Essays in Biblical Interpretation

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FORWARD

This book, as may be gathered from its title, is a group of essays loosely structured around the central theme of biblical interpretation. These essays are the fruit of several years of study and writing while a graduate student at Global University. Each essay is a self-contained unit of thought, but the work as a whole retains a unit of purpose—to uncover what it is that God is saying in the Bible, how He is saying it, and how it can be understood and applied today. The foundational presupposition of the entire work is the centrality of Jesus in all of God's revelation. From this presupposition several key secondary presuppositions are derived and elucidated throughout the work (it will be left to the reader to discover what these secondary presuppositions are). The essays have been grouped into four parts with five chapters each: the history of biblical interpretation, the message of the Bible, the form of the Bible, and the Bible in theology and apologetics.

While some theologians call for the liberation of the Bible "from its captivity to one-sided white, middle-class, male interpretation" (Russell 1985, 12), the present group of essays fails to transcend this bondage. The author is a white male, upper lower-class to lower middle-class American. The question must be asked: "Does his very existence disqualify his presuppositions, methods, and conclusions before he has made them?" Does his skin color, gender, economic status, or cultural background make him incapable of insight, devoid of understanding, or neglectful of the importance of compassion and love in interpretation? "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Sythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Col. 3:11), all are on equal ground before the cross and before God's revelation (v. 10). The content of these essays

are presented to the reader for approval or disapproval on their own merits, beyond the author's context (which is indeed important in understanding the bases of his presuppositions, methods, and conclusions). May the reader assess their value and come to conclusions regarding what biblical interpretation is, what it ought to be, and what it might look like in a postmodern world. And may the reader be confronted with the heart, mind, and life of Christ that transforms, illumines, and revives.

Part I
Historical Hermeneutics

CHAPTER 1

FORCES AT WORK

The purpose of this essay is to define and evaluate five historical and three contemporary forces at work which affected hermeneutics greatly. Five forces at work which I consider to have had the greatest effect on hermeneutics in the past two thousand years are the growth of the church, influences from within, opposition from without, education and knowledge dissemination, and state systems—secular or sacred.

Historically, as the church spread across vast new religious, philosophical, political, cultural, and geographical boundaries, it changed its emphases, how it saw the world, and was stretched greatly in its effort to remain unified in spite of its growing diversity. As it grew into an empire (the church as a world power) its hermeneutics became more authoritarian, rather than literal or philosophical. The church also spread across lands whose inhabitants had formerly espoused incredibly complex systematic structures for viewing their world, and it was only natural for these new Christians to view biblical interpretation in the light of their own particular world views and cultural systems.

Various influences from within the church have had a major effect on hermeneutics. Included in this would be the major heretical philosophies of the Gnostics,

Arians, Modal Monarchians, Deistic Transcendentalists, Unitarians, and a great host of other groups like them. As heterodoxy has flourished in the church's history, so also has opposition to it through authoritarian, philosophical, and literal interpretations of the Bible which sought to bring the church back to its original orthodoxy. These many heretical groups have challenged church leaders throughout the centuries to make their hermeneutics relevant, logical, and systematic. Many of the great creeds were formalized as a result of heterodoxy in the church.

Opposition from outside the church has also had a vast impact on how the church interpreted the Bible. Judaism, paganism, Islam, rationalistic Atheism, and even religious pluralism have all had major effects on the church, and have caused church leaders to develop various apologetics to combat syncretism and the threat of dissonance in gospel content.

Education and the dissemination of knowledge have affected hermeneutics by various means. Educational centers of hermeneutics and Christianity such as Alexandria, Antioch, the Universities of the Scholastics, and the Tubingen school at Germany have been factors which revolutionized the way Christians dissected and read their Bibles throughout history. Also, the flow of information through history in the form of books, pamphlets, written sermons, and histories have deeply influenced leaders to "revive" old traditions, philosophies, and hermeneutics. Examples of this are Philo's use of Plato's "essence", Origen's later use of Philo's allegorical method, and Thomas Aquinas' use of Aristotle's "form" which he utilized to discredit Plato's "essence" and Philo and Origen's allegorical method. The open flow of information may expand the thought horizons of a group, while the control (whether conscious or unconscious) of the flow of information

has at times led to intellectual and hermeneutical stagnation (such as what occurred in great measure during the Middle Ages).

Secular and sacred state systems have impacted hermeneutics through persecution and acceptance of the church. In early Christianity, the church was often persecuted and oppressed by the secular state, causing it to grow and become stronger in its defense of the gospel and its pure interpretation. As the Roman Empire fell into disarray over the centuries, the general populace's hope in the secular state waned. Christianity was forced to the front and became in many ways inseparable from the government of the newly rising Byzantine Empire. This rising influence and widespread acceptance of social Christianity changed the way church leaders were interpreting the Bible. Throughout history, whenever Christianity has intricately interweaved itself with the state, the state has come to see itself as the new Israel, and the gospel has become a political force in the present world (as with the New England Puritans of early America). Conversely, whenever Christianity has been oppressed or persecuted by the state it has interpreted the Bible in light of its persecution, seeing itself as the struggling remnant, and the Bible as its hope in a new perfect world.

Three contemporary forces at work in American culture and the Assemblies of God (A/G) are education and the dissemination of knowledge, an emphasis on subjectivity and tolerance, and anti-intellectual functionalism.

In Universities and in Seminaries, Colleges, and other academic circles across America education has been a prime factor for change in hermeneutics. Historically, the critical methods of Bible interpretation (whether grammatical, historical, or literary) have had a direct impact on Christian leaders who exegete the scriptures. They have lessened

the faith of many in miracles, the supernatural, and the historicity of the Biblical accounts. This weakening of the Bible's authority has led many toward neo-orthodoxy, which is a fancy word for "skeptical exegete" (and opposes orthodox churches from without, while influencing the populace of those churches from within). In the American A/G our academia is hard-pressed to train leaders that are academically up to neo-orthodox standards. This is because they seek to remain truly orthodox in their hermeneutics and beliefs, but still try to scientifically and objectively exegete the scriptures. Neo-orthodoxy and other liberals in hermeneutics will always see them as relative outsiders because the A/G emphasizes belief in what they know, while much of the academic world emphasizes belief in belief (hypotheses) or knowledge of knowledge (science's analyzing of accepted facts). To know what you believe and to believe what you know (dogmatically) is unacceptable.

Another important area of knowledge dissemination in America which has influenced hermeneutics is the information explosion. More and more people are becoming more and more educated through formal training in colleges and universities, informal training through accessing the internet and libraries, and technical training in increasingly narrower fields. More and more people are learning more and more about less and less. Pretty soon everyone will know everything there is to know about nothing. We will all have narrowly specialized fields of expertise which no one else will understand or even care about. There is so much out there, that no one brain can understand and study it all. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. So we specialize in our hermeneutics in order to understand small bits of the picture better. Unfortunately, this allows us to increasingly lose sight of the big picture. Suddenly it

does not matter that we are dissecting an elephant. Our little bites are all that matters. But if this is true, than it doesn't really matter that much what we dissect (the Bible or the Koran) as long as it has bite-sized pieces. The practical, theological, and spiritual concerns are left to others more experienced in those fields.

An emphasis on subjectivity and tolerance is the second force at work in American culture and the A/G. Our country is neither fully secular, nor fully sacred. It is decidedly noncommittal and diverse in church and state policies. "What is true for you may not be true for me," is heard across America daily in schools, workplaces, and yes, even in churches. As the A/G struggles to hold its own academically, many of its people run the other way, believing that it doesn't matter so much what we believe, or why we believe it. All that is important is that we get along with other Christians in our Biblical interpretations. Tolerance of other religions and worldviews has become so engrained in American heads that exclusivists are often the only ones that are excluded. Objective reality (in meaning, logic, or even beliefs) is not seen as being the most important thing anymore. A Bible verse may mean what you want it to mean (as Augustine came very near to saying by his emphasis on the multiplicity of meaning) and truth is what you make it. This point makes the A/G's sixteen fundamental truths seem out of place in such a subjectivist context. What is fundamental? What is truth? Is there even such a thing (or sixteen of them)? The organization and many of its leaders push strongly for an objective view of reality in Biblical interpretation and theology, but many who populate their churches live by a different code—tolerate others and learn to see that the truth is not monopolized.

The third force at work in American culture and the A/G is anti-intellectual functionalism (or existential, phenomenological, and pragmatic faith). This is tied intimately with the second force (tolerance and subjectivity) and is often opposed to the first (education and the dissemination of knowledge). This may seem odd since America's popular emphasis on tolerance and subjectivity is a direct result of the information explosion, which uncovered the complexity of the data this world contains and the diversity of systems by which to understand those data. Nevertheless, popular American and A/G sentiment often oppose the specialization of education and the increased burden of the information explosion. They view education negatively, taking subjectivity at face value and asserting that because we cannot know everything and what is to be known is not worth knowing since it is not real, we have no real reason to explore our world at such great depths. No one will benefit from such efforts and they are therefore worthless. We must cut off our brains and discover our hearts and hands.

These anti-intellectual functionalists see religion as primarily based on mystical and spiritual experiences and phenomena, with a labor of love as a result. Biblical hermeneutics are personal, subjective, and meant to spur us on towards love and good deeds. While these ideas are true in part, they often neglect what the Bible actually means or says. They fail to realize that it is only through the knowledge of God and his word to us that we may come to know and experience him in our lives working through us. They say that they believe in simple faith, but they do not know the one they believe. Orthodoxy (and the A/G specifically) cannot remain true to its historical interpretations of the Bible and faith, and continue on this road towards a mindless, subjectivist pragmatism. Christianity is not just a way of life, an experience, or a feeling. It is a

belief in what we know. And we know by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

CHAPTER 2

FOUR MAJOR INFLUENCES ON AUGUSTINE'S HERMENEUTICS

Bishop of Hippo, theologian, philosopher, exegete; this is the order of primacy which Augustine (A.D. 354-430) placed on his roles in this world. Augustine placed his faith firmly in the church, a systematic knowledge of God, wisdom, and the Bible's literal and spiritual interpretation. Many factors came together to make him who he was, but among these, four stand out as major influences on his Biblical interpretation. Augustine's canonical, dualistic, philosophical, theological and ecclesiastical hermeneutics grew out of his pre-Christian moral life, flirtations with the Manichean sect, intellectual formation and pre-Christian schooling, and a growing, monolithic structure called the church.

Pre-Christian Moral Life

One important factor which influenced Augustine's hermeneutics was his pre-Christian moral life. Augustine's life previous to his conversion was one of moral laxity and self-indulgent ambition. He had several mistresses at different times, and while at Carthage had a child out of wedlock before the age of 20 (which he later abandoned). He was "seduced and seducing, deceived and deceiving, in diverse lusts" (Tomlin, 1963, 95). He sought position and wealth, and acquired great skills in rhetoric and philosophy (mainly Platonist and Manichean philosophy) in an effort to attain a high post as a Rhetorician and to live a successful life. He craved a sinless life, but found it too hard to live in the present.

Later in life, after becoming Bishop of Hippo, he was to be reminded constantly of his moral indiscretions by his enemies who sought to discredit him and his theology. He was open to their attacks and confessed freely his past sins, finding solace in the city of God, where freedom from past sins is not earned but graciously given freely. He emphasized the need for purity in this life, and the necessity of love for God and man to derive the true interpretation of Scripture. According to Augustine, we must believe and live truly if we are to understand the Bible (Grant and Tracy, 1984), because communion with the God of grace is a precursor to knowledge of that which we believe.

Flirtations with the Manichean Sect

Another important factor in Augustine's pre-Christian life that impacted his later interpretations of the Scriptures was his flirtations with the Manichean sect. The Manichean sect was influenced greatly by Zoroastrianism from the east and was a dualistic philosophy of religion wherein good and evil eternally struggled in this world to overthrow one another, with evil often defeating good. They believed in siding with the triumphant power (which they saw as the evil power of the world) and because of this could abuse both logic and morals (Tomlin 1963). They viewed the Old Testament with disdain, declaring it unfit for truth bearing, on account of its immorality, violence, and its crude conception of God as a vindictive, favoring, unfair lawgiver.

Later in life Augustine would openly oppose the Manicheans in his treatises and arguments against heretics, but to some degree he retained their dualism in his conception of history as two struggling powers in his book "The City of God." This new conception saw good and evil, spirit and matter not as equal, but as coexistent realities, not as eternal forces (only good was eternal), but as both eminent (with good being eminent and

transcendent). These new distinctions separated him from his former Manichean philosophy and opposed its extreme dualism. This had a great effect on how Augustine viewed and interpreted the Scriptures.

The Old Testament was seen in light of the New (i.e. Christologically), and Manichean difficulties with the text were removed by emphasizing the spiritual nature of the text. The Old and New Testaments were unified into one idea of the growth of the city of God. "From this canonical framework, Augustine developed his hermeneutical approach" (Dockery, 1992, 139). Using this unified framework, Augustine distinguished between the world and the church, and developed this theme systematically through an exhaustive exegesis of the entire Bible (and history).

Intellectual Formation and Pre-Christian Schooling

Augustine's intellectual and pre-Christian schooling were another important influence on his hermeneutics. As a young man Augustine hated learning to read and write Greek and Latin, and attended grammar school at the Roman colony named Madaura, where he learned a Roman worldview. This may have affected his views on the authority of the original manuscripts of Scripture, and the importance of developing a comprehensive and cohesive worldview with which one may interpret Scripture. For an elder Augustine, this worldview was the church's worldview which became for him the lens of clear perception of the world and God's revelation.

Augustine, through extensive contact with neo-Platonist thought, came to be convinced of Plato's own conceptions of the form and essence. Also, his stint as a Manichean provided him with a basis for the distinction and separation of form and essence, as can be identified in his dualism of the world and the church, the spirit and

flesh of a text of scripture (in this area he was influenced greatly by Ambrose of Milan), and the lustful depraved human nature contrasting with the transcendent spirit exalted by grace.

Augustine's pre-Christian life as a distinguished Rhetorician also provided him with a great knowledge of techniques of persuasion and rules of logic, which he would later use to convince others that the truth in Scriptures can be discovered logically, and that one's Christian worldview must be coherent with natural revelation. He later taught that the reason is greatly tainted by sin, but by grace is allowed to open one's soul to the spiritual truths of scripture.

A Growing, Monolithic Structure Called the Church

With the slowly dissolving Roman Empire, hope in the secular state began to wane. Social solidarity in an increasingly diverse and diverging society became nearly impossible. The Empire was falling apart. But Augustine saw this transitory secular Empire in direct contrast with God's eternal kingdom, the church. As the church grew and began to flesh out its doctrinal creeds, hermeneutical methodologies, and authority as God's body, its authoritarian stance strengthened. The "rule of faith," which was the church's normative standard of Biblical interpretation in Augustine's time, had grown to become not merely a standard for living, but an authoritative system of concepts which were primary to one's true understanding of the Scriptures.

While Augustine defended the Scripture's own interpretation of Scripture, he emphasized that this interpretation was subject to the verifying authority of the church and its traditions. Scripture was seen as primarily prophetic, to be applied to the church (following Tyconius' principles of Hermeneutics) (Froehlich 1984). Augustine posited a

fourfold sense of Scriptural interpretation; a literal sense (following the Antiochan tradition in the church), an allegorical sense (following the early Church's example of Christological interpretation), a tropological sense (following moralists from the Jewish and Christian traditions), and the anagogical sense (following the spiritualizing tendencies of the Alexandrian tradition in the church) (Froehlich 1984). In this way Augustine's hermeneutics, at least as he defined them (not necessarily as he utilized them), were thoroughly canonical (scripture interprets scripture), prophetic (they applied to the church), and traditional (synthesizing all of the major schools of thought in orthodox Christendom). Only through belief and pure living could the Scripture's true meaning be ascertained. To a large extent the authority of the Scripture for Augustine rested in the authority of the church as God's Kingdom on earth (Bray 1996).

Summary

So we find that Augustine's hermeneutics were greatly influenced by these four factors, and developed into one of history's greatest achievements—a systematic history of religion, a worldview of the church, and a biblically based yet diverse hermeneutic drawing on all of the great traditions of the early church fathers, in an attempt to understand and live in communion with God in his city. The city of God was Augustine's great end, and toward that great end he struggled, influencing and being influenced by various factors in his historical context. We can only hope to do the same.

CHAPTER 3

WASHING THE REFORMERS' FEET: A SHORT STORY

Captain's log, stardate 501.352. Today was another uneventful cruise in the Enton galaxy, quadrant four. Our search for life here may end up fruitless. The U.S.S. Enterprise is handling well, but our hyper-drive is unstable at present. So we must wait. Earlier today I found myself drawn to holo-deck five. I have spent very little time in the holo-deck throughout Operation Beline, and wanted to indulge in a little old-fashioned debate with hologram images stored in the computer. I chose as my setting the fictional town of Goleb, Germany, and my sparring partners would be five major characters from the Reformation (all provided by the hologram computer data-bank). I wanted to know how Luther, Zwingli, Grebel, Henry VIII, and Calvin might have interpreted Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet.

Luther and Zwingli were already present when I entered the scene. They were sitting at the table having a heated discussion on the meaning of communion. Luther had even written on the table in front of him to make his point more persuasive. As I sat down at the head of the table, Luther finished his argument "And if God told me to eat dung, I wouldn't question him about it, I would just do it because he told me to! Some things are beyond reason" (Friedenthal, 1967, 505).

"Like you, for instance" Zwingli muttered under his breath.

Luther turned a bright shade of red, and you could tell his passionate nature was getting the best of him, but when he noticed my presence at the table, he immediately withdrew his anger and sat back in his seat.

I could see this was going to be quite a discussion! Conrad Grebel, an Anabaptist, opened the door to our little room and peered in warily. He seemed nervous, so I ushered him to his seat and assured along the way that the guards outside the door were not for his execution, but for his protection. He was eased little by my exhortation to remain calm. Luther and Zwingli both glared in Grebel's direction. Just then Henry VIII barged through the door and promenaded to his seat at the front of the table. John Calvin came in after him and shut the door, but remained standing in a dark corner of the room.

I began, "I have called you all here today to discuss your respective views on the washing of the disciple's feet by Jesus on the night of the Last Supper. I am interested in . . ."

"Because I have very little time to waste," Henry blurted out, "I shall speak first and be off. I have no reason to remain any longer with such riff-raff as you have invited to this meeting!"

"We shall have Luther speak first, and all others will wait their turn," I continued, ignoring Henry's comments. "Go ahead."

"Because I am opposed to ordinances and rituals of the church not scripturally warranted," Luther began feverishly, "this discussion will be concise. In John chapter thirteen, we find the account of foot washing. Jesus is showing his disciples the piety of servanthood, and sets himself as their example. Christ as servant is portrayed vividly in Philippians 2:5-11. The passage in John is an example of Jesus' servanthood through submission to God by humility towards others. It is not a prescription for foot washing as a ritual of the Church or for any other physical act (as if these things could save a person). It is a direct foreshadowing of Jesus' humble act of crucifixion for our sins and

our regeneration through his servant-like cleansing in resurrection. As the disciples had to accept this by faith (not actions) so we also must have faith in Jesus' grace and be servants like him."

"An excellent exposition, Luther," I said as he concluded.

"They don't call me 'The Morning Star of the Reformation' for nothing," Luther responded jovially.

"From your speech I gather that generally your method of interpretation emphasizes paradoxes (faith vs. works, grace vs. the law) and finds Christological meaning in the literal exposition of scripture."

Zwingli spoke up. "You have presented an excellent and compelling argument, Luther. I agree with your literal interpretation, but several minor points need addressing." After calming Luther down, I motioned for Zwingli to continue. "Your exegesis lacks an emphasis on the importance of the Christian community in interpretation. A theocratic government whose leaders are Christian is the basis of a true exegesis of this text (Vos 1994). The foot washing was symbolic."

"Everything is symbolic to you!" Luther retorted.

"Yes," Zwingli continued, "much of what is considered liturgy in the church has symbolic only secondarily spiritual meaning. And the symbolism can only be understood through a literal reading of the text by the community of faith, which is not merely the church but is the entire system of government. I am concerned with politics and the well-being of the Christian state, and because of this, Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet contains special significance for me. Jesus put himself below the community symbolically through foot washing, and included all those present in his kingdom by this

act which symbolized his servanthood on the cross. I find no great distinction in God's word between the law and the gospel. It is all God's revelation. Christ is, through foot washing, giving us a glimpse of his kingdom and our involvement in it through lowly public service and piety (Cairns 1996)."

"Several interesting points, Zwingli" Grebel piped in. "Your interpretation finds meaning in community and seeks to draw out contemporary applications of the text. Unfortunately, the community of faith is scripturally set apart from the state authority, as being distinct and Godly. Also, I find your interpretation to be a little too loose with the text. Jesus says specifically in verses fourteen and fifteen of John chapter thirteen 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet,' and goes on to say 'I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you' (NIV). Jesus states specifically that foot washing is to be carried out by the disciples. As baptism symbolized new life in Christ, so also foot washing symbolizes the humble servanthood of the believers."

"Are you advocating the foot washing of contemporary believers?" Luther asked incredulously.

"We no longer wash each others' feet," Grebel responded, "We shine each others' shoes" (Bainton 1952, 109).

"And this is why we exiled you and your friends from Zurich" Zwingli retorted. "You were overly literalistic and mystical to a fault. All of you Anabaptists and radicals (who falsely call yourselves 'Brethren') are heretics who exclude yourselves from the community, and that is why we exclude you! We were friends at one time, Grebel, but now we are enemies—and all because of your extreme radicalism!"

Before Grebel could respond, I took control of the conversation and moved the group back to the issue at hand. Seeing Henry shifting impatiently in his chair, I said "Let us now hear what Henry VIII, King of England, has to say, so that he can be relieved of our presence and go on to more important appointments."

"I actually have very little to add," Henry said. "Earlier today I was opposed to the Reformers' ways and ideas, but I find myself now gently enamored with their position (though to my embarrassment)."

"And ours" Luther interjected.

Henry continued, "I have found myself agreeing with Luther, who is foremost among you all, and see in his interpretation many things. For instance, monks, priests, and bishops in England have for too long ruled their parishes and monasteries with iron hands, clinching fistfuls of English gold and land, only to deliver it up to their own gluttony, and to the French (with whom the Pope so closely allies these days). They show no respect for our Lord's own words, in his admonition for spiritual leaders and rulers of the church to be servants to others. These greedy scoundrels serve only themselves. They are as Judas Iscariot, influenced of the devil, to betray our Lord and serve their fattening bodies, while posing as true disciples. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is a clear example of the need for servanthood in the church. I know now what I must do. I must expel this untrue church and set in its place one which is true to Christ and to England. I shall give the land and monies of the pope's minions to my middle class, and by the authority of the parliament and God, set myself as supreme servant of the church and state of England."

"Your unfettered interpretation of God's word is amazing." Calving spoke up for the first time. "Your unification of the church and state are indeed exemplary, but the scriptures are not your basis in this instance. Your reasons are political, not spiritual, and by this you show that you are not one of God's elect."

At this statement, Henry exploded, only to be stopped abruptly by the peaceful but firm hand of Calvin, still standing, who looked the King in the face calmly and said, "I am not here today to defame you or any other. God's election is sure, but man's knowledge of this election is not so sure. Bear the fruit of repentance and election, Henry, and be sure. As you are, you cannot understand what is written, for the Spirit has not enlightened your own spirit (Grant and Tracy 1984).

"To the rest of you, I say this: go to the Bible and read it as it is. Do this, and develop it into a theological framework, then apply it through preaching. The literal, grammatical, historical meaning is bound up in the text. The author's intent (in this case, that of the evangelist John) is the meaning. And we may find this intent through clues in the Scripture. All of you acknowledge literal interpretation as fundamental. Let me develop this fundamental principle as it applies to John chapter thirteen and the practice of foot washing.

"The setting is the Last Supper, directly before Jesus' arrest and later crucifixion. Judas Iscariot has already sold Jesus to the Jews. At the end of verse one, in the thirteenth chapter, the apostle John writes that Jesus now showed the full extent of his love, loving them to the last. This verse serves as a short prelude to the actions of Jesus before, during, and after the Last Supper. John's emphasis here, then, is on Jesus' love for his chosen people through his action of foot washing, and later cleansing through

death and resurrection. This goes along with John's theme of love as primary to redemption. God's love saves us (John 3:16), and belief in this irresistible love enters us into the community of faith.

"Peter, in this event, did not understand what Jesus was doing (13:7), but would later understand Jesus' actions in light of his ministry on earth. Jesus tells his disciples to wash each others' feet, but in verse sixteen he elaborates on the idea of a servant being no greater than his master, and a messenger being no greater than the one who sent him. Jesus served them physically, and was instructing them that if he, the master, served them humbly through physical action, so also they should serve (and love) one another in the community of faith. In Jesus' actions, then, the disciples (and later the readers of John's gospel) see his servanthood. The menial task of foot washing is blessed (verse 17). Jesus was leaving his disciples, and promised the Spirit of truth to dwell within them and guide them (14:15-17), to help them do the things that Jesus did. What Jesus did on earth was serve God and others in love. Thus foot washing was a graphic example of Jesus' physical servanthood towards humanity, and was to serve as an example to the disciples and the community of faith."

Calvin said many other things, mostly related to the grammar of the text and the specific use of Greek in the gospel of John. The others discussed at length the practical applications of this piece of scripture, and came to no certain consensus.

"Gentlemen," I finally concluded, "This has been an enlightening voyage into your thoughts on foot washing. "I am impressed and deeply influenced by different aspects of your respective hermeneutical systems (with the exception of Henry, sorry). All of you have emphasized the primacy of the literal interpretation of scripture, and

several of you (specifically Zwingli, Grebel, and Calvin) have seen this in light of the community of faith (though you all see this community in a different light). Community is important, but I cannot agree with those who state that government can be in this age wholly Christian or Theocratic, and I find fault with those who would separate themselves so far from the world that they must create their own separatist 'Holy Culture.' I believe there must be interaction with the world and the world's ideas in Biblical interpretation. The Bible was given to the world, as was Christ (John 3:16), and we are to be shining lights, set apart yet still wholly human.

"Political interpretation of scripture is obvious isogesis, as is developing one's exegesis from theology instead of the other way around. We understand in order to believe, we do not believe in order to understand.

"Also, it is unfortunate that so many of you leaders throughout church history have failed to apply what you theorize so boldly. Whether taken literally or not, foot washing was about servanthood. And very rarely has anyone in this room actually done anything close to what Jesus exampled by actually serving one another in love. This is apparent from your endless bickering, your murder of "heretics," and your exile of disobedient evil-doers all in the name of Christ. Historically violent and intolerant contexts do not excuse unbiblical behavior.

"You all suppose yourselves to come out of the worldly, authoritarian Catholic Church. In reality you are often one with it, if not in doctrine, at least in practice. You all persecute and slander one another, and never find time to actually apply what it is you fight about—the love of God in Christ Jesus.

"To be brief, let me say that I view Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet as a sign for us to do likewise. Not just to wash feet (though there is nothing wrong with that), but to give ourselves in servant leadership not authoritarian lordship. The greatest among you must be the servant. Luther, you served your people by translating the Bible into German. Zwingli, you served Switzerland by attempting to rid it of its mercenary business. Grebel, you humbly served the brethren by exampling good living and the love of Christ (I wish more church leaders were like you). Henry, well, anything good you did was probably on accident, but God can use corrupt leaders for his own greater purposes; just look at Nebuchadnezzar!" At this remark, Henry VIII stormed from the room with a great huff and a haughty air.

"Calvin, you tried to serve Christianity with your development of a powerful systematic theology and scientific exposition of the scriptures. Also, you attempted to serve the people of Switzerland as your predecessors Zwingli and Luther, but as with them, you have in the end made the church into the state. We as Christian leaders are not to be Bible police. Judgment is the Lord's. An unbeliever is condemned in himself. We may warn him, and excommunicate him, but we are not sword-bearers."

"I am," Zwingli said as he lifted his short sword which he always wore (Mosse 1963).

"What I mean is that we are to be lowly servants, not haughty kings. Remember to the live the lessons you preach and return to meekness of heart. Literal interpretation of the Bible is worthless unless a person literally obeys it. In the words of Jesus 'Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them'" (John 13:17).

"Computer" I addressed the hologram computer, "We are finished."

All that happened today may have been a fictional hologram, but the ideas were real. In my own life I see the danger to lead with a strong arm. But the U.S.S. Enterprise must not be dictated. I must guide by serving, putting myself last. And so I ended the day by helping out in the enlisted men's kitchen on deck twelve. A space commander washing dirty pots and pans—that was what foot washing was all about.

CHAPTER 4

A RATIONAL INTERPRETATION

In the 18th and 19th centuries a bright new hope was unlocked—the mind of man. This new mind (rationalism) sought intellectual and academic freedom from the objective past of traditionalism and orthodox dogmatism, even as it attempted to redefine that past. Science and reason were enthroned, and authoritarian supernaturalism was opposed. Humans were now at the center of the show. The Bible would never be read the same again. Rationalism grew out of individualistic humanism and the scientific method, and has influenced Biblical interpretation by exalting reason and discrediting traditional supernatural revelation and orthodox Christianity, thereby creating a religion of man.

The Rise of Rationalism

Many different forces came together to form rationalism as it existed in the 18th and 19th centuries. The "Protestant Experiment" in Britain had failed miserably. The humanist spirit of the Reformation was growing into a full-blown worldview. There was a renewed interest all over Europe in the literal interpretation of Scripture (due in part to the Reformers' emphasis on non-allegorical literal and systematic exegesis). Natural science was blossoming and becoming a powerful tool through which to view the world objectively. The scientific method came about as a result of people seeing the world as purely physical laws of cause and effect which can be described accurately using the tools of reason, observation, testing, and hypothesizing. Knowledge was being systematically categorized and Aristotelian philosophy was slowly replacing Platonism. With the dissolution of the Catholic Church's stifling authority, new individualistic interpretations of the world became widespread. With the rediscovery and revival of

rationalistic ancient Greek and Roman thinking, rationalists were able to find historical links for their worldview.

The Impact of Rationalism on Hermeneutics

One major effect that rationalism had on hermeneutics was to dissolve humanity's faith in an imminent God (this was known as Deism). Natural law seemed to exclude a God who interferes with his creation and made him wholly transcendent. Deism took the supernatural elements out of the Bible, centralized science and reason's roles in its interpretation, and studied the Bible as one would study any book of ancient history (secularized exegesis). Rationalism brought functionally atheistic methodologies to the text by denying supernatural intervention and revelation. Reason's new role also spurred others in the opposite direction to mystify and subjectivize their faith and to emphasize the essence of truth at the expense of the form with a return to Platonism (Romanticism). Others were forced to retaliate against rationalism by presenting their faith as rational, through scientific discovery (the creationists), archeological evidence, and through critical exegeses of Biblical texts.

Rationalism taught the unfalleness of reason, and its ability to bring us to truth. The human mind alone (without divine inspiration) was now the interpreter and source of Scripture. Morality was imperative to most rationalists, but the Bible gave many examples of immorality such as David's adultery and polygamy, and the slaughter of thousands of Canaanites by the encroaching Israelites in the establishment of their "Theocratic" nation. The rationalists had seen similar "Theocratic" Reformed church-states in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the devastating effect these had wrought on free-thinking and individualism. Humanity had been in the hands of traditional orthodox

Christians for far too long. It was time for humanity to be governed by the thoughts and power of humans alone. Rationalists attempted to expel irrational and immoral elements from Christianity and the Bible through criticisms of errors in the Bible, Old Testament evils, and contemporary authoritarian interpretations. This sowed seeds of doubt among many orthodox believers (Bray 1996).

Positive Aspects of Rationalism

Rationalism had quite a few positive effects on Biblical Interpretation and Christianity in general. Rationalism brought the mind of the individual back into the search for truth. Rationalism attempted to found itself on reasonable belief, and emphasized the literal "real" world, centralizing humanity's role in history and Christianity. Reason is imperative in Biblical interpretation to discover meaning. Reason is our part in interpretation (illumination is God's). Our intellect must be open to different ideas and presuppositions, and it must remain committed to the most viable worldview. Discovery and hypothesis are just two of the important concepts realized by rationalism which are important to modern hermeneutics. Because of the rationalist's emphasis on knowledge, dictionaries and concordances were written, and theories developed which attempted to systematize Biblical and physical data. Theories of criticism became important aspects of Bible study, emphasizing contextual, philological, and historical familiarity.

Negative Aspects of Rationalism

Rationalism's affects were not all positive. In its search for objective truth it deified the human mind's role, denying God's supernatural imminence within his creation. Thus rationalism undermined the very foundation of Christianity—God's

revelation of himself through supernatural events (such as the resurrection, miracles, and the redemption of fallen humanity through communion with Christ). This became a "crisis of interpretation." Rationalists like Wellhausen and Baur had denied revelation's very source and essence by discrediting the history and authorship of the Bible. Rationalism asked unreasonable questions; questions not actually intended to be answered by anyone, but rather to be used in argumentation against the fundamentalist opposition. For rationalists, the letter left behind the Spirit (the Antiochenes never went as far as the rationalists in undermining the *theoria* in favor of the *historia*).

The rationalists, with their heavy emphasis on objectivity and the scientific method, still subjectively based their exegesis on the contemporary author and reader instead of the original author and reader. They attempted to discover the "historical Jesus" (one who looked surprisingly like a moral rationalist himself), and often denied anything religious while somehow still espousing spirituality (which for them was moral mysticism). Theology became estranged from exegesis leading to two separate fields of inquiry. The same happened with the Old and New Testaments, as increased specialization drove scholars deeper into their academic shells and further away from a comprehensive Biblical exegesis, resulting eventually in the splitting of criticism itself into many shards of methodology (i.e. form criticism, literary criticism, historical-grammatical criticism, redaction criticism, etc. The list seems to grow every year). The rationalist Bible critics ignored plain readings of Scripture in favor of cutting the text to pieces with the scissors of their philosophically indefensible presuppositions (which were often based on materialistic positivism, not reason).

Rationalism weakened the liberal church's views of the authority of the Bible through discrediting its historicity and straightforward truthfulness in areas of authorship, divine inspiration, canon formation, and theological accretions. In secular society it became popular to disbelieve an unscientific, historically discredited, and immoral book like the Bible. Scripture could not be accepted for what it purported to be. The Bible became a mere book or spiritual manual, because in the world's eyes it had failed as a worldview to be lived.

Rationalism in Review

The faith we possess as Christians is rational. Reason is used by believers to bring them to faith in the reasonable. Faith and reason are reconciled in the historical revelation of God to man. Our faith is in the evidence. But faith in the results of reason itself (and not in the primacy of God and his revelation) has become a major school of thought, and has impacted how some interpret the Bible and the world. Rationalism has severed God from humanity, Jesus from Christ, the Old Testament from the New, faith from reason, and the past from the present. It has made our world a lonely planet for those who embrace it. While it has rightly emphasized the importance of the mind in our salvation, it has unduly separated that mind from God. Rationalism grew out of individualistic humanism and the scientific method, and has influenced Biblical interpretation by exalting reason and discrediting traditional supernatural revelation and orthodox Christianity, thereby creating a religion of man.

CHAPTER 5

An Analysis of Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches in America in Light of the History of Biblical Interpretation, or

HERMENEUTICS FOR DUMMIES

Unlocking Buried Treasure

Before I went to college I had never heard of the word "Hermeneutics." It sounded to me like a class on the biology of hermits. But now, after many exciting adventures into the world of hermeneutics, I have discovered that "Hermeneutics" is just a fancy word for the art and science of interpreting the Bible (just like homiletics is just a fancy word for the art and science of preaching). It took me years to unlock that little bit of trivia, but it has taken millennia for the church (and ancient Israel) to unlock what the Bible actually means, which is what hermeneutics is all about. A great treasure has been locked in a large chest and buried deep in the Bible. The chest has been dug up, but it is locked securely. So how can we open the chest and reveal the meaning that God wishes to convey to humanity? This paper is a simple story about how various people and schools of thought throughout history have sought to open this treasure chest.

Goethe has said "Certain books seem to have been written not so much to enable one to learn something, but to show that the author knew something" (Gitt, 2001, 75). In this assignment I hope to develop something which will be useful for the instruction of others at a later date, not just to show that I finally figured out what "hermeneutics" really is about, and for this reason I have attempted to dumb down the technical material considerably. Hopefully this will make the realm of hermeneutics clearer and more

accessible to a wider audience. And so, without further ado, I give you

HERMENEUTICS FOR DUMMIES!

The Five Schools of Interpretation

Most young people can't wait to get out of school. They long for the day when they can kick back and . . . well, do anything but homework. I hope you don't feel this way, because I surely don't. I love school. I guess that's what makes me a nerd. School is where you experience new thoughts and worldviews and come into contact with things you've never heard of before. The Bible is the most important book in the world, but without schooling you'd never know how to read it. It may surprise you to find this out, but the Bible is not just composed of letters and sentences and paragraphs and chapters and books and testaments. As if these things weren't enough to try to read, there is also the all-important aspect of meaning and purpose. If the words were just words we might as well just be reading the Bangkok phonebook because the Bible would be nothing more than a bunch of unintelligible scribbles.

The Bible (like this short paper) is not merely made up of words, but is rather a meaningful transmission from an intelligent being to other intelligent beings (like a message from space). It is God's message to humanity. In its history, in its poetry and proverbs, even in its teaching, we find a God who is speaking to us out of this book. But there have been many different schools of thought throughout history which have tried to tell us what God is saying. So how do we know which school we should attend? Let's take a look now at a few of the major schools of hermeneutics so that we can judge for ourselves.

The "Jesus Told Me So" Mystical/Christological School

One of the oldest schools is the "Jesus told me so" mystical/Christological school. (A word of caution: each of the five schools identified in this paper are not set in stone. Also, teachers of one school often transferred to another, or taught in more than one school at once.) The teachers from this school taught that the Bible was entirely divine in origin. The word of God centered on Jesus and communion with him through spiritual experiences, community, and godly living. This approach emphasized the Christological, pious, moral, prophetic, and spiritual aspects of scripture.

The Bible, according to the "Jesus told me so" school, revealed Christ in every place (which is known as the Christological aspect). From the Garden of Eden to the walls of the New Jerusalem they found Jesus. Like the child who sees a monster in every closet and a boogie-man under every bed, the teachers of this school often saw Jesus on every page of the Bible. Interestingly, Christ-centered interpretation began even before the time of Christ's earthly ministry. From the times of the prophets in the Old Testament and throughout the Babylonian exile and Grecian rule the people of Israel saw a Savior in scriptures. This "anointed one" (what "Christ" means) would come and dwell among them and change their world.

