizing that this is a controversial approach in many circles today where the text as text is reckoned to have 'semantic autonomy' at the expense of authorial intention. Nevertheless, Stein argues strongly for his own traditional view and develops a carefully nuanced system of interpretation which takes full account not only of the author's intention and context but also the later readers and the significance of the text for them. But fundamentally Stein holds this view for theological and practical reasons: 'The importance of interpreting the Bible correctly cannot be overemphasised. The claim that the Bible is inspired and that it is God's revelation to humanity is ultimately of little value without some understanding of how that divine revelation should be interpreted'. Accordingly he devotes a whole chapter to the question of interpretation and the inspiration of Scripture.

It is as a result of this strict adherence to authorial intention and the recognition of the role played by different types that Stein stresses the importance of 'playing [the "game" of interpretation] by the rules' that apply to each category of literature. This makes for a somewhat structured approach to hermeneutics, with this volume providing a useful and easily accessed manual for the purpose.

OUR TRIUNE GOD

by Peter Toon

Wheaton, IL: Victor Books 1996 approx. \$20

(Reviewed by Max Davidson)

Peter Toon, an Anglican evangelical, has authored some twenty books. The present volume aims 'to set forth the biblical doctrine' (p. 9) concerning the Trinity. Toon acknowledges he is not a specialist in biblical studies but 'a theologian, who is committed to the Faith expressed in the Nicene Creed from the fourth century' (p. 9).

Toon argues in the first of four parts that the primary source for knowledge of the Trinity is the Scriptures. Beyond this, the trinitarian perspectives of the early church, which was involved in the creation of the canon of Scripture, ought to be respected. He rejects modern feminist approaches that seek to 'name God' out of women's experience, as well as warning against confused and syncretistic thinking within the Christian church of the West. There is a brief survey of major theological ideas about the Trinity from patristic times to the present, and a review of several twentieth century biblical studies.

Toon thinks there is an implicit rather than explicit trinitarianism in the New Testament. The second p. 285 and third parts of the book consider the biblical material. The Old Testament points to Yahweh as the one and only God who is characterized by plurality in unity. Nevertheless, the New Testament indicates that the first Christians had taken a major step in regarding Jesus as fully divine, trinitarian revelation being given 'in the incarnation of the Son of the Father and in the outpouring of the Spirit of the Father' (p. 129).

Yahweh is Father in his eternal begetting of the Son. Toon subscribes to the traditional doctrine that sees the Father as 'the summit of the Holy Trinity', with the Son and Spirit 'truly consubstantial with him because they receive from him their substance' (p. 150). The Son is called 'Lord' which serves 'to identify him in the closest possible way with God

the Father' (p. 169), since the name Yahweh is normally rendered 'Lord' (*kyrios*) in the Septuagint.

Concerning the Holy Spirit, incidents such as the baptism of Jesus, the fact that the Spirit is said to act like a person, the clear parallels between Jesus and the Spirit in the Fourth Gospel, various threefold formulae (as in [Rom. 14:17-18](#)), and other evidence are seen as consistent with the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which states that the Holy Spirit, 'with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and glorified'.

The most stimulating section for this reviewer was the last, 'Joyful and Informed Orthodoxy'. Joy and worship lie close to the surface here as Toon considers biblical incidents in which all three members of the triune Godhead were active. These include the conception, baptism, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In addition, salvation and prayer are both the gracious work of the Triune God.

Toon makes a plea for preachers to 'so direct public worship that they really and truly give the impression that the Holy Trinity is God and God is the Holy Trinity'. Otherwise, the 'doctrine of the Trinity appears to have no practical relevance to life in this world because it speaks of that which is outside space and time, (p. 234). 'Reverential knowledge of the immanent Holy Trinity comes through experiential knowing of the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit' (p. 245).

The book is a useful introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. Most importantly, it seeks to develop its perspectives on the basis of biblical revelation. It also respects patristic statements such as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan and Athanasian Creeds, in contrast with much modern writing that sees limited value to the church today in such statements. A short bibliography after each chapter, not limited to conservative evangelical authors, invites the reader to independent thought. In addition, the author's concern is not merely academic, but pastoral and practical.

However, this book has several serious limitations. Frequently, more rigorous exegesis would have been appropriate. For example, he is too uncritically sympathetic to the interpretations of Augustine and Calvin who understood appearances of the angel of Yahweh in the Old Testament in trinitarian terms. A heading such as 'The Holy Trinity Appears [p. 286](#) to and Speaks with Moses' (p. 89) in reference to the theophany of [Exodus 3](#) creates an impression that the approved way of reading the incident is trinitarian. To say that 'the sole use of the historical-critical method serves to hide the holy Trinity from view' (p. 83) is misleading if, in fact, the Trinity is not actually there to be seen in these incidents in the first place. The suggestion that the medieval approach of interpreting Scripture at four distinct levels, literal, allegorical, moral and eschatological (p. 79-80), has value for exegesis must be regarded as questionable.

Of particular concern is the frequent reference to the Son as eternally begotten by the Father, but without any demonstration that this follows from Scripture, or any explanation of just what this concept might actually mean. Toon appears to accept, with most modern scholarship and Bible translations that *monogenes* in [Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16](#) means unique, for he writes, 'Jesus is the only Son; he is one of a kind' (p. 162). But in keeping with the church fathers, he frequently speaks of the Son as 'begotten of the Father before all ages' (p. 240). He accepts, without demonstration, the fourth century Cappadocian distinctions between Father, Son and Spirit as being based in ingenerateness, generateness and procession. Much more penetrating exegesis is called for in this matter. Certainly 'Son' can be adequately interpreted in terms of relationships, rather than origin.

Toon's position implies a kind of eternal subordination. He writes that 'the Father is first and the Son is included in the Father, for he is begotten of the Father before all ages'

(p. 240). In fact, it seems that Toon's self-confessed allegiance to the early creeds, rather than an openness to the biblical text itself, underpins his trinitarian exegesis.

Sometimes technical terminology is not adequately explained when introduced. For example, *perichoresis* (coinherence) is said to be 'the mutual interpenetration and embracement of the Three Persons through the possession by each, in his own proper way, of the totality of the one, divine *ousia*' (p. 42). This is too opaque in a book for 'Christians who are used to serious reading, but who do not have seminary training in divinity' (p. 10).

Toon has no time for inclusive language. He has good grounds for retaining masculine pronouns when we refer to God, for that is how the revelation has come to us. But I must disagree when he refuses to use inclusive language for men and women. He says, 'The use of the word man in the traditional sense conveys the notion of order for he being first in order contains in himself she who is second in order. It is wholly appropriate that the word man can mean both the human race and the male species; and that the word woman can only mean female man and never the human race. This, in a trinitarian perspective, mirrors the truth that the Father is first and the Son is included in the Father, for he is begotten of the Father before all ages' (p. 240).

Overall, this book will prove useful as an introduction to theological students and others who wish to gain an entry into trinitarian theology.

However, some of the thinking it will stimulate will not be because the author himself explores new territory, but more because the issues themselves demand rigorous attention by all Christians.

Joan Delaney, M.M., was the Catholic consultant on mission at the World Council of Churches, Geneva, from 1984 to 1990. p. 287

Journal and Book Information

Churchman

A journal of Anglican theology published quarterly by the Church Society, editor Gerald Bray. Subscriptions from Churchman, Dean Wace House, 16 Rossly Road, Watford, Herts, WD1 7E4, UK. Rates £22.00

Evangel

An international review, editor Stephen Dray. Published three times a year by Paternoster Periodicals, P.O. Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, UK. Subscription rates UK £13.50, International £16.20

Reality

Published by the Bible College of New Zealand, Private Bag, Henderson, Auckland 1231, New Zealand five times a year. Subscription rates US \$20.00

Reformed Theological Review

Editors Allan M. Harman and David G. Peterson, published three times a year. Subscriptions from The Editors, P.O. Box 635, Doncaster, Vic. 3108 Australia. Rates US \$15.00

An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics, by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva.
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