The early Christians (and Jesus himself) held this view, and made it their way of interpreting the central message of scripture—salvation through Christ. The early Christian writers (most of whom where apostles) saw the overarching theme of scripture as the revelation of Christ. Later, during the time of the early church fathers, this theme was developed to the point of seeing Christ in every little bit of scripture. Each bit of history became "HIS story." Heretics (people who go against the grain of the church)

had claimed that much of the Old Testament was worthless and entirely different from the New. The church, in response to the heretics' arguments began to reinterpret the Old Testament, with Christ as the true underlying message in every seemingly immoral, legalistic, or violent passage. Teachers such as Martin Luther would later use a Christ-centered approach to develop a holistic interpretation of the Bible that fit their own views of God and his plan. Several other aspects of the "Jesus told me so" approach developed as the early church grew.

The Bible tells us how to live (which is known as the pious and moral aspect). It instructs us to do certain things, and not do others. While the New Testament centers on grace, it still upholds right living as the standard for those who wish to know God. The Bible does not center on metaphysical concepts. Rather it is a guidebook for holy living. This aspect emphasized the "doing" and not the "thinking" or "being" of Christianity. Those who supported this view often found fault with others who tried to dissect the Bible and develop ways of thinking based on it. Instead, they focused on what the Bible compels us to do. Many have held this view, from the early church's fight against loose living, to the groups of "Pietists" (the people who wanted to live pure, unworldly lives) in the Reformation, from the orthodox (traditional and church-friendly) monasteries of the Middle Ages to the non-traditional scholars in the 19th century like Albert Schweitzer who found the Bible to be a moral code for life.

The Bible tells us about community and the future (which is known as the prophetic aspect). It speaks to us yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It was written for us, not just for its original recipients. The early church developed this from the Christ-centered hermeneutics discussed earlier. The entire Bible was seen as pointing toward a

future kingdom of God in heaven and a present kingdom of God on earth—the church. An important church leader named Augustine of Hippo (Hippo is where he lived, not his pant-size) was a major teacher in this school. Others came before him who emphasized the place of the church in God's history, but Mr. Augustine (who lived about sixteen hundred years ago) developed this aspect the most. The Roman Empire was crumbling slowly, and many saw this as a direct effect of Christianity on the state. In arguing against this and against his old pals and new enemies (the Manicheans, a group of philosophical Christians more philosophical than Christian), Augustine found in the Bible the timelines of two great cities—one heavenly and one earthly. God's plan was to develop his city alongside the evil city, and in the end to destroy the city of the world, and complete his great work the church, the city of God. Everything in the Bible was seen in light of God's care for his people (Israel and the church), and his plan of salvation.

The Bible tells us how to commune with God (which is known as the spiritual aspect). It teaches us to devote our lives to him and to experience him firsthand. This aspect sees the Bible as many first-hand accounts of God and his activity on the earth. The Bible is to bring us to experience God, so each passage should be seen as a passport or key to experiencing God. The monks meditated, the mystics prayed, the Quakers quaked, and the Pentecostals pentecostalized. In each group the Bible became a manual for communion with God through spiritual application of its truths. This aspect grew out of a response in the early church towards "dead religion," and has always become more popular on the "fringes" of Christianity as the wider church has sought to make the Bible

more reasonable, more literal, and more detached from who we are as emotional and spiritual humans.

As you can plainly see there are a lot of views in just this one school! There are also a lot of good and bad things to say about each aspect in the "Jesus told me so" school. Christ-centered interpretation finds Jesus at the center of everything in the Bible, but this often changes from Christ-centered to Christ-bloated interpretation. What the Bible actually has to say often suffers at the hands of interpreters who see Jesus in every jot and tittle (which are itty-bitty markings in the Hebrew written text), ignoring what the Bible has to say for itself. Pious/moralist interpretation focuses on what the Bible wants us to do, but fails to recognize the spiritual and philosophical themes in the Bible. This interpretation neglects to see that we have to be Christians before we can do Christian things. The Bible is not just about living right—it is about living with God. Prophetic interpretation sees our world as a battleground and the church as our hope of heaven. The Bible does center on this theme, but this interpretation too often finds its authority in the church (the "because I told you so" school) and not in God. Mystical interpretation often becomes an excuse for private interpretation of scripture. For them the Bible seems to center on the individual and God and their ultimate union, but they often fail to recognize that God's word is for the world and his community not just the individual Christian.

Overall, the "Jesus told me so" school was a good approach, biblically based and often accurate in how it saw the Bible. But many wrong doctrines and distortions of scripture have arisen over time from this school because of its non-literal wishy-washy interpretations of the Bible. These problems arose from this school's emphases on the

practical and the spiritual nature of God's word, which at times led them to neglect the original meaning in favor of their own.

The "Because I Told You So" Authoritative School

Have you ever been told "It's that way because I said so" before? Some parents seem to love giving this response to their children's difficult questions. It sure is easier than coming up with an intelligent answer that the children will agree with. When I was a kid I always wanted to wear jeans to church. I figured if it was good enough for God from Monday to Saturday, it would we just fine for Sunday morning too. Boy was I wrong. At least that's what my parents told me. They would tell me to get some nice slacks on to show God respect. I would tell them that I could respect God just as much in jeans as in dress slacks. They would say I should respect them and do as they said. I would argue back, and in the end it always came to them telling me to look snazzy just because they told me to. This is what the "I told you so" authoritative school is like.

In the early church the apostles where often the source of doctrinal development, which meant that they had most of the responsibility of keeping all their fellow Christians in line (almost all of the New Testament was written with this in mind). It was sort of like baby-sitting for God the Father. So what happens when the baby-sitters die? Thankfully they trained new baby-sitters before they died. But as the years went by, these new baby-sitters found that some of their fellow Christians were straying from the truth of scripture (and as they say "the banana that strays from the bunch gets eaten"). So they told these straying Christians that the Bible was to be read and interpreted in light of the Church not the individual or the straying brethren. The true meanings in scripture

were the possession of the leaders of the Church, and they had been given this authority by God.

It was true. They did have authority from God. But the straying Christians wanted to hear some logical arguments for their interpretations. Several church leaders through the ages (like Tertullian, Ireneaus, Augustine, and Gregory the Great) have responded that the interpretation of the Bible was subject to "the rule of faith." What was this "rule of faith?" Basically it was what the church accepted as truth and meaning in the Bible. Tradition and leadership ruled (and at times without any good reasons).

This approach brought about a great amount of conversation within the church. What was it exactly that the church believed? What was their standard? The "this means that" school and the "Bible told me so" school were both attempts within the church to answer these persistent questions about how to interpret the Bible. This approach also helped to spur the Church on towards developing clear creeds, doctrines, and a New Testament canon (which was not a weapon, but a "standard" of which books were scripture, and which books were just hoopla). During the Middle Ages this school often reigned supreme over all the other schools. This school was also partly responsible for making the pope a powerful figure and head of the authority of the church. Before and during the Reformation several leaders arose who questioned the right of the church to hold sway over the interpretation of the Bible. Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin all found authority in the Scripture itself (a literal interpretation), and to different degrees each of them denied the supreme authority of the church in matters of interpretation. Ironically, each of them still clung to a "community of faith" interpretation, which emphasized the importance of the Christian community in finding the meaning in

scripture. Eventually, the "community of faith" approach gave way to the probing "Science is never wrong" school, which found authority in the individual's reason.

So we find that when people question the church's hermeneutics, church leaders often respond with a call to authority. This authority is found in themselves, the church as a whole, the community of faith (those who they saw as being part of the true Church), or an individual's powers of reason. An "I told you so" response should not seem strange to us, though, because even the writers of the Bible used this approach as the basis of their interpretation of scripture. But in their case the authority was the Holy Spirit's inspiring presence in their writing. As contemporary Christians we do not have that same degree of creative divine inspiration that the apostles and prophets could claim. (Or do we? We'll take a look at that in the next section.) How can we remain true to the Bible? We have to find another source of authority. If we look to the church leaders, we will find that they do not all agree. If we look to the community of faith (those we view as the true Church), we will find that we can only know the identity of the true Church as we understand scripture, but to understand scripture we must first rely on the true Church's interpretation (which leads us in a vicious circle). How are we to answer the skeptics who want to know why we believe what we believe? We must turn to several other schools now and see how they tried to answer this question.

The "This Means That" Allegorical School

How do you respond to a group of people who ask you what the Old Testament has to say to Christians today? It's just a bunch of old books about a God who decides to favor some small country and give them a bunch of laws to fulfill. But the nation doesn't like their God all that much so they rebel against him again and again, and he repeatedly

judges them for their sins. That's quite a bloody, immoral, inelegant story. How exactly is that to be understood in light of what Jesus did for us on the cross? The New Testament is about grace and love and living righteously.

If you lived in Alexandria in the first to third century AD, and you found yourself surrounded by philosophers who were reading deeper meanings into everything, you might respond with the "this means that" approach to the Bible. A Jewish guy named Philo is credited with being the founder of this school of hermeneutics. He said that these crazy accounts in the Old Testament could be understood to mean spiritual truths. Later, Christian leaders such as Origen and Clement would take this approach and develop it even further. Clement found a two-fold meaning in the Bible. The scriptures are comparable to the spirit and the body of a human; there is a spiritual and a literal meaning in every text. Origen taught that humans have a spirit, soul, and body, and that likewise the Bible has a spiritual, moral, and literal interpretation. In this approach, the interpreter should move from the literal meaning, to the application, and then to the spiritual meaning (Klein 34). If the Bible said that God wanted his people Israel to kill the Canaanites, this approach would say that the deepest meaning was that God wants to cleanse the world of sin, and to bless his chosen people by using them to expose and get rid of sin in their own lives.

This was a powerful school. Augustine was saved under the "this is that" teacher Ambrose, and found in this approach a strong argument against skeptics of the Old Testament and traditional Christianity. Many other great teachers throughout the centuries found meaning in the "spiritual" meaning of the text, and throughout much of the Middle Ages and into the Counter-Reformation (which was the Roman Catholic

response to the Reformation) this school continued to flourish among the traditional church. The "this is that" school not only made interpretation contemporary, it also emphasized the divine nature of the text and the Holy Spirit's ongoing presence in the interpretation of scripture (much like feminist and liberation theology today, which find the Bible's meaning in much the same way).

The Bible may at times mean more than one thing; but if it does, then we must let it interpret its own second (or third) meaning. Many groups of straying Christians throughout history have claimed divine inspiration in the interpretation of scriptures, but almost all of these groups disagree with each other. We can conclude that either they were all wrong in their approach or at least mostly wrong. The Spirit does help us to understand God's word, but the way we know it is God's word is to test it against what God has actually said (in a literal interpretation of the Bible).

As you could probably guess, the "this is that" approach is rather arbitrary. The Bible can mean anything you want. How exactly does that help us discover what the Bible really means? This approach is inadequate as a key to unlocking the meaning in the Bible. It doesn't care what the Bible means or intends so much as what it means to the interpreter (this is also true with many modern hermeneutical approaches, which find meaning in the interpreter's response to the Bible). Biblical events and God's revelation of himself in history become overshadowed by the unbridled imagination of the reader, and the church is left to create itself because its standards are found in its own "spiritual" understanding of the Bible. That sounds a little like chaos to me.

The "Bible Told Me So" Literal School

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he didn't just respond with emotional, spiritual, or authoritarian remarks. Sure, Jesus is an emotional being. He is the greatest Spirit (because he is infinite). He is the King of kings. He could have responded in these ways. But Satan was distorting the truth of scripture and offering Jesus an alternative worldview. Jesus found solace in the words of God. In essence, he responded to Satan's trials with "The Bible told me so."

Jewish scholars before the time of Jesus are responsible for establishing this school. The prophets in the Old Testament, and teachers like Ezra, taught that the Bible needs to be understood by looking at the words and figuring out what they meant originally, drawing spiritual truths from it, then applying the underlying meaning to today. This sounds simple, but it is still a revolutionary way of looking at the Bible (if you don't believe me, try attending a college Hermeneutics class at my alma mater Trinity Bible College, and you will find a class-room full of students who want to revolt against the literal interpretation taught by the instructor).

In the fourth century A.D. a Christian "Bible told me so" school was founded. Leaders such as Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and John Chrysostom taught this approach, and used it to react against the allegorizing "this means that" school. They said that the Bible's meaning was primarily to be found in the text (the history and events and words, etc. which were called by them in Latin the *historia*). Secondarily, and based on this literal interpretation, the spiritual, theoretical, or theological meaning was to be built (which they called in Latin the *theoria*). Even with this distinction, sometimes these leaders tended to get so close to the "this means that" school's interpretations that it was

hard to tell the difference. At other times, they would interpret the text so literally, that it would end up meaning nothing to contemporary believers.

Later, Augustine, Calvin, and my college Hermeneutics teacher Munyon helped to develop this school into a more well-rounded interpretation. Augustine claimed a four-fold interpretation of the Bible—the literal, the moral, the analogous, and the spiritual. This view was very important during most of the Middle Ages. But Augustine often based his interpretation on the authority of the church (the "I told you so" approach). Calvin and his friends in the Reformation didn't exactly like that approach, so they sought to find meaning in the Bible alone. Calvin said that the historical and grammatical meaning of the Bible was the meaning. From this meaning we may draw our theology, and last, but certainly not least, we must apply it to our lives today. My Hermeneutics teacher Timothy Munyon further developed this theme, but the class always met at 7:30 in the morning and my mind was still too fuzzy to understand what in the world he was talking about. So much for his input.

The "Bible says so" school helped to bring the church back to a historically accurate view of its scriptures, and also assisted in keeping theologians throughout the ages on their toes (metaphorically speaking) by always bringing people back to what the Bible actually had to say. Unfortunately, this school often reverts to overly emphasizing the human side of interpretation. The approach clearly makes the Divine scriptures its center, and tries to bring clarity and objectivity to the interpretation process. The school attempts to find meaning using the mind, not the spirit or the imagination. It allows for fresh insight into the mind of God through the discovery of facts in the text.

This school is often too human-oriented, non-practical, unspiritual, not Christ centered, and blind to its own authoritarian stance (their authority is their understanding of the Bible). Other than that, it's not too shabby. The literal interpretation is the most important school of the Bible for Christians today, because it actually tries to find what the Bible wants to say. The original author and audience of the scripture are all-important to our understanding of what exactly God has to reveal. The key to the Bible is found in the Bible itself. It is simple and complex, hidden yet right under our noses. The treasure chest was unlocked by God in his word. We just have to discover it.

The "Scientists are never wrong" Nature-Brain School

The world is flat. The universe revolves around the earth. We are unique in the cosmos. God made everything and continues to work in the world. Plato and Aristotle were geniuses. The church holds the key to salvation. Traditions are the heart of a people, without them the people perish. Humanity's sinful nature is responsible for all of the evil in the world. Some of these statements are true, and some of them are false. Others are only partly correct. But if the whole gamut of beliefs is held as indisputable, then when one of them falls they all come into question.

If the backbone of a people's thought structure is taken away, those people turn into jellyfish until another backbone is found. The end of the Middle Ages witnessed a renewal of interest in the things of the east and western civilization's own past. But as the humanists began to grow in number (humanists are those who exalt humanity and the human's role in the world) they also grew in boldness. Luther, Calvin and others denied the established Church's authority, and found meaning in the literal words of God. They found God's meaning by using their minds.

The 18th and 19th century witnessed the founding of a new breed of school. Natural science was being developed, and people started turning their attention from what God and the church were saying to what the physical universe and their own brains were saying. The problem was that the universe and their minds seemed to be contradicting God. One of them had to be wrong, and since you can't see or scientifically test God, guess who won the argument? Leaders like Schliermacher, Wellhausen, Bauer, and Harnack all found fault with the church's traditional interpretations. The church was so unreasonable and unscientific. They wanted to make the Bible relevant. So they studied and analyzed and critiqued the history of the Bible's development, the sources of the Bible's authorship, the development of the Christian religion within its cultural contexts, the literary forms of the writings, etc. etc. etc. until in the end the modern reader was so separated from the original meaning in the Bible that it no longer mattered what the Bible said.

This nature-brain approach denied the supernatural elements in religion (including miracles, divine revelation, and eventually even the creation of the world by God) as its first principle, because the supernatural was not scientific or reasonable. Only what they could prove with their reason and with scientific data was allowed. The Bible became just another book, and was torn apart by the secular critics. The world of Bible truth came crashing down to the ground. The "scientists are never wrong" school distinguished between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. The Old and New Testament were suddenly too divergent to be studied together, so they were separated into their respective domains. Often theology made no difference in their interpretations, only scientific theories really mattered any more. The "scientists are never wrong"

school had opened up a whole new world of inquiry into the Bible. Like morticians dissecting a dead body, the Bible was cut to pieces, analyzed, scrutinized, and studied in every conceivable way. While a systematic study of the Bible was beneficial to its understanding, an outright denial of the Bible's foundational inspiration by God made the living word into a dead relic of our society's past.

Many traditional theologians and Bible interpreters reacted strongly against this. Even such liberal theologians (liberal with their ideas, which meant that they were often not on the same page as the traditional church) like Barth and Bultmann found fault with this school and sought to bring it back to spiritual and theological foundations and applications. But the damage had been done. Science had torn apart any shred of objective meaning that the Bible may have contained. The interpreters were left to build up the Biblical world by themselves, supplying the meaning wherever they saw fit (which is what the "New Hermeneutic" is all about).

The scientific method has been one the world's greatest achievements. But it is not fool-proof. The scientific method and a nature-only approach to the world have a disabling disease. They claim to be a full-fledged worldview, when they cannot even justify their own existence. Without God there is no reason for there to be reason. There is no possibility for the universe's existence. The natural laws have to be founded on something outside of the physical universe. And you can never scientifically prove (or even falsify) the scientific method's truthfulness. All too often the scientists of our modern world are given the seat of the theologian, philosopher, and Bible interpreter. They then dictate authoritatively (and might I say unscientifically) what humans may

believe, creating a jaded, godless, and meaningless world. On the bright side, at least everybody will have cool gadgets to play with!

The "scientists are never wrong" school has widened the church's perspective of the Bible and its formation, as well as enabled it to find new insights into the human side of inspiration. The school has introduced powerful new tools to study the Bible with, and has helped to increase our appreciation for history and its impact on the church. But it fails as a school of interpretation because it undermines the source of the Bible—God. Not only that, it often destroys the plain meaning in the scripture in its efforts at creating exciting new hypotheses. It usually cares less about what is in the treasure chest than about the composition of that chest (Is it wood? Is it metal? What do the grooves on the side mean? If the chest is ten feet in length and . . . . Forget the gold inside, I like the box).

The Bible in My Backyard

Now that we have looked at a quick history of the most important schools of hermeneutics we will deal with how the Bible is being interpreted in America (or more specifically in Grand Forks, North Dakota) in the present. If the Bible has meaning for today, then modern (or post-modern) interpreters must search for that meaning. Let's examine three sermons from different religious backgrounds (Lutheran, Catholic, and Evangelical Covenant) and see how the speaker relates his message to the text, then we'll take a look at some important trends in American hermeneutics.

Holy Family Catholic Church

My wife and I sat in the back of the enormous sanctuary. Each wooden pew had a moveable kneeling bench on the back of it. Everyone was quite. As the service

commenced, the Catholic priest strode to his "throne" in the direct middle of the stage and took his seat. After several choruses with piano accompaniment, a woman came to the stage and read from two different scripture portions. The first was the passage in Leviticus in which Moses tells the people of Israel about the uncleanness of leprosy. The second scripture reading was from Mark. In this particular account, Jesus asks a leper if he wishes to be cleansed from his leprosy and the leper replies that he is willing. Jesus heals him and sends him to the priest to offer a sacrifice for his cleansing. At the end of each reading, the woman would close the Bible and say "The word of the Lord," and the congregation would respond with "Thanks be to God." Finally the priest came to his pulpit and delivered his sermon.

The speaker began with an illustration from history. Father Damien, a Catholic monk from the late 19th century, went as a missionary to a leper colony that was on an island. Damien learned to identify with the lepers that he ministered to. When speaking of leprosy, he would say "we lepers," finding his own identity wrapped intricately with those of the island. In 1889, only ten years after he began his ministry, Damien died of leprosy.

Leprosy, according to the speaker, is a disease which slowly deteriorates the afflicted person's body. Body parts decay and fall off. Eventually the disease is fatal. (The priest apparently never read up on the actual facts surrounding leprosy. Leprosy is actually a neurological disease which affects a person's ability to feel pain. Any harm that befalls the diseased person is self-inflicted, and is not a direct result of the decaying process of the disease itself.)

The speaker then rehashed the story of Jesus and the leprous man. The man with leprosy was willing to be cleansed, and Jesus was willing to heal him. The speaker went on to compare the disease of leprosy with the disease of sin. Both infect a person from within. As the story of Adam and Eve shows us, sin affects us by separating us from God and the goodness he has created for us to enjoy. Adam and Eve had a free will to obey God, but they chose to break the only commandment they had been given. They chose to determine reality and ethics for themselves. This original sin (eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) caused Adam and Eve to decay in their intellects, their wills, their emotions, and their physical makeup.

Like leprosy, sin always disturbs and decays goodness. Sin caused Adam and Eve (and the entire universe) to fall to a lower level of goodness. Through free will, good was rejected and evil came into existence. Every time we choose good or evil we affect all of creation. The reason why the gospel is the good news is because it tells us that Jesus is the only way to restore the world and heal us from inner leprosy (sin). Jesus restores our intellects, our wills, our emotions, and gives us eternal life. One of the Psalmists has said "I confessed my faults to the Lord and you took away my sin." God is always there for us, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation (the mass). We should all cry "Jesus, if you wish, you can make me clean!"

As you can see, the speaker's use of scripture was very mystical and Christ-centered. While Jesus' own interpretation of the scriptures are often Christ-centered (see Luke 24:27; 24: 44-49 and John 5:46), he always based these on the actual meaning found in the text. There is a tendency in the Catholic speaker's interpretation to overemphasize the philosophical and spiritual meaning in the Bible and to neglect its

plain literal message—Jesus physically heals people to show his power and his Divinity. Also, the speaker finds a mystical union with Christ as the aim of communion instead of focusing on the sacrament as a remembrance of all of the actions Christ has done and will do for us. The speaker finds his authority of interpretation in the Roman Catholic Church, and develops his themes along those theological lines.

Sharon Lutheran Church

It was the weekend before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season, a religious time which is special to many traditional churches. Sharon Lutheran's traditional service (they also have a contemporary worship service) met early on Sunday morning. The sanctuary was nearly empty. The massive organ at the front of the room loomed ominously over us, its titanic pipes bellowing out hymn after hymn as the congregation read and sang along with it. The entire service was mapped out intricately in the handout each person was given (so everyone would know when to stand up and sit down and say the Apostle's Creed). A layperson came to the reading pulpit (there is one for reading and one for preaching) and read from Second Kings 2:1-12 and Second Corinthians 4:3-6. In the first reading, Elijah is taken up in a whirlwind while Elisha stands watching. In the second reading, Paul writes to the Corinthians about the light of the gospel's revelation in the person of Christ, whose face shines forth the light of the glory of God. The elderly pastor, robed in white, strode to the podium, and began to speak on the topic of the transfiguration.

In the voice and mannerisms of Mr. Rogers, the pastor opened his sermon with an illustration from life. He and several youth had gone hiking in the mountains the previous summer, and the views were spectacular. It was an unforgettable experience for

him (especially because he lives in the plains of North Dakota), and he never wanted to leave those high places. All of us, the speaker continued, have times like this in our lives—high points that bring purpose and direction to the valleys of life.

Mystery and mysticism surround the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top. What was its purpose? To begin Christ's journey to Jerusalem and death? To strengthen him for his ministry of reconciliation? To help the disciples to believe in him? It was a moment of splendor and glory. How did the disciples know who Elijah and Moses were? Did they represent the law and the prophets? Was the experience a sign that Jesus superceded the law and the prophets? All three of them (Jesus, Moses, and Elijah) had had times of doubt and trouble. They all would have mountain top experiences of victory Jesus at Calvary, Elijah at Carmal, and Moses at Sinai. Why did Peter want the booths or tabernacles to be built? Was it for the disciples? Was it for Moses and Elijah? Did Peter just want to stay on the mountain? Did he want to sell the experience?

Coming down from the mountain was the most important part of the story. Peter had said "booth," but Jesus had said "cross." Jesus led the disciples down to the need in the valley. We want to enjoy good spiritual times. We can be transfigured with gospel hope. But these times exist for us to be strengthened to go back down to the valley and minister. The great theologian, Rudolph Bultmann (at the mention of his name, I jerked to attention. I couldn't believe he was being referred to as a "great theologian." He may have been important, but I don't think he was that great) has said that when we enter into obedience and poverty in the plain, God is waiting for us there. Christ ministered to a boy with epilepsy when he descended from the mountaintop. We are all called to be

graced and transformed by God in order to grace others. God is with us on the mountain, and he goes with us to the valley.

After the benediction and closing hymnal, I sat in the sanctuary on a bench alone thinking about what the pastor had said. He had asked so many questions in his sermon, but he had answered very few of them. At one point he had mentioned that a commentary he had read had interpreted this passage in nine different ways. For him this meant that the meaning in the text was ambiguous at best, but that an overlying theme could be ascertained from the details. That theme he derived from a personal/spiritual interpretation of the text, seeing Christ's transfiguration and ministry in the valley as a figure of our own lives. To him, it wasn't important what the story actually meant in context, because he seemed to believe it couldn't be understood. He found the meaning by reading it prophetically/mystically. The church was the theme, and the life of the individual was the subject. If the Bible is to be interpreted in this manner, he might as well have only quoted Bultmann instead of the Bible itself. It is very apparent that for him the meaning is found outside of the Bible, not in it.

Hope Evangelical Covenant Church

The church was packed. Over four hundred people sat in chairs, stood talking, or lingered in the fellowship hall waiting for their spouses to park the car. Most of those present were under the age of twenty-five, and the rest seemed to be farmers from out of town. The worship band played several upbeat contemporary choruses, but hardly anyone was clapping along (North Dakotans aren't known for their rhythm). The pastor was slick and very charismatic.

The sermon centered on the topic of forgiveness. In Ephesians 4:29-5:1 Paul tells us that we are to forgive one another just as Christ forgave us. God's forgiveness, the pastor began, was scandalous. God's forgiveness is not reluctant, it is not exhaustible, and it is not repressible. God's forgiveness does not depend on our actions but on who Jesus is. Our relationships with God and with others are damaged by unforgiveness. Forgiveness is best for us because it is an expression of God's forgiveness in Christ. Forgiveness starts with the gospel (Christ's death).

God expects, commands, and enables us to forgive all sins past, present, and future. In Matthew chapter 18 Jesus tells us a story about a man who is forgiven a large debt. This forgiven man goes and finds a fellow servant who owes him a small amount of money and he holds his debtor responsible to repay him. This unforgiving man is then tortured by his master who finds out about his wicked unforgiveness. Jesus' point is that God will treat us in the same way unless we forgive others. Often when we forgive others the only person set free is ourselves. We must recognize the grace of God in our own lives so that we may grace others with his forgiveness. Forgiving another's debts is not fair, it is in faith believing that God's justice will prevail. We must extend God's mercy to others (as in the Lords Prayer recorded in Matt. 6:12).

If you have been hurt and wounded by others, your duty is to grant release to the perpetrator and to be kind and compassionate toward them as the Father is toward us. Philip Yancey, Charles Williams, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer have all given good examples of the faith and grace involved in forgiveness. When we forgive we don't say that the problem is okay, or that it doesn't hurt, or that there are no consequences for sin, but that we choose to grace the person with continued relationship. We choose to love each

other. Unforgiveness holds up a mirror to the debtor in which their sin is reflected, and imprisons the unforgiving heart. Forgiveness holds up a window to the debtor through which Christ's grace is seen, and sets the forgiver free.

When the sermon was finished each person in the congregation received a small piece of paper on which to write their forgiveness for those that have hurt them. After the service they were all encouraged to bring them to the altar and leave the pieces of paper there. The pieces of paper would be burned and the ashes would be used on Ash Wednesday.

The pastor's interpretation of the Bible was refreshingly literal. His preaching was topical and didactic (he focused on particular topics in the Bible and he taught them in a systematic manner) and allowed the scripture to provide its own emphases. While much of what he said was merely truth he had discovered in life and not Biblical truth, the scripture that he did deal with was taken at face value. The church's observance of Ash Wednesday slightly confused me because of my non-traditional upbringing in the church, but I'm guessing that if I was raised in a Catholic or Lutheran or other traditional church I would be more accustomed to mixing religious ritual with hermeneutics. Often the traditional churches mix their religion so much with their interpretation that their interpretation begins to serve their religious rituals instead of the other way around. For example, in the churches that believe in the actual physical presence of Christ in the communion, their interpretation of the relevant texts has been overshadowed by their religious beliefs. They tend to over-literalize or over-mysticize the texts in their attempts at reconciling their beliefs with the Bible. The danger is in misinterpreting the Bible for

religious reasons, instead of searching for the true religion revealed by God in the person of Christ.

So, what's the Big Deal?

What does hermeneutics have to do with me, or America, or modern attitudes in the church? How I view the Bible and its meaning will affect how I view the world around me, and will either distort or enhance my vision of God and my world. God exists in reality. If he is truly there and he truly has something to say us, we ought to be humble enough to put our own ideas to the side and accept it. If the American church no longer cares what God has to say, it fails to be the Church of God. Three contemporary forces at work in American culture and the Assemblies of God (A/G) are education and the spread of knowledge, an emphasis on subjectivity (personal interpretation) and tolerance, and anti-intellectual functionalism (a big term meaning that they don't care as much about making sense as they do about things working. If an idea works it is good, whether it is reasonable or not).

In Universities and in Seminaries, Colleges, and other academic circles across America education has been a prime factor for change in hermeneutics. Historically, the critical methods (the "Science is never wrong" school) of Bible interpretation (whether grammatical, historical, or literary) have had a direct impact on Christian leaders who exegete the scriptures. They have lessened the faith of many in miracles, the supernatural, and the historicity of the Biblical accounts. It no longer matters to interpreters that Jesus is recorded as having healed people. The only thing important is the spiritual applications to religion that we can draw from the accounts (as we can clearly see in the sermons at Holy Family Catholic Church and Sharon Lutheran Church).

This weakening of the Bible's authority has led many toward neo-orthodoxy, which is a fancy word for "skeptical interpreter" (and opposes orthodox churches from without, while influencing the populace of those churches from within).

In the American A/G, our academia is hard-pressed to train leaders that are academically up to the liberal scholars' standards. This is because they seek to remain true to the Bible in their hermeneutics and beliefs, but still try to scientifically and objectively interpret the scriptures. Neo-orthodoxy and other liberals in hermeneutics will always see them as relative outsiders because the A/G emphasizes belief in what they know, while much of the academic world emphasizes belief in belief (hypotheses) or knowledge of knowledge (science's analyzing of accepted facts). To know what you believe and to believe what you know (dogmatically) is unacceptable.

Another important area of knowledge dissemination in America which has influenced hermeneutics is the information explosion. More and more people are becoming more and more educated through formal training in colleges and universities, informal training through accessing the internet and libraries, and technical training in increasingly narrower fields. More and more people are learning more and more about less and less. Pretty soon everyone will know everything there is to know about nothing. We will all have narrowly specialized fields of expertise which no one else will understand or even care about. There is so much out there, that no one brain can understand and study it all. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. So we specialize in our hermeneutics in order to understand small bits of the picture better. Unfortunately, this allows us to increasingly lose sight of the big picture. Suddenly it does not matter that we are dissecting an elephant. Our little bites are all that matters.

But if this is true, than it doesn't really matter that much what we dissect (the Bible or the Koran) as long as it has bite-sized pieces. The practical, theological, and spiritual concerns are left to others more experienced in those fields.

An emphasis on subjectivity and tolerance is the second force at work in American culture and the A/G. Our country is neither fully secular, nor fully sacred. It is decidedly noncommittal and diverse in church and state policies. "What is true for you may not be true for me," is heard across America daily in schools, workplaces, and yes, even in churches. As the A/G struggles to hold its own academically, many of its people run the other way, believing that it doesn't matter so much what we believe, or why we believe it. All that is important is that we get along with other Christians in our Biblical interpretations (for instance, at Sharon Lutheran Church, the pastor gave many possible interpretations of the transfiguration but never came to any conclusions about its true original meaning).

Tolerance of other religions and worldviews has become so engrained in American heads that exclusivists are often the only ones that are excluded. Objective reality (in meaning, logic, or even beliefs) is not seen as being the most important thing anymore. A Bible verse may mean what you want it to mean (as Augustine came very near to saying by his emphasis on the multiplicity of meaning) and truth is what you make it. This point makes the A/G's sixteen fundamental truths seem out of place in such a subjectivist context. What is fundamental? What is truth? Is there even such a thing (or sixteen of them)? The organization and many of its leaders push strongly for an objective view of reality in Biblical interpretation and theology, but many who populate

their churches live by a different code—tolerate others and learn to see that the truth is not monopolized.

The third force at work in American culture and the A/G is anti-intellectual functionalism (as with the Pietists, it is not what you think, it is what you do). This is tied intimately with the second force (tolerance and subjectivity) and is often opposed to the first (education and the spread of knowledge). This may seem odd since America's popular emphasis on tolerance and subjectivity is a direct result of the information explosion, which uncovered the complexity of the data this world contains and the diversity of systems by which to understand those data. Nevertheless, popular American and A/G sentiment often oppose the specialization of education and the increased burden of the information explosion. They view education negatively, taking subjectivity at face value and asserting that because we cannot know everything and what is to be known is not worth knowing since it is not real, we have no real reason to explore our world at such great depths. No one will benefit from such efforts and they are therefore worthless. We must cut off our brains and discover our hearts and hands. The treasure-chest of meaning in the Bible is not worth opening.

These "it's not what you think, it's what you do" people see religion as primarily based on mystical and spiritual experiences and phenomena, with a labor of love as a result. Biblical hermeneutics are personal, subjective, and meant to spur us on towards love and good deeds. While these ideas are true in part, they often neglect what the Bible actually means or says. They fail to realize that it is only through the knowledge of God and his word to us that we may come to know and experience him in our lives working through us. They say that they believe in simple faith, but they do not know the one they

believe. Orthodoxy (and the A/G specifically) cannot remain true to its historical interpretations of the Bible and faith, and continue on this road towards a mindless religiosity or spiritualism. Christianity is not just a way of life, an experience, or a feeling. It is a belief in what we know. And we know by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). So let's quit being HERMENEUTICS DUMMIES. Let's open the treasure-chest and enjoy the revelation that God has given us.

PART II
THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

CHAPTER 6

A HOLISTIC HERMENEUTIC

Four Exegetical Principles

What are some important exegetical principles to which the interpreter of the Bible must adhere? Four broad categories of interpretation, listed in the order in which they must be performed, are as follows: presuppositions, context, organization, and application. The presuppositions of the interpreter must be dealt with before the text is analyzed. The interpreter must be aware of his/her own theological, religious, cultural, and exegetical presuppositions before encountering the text and must be open to new presuppositional horizons uncovered in the text (Dockery 1992; Klein, Blomburg, and Hubbard 1993). The context of the text is extremely important to interpretation. Authorial intent, literary genre, grammatical usage, historical-cultural background, and redactional issues must all be examined thoroughly in order to ascertain the meaning of the text in the context in which it was written (Arthur 1994; Fee 1991). Organizing the meanings in the texts (transforming biblical theology into systematic theology) is the next step in the hermeneutical process. Scripture must be compared with Scripture in order to develop a holistic analytical/synthetic framework upon which to build one's faith (Stronstad 1995, 29). Last, the interpreter must apply the text to his/her present reality. This is the verification level of the hermeneutical process (Stronstad 1995). The applications made

must cohere with the systematic and biblical theology based on the context and presuppositions of the text itself.

Presuppositions

The primary presupposition of the present work is that the Bible is "the primary source of information about the Bible" (Arthur 1994, 8). The Bible should be used to interpret itself. The interpreter should seek to ascertain and utilize the presuppositions of the original author and audience. In the present study, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are the two primary sources of information about signs and wonders and signs and wonders narratives in Luke and Acts. The hypotheses of the study were tested primarily through an evaluation of the signs and wonders narratives in Luke-Acts and secondarily through an evaluation of studies of signs and wonders narratives by previous researchers.

As Stronstad (1995) has rightly observed, experiential presuppositions are also important in exegesis (61–63). Bible study is not a wholly detached and objective enterprise, but is an exploration of the "existential continuity" that exists between apostolic believers and modern experiences of the interpreter (Arrington 1988b, 383). Regarding the focus of the present study, those who have experienced miracles are more open and understanding when exegeting biblical history concerning miracles (Stronstad 1995, 62). If the experiences of the interpreter become the sole and unbridled starting point of interpretation, however, "the perceived meaning of Scripture becomes easily susceptible to distortion by the presuppositions of the interpreter" (Arrington 1988b, 384).

All interpreters approach the signs and wonders narratives with experiential presuppositions that drastically affect the outcome of their exegesis. Arrington (1988b)

asserted that the relationship between personal experience and exegesis is dialogical: “At every point, experience informs the process of interpretation, and the fruit of interpretation informs experience” (384). In an exposition of the signs and wonders narratives, an openness to the supernatural acts of God in history is necessary in order to properly understand and evaluate the sign value of miracles recorded in the text. Miracles are only as apologetic as they are experiential.

Exegesis and Explication

Literary-historical analysis and canonical-theological analysis are the “two interrelated phases” of a proper hermeneutic (Dockery 1992, 180). Exegesis is the historical-grammatical analysis of the text. Explication is the literary analysis of the text. In both exegesis and explication, the primacy of authorial intent should be upheld, and the importance of a text’s genre should be appreciated (Fee 1991, 43). While so-called “higher criticism” has been used by many Bible scholars since the rise of rationalism in the West, it is often too rationalistic and reductionistic to deal with signs and wonders narratives.

Regardless of a text’s history prior to canonization, its message must be understood holistically in light of its larger literary context using the supernaturalistic presuppositions of the original author and intended audience. The religio-historical context must not be ignored in an interpreter’s understanding of miraculous events (Strobel 2000, 92). The religio-historical context of first-century Hellenistic Jewish Christians includes an emphasis on the supernatural. Jesus’ miracles (and those of his disciples) were signs of his ministry, role, and identity, and were related to who He was and what He said historically. Luke’s redactions of his sources may in fact reflect his own

particular interests and purposes in writing, but it is the finished work (Luke-Acts) that the exegete must seek to understand, not just the parts. The interpreter may only know Luke's original intent as he/she encounters the entirety of Luke's completed work in Luke-Acts using grammatical-historical tools of analysis and literary explication.

Literary explication often avoids reductionistic and rationalistic tendencies. Ryken (1992) observed that "storytellers embody their point of view in their selectivity and arrangement of details" (85). Authorial assertion, normative spokespersons (characters who give the meaning or sum up the plot), implied authorial viewpoint, selectivity, and arrangement are all examples of "authorial devices of disclosure" (Ryken 1984, 62–63) that reveal what a story means and what it teaches. The four modes of narration are direct narrative (the author tells what happened in their own voice), dramatic narrative (dialogues and speeches), description (details of setting or character), and commentary (1992, 43).

Three basic ingredients of a story are setting, characters, and plot (Ryken 1984, 35). The settings in signs and wonders narratives in Acts progress from Jerusalem into all the world (following the expansion of Christianity). The characters move from Jewish apostles, to Hellenistic Jews, to God-fearers and proselytes, to Gentiles. The plots move from several lengthy signs and wonders accounts (Acts 2 and 3) to short paradigmatic summaries but continue to follow the miracle-explanation-response progression of chapter two. Three types of story settings are physical, temporal, and cultural (Ryken 1992, 62). Characters in a story may be sympathetic or unsympathetic, and they may be normative characters that embody "the standards, values, or norms that the story is

offering for our approval" (72). When a character in a story gives a summary of the story's meaning, he/she is a "normative spokesperson" (85).

Biblical Theology

"In the hermeneutics of biblical history the major task of the interpreter is to discover the author's intent in recording that history" (Fee 1976, 125). Biblical theology is a holistic understanding of a biblical book or books (Luke-Acts in this case) that seeks to analyze the key themes and agendas of the text in its historical setting (Ladd 1974, 25). The theology of a particular biblical writer is explicitly stated or implied in the work (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993, 383). Daniel Fuller (1978) presented several guidelines for biblical theology: (a) compare texts by the same author before comparing them with texts of other authors; (b) analyze texts by the same author chronologically to discover progression; and (c) compare texts with texts of similar genre (195–196). In the present study, Luke's writings were analyzed chronologically in light of his other writings. Since both Luke and Acts fit into a similar genre (that of the historical monograph), these two volumes provide the interpreter with ample examples of signs and wonders narratives in the same genre written by the same author.

Fee and Stuart (1993) asserted that when stories are in an explicitly didactic context they often serve as illustrations of what is being taught (130). The narratives in Acts 2–3 are examples of signs and wonders narratives in a context that is explicitly didactic concerning signs and wonders. In any biblical theology of Luke-Acts, emphasis must be placed on Luke's distinctive kingdom Christology (Fee and Stuart 1993, 131). Time must be spent relating signs and wonders narratives to the "already" of God's

impending blessings and judgment, and the "not yet" of the total fulfillment of God's plan for the world.

Systematic Theology

Erickson (1998) defined systematic theology as a discipline that "strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to the issues of life" (21). Fee and Stuart (1993) distinguished between the theological, ethical, experiential, and practical doctrines that can be derived from the texts of the Bible. Within these four areas, Fee and Stuart have identified primary doctrines (based on the explicit intent of the original author) and secondary doctrines (based on the implicit intent of the author). Fee and Stuart argued that the secondary experiential and practical areas are not meant to be normative for all time but are rather patterns or particular events that merely point to the wider purpose of the original author in his work (106).

The main story of the Bible as a whole, and Luke-Acts in particular (Witherington 1998), centers on God's purposes and actions in history and is known as "salvation history" (Ryken 1984, 170). Signs and wonders narratives focus on an important aspect of God's actions and purposes and are manifestations of God's plan in salvation history. Signs and wonders narratives contribute to the Christology of Luke-Acts. The "resurrection-ascension-exaltation perspective" of the Christology of Acts is highlighted in the signs and wonders narratives (Stronstad 1995, 143), and the Christocentric sign value of miracles is shared by Luke with both John and Paul in their

writings (John 7:4–8; 5:36; 9:30–3; 10:25; 11:47–48; 14:11–14; 15:24; 20:30–31; 1 Cor. 12:12).

Application and Verification

William W. Menzies (1987) argued that exegesis and biblical theology must be verified in the life of the exegete (1–14). If findings are not verified by present experience, an interpreter's hermeneutic fails. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard (1993) presented a useful four-step methodology for the application of biblical texts to today: (a) determine the original application, (b) figure out how specific the original application was, (c) identify any cultural issues, and (d) determine what contemporary applications go along with the broader principles presented in the text (406–424). Consistent patterns and positive models indicate Luke's intentions of establishing "normative, consistent behavior" (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993, 350). How can the interpreter of Luke-Acts ascertain the normative value of a particular narrative in Luke-Acts? Fee and Stuart (1993) dismissed the normative value of narrative details based on the fact that the details are often incidental or ambiguous (107). Witherington (1998) offered the following three guidelines for assessing the normative value of a particular narrative: (a) look for positive repeated patterns; (b) be sure that a pattern does not change; and (c) assess whether a clear divine approval is given for belief, behavior, experience, or practice (100–101). Luke's distinctive historiographical methods must be understood in order to ascertain the apologetic nature of signs and wonders and signs and wonders narratives in Luke-Acts.

CHAPTER 7

THE GENTILE LETTERS: UNIVERSALITY IN FOCUS

The principle of universality is an ancient one. Dating from the time of the first humans, Adam and Eve, the idea of a universal curse and blessing has been a recurrent theme in the history of the nations. Later, the universality of the sinfulness of mankind (excluding Noah) was the reason for a universal (worldwide) flood, and the subsequent renewal of a universal covenant with new mankind. A post-flood world would see the worldwide rebellion, unity, and pride of man scatter with the blunder of Babel, sending humans out across the planet. As Paul later said on Mars Hill to the philosophers of his day:

> From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "we are his offspring." (Acts 17:26-28 NIV)

The universal fatherhood of God caused the universal scattering of mankind in order to facilitate the universal incoming of mankind into good relationship with him. The Gospels and Acts record the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ into all the world. God was bringing his call of repentance and faith to the nations. As the kingdom rule of God expanded across the earth, God used human vessels to reap the harvest and to plant and water the growing organism that was the church. In the epistles of the New

Testament (most of which were written to Gentiles) the growing churches are reminded of the universality of sin, judgment, salvation, the kingdom of God, and the church.

The Letters of Paul

It is no mistake that the first of the epistles in the New Testament is Paul's letter to the Romans. The history of Acts ends with Paul in Rome, as a preliminary climax to Jesus' outlining of the spread of Christianity which Luke records in Acts 1:8. Paul was sent by God as the apostle to the Gentiles (in which role he probably found eschatological significance),[1] and in the first eight verses of his letter to the Romans he expresses the history and nature of this apostleship. According to Paul, the gospel was promised to the prophets in the Old Testament—the revelation of the God-man who had now sent Paul to call "all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5). Paul goes on in the letter to expound the primary doctrines of Christianity. His major themes are the universality of sin and judgment (Rom. 1-7), the universal offer of salvation (3-9), the fate of Israel (9-11), life in the kingdom of God for Jewish and Gentile converts (12-15), and the scope of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (15). The letter ends with many greetings and a repetition of God's plan for the universal spread of the gospel and the kingdom (Rom. 16:25-7).

In first and second Corinthians Paul defends his apostleship and the unity of the universal church of God. Paul addresses several problems which the Corinthians (and Christians all over the world) were struggling with such as those concerning disunity, immorality, lawsuits, marriage, slavery, idolatry, propriety in worship, gifts of the Spirit,

[1] Clark, Andrew C. "Apostleship: Evidence from the New Testament and Early Christian Literature." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 13.4 (October, 1989): p.p. 344-378. Clark argues convincingly that Paul saw himself in light of the eternal purposes of God for the nations, eschatologically being sent to bring the future kingdom of God to the Gentiles, as Peter was sent to the Jews.

the resurrection, almsgiving, apostleship, suffering, and the nature of ministry. His extensive use of Greek rhetoric and style provide us with a useful model of incarnational apologetics.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he makes it very clear that Christianity is not merely an extended Judaism but is rather a universal religion of faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. He reminds the Ephesians that God has chosen a people for himself from all flesh to dwell in the household of God's rule and to fulfill God's purpose for creation. To the Philippians Paul emphasizes Christ's example as the supreme servant-leader of the church and the world, drawing people into the joyous kingdom through suffering. Paul writes to the Colossians that Christ is reconciling the world through us by his blood, and that Christ rules all things because they were made by him and for him. The preaching of the gospel is to every creature, and Paul points out that God works through ministers in the church to reveal the mystery of the kingdom to the Gentiles. In first and second Thessalonians, Paul reminds the Christians of the universal hope that is in Christ, and of the future of universal sin and evil. Jesus will return and establish his universal rule. To Timothy, Titus, and Philemon Paul writes about local church and leadership development, deriving his particularistic advice from universal concepts in God's purpose for his worldwide church.

In all of Paul's letters we discover that the church's purpose in the plan of God is universal, and that as individuals in the "charismatic community"[2] find their place in Christ, the outward working of the kingdom to all men is performed universally and locally.

[2] Snyder, Howard A. "The Church in God's Plan." Perspectives on the World Christian Movement. Revised Edition. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, Eds. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1992. p. A141.

The Letters to the Hebrews

No one alive today knows for sure who wrote the letter to the Hebrews, but whoever he (or she) was, one thing is certain—the author believed very strongly in the universal supremacy of Christ. Jesus is seen as better than the angels, better than Moses, better than any human high priest, and his new way is better than the old way. The theme for Hebrews brings into focus Christ's universal ministry as the leader of the new priesthood to create a new and better (universal) covenant and to example this for his new people, who are to live by faith in the same way. The people of Israel are now only spiritually Israel (God's people) by faith in the one who took away the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles.

You might have noticed that the title to this section is "The Letters to the Hebrews." While there is only one epistle formally known as the letter to the Hebrews, James' letter "to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1) could easily be said to deserve the same name. While his target readership may well have included Gentile believers as some have argued (using Israel as a metaphor for the spiritual house of God), still James sees his readership as being children of Abraham, and therefore Hebrews (whether physically, spiritually or both). James' Jewish flavor gives the letter its characteristic symbolism, practicality, and emphasis on action. It encourages Israel to be a light to the nations (1:1), exampling the changing power of faith within individuals and the community.

The Letters of Peter, John, and Jude

Peter writes forcefully and sometimes cryptically of the kingdom of God and its eschatological significance. He exhorts his readers to live holy, as a people, a nation, a

priesthood, and a living temple, in order to be a light to the nations (1 Peter 2:12). He brings focus to the nature of God's revelation to mankind (2 Peter 1:16-21), and its distortion by false prophets (2 Peter 2:1-22). He goes on to speak of the universality of sin, judgment, and God's offer of salvation (2 Peter 3:1-15). Peter's rationale for why Christ had not yet returned was that God was patient and wanted all to be saved. Several things Peter teaches us are: 1-Christ's return is imminent, 2-Christ wants all to be saved, 3-God's promises are sure, and 4-Christ's return is somehow linked to the completion of the gospel proclamation and acceptance (his mercy and the preaching of the kingdom are tied together).

John writes several letters to specific churches and to the universal church in order to remind them of the love, light, and life that are in Jesus (we will deal with John's letter to the churches in Asia entitled "The Revelation" in the next section). In first John, he begins with a description of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. John testifies and proclaims eternal love, life, and light to all mankind because God had done this first (through Jesus) in order that the lost may have fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:1-4). The spread of the kingdom, according to John, was the spread of relationship. God's universal offer is relational.

Jude, using apocalyptic and thoroughly symbolic language, draws the line clearly between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Near the end of his short letter, he exhorts the children of the kingdom of God to reach out in love to the slaves of the kingdom of darkness in order to save them by the power of God's sustaining mercy (Jude 17-25).

The Revelation

In John's letter to the churches of Asia (usually called "The Revelation") we find an excellent consummation of history and prophecy, and the climax of the kingdom of God in judgment and in blessing. This letter begins with God's particular purposes for the local churches of Asia, and ends with his universal purpose for the universal church. Each church is exhorted in a different way to stay true to their calling. After this, John is whisked away to heaven to see and hear things of the future and the past. All of history is summed up, and the final days are foretold, bringing God's heavenly rule and kingdom to the earth, and finally to the new universe.

God's bride is the church, including individuals from every ethnic, linguistic, political and social group.[3] How is this possible? Where did they all come from? The answer is simple. The only answer can be that these people were all confronted by the kingdom of God and the person of Jesus Christ through his instrument the church. The only reason you and I are members of one body is because that body first reached out to us. Why did they reach out us? Because God's purpose for the church and his kingdom is universal.

The Universalist Letters

In the epistles of the New Testament (most of which were written to Gentiles) the growing churches are reminded of the universality of sin, judgment, salvation, the kingdom of God, and the church's mission. The New Testament epistles reveal a God that is not only exclusivist, but is also universalist. God cares for all of lost mankind, and seeks them in order to bring them to himself. God will include at his table all that are

[3] Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors. An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*. London: Tydale Press, 1969. p. 92. quoted in Steyne, Philip M. *In Step with the God of the Nations*. Revised. Columbia, South Carolina: Impact International Foundation, 1997. p. 289.

called and believe from every nation, and will exclude only those who choose not to come. How shall they be called unless we are sent? A universal gospel is useless without a universal call, and a universal call is impossible (biblically) without a universal church fulfilling its universal mission to the lost.

CHAPTER 8

AN INWARD FORCE

Gravity and Motion

If I drop my pencil, it falls to the ground. Not just once or twice, but every time. Mean old mister gravity seems to always pull me down to the ground every time I jump off the roof to attempt flight. Similarly, when I golf the ball seems to always eventually fall back to the grass. If I could, I would build a rocket in my backyard and shoot myself and my wife and kid into space (to be the first "space missionaries"). Out there away from the earth and other planets life would be easy. Nothing would be heavy, lifting weights would be a cinch, slam dunking would be a cake walk; just about every activity would be easier (except maybe juggling). But space is cold and empty for a reason—sustaining biological life is nearly impossible. *Gravity is a useful force which draws objects together, and allows for symbiosis in energy interactions.*

When I am driving down the road in my car and I see an accident just ahead I cannot slam on my breaks and stop the vehicle instantly. It takes time to slow down because my car wants to continue moving in the same direction at the same speed for eternity (and it would if there weren't so many potholes and the price of gasoline weren't so high). In a similar way, if my car is stopped in the middle of the road and I see a semi truck coming toward me, I cannot instantly speed up and avert tragedy. It takes energy and time to make mass move slower or faster. *Motion is a useful state which changes the relationships of objects in space and time, and like gravity allows interaction between objects to transpire*. Without motion in a physical universe, nothing changes, action is

impossible, and life ceases to exist.[4] Neither motion nor gravity can change instantaneously though; to put it simply *changing relationships takes time and energy*.

Gravity and motion are an integral part of the kingdom of God as revealed in the Gospels and in Acts, and help to form a theological basis for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church.

The Message of the Gospels

"The day of the Lord has come! The kingdom is restored to the throne of David. The disobedient and the oppressor will be judged, but the poor and the afflicted will be blessed. God's rule on earth is here!" This message rings clear in the first four books of the New Testament. In fulfillment of ancient prophecy and promise, God has led his people Israel into a new era—an era of the heart and Spirit. God was with them, in flesh and blood. No longer would God's dealings be primarily with a single people. He would now reveal himself to the entire world through them. God's Old Testament prophets had come and their time was now passing (with the death of John the Baptist). The day of the Lord was now at hand, a day of judgment and mercy. Cornell Goerner has stated it well:

> Judgment must begin with the house of the Israel. It then must be proclaimed to all the nations. . . . A new covenant was to be sealed with a faithful remnant of Israel, who would then call the Gentile nations to repentance in the name of the Messiah, the judge of the living and the dead.[5]

But the day of the Lord was not instantaneous like some had imagined. It would take place in stages and developments (like God's revelation) of God's origin and

[4] Yancey, Philip and Tim Stafford. "James: An Introduction." *The Student Bible: Study Notes.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1986. p. 1079.
[5] Goerner, H. Cornell. "Jesus and the Gentiles." *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Revised Edition. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, (Eds.) Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1992. p. 98.

implementation, in order to grow the greatest living organism of history—the church.[6] This would take a lot of time and energy

The message of the gospels is the divinity, compassion and mission of Jesus Christ. God's plan for humanity included his close identification with humanity through incarnation. In the Old Testament God had continually reached out to his people to draw them to himself and his plan for the world. He gave them the responsibility of modeling the God/man relationship on earth. He outwardly compelled them to change and become a witness of God. In the gospels, we see the promised Messiah (God among men) constantly focusing on the inward compulsion of ministry and witness. In both Testaments we find that God's plan is to draw the nations to himself (incoming) and to send his people to bring them in (outgoing). God's people are to be magnets and missionaries (gravity and motion).

Gravity and Motion in the Gospels

Let's take a look now at a few examples of gravity and motion at work in the gospels. First, let's examine Jesus' background. He was a Jew, a descendant of God (the father of the world), Abraham (the father of God's blessing for the world), of David (the father of God's rule in the world), of Ruth, Tamar, and Bathsheba (women of the world, drawn into the plan of God by his people's sinful or exemplary lives), and of the exiled people of Israel (sent out into the world in judgment). Here was a man for the world.

John the Baptist, Jesus, and his disciples all preached a message of repentance to the people of Israel. The establishment of the kingdom of God was central in their thinking (though the disciples were a little slow in ascertaining what exactly this entailed,

[6] Glasser, Arthur F. "The Apostle Paul and the Missionary Task." Revised Edition. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, (Eds.) Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1992. p. 126.

cf. Acts 1:6-8). God would rule all flesh, and would judge Israel and the nations. Several times Jesus says that the chosen people of Israel are children of the kingdom by belief and adherence, not by birth, and tells the Jews that God's kingdom rule is for every nation (Matt. 8:10-12; Luke 13:23-30; 14:16-24; 20:9-19). God's people from every nation are drawn to him as he sends his gospel out. Jesus sends his disciples out with the good news of the kingdom several times to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles as well (Matt 10:5-8; 28:19; Luke 10:1-12).

During Jesus' earthly ministry among the Jews several things occur which bring clarity to the issue. He heals a Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (Matt. 15:21-28), a Centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13), preaches the gospel in a Samaritan city (John 4:5-52), delivers a Gadarene demoniac (Matt. 8:28-34), heals a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:12-19), and cleanses the court of the Gentiles in the Temple at Jerusalem.[7] In each instance the Gentile believer seeks after God in faith as Christ seeks after them and brings his kingdom rule to them (through healing, cleansing, judging, preaching the gospel, and deliverance from bondage). Gentiles are being drawn even as Jesus is being sent.

The Message of Acts

The message of Acts is the same as the message of the entire Bible—God loves the world and is acting in history to reveal himself and accomplish his purposes. Diaspora Jews living all over the world were drawn to worship God at Jerusalem. It was there that God enacted his next plot twist. Moses had cried for the Spirit of God in every man, and now the fulfillment of that prayer would be found. An inward force (the Holy Spirit himself, who is more specifically a person and not a force) was poured out on the

[7] Goerner, H. Cornell. "Jesus and the Gentiles." *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Revised Edition. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, (Eds.) Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1992. pp. 101-2.

church on the day of Pentecost. The outward manifestation of this force drew a crowd to God's people, and a gospel meeting took place. The Jews came to hear, the disciples went to preach, and by the power of the Spirit thousands were added to the church that day.

This epicenter revival in Jerusalem continued to gain momentum as the people were drawn to God and the disciples were sent to witness in the city. Soon the Greek Jews were reached through Stephen, Philip and others, and as persecution arose, the church scattered to further regions around Judea, Samaria, Cyprus, Syria, and beyond. God had sent them through persecution to the Jews that were scattered abroad on the earth. God's witness to the Jews continued to grow.

Through Peter, Jewish missionaries to Antioch, and later Paul, Barnabbas, Timothy, Titus, and many others, the church broke into the Gentile world. But the world they were breaking into first consisted primarily of God-fearers and Jewish proselytes. Judgment began with the house of Israel (to curse or bless them according to their reaction to the gospel). As the Jews were ministered to by the sent ones (apostles), the Gentiles who were drawn to worship the true God entered the kingdom. By the power of the Holy Spirit within, the disciples were sent without, and the nations were drawn into the kingdom (to respond as they chose). The Spirit empowered the outgoing ministry of the church to Israel in the nations, and the Spirit drew the people of God to himself. God's purpose is the salvation of the world (John 3:16), and he accomplishes this purpose through his people's outgoing and incoming, their magnetism and their missionary nature, by the inner force of his Spirit's communion with his people.

Gravity and Motion in Acts

The apostles Peter and John were going to the Temple when they were accosted by a street beggar. He pleaded for money, but they gave the man healing in the power of the King. The man jumped for joy, and the ruckus caused a sensation in the Temple courts as all the people were drawn to see the works of God and hear the apostles' message. This kind of thing happened again and again, and many people gravitated toward the kingdom of God (for better or worse). Many of the leaders in Jerusalem were not impressed, and by their response (of persecution) brought the curse of Abraham on themselves (they got on the King of kings' bad side).

With persecution came blessing; God's people were sent to the house of Israel in farther regions to spread the kingdom there. And then it happened. Peter went out to minister in Joppa by the sea, and a Gentile military leader was drawn by the Spirit to contact him and request his presence. Peter was sent by the Spirit to go to the Gentile's house, and as the people there were drawn by the message and signs of Christ's coming which Peter was sent to deliver, God brought the kingdom to them.

Through Paul, the church's earlier persecutor, the world would receive God's gift. But in city after city the focus began with Israel and went outward to the Gentiles. All those who were drawn were confronted with the gospel, and their obedience to God's rule (in the person of Jesus) was the deciding factor in their judgment—curses or blessings.

Later, at the Council of Jerusalem the issue of Gentile believers was debated. Peter said he had been sent to Cornelius and his household, and God had drawn them. Paul said he was sent to the Gentiles in many regions, and God had drawn them. James

went on to say that in the Old Testament God had promised to go out to the Gentiles, and to draw them to himself. (Are you noticing a trend here?) In James' words, God was "taking from the Gentiles a people for himself" (Acts 15:14). Jews and Gentiles could all be God's people without distinction, and without the imposed burden of the law. What was the decision of the Council? Entrance to the kingdom is by faith, and faith is an inward force driving outwards, drawing inwards.

Life in Orbit

Objects in motion tend to stay in motion (and objects at rest tend to stay at rest) unless acted upon by an outside source. According to Isaac Newton, objects also tend to attract one another, and all the more so the closer and more massive they are. What this means for us on earth is that our little blue planet whirls around the sun at a tremendous speed with an orbit in the shape of an ellipsis with the sun at one of the outer foci. The earth tends to move in a straight line (and it wants to fly off into space), but is acted on by the gravitational pull of the gigantic sun which pulls it towards itself (lucky for us). As the earth nears the sun (like a penny in a funnel) it gains speed and mass (according to Einstein's General Theory of Relativity) and becomes a force to be reckoned with. Its momentum lends to its ability to fling away from the sun with tremendous speed. But as the earth nears the foci furthest from the sun, it loses speed and mass and starts its long journey back to captivity by its massive neighbor star. The balance of gravity, mass, and motion (centrifugal and centripetal forces) in the earth's orbit allow life to be sustained on this third rock from the sun. Without this balance, our world would be consumed by the fire of the sun or frozen in the vast expanse of cold space.

The church and God's purposes in history are similar. He draws all men to himself and sends his son to them. Not instantaneously, but by a process known as the expansion of the kingdom, in order for life to be preserved and for a balance of outgoing and incoming. In this way God draws all flesh to himself and develops them in symbiotic relationship to one another, changing them into his image in order to shine through them outwards. Gravity and motion are an integral part of the kingdom of God as revealed in the Gospels and in Acts, and help to form a theological basis for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church.

CHAPTER 9

THE MEDIATOR

If I were to build a house, I would probably start with the foundation. Come to think of it, most people would start there as well. It's the smart thing to do. After all, who wants a shifty, sinking, leaning house (other than Oscar the grouch)? A firm foundation makes for a good start at building a beautiful house. What would happen if each of the stones in the foundation had a free will and decided that they didn't really want to be part of that house? What if they would rather be a fountain, or a throne, or even just a pier on a beach in the Bahamas? The problem with living stones is that they tend to run away. What we need is a firm foundation to build on.

God is building a house, and he has laid its foundations firmly. This essay is the story of that foundation, and the one who in the end gave his life as a prophet, priest, and King, to mediate between God and man, and bring God's plan to all of humankind.

Priests, Kings, and Prophets in God's House[8]

The people of Israel at Mount Sinai had been made by the Lord into a nation of priests. The people could not stand this awesome responsibility, so the Lord appointed representatives to stand in the gap for them. The house of Levi fulfilled the role of priests and mediators of God's holy covenant with his people. Instead of the entire nation acting as priests to the rest of the world, they required priests to mediate for them.

Under David the nation of Israel would see its first monarchial theocracy. The structure of the government had David at its head, with the King of all kings at his head. As David and other psalmists would later sing, the kings of the nations would one day

[8] Steyne, Philip M. *In Step with the God of the Nations*. Revised. Columbia, South Carolina: Impact International Foundation, 1997. p.212.

bow before the Anointed one of God, the King of the whole earth. Now God had ushered in a new aspect of his redemptive plan with humanity. The king of Israel took the place of the people by mediating politically between God and man. "The king, then, became the channel of God's blessings and judgments."[9]Before Israel had a king, God had appointed rulers (traditionally called judges) who dispensed the wisdom and rule of God for the people of Israel. The reason that Israel needed rulers in the first place was because the nation as individuals went their own ways and neglected submission to God their heavenly King. They were meant by God to be a nation of kings dispensing justice, equality, liberty, and mercy to the world. They had failed in this and God had appointed David and his house to mediate for the people.

Not only were the people meant to mediate between God and the nations as priests and kings, they were also to be God's mouthpieces to the world. They were to be prophets of the Lord, mediating his word to the nations. A prophet is one who interacts with God and man, communicating God's message (of judgment or blessing) to man, and man's message (of repentance or obstinacy) to God. They were to speak to the world about God's plan for humanity and to God about mankind's condition (in prayer). In this role the nation failed miserably. They not only ignored the plight of the nations, they went so far as to ignore the God who called them to be prophets. So God gave Israel mediators, prophets to stand in the gap of communication between God and man.

House of David, House of God

When Israel saw that the rest of the nations around them had kings to rule over them and fight their battles, they decided that they wanted one too. The last judge,

[9] Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. Toward an Old Testament Theology. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie (Zondervan), 1978. p. 162.

Samuel, was upset. Israel needed no king if they would only accept God's rule directly. But they cried for a mediator. So God, through Samuel, gave them one. But he was not quite what they had desired (they had been warned this would happen). The new king was overbearing, bipolar, rash, and extremely jealous. In short, he was not fit to rule (as is the case with most kings in the history of civilization). The worst part was that outwardly the king made a great show of dispensing God's rule to the people, but at the heart of his actions was a void of mediation. It was not God's rule he was enforcing, it was his own. And that's why Israel's first mediator-king got canned.

Let's move on the second (this story has a happier ending). In God's perfect timing, a young man named David was chosen by God (again through Samuel) to be his chosen mediator-king. He was to bring God's rule to the people of God. There was only one problem. The people already had a king (isn't that always the way)! But David knew his role as mediator under God, so his ambitions were not lofty. He did not ascend the throne by force and cut off the head of the existing ruler (as so many of his descendants did later on). He would wait for God's time, and rule under God in the places that God would grant him (whether in the palace, the battlefield, or the caves of the desert). God's mediator would not be thwarted, but in patience and submission David would rule as a servant.

And when God finally did establish David's kingdom to rule over all of Israel, David looked around and saw that while he lived in a newly erected palace, the God and King of Israel dwelt in a tent. What a bummer. Who was king around there anyways? So David got the idea that he would build God's house, the palace of the Almighty on earth (which was prophesied about by Moses hundreds of years earlier). His friend

Nathan the prophet thought the idea was stupendous, so the work would commence. But that night God's mediator-communicator Nathan received a revelation from the King of kings. Nathan came to David and told him everything.

David's seed would build God's house. God had built David's house, and would continue to build it and rule it forever. David was a shepherd, and his progeny would forever shepherd God's flock (his chosen people). God would establish David's house as the mediator-rulers for eternity. As sure as the house of Israel was made firm by God, so also would the house of David be established. By God's rule over David's house the house of the Lord would be ruled. In effect, God would build his own house through building David's.

The Future of God's House

After David died, and his son Solomon was laid to rest, the house of God went to pot. Everything seemed to fall apart. Sure, there were times of renewal and repentance, but as a whole the people of God failed to live up to the conditions of the covenant made on Mount Sinai. The hearts of the people had turned from the mediators of God (his prophets, priests, and kings) and set up false mediators (ungodly prophets, priests and kings). Something had to be done. God had made a promise to build his house through his servants, and he would not be made a liar.

The day of the Lord became a major theme of the prophets God sent to communicate with his house. This future day, the day of the Lord, would bring judgment on the nations (including the disobedient of Israel) and blessings on the faithful from every nation. It would be a great and terrible day, for it would usher in God's just rule in the world. Sin would be punished fully, and the oppressed would be set free from their

bonds (both spiritual and physical). A king would arise from the house of David, and he would build God's house and establish his kingdom on earth.

But interspersed with these prophecies of a new kingdom and rule were obscure references to a suffering servant. Israel was to suffer in order to redeem the people of the world. And a man of Israel, of David, a priest, a prophet and a king would arise to bring God's people to himself. The good news of God's kingdom would be preached! The Shepherd of Israel would die, and would somehow defeat death and the curse of sin in the process. His kingdom (the house of David, God's house) would be established over the face of the earth, and the nations would be confronted with the rule of the great Son of David, the supreme mediator between God and man.

The House has come!

If we fast-forward several hundred years, we will find the people of Israel wondering aloud at the message of some obscure baptizer from the desert. "The day of the Lord is coming soon!" And then it came. The mediator showed up. God's time was complete. The house of Israel needed a priest to mediate for them with God. A man named Jesus forgave sins and healed the sick in the same sentence. The house of God needed a prophet to communicate between God and man. This Jesus prayed to his "heavenly Father" for the sake of humanity, and spoke with authority about the nature and essence of God and his kingdom. The house of David needed a ruler to mediate justice, equality, liberty, and mercy from God. The carpenter's son Jesus proclaimed judgment by speaking the truth, recognized the equality of all humanity before God without favoritism, brought liberty to the oppressed (both spiritually and physically), and preached the infinity mercy of the Father of love.

Here was God's prophet, priest, and king, descended from David to rule on his throne forever. There was only one problem. He died.

Fortunately, God's plans are not so frail that they can be destroyed. God's house would prevail. God had sent his Son (as Jesus claimed to be) to save the whole world and establish God's house. It turned out that this Jesus had been preaching about his upcoming death for a long time. He saw it as the consummation of his physical work on earth. But dead guys don't rule.

Jesus lives; resurrected the third day, revealed to the disciples afterward, and ascended to heaven, this heavenly King was indeed the mediator who would bring humanity to the house of God. The great commission of Jesus to his disciples was not their prime motivator to reach out to the world. The power of the promised Holy Spirit was poured out on them, and his inward witness to the mediator role of Jesus was the factor that led Jesus' followers across the earth to proclaim God's message, sacrifice, and rule to the Jews and Gentiles. The firm foundation of God's house became the impetus for the rest of its building! God is building a house, and he has laid its foundations firmly. This essay has been the story of that foundation, and the one who in the end gave his life as a prophet, priest, and King, to mediate between God and man, and bring God's plan to all of humankind.

CHAPTER 10

RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST: A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS

Vertical Relationships

A Pessimist's Dream

Have you ever known any die-hard pessimists? No matter how strong the positive evidence is, their negative, sometimes argumentative views seem to darken the atmosphere of the data, and convolute the crystal clarity of the issue. Metaphorically speaking, they love to muddy the water. Simple things become complex. Joyful events become painful. Even humor becomes sarcastically biting in pessimism's dark wake. I speak as an empathizer towards their position. I am an overly pessimistic person myself. I know what it is that drives them. For me, it is a struggle for perfection against an unfair, unloving, and unforgiving world. I seek the perfect and I am often disappointed.

When pessimism (with a dash of skepticism) is applied to the way a person understands the world, especially the theological world and its corresponding biblical revelation, darkness prevails and along with it comes an ensuing sense of meaninglessness. There is no single unifying theme in scripture. Science has taught us to dissect things, and the Bible is just another piece of religious literature which should be dismantled and disrobed to reveal its stark barrenness of disunity. Many themes catch our eye, and the proliferation of Biblical theologians only serves to increase the numerical growth of thematic presentations discovered in God's revelation. Without a solidly unified theological axis upon which God's revelation revolves, the scriptures are a mesh of ancient history, philosophical conjecture, and religious feeling, meaningless both

canonically and hermeneutically (and are therefore theologically void).[10] It sounds like a pessimist's dream come true.

Are the naysayers correct in their estimations? Why do we need unity anyways? Isn't our God powerful enough and smart enough to multi-task? If we neglect the many facets of revelation, we may find ourselves ignoring the nuances of God's message in favor of unity. If we impose only one center on scripture, we are left with a reductionistic theology, and with a God who is unimaginative and one-tracked. God seems to be stuck in a rut. Let's take a look at several foci from the scriptures and see what they have to tell us about the unity (or disunity) of the scriptures.

Several Themes to Discover

One of the first themes a reader of scripture comes across (if they start at the beginning) is that of revelation. The Bible is first and foremost God's revelation. After all, no one was there when God created all that cool stuff. We have to take it in faith that God revealed these events to the person who wrote down the story of creation. Next, we see that God makes covenants with individuals (Adam, Abraham, David), groups of people (the descendants of Shem, the house of Israel, the house of David), and with mankind (through Adam, Abraham, and David). In the Old and New Testaments we find an emphasis on the kingdom rule of God. We find blessing and cursing on people. We see the distinction between the Law of Moses and the faith of the gospel. We read about servant ministers (like the judges, kings, prophets, priests, apostles, angels, etc.) who proclaim and live God's message. Wisdom and mystery are in focus, Theocentrism and

[10] Kaiser, Walter C. , Jr. *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie (Zondervan), 1978. pp. 22-3. Kaiser denies that biblical theology is merely a descriptive science on the grounds of meaning, context, and theological essence in the scriptures. He argues forcefully against deductive biblical theology, and instead sees inductive methods of analysis as being more useful for analyzing patterns, themes, and systems, especially in the area of OT studies.

Christocentrism are admonished, a future eschatological hope of God's people is surveyed, sacrifices and obedience are preached, judgment and mercy are proclaimed, external ethics and inner morality are described, and on, and on, and on. When we open the book we are immediately bombarded with a flood of emphases, foci, and particularistic data. We are in serious danger of drowning in a sea of complexity. What are we going to do?

The Truth in Unity (A Unified Field Theory)

At the turn of the last century, physics had pretty much figured everything out. The geometry and composition of the universe was as plain and forthright as could be. Light (and all other substances) traveled through invisible ether, according to the laws of Newton, and atoms were simple particles, behaving as the ancient philosopher Democritus said they should. All was well in the universe.

Until **he** showed up.

He was a wild-haired patent officer from Germany. Underneath the gigantic hair and within that awkward skull hid a diabolical brain that would bring the world to its knees. With the publication of three simple papers in 1905 the fields of particle physics, molecular hydrology, quantum physics, and astrophysics began to come into being. It would be another ten to twenty years before the world would even know what it was that had hit them (it took that long for other people to start to grasp what it was that he was saying). The universe had been transformed into a multi-dimensional space\time continuum (utilizing Reimmein geometry and the Lorentz transformation), with quanta of electromagnetic radiation in simultaneous waves and particles (utilizing Plank's constant and Maxwell's equations) speeding through the void (no longer the ether) at a specified

speed limit (the speed of light). The cat was out of the bag. We live in a relative universe. There was only one problem. The presuppositions of astrophysics and quantum physics didn't fit together. They are, in fact, mutually contradictory. I won't get into the details, but the point is that Einstein had a problem. He needed a unified field theory in order to hold onto his belief in an ordered, rational, and comprehensible universe. He tried and tried, but he could never figure it out.

Thousands of scientists since then have been working on the problem, but no one has yet met with success. A unified theory of the universe (now intimately dubbed a "T.O.E.," Theory Of Everything) continues to be the driving quest of physics in the 21st century. Many theories have been proposed, but all have failed in the end (including the ever-popular superstring theory which is unfalsifiable, untestable, unobservable, and therefore unscientific in nature). The major problem isn't creativity in theory-making. The real nuisance is the data itself. It just won't sit still long enough to categorize and analyze. It seems that Einstein may have broken the unity of the universe.

Or did he? Hasn't the universe been this way for all of time? Some human finally figured the math out, but that doesn't mean they invented it. Our historical experiences with the world have brought us to the realization that our universe is ordered, rational, and comprehensible (at least in part). We live by this simple rule. Even atheistic science (fiction) authors and philosophers such as Carl Sagan and Fredreich Neitche would have to admit (if they were still living) that there is order, reason, and comprehensibility in the universe. Though they would probably deny this claim if they could, their very denial is based on order, reason, and the hope of comprehensibility. We as humans are confronted constantly with the evidence about our world and our creator.

The fact of the matter is that the truth is in unity. Humankind (which would include most physicists) seeks unity in diversity because we are God's image-bearers, endeavoring to unlock the mystery of the universal laws. This "unity-consciousness" is the hope of humanity, the nightmare of the eternal pessimist (because even his\her own pessimism is rooted in a deep-seated desire for perfection and clarity which has been twisted to despair).

Relationship with Christ: A Biblical Theology of God's Mission

How does all of this get us any closer to the center of the Bible's message? Evidence must be gathered to inform our analysis of the Bible's central theme. The particulars in the evidence at times seem to point away from a theological center, diverting our attention from the universal aim or purpose of the scriptures. The cohesion of meaning within the Bible (and subsequently all of history) hinges on the question of whether this center actually exists. In the instructions for the writing of this paper the main thrust of the first section was supposed to be a synopsis of the argument for taking *missio Dei* as the central theme of Scripture. I will not do this, because I do not think it is true. The purpose of this paper was to give a personal response to the biblical theology of missions, and as my personal response I wish to delineate what I feel is a more biblical and theologically sound center for missions than what was presented in this course. Let me explain, and then I will give some biblical evidence for my point of view.

The fact is that I do believe in a central theme of scripture. Without one, the canon is no longer a canon—it is a compilation. The same is true of our faith. But I cannot accept as a central theme that which is man-centered—mainly the mission of God towards creation. In the Bible, God reveals himself and his plan of salvation to man. The

consummation of this revelation (and the promises made to Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Israel, and the Church of God) is found in a person.[11] Simply put, the theme of the Bible is personal. The persons of the triune God is the theme of scripture. The focus of scripture is on his person. Jesus told the religious people of his day "You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). The Bible is not about the salvation of humanity (no matter how heretical I might sound saying that). It is about Jesus Christ, who in his person reveals the plan of salvation, the mission of the church, the rule of the King of kings, and the relational love of God for humanity. Jesus is the content of the Bible. Einstein may have fractured the apparent unity of the physical cosmos in the minds of the scientists, but if one person can screw things up, so also can one person make things better. The T.O.E. is Jesus.

Advocates of the *missio Dei* approach to scripture are swamped by the attacks of modern biblical theologians who fail to see the mission of God in scriptures. Their attackers point out that lexicographically the evidence for their approach is weak.[12] The response given to these attackers is that contextually the terms promise (Exodus 12:25; Deut. 9:28; 12:20; 19:8; 27:3; Josh 23:5, 10), blessing (Gen. 1:22,28; Deut. 1:11; 15:6), multiplication of God's possession (Deut. 6:3; 26:18), rest (Josh 22:4; 1Kings 8:56),

[11] York, John V. *Missions in the Age of the Spirit*. Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2000. pp. 19-20. While York would agree that Jesus is the agent of fulfillment, and the content of the blessing, he sees the theme of scripture as the proclamation of that blessing. In my view, this way of looking at scripture reduces the Bible to a story of God's mission, instead of a story of a God on a mission. I believe he puts the cart before the horse.

[12] Albrektson, Bertil. *History and the Gods*. Lund, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup Fund, 1967. pp. 68-77. as cited in Kaiser, Walter C. , Jr. *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie (Zondervan), 1978. pp. 29-30. Albrektson concludes that a single plan or mission of God across time is nonexistent in the evidence. Kaiser responds to this attack by pointing to several clear passages supporting a unified plan of God (Gen. 12:3; Micah 4:12; Psalm 33:10-1; Isaiah 40:25; 41:26-8; 42:9; 44:7-8; 26-8; 45:21; 46:9-11; 48:3-6), citing Albrektson's own acknowledgment that the idea of a single diachronic plan of God is present in scriptures even if the vocabulary is not.

pledge (Gen. 22; 26:3; Deut. 8:7; 1Chron. 16:15-18; Ps. 105:9; Jer. 11:5), and covenant (with Adam, Abraham, David, etc.) seem to confirm a contextually based center on the purpose of God.[13] Also in view are the formulaic constructions of God's promises recorded in scripture and the metaphors used to speak of the promised descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David (i.e., the seed, branch, servant, king, etc.).[14] According to Kaiser, "the focus of the record fell on the content and recipients of God's numerous covenants."[15] This theology is diachronically constructed on the basis of God's actions in history (either explicitly described or implied), growing and interconnecting as the revelation develops.[16]

I would argue that *missio Dei* is by definition not content but purpose, not ontological but teleological in nature. With *missio Dei* advocates I would concur that the Bible's main or central **purpose** is God's plan for the nations (seen clearly in the covenants with Adam, Abraham, and David, as well as in the spirit-empowered missionary nature of the church in the NT), but I would say that this aim or plan of God is based on the person of Christ, the promised one and the fullness of the Deity bodily. Jesus is the perfect revelation (John 1:9, 14) and as such he is eternally unchanging diachronically (immutable). This is not to say that from a human standpoint God's revelation is complete from the beginning, but rather it affirms that for God, his redemptive plan in the person of Christ is accomplished before the creation of the world, and yet is revealed in stages diachronically toward the historical fulfillment of his purpose in the person of Christ (Gen. 3:15; 49:10; Num. 24:17; Ps. 2; 110:1-4; Is. 2:2-4;

[13] Kaiser, Walter C. , Jr. *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie (Zondervan), 1978. p. 33.
[14] Ibid., pp. 33-34. Kaiser sees these as pointing toward God's unified purpose for creation.
[15] Ibid., p. 34.
[16] Ibid., pp. 21-2.

4:2; 9:1-7; 11:1-5; 52:13-53:12; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:14-8; Ezek. 34:22-31; 37:24-8; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11-5; Mic. 4:1-4; 5:1-5; Hag. 2:6-9; Zech 6:12-6).[17]

The essential love relationship that binds the triune God is also the basis of his love for creation, and out of this deep relationship his kingdom purpose flows.[18] The emphasis is on the promised Savior, not on the promise (or even the proclamation) itself. Biblically speaking, *missio Dei* is the methodology and blueprint of God's extending relationship through the person of Christ, who is the focal point of all of scripture. From the beginning of time, to the end of the ages, Christ is central. From the creation of the universe by the triune God (Gen 1; John 1:1-3) to the creation of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-5), the center of healing for the nations is in God (Rev. 7:9-17; 22:2). If Christ is not seen as the center, a theological void results.

When the plan of God (*missio Dei*) is put before God himself (*Dei*) we are left with a mission-driven instead of a God-driven missiology. According to Christ himself, the greatest commandment in the Law is to "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets (the entire OT) hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:34-40). The apostle John later says "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is

[17] Steyne, Philip M. *In Step with the God of the Nations*. Revised. Columbia, South Carolina: Impact International Foundation, 1997. pp. 200-1. Steyne views this messianic hope as the primary inspiration and motivation for Israel to continue with God's mission to the nations.

[18] Scherer, James A. "Mission Theology." *Toward the Twenty-first Century in Christian Mission*. viii. James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, (eds.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdman Publishing Co., p. 194. Scherer elucidates the content of the IMC Willingen Meeting (1952) as centering on the triune God which is the source of missionary movement, with the church as the ontological manifestation of this mission. I would disagree with the findings of the Willingen meeting on the basis of the church's contingent existence on Christ, the root. The necessary head of the mission, and therefore the essential one (ontologically) is Christ, from whom flows the love of God through the church, his contingent body (by relationship, not by essence).

love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. . . . We love because he first loved us . . . . Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (John 4:16, 19, 21). The basis of God's purpose for creation as revealed in the scriptures is in the love of the person Jesus Christ, loving God and man through us, reconciling the world through him. We aren't involved in God's plan for creation just because he has a plan. We are involved in God's love because he revealed that same love relationship in our hearts by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and God's aim and desire flow supernaturally out of us as a result.

Horizontal Relationships

The Face of Love

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4: 18-9; Is. 61:1, 2). Jesus quoted these words from Isaiah in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, and went on to say that these things were fulfilled in the ears of those who heard him that day. "Today is the day of salvation," for the anointed one had come to fulfill his purpose on the earth. And what was that purpose? According to Isaiah, it was to build a New Jerusalem, a new people, a new priesthood, to bring righteousness and salvation to those who desperately needed it (60-62). Isaiah's focus was three-fold: 1- to proclaim the gospel of emancipation and blessing to the needy (both spiritually and physically); 2- to work miracles of regeneration (both spiritually and physically); and 3- to bring God's judgment and mercy on the earth (both spiritually and physically). This can be seen in the wider context of God's kingdom purpose with

humanity, climaxing in the person of Christ the compassionate, who seeks both perfect vertical and horizontal relationships (Luke 10:25-8). A person's vertical love relationship with God will spill over into evangelistic and socio-humanitarian aid as evidenced in the Good Samaritan story (10:25-37) and the parable of the Great Banquet (14:15-24).

The gospel is not merely the proclamation of words, but is intimately connected with our love for our fellow humans (1 John 3:16-8). Those who have been saved by Christ cannot ignore the horizontal aspect of their mandate from God because: 1- the church is to proclaim God's message, be a charismatic community, and minister to the needs of humanity; 2- the kingdom of God's coming is directly related to physical needs (as in Jesus' quotation of Isaiah) and spiritual appetites; 3- God is love, and as his image-bearers we are to be love to the lost who are also his image bearers; 4- the good news is holistic, not separated from reality or from present contexts;[19] 5- our deeds are often a direct witness of our content (i.e. what we believe will spill over into how we treat others); and 6- when we help others in this way, Jesus sees it as helping him (Matt 25:31-46). Our love in horizontal relationships is to be a result of God's love in us through our Savior: "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16). Consequently, if our face to the world is love, that very face is the face of our savior.

[19] Petersen, Douglas. "Pentecostal Praxis in the Third World." *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. pp. 44-58. Petersen uses the Latin American liberation theologian Segundo's hermeneutic as a tool toward Christian assessment of contextual reality in the world. While I would disagree strongly with his underlying assumptions (emphasizing a subjective hermeneutic) I believe his message is relevant to the present discussion. Petersen's basis is weak for a contextual gospel, but his focus on its importance is nevertheless central to an understanding of God's plan for humanity.

Redemption and Lift

C. Peter Wagner has said that "while God loves all people, including the rich, the Bible indicates that he has a special bias toward the poor and oppressed."[20] This is an extreme view of God's partiality which could lead to an improper emphasis on socio-economic aid. While it has been acknowledged by many that Christians seem to lift economically and socially from the mire of their pre-redeemed life, Christianity must not be seen as a means toward a socio-economic end (or as biased towards the poor). We have acknowledged previously in this paper that Jesus is the center of history and from his person emanates the purpose of God for humanity. As Paul says, "your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). Paul goes on to quote an early creedal hymn of the church, which presented Christ as the supreme servant, who is exalted by God for his humility, obedience, and sacrifice on the cross as a "nothing" man (2:6-11).

God's plan for humans is not merely to lift them from their present physical context (1 Cor 7:17-23), but to reveal the kingdom (rule of God) through them in love. The cost of discipleship includes humility, obedience, and the sacrifice of the cross (Luke 14:25-33). If the "lift" aspect of "redemption and lift" is overemphasized, Paul's warning to Timothy will come true yet again (1 Tim 6:10). Paul sees the greedy as foolish people who put their hopes in transient objects (6:7, 17) and whose end is destruction (v. 9). He commands the rich "to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share" so that they will put their hope in their eternal rewards (6:18-19; see also Jesus' parable about the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21). Jesus tells us not to worry about food or

[20] Wagner, C. Peter. "A Church Growth Perspective." *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. p. 273.

clothing, but to rather set our hearts on his kingdom (12:22-31). He went on to tell his disciples:

> Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where you treasure is, there your heart is also (Luke 12:32-34).

We see in scriptures a pattern which focuses on community based generosity[21] stemming from a hope in God's gift of blessing in the future kingdom, not from a greater love of God for the poor, but from a heart of love in Christ for all humanity seeking equality and positive horizontal relationships[22] (Ex 22:16-23:9; Ps 17; Is 5:8-17; Amos 9:11-5; Rom 12:13; 2 Peter 3:11-4; Rev 3:17-18).

Kingdom Relationships

How does all of this relate to the church's role in this age, and the growth of the kingdom of God on earth? More specifically, what is the present and future role of the American Assemblies of God (AG, the national denomination of which I am a member) in the development of the kingdom purpose of God? To put it simply, what actions must the American AG take in its quest of furthering the person and plan of Jesus Christ, in his

[21] Pickett, Robert C. and Steven C. Hawthorne. "Helping Others Help Themselves: Christian Community Development." *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Revised Edition. Ralph D. Winter and Steven Hawthorne, Eds. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1992. pp. 213-9. Pickett and Hawthorne denounce "rice Christian" development, and present a holistic plan for community development which they claim "holds the most promise for the Christian worker desirous of promoting fundamental change in human societies" (219).

[22] Dayton, Edward R. "Evangelism as Development." *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Revised Edition. Ralph D. Winter and Steven Hawthorne, Eds. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1992. pp. 210-2. Dayton views evangelism as the primary catalyst and sustainer of true development (leading from spiritual to physical development), and sees our motivation as arising from Christ's love in us as we live in the "already" and the "not yet" of God's kingdom.

fullest expression of love toward humanity? First, we must ascertain God's tri-fold role for the present church in this age. Second, we will summarily analyze and project God's role for the American AG, utilizing the three-fold plan of God for the universal church as a helpful outlining tool (though it is by no means perfect or complete). Third, we will attempt to assess the present and future essential situation of the American AG in regards to its fulfillment of the three-fold role of the church.

Trinity in the Church

God's purpose in Christ for the church in this age is three-fold: first, it is to proclaim the good news of Christ to the nations and draw all humanity into a love relationship with himself (the *kerygma* of the kingdom); second, it is to bring all of humanity into a fellowship of worship and community as his people (the *koinoniac* of the kingdom); and third, it is to involve all humanity in the love relationship of the Godhead through service and ministry to one another (the *diakonia* of the kingdom).[23] The first action of the church is that of evangelism and discipleship. It is the consistent and systematic proclamation of the kingdom of God through preaching, teaching, prophesying, and evangelizing that is to characterize the outgoing nature of the church in this age (John 17:14, 18). Secondly, the church is to be a fellowshipping community of believers who build social solidarity through their unity with the person of Christ (17:20-3). The church is to live worshipfully, toward Christ, as a body of faith, building each other up in the bond of the love of Jesus. Thirdly, the church is to be a suffering servant to the world, taking upon themselves the responsibility of righting the wrongs of

[23] Dempster, Murray W. "Evangelism and Social Concern." *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective.* Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Peterson, Eds. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. p. 22-43. In his three-fold interpretation of the ministry of the church, Dempster borrows heavily from Cox, Harvey. *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*. Revised Edition. New York: Macmillan, 1965. pp. 108-29.

this world, and of charismatically sharing the Holy Spirit's enabling power and gifts toward the redemption of fallen creation. The church is to reveal God's love in action through charismatically enabled religious and socio-humanitarian aide (James 1:27; 2:14-8).

All three of these roles of the church must be kept in eschatological focus. Christ promises to be with his disciples in their faithful proclamation and discipleship till the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). The church is seen by John the Revelator as a multi-cultural community of worshippers unified in their faith and adoration of the Lamb of God (Rev. 7:9-17). Finally, the gifts and works of the church are for this present age in anticipation of Christ's great second coming, when the judgment and mercy of God will be revealed in its perfection. In the end love is the only thing that is eternal (1 Cor. 13:8-12). The three-fold role of the church in this age must also be viewed pneumatologically. It is the Holy Spirit that enables the Christian (Acts 1:8; John 14:26), draws and redeems the unbeliever (John 6:63-5; 16:8-11), and prepares good works for us to do (Eph. 2:10). So we discover that without the person of Christ (by the Holy Spirit) working in and through the church in this age, God's plan is empty and impossible. And only in Christ will complete fulfillment of the three-fold role of his body be fulfilled.

I have referred to the three-fold role of the church in the title to this section as the "Trinity in the Church." This is because of the interconnected nature of the three manifestations of the church's role in this age. In form they are distinguishable and distinct in their personality, while in essence they are unified in their relationship to the person of Christ. (The term "personality" is here being used very loosely, as is the term "trinity." By neither of them do I mean to ascribe divinity or personhood to the three-

fold purpose of the church. While the church's purpose is directly related to its identification with the triune Godhead, it is not identical with the persons of that Godhead.) Without a holistic approach to the three-fold purpose of the church, the gospel presentation, discipleship, fellowship, worship, and charismatic service become detached from the overall plan of the church in Christ. Christ desires all of his purpose to be fulfilled in the church, without reducing or separating the various aspects (or forms) of the love of Christ in his body.

While the "three-fold" purpose of God for the church in this age is a very useful tool for analyzing the contemporary church, it has its own problems. While Murray W. Dempster seems to find in this approach "a theology of church ministry capable of integrating programs of evangelism and social concern into a unified effort in fulfilling the church's global mission,"[24] its several weaknesses are readily apparent. As with any systematic theology its categories are arbitrary and often superficial. The three-fold purpose of the church could easily be expanded to be the five-fold, twenty-fold, or even the million-fold purpose of the church in this age.[25] In its oversimplification of the character of the church's ministry much of the inherent complexity of the church's interrelationships is underappreciated or overlooked.

More significantly, the categorizations are not derived from the biblical data, but are rather taken isogetically as presuppositions of church ministry imposed on the biblical record as an assessment tool for the contemporary church. This is perhaps its greatest

[24] Dempster, Murray W. "Evangelism and Social Concern." *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective.* Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Peterson, Eds. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. p. 23.

[25] Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995. While Warren delineates a five-fold purpose of the church, his analysis provides useful observations for the present subject. He emphasizes the importance of clearly identifying the church's purpose in order to communicate and assess them more effectively. In this he is correct--oftentimes the simplest analysis is the most convincing argument.

weakness. So, while the principles of assessment are biblical, the relevant biblical data are not as clear, distinct, simple, or coherent as the "three-fold" theory of church ministry would suggest. With this in mind, let us approach the task of assessing the present and future role of the American AG with humility and transparency, admitting that any tool of assessment is bound to be subjective to a point (unless based on the person of Jesus Christ), and being careful not to overindulge in criticism of the work of others (James 4:11-2). As to the subjective nature of our assessment, effort will be put into maintaining objectivity (and generality) in the centrality of the person of Christ, while also seeking to subjectively assess the particular object of our inquiry—the American AG's three-fold role in the present age as it relates to the universal church. This is a difficult tension to balance, but accomplishment without effort expended is often void of learning experiences.

Evangelism and Discipleship

The first of the three-fold role of the church in this age is the *kerygma*. Let us attempt to assess the American AG's present situation with regards to its proclamation of the gospel. First, we will focus on a few programs of the church (in this paper, the word "program" means a general field of activity or planning, not necessarily a specific name or organization that is sponsored by the denomination), then we will discuss the overall approach and "feel" of the work, and last we will explore the church's future work in this area.

The evangelism and discipleship programs of the American AG are many. In the area of evangelism, such programs as Evangelism Explosion, evangelism crusades, short and long-term global mission endeavors focusing specifically on evangelism, evangelism

classes in schools and churches, urban evangelism focus groups, Bible camps, and city and nation-wide prayer gatherings and marches are witnessing to the truth of the gospel. In the area of discipleship, such programs as Teen Challenge, Master's Commission, Bible and small group studies, Global University courses and study materials, Bible colleges and universities, Sunday School, Royal Rangers and Missionettes, and discipleship literature distribution (much of which is published by the AG's own Gospel Publishing House) all provide helpful access to discipleship principles and may aid in Christian development.

Let us turn our attention now to the overall approach and "feel" of the work in order to better assess its purity and effectiveness. In the area of evangelism, the American AG has been extremely active and effective. The focus of evangelism has properly been on Christ, and the ultimate goal has been the expansion of the kingdom of God in the eschatological hope of Christ's second coming. Unfortunately, the American AG has traditionally emphasized a non-personal form of evangelism. By this I mean that evangelism is usually seen as more of an action than a relationship toward others. The early Church's bold proclamation of the gospel to the masses is seen as being the supreme model for programs of conversion (while the slow but steady growth of Christianity through personal evangelism is largely ignored, if not in theory than in practice). All too often person-to-person lifestyle and friendship evangelism are replaced by charismatic preaching and "numbers" evangelism, which tend to find more importance in immediate numbers than in incorporating the whole church into the process. This may lead to an impersonal view of the proclamation role of the church which ignores the relational nature of sharing the gift of God with fellow humans.

In the area of discipleship, the American AG has been very successful and innovative. On every spectrum, from formal to informal training and development, the AG has provided wonderful tools and programs of discipleship which center on the personal aspects of relationship with Christ. Teaching is usually biblical, solidly applicable, contemporary, charismatic, and Christ-centered. In the last several decades the denomination has become far less legalistic and dogmatic in its various cultural criticisms. One weakness in the area of discipleship (primarily in the local churches) is the neglect of doctrinal and biblical knowledge acquisition. While it is true that discipleship is not merely learning but becoming, part of that becoming involves opening oneself up to worldview and doctrinal formation through intellectual interaction and development. To put it simply, most of the Christians in the American AG churches know very little about what they believe and why they believe it. This is unfortunate, but it is not easily remedied.

Let us now turn our attention to the future of *kerygma* in the American AG. The proclamation of the gospel must become more personal (which would actually be more congruent with Pentecostalism's traditional personal and experiential nature) if it is to continue to be the voice of Christ. What I mean is that the evangelism and discipleship aspects of the *kerygma* must be more fully intertwined in order to avoid "baby Christian infanticide" and the depersonalization of the gospel message. If the gospel really centers on relationship with the Godhead (as I have argued) and produces good human relationships (love), than the vertical and horizontal relationships must take precedence in conversion experiences. And in order to combat "ignorant Christianity," grass-roots discipleship must arise from within the local churches (for that is where the problem

seems to exist) which seeks to develop in knowledge as well as in action. Wonderful and effective discipleship materials and programs exist already, but if the church continues on its present course of aversion towards knowledge it will eventually collapse for the lack of content. A contentless Christianity is no Christianity at all.

Fellowship in a Worshipping Community

The second of the three-fold role of the church in this age is the *koinoniac*. Let us attempt to assess the American AG's present situation concerning its focus on fellowship and the building of a worshipping community. First, we will focus on a few programs of the church, then we will discuss the overall approach and "feel" of the work, and last we will explore the church's future work in this area.

Several programs which focus on worship and community in the American AG are the many cutting-edge worship programs of local churches across the country, the denomination's "fellowship structure" itself, camp meetings, worship seminars, cell/small groups, church membership, district councils, and socio-humanitarian and evangelism projects which bring people together, helping to build structure and community.

The overall approach of the work is usually that of secondary effectiveness. What I mean by this is that the intentional building of a "temple of God" is often overlooked or is relegated to being viewed as a side-effect of church growth and evangelism. It is even seen as a non-purposeful reaction by church attendees toward established church societal structures. Membership is merely a voting privilege. True "membership" is often overlooked in favor of formal training and recognition. I would argue that the involvement of every member (formal and informal) into the ministry and community

development of the church is imperative to the continuance of the discipleship process. Assimilation is often overlooked as being a strong impetus for creative change in church society. Eating, praying, and chatting together, all of which help to unify people, are sometimes looked upon as being non-central to the church's vision in contrast to the early church's community focus. That is not to say that fellowship and community-building are not present in the AG, or even that the denomination itself does not see the importance of "building people." Often, the problem is that the local church fails to recognize the great importance of the universal and local manifestations of community and fellowship in the body of Christ and to purposefully participate themselves.

Worship in the AG is properly seen as both an action of the fellowship and a lifestyle of the participants. Creative indigenous lyric and music composition are widespread in the AG, and the free flow of music in the church at large encourages dialogue and clearer understanding between different denominations and theologies of praise and worship. The content of the praise and worship is usually very biblical, and is increasingly metaphorical.

What does the future hold for the American AG in the area of fellowship and worship? Hopefully, the two aspects will be intertwined more thoroughly in the life of the church in order to more holistically view church society. Worship should be seen as a function of fellowship with humans toward God. Unfortunately at times praise and worship composers and performers become personalities whose services are sought on the basis of their charisma and talent, while home-grown worship responses are neglected and the community aspect of the worship is abandoned. Worship is not in a person but in a people. Also, there is a present tendency in the American AG to be non-Christ centered

in worship and fellowship. If we are to be a community, we are to be unified in Christ, building others up in that direction. If we are to be a people of worship, our hymns and choruses must begin to focus more on the object worshiped than on the worshippers or even on various biblical themes. As Christ is the center of the Bible, so our fellowship and worship must be centered in him. Worship, prayer, eating together, and fellowship are all communal responses to God, and are great evangelistic/discipleship tools to be used purposefully toward the development of a community of faith and worship, reaching out to the wider secular community with the intention of charismatically expanding the kingdom of God.

Ministry and the Gifts

The third of the three-fold role of the church in this age is the *diakonia*. Let us attempt to assess the American AG's present situation with regards to its service toward humanity and its emphasis on the role of the charismata in ministry. First, we will focus on a few programs of the church, then we will discuss the overall approach and "feel" of the work, and last we will explore the church's future work in this area.

The American AG has historically been very active in offering religious and socio-economic aide. Community services are correctly purposeful, with the aim of expanding the kingdom influence of Christ on earth. Such programs as global missions giving, urban renewal projects, Teen Challenge, Native American outreaches, low-income housing projects, church building ministries, food pantries, emergency relief, medical missions, and Hillcrest homes are all helpful ministries which serve the secular community, charismatically meeting the felt needs of the world.

The overall approach and "feel" of these programs is evangelistic and inclusive. If a program is not seen to bear any fruit in the form of life transformations its effectiveness is questioned and often the program is discarded. The American AG recognizes that the primary purpose of the church in this age is to fellowship with Jesus and each other while drawing the nations to this same relationship, going out into the world and bringing in those who would be saved. We are not to be just another "social services." While that ministry would be beneficial to the world, the greatest purpose of God in Christ must never take back seat to socio-economic community development. Christ is the progenitor, sustainer, and ultimate end of true ministry.

The American AG has done well to recognize the importance of the pneumatological charismata in bringing people to Christ. The gifts and the services of the local church are seen as an overflow of the love of Jesus compelling individuals into ministry. Historically, the connection between the gifts of the Spirit and the evangelistic goal of church ministry has been strong in the American AG. In its formation years the baptism of the Holy Spirit was seen as empowerment for service in the mission of God through global missions, healing ministries, food pantries, homeless shelters, and urban street missions. Unfortunately the denomination has often failed to retain this tight connection between the Holy Spirit's aide and the church's work (if not in theory, than at least in practice). Perhaps the shrinking amount of manifestations of charismata in the local church is one cause for this problem.

Where is ministry in the American AG going? Hopefully it is heading toward personal renewal and revival through Spirit empowerment. If not, even Christo-centric ministry is bound to fail. It is the Holy Spirit that draws people to God through

empowered believers, and without his sustaining power (which is a sign to the unbeliever) our hope of redeeming the world through Christ is impossible. Helping people to live better lives is nice. Helping people to become part of the fellowship of God is great too. But the role of the church in this age goes beyond either of these two actions. The three-fold role of the church in this age is incomplete without an ontological focus.

American A/G: To Be or Not to Be?

What does it mean to have an ontological focus? The purpose of this section entitled "Kingdom Relationships" was to assess the present actions of the church of which I am a part, and to project a future course of action in response to *missio Dei*. Earlier I argued that the center of scripture and the basis for missions is in the person of Christ. Here I will discuss the fact that the actions of his church are not identical with the essence of his church. If our view is blocked by style we will be unable to see the substance of the matter. Just because the American AG <u>acts</u> like the church does not make it the church. While it is true that actions are an overflow of the heart (Luke 6:43-5), even what seems to be charismatically empowered ministry may be ignored by God on judgment day if there is a lack of relationship with Christ (Matt. 7:15-23). We will be judged on the basis of our actions, whether good or evil, but accepted or rejected on the basis of our relationship to the God of the universe. Actions are a result of relationship, and are evidence of the essential character of the church, but they are the fruit and not the branch. The essence of the church has as its base communion with the essence of the Godhead. The church is not divine, but its essence is divinely inspired, sustained, and led. If the American AG is to survive and thrive as a part of the universal church of

Christ in this age, its focus must be on the content of its faith and action—the love of Christ—rather than on its programs, ministries, or fellowship. More important than what it is doing is the question of what it is. We will only fulfill our three-fold role as we grow in our consciousness of our existence in Christ, finding our purpose in his person.

Personal Relationships: A Conversation with Bob

It is easy to talk about the church, theology, and relationships, but to realize in our own lives the completion of our theorizing through personal response is a task that is not easily accomplished. What must I do with this knowledge? The subject is personal. The method employed must be personal as well. That is why I have chosen to interview myself in this last section, to ascertain my personal role in the *missio Dei*, within the wider context of the universal and local church of which I am a part, and to assess my individual actions in this role. This may seem like a strange idea, but self-dialogue is an effective and personal way to draw out that for which we are seeking—information on personal relationship.

A Bottom-Up Approach

Q- Robert, what do you see as your role in the *missio Dei*?

A- You can call me Bob. As to my role, I would say that my first role is as a called child of God, saved by grace, growing by grace, and by grace participating in the work of God. I believe very strongly in grass-roots development and every-member ministry, and am dedicated to charismatically building people in my local church into children and ministers of God through youth group ministry, leading praise and worship, preaching, teaching Sunday school, witnessing to my neighbors and friends, eating and fellowshipping, and by prayer and example. I am also a strong advocate of (and am in

involved in) Bible, theology, philosophy, and apologetics education. At my local church I am the missions board director and the children's special services coordinator. I am actively involved in the three-fold role of the church; evangelizing and discipling, fellowshipping and worshipping, and charismatically ministering to the felt needs of the church and the community at large.

All of these actions are unofficial, unrecognized, and informal. I am not a licensed minister, although I was trained to be one. I am a nobody who has to work a second job to feed my family while I continue my education with the final goal of becoming a non-licensed, unofficial, unrecognized and informal missionary in the countries of Brazil and Turkey. But I am first and foremost a child of God. Anything I do must be an overflow of what I sense God is doing in his relationship with me and the local church. And it is because of this that I believe in the bottom-up development approach. Trees don't grow from the sky. They start from a tiny seed and develop upwards. The church began in the same way, by the humbling of the God-man Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5-11).

Having said all of that, I would like to tell you that I think that resumes are stupid, and I believe that Paul does too. In Second Corinthians chapter eleven he speaks to the church about the boasting of false prophets. He goes on to indulge in their foolish revelry of boasting to prove a point, and then concludes with several amazing statements. He says, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (11:30), and "that is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). Paul became a nothing-man so that God's strength could be revealed more fully through him.

May my resume read the same as Paul's, "A weak slave of Christ, saved and sent by him for the redemption of mankind."

Passion and Patience

Q- What would you say is the biggest challenge you are facing?

A- I think that would be maintaining a healthy balance of passion and patience. I know that I am called into overseas pioneer ministry, and every time I hear a missionary speak or read a missions related book I am confronted again with the strength of my calling. I feel like I want to explode. I wish I could go right now to wherever God is sending me, but it is not time yet and I know it. That doesn't make it any easier. At other times I find myself lulling myself to spiritual slumber because of the long wait. I'm like a kid in a car going to the candy store. I cry and cry and just won't shut up about the candy, but when I do, it's because I've fallen asleep. As the proverb says "hope deferred makes the heart sick."

It is also hard to see people in the church and in my community that seem to not be growing. I want to see the fruit of my ministry, but I also must be patient with the fruit-bearers. I want the harvest, but not the long summer months preceding it. I need to learn to plant the seeds and water patiently, and leave the growing process up to God.

Bob and the Church

Q- What is your relationship with Jesus and his church like?

A- Well, there's no easy answer to that. A simplified answer might have to suffice. Jesus is my center. My wife and daughter are my nucleus. My family and friends are my spinning electrons. I am a massive atom held together not by the laws of nature but by the sustaining power of the Almighty God. But I am part of a larger whole. The

molecule of the local church and the macro-molecule of the AG help to maintain the communal aspect of faith. The universal body of Christ, of which we are but a small part, is the organism of God, which grows and expands as each member (atom) does its part. As I fulfill my role of centering on Christ, and by his Spirit draw others to him by preaching, teaching, evangelizing, prophesying, and being sent, the relationship of God with man is restored more and more, and the power of Jesus in establishing his kingdom is manifested. It is not about what I am doing, or even what I could be doing, but is rather about who Christ is, and what he is doing in and through his people.

Today is the Day

Q- Do you have any thoughts about the future that you would like to share?

A- God's plan on the earth is well under way. Today is the day for action and relationships. But the things we do in light of the future must be Christo-centric if they are to be everlasting. It is only through him that salvation comes in the present and in the future.

Relationship with Christ: A Very Brief Summary

Please forgive me for a rather long paper (at least this summary is short). It was not my original intention to draw out a counter-argument against a centralized conception of *missio Dei,* but was rather a result of the data with which I was working. I do not see in *missio Dei* the same solidity of centralization as I do in the person and work of Christ. Call me crazy, but I think the Bible and the church are about God. The gospel of which I am familiar stems from God's love for the world in Christ, and its essence is based in his person. The purpose of scripture is to make a redeemed people for himself from the nations, and this is accomplished in and through and by the persons of the Godhead. We

are talking about a relational God, drawing others into good relationship with himself and others, and building kingdom relationships by empowering individual believers like you and I to act like and be persons in good relationship with him. We cannot overemphasize the importance of relationships, especially the central relationship of the Godhead revealed in Christ to humanity. It is out of this relationship that everything else grows.

PART III

CHAPTER 11

SOME QUESTIONS FOR LITERATURE
And
PSALM ONE AS LITERATURE

Some Questions for Literature

What are several of the most important questions a person should ask when reading literature? First, they should ask the question, "What genre does this piece of writing fit into?" If it fits into the genre of poetry, the conventions of poetry interpretation should be applied. A person should not peel an apple with a chainsaw or cut down a tree with a peeler. Second, they should ask, "Does this literature use any archetypes, and if it does, what is their significance?" Sometimes ordinary items and details in a story can hold special significance when they are being used by the writer to express the universality of the concrete experiences or ideas that are conveyed. A painter adds a human figure to his nature scene to bring it to life and give it a human/nature feel. A secular pop star uses the word "damn" in his song to convey bitter resentment, remorse, or shock. These are images or signs that are widely known and used in our society. Third, they should ask, "If there are vivid details in the literature, what do they bring to the passage?" For the conscientious writer every word matters. If a dragon appears in a computer animated movie it will probably have a lot of intricately painted

scales, tendrils, and flames. These are to awe the viewer into responding appropriately in fear. The details bring it to life and make it seem more realistic (and scary). Fourth, they should ask, "How does this passage speak about universal human experience?" If humans had never had any traumatic run-ins with nature, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* would have a completely different meaning. Similarly, the captain of the ship has some serious ego problems (his sense of self is intricately tied to his unending ambition and struggle), and it is this quality that we so often find in ourselves. When we read a piece of literature (or explore our world in other ways) we end up discovering ourselves and our relationships along the way. Fifth, they should ask, "What literary forms does it use to convey meaning?" Often a preacher will repeat himself to drive a point home, or will make a three-point sermon into an acronym to help the congregation remember Monday what the preacher said on Sunday. Most good jokes have punch lines, and most good stories have a beginning, middle, and end. Sixth, they should ask, "How does this literature relate to the wider context of history, theology, philosophy, and other disciplines?" Poets are born. Historians go to school. Scientists read books. Ideas, stories, songs and designs don't just pop out of Never-neverland. And when they come into existence, they are not born into a void. Seventh, and most importantly, they should ask, "What seems to be the point? What is the message, purpose, or intent the author is trying to convey to the reader through the text?" A can of Campbell's soup is just food to most people. But if an artist paints that can of soup in order to show the latent art in pop culture (or just to be famous and make lots of money) we have a different story. Suddenly cans of food are expressing meaning and purpose. Information is meaningful. The way information is organized, codified, and presented is also meaningful. A wise

man tells a short story to a fool, but a fool waxes long on explanation. I guess that makes me a fool.

Psalm One as Literature

Some of the features that make Psalm one literature are its use of themes and archetypes, its creativity of expression, its dynamic, experiential presentation, its artistic form and delivery, and its unity and coherence. These ingredients come together in Psalm one to produce a beautifully vivid psalm that is short but potent.

[26]Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
[27]But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
[28]He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
[29]Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
[30]Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
[31]For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm one speaks about a theme and several archetypes that are touched on throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. In Genesis we find Adam and Eve in a

beautiful garden with rivers running through it, surrounded by fruit trees of every sort (including the tree of life). But after their disobedience the ground is cursed and the fields are required to be worked. Adam and Eve chose death instead of life, and were brought to rightful judgment. In Revelation, we find a beautiful city coming down from heaven, dressed as a bride. In the middle of the city we find a mighty river, with beautiful trees growing on both sides (the tree of life) each bearing fruit in its season and growing leafs that are used for the healing of the nations. Sinners are cast into everlasting darkness. It is just as John the Baptist prophesied—the chaff is burned in unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17). (While we should not view Psalm one anachronistically, it should be analyzed as a part of the whole of scripture, which presents a holistic worldview and is incomplete without being viewed in the wider context of the whole.) Psalm one's literary nature brings these themes and archetypes to life through vivid imaginative language.

Creativity abounds in Psalm one. Instead of a dry contrast between the righteous and the wicked, the psalmist finds illustrations from nature which bring out the point (a tree, streams of water, chaff). The psalm is creatively organized by setting the transience of the wicked in contrast to the enduring quality of the righteous. Instead of saying "you can be on God's good or bad side," the author comes from a second-person point of view, extending his readership and purpose to all who would fit his criteria. The psalmist says a righteous person doesn't walk on the same road as a sinner, but rather follows the law of God. The psalmist realizes his own poetic talents and abilities and utilizes them with the inspiration of God to create an insightful expression of the archetypes of good and evil men. Instead of prescribing explicitly how the reader should live a good life and

follow God's ways in order to have true success, the psalmist instead describes what the paths of good and evil are like, and how the Lord deals with sinful and righteous humanity. The psalmist is not saying that physical prosperity follows righteousness, but that true prosperity is a result of following God (and is often accompanied by outward success).

The psalmist gives a dynamic, experiential presentation. The author offers a glimpse into a world where good is good and evil is evil. Poetic justice is in focus. Good men are blessed when they follow God. The psalm doesn't point out exactly how they will be blessed, but it does present the reader with an experience of a cool, shady fruit tree by a stream. As the reader is confronted by this image, the author describes the scene further. Suddenly we see that the tree is covered in fruit. It is the season of harvesting fruit trees. It may get hot as the sun beats down on the branches, but the leaves don't wither because they are attached to a tree that has roots that are continually watered. This close proximity with a source of life and sustenance brings the tree to fulfillment of its purposes. Just then the psalmist exclaims "Not so the wicked!" (1:4, NIV) Now we are confronted with the transience of the wicked. The wheat is threshed on the threshing ground, and is separated from the chaff. As the wind blows, the chaff is tossed up and away with a winnowing fork by the farmer. The wheat falls to the ground in a pile by the farmer's feet. The chaff is light and insubstantial, and is blown away by the breeze. The wicked will not stand, but they will perish. Their judgment is sure, and their inclusion into the assembly of the righteous will be denied. Light can't stand with darkness. The Lord watches over and cares for the tree by the waters, but way of the

chaff is destruction. The reader is left with these living images of the reality of good and evil and their effects.

Psalm one is artistic in form and delivery. Its pattern is intricately molded to fit the psalmist's purposes. "Blessed is the man," it begins, "who does not walk . . . stand . . . sit" in the path of men who do evil. The righteous man doesn't take wicked men's advice, is not one with them, and is not on the same path. The righteous man is happy (blessed) because he delights and meditates on the law of God all the time (here parallelism is used to artistically frame the author's meaning). The psalmist illustrates his point, explains it ("whatever he does prospers"), and then sharply contrasts this with the way of the wicked using another illustration from nature. As the righteous would not stand with the sinner, so in the end the sinner will not stand with the righteous. The psalmist finally gives the reason for all of this. God cares for the path of the righteous, but the path of the wicked is not watched (nobody cares), and so it leads to destruction. The psalmist expertly balances his contrast on a pendulum and carefully weighs the ways of the righteous and the wicked, progressing along until the conclusion is reached that relationship with God is the factor that brings the righteous to prosperity and the wicked to judgment. The psalm's design brings the contrast to life, giving it artistic texture and balance. It begins with the exclusion of the righteous from the sinners and ends with the exclusion of the sinners from the righteous, with two contrasting illustrations from pastoral life in the middle.

Another point which we might mention about Psalm one is its unity and coherence. The psalm is a piece, wholly incomplete without each of its components. While the ideas presented in the psalm are universal, they are derived by the psalmist

from particular every-day experience. In the world of Psalm one, we find the spiritual and physical aspects of life intertwined. Through the use of concrete physical images, the psalmist paints a picture of two groups of humans, one righteous and one wicked. But the source of righteousness and success is supernatural. The Lord attends to the man who attends to him and his law. Throughout the psalm a relationship with God is seen as being of utmost importance. Each piece of the puzzle adds to the theme of contrast between the two groups of humans. They are in different relationships with God. They are in different relationships with others. Their purposes, ways, and ends are different. The psalm is a compilation of ideas and images from life, but all of these ideas and images build on a unified them, producing a very coherent whole.

Some of the features that make Psalm one literature are its use of themes and archetypes, its creativity of expression, its dynamic, experiential presentation, its artistic form and delivery, and its unity and coherence. The psalmist has produced a piece of literature that is interesting, full of truth, and is concrete relational (a common trait of communication in an Oriental culture). When viewed as literature, this piece of art can be seen for the masterpiece that it is.

CHAPTER 12

THE STORY OF ELIJAH: AN EXPLICATION

The Lord is God

The name Elijah means "the Lord is God," and that is the overriding topic of the narration contained in 1 Kings chapters 17-19, and 2 Kings 1:1-2:12. The story of Elijah is a great piece of literature that follows closely the theme of reconciliation and obedience to Yahweh. Elijah is the main human hero in this story, but the Lord God is the "super-hero" of each episode, revealing his nature and his Lordship over Israel and all of creation. There is cosmic conflict, a battle of wills and gods, deciding the fate of the nation. An underdog is the protagonist. A king and queen (with their minions) are the villains. From the desert to a whirlwind the hero shows he is obedient and is intimately involved in the reconciliation of his people to their God. While the story is incomplete when the hero leaves the scene, still his role is foundational in the call of a nation to their God. Before we turn to the story itself, let's take a quick look at several questions that are helpful to ask when reading a story.

Ten Questions for the Story

There are ten important questions that a reader should ask when reading a story. First, what experiences is the reader sharing with the characters in the story? Second, what are the details of the setting, and if they play an important role how do they contribute to the story? Third, how do the details in the story help me understand the characters? Fourth, what are the plot conflicts in the story, how are they developed, and how are they resolved? Fifth, what significant things does the protagonist's experiment in living say about human life and values? Sixth, how is the story's unity shown in its

episodal coherence to a central theme or framework, and how do the episodes relate to each other in the development of the story? Seventh, how do the choices and tests the protagonist is confronted with give structure to the story, and how are those choices and tests related to the central theme of the story? Eighth, what changes and transformations appear in the characters through the story, and how are those changes and transformations brought about? Ninth, are there foils, dramatic irony, or poetic justice in the story, and if there are, what do they add to the meaning of the story and its affects on the reader? Tenth, how does the story influence the reader's approval or disapproval of events and characters in the story, and what does the story mean based on this approval pattern (Ryken 1984)? Using these ten questions, let us now attempt a brief explication of the story of Elijah, with special emphasis on two of the episodes—one centering on foils and approval patterns, the other on conflict.

The Lord is God in Humble Settings

In Elijah's very first appearance the setting is all-important to the development of the plot. Elijah, a prophet from the desert, brings a wicked king (and kingdom) to justice. He proclaims a drought on the prosperous land of Israel. God immediately tells Elijah to hide in a ravine across the river Jordan not far from where he was born. The prophet was told that he would drink from a brook, and that at God's command the ravens would bring food for Elijah. Elijah obeyed and everything went as God had said. From the desert, to the presence of a king, to a deserted ravine, Elijah came from humble settings of very little sustenance, went to proclaim the humiliation of the prosperous settings (the drought and ensuing famine in Israel), and then went on to humble settings where he was given sustenance from God. In this way, the themes of God's power and obedience to his

will are highlighted in the settings. The setting also gives us a backdrop for the ensuing conflict. This episode reveals that the Lord is God of the desert, of fertility, of judgment, and of humility.

Lord Over All: Testing God in Dilemmas

In the next episode (the widow at Zarephath) the details in the story give us clues to help us understand how the characters deal with dilemmas, and the Lordship of God is once again seen in a new light. Elijah's brook dries up because there is no rain. Elijah is faced with a dilemma. God answers by commanding him to go to a gentile country and stay in a widow's house. So Elijah went. Elijah is at the town gate, and he sees the woman picking up sticks. He asks for a little water jar to drink from (because there is a drought), and as she complies, he calls for her to bring him a piece of bread. These details are illustrative of the episode as a whole. Details like the size of the bread and jar, or the amount of oil the woman has point to the utter destitution and hopelessness that the woman feels. A tragedy of starvation is turned around by God to be a sign of God's provision. The oil and flour offered to the prophet are multiplied in their containers, and the widow and her son are provided for until the end of the drought. Then the boy dies of an illness. He stops breathing. The woman blames Elijah. Elijah is filled with compassion. He enters into the woman's fate, and cries out to God for the life of the boy. Details such as Elijah's cry being heard by God, Elijah picking the child up, and the woman's trust in the truthfulness of the word of God in Elijah's mouth are all clues that help us discover the qualities of the characters. These details in the story point vividly to the widow's dilemma of hospitality in the face of starvation and death, and to Elijah's dilemma of trusting in God in the face of tragedy (17:20-1). But most of all, they point to

the Lordship of God over evil, the effects of judgment, and the human race as a whole. The Lord is tested and proved to be the God over food and human life. The Lord God is intimately concerned with his children, even those that are not yet part of his family (the woman was not an Israelite). The Lordship of God is throughout all the earth.

The Right Kind of Obedience to the Lord

In the next episode we find that in the story foils and approval patterns (discovered in the repetition and contrast) help to emphasize the direct obedience of the protagonist to the Lord God. God tells Elijah to go to Ahab (the villain) and proclaim an end to the drought, thus humiliating the adopted gods of the Israelites who were supposed to be in charge of fertility and rain (Asherah and Baal). Elijah obeys. We are confronted next with the utter destitution caused by the famine in Samaria. Ahab the king summons Obadiah (whose name means "servant of the Lord") who is a new character to the story. Obadiah is in charge of Ahab's palace. Obadiah was a "devout believer in the Lord" (18:3). The story goes into a rather detailed description of how Obadiah had saved the life of one hundred prophets of the Lord from the murderous wrath of his boss's wife Jezebel. He even supplied them with food and water (which were scarce). So Obadiah is described as being the Lord's in name, at heart, and in action. Ahab sends Obadiah to look for grass for the animals so that they will not die. Both Ahab and Obadiah go searching in different directions throughout the land.

As Obadiah is walking (not riding a horse, perhaps as a result of the drought) he stumbles across Elijah. Obadiah recognizes him and bows down (perhaps thinking Elijah might just be an apparition or a ghost) and asks the prophet if it is really him (modern readers may think of Shakespeare's Hamlet, who is given a mission by the ghost of his

own dead father). Elijah responds with a minimum of words (perhaps pointing to his own quickness to obey God's command), instructing Obadiah to tell Ahab that "Elijah is here." These words become the nightmare that stalks Obadiah's soul. Fear and doubt immediately enter Obadiah's words, and he begins to rant and rave about how he would be killed for the message.

Ahab had sought for Elijah passionately in many lands so that the curse might be broken. Obadiah mocks Elijah's simple instructions, and proclaims them a death wish to any messenger. Obadiah then elaborates to Elijah the account of his heroism in the face of danger by saving the prophets. Obadiah proclaims himself a servant, worshipper and hero. Here a false approval pattern is evident. While Obadiah's deeds and character are shown twice by the author of 1 Kings, it is set in contrast to the simple (and often confrontational) obedience of Elijah. Obadiah has risked his neck for God, but in secret. Now Elijah wants simple outward obedience from him. Obadiah again repeats his claim that Ahab will kill his servant if he tells him of Elijah's presence. There is a foil here that contrasts Elijah's simplicity with Obadiah's fearful and complex obedience. Elijah promises by God that he will show himself to Ahab, and the matter is settled. The conflict in this episode is the inner turmoil of Obadiah. It is resolved when he obeys the Lord outwardly. Its cohesion with the rest of the story exists in its call to making the Lord the God of Israel no longer in secret but in the open.

The Right Kind of God

In my opinion, the most exciting part of the story comes next, in a "battle of the gods" (around which all of the other episodes in the story seem to revolve) climaxing in the conclusive exclusivity of Yahweh's Godhood. Ahab goes to Elijah and calls him a

troublemaker. Elijah points the finger back at Ahab and tells him that the cause of the famine and drought is the sin of Ahab and his family. After blaming the king, Elijah commands him to bring the people of Israel and the prophets of Baal and Asherah to a showdown on Mt. Carmel. This setting would be one of the few places in the land of Israel where water and plant life would still abound, but it would also provide a view of the desolation caused by the drought in the plains. Ahab sends the word, and Elijah sets the test. He extols the people of Israel to follow the true God (who would show himself true by passing the test and sending fire to consume the sacrifice). The false prophets cry out to their god, and nothing happens (this is stated five times in the narrative). The prophets of Baal go crazy and work themselves into a frenzy while Elijah looks on in disdain and humorously mocks their non-existent gods. Finally, at the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah has the people of Israel come to him. He rebuilds the altar of the Lord with twelve stones (symbolizing the religious unity of the twelve tribes) and commands the people to pour large amounts of precious water over the whole thing three times. Elijah is stacking the deck against himself and his God.

Elijah calls on the Lord, and the Lord answers him with miraculous fire. The false god's impotence is contrasted sharply with the true God's power. The desired affect is achieved when the people of Israel fall down and proclaim emphatically that the Lord is God. By Elijah's command the people seize and slaughter the false prophets. Then Elijah tells Ahab to eat and drink, for rain is coming (yet another confrontation with the king that has at its focus the Lordship of Yahweh). Elijah prays seven times, and finally on the seventh time there is a small cloud. By Elijah's command Ahab rides in his chariot to his palace ahead of the rain, but when the power of the Lord comes on Elijah,

the prophet outruns the chariot (and the rain) all the way to the royal residence in Jezreel. We see God exploding onto the scene in Israel throughout this episode by sending fire from heaven, judging the false prophets, sending rain, and supernaturally enabling his prophet. This great conflict between good and evil is resolved with the triumph of God. The Lord is God, not Baal, not Asherah. The Lord of creation is tested before all of Israel, and is found to be Yahweh. No foreign God will do, because the God of Israel is the only true God. This is a hero story, centering on Elijah, as he tests and is tested by God. Elijah, as a prophet of the true God of Israel, is the mediator of the covenant communication and relationship between God and his people. As such, he is a representative of the human and the divine, the national society and the one true God. He represents for the reader the dialogue and apology for the Lordship of Yahweh, both in action and in word.

Man's Weakness, God's Strength

In the next episode we find a window into the tragic side of man and the sustaining nature of the Lord God. Jezebel confronts the prophet, and he runs scared and alone into the desert. He despairs of his life, and falls to sleep under a small desert shrub. Here is a man with the taste of victory still in his mouth, entering the dark valley of depression and futility (a universal theme); from the fiery glory of the Lord to the barrenness of death's dark door; from ecstasy to agony. So God let him die. After all, his mission was complete, and he had failed because the instigator of religious rebellion, Jezebel, still lived and was as powerful as ever. What a tragic end. It might have been if the Lord had let him die then. But the text says "all at once" an angel came and woke him up, giving him food and drink. Elijah is weak. Again God shows himself true and

provides. By God's strength Elijah is able to move on. This episode bears deep resemblance to the episode at the gentile widow's house. Both stories recount God's provisions in weakness and distress, using vivid details to bring out the transient emotion of humanity and the all-sustaining power of the Lord. If the Lord is God, he will provide for his servant, and will be with him in times of distress and need.

The Intimate Answers of God

The next episode reveals through repetition, lament, and lively details the methods that God would use in resolving the plot and reconciling his people, as well as the intimacy of God's sustaining word. In this scene we find Elijah in a cave of a mountain (probably Mount Sinai). The Lord asks him what he is doing there, and he responds with righteous hopelessness. The prophet laments that he has done his job, but that the Israelites continue to rebel. Elijah complains that he is the last prophet of God and that even his life is threatened. So God responds by telling him to go out and stand on the mountain in the divine presence. A wind, an earthquake, and a fire all pass by Elijah on the mountain, each described as not containing the divine presence. Then a whisper is heard. Elijah realizes that this is God, and covers himself. God's works of power are seen in the wind, earthquake, and the fire, but his actual presence is revealed in the details as gentle, soft, and intimate. Again, the voice of God asks him what he is doing there. Elijah repeats his lament in the presence of the Lord, and the Lord answers him with a preview of the future anointing of a new king of Aram and Israel and a prophet to succeed him. Through the protagonist God will resolve the plot conflict and bring Israel back to himself. Then God tells Elijah that there remains a righteous remnant in Israel, responding to Elijah's cry of loneliness in performing God's mission of

reconciliation. In the last episode we found God sustaining his prophet in weakness. In this episode we find the Lord God encouraging, counseling, and dealing personally with that same prophet. The Lord is not merely God of Israel, or the cataclysm and the miracle (as in the rest of the episodes). The Lord is God of the gentle intimate whisper. He is not just God—His Lordship is personal. His answers are near, and they are our sustenance.

The Call of God

When Elijah goes to appoint Elisha as his successor, we find a scene that clarifies through the protagonist's experiment in living the true value of simple obedience to the Lord God. Elijah ("Yahweh is God") finds Elisha ("God saves") plowing a field with twelve yoke of oxen (he was probably wealthy). Elijah throws his cloak around the man, and Elisha realizes that he has been anointed as prophet to succeed Elijah. What will Elisha do? Does he value his possessions and family more than his obedience to the call of God? Elisha left his oxen and ran to Elijah. Elisha told the prophet he would go and kiss his mother and father goodbye, and then come and follow him (this account sounds an awful lot like an incident in the gospels). Elijah tells him to go back, and asks "what have I done to you?" (19:20) Elisha did go back, but instead of refusing the call of God, he immediately puts his vocation to the torch by slaughtering the oxen and burning the plowing equipment. Everyone had a barbeque and Elisha went to be with Elijah as his attendant (the same designation that Joshua had under Moses). Elisha shows us what is worth living for, just as Elijah gives us an example of a prophet calling others to obedience. The whole experience emphasizes simplicity in obedience (even to sacrifice) in everyday matters, and becomes a recurrent theme even in the New Testament when the

disciples are called from their nets to become fishers of men. The call of God requires complete surrender, and this scene serves as an example to the people of Israel to follow the Lord their God—to acknowledge his Lordship over their working lives.

*A King is Changed by **the King***

Several chapters later, we find an incident involving Ahab, Jezebel, and Elijah, which highlights an important character transformation in the villain brought about by God (the super-hero of the story). There is a guy named Naboth who owns a vineyard near the king's residence in Jezreel. Ahab wants the property, but Naboth just won't budge. Chapter 21, verse four says that Ahab "lay on his bed and refused to eat." What a baby, crying in his room because he can't get his own way. His wife comes in and wants to know what the matter is. Ahab tells her, and she basically responds with "And you call yourself a king? I'll get you what you want" (21:7). So Queen Jezebel hatches an evil plot against Naboth (by proclaiming him a blasphemer before the rulers of the city) that gets him killed. Jezebel tells Ahab that she has done the deed, and Ahab goes skipping off like a schoolboy to the toy store (Naboth's vineyard).

God tells Ahab's little secret to Elijah, and Elijah goes to Ahab (who is not happy to see him) to pronounce judgment. Yahweh, the true king of Israel, sees all and knows all, and his justice is perfect. Elijah gets into some gruesome details when he describes God's judgment on Ahab and his house. The evil king Ahab was distraught. He went around mourning his fate in acts of public repentance by tearing his clothes, wearing sackcloth, and fasting. God saw this and announced mercy to Ahab and his family through Elijah. God's impending judgment on the villain caused a change of character, bringing mercy where poetic justice would have prevailed. Ahab's transformation thus

extends the plot's resolution to the next generation beyond Elijah's time. We find in this story that one of the main antagonists is changed into a sympathetic character, and is not judged until after the king's own death and the departure of the protagonist Elijah. God is shown as a merciful and longsuffering God, who is omniscient and omnipotent (he knows our sins, and he has the power to judge us for them). But the Lord God is forgiving. The Lord's justice will prevail in the end (as in *The Count of Monte Cristo*). God's judgment is mixed with mercy. In this episode the infantile king of Israel is brought to his knees by the omniscient and omnipotent King of the cosmos (through his prophet), and is changed in the face of judgment.

The Judgment and Mercy of God

In the next episode, we find a great story that uses repetition to drive home the point that God judges those who trust in man or other gods and has mercy on those who seek Him. Ahab is dead, and his son Ahaziah is on the throne. Ahaziah has an accident and is hurt badly. He sends messengers to consult "Baal-Zebub [the lord of the flies], the god of Ekron" (2 Kings 1:2). The Angel of the Lord again tells Elijah the royal secret, and off the prophet goes to pronounce judgment. Elijah repeats the Lord's message to the messengers, the messengers repeat it to Ahaziah, and near the end of the story, after Elijah goes to the king, the prophet again reiterates the message. But in the middle of the episode we find Ahaziah discovering the identity of the prophet and summoning the prophet to his palace. Fifty men are sent to round up the desert prophet, but at Elijah's command God kills them with fire from heaven. This happens again, and then a third time, but on the third attempt, the captain of the soldiers (realizing the power and authority of God and his prophet) asks the prophet for mercy. The third time is a charm.

Elijah goes to the king and pronounces the judgment of God on the king (the third time the message is repeated in the text), and the king dies. The narrator is using repetition to tell the reader that what the king (and the first two groups of soldiers) was doing was wrong. This pattern of disapproval ends with judgment in one incidence and mercy in the other, depending on the actions of the recipients. As in the last episode, God is shown to be a God of mercy and fire. Human decisions of obedience and obeisance toward the rule of God are approved of as being worthy of emulation, while insolence, disobedience, and idolatry are worthy of punishment.

An Old Hero to God, a New Hero from God

The last episode in our story is one involving the "rapture" of Elijah and the anointing of Elisha, and in it we find the testing of the successor to the role of protagonist and the miraculous ending of the hero of our story. Like a man whose fate is sealed (we view Elijah's fate in advance in chapter two verse one) Elijah travels to his end on the earth. Elijah instructs Elisha to stay while he goes on. Elisha promises faithfulness. Elijah stops at the "house of God" (Bethel) and the prophets warn Elisha that his master will be leaving the earth. The same things happen (warnings by prophets and instructions to stay) in three cities in a row till they reach the river Jordan. There a miracle occurs when Elijah causes the river to split and they walk on dry ground. Thus Elijah recounts backwards the steps of the Israelites who under Joshua had entered the Promised Land (as Elisha would later recount backwards the steps of Elijah in his miracles and pronouncements). Elijah asks what Elisha's inheritance is to be. Elisha asks the prophet for a double portion of his spirit. Elijah has tested Elisha's faithfulness in the journey, and now he tests God's choice. He proclaims that if Elisha sees the prophet's departure,

Elisha will have his wish (and will thereafter be the protagonist of the story). As the old and new hero walk and talk, a miracle occurs. Horses of fire pulling a chariot of fire split the two up, and the first protagonist is taken away to heaven in a whirlwind (never dying, like Enoch; on the other side of the Jordan, like Moses). How does Elisha respond? He tears his own clothes (in mourning and in a sign of movement into a new life), and takes up the cloak of Elijah. And thus the story is handed over to a new hero, who has withstood the test of man and God, and has shown himself true and anointed. God's spokesman has moved from revealing God's Lordship (Elijah's mission) to proclaiming God's salvation (Elisha's mission). Elijah had journeyed to God, and now Elisha was journeying with God (as evidenced both times by the miracles of the Jordan crossings). Elisha had inherited Elijah's ministry under God by witnessing supernaturally Elijah's ascension. The heroes and villains may change, the times may change, and the circumstances and settings may change, but the super-hero remains forever and always the Lord God. The hero of our story is gone, and has been replaced by another. In this story, God is the Lord (and super-hero) across time (before and after the hero lives and dies), across national boundaries (the Jordan in this episode, Zarephath in an earlier episode), across even the "laws of nature" (as evidenced by the signs, wonders, and miracles involved in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha). The Lord is an infinite God.

Unity in God

The unity and coherence of the whole story, in all of its episodes, centers on the Lordship of God as witnessed to by the prophet Elijah. Each of the episodes shines new light on this theme, and the reader is shown the extremes of human emotion and experience from spiritual elevation and experiential magnificence, to depression, fear,

and hopelessness. From the heights to the depths of the story, the Lord is God. He sustains, empowers, judges, has mercy, tells secrets, brings fire, and whispers. The unity of God, his prophet, and his people is the unity of the story. We are confronted with experiences of obedience, faith, and power. God is in control. The name Elijah means "the Lord is God," and that is the overriding topic of this story, discovered by asking several pertinent questions of the text, and by being open as a reader to the answers given.

CHAPTER 13

WHY SHOULD I BE GOOD?

AN EXPLICATION OF PSALM 73

There are at least six questions which a reader of poetry should ask of the text in order to understand it better. First, what is the topic, theme, or underlying situation of the poem, and how do these unify the poem? Second, how is the poem structured? (Is it expository, descriptive, or dramatic? What is the flow of the poem? What are the contrasts? Is the theme developed through repetition, catalogue, association, or contrast? How does the poem fit into the framework of theme and variation?) Third, what is the poetic texture, and what do these figures of speech and poetic devices mean? Fourth, is the poem emotional or reflective? Fifth, how does the artistic patterning of the poem affect its meaning and effectiveness? Sixth, how is the theme in the poem resolved (Ryken 1984)? When these six questions are applied to the poetry of Psalm 73, we become acutely aware of the content and structure, as well as the artistic beauty, of this psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 73 is the first psalm in book three of the Psalms in the Bible, and centers on the question of good and evil in humanity. It is also the first in a collection of Asaph's psalms (from Psalm 73 through 83), and is very similar in theme to Psalm one. Psalm 73 is traditionally known as a psalm of Asaph, who was a leader of one of the choirs of Levites under King David. While not all of the psalms attributed to Asaph were necessarily written by him, they may have been composed at a later date by his descendants (for instance, see psalms 74, 79, and 84, all of which seem to directly refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the time of the exile to Babylon in 686

B.C.). There is no reason to believe, however, that Asaph was not the composer of this particular psalm. The topic of Psalm 73 is good and evil men. Its theme is the goodness of being righteous. This is stated explicitly in the first and last verses of the psalm. The situation behind the poem involves Asaph's musings about the rewards of the wicked and the righteous man, and in the end the true goodness of righteousness is vindicated. This theme is a universal one, and is experienced by people quite often. When the evil person is temporally blessed, the righteous are afflicted. As Job might say "Why be good if it only leads to trouble?" If evil actions receive good rewards, and good actions receive evil rewards, is good still good? A sure way to break a child's spirit is to spank them when they act properly. But this psalm neither begins nor ends in hopelessness.

The structure of Psalm 73 is complex and contrasting. It is expository, dealing with the ideas of reward and punishment, good and evil, and the eternal versus the temporal. It is also descriptive of the lives and ends of the good and evil man (much like Psalm one) and is dramatic in the sense that the later half of the poem (and perhaps the first half as well) is a discourse directed at God himself. Psalm 73 begins with a statement of the theme and a lament in verses 1-3, which is repeated in verses 13-17, 21-2, and 27-8, roughly in the beginning, middle, and end of the psalm. The psalm moves on to a variation of the theme by listing the actions of the wicked in verses 4-12, which sharply contrasts with the final conclusions about the wicked in verses 18-20 and 27. Verses 3-5 describe (from the psalmist's point of view) the marvelous lot of the wicked, verses 6-7 describe state of mind of the wicked, and verses 8-12 describe the actions and words of the wicked. The poet then gives the righteous person's response (in their own voice) to the good rewards of wicked people in verses 13-17. The NIV Study Bible cuts

the psalm into two equal halves of fourteen verses each, but I find this break unnatural (Stek 1995). The entire flavor of the psalm changes in verse 18, from a lament to an epiphany of eternal rewards and the transience of wicked men. In verse 17 the poet enters the sanctuary in his distress, and from then on his understanding of the situation of good and evil men is changed in focus to "their final destiny." Verses 18-20 paint a picture of the transience of the wicked man. Verse 21 reiterates the poet's former response, and in verse 22 we see his present reviling of his past state of mind. From verses 23-26 we are given a view of the righteous person's life and end in God (which is very different from the wicked person's spoken of in verses 18-20), and in verses 27-8 the theme is restated and a resounding praise brings the psalm to a resolution.

As we look at the actual texture of Psalm 73, we begin to appreciate the emotional and religious imagery that the psalmist utilizes. It is an emotional overview of the poet's own reflection on the question of whether it is good to be righteous or not (which is the overriding theme in this psalm). In the statement of the theme in verse 1, the psalmist ascribes the name Israel in a metaphorical way to those who are pure in heart, and he declares the goodness of God to them. In the next verse we find "but as for me," and are brought into the conflict in the poem. The poet compares his own envy of the arrogant and prosperous sinner to slipping from a path and loosing his foothold (compare this to the imagery in Psalm 1). We are thus prepared for the poet's ensuing complaints in verses 4-16, and are conditioned to respond to his musings with incredulity (as he does himself beforehand). He is saying "Hey, what was I thinking? These observations I'm about to present were very misled when I first made them, but now I recognize my faulty logic."

The psalmist goes on to exaggerate about the lot of the wicked in verses 4-12 (cf. Job 21). He shows us the way he was viewing the subject, and there is an emotional tattle-tail/whiner slant to the whole section. The wicked have no struggles (a hyperbole expressing the extreme emotions that the psalmist has when he thinks about the earthly prosperity of the wicked). They have nice healthy bodies. They don't have problems like everybody else. In verse six the psalmist tells us that that is the reason why they are so prideful. Here, he uses images to present his case. "Pride is their necklace, they clothe themselves with violence" (vs. 6) speaks of the wicked as wearing their pride openly and vaunting boastfully, as well as being covered with violence in the sight of others (their wicked actions are readily apparent). The psalmist uses ideas like calloused hearts, no limits, and carefree to describe the wicked. Their actions are prideful and ambitious, blaspheming and greedy. "Mom, Billy is always naughty, and he never gets in trouble!" cries the older sister to her mother. The spoiled child is tattled on, but the bitterness of heart remains in the accuser.

Verses 13-17 speak of the inner distress of the psalmist, and his transformation of understanding. The psalmist kept his heart pure and washed his hands in innocence (both metaphors refer to the psalmist's righteousness in contrast to the wicked man's guiltiness). The psalmist cries to the Lord to provide an exclamation point for his question mark (Rice 1998). Was his good life for nothing? All through the day and night the question plagues his soul. In verse 15 he tells us that if he had spoken his musings in that manner, he would have betrayed the righteous children of God. According to the psalmist, such fatalism should go unvoiced, lest it influence others to abandon the family of God. He couldn't understand how to solve the oppressive riddle, until he "entered the

sanctuary of God" (vs. 17). Whether this reference to the sanctuary referred to the tabernacle in David's time, the temple in the time of the kings of Judah, or the place in the psalmist's heart where he worshipped God is secondary (although I would argue for dating the psalm to the time of David's reign because I am a strong believer in trusting the simplicity of the text): the primary focus in the psalm is that it was in that setting that understanding finally came. And this is the turning point of the whole psalm.

Verses 18-28 lay out before the reader the epiphany that the psalmist experienced in the presence of God concerning his theme. Suddenly the psalmist is speaking directly to God in optimism about the demise of the wicked and the hope of the righteous. God places the wicked on slippery ground (just as he had almost slipped in his musings) and casts them down to ruin. This is a tragedy, caused by the fault of the wicked. They are destroyed, swept away, cast down, and despised. Like characters in a dream they vanish in unreality when the dreamer awakens (here God is the one who is portrayed in a simile as awakening to judgment). In verses 21-22, the psalmist acknowledges that his emotions were out of control and senseless. He was acting like a stupid animal to think that bad people are rewarded always with good things. The psalmist realizes that even though he was foolish in his prior musings, he was always with the Lord, and the Lord was in intimate communion with him (as seen in God anthropomorphically holding his right hand, which is a symbol of friendship, and is still a common gesture when walking and talking with your fellow man in the Middle East and Africa). God guides the poet, and brings him into glory (here referring to heaven, not the earthly temple, as evidenced by the previous phrase "and afterward you will take me"). Evil circumstances may arise both physically and spiritually in the psalmist's life and cause him to be distressed ("my

flesh and my heart may fail"), but God is the strength of his heart, and his inheritance (as opposed to the temporal inheritance of the wicked).

In verses 27-8 we find the restatement of the theme and resolution of the conflict through contrast and worship. Those who are far from God, and unfaithful to him will perish and be destroyed, but as for the psalmist it is "good to be near God" (which contrasts to the farness of the wicked) and the psalmist has made the all-powerful ruler of the universe his refuge (which contrasts with the unfaithfulness of the wicked). If before his epiphany the psalmist would not disclose his thoughts for fear of blasphemy and betrayal, he now is more than willing to tell his story. Good is vindicated. God is good. The bad guys lose and the good guys win in the end (poetic justice). The psalmist's problem has been resolved by looking at the world through God's eyes.

The simple honesty of this poem is touching. The reader enters into the psalmist's anguish and ecstatic revelation, and overhears as in prayer the psalmist recounting the epiphany that changed his view of good and evil men. At first we are in a world of temporal blessings, in which the wicked are super-human and above morality. But when "their final destiny" (vs. 17) is discovered by the psalmist, the reader is exposed to the spiritual and more meaningful end to the righteous and the wicked. Earthly blessings are never condemned in this psalm, but neither are they exalted. A person must look below the surface of the water, and above the lingering clouds in order to view the true blessings in life. The psalmist speaks of this beautifully when he says: "Whom have I in heaven but you (God)? And earth has nothing I desire besides you" (vs. 25). Here the archetype of the pilgrim is manifested, showing that a home and prosperity is to be in God, not apart from him. When the six questions I mentioned

earlier are applied to the poetry of Psalm 73, we become acutely aware of the content and structure, as well as the artistic beauty, of this psalm of Asaph. It is a psalm that acknowledges the conflict between good and evil, and is affective on the reader, causing transformation of viewpoint and clarification of eternal versus transient rewards and values.

CHAPTER 14

GENRES: A CLOSER LOOK

Magnification

The concept of magnification is a simple one. Using the precisely defined boundaries of certain transparent molecules the paths of light particle\waves are bent outwards from the object of inquiry toward the onlookers. As the object's visible molecules are spread out farther in the sight of the onlooker, the object appears to be larger than life. This magnification allows the inquisitive person to see the fine hairs on the back of a leaf, or the details of a blemish on their own elbow. Small things appear large. Objects that once were seen as wholes are now viewed as containing many detailed parts. It's a whole new world. Suddenly sets contain subsets, cells contain macromolecular structures, and classes contain categories. The amount of differentiation among and within objects becomes enormous.

The Bible is a whole. But it is composed of many parts. One useful tool for analyzing the different parts of the Bible is the concept of the genre. A genre is a particular generalized style or form of writing. A genre is recognizably distinct from other genres. A piece of writing may contain any number of specific genre types, and each of these genre types must be analyzed according to its kind. You don't send your pet butterfly to the doctor's office, and you don't send your three-year-old daughter to the veterinarian for a checkup. Authors write according to a set form, and we need to discover what that form is and how to interpret meaning from it. Each genre has different specific questions which should be asked of it in order to ascertain meaning in the writing. These genre-specific questions are all-important as magnifying tools. They

make larger than life the meaning contained in the text. The questions allow us to see clearly what was blurry and undifferentiated before. In this paper, I will present four separate and distinct genres, with their corresponding genre-specific questions, biblical examples, and explications drawn from this knowledge.

Exhibit A: Proverbs

Let us examine several proverbs. Because of their diverse nature, we will deal with each single proverb as a complete unit in itself. But first we will ask some pertinent questions of proverbs in general in order to analyze each proverb genre specifically. Some important questions are: 1- Is the proverb primarily prescriptive or descriptive? 2- What observations from everyday life are presented? 3- What figurative, poetic, or concrete language does the proverb utilize? 4- What simple and profound meanings are discovered? 5- What values, virtues, or vices are observed (Ryken 1984)? We will now examine five separate proverbs, analyzing them according to the framework provided by these questions in an effort to interpret the proverbs genre-specifically.

Do not boast about tomorrow,

For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

This proverb is explicitly prescriptive, telling the reader that they must not do something. Both lines emphasize negatives. A person should not boast about the future because of their lack of omniscience. This proverb may seem to be abstract, but in reality it speaks of the cold hard facts. Life is uncertain. We see a person in our mind's eye who is boasting about winning the lottery tomorrow, or bragging to his friend that his baseball team will win out over all the opposition. In the second line, we find the reason why this

person is a fool. The person doesn't even know if they will live or die, win or lose, achieve or fail in the future. For humans the future is foggy. A day, in this proverb, is pictured as "bringing forth" events that are presently uncertain to man. The simple message is for us not to count our eggs before they hatch. But the profound meaning underlying this observation is the recognition of our own limitations. The value of leaving the future in God's hands is found, and the vice of "blind" boasting is opposed.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
Profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

This proverb describes vividly and in a contrasting way the actions and reactions of those in different relationships. The author observes that a true friend knows that love is hurtful at times. A person may receive advice which is stinging in its reception, but truthful in its content, but he must guard against flattery and the "Yes-man syndrome." Here the friend is pictured as wounding someone for their own good, and an enemy is seen as profusely "kissing up" to the person. The proverb is only two lines of simple and scantily detailed description, but is profound in the implications it makes against "brown-nosing" and for the pain involved in true friendship. Honesty and forthrightness are the implied prescriptions, while flattery and unfaithfulness in friendship are revealed as vices.

Like a bird that strays from its nest,
is a man who strays from his home.

This simile is a descriptive proverb that deals with familial issues of faithfulness to one's place in life. The author observes the similarity between a bird straying from its

nest and a man straying from his house. What might the similarities be? Perhaps insecurity: away from the nucleus the ties on the electron are weaker and so require more effort on the electron's part to sustain balance (as they say, it's the banana that strays from the bunch that gets pealed). Perhaps marital and familial unfaithfulness: the mama bird is not going to like the papa bird to come home smelling like some hot chick, and every family needs a daddy's presence. Perhaps irresponsibility: it may be fun to go to the arcade, but when you come home without groceries you're going to get it. The wealth of possibilities is amazing. Through a simple comparison with nature, the author has implied a standard of living in which humans are seen as "social animals" with strong ties to the home. The "home" and the "nest" become pictures of security, responsibility, and marital and familial faithfulness in the hands of this skillful author.

He who blesses his neighbor with a loud voice,
rising early in the morning,
will be counted as cursing.

This proverb deals descriptively with the matter of timing and form conveying meaning more powerfully than content. The setting in this picture is important. A person is seen blessing his neighbor. If that were the end of the matter, the author would not have to say that the blessing is counted as a curse. People usually react nicely to blessings. But the manner in which the blessing is conveyed is not so nice. The blesser is obnoxiously loud. Not just that, but also the time is still early in the morning. This guy is a jerk! The blesser doesn't sympathize with others at all. His timing and form are atrocious. He may as well have said "Wake up, you punk!" Any college student who has stayed up late working on a paper can interpret the simple meaning of this proverb. If

you disturb your neighbor's sleep in the early morning with a loud call of "I hope you have a great day, Frank!" you are going to get beat up. More profound thoughts that are discovered in this proverb are the implicitly stated prescriptions of thoughtfulness and timeliness—not only in early morning salutations, but also in the ebb and flow of life in general. You shouldn't congratulate someone whose wife has just died by telling them "I heard you lowered your cholesterol. That's wonderful!"

A continual dripping on a rainy day
and a contentious woman are alike.

This proverb beats them all. With a simple simile, describing the contentious woman through comparison, the author vividly paints a portrait in our minds of the emotions and experiences that he is observing. If this proverb was composed by Solomon, he certainly had reasons to write it. I don't envy the man with six hundred wives and three hundred concubines. You would pretty much be in the middle of a continual pre-menstrual syndrome cycle (believe me, I have three sisters). Nagging, arguing, fighting, backbiting, gossiping etc. would probably be the norm. Drip, drip, drip, drip, will this ever end? Drip, drip, drip, drip, are the clouds still full? Drip, not over, drip, still raining, drip, the sky is hazy. Drip, this noise is, drip, making my, drip, drip, mind go crazy! This is a relatively simple proverb. A contentious woman is like the continual dripping of rain on a rain-weary day. It goes on and on, wears people down, enables no one to work, and is a source of unending strife. But this proverb is not just about a particular woman or even women in general. Here the woman is representative of the universal archetype of the never satisfied, gossiping, brawling, "spirited" Oscar the grouch. We all know this person. It's the person at work who is

always nagging at someone, or is always in an argument. It's the child who doesn't like his older sister, so he always pulls her hair and calls her names and never does what he's told. It's the neighbor's dog that always yaps at you when you walk by. This proverb is full of insight into the nasty character of humanity. The verses cry out satirically against contentiousness, and implicitly preach an important lesson. We are to let the clouds part and let the sun shine down and dry up all the rain (metaphorically). We must allow peacefulness to take away our dripping day. Don't be annoying, be a peacemaker.

Exhibit B: Satire

Let us now move on to examine a short piece of satire. Satire exposes the vices of its objects and offers as its true standard the person of God. Several questions that need to be asked of any piece of satire are: 1- What objects are being attacked? 2- What is the satiric vehicle (i.e. story, poem, portrait, character sketch, or direct or derogatory denunciation)? 3- What is the tone of the satire (Horatian or Juvenalian)? 4- What is the norm or standard by which things are criticized (Ryken 1984)? We will now examine a Biblical example of satire, analyzing it according to the framework provided by these questions in an effort to interpret the work genre-specifically.

In Amos chapter six, verses four through eight, we find a short satire denunciating those of Israel and Judah who are smug and secure. In verse one of chapter six the woe begins. It is immediately addressed (like a letter) to the complacent and secure leaders of Israel and Judah. They are said (in verse three) to put off the evil day, and bring near the reign of terror by their inaction. Amos describes them as laying down, lounging, feasting, playing and making music, drinking, putting on lotion, and not grieving. The objects of his scorn are smug, rich, and secure in their pride as evidenced by the

descriptions of beds of ivory, couches, choice lambs, fattened calves, harps, musical instruments, wine by the bowlful, and the finest of lotions. They are gluttons and drunks, both idle and lazy.

How is this satire portrayed? It is a poetically constructed direct denunciation that mocks these complacent Jews. The prophet Amos uses a brief sketch of their actions in order to reveal to them their own smugness. The times of justice and exile were yet to come. In these passages he elucidates several of the reasons for Israel and Judah's coming judgment. He could have just said "Hey, you guys are materialistic!" but instead he describes the extent of their situation. Not only does he go into detail about their assets and actions, he goes on in the passage to condemn their character. These people did not grieve. Judgment was upon them and they couldn't care less (vs. 6). They are characterized as being uncaring and selfish, thus bringing upon themselves their own judgment. God comes on the scene and says "I abhor" and "hate" the pride and strongholds of Israel (here in parallel form) and "will deliver up the city and all that is in it" (Amos 6:8). The poetic construction of the satire is readily apparent. Laying and lounging, eating this and eating that, and playing and composing music are all parallels which reinforce the extent of the materialism and complacency. The objects of scorn are drunks and they smell nice, but they are uncaring about their own ruin. That is why they would be the first to go into exile, and the party would be over. In the next verse, six times God is referred to, assuring the people that their judgment would have a Divine origin. The passage we are dealing with ends with two sets of parallel lines, the first two lines giving reasons for judgment, and the last two lines declaring what the judgment will be. After the satire about what the people feel (secure and complacent) and do (live at

ease) God tells them how he feels (angry), and what he will do (he will destroy them). Thus, the balance is complete, revealing a foil. They feel safe, but God says they are not. They love to put confidence in their stuff, but God hates it. Here we witness a striking contrast between the two groups (God and uncaring humanity).

What is the tone of this particular satire? We are dealing with a mean-spirited attack, not a subtle caricature. While the pictures presented are humorous when envisioned, they are not nice in any sense. True, Amos is not being as mean as he could be, but his attack is full of sharp words. He could have said that the leaders were fat cows who drank and ate and slept like brute beasts (which he comes close to saying). He could have said that all of their riches were nothing but poop. But instead he (and God) chose to artistically design a warning about complacency in the face of impending judgment ("the day of the Lord" spoken of in chapter 5). Amos presents the way it is, and the way it will be. The situation will be reversed. These smug leaders were always the first to enjoy pleasure and leisure, and they will remain the first (to go into exile). God scorns rather than laughs at the leaders' complacency.

What is the norm or standard by which these leaders are criticized? God and the godly man are implied as norms throughout this satire. As Amos satirizes the actions of these people, he gives us a negative view of reality. Consequently, we see implied in this pessimism the overriding norm to which they are being compared. The people are getting fat, and weak, and easy. They don't care anymore. Amos wants them to be mindful of the coming day of the Lord, and to grieve, and fast, and mourn—to humble themselves before God and seek forgiveness. The godly man, though never mentioned explicitly, would set just this sort of standard. Also in focus (this time explicitly) is the

person of God as a standard. Perhaps the reason why God is referred to by so many names in verse eight is that he must make very clear to them that he is their God. He is powerful, he is sovereign, and he is ever-present. He is telling them that life is supposed to be about him. The Theocentrism admonished in verse eight is in direct contrast to the godless materialism and complacency presented earlier. God hates the way these people feel and act. He is trying to stir them into repentance and reconciliation. He is the balance that has measured them and found them wanting.

Exhibit C: Drama

The stage is thrilling. In front of the lights, make-up plastered onto the face, memorized lines swirling around in the mind as you carefully listen for your queue. Action and dialogue, characterization and plot movement, emotion and experience; these are all a part of the theater. While dramas are stories, they do not always act like them. They are more like chick flicks than action films. If you want to know what's happening, you learn to watch for setting, characters, ordeals, conflicts, occasional poetic form, irony, plot movement through dialogue, and stage positioning and gestures. Let's formulate these into a list of questions which we can ask of a specific piece of biblical drama. 1- What is the nature of the ordeal? 2- Who are the characters, how are they developed, and what conflicts do they appear in? 3- What is the role of setting? 4- Does the drama utilize poetic form, and if it does, how is it to be interpreted? 5- What is the role of irony? 6- How is the plot carried along by dialogue? 7- How does the stationing and gesturing of the characters affect the meaning? These may sound like difficult questions to answer, but in reality most people unconsciously discover most of the answers just by experiencing the drama. We normally interpret dramas on the go, but in

this paper we will slow everything down in an attempt at systematizing our experiences into recognizable and definable elements, using the magnifying glass of genre-specific questioning to analyze the drama more exhaustively.

The drama we will be looking at is contained in Genesis 27:18-27. This ordeal is a blessing drama with the added dimension of disguise and theft. We have already learned in the story that two boys were born to Isaac, the son of Abraham. Jacob and Esau, as they were named, came into the world struggling. Jacob was grabbing Esau's ankle on the way out, grasping for the right of the first-born from the get-go. Although Esau won the race out of Rebecca's body, the conflict was just beginning. We are told that Rebecca favored Jacob, and Isaac favored Esau. But Esau was a rash man, and had sold his birthright to his brother for a bowl of red soup. Rebecca and Jacob were not satisfied with a mere birthright, however. Abraham had passed down a blessing to Isaac, of multiplication and prosperity from God. This blessing would fall to Esau the firstborn and favored son of Isaac, but not if Rebecca and Jacob could help it. The ordeal we will deal with is the pivotal scene in which Jacob comes to Isaac, disguised like Esau, with Isaac's "last meal." Isaac expects Esau to be coming to receive his blessing, and as the curtain of the tent rises, we see Jacob standing there before his bed-stricken father, deceit in the son's eyes, fur on his arms to simulate the hair of Esau, dressed in Esau's clothes, and his father's favorite meal of Esau's in his hand (which was prepared for Jacob by his mother). This is a ridiculous sight. But Isaac's eyes are weak. And Jacob is as bold a theft as any. The stage is set for several close calls, a few blunders, and plenty of irony.

The list of characters in this drama includes only Isaac and his son Jacob. But beyond them we see Rebecca's own influence and handiwork, as well as Esau's loss.

This is a cast of pastoral aristocrats. Isaac is the old protagonist of the story, ready to give up on life. The reader is sympathetic with his old age and poor sight, but the backdrop of favoritism and sympathy towards Esau brings us to doubt his good judgment. In this scene Isaac is meticulous and skeptical about Jacob's disguise, but in the end the evidence is overwhelming. Nothing gets past this guy—except his son. Jacob is the ascending protagonist, who is deceitful, ambitious, and conniving. Up to this point, he has only grown bolder in his plots and actions. Who would believe he is to be the new hero? In later episodes he will be transformed by several encounters with God and His blessings. But at this point in the story, he is heading toward a cliff. We expect his destruction to come at every turn. He is egged on by his mother, the weakness of his father, and the rashness of his brother, but he is by no means merely a product of his environment. In this particular drama we see just how intentional and willing he is to climb the ladder of success at any cost, never wavering in his scheming and deceiving, ever-ready to lie, cheat, and steal from his own father and brother. Esau his brother is another matter entirely. He despised his own birthright. He married Canaanite women against his parent's wishes. While he is strong, skilled, and passionate, he is also fool-hardy, irresponsible, and ungodly. His weaknesses become the backdrop for this scene, which to him becomes a tragedy. In this single simple scene he loses God's blessing, the covenant made to Abraham, and the prosperity and favor of his family. Where is he? He's out in the field somewhere hunting for his father's meal, thinking about his oncoming blessing. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, he is blind and dumb to his impending tragedy. The conflict thickens. And the schemer behind this dirty plot is none other than his own mother, Rebecca. If this were a football game, the sides would be the

Rebecca-Jacobs (the contenders) against the Isaac-Esaus (the reigning champions). Isaac throws the ball to Esau, Rebecca distracts both of them, while Jacob runs in for the kill, intercepts the ball in mid-air, and runs unscathed for a touchdown; final score: Rebecca-Jacobs 6 \ Isaac-Esaus 0. What an upset! And to think, this is part of salvation history.

The stage of this drama is a large central tent surrounded by many smaller tents, all simple yet elegant in their airy quintessence; an unlikely backdrop for such a conflict. Inside, richly ornamented rugs cover the ground. The lights are dimmed. The furniture is comfortable, but light. This is a pastoral aristocrat's personal room, his mobile palace. Fields, grown thick with vegetation surround the tents. There are a few shady trees nearby, and a deep well for the herds, which graze not far beyond. The smell of cooked venison wafts lazily on the breeze. Curtains are hung from the ceilings and small lamps fill the stage with an other-worldly sense of hominess. Some of the inhabitants in the tent-village work in the hot sun, sweat on their backs, grass at their feet and the harsh realities of outdoor life before them. Others spend their days among the tents, in conversation, cooking, laundry, and merchandising. This is the world of our present drama, and in its lovely simplicity, it beckons us to remark "Is this to be the scene of deceit, thievery, and tragedy? Is an old man's tent to become the setting for a plot that changes the history of the world?" There is truth in the old saying that "the world would sure be a lot nicer if there weren't so many people in it."

The poetic form and irony in this drama runs almost like a fairy tale. Most children know the story of little red riding hood. In the drama we are dealing with, the roles are reversed. Here the old person is honestly intending to bless his firstborn son, Esau. But in walks the big, bad wolf, dressed like the first-born son, bearing goodies

with him. "What a big nose you have!" cries Isaac, and is answered by Jacob the wolf "All the better to smell you with."

"What big eyes you have!"

"All the better to see you with."

"What big teeth you have!"

"Yes, well, the teeth. Uh, didn't you see the goodies I brought you? Why don't you eat some and forget about the teeth."

"You do smell like my firstborn son," the father said, as he gobbled up the goodies Jacob had brought him. After he was finished, and plump and fattened, Jacob the wolf promptly devoured that old man, clothes and all.

The reader has a previous knowledge of Isaac's poor sight and old age, Jacob and Rebecca's deceptive plot, Esau's absence, and the details of Jacob's disguise. Isaac tests Jacob about his food, his physical body, his character, and his smell. Jacob passes each test with flying colors, and seems to spare no ends in deceiving his father to the uttermost. But several near blunders (Isaac's recognition of Jacob's voice, and the unusual speed of the meal's preparation) cause the reader to gasp in wonder, adding to the building suspense. The reader is caught between rooting for Jacob in his audacity and smoothness of methodology, and cheering for Isaac to discover this wolf in sheep's clothing before it is too late. The poetic fairy tale form lends to the story its compelling qualities, and leads the reader into an intimate family experience. The irony and poetic form help to highlight Jacob's continually growing breadth of ambition and deception, and breaks any sympathetic notions which the reader may have carried toward Jacob.

Jacob got what he wanted in the end, but soon afterward lost the closeness of his family, land, and blessings.

All of this is built around a balance of simple dialogue and action, which carry the plot towards its climax in the blessing of Jacob by Isaac. There is the bringing of food and drink, the feeling of skin, the kiss of blessing and the smelling of garment. And with very few words the greatest covenant between God and mankind changes hands. On the wings of sparing words the prize of creation is carried away. Jacob calls for his father, Isaac responds and questions his identity. Jacob lies about his identity and actions and requests his father's blessings. Back and forth the questions and answers fly, building on the suspense as if in a courtroom drama. The veracity of the witness is testified to by the deceitful evidence and the plot is confirmed. Simple dialogue, narrative explanation, and actions are the building blocks of this production. Seven times Isaac calls Jacob his son (for this is never in doubt). Jacob speaks less and less as the story progresses, perhaps for fear of giving away his true identity through voice recognition. In the end it is the physical evidence that convinces Isaac, not the dialogue. Initially, through dialogue Jacob attempts to attain the blessing and deceive his father, but as the ice gets thin Jacob's actions and physical disguise are relied upon more and more as his advocates, so that by the end of the scene Jacob is serving and being kissed and smelt, and only saying "I am".

The stationing and gestures of the characters on the stage add great dimension to this drama, bringing focus to the extent of Isaac's testing and Jacob's grasping. Jacob goes in to his father. His father is lying down, so he tells him to sit up and eat and bless him. Jacob calls Isaac to physical action. A little later Isaac tells Jacob to come near to

him to be felt. This closeness and the physical reality of Jacob's Esau-like presence finally convince Isaac. But not before eating and drinking at the hand of Jacob. A paternal kiss seals the deal. Isaac smells Esau's clothes and is convinced. This stationing and gesturing of characters brings back the strong pastoral and familial setting. Isaac sits up in bed eating and drinking and sharing a "last meal" with his "first-born" son. Jacob does not stand aloof and unconvincing. He is always ready to be tested, as seen in his non-aversion to close physical proximity. Through the careful scripting and flexibility of stage directions Jacob has finally grasped his precious blessing. The extent of his disguise has paid off. Isaac was no fool, but he was no match for the likes of Jacob and Rebecca.

Exhibit D: Visionary Literature

What if we could see the world, not as it really physically exists, but as symbols of an alternate reality? History and events would become colorful metaphors and archetypes, vividly revealing a rainbow of meaning and disjointed "trips." As a dream or music video flickers images across the screen, coalescing into patterns of surrealistic communication, thoughts and experiences are flooded into the mind, and the cosmic significance of details in the journey become seemingly insurmountable in the other-worldly flavor of the vision. This is not a drug-induced religious experience we speak of. It is a God-given sight into the unseen, a sober look at the world from heaven's view, an extravagance of expression, action, characters, and setting, revealing salvation history and God's great will for the cosmos. This is no hippie trip. It is the mystery of visionary biblical prophecy. Gross misunderstandings will result if we do not treat this category genre-specifically. Several questions we should ask of visionary literature are: 1- What

are the setting, characters, and actions, and how do these transmit meaning? 2- How is ordinary reality subverted? 3- What breaks in the flow of the writing are to be noted and what does the diversity and impulsivity give to the writing? 4- What historical events or theological realities seem to be presented in the passage symbolically (Ryken 1984)? We will now examine Zechariah chapter five, analyzing it according to the framework provided by these questions in an effort to interpret the work genre-specifically.

The setting, characters, and actions in this passage are simple, fraught with background, and are often wildly visionary. Zechariah prophesies to the returned exiles several months after the rebuilt foundation to the temple is finished. Jerusalem is on its way to reconstruction, but the Lord's house is taking too long (which is part of the focus of Haggai's prophecies). The high priest and the leader of the people, Joshua and Zerrubabel (the high priest and the descendant of David), are struggling in their work at maintaining state security and religious identity, and the Temple becomes the focal point of Judaism's renewal. It is in this city (and people) under construction that the prophet finds himself. The characters in these scenes are the prophet, an angel, a scroll (personified as flying, going out over the world, and entering and destroying houses), a woman in a basket, and several winged women. What a cast! The prophet sees two separate visions, of a flying scroll of judgment and of a woman banished from the land. The angel is the revealer. The scroll goes out from God (with allusions to the temple and the Law of Moses) and cleanses the land from sin. The woman in the basket is "wickedness," and is banished supernaturally by other women. It seems that Zechariah saw nothing ordinary in these visions. These strange, folksy, surrealistic moving pictures paint a world that is simple yet subtly profound. God reveals to humans his view of

reality. Judgment is coming for the lawbreakers. Exile is coming for those who are a stumbling block to the nation. All of this is in a historical setting, acted by simple persons and symbols, and portrayed in moving imagery (such as flying scrolls, curses, cutting off of the thief and liar, the timbers and stones of houses being consumed, wickedness made explicit, a basket with a leaden lid that is shut on a woman, women with wind in their stork-like wings, lifting a basket and sending it to its place in Babylon).

Ordinary reality is subverted by symbolism (which presents significant details as representative objects) and the historical events of the rebuilding of the Israelites as a nation under God is portrayed giving the reader a vivid sense of the affective (and in this case effective) nature of visionary literature. The law of God is now a huge flying scroll that happens to be the same size as the front porch of the temple which is being rebuilt. The scroll (as in Deuteronomy 28:15-68) is God's curse on the lawbreaker, proclaiming and bringing forth the breaking of the lawbreaker going out over the land from the presence of God in the temple. In this instance, the thief and the liar, as breakers of the eighth and ninth commandments, may be representatives of the whole class of sinners that will be destroyed (with their "houses" which is an ancient archetype still in use today that attributes to the house familial inheritance, progeny, and security, and is seen as the place where one's actions and relationships are primarily carried out, and is thus an appropriate object of judgment). The next vision symbolizes an actual historically significant event that occurred during the ministry of Zechariah in Jerusalem. In Ezra chapter nine we find the circumstances. The Israelites have disobeyed God (especially the leaders and officials) by intermarrying with the women of non-Israeli background around them. Ezra has just arrived in Jerusalem and is told of these things by some

leaders in the city. Ezra is completely broken. He fasts and mourns and cries out to God for forgiveness for the people. All of Israel is gathered in Jerusalem (Ch 10), most of them confess their sins to God, and a covenant is made in Israel to get rid of these foreign wives and their children. The book of Ezra ends with a list of the names of those involved in the intermarriage scandal, and in doing so records for all time the sin and repentance of specific individuals (if my name were in the Bible, I would not want it here). In Zechariah, this scene is represented by a measuring basket with a woman in it. The angel proclaims the wickedness of the situation, and shuts the mouth of the basket on the woman. This foreign woman is carried away by two winged women to Babylon. As the people of Israel had been exiled for their sinfulness many years before, so now their sins were exiled from them. It is unclear to me whether the winged women represent an actual class of historical people or events, but at the very least it is clear that the sin of the people is banished supernaturally and that it is not women in general that are wicked, but only specific women in specific relationships with the people of Israel. These ungodly relationships were torn asunder by the God of Israel and the women and children were carried away supernaturally (by prayer and fasting, by the affective words of Ezra's spirit-empowered pleading and Zechariah's spirit-led vision, and by the actual physical work of identifying, condemning and sundering these wrong relationships by the people of God). So the law is seen as going out and cleansing the land from sin in the first vision, and in the second vision evil is seen as being banished from the land. Through visionary language Zechariah has affected the people of Israel effectively. The law of God is supreme, and God's holiness is upheld.

The diversity and impulsivity of the writing lend to the passage's power of affection, and the rapid onslaught of actions, characters, and dialogue gives poetic character to the work and leaves the reader gasping for breath. This passage resembles Mohammed Ali's famous quip: it "floats like a butterfly, stings like a bee." The writing soars into the sky at least three times, following the characters and their actions. The reader is bombarded by blast after blast of powerful images (a huge scroll, sinners cut off, houses burned down, a basket with a woman in it that is proclaimed as being wickedness, women with stork wings that fly the basket off to Babylon). These brief images are constantly in motion, being viewed in quick succession, constantly crying out for a change of thought and action on the part of the reader. In this section of Zechariah, wave after wave of visions pour over the reader (and the prophet), switching themes, characters and actions, at one moment engaging in dialogue, and in the next moment calling for the prophet to look at something strange and new (which is Zechariah's constant role in this section). It is almost as if the prophet (and also the reader) is brought to a spectacular buffet and is forced to try a little of everything. From a discourse on a flying scroll, to a quick declaration of the wickedness of a basket's contents, from a revealing angel to women with wings, from stones and timbers to leaden basket lids, this passage never focuses on its language, characters, or images long enough for the reader to become fully acquainted with their presence. As a campfire burns its fuel in flickering, ever-changing intensity and brightness, so does this passage coalesce and divide, always moving on in energy and form, in a masterfully alternating view of another world. Gaze into this fire and behold the light of revelation. This specific flame presents for the viewer a moving

piece of holiness and cleansing, and of the reestablishment of God's holy order in Jerusalem.

A Final Word

We have now looked at four examples of genre-specific questioning, which brought to the forefront the importance of genre identification and analysis as tools in biblical interpretation. While the magnifying glass is not the only tool of the good scientist, so also is this hermeneutical tool not the only one. But its powers of heightened sight are a great evidence of its value to the interpreter. Let us not ignore what the Bible has to say. And let us also not ignore how it says what it says. Meaning and form are partners in communication, together leading us to the truth, in scripture and in life.

CHAPTER 14

DIALOGUES TOWARD BELIEF

Dialogues Toward Belief: An Overview

The theological themes of the gospel of John are simple yet profound. Three of John's favorite metaphors of the nature of Jesus and his ministry provide useful pictures of the overall approach of this gospel and much of the rest of John's writings. Love, light, and life become who Christ is, what he does, what he offers to humans, and what he is for the body of Christ. These "spiritual metaphors" (comparisons between concrete, physical, experiential reality, and spiritual reality), while overflowingly imbued with theological and philosophical significance, present not merely a metaphysical and ideological Messiah, but one who addresses human need as it exists in all its forms (whether spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, or otherwise). Other messianic pictures of this sort include water, food (bread and wine), word, and flesh. John loves to put these meaningful metaphors in the midst of dialogue and conflict between Jesus and others. Jesus is seen as having supremacy and immanence over Moses, Abraham, Jacob, David, John the Baptist, and others. Several of these discussions center around Jesus' "I am" statements (allusions to his identification with God), which point directly to the gospel's stated purpose of planting and growing belief in the reader. So we find that John uses dialogue that presents simple metaphors which are profound and imminent, and that stress Jesus' supremacy over the ancient prophets and patriarchs, all in an effort to bring those who hear him into a believing relationship with himself. In short, Jesus dialogues with individuals and groups toward belief.

These general tendencies of John's writings are helpful tools in our analysis of John 4:1-42 which is a story or mini-drama that centers on these kinds of dialogues toward belief. The story begins with details about its setting and historical background (4:1-6). From there the reader is brought into an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman (7-26). Jesus draws attention to the woman's physical, spiritual, and moral needs, and points to himself as the provider of those needs. He calls her to belief through each point of the dialogue. In the second scene (27-38), we see that the woman has returned to the city and convinced others of Jesus' identity, calling on them to come and see for themselves. Jesus' disciples return with food, and offer their master some. Jesus refuses, and speaks of food from God. This spiritual metaphor is misunderstood by the disciples, as were Jesus' earlier words to the Samaritan, and both scenes follow a narrative pattern containing three stages: 1- Jesus' pronouncement, 2- expressed misunderstanding by those who hear, and 3- Jesus' explanations . This is a common pattern in the gospel of John (Ryken 1984). The third scene involves the city of Samaritans and their encounter with Jesus and subsequent belief in him as "the Savior of the world" (4:42). The first scene is an encounter story leading to a recognition story. The second scene is a testimony story (spilling over into scene three) with a pronouncement story full of poetic aphorisms and metaphors like the first scene. The third scene is a recognition story. Through encounter and dialogue Jesus has brought the Samaritan woman, the disciples, and many other Samaritans from the town of Sychar to belief in his identity and his work as Messiah and Savior. Jesus' dialogues were not merely casual conversations, but were rather goal-oriented reciprocal speech patterns leading toward changed belief and action on the hearer's part. Let's examine each scene

in detail to uncover how Jesus used dialogue, what metaphors he used, who he claimed supremacy over, his subtle "I am" statement, and the cause-effect link between events in each scene leading to the epiphany in verse 42.

Scene One: Dialogue Toward Belief

The first scene opens with a brief summary of the historical background of the setting, the circumstances which bring the characters together, and the time of the event. The Pharisees are mad at Jesus. John the Baptist was a problem, but now this new Jesus fellow was baptizing more than even John. The gospel records that it was not actually Jesus who was doing the baptizing (it was his disciples), but the matter of public opinion (good and bad) necessitated Jesus' movement in ministry locale. So Jesus left to go back to Galilee. But in order to get to Galilee from Judea a person must either cross the Jordon twice or travel through unclean Samaritan country. Jesus and his disciples take the later route, and it is in the middle of this journey that we find them. They had come to Sychar, a small town near Shechem, which was Joseph's double portion of land given to him by his father Jacob on his deathbed in Egypt (Gen. 48:21-2). A well was there, and Jesus, exhausted from the journey, sat down by it. The heat of the noon-day sun and weariness from the journey had brought this spiritual sojourner into this foreign setting. This scene bears direct resemblance to Abraham's servant's test of Rebecca at the well of Nahor (Gen. 24:12-27), Jacob at the well when meeting Rachel (Gen. 29:10), and Moses when meeting Zipporah (Ex. 2:15-7). In the same way, Jesus sat there alone (his disciples had left him to get food) and a woman came upon the scene to draw water from the well. While most socially acceptable women would draw water at the end of the day when it was cooler, this Samaritan woman's singular timing was not unheard of in ancient times.

For instance, see Genesis 29:7 where Jacob waters his uncle's flocks while the sun is still high, or read Josephus' later claims that Moses drew water for Zipporah at midday (NIV Study Bible 1995). One cannot overlook the great Old Testament allusions already apparent in the setting which draw the reader's minds back to patriarchal pastoral life, of meetings at wells, of the drawing of water, and of the recognition of identity and action in each Old Testament instance alluded to. This rich history provides a useful backdrop for the ensuing story, which plays like a modern television drama.

As the actors enter the scene, we are taken aback immediately by the stark contrast in the characters and what the dialogue reveals about the actions and identities of each one. Jesus is a Jew, is greater than Jacob (12-14), is a prophet (19), and is the promised Messiah (25-6), while the woman is a Samaritan (7), probably a bit of a social outcast even among her own people (6-7), does not understand spiritual metaphors (10-5), is a serial monogamist (17-8), and is authoritarian in her outlook on religion (19-25). Jesus shouldn't be talking with her. He especially shouldn't be asking her for water (she was unclean in the Jew's eyes). This would have been a great moment for Jesus to turn the other way. Instead, he chose to encounter her in a dialogue toward belief. The details in the scene vividly portray each character's actions and identities. Jesus asks for water, but she responds that he should not condescend culturally in this manner. Jesus responds by pointing to his own identity, utilizing a simple yet profound spiritual metaphor. Jesus' response to her unbelief gives us a helpful up-close look at how Jesus dealt with unbelief and pushed his dialogue toward belief. "Can I have a drink?" "Are you crazy; how could you ask me for a drink?" "If you only knew who I was, you'd ask me and I'd give you living water." She misunderstands and sidesteps the issue, pointing to the patriarch Jacob

and his work concerning the water and the well. Jesus encounters her words and pushes them toward himself. He is greater than Jacob. Jesus gives water that never fails; "a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The illustration was at hand. Physical water was what both individuals needed, and that physical need became in the hands of Jesus, the master poet, a symbol that transferred to the spiritual world. Jesus meets spiritual needs always, in contrast to physical water's inability to keep a person from thirsting again. The woman wants some of this water to avoid the work of hauling water every day from the well (misunderstanding Jesus again, almost as if failing to believe that her spiritual need for living water was as great as her physical need for water). So Jesus addresses her spiritual need (her immorality), and she is impressed with his gift of prophecy, but brings up a religious stumbling-block (temple worship) in order to shift the dialogue away from being personal toward being merely cultural and religious. Jesus' response is amazing. He predicts the destruction of the religious status quo, addresses the Samaritans' lack of knowledge in worship, and defines the nature and manner of true worship. But these ideas are not conveyed as theological maxims. They are rather set like pearls on a necklace, building on previous ideas and questions, structured poetically (in form much like John's epistles), and are truth revelations meant to bring the woman to belief (21), not just in the ideas conveyed, but in the person of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' actions and dialogue in this scene show his disdain for common religious practices (9, 21-2), his willingness to encounter an argumentative outcast, and his skill for moving past surface-level dialogue toward meaningful communication and patient revelation. Jesus identifies with the woman, she pulls away, he offers her "living water," she doubts his offer, he poeticizes further on the water theme, contrasting his water with the normal

water and well of the patriarch, and on and on it goes, back and forth. Jesus' words dizzy the reader (at least they dizzy me) with subtle nuances like his reference to living water becoming a spring of water in the receiver and welling up to eternal life. Such gifted poetry adds an experiential texture to the dialogue, at once pointing to physical reality and at the same time placing it into a spiritual worldview. Every time the woman is thirsty, she will think of Jesus' lively water that is in her. What a great aid to memory and understanding. But Jesus' arguments are not meant merely to be mentally assented to. They are to be digested, believed, and acted on. Jesus is a man of action who uses everyday items of significance to bring others to belief and action. The woman, though not ignorant (she has a gift for evading troublesome issues, the likes of which we see often on Capitol Hill), is nevertheless stumbling in her attempts at comprehending this great man. But when belief finally comes, action soon follows (26, 28-9).

The dynamic plot in this scene is forward-moving, climactic, and is carried along on the wings of Jesus' words. The beginning of the plot finds two very different characters with a deep well of cultural and religious differences between them. The unity of plot in this scene is not in the poetic texture, but in the momentum of Jesus' words, in the unity of the characters, and in the movement from misunderstanding to belief on the woman's part. The water theme, which follows a familiar Johanine formula of pronouncement, misunderstanding, and explanation, is carried from verse seven to verse fifteen, and isn't picked up again until the next scene as a prop (28), and is changed into a food theme. The question of the spouses and immorality of the woman are next. This moves the woman to admit to Jesus' identity as a prophet, but also causes her to attempt to glance his sword of truth off to the side with her shield of religious contention. Jesus

is not to be thwarted, and the blow is struck. Jesus takes up the woman's new them of worship, and brings the future into her present (notice "a time is coming" in vs. 21 and 23). Jesus points out her misguided religion, the end of the sacred pilgrimages, and the essence of true worship. Jesus' short argument expounds upon the persons who worship, the places they worship at, the person they worship, and that which is true worship. The woman has before responded to Jesus' overwhelming dialogue with an authoritarian stance. She lists Jacob, the patriarchs or fathers, and now the coming Messiah as the bedrock of tradition and truth for living, which somehow in her mind supercedes Jesus' own well spoken dialogue. At the pulling of the trump card, Jesus would see to be defeated. But in verse 26 Jesus reveals that this was the purpose and end goal of the entire dialogue—to reveal his own identity in order to lead the woman to belief. "I who speak to you am he," one of Jesus' important "I am" statements, is the climactic pronouncement of the plot, which has been building towards this moment of epiphany. This was not what the woman was expecting. Their close-up conversation, which had shifted from character to character, never settling long on any one topic, had finally led to a conclusion—the woman was in need of a true religious, cultural, moral, and authoritative foundation, and this strange thirsty Jewish man was the great provider. Later (in vs. 29 and 39) we find that the greatest evidence to her of Jesus' true identity as Messiah was her personal experience of his supernatural knowledge of her personal life. The gift of prophecy (16-19) was not all that drove her to go away and bring others. Rather, it was Jesus' dialogue, not merely in words, but in life. Jesus' identity and actions encountered and confronted the woman's identity and actions, and grew in her an awareness of the necessity of belief. Jesus moved her forward against a cliff and the only

way to avoid jumping off was through him, not merely ideologically or intellectually, but spiritually and experientially. This was the real flesh and blood Messiah! The moment of truth had arrived. What would she do with this experience?

Scene Two: Action Toward Belief

In the next scene (27-38) the setting is continually important as a key to the actions, words, and thoughts of the characters on the multi-dimensional stage. At the great height of the plot in verse 26 the reader is expecting to soon near the conclusion of the dialogue. But just at this moment a great intrusion occurs, awkwardness ensues, and the woman's decision is made. The disciples return from town just then and seem to expect to find a relaxing hungry Jesus. Instead, they walk straight into an important dialogue unknowingly (much like a later scene in Plato's *Symposium* in which a raucous crowd of carousers disturbs the dinner party, disrupting the conclusion of the earlier dialogues). Here on the stage is a Samaritan woman talking to a Rabbi at a well, and a group of Jewish disciples walks up with food in their hands (this almost sounds like the beginning of a joke). Everyone is quiet as the grasshoppers chirp their midday melodies. The scene becomes too foggy for words. Questions cloud the disciples' minds (27), but nothing is said. Suddenly the silence is broken as the woman sets her water jar softly by the well and rushes off (a sign that she is obviously coming back, and also that Jesus has moved her to set aside her physical needs in order to meet spiritual needs). The narrator's eyes follow the woman into the town where she is heard testifying to the townspeople of Jesus' identity. Back at the well the disciples can see the distant movement of people from the village coming in their direction, thus creating a multidimensional stage upon which the actions and dialogue of the scene take place.

Dinner is ready, and this physical prop (food) becomes the first spiritual metaphor of Jesus' ensuing dialogue with his disciples. Jesus declares that he has already eaten, which they misunderstand and look around to see who it was that might have brought him food in such a place. The surrounding fields then become the spiritual metaphor of Jesus' dialogue, focusing on the similarity between the physical harvest and the bringing of people to belief in Christ. Jesus is pushing his disciples to be laborers in the field, to work hard at bringing others to belief, a work that is the blessed end of much labor on the part of others, and that is the true food from God (that which nourishes is seen as that which moves others toward God in belief). A well, a water jar, a prepared meal, the harvest, these are the props in the disciples' world that become the backdrop of meaning in Jesus' words and actions. Sowers and reapers, workers and eaters, these were the realistic characters in Jesus' world of poetic and pastoral communication. Jesus uses what is at hand in the setting to bring the group of disciples to understanding and action (much as he had with the woman in the previous scene).

The characters in this scene are many and varied, with Jesus in the center, and the other characters acting, speaking and thinking in response to Jesus. The Samaritan woman is about to respond to Jesus when the disciples come back. Her wordless get-away and urgent testimony reveals her quickness to put into action and words the content of her new-born epiphany. In response to her words the people in the city likewise take immediate action. Jesus had struck the woman and her fellow townspeople to the heart. But the disciples are constantly confused. They don't understand what the woman wants with Jesus, or why she (an unclean Samaritan) is talking with their Rabbi. They don't understand why Jesus won't eat, or how he could have already eaten (for a Jew in the

middle of Samaria there aren't many clean vessels to eat from). Who had fed their teacher? To them, the physical world seemed to be all that mattered. And so it is in this physical language that Jesus responds to them in order to bring them to respond to and understand the spiritual world. Jesus' final words in the scene show his mastery of proverb, poetry, and personally inspiring dialogue. Through speech and action Jesus seeks to move others, and in this scene he further moves others toward the same work—dialoging toward belief. So we find the woman doing, and the disciples being instructed on the necessity and blessing of doing, this action toward belief. The unclean woman was acting on what the disciples still failed to understand—Jesus was for everyone, Jesus was for now.

The plot of the scene moves directly from the close-ups of the scene before to characters and groups, both near and far, and centers on the continuing action of the first scene—bringing others to belief in Jesus. In the first scene we had only two characters on a simple stage. Now the stage widens and we find ourselves immersed in characters and actions and places. The disciples come, the woman leaves. The woman testifies, and convinces a crowd in the distant town, and they come to Jesus. In the meantime, the disciples take as their purpose the feeding of the Rabbi, while Jesus sees past physical hunger (as the woman has seen past physical thirst) while using the physical world to draw experiential pictures of otherworldly reality (it is no wonder the disciples didn't understand). The woman is bringing others to believe in Jesus, and Jesus is bringing his disciples to do the same. The ministry of Jesus is the dialogue's central theme, while the action in the scene is that of drawing others to Jesus. In the beginning of the scene we are in suspense as to the outcome of the first scene's plot resolution (belief in Jesus and

action on that belief). In the middle we see the action toward resolution (the woman's response) and Jesus' incorporation of the disciples into the plot. By the end of the scene the reader is ready to zoom out and view the resolution that Jesus foretells of when he speaks of a harvest being brought in.

Scene Three: A Resolution of Belief

The setting in this scene becomes the place of acceptance of Jesus' words and ministry, which is the fulfillment and resolution of the plot begun with the woman at the well in the first scene. This scene opens with a view of the crowd from Sychar believing and coming to meet Jesus, whom they bring to stay with them for two days (40, 43). This Samaritan village becomes the physical backdrop and symbol of acceptance and plot resolution. The Samaritan villagers accept Jesus and his ministry into their town. Their belief in him is evidenced by their action of bringing Christ physically to stay with them, and later by their words (40, 42). This action brings others into contact with Jesus' words and ministry, and a great outpouring of belief is the result. Jesus had encountered a lone Samaritan woman on the outskirts of town, and now that town, through the testimony of the woman's belief, had come out to bring him to them. This acceptance of Jesus showed the disciples the meaning of Jesus' words in the second scene about the harvest being ripe and was the actual physical experience of what was happening within the people's hearts. From the well to the city Jesus was brought into the lives of these people. Jesus had dialogued toward belief with the woman and later with the disciples. Now he dialogued toward belief with the townspeople, and the harvest was brought in—they believed Jesus' identity and ministry, on the outskirts and in the heart of their village, in physical, mental, and spiritual obeisance.

The crowd in this scene shows its belief through actions and words, while Jesus continues in his ever-purposeful dialogue. The disciples are not even mentioned in this scene. It is not that they are not present and active in the work, but that the purpose and work of Jesus is the overriding force behind the townspeople's movement toward recognition, acceptance, and belief of Jesus' identity and ministry. It was Jesus himself who was brought into the town because of who he was. Jesus continues his dialogue toward belief in this new wider venue and brings many to himself. He is always ready, always full of momentum. Many Samaritans believe the woman's testimony about Christ (believing without seeing is a recurring theme in John's gospel) and many others are brought to belief by actually experiencing Jesus' purposeful dialogue. This Messiah would save the world (42) not just the Jewish nation of which they were not a part. This Jewish anointed one was not racially discriminating in his ministry and was accounted worthy of their belief. Thus, all of the characters mentioned in this scene bear witness to Jesus' identity and ministry.

This scene is the resolution in action, word, and thought to the story's plot of dialogue toward belief. Jesus' dialogue in the first scene has brought the woman to belief in him. Her words and actions testify of her inner belief—she goes and testifies and brings to Christ. The second scene (which deals with the woman's work of bringing others to belief and Jesus' explanation to the disciples of his own work of bringing others toward belief) gives a snapshot of the action of the woman and the townspeople and a dialogue of Jesus with his disciples urging them toward the same kind of action. The moment has finally arrived. The people who come to Jesus already believe and when they arrive at the well, they confirm that belief through action—they invite Jesus to stay

with them and minister in their town. In the end of the story we find the people's pronouncement of belief in Jesus, the resolution of Jesus' work in the story, the goal toward which his dialogues moved. Jesus has encountered a woman, his disciples, and a Samaritan village and in the end his efforts are rewarded by a pronouncement of belief similar to what is found often in John's gospel (1:34; 2:49; 6:69; 7:41; 9:36-38; 20:28). Jesus didn't need people to believe in him in order to maintain his identity and work (2:25; 5:33-34), but rather worked toward that end because of who he was (4:34; 5:36). John's gospel was written purposefully, and this story fits in perfectly with his overall plan of bringing people to belief in Jesus (20:31). The story ends with a scene combining action (4:40), thought ("know" in v. 42), and words of belief ("the savior of the world" in v. 42), brought on by the identity and works of Jesus evidenced in his dialogue with a crowd of Samaritans who were looked down upon by his culture. Jesus' worldview transcended his cultural barriers and the protagonist is recognized for who he really is—the Messiah. The town is given the living water that never dries up from one who is greater than the prophets and patriarchs. Jesus has food that is truly nourishing, the food of doing God's work of dialoguing with others toward belief. The harvest is brought in and true worship takes place. If only all stories could end so happily.

Artistry Toward Belief: A Reflection On Form and Meaning

The artistic beauty of this composition is rich in poetic texture, and is amazing in light of the simplicity of its action, words, and plot movement. Spiritual metaphors are constantly introduced into the story by Jesus in his dialogues and are interpreted later by his own actions and words. Jesus doesn't just mutter vague statements, but is precise in his transmutation from physical reality to spiritual insight. Crops rolling in the wind

become individuals in need of being gathered to belief. Cool, still water becomes a living picture of the indwelling power of ongoing belief. Even a simple vessel for carrying water or an ancient well dug by a patriarch become dynamic visions of humans whose lives are filled with the transcendent Jesus' life. The simple actions of the woman (leaving her water jar at the well, testifying in the town, and bringing others to experience Jesus firsthand) are very small yet not insignificant. They are her reactions of belief, just as the people's later invitation for Jesus to come stay with them evidences their inner assent in outward actions. Jesus' simple quest for belief becomes intertwined with questions of religion, cultural difference, morality, food and water, and the who, what, when, where, and whys of worship. The woman's testimony is short but effective, as is the townspeople's later acclamation of Jesus' identity and ministry. It reveals to the reader the movement from encounter to belief in Jesus through proclamations, misunderstandings, explanations, and final recognitions of Jesus' identity and ministry. The road of meaning is narrow, but Jesus leads ever-onward toward belief, showing his purpose for humanity, and his mastery of dialogue. The most amazing thing bout this whole story is that it is true and in its truth it asks of us to respond to the story's dialogue in our own lives with actions, thoughts, and words of belief. Jesus truly is the Messiah and Savior of the world!

CHAPTER 15

FORM AND CONTENT: A LITERARY APPROACH TO THE BIBLE

Three Questions for the Bible

Not one book, but several; ancient yet contemporary; simple yet allusive: this, by analogy, is the Word made flesh. Scripts of poetry, proverb, satire, all bound in one cover, one worldview, one revelation in one person. The Godhead has left his mark on humanity, in the wider world, and in the breath of his word. This word speaks our language, it walks our steps, it smiles and cries, and lifts us up to the heavens even while painting earthly flocks on verdant hills overlooking still waters. At times mild, at other times harsh, it is passionate and loving, propositional and historical, filled with debate and intimacy, war and childbirth. This word was surely meant for us. But how is meaning to be found, and in what form, and by whom? By the prognosticator? By only the scholar? By the holy man who stands before the crowd? Was it not meant for all of mankind? And so it is that truth is found in the simple robe of a peasant, in the heart of an artist, on the path of Everyman. Let us turn, each one of us, to the way of the word, to its meaning and form, to the road that God has tread. Our Bible as literature is a wealth of experiences, thoughts, and feelings, and is likewise complex in composition. We must approach it as it exists. What is a literary Bible, how can we interpret it, and is it still of Divine origin? These three questions are the heart of this paper. The Bible's form, setting and content are to be understood literarily, historically, and theologically, its form is to be analyzed in light of its primarily literary nature utilizing literary tools of analysis,

and the Bible is to be understood as a richly human and divine book ever true to both realities.

The Literary Nature of the Bible

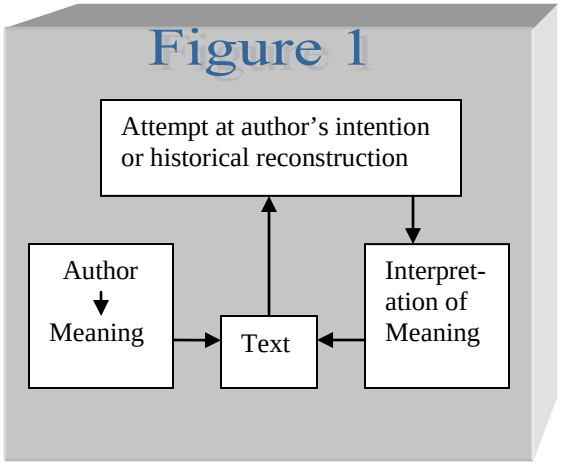
The Bible is historical, theological, and literary in its setting, content and form. "Joktan was the father of Almadad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah…" (Gen. 10:16). This passage of divinely inspired script evidences the historical reality of the Bible's world. Much of the Bible is set in the real space-time world of events, days and years, land and children. The documentary impulse in the Bible must not be ignored, for if many of the Bible's most important events and characters and plots were ahistorical, any faith based on this book would be worthless. The foundation of Christianity depends on the historical reliability of the Bible (if Christ did not die and rise again, none would be saved). But the scriptures are not merely a document of the way it was. Theological reality permeates every pore, every nook and cranny, and builds to a climax in the death and resurrection of Christ, a historical fact that is imbued with more meaning than any other event in history. The words of this text from Genesis to Revelation constantly make us aware of a God who created us, sustains us, loves us, and who will judge us in the end. The Bible is historically theocentric. The primary setting is historical, the primary content is theological, but what of its form? It is certainly not just a history book, containing facts about the Jewish race and religion and a growing sect called Christianity. While it does do that (in some parts more than in others) it is also about God's progressive revelation of himself in history. But it is not a systematic theology book, merely propositional and expository in form (though in some parts it is more theological and didactic than in others). The problem of form is that which this paper

seeks to address. The form of the Bible is primarily literary and only secondarily theological and historical. Its content is primarily theological, and its setting is primarily historical. But what does all of this mean? Let us focus on the literary nature of the Bible (its structure, poetic texture, heightened language, imagism, creativity, artisticness, and concrete experiential presentation) and derive from this primary form (not the only form, but certainly the primary one) the meaning of the Bible, set in the historical world of reality. As Robert A. Weathers has stated: "The literary form bears the content of history which is the primary concern of the interpreter." (133, 1994)

What does it mean to say that the Bible's form is primarily literary? When we say its form is literary, we mean that we often find parables, proverbs, poetry, drama, and heightened accounts of speech and events. This type of writing uses language in special ways. The Bible uses metaphors, similes, lists, the rules of Greek rhetoric, and the universal archetypes which are the building blocks of the artistic writer. Its authors structured their works with intricate craftsmanship, choosing what to include or exclude, artistically molding accounts and songs into beautiful pieces that are often holistic and realistic. Authors used established conventions of genres in their writing (at times creating or transforming them into new ones) and seemed to have a flair for creating "worlds" with their words which absorb the reader and bring them to experience the characters, settings, and events firsthand. Comparing Norton's Anthology of English Literature or Homer's great works to the writing of the Bible brings out many characteristics similar to all literature. The earth cries out to the land and sea in *Prometheus Unbound* by Percy Shelley. The Bible likewise reveals a helpful earth that opens its mouth, swallows a river, and helps a woman in distress (utilizing

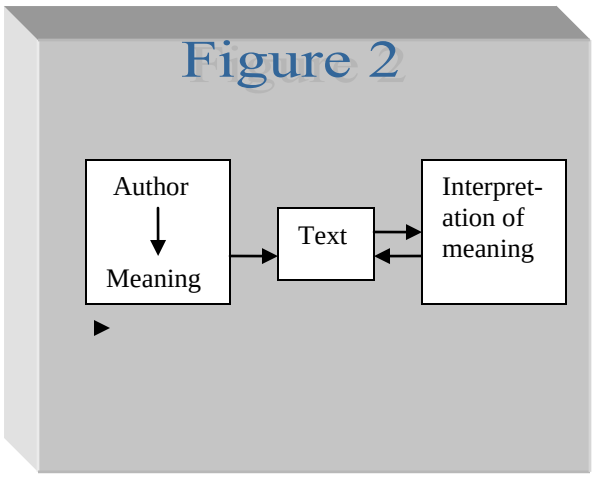
personification to convey meaning). As in Homer's battle over Troy in the *Iliad*, not all is documented, but only that which is pertinent to the bent of the story, following heroes and gods in their clashing and scheming; so also does the Bible leave out much that was and structures its overarching plots around the ascending spiral staircase of God and his covenants with mankind. But the Bible is distinct from most other pieces of writing in its content and setting (its theology and historicity), and often it transforms its forms around its central purpose (to reveal God to man, toward salvation and good relationship). Writing does not have to be fiction to be literary. After all, the Bible is intensely readable, enjoyably memorable, and painted with a straight yet subtle charm, yet it is based in real history. It is often suspenseful and climactic. Joy and hate are expressed in words that beckon the reader to enter into this world of mixed and complex experiences and genre-specific writing. Recurring images and heightened patterns of writing are everywhere evident. The Bible is the greatest piece of literature in existence, though it is not merely literature (Frye 1983). Its content is often incarnated into literary forms in which the meaning is inherently combined with the process used to communicate it.

When we use the literary method, we are not searching for the revelation of God through the Bible but in it. What I mean may become clearer by using the following simplified diagrams. The first diagram shows what often happens when the Bible is interpreted only theologically or historically, and the second combines all three (the historical, theological, and literary hermeneutic) with an emphasis on the "how" of the writing in an effort to derive the "what," "when," and "where" of the writing.



In Figure 1 the text is interpreted extra-textually, and the "author's intention" or the "historical reconstruction" is in danger of being the interpreter's own subjective opinion (dressed in a suit and tie).

In Figure 2 the text is interpreted in light of the form, and meaning is derived textually.



Figures 1 and 2 draw as their source Leland Ryken and his logical semantics of Biblical analysis (1986).

A literary approach to the Bible is distinctly Aristotelian (as opposed to Platonist) in that it seeks the universal within the particulars, instead of attempting to experience the universal by delving past the particulars. In other words, the meaning is in the text, its forms, language, images, and its detailing of concrete experiences (Longman 1985). A literary approach admits to a rich human-divine text that is incarnational in form (Ryken 1984). The Bible is not only literary, but is primarily literary in form (in some passages more than in others). We must seek to acknowledge and understand the form of the text before we attempt to explore its meaning. This is not to say that a particular passage cannot be historical, theological and literary, but that we must distinguish between a passage's settings, content, and form in order to understand it more holistically. A passage may be historical or theological in form (to a greater or lesser degree), but more

often they are literary. I offer the reader no scheme for devising how much of this or that passage is literary, except the following: upon close examination of a text the reader should identify and analyze its theological, historical, and/or literary form, content, and/or setting in order to take the passage as it is. The Bible is complex, mixed in form, content, and setting, and always full of surprises. When it asks us to read it as a story or a word of wisdom or a historical reflection, we must engage it on its own terms. The way we read a text must change in the light of how it is written. The form conveys the meaning (as universals are derived from particulars) and tells us what is important and why. Let us explore further this theme of content in form, and evaluate literary methods of analysis in the actual practice of interpreting Biblical texts.

A Literate Hermeneutic

The Bible is God's written revelation, and must be interpreted as a piece of writing. The interpreter should be a literate reader, not just in history and theology, but in literature. The actual practice of interpreting the Bible is where the rubber meets the road, where literary theories become literary methods. In the next several paragraphs we will explore the tools of literary criticism as they apply to particular Biblical texts in order to evaluate a literary hermeneutic in action. We will begin by discussing questions for the text, distinguishing genres, and illustrating genre-specific questioning. We will then move on to the importance of the literary form, and evaluate many of its strong points in communicating and interpreting. Finally, we will deal with the unifying effects of literary analysis.

If a person reads for comprehension or even for pleasure, that person will not merely experience the text, but will seek to find some sort of meaning in it. We may

formulate this seeking into specific questions which may be asked of any text, especially if it is literary. If we experience the meaning in the form (as we have argued earlier) than the form of the writing holds for us the truth. We must first ask "what genre is it?" There are stories (Jacob's ladder), parables (The Good Samaritan), historical accounts ("In the days of Caesar Augustus…"), and many more. We will deal with genres a little later, but for now let's look at some other questions which are pertinent to our discussion. "Does the writing utilize archetypes (recurring images, symbols, and allusive details of importance)?" For instance food, water, and blood are all used by John in his gospel to identify with universal humanity's need for belief in Jesus. In John chapter four we find several useful examples of archetypal meaning transference. Water, food, the harvest, and laborers are all used by Jesus to symbolize different aspects of spiritual reality. If we pick up on these little gems throughout scriptures, the Bible is tied together in a web of meaning, constantly enlarging or defining some element of experiential reality, revealing a complex composition of extended context throughout the scriptures and beyond (reaching even to our front door, and the world of novels, television dramas, movies, and the theater). Our culture, (or cultures, for those who would argue against an overarching American "mono-culture") is deeply imbued with much of the symbolic language, structuralism, and love for art and beauty that is everywhere evident in the scriptures. In fact, cultures the world over use such objects as rivers, stones, bread, and the moon to symbolize different aspects of experiential (and religious) reality, making archetypal literary analysis an important endeavor.

The next question we should ask of the text is "If there are vivid details, what do they contribute to the passage?" Good writers spend time on things they think are

important. For instance, large portions of each gospel are dedicated to telling the story of Jesus' last week, crucifixion and resurrection, while we hear practically nothing about his childhood or early adulthood. At times writers draw out subtle details in the setting or characters in order to bring home a point more forcefully. As in Jesus' Good Samaritan story, where we read of a Jewish man's brutal beating and three unlikely passersby who each respond to him in their own ways depending on their cultural/spiritual background, and the details of the Samaritan's neighborliness (wine, oil, taking him to an inn on his donkey) shock the reader by their visions of physical helplessness, apathy, and true love. Also writers often repeat or continually allude to objects or experiences of importance.

Next, the text should be asked "How does this passage speak to universal human experience?" This question deals with the archetypal nature of plots, characters, and settings, (as well as other important genre-specific areas) and helps to bring out the passage's experiential flavor and complexity. It is a text-based reader-response to the Bible, and must be developed from the form, content, and setting in the passage to avoid over-subjectivity. This question elicits from the Bible its devotional, practical, and experiential side. When Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well and asks for water the reader is confronted with the universal human experiences of overcoming racism, social elitism, and religious condescension, and the meeting of physical needs (and later in the story spiritual needs as well). Jesus used the experiential metaphor about water to dialogue with the woman in order to bring her to belief in himself, using human experience (thirst, racism, religiosity, immorality) to convey super-human experience.

Another question which should be asked of a text is "What literary forms does this passage use to convey meaning?" Often these forms are genre-specific, and should

be analyzed thus. The Book of Psalms often uses metaphors, similes, parallelism, chiasms, and richly pastoral language to convey helplessness, security, belief, complaint, praise, and the experiences of every day life. The distinctly poetic language of the psalms should be analyzed literately (with knowledge of poetry analysis). For instance, Psalm 73 portrays God through a simile as "awakening" to judge the wicked, as a dreamer awakes and his dream flies away. Later, God is said to be always in intimate communion with the righteous man, and this idea is conveyed through a picture of God anthropomorphically holding his right hand, which is a symbol of friendship, and is still a common gesture when walking and talking with your fellow man in the Middle East and Africa. The Psalmist declares that "my flesh and my heart may fail" but that God is the strength of his heart and his inheritance. If these few poetic examples were taken literally (instead of literarily) the meaning would be greatly distorted (metaphors are not meant to be actual pictures of reality, but rather signs or journeys toward reality through experience and relationship). Poetic literary form allows the poet to convey meanings, relationships, experiences, and feelings (both theocentric and anthropocentric in this psalm), and gives the reader a world to experience through heightened pictorial language.

The last two questions we will deal with ask "How does this passage relate to the history or theology of the Bible?" and "What seems to be the message?" These two questions may at first glance seem to be disparate, but on closer analysis well will see that they are truly similar in content. The literary form of the Bible should be taken together with its theological content and historical setting in order to derive meaning. If the Bible is not viewed as theocentric literature, we are left with a book that is devoid of original purpose—to bring humanity into good relationship with God through revelation

of God's actions, words, and feelings toward humanity. If the Bible is not viewed historically, it is deprived of its power of truthfulness of God's actions in space-time, and is a book of non-real events, people, and settings in which readers have mistakenly put their belief. The message of a text must be holistically viewed—historically, theologically and literarily—in order to receive, understand, and act on that which is communicated. Ryken argues "In a literary text is impossible to separate . . . content from form" (29, 1984).

Now that we have looked at several general questions to ask of a text, let's move on to the problem of genre identification and analysis, examining several extended examples in order to illustrate our points. A literary genre is a type of writing that uses established conventions specific to its genre. If this seems to be a circular definition, it is because what makes genres into genres is close relation to other works in their genre. Suppose we have a set of number (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and we wish to use several of them to perform a mathematical function. We want only odd numbers in our new set of numbers (1, 3, 5) and this set contains particular odd-number subsets (1, 3) and (1, 5). We can see that these are odd-number subsets and are thus "genre" specific number subsets, and are thus different in composition from the even number subset (2, 4). In comparison, the presence or absence of certain literary traits in a piece of writing help to make the writing genre-specific (not mathematically, but in form and style). There are stories (tragedies, comedies, epics, hero stories, parables, pronouncement stories, etc), poems, encomiums, satires, visionary literature, epistles, hymns, proverbs, orations and on and on. Each genre specific type of wiring uses accepted forms to convey meaning in its own particular way, and must be understood and analyzed for what it is.

Let's look at a few examples of genre specific questioning and analysis in order to evaluate more illustratively the literary methods of interpretation. We will begin with an literary analysis of several proverbs, and move on to an example of satire from the Bible. Proverbs are diverse in nature, so we will deal with each single proverb as a complete unit in itself. But first we will ask some pertinent questions of proverbs in general in order to analyze each proverb genre specifically. Some important questions are: 1- Is the proverb primarily prescriptive or descriptive? 2- What observations from everyday life are presented? 3- What figurative, poetic, or concrete language does the proverb utilize? 4- What simple and profound meanings are discovered? 5- What values, virtues, or vices are observed (Ryken 1984)? We will now examine two separate proverbs, analyzing them according to the framework provided by these questions in an effort to interpret the proverbs genre-specifically.

Do not boast about tomorrow,

For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

This proverb is explicitly prescriptive, telling the reader that they must not do something. Both lines emphasize negatives. A person should not boast about the future because of their lack of omniscience. This proverb may seem to be abstract, but in reality it speaks of the cold hard facts. Life is uncertain. We see a person in our mind's eye who is boasting about winning the lottery tomorrow, or bragging to his friend that his baseball team will win out over all the opposition. In the second line, we find the reason why this person is a fool. The person doesn't even know if they will live or die, win or lose, achieve success or fail in the future. For humans the future is foggy. A day, in this

proverb, is pictured as "bringing forth" events that are presently uncertain to man. The simple message is for us not to count our eggs before they hatch. But the profound meaning underlying this observation is the recognition of our own limitations. The value of leaving the future in God's hands is found, and the vice of "blind" boasting is opposed.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
Profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

This proverb describes vividly and in a contrasting way the actions and reactions of those in different relationships. The author observes that a true friend knows that love is hurtful at times. A person may receive advice which is stinging in its reception, but truthful in its content, but he must guard against flattery and the "Yes-man syndrome." Here the friend is pictured as wounding someone for their own good, and an enemy is seen as profusely "kissing up" to the person. The proverb is only two lines of simple and scantily detailed description, but is profound in the implications it makes against "brown-nosing" and for the pain involved in true friendship. Honesty and forthrightness are the implied prescriptions, while flattery and unfaithfulness in friendship are revealed as vices.

If a person were to approach these two proverbs as if they were universal truths or historical facts, the outcome of the analysis would be much different. The wounds of a friend are not always faithful, and enemies don't always kiss profusely, so the second proverb cannot be universally true or historically accurate one hundred percent of the time. The first proverb is a sort of maxim for living, but it is much more than that. It is a specific manifestation of the principles of trust, patience, humility, and the limited nature of man's knowledge. If we merely take its face value, its voice in many complex

situations becomes mute. It becomes a very limited universal truth. But it is obvious from the genre of the proverb that the application is to be seen in its literary guise. The verse is not just talking about boasting, but is applicable in its principles to various complex situations. Its meaning is narrowed too sharply by a non-literary approach. Its contrasting parallelism is lost. Proverbs become straightforward statements meant to be obeyed literally, and the beautiful imagery is ignored in the "pursuit for truth". Many historians would seek to analyze these proverbs in light of their authors and the circumstances of the writing, and would pay little attention to what was actually being said, or how it was being said. This historical approach, while often enlightening, hardly ever approaches the text as it is (holistically) and reduces creative expression into formulas of causative formation. So these two proverbs were written down by a temple scribe in the late eighth century BC and were developed historically from ancient myths and traditions handed down to them orally, or were borrowed from neighboring cultures and their literature. This information about the proverbs may be interesting, and may or may not be true, but it is usually beside the point. The proverb must be read and analyzed itself if meaning is to be found. The proverbs are a literary genre, and belong with others of their kind. They must be understood and read in the light of their wider contexts (similar proverbs, human experience, and the literary nature of proverbs). It is not enough to know about their history, or their theological significance, we must interact with the actual proverb itself if we are ever to bring it to heart.

Let us now move on to examine a short piece of satire. Satire exposes the vices of its objects and offers as its true standard the person of God. A satire like that presented in Amos chapter six could be interpreted in many different ways. The historical

circumstances could be brought out, its theological considerations could be observed, and its literary characteristics could be analyzed to discover its meaning. But without the last approach, the two former approaches would be helplessly lost in its images (did everybody in Israel really drink wine out of bowls?), its biting remarks (is God really hateful, or is the prophet just mad?) and its standard by which all things are criticized (why such utter pessimism?) But if we recognize and appreciate the form of the writing, we will find ourselves immersed in a world of pictorial decadence contrasting with the measure of God. Several literary questions that need to be asked of any piece of satire are: 1- What objects are being attacked? 2- What is the satiric vehicle (i.e. story, poem, portrait, character sketch, or direct or derogatory denunciation)? 3- What is the tone of the satire (Horatian or Juvenalian)? 4- What is the norm or standard by which things are criticized (Ryken 1984)? We will now examine a Biblical example of satire, analyzing it according to the framework provided by these questions in an effort to interpret the work genre-specifically.

In Amos chapter six, verses four through eight, we find a short satire denunciating those of Israel and Judah who are smug and secure. In verse one of chapter six the woe begins. It is immediately addressed (like a letter) to the complacent and secure leaders of Israel and Judah. They are said (in verse three) to put off the evil day, and bring near the reign of terror by their inaction. Amos describes them as laying down, lounging, feasting, playing and making music, drinking, putting on lotion, and not grieving. The objects of his scorn are smug, rich, and secure in their pride as evidenced by the descriptions of beds of ivory, couches, choice lambs, fattened calves, harps, musical

instruments, wine by the bowlful, and the finest of lotions. They are gluttons and drunks, both idle and lazy.

How is this satire portrayed? It is a poetically constructed direct denunciation that mocks these complacent Jews. The prophet Amos uses a brief sketch of their actions in order to reveal to them their own smugness. The times of justice and exile were yet to come. In these passages he elucidates several of the reasons for Israel and Judah's coming judgment. He could have just said "Hey, you guys are materialistic!" but instead he describes the extent of their situation. Not only does he go into detail about their assets and actions, he goes on in the passage to condemn their character. These people did not grieve. Judgment was upon them and they couldn't care less (vs. 6). They are characterized as being uncaring and selfish, thus bringing upon themselves their own judgment. God comes on the scene and says "I abhor" and "hate" the pride and strongholds of Israel (here in parallel form) and "will deliver up the city and all that is in it" (Amos 6:8). The poetic construction of the satire is readily apparent. Laying and lounging, eating this and eating that, and playing and composing music are all parallels which reinforce the extent of the materialism and complacency. The objects of scorn are drunks and they smell nice, but they are uncaring about their own ruin. That is why they would be the first to go into exile, and the party would be over. In the next verse, six times God is referred to, assuring the people that their judgment would have a Divine origin. The passage we are dealing with ends with two sets of parallel lines, the first two lines giving reasons for judgment, and the last two lines declaring what the judgment will be. After the satire about what the people feel (secure and complacent) and do (live at ease) God tells them how he feels (angry), and what he will do (he will destroy them).

Thus, the balance is complete, revealing a foil. They feel safe, but God says they are not. They love to put confidence in their stuff, but God hates it. Here we witness a striking contrast between the two groups (God and uncaring humanity).

What is the tone of this particular satire? We are dealing with a mean-spirited attack, not a subtle caricature. While the pictures presented are humorous when envisioned, they are not nice in any sense. True, Amos is not being as mean as he could be, but his attack is full of sharp words. He could have said that the leaders were fat cows who drank and ate and slept like brute beasts (which he comes close to saying). He could have said that all of their riches were nothing but poop. But instead he (and God) chose to artistically design a warning about complacency in the face of impending judgment ("the day of the Lord" spoken of in chapter 5). Amos presents the way it is, and the way it will be. The situation will be reversed. These smug leaders were always the first to enjoy pleasure and leisure, and they will remain the first (to go into exile). God scorns rather than laughs at the leaders' complacency.

What is the norm or standard by which these leaders are criticized? God and the godly man are implied as norms throughout this satire. As Amos satirizes the actions of these people, he gives us a negative view of reality. Consequently, we see implied in this pessimism the overriding norm to which they are being compared. The people are getting fat, and weak, and easy. They don't care anymore. Amos wants them to be mindful of the coming day of the Lord, and to grieve, and fast, and mourn—to humble themselves before God and seek forgiveness. The godly man, though never mentioned explicitly, would set just this sort of standard. Also in focus (this time explicitly) is the person of God as a standard. Perhaps the reason why God is referred to by so many

names in verse eight is that he must make very clear to them that he is their God. He is powerful, he is sovereign, and he is ever-present. He is telling them that life is supposed to be about him. The theocentrism admonished in verse eight is in direct contrast to the godless materialism and complacency presented earlier. God hates the way these people feel and act. He is trying to stir them into repentance and reconciliation. He is the balance that has measured them and found them wanting.

Why is the literary form important? We have just looked at two examples of genre-specific questioning, which brought to the forefront the importance of genre identification and analysis as tools in biblical interpretation. Not only that, we have viewed several important aspects of the literary form. It is memorable, loveable, and life-like. Aphorisms are short pithy generalizations which aid the memory in their succinct statements of simple yet profound meanings. Satires sprinkling biting humor over open wounds not mended are glaring sparks of memorable standard-setting. Stories utilizing patterns of repetition, surprise, and characterization stay with a person forever. Letters written to church's dealing with specific problems are jammed pack with oft-quoted lines of exhortation and encouragement. Literary forms afford poets and creative writers a chance to use above-ordinary language to convey meaning, thus leaving in the reader a sense of experience in that which is communicated. Humanity remembers the ambitious super-ordinary language of its greatest authors with reverie and we find in those words a sense of security in other-worldly form. Literature is what we love. To listen and tell stories. To compose and sing songs. To let our hearts and minds free. To experience the unexperienceable. To create in beauty and skillfulness "words of delight" that enchant the soul and point to truth and reality. These words lift us to the heaves and plunge us to

the depths of hell. They lead us to experience "the same in the other" and in them form embodies unity and variety (Lewis 1967). The literary form is intensely life-like. It is often concrete in its language and very rarely abstractly revealing. We experience in literature fruit-laden trees, broad strong castle towers, rushing rivers, fat cows, beaten travelers, and giants. The literary form involves us in the actions and lives of others in its communication. It is imaginative in conception and delivery, and requires intensive interpretation. It is rich in historical, theological, and literary background. We are often surprised by its simple profundity. We are always confronted with its non-straightforward and complex version of reality and are forced to live what it speaks in order to understand what it says. In a way, the author and reader become part of the form, dialoging with the picture, unifying horizons. The author inputs meaning into the text, the reader seeks that meaning in the text, and yet in a way the meaning resides in all (the writer, reader, and text). The literary method thus avoids both the intentional and the affective fallacies of interpretation. It recognizes the writer, the form of the writing and the role of the reader and seeks to holistically interpret the form, content, and setting as they exist (historically, theologically, and literarily).

Another important strength of the literary approach to Biblical interpretation is its emphasis on unity. Stories are taken as completely unified units, and overlaid structures of balance, contrast and plot construction are properly recognized as unifying elements in the texts of the Bible. This assumption of unity in the text is one of the literary approach's greatest assets. Non-literary liberal Biblical scholars and theologians have traditionally dissected the text in an effort to get at its "true" form, which usually ends up being whatever they feel the most comfortable with. Non-literary conservative Biblical

scholars and theologians have often used the Bible as a mere source of theology and apologetics, ignoring literary context. Conservative literary Biblical scholars find unity and cohesion in the form of the written work, and make it their source of analysis, while at the same time recognizing the importance of the theological and historical aspects of the Bible in their interpretation. It is good to see such important literary scholars as Ryken and Frye recognize the importance of traditional historical and theological scholarship to their own inquiries into the unity of the Bible. Truly the literary approach has been from the time of the Bible's conception and will be to the end of the earth, a major "eye glass" to the Scripture's meaning in form.

The Richness of Divine Revelation

The following section is a defense of the inspiration and reliability of the Scriptures from a literary point of view. If the Bible is a piece of literature mightn't it just be literature (and not divine in origin or historically and theologically reliable?). Let us first deal with the issue of human language and inspiration for that is of utmost importance in our interpretation and understanding of the Bible, and then we will discuss how the Bible can be both literarily artistic and true in history and theology. Afterward, we will return to the discussion of finding meaning in form.

What is human language? It is the means by which humans communicate meaning by using symbols of reference to experience one another's "worlds." Body movements and gestures, positioning, contextual awareness, syntax, morphology, phonology, conventions of speech type, writings of various kinds, inflections and tones; all of these are ways of expressing meaning in form (communicating). Humans are creative, inspiring, and often purposeful in their language (much like their Creator). If

humans want to express or understand meaning they must first clothe it in some kind of form. The Bible was written in many different languages originally (Hebrew, Chaldean, Aramaic, and Greek) and its writers used traditional ways of writing from their parts of the world. But the question is whether or not God inspired such man-based forms of writing. If a person believes that the Bible was written in many different languages (which it was) and can still hold on to the inspiration of that language, there is no difference between an inspired human language and an inspired human form, and consequently a person should believe in both the inspiration of the Bible's actual vocabulary and of its particular literary forms. God revealed himself in actions and words to various people at various times and spoke and acted in forms which humans understood (at least in part). God speaks human language. In the same way he speaks in human forms so that we can come to know and experience him, which is what revelation is all about. It makes no difference if that form is primarily historical ("In one year you will have a child), theological ("Through your seed all nations will be blessed") or literary ("As the stars in the sky, so will your descendants be, too innumerable to be counted") (while there three illustrations are good representatives of their respective classes, they are not simple in their form, but are rather complex historical-theological, theological-literary, and literary-historical accounts). God reveals himself anthropomorphically and incarnationally. Jesus is our supreme example. Though human he was God. The Bible, though human in origin is divine in origin. The literary approach acknowledges and applauds this human/divine interaction which presents a rich view of inspiration. It is rich because it utilizes such variety, artistry in delivery and composition, and fully human experiential concreteness on the part of the human authors, and such

imminence, incarnational transcendence, and appreciation of human cultures, forms, and languages on the part of the divine author.

But how can a text be both literary and true to history and theology? Doesn't acknowledging the literary traits of the Bible's form force us to turn from the Bible's reliability? True, if a witness on the stand were to recite a poetic account for his testimony before the judge and jury he might be arrested for attempting to distort or conceal the truth. But this is a primary misunderstanding about the nature of the Bible. It is not meant to tell the facts, all the facts, and nothing but the facts, so help me God. Because of its richness in form we come to realize that it is often not a scientific (or even ordinary) account of what transpired (historically or theologically) but is often rather a true to life experience-communication, which utilizes the many facets of the human (not just their brain, but also their hearts, their wills, and their souls). An ordinary or scientific account of the facts could not have contained all that the Bible brings us to experience. We might have known about a God who did this and that to him and her, there and then. The Bible in its extent does no serve this purpose, but rather leads the reader to experience the truth, and its reliability is attested to by its truthfulness to the human condition and also by its historically accurate episodes and details, and its constantly Theocentric push. The Bible often does not just point to the truth, as a witness on the stand would, but rather leads the individual reader and the community of believers into the truth—of humanity without God, of humanity with God, and of humanity alongside God (Weathers 1994).

Here again we must admit that the form is the clothing of the meaning. They are together and inseparable to a certain degree. The Bible's reliability and inspiration are

clearly evident in its form. When we ask genre-specific questions, or apply other literary tools of analysis to a text it often yields such clear theological and historical meanings that we are astounded at its ability to convey truth succinctly in such non-straightforward ways. The Bible is more of a journey that a sign. How then can this acknowledgment of meaning in form undermine orthodox Christianity's view of inspiration and reliability? It cannot. The Bible is truthful, but not stupidly so. It holds your hand, but it does not give the interpreter the desired goal without traveling its steps. It is God who draws the reader into the stories and lines of poetry, through the language of the artist and the human creator. Truth embodied in human form is affective and complex, and is true to reality. An attempt at the truth that seeks it beyond the form (instead of in it) is all too often overly simplistic and focuses on unknown and unknowable intention instead of that which has been used to bring the meaning to life (the form). The literary method is not the only method, just as the Bible is not only literary. But its literary form must be interpreted literarily, its historical setting understood historically, and its theological meaning theologically. These are not three boats, but one, by which we travel the sea of the texts (set in the waves of humanity) to the shore of God. These books we were given so long ago lead us on, with the Spirit who brings us life, God in the form of man we read, and in this place are brought into the lives, actions, thoughts, stories, poetry, and events of God's historico-theologico-literary revelation.

PART IV
THE BIBLE IN THEOLOGY AND APOLOGETICS

CHAPTER 16

THREE THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO AMERICAN PLURALISM

An American Pluralistic Worldview

Diverse races, societies, cultures, religions, and worldviews are represented in the melting pot of America. In the presence of a plurality of worldview options, many have opted out of explicitly exclusive worldviews in favor of pluralism. Pluralism acknowledges the value and validity of all worldviews, yet calls into question exclusivity within those views. While many individuals in America hold to (or are familiar with) only one general worldview, they are often aware of and open to differing worldviews. This openness to other worldviews is not pluralism until the validity and value of alternate worldviews is assumed. Pluralism espouses relativity in worldviews (all worldviews have equal value and validity) using key words like *tolerance* and *acceptance* (the terminology of pluralism also borrows heavily from the many worldviews it encompasses, yet changes the meanings of those terms to fit its own universal inclusivism). Six important aspects of American pluralism are: (a) consumerism, (b) the spectator mentality, (c) individualism, (d) divine absenteeism, (e) ethical relativism, and (f) Postmodern nihilism and jadedness. David W. Henderson's (1998) discussion of these six aspects and the historical, geographical, and economic factors that initiated and perpetuated them serves as a useful starting point for an analysis of American pluralism.

Consumerism affects every area of American life. Billboards, telemarketers, commercials on the radio and television, and pop-up advertisements on the internet confront Americans every day with new and improved products and services. American citizens are encouraged by their government to spend more money in order to boost the economy. Americans have trouble picking out what clothes to wear, what food to eat, and what banks to use because of the plethora of options that exist for them. "The idea is that it is beneficial to spend, to accumulate, to buy primarily with thought of one's own needs . . . (and) selfish desires" (Henderson 1998, 50). Contemporary consumerism grew out of Adam Smith's economic theories concerning free market economies. Consumerism sped up as the Industrial Revolution produced a flood of new options for buying and selling. America was rich in natural resources and its geographical boarders were always expanding, making more and more resources available for use. Consumer marketing and advertisement exploded in the early 20th century and spread the consumer spirit with it (53). Planes, trains, and automobiles have made products more accessible worldwide. All of these factors have helped to fuel American pluralism. The vast plurality of products has accustomed Americans to getting what they want, when they want it, and how they want it. Consumerism has become a part of many Americans' worldviews. Alternative worldviews are seen as a matter of taste and consumer decision. Validity is not as important as value, attractiveness, and utility. Americans are shopping for worldviews, and miss-matching thought structures to fit their desires.

Americans are spectators. They would rather watch "The Real Life" on television than live a real life themselves. Inventions like the telegraph, camera, and telephone helped to create this spectator mentality by "removing information from its context"

(Henderson 1998, 73). Radio, movies, and television broadened the horizons of human entertainment, but failed to foster a sense of meaning and resulted in boredom. Americans are distracted and pacified in the privacy of their own homes (75–76). This has developed into a distracted, private, and passive approach to worldview formulation and analysis.

Americans are increasingly isolated and individualistic. The humanism of the Renaissance brought with it an emphasis on the significance of the individual (Henderson 1998, 98). The rise of democracies in the west (especially in America) was accompanied by the theme of individual rights. The Enlightenment and its rival movement in Romanticism both emphasized individuality in different ways (the first as the root of reason, the second as the meaning of personhood) (99–100). The founding documents of America are interpreted by many as upholding the rights of the individual above all else. Children are taught the value of "being yourself." Increasing social pressure, self-service, and geographic mobility has fractured the idea of the nuclear family, the extended family, and the community. Many Americans believe strongly in the personal nature of worldviews, and the right of individuals to choose between worldviews or to formulate new worldviews in the context of their own individuality.

Secularism is widespread in America. The scientific revolution, viewed through the lens of the Enlightenment, introduced an enormous gap between humanity and God (Henderson 1998, 127). The Enlightenment gave birth to views of God that found Him distant, absent, or compartmentalized (127–130). Darwinian evolution sounded the death knell for God's existence. God has been pushed from the schools, the sciences, and the philosophical worldviews of Americans. There is no longer any place for Him. American

pluralism allows for people's belief in God (or unbelief in Him), but not for God's absolute existence (or absolute knowledge concerning Him) (Hick 1983). In America, secular "Christianity" is increasingly common.

Moral relativity is on the rise in America. Thinkers during the Enlightenment asserted that humans could be trusted, and that a rights-based morality was justifiable on rational grounds (Henderson 1998, 160). Pragmatism and existentialism pointed to the utility and ultimate meaninglessness of value judgments (161). Many Americans live in large cities where moral pluralism abounds, and through electronic media the rural population is likewise infected with this tendency for ethical tolerance. *Right* and *wrong* are often treated as oversimplifications of complex behavior and motives, and as matters of taste or social discretion. This relativism has affected Americans' worldviews by destroying any standard for absolute truth, by ignoring distinctions and contradictions, and by establishing individual human autonomy from moral law.

Postmodern nihilism in America has found the rainbow, only to discover that the pot at the end of it is empty and broken. The scientific and mathematical theories of general and special relativity, quantum mechanics, and fuzzy logic, have led to doubt in the existence of an objective perspective (Henderson 1998, 190). The information explosion has inundated Americans with an overwhelming amount of data and of alternative ways of seeing the world. Life is irreconcilably fractured into many parts, some of which are mutually contradictory. Cognitive dissonance is no longer avoided. No absolute meaning is believed to exist, making possible worldview eclecticism, specialization, and compartmentalization.

Pluralism: America's Most Critical Theological Issue

Several critical theological issues in America demand attention. Divine immanence and transcendence, liberation, environmentalism, a loss of biblical authority, and spiritualism all deserve treatment by the modern American theologian, but perhaps no other theological issue is as deeply rooted in American life as theological pluralism. Some form of pluralism is the direct or indirect cause or result of each of these key theological themes. Several key issues characterize religious pluralism in America: (a) a loss of any real sense of objective theological reality, (b) an overemphasis on usefulness, entertainment value, and coherence with materialism, (c) a sense of theological apathy, (d) a glossing over of exclusivist claims, and (e) a tendency to undervalue a holistic theological methodology.

Religious pluralism has clearly made its mark on modern American Christian apologetics and evangelism. Individual sinners are marketed and entertained. Often very little is said about right and wrong and what it means to be under God's *just* love. Christianity is presented as an elixir for the postmodern blues, but is rarely ever fully articulated and often becomes a jaded form of postmodernism itself. Pluralism should be seen as a significant threat to Christian theology, for apologetics and evangelism are the arm of the church (and God) to the world. If the message is distorted in transmission, eventually the content will be lost (new Christians will know less and less what they should believe, how they should behave, and what they should experience). Not only is this trend dangerous for the transmission of Christianity from generation to generation, it also fails to confront the world with any real, unique, and objective message. While apologetics and evangelism must continue to contextualize their methods, care must be

taken not to merely synthesize the content of the gospel with the American worldview (Lingenfelter and Mayers 1986).

An emphasis on subjectivity and tolerance in American culture has led many people (and even professing Christians) to become relativists. The country is neither fully secular, nor fully sacred. It is decidedly noncommittal and diverse in church and state policies. “What is true for you may not be true for me,” is heard across America daily in schools, workplaces, and yes, even in churches. Tolerance of other religions and worldviews has become so engrained in American heads that exclusivists are often the only ones that are excluded. Many Americans no longer believe in the objectivity of meaning, logic, or even beliefs. A Bible verse means what you want it to mean and truth is what you make it. This heavily subjectivist context makes the Assemblies of God’s sixteen fundamental truths seem out of place. What is fundamental? What is truth? Is there even such a thing (or sixteen of them)? Many evangelical church organizations and leaders push strongly for an objective view of reality in Biblical interpretation and theology, but those who populate their churches often live by a different code—tolerate others and understand that the truth cannot be monopolized. Christian leaders and theologians struggle with the content of Christian belief, while their followers run the other way, believing that it doesn’t matter so much what we believe, or why we believe it. All that is important is that we get along with other people in our worldviews, theologies, and biblical interpretations and remember that all religious beliefs are valuable and valid.

Narrative, Process, and Evangelical Theologies Respond to American Pluralism

Narrative Theology's Response to Pluralism

Narrative theology is founded upon three interrelated presuppositions. First, it is assumed that stories are the fundamental building blocks of human understanding (McFague 1982, 15). Second, the Bible and history (personal experiences and literary interpretations of experiences) are primarily stories. Third, the content of truth is only to be understood through the form in which truth is set (which is primarily literary and experiential) (Ryken 1984). Three major approaches to narrative theology are based upon these presuppositions. In the first approach, theology is understood as myth. Theology is said to express the mythical nature of human experience and the importance of myths in societies. All myths are interpreted in terms of their transcendence and renewed imminence (Kliever 1981, 153–184). Individuals and societies interact with myths by crossing over into the horizon of the myth's world picture, and bringing back that horizon into present reality. In the second approach, theology is understood as biography. Theology centers on characters. This theological approach focuses on the personal and subjective experiences of faith in action, and often derives theology from wholly extra-scriptural sources (often from biographical history). In the third approach, theology is understood as parable. It is contended that theology should look to Jesus' use of parables as a guide. Theology, in this view, is a story that expresses dynamic relationships in the world in novel ways and points to God through unexpected occurrences in everyday life (Kliever 1981). Theology's conclusions are not meant to be propositional, but are to be aimed at challenging the status quo of humanity with the surprising presence of the divine

in the world. The metaphor becomes the central tool of the theologian. All of human experience is open to theological inquiry.

Narrative theology responds to pluralism in America with an affirmation of pluralism's importance in capturing universal aspects of the human situation. Theology as myth insists on the value of all myths. Christianity is seen as one of many sources of myths, one of many equally valid worldviews. Theology as biography is an assessment of individual characters in particular circumstances. It places primary theological value in individual personal experience (Kliever 1981). Theology is thus thoroughly personal. Theology as parable finds its center in the metaphor, which is believed to be the building block of humanity's understandings of relationships. No source of metaphors (including the Bible and Christianity) can claim exclusivity of value or validity. Narrative theology openly embraces all religions and worldviews (though often not explicitly). It is believed that pluralism is a positive step toward a holistic human experience of God's actions in the world. This is not a necessary conclusion of narrative theology, but it is a natural one. Theology as story in America is naturally pluralistic due to its pluralistic cultural, philosophical, and religious context.

Process Theology's Response to Pluralism

Process theology is a synthesis of modern evolutionary models of the universe and the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead with the Judeo-Christian worldview (Starner 1997, 36). Whitehead was a mathematician and philosopher who pointed to the existence of change in our universe as a clue to the nature of reality and God. God's original purpose or aim is seen in the world's events, and is a dualistic existence (abstract

and eternal yet physical and temporal) (Grenz and Olson 1992, 136–137). Whitehead espoused a type of panentheism (as do many of the process theologians).

Process theology has been developed under several leading theologians. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's major contribution was his evolutionary/Christian view of history. He pointed to a future event that he termed the "Omega point" that was to be the culmination of creative history and the ultimate synthesis of spirit and matter (Grenz and Olson 1992, 134). This event was viewed as fulfillment of the Christ theme in history. John B. Cobb Jr. took Whitehead's philosophy one step further in his synthesis of Christianity and evolution, and introduced a view of Christ that made "Christ" synonymous with cocreative change in the world (of which Jesus was an example) (138–141). Cobb pushed the teleological aspects of process theology to the forefront, and made God the purposer and ultimate end of all things. Charles Hartshorne brought Whitehead's God into further imminence by making Him a physical existence (Surin 1989, 106). God influences and is influenced by the ever-changing world. God's existence is a given truth, bound up in the existence of everything. The world is a part of (but is not all of) God. The two poles of God's existence (the eternal and the temporal) are seen as two parts of one whole

(107–108). Thomas J. J. Altizer saw God's progression in history as a sort of death of the eternal for the life of the temporal (Kliever 1981, 61–62). God, through creation and incarnation, has died and has lifted our world to a new level. God becomes no longer transcendent and in the events of world history becomes "actualized as Total Immanence" (66). Altizer looked forward to a time when the universe dissolves back into the divine immanence, individuals die, and a monistic reality is resurrected (66).

The main philosophical presuppositions of process theology are: (a) Christianity and modern scientific understandings of reality should be merged; (b) science and reason (both of which are a part of natural theology) are the starting point of theology; (c) God is an evolving transcendent being that is interdependent with the physical world (Grenz and Olson 1992, 32). Process theologians interpret scripture in the light of modern scientific understandings of reality. The Bible does not play a primary role in the development of their theology (science and process philosophy are primary), but is synthesized as a secondary worldview with their philosophical preunderstandings. The Bible is viewed as part of God's intimate connection with history and as a revelation of His changing and creative dipolar nature. In process theology, change is primary. "Since all reality exists in such a state of fluctuation, the meaning of a text in scripture cannot be precise or authoritative" (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993, 106), and because of this "process interpreters do not search for propositional truth; they simply process what the reader has encountered in the text" (107).

Process theology responds to pluralism in America by emphasizing the dipolar nature of God. Cobb (1990) contends that pluralism as it is popularly understood (all religions are equally valid and valuable and should be synthesized) is indefensible, but he goes on to argue for a more fundamental pluralism "that allows each religious tradition to define its own nature and purpose and the role of religious elements within it" (84). How can such fundamental religious contradictions exist? The answer lies in process theology's understanding of the nature of God. John Hick (1983) stresses that process theology's distinction between divine immanence and transcendence "enables us to acknowledge both the one unlimited transcendent Reality and also a plurality of varying

human concepts, images, and experiences of and responses to that Reality" (83). As God changes and becomes immanent He also becomes particularized, jaded, and dead to transcendence (Kliever 1981, 62–66). But the world has hope of meaning and purpose in its future dissolution back into God. The individual is in reality nonexistent apart from his/her unity and interdependence with the world and God. God is not absent, rather He is in us and we are in Him. God takes on American plurality, and exists interdependently with it, changing with it until the culmination of all things comes to pass (i.e., the omega point).

Evangelical Theology's Response to Pluralism

Five central presuppositions of Evangelical theology are: (a) a supernatural world exists which interacts with the natural world; (b) the Bible is God's revelation of Himself in Christ and is the primary source of theology; (c) the Bible is authoritative and inerrant; (d) exegetical methodology should be sensitive to authorial intent; (e) the Bible establishes normative beliefs, behavior, morals, and experience (Fee and Stuart 1993). Evangelical theologians are often faulted for being too authoritarian in their dogmatism. They respond: "Our commitment to the authority of the Bible derives from our prior conviction of its truthfulness" (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993, 110). If the Bible is true—it is argued—then its propositions must be adhered to unswervingly.

Evangelical theology responds to American pluralism with a cry for renewed biblical Christocentrism. Jesus taught that Christianity is not a spectator's sport (Matt. 7:24–27). Belief in Him is not merely useful or pleasing (Luke 9:59–62), it is necessary (John 20:31; Acts 4:12). Individuals must make a personal decision to follow Him (John 21:22), but Christ's body is a diverse and interdependent community (1 Cor. 12). Christ

is not absent in American life (Matt. 28:20), and He is concerned with humanity's everyday needs (Matt. 6:25–34). Jesus calls humans to death in Him (Luke 14:25–27), and resurrection by the Spirit (John 8:51; 11:25–26; Rom. 8) so that they might be in good relationship with God and others. Jesus reveals God's absolute moral standard (Ex. 20:1–21; Matt. 5) and condemns to hell all humans who choose to remain in sin (Rev. 21:6–8). Life has meaning and purpose in Christ (John 15:1–8) and the Bible offers humans a holistic and cohesive worldview in Christ (1 John 5:1–5). Jesus claimed to be the only way to God (John 14:6), and His disciples claimed the same for their master (Acts 4:12). Pluralism makes Christ out to be a liar, and makes His death on the cross superfluous. Pluralism attempts to rid Christianity of the exclusivity of Christ's claims in scripture. Pinnock (1992) asserts that "efforts to revise Christology downward are difficult to accept because they go against the evidence, and they appear to be based on special pleading and hostile presuppositions" (69).

An Evaluation of the Three Theological Responses

The Bible as the Standard

God's revelation of Himself in scripture provides a standard by which to judge theological presuppositions, methods, and conclusions. In modern American theology, this has become a central issue. If God has revealed himself in the world, and especially in the recording of His actions in the world, theologians ought to give this aspect of the theological task their utmost attention, for it is here that God speaks clearest. In the midst of a plurality of theological voices in America and around the world, God's voice in His revelation should remain the center.

How is biblical revelation to be understood? Is the Bible God's primary revelation of Himself and His plan of salvation, or is scripture just one small (and imperfect) part of God's revelation? Jesus is presented in scripture as God's primary self-revelation to the world, and as the only source of salvation (Acts 4:12; Col. 1: 15–23; Heb. 1:1–3). All other revelation must be understood as it relates to Jesus. Paul is adamant about the exclusivity of God's revelation in Christ: "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned" (Gal. 1:9). Biblical revelation must be viewed through this paradigm of exclusive Christocentricism. As such, it is God's revelation of His historic actions and words in the world, recorded by human authors in human language and literary form. All of scripture is God-breathed. God revealed Himself in the way He desired to reveal Himself. Theologians must listen to His voice in scripture's stories, poetry, parables, letters, and prophecies. Theology must seek to come to grips with the stories of the Bible, understanding divine and human elements in the scripture as holistic revelation. God has revealed Himself in the Bible (Rev. 1:8), Christ is the revelation of God in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15), and the Bible is God's word of teaching, correcting, training, and equipping the believer (3:16). Theology, if it is to provide humans with a rational understanding of God in Christ, should seek to understand the Bible—experientially, historically, literarily, and systematically.

While scripture is not specifically intended to provide scientific or philosophical data, it is nevertheless accurate in its descriptions of events and its prescription of a Christocentric worldview. Christianity is a religion that is based on historical events (i.e., the creation of the world, humanity's fall into sin, Jesus' death and resurrection) and must be approached as a worldview (a holistic way of looking at reality). Humans may err in

their interpretation, systemization, and application of biblical revelation, but the Bible itself is inerrant. The Bible is God-breathed, and so is "good." Its purpose is to bring humans to salvation in Christ and to full development as Christians (2 Tim. 3:15–16). It is God's revelation of Himself, not man's search for God. It is God who initiates theology, and man who accepts and seeks to understand God's own self-revelation. The Bible is the standard by which to judge narrative, process, and Evangelical theology's responses to American pluralism.

An Evaluation of Narrative Theology's Response to Pluralism

Narrative theology's first presupposition (stories are the fundamental building blocks of human understanding) fails to deal with abstract, mathematical, and logical thinking in a straightforward manner (these types of thought systems cannot be built from stories). Its second presupposition (the Bible and history are primarily stories) is correct, but narrative theology often fails to acknowledge the importance of historical and abstract theological details, themes, and forms in scripture. Its third presupposition (the content of truth is only to be understood through the literary and experiential form in which it is set) has a tendency to overemphasize the form and neglect the original content. Narrative theologians interpret the task of the theologian as involving a literary analysis of the biblical texts, but often fail to systematize their particularized findings (Ryken 1984).

Theology as myth subjectivizes faith and relativizes religion. All religions are seen as equally useful mythical systems. While it must be admitted by the conservative interpreter of scripture that the Bile is a story, narrative theology goes too far in relativizing the content of the story, so that in the end all stories are the same. This is not a distinctly Christian theology, and is overly universalistic. Theology as biography falls

prey to the same problems (i.e., relativity and subjectivity) as does theology as myth. Theology as parable is correct in its emphasis on the importance of the metaphor and human experience in theology, but denigrates the abstract truth of scripture in favor of the pictorial and concrete nature of parables. This seems to miss Jesus' point with parables (i.e., to teach [Ryken 1984, 152]) and to make the formulation of standard beliefs impossible. All three approaches to narrative theology suppose that the only propositions to be adhered to are their own stated presuppositions concerning the narrative nature of life and reality.

Narrative theology is often reader-oriented in its interpretation of scripture. The reader provides the meaning and becomes the final authority of meaning in the text unless "controlling factors" are utilized (i.e., the use of more objective and holistic methods of analysis) (Starner 1997, 41; Ryken 1992). Its reader-oriented approach focuses on the reader's (not the writer's) intentions in the text (McNight 1988, 150). "Biblical texts are perceived and interpreted in quite different ways as a result of changes in worldview and in social surroundings within any given worldview" (149). Narrative theologians view the Bible as a book, with a plot, episodic development, characters, and settings. This is diversely understood as following the paradigm of the parable, myth, and biography. The reader experiences another world. The Bible plays the role of a story in the wider world story. Narrative theologians focus on the Bible in the context of other religious books, myths, and traditions (McKim 1997, 127). They focus on the characters of the Bible and compare them with historical Christian characters to assess what Christianity ought to look like in the reader's life (128). They look at the Bible as a source of metaphors that address the human situation and use scripture's symbols, metaphorical relationships, and

stories to challenge contemporary existence (128–129). The gospel becomes “a story that gives you a way of being in the world” (Hauerwas and Burrell 1977, 73).

The Bible tends to take a secondary role in narrative theology under the reader’s experiences and understandings. It is important mainly as a piece of literature in continuity with human existence. The Bible is one among many sources for theology. All stories have equal authority. In contrast, the Bible in propositionist theology is important as the primary foundation of truth. For liberal theology, the Bible is a flawed (though useful) human conception of the God-man relationship and dialogue, but is useful for its symbology (a vein shared by narrative theology). In process theology, the Bible is important as a source of human experience and is to be synthesized with modern understandings of reality, but is understood more abstractly than in narrative theology (which emphasizes concreteness). Reader-oriented narrative theologies have the danger of subjectivity and relativity. Narrative theology is inclined to undervalue the importance of historical intentionality and the uniqueness of God’s revelation in scripture and in Christ.

American theologians tend to emphasize the abstract, scientific, and often dehumanizing aspects of theology. Narrative theology presents a challenge to these tendencies. It explores the function of stories in the dissemination of the gospel, the construction and analysis of theology, and the evaluation of the human situation. Stories are central to the human psyche. Narrative theology points to the significance of form, relationship, and function, and the role of the reader in interpretation. It is open to the metaphorical and literary aspects of the Bible. It seeks to open up new worlds for the reader to experience (not just accept).

Narrative theology, however, fails at several points. First, and most importantly, narrative theology can easily become too reader-oriented (and therefore subjective). This reader-orientation in hermeneutics is made more dangerous by narrative theology's unrestrained openness to all stories, characters, myths, and metaphors. It consigns scripture to a back seat in theological construction and analysis. Without an absolute standard for theology, it fails to achieve normativeness for Christian belief, behavior, morals, or experience. Second, it often relativizes religious belief (and approaches universalism). Third, it overlooks important didactic, propositional, and historical agendas, themes, and details in scripture. Fourth, it undervalues the import of objective abstract (or even concrete) truth. It emphasizes description of the human situation and neglects prescription. Literary explication can and should be used as a complementary tool with historical-grammatical analysis in the exegesis of scripture, but narrative theology's wholesale dismissal of propositionist theology is unacceptable in view of its own weaknesses. It fits comfortably within an American pluralistic worldview. Christian theology becomes the story of increasing pluralism.

An Evaluation of Process Theology's Response to Pluralism

The assumptions of process theology are questionable in light of a biblical view of reality. Process theology deviates widely from traditional Christian theology and distorts the nature of God and the world. While science's views on the nature of reality are in constant state of flux causing major paradigm shifts, God is proclaimed by the Bible as being immutable (Num. 23:19; Psalm 102:26–27; 33:11; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17) (Erickson 1998). A self-revealing God is the only sure starting point of God-knowledge (31–35). The fall has affected humankind's relationship with God so that nature and

reason are not perfectly untainted revelations of God. The Bible teaches that God is different than the world (Gen. 1:1; Is. 55:9; Jer. 10:10–11), and that He created the world not because it was necessary or because He was dependant on its existence, but rather because His will purposed to create in order to show His transcendent love to His creation through the death of His Son on the cross (John 5:26; Acts 17:25) (Erickson 1998, 294–298).

Process theology's basis in evolution and dipolar theism differs greatly from the presuppositions of the Bible's "world horizon" (Dockery 1992). McKim (1999) offers two functions of scripture for the process theologian: (a) it is a source of doctrine (119–120), and (b) it is a presentation of "possibilities of experience that go beyond the experience of a society not informed by scripture" (121). While these two functions are likewise affirmed in traditional theism, the Bible's secondary role in the development of process theology relegates scripture to a place in which distortion is a constant danger. The Bible is not viewed as self-authoritative, but must cohere with what is "self-evident" to the interpreter (121). Process theology's philosophical presuppositions are the basis of this self-evidence. The Bible is viewed as a part of God's unfolding action. Thus, Jesus of Nazareth in scripture is God incarnate self-evidently, and the interpreter's perceptions of God's love in Jesus "tells us that God's subjective form in feeling the world is love" (Suchocki 1982, 104). In process theology, human philosophy and "prehension" is a tyrant over original scriptural meaning.

Process theology has several positive features. It seems to cohere easily with modern scientific theories (mainly evolution). It focuses on the immanence of God. In process theology, God suffers with the world, and is with us in our present fallen state. It

views history and revelation as a process with teleological momentum. The culmination of historical purpose helps give meaning to seemingly insignificant human drama.

In spite of its positive attributes, process theology is not an adequate Christian theology. It ascribes ultimate authority to modern ideologies of science. It is panentheistic (something process theologians must realize is foreign to traditional Christianity and Judaism). “Dependence on the processes of the world compromises quite seriously the absolute and unqualified dimensions of God” (Erickson 1998, 306). It dissolves the person of Christ into a theme, utilizing Jesus as a mere metaphor. God becomes no longer a personal being and is made “little more than an aspect of reality” (306–307). It is syncretistic in its attitudes toward other religions and borrows much from eastern thought. Process theology is attractive to Americans because it makes no absolute claims on their lives, it offers a God that is as jaded as they are, and it seems to fill the world with purpose. But it fails to achieve any normativeness in its own precepts or to establish any objective truth claims. What makes Whiteheadian philosophy self-evident truth? If process theology were truly based on self-evident truth, why have its presuppositions and conclusion not been universally recognized as such? Process theology has become its own self-evident truth. Process theology overemphasizes divine immanence, and distorts the meaning of transcendence. In process theology, God changes, dies, creates the world in order to dissolve it into Himself, is in the world, and the world is in Him (Grenz and Olson 1992, 137–138). This is not the God of Christianity.

An Evaluation of Evangelical Theology’s Response to Pluralism

Evangelical theologians focus primarily on the authority of scripture, and secondarily on the role of tradition, the church, reason, and experience. They seek to

defend the Bible's inerrancy at every turn and presuppose a supernaturalistic worldview, although many (excluding Charismatics and Pentecostals) are hard-pressed to provide explanations about the seeming contradiction between their faith in biblical supernaturalism and disavowal of contemporary supernaturalism. They use reason and historical, scientific, philosophical, linguistic, and literary tools to analyze the Bible's message, which is their primary source for theology (Fee and Stuart 1993). Evangelical theologians have at times become isolationist as they have sought to stay true to the scripture (establishing new seminaries, denominations, and international associations), but have also been the greatest proponents of the growth of Christianity around the world (Grenz and Olson 1992). A tendency for authoritarianism is a constant danger, but has often been averted by referral back to the basic authority of scripture over the authority of reason, tradition, the church, or experience. They conclude that God has revealed Himself in and through scripture and that He is both transcendent and immanent. They reaffirm ancient articles of the faith (especially in the area of Christology) as they seek to grapple with current political, moral, and spiritual issues and debates.

There has at times been an overemphasis on personal experience in the Evangelical camp (especially in the areas of conversion and spirituality), but this experiential dimension has lent much to their apologetic effort (Grenz and Olson 1992). In the end, their biblically-based theocentrism has allowed them to remain a relatively stable theological approach. Evangelical presuppositions, methods, and conclusions seek to stay true to the biblical revelation of God, and bring the good news of God's self-revelation in Christ to an all-too-often relativistic American culture.

Conclusions

Narrative and process theology both fail to be convincing theological responses to American pluralism because they deny any objective truth (making their own presuppositions, methods, and conclusions fully subjective and thus not necessary). They can claim only to be alternative opinions in an ocean of theological options in America. More importantly, they fail to be distinctively Christian. Their neglect of the Bible's authority has estranged them from the community of faith. Evangelical theology's affirmations of objective reality, the authority of scripture, and the importance of biblical presuppositions, holistic methodology, and exclusivist conclusions separate it from main stream theology in America. Pluralism ostracizes such wholesale exclusivism and claims to objectivity. Evangelical theology seeks to remain true to biblical Christianity, relying heavily upon the Bible as its standard. Contemporary Americans may view Evangelical theology as stale, isolationist, intolerant, and premodern, but its stability, separateness, exclusivism, and biblical authoritarianism are its greatest strengths. A pluralistic America needs to see the value and validity of a single cohesive worldview.

In the final analysis, biblical theology in contemporary America should be rational and experiential if it is to be meaningful. It should not overlook past influences that have led to the present pluralistic worldview, but should focus on God's Christocentric self-revelation in scripture as an answer to pluralism. The God of evangelical Christianity satisfies the consumer, involves the spectator, reconciles the individual with the community, reveals Himself to the secularist, establishes a moral standard for the ethical relativist, and gives meaning and purpose to the postmodern American. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8); while Americans were still pluralists, Christ

provided them with one true path. “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent” (17:30).

CHAPTER 17

DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE

The Historical Interaction between Christianity and Science

In the past, Christianity has both aided and hindered the development of science. Medieval Europe, which witnessed the birth pains of science, was a world increasingly dominated by traditional Christian worldviews. Christianity aided science's development historically by serving as a foundation and impetus for scientific inquiry. Scientific study is founded upon the Christian belief that the physical world is objectively real and is good in its primary essence (though it is not a god) (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994). This fundamental presupposition is of utmost importance if scientific inquiries are to be of any value. It asserts that there is to be no fear or undue reverence in discovery and that the world of the scientists is the actual world we live in.

Another theologically based foundation of science is the belief in a rationally ordered world, including a rational humanity. Scholasticism taught that nature was capable of being comprehended because of its essentially rational nature and the God-given rationality of humans (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994). Nature was seen as predictable and orderly because of a rational Creator. We must discover the specific rationality which was given it by God voluntarily. This voluntarism helped to give birth to the experimental method with its emphasis on actually verifying a rational idea of the world with the world as it exists (Pearcey and Thaxton).

One fundamental impetus for early scientific work was the idea of glorifying God and benefiting humanity through science. A Christian worldview presupposes that humans are responsible for ruling over their environment and actively changing that

environment to the glory of God and the benefit of humanity (Gen. 1:28). The original aim of many scientific endeavors was to alleviate the many devastating affects of the curse on humans and the world (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994). God is glorified by the hard work of His image bearers and in their attempts to understand Him and His ways through nature (Rattansi, 1972).

Christianity and science have not always been so kindly disposed toward one another. As the Medieval age ended, science began to become more independent and inquisitive. Such instances as the persecution of Galileo and Copernicus by the established church serve as vivid reminders of the rivalry which has existed between certain views espoused by Christians and others by scientists.

The struggle between Galileo and the church must be seen in light of its historical context (which involved personal, philosophical, and scientific clashes), set during a struggle between aristocracy and the growing middle-class, between the establishment and the new intellectual pragmatists. "Altering fundamental concepts about the world is never an easy process" (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994, p. 41). Thomas Kuhn (1959) and E. A. Burtt (1954) have argued that it was not the astronomical observations that persuaded Copernicus and Kepler of the truth of heliocentrism, but rather their adherence to neo-Platonism with its emphasis on beauty, order, and mathematical precision.

In the examples of Copernicus and Galileo, tradition played a large role. Christianity had espoused strong traditions in its ascendance to the pinnacle of Medieval culture. Aristotileanism had become firmly entrenched in the minds of many educated western men and the church of Rome had extended its power throughout Europe (Cairns,

1996). Ptolemy's geocentric universe was the premiere showcase in the science of astronomy (Kaiser, 1991). Copernicus and Galileo stood against a unified world system with only a handful of evidence for their case (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994). Christianity helped to solidify the role of tradition (with its emphasis on standardization and total worldview development) and in so doing may have hindered science's development in the area of astronomy.

Another problem was the misrepresentation of Scripture made by Christians to support their own misguided cosmologies. A flat earth, a geocentric universe, and an Aristotelian distinction between heavenly and earthly substances were all argued for at one time on the basis of Scripture (taken out of context) (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994). While much of this misrepresentation may have been unintentional, its negative effects are still apparent. Many modern scientists view Scripture as outdated, intrinsically flawed, and inconsistent with the reality of the physical cosmos. The misuse of Scripture and tradition has hindered the development of science and has helped to estrange modern science from Christianity.

The Compatibility between Christianity and Science

It is possible for science to support Christian beliefs. The fine-tuning of the universe, the existence of a finite universe, and the purposefulness of the universe are all attested to by modern science. Hugh Ross cites numerous finely tuned parameters in our universe which are necessary for the existence of life, and concludes that these factors make the appearance of life by chance anywhere in our universe extremely improbable (1995; Adair, 1987). Sagan and Shklovskii (1966) have postulated that the universe is brimming with life because of the inevitability of evolution in our cosmos (Gibbon,

1993), but the absence of observational evidence for these claims and the improbability of the existence of another planet like our own (Ross, 1995), as well as the problems with Darwinian evolution and abiogenesis (Johnson, 1993) seem to suggest that we are unique in this universe. Not only that, but our entire cosmos seem to be fine tuned for our existence, which points to the possibility of God (Allen, 1989).

The universe had a beginning and it will have an end. The belief in the eternality of the cosmos by scientists of the past (Greene, 1999) had presented a major stumbling block to the development of faith in the Christian conception of a finite cosmos. But H. W. M. Olber observed that the darkness of the night sky disproved the idea of a "universe that is infinite and unchanging in space and time" (Adair, 1987, p. 308). The stars do not go on forever, and the radiation from them is not infinitely dense (Gibbon, 1993). With the recent discovery of microwave background radiation and the size and expansion rate of the universe, as well as the application of the laws of conservation and entropy, most scientists have come to acknowledge the relatively recent appearance (between 10 to 15 billion years ago) of the cosmos (Ross, 1991; Weaver, 1994, p. 33).

Another conflict between Christianity and science has been the naturalistic tendency of some scientists who deny the existence of purpose in the universe (specifically with reference to humanity) (Weinberg, 1993). This has recently been questioned by some in the scientific community who see apparent design and fine tuning as pointers to another reality (Gibbon, 1993). The emergence of the anthropic principle which finds humanity at a central point in the scheme of things seems to indicate the scientific community's reappraisal of this issue. Questions about purpose and

purposefulness in the cosmos are now frequently discussed in scientific literature (Gibbons, 1993; Greene, 1999; Heisenberg, 1971; Weinberg, 1993).

Theologians have also made attempts to reconcile their beliefs with those of science. Many modern theologians now recognize the importance of naturalism, the development of the cosmos, and voluntarism.

Naturalism has for several centuries posed a serious threat to the Christian worldview. Materialistic naturalism's denial of the reality of the supernatural world has helped to push God out of the picture in scientific study (Johnson, 1993). But naturalism can also mean an emphasis on and study of the natural world. Recently, theologians have reassessed their positions on naturalism and have sought to clarify their descriptions of God with respect to the natural world. God is increasingly being viewed as one who transcends nature and who is mysterious in His existence and essence, yet imminent with the world and natural in some of His workings (Weaver, 1994). A "God of the gaps" belief has been widely abandoned for a belief in a Creator above our realm of time/space/matter, yet intimately acting in it to fulfill His purposes (Allen, 1989).

Part of that action within the cosmos is God's involvement in the evolution of the universe. The question of evolution is still being debated among mainstream Christian theologians and scholars. Many now see evolution (slow purposeful change in the cosmos) as a valid tool in God's creative toolbox (Weaver, 1994). While this view of evolution (as purposeful) denies chance as the cause for change, mutations, and fine tuning, it nevertheless finds in the cosmos and in Scripture evidence for long durations of self-formation guided by God (Weaver; Allen, 1989).

Voluntarism (the belief that the world doesn't have to be the way it is) has affected Christianity's views of science since the Reformation and aspects of voluntarism have been readopted by scientists as they move away from mechanistic determinism and rationalism toward an understanding of the cosmos that includes many alternate possibilities (as evidenced by quantum theory, multiverse theory, and the anthropic principle) (Engels, 1940; Gibbons, 1993; Greene, 1999). These scientific understandings have in turn affected many theologians' views on voluntarism. Now the emphasis has gone from a focus on God as willing things to be a certain way to a focus on God's power in sustaining a world that is so volitional and probabilistic in nature.

Both science and Christianity are involved in quests for truth. This truth exists outside of us. The methodologies used by these two groups may differ, but both analyze and incorporate experience into their worldviews. The question is "How can science and Christianity work together?"

Augustine said that faith is a precondition of knowledge. This holds true for both religion and science. We must believe something exists before we understand it. Thomas Aquinas postulated that faith and reason can never conflict, but are rather two sides of the same coin. Dual revelation theology suggests that "apparent contradictions (between the facts of nature and Scripture) are due to human misinterpretation" (Ross, 1991, p. 145). Theology presupposes God's existence and works within the framework provided by His revelation, while science and reason culminate in the discovery of God's existence and nature revealed in the cosmos (Nash, 1999). John Weaver presents another model for theological/scientific dialogue which seeks to develop an overlapping community of believers and scientists who are engaged in formative dialogue with one

another (1994). This model emphasizes the importance of integrating scientific and theological data, theories, and testing in an effort to construct a fully holistic and psychosomatically unified worldview congruent with both Christianity and science (Weaver, pp. 12-9).

It is God who gives humans the curiosity, ingenuity, and rationality to perform scientific inquiry and speculation. What we learn from science about the objective physical world is God's truth and rationality and orderliness. Science can still be done for God's glory and humanity's benefit. As Einstein has said, "Religion without science is blind. Science without religion is lame" (qtd. in Weaver, 1994, p. 135).

General Revelation

God's use of nature as a tool of revelation is known as general revelation, natural revelation, or simply as the "Book of Nature." General revelation encompasses three broad areas. Nature is seen as revealing God's divinity, goodness, and care. History is seen as revealing God's actions, covenants, and purposes. Humanity is seen as revealing God's handiwork and image. It is called general revelation because "it is accessible to all persons at all times" and because its content is less detailed and specific than special revelation (the Scriptures) (Erickson, 1998).

Romans 1:18-21 (NIV) gives a powerful description of general revelation, including nature, history, and humanity in its scope:

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

> For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Let's go through this passage and attempt to ascertain Paul's understanding of general revelation and its role in our lives.

Verse 18 immediately puts God in the spotlight. God is actively revealing His wrath against the evil actions of particular humans (the evil actions are expanded upon in 1:21-32). These humans act wickedly as if there is no God and suppress the truth. Humanity leans toward rebellion against God. Verse 19 tells us what truth is being suppressed. The truth Paul speaks of is that which may be known about God. This knowledge is plain to everyone because God has made it plain to everyone (general revelation is for everyone). God reveals what may be known about Himself. Humans suppress the plain truth.

Verse 20 explains how God has made the truth plain to humans and what the content of this general revelation is. Since the creation of the world (emphasizing the omnipresence of God's revelation throughout history and pointing to creation as a revelation from God) the qualities of God that cannot be seen (His omnipotence and divinity) have been clearly seen. Humans throughout history have been able to perceive the empirically imperceptible qualities of the Creator through what He has created. The nature of God can be seen in nature and His infinite power is revealed by the things He has brought into being by His power. Humans are without excuse. Paul leaves no room for misunderstanding God's revelation. The language used here is clear and indicates "possession of genuine and accurate knowledge" (Erickson, 1998, p. 193).

Verse 21 explains why God's wrath is now being revealed against the wickedness of humans. Humans know God. Throughout all of time every person (capable of knowing) has been able to know that God exists and that He created the universe. This includes modern scientists, ancient muses, future senators, medieval pheasants, primitive pygmies, and students at Global University. But this knowledge is not enough. Not all humans have glorified God as being their Creator, Sustainer, and Deity. Not all humans have given thanks to God for what He has done in creation and for what He continues to do in the world. Instead, their thinking has become worthless and vain, and their hearts have become darkened. Some humans have chosen to blind themselves. The ultimate truth is denied.

These verses teach us that God discloses himself to humans through creation. But humans often turn from the truth and accept a lie (1:25). God's omnipresence and Divinity are written on the face of His creation, in history, and in the minds and hearts of humanity (1:21). This is not to say that general revelation is the only source of knowledge about God or is even the most important source (we will deal with these ideas in a later section). God's revelation of himself in nature gives us a glimpse of how great He is and His position with reference to His creation. The world and all that is in it exists by the power of a great Being. This Being is to be the object of worship. Nature may bring the open heart and mind to awe and worship God and to recognize His creative power. Unfortunately many people close their eyes to nature's testimony.

In the wider context of the book of Romans, Paul elaborates on several aspects of general revelation and its role in human affairs. Humans are presented as having rebelled against God, the testimony of creation, and themselves, and as having been given up by

God to their blind and idolatrous ways (Rom. 1:24-5). Humans know the holy sovereignty of God but turn from Him (1:32). Without special revelation, humans are still condemned (2:12) because God's law has been written on their hearts and consciences (2:15), but special revelation brings humans to a true knowledge of their sins (7:8) and allows them to enter into a good relationship with God through Christ's death and resurrection (8:15). Thus Paul discusses all three aspects of general revelation (nature, history, and humanity) which are presented as pointers to God and His special revelation (specifically in Christ).

The apostle Paul seems to be very clear in His pronouncements that God can be seen in nature. In the last several centuries, humans have expanded their knowledge of the physical cosmos immensely. What does all of this information provide concerning the topic of general revelation? More specifically, what are some scientific discoveries concerning nature that point to the existence and creative power of God? We will discuss three examples of nature revealing God and His creative power: 1. the finite existence and fine tuning of the universe; 2. the existence of complexity and beauty in our world; and 3. the existence of information and information systems in our world.

Most modern scientists agree that the present physical universe came into existence in the finite past. Evidences for the finite existence of the universe include the expansion of the universe, the darkness of the night sky, the laws of entropy and the conservation of mass/energy, and the existence of microwave background radiation (Ross, 1991). However, scientists disagree on what (if anything) caused the universe to come into being. Some site quantum fluctuations (Barrow and Silk, 1983), the existence of a "Higgs field" boson (irreverently dubbed the "God particle") (Lederman and Teresi,

1993), the string-like nature of the elements and forces (Greene, 1999), or the existence of prior (or present) multiverses (Engels, 1940) as causes for the existence of the universe. Such speculations fail miserably however. If the answer to the physical universe's existence is the physical universe's existence, what is the question (Lederman and Teresi, 1993)? This points to the fact that there can be no fully naturalistic answer to a question framed so naturalistically (with the underlying assumption that no supernatural answers will be admitted). Unfortunately, only one set of scientific "data" exists to answer the question and that is the universe itself (Lederman and Teresi, p. 403). Nothing comes from nothing. Our universe is something, so where did it come from? Putting a beginning further back in time by pointing to natural causes does not do away with the question of where it all came from in the first place. Arno Penzias says that astronomy has discovered a universe made from nothing, which is fine tuned for life and seemingly purposeful (cited in Ross, 1995, pp. 122-3). This would seem to suggest a transcendent cause.

Not only does the universe exist, it is fine tuned for the existence of life (Adair, 1987). The earth is a perfect habitat for humanity. Chance cannot be considered a sufficient cause for our habitat's fine-tuning or for life itself (Monod as cited in Ross, 1995). Hugh Ross has pointed to 26 finely tuned parameters for life to exist in our universe, along with 31 parameters for our planet, moon, solar system, and galaxy which must also be met (1995, pp. 118-121, 138-41). Ross estimates that the probability of attaining and maintaining these incredibly fine-tuned parameters for life support on earth without a transcendent prime mover/sustainer is 10^{-53} (Ross, pp. 143-4). Diogenes Allen emphasizes the importance of these parameters not as improbabilities but as pointers to

the possibility of God (1989). The earth is the right size, is the right distance from the moon and sun and stars, has the right kind of elements and atmosphere and orbit and spin, and has balanced tectonic plate movement. The earth's configuration within the solar system, galaxy, and universe is unique. It is near (but not too near) a star that is just the right size, age, and intensity; it is just the right distance from the center of our galaxy; and the universe has just the right amount of certain elements and force strengths needed for the existence of our planet and life (Ross). All of these factors (among many other parameters) are necessary for the life support of carbon-based organisms making the earth unlikely to be replicated anywhere else in the cosmos (Ross, 1995) Our fine tuned habitat presents a compelling case for intentional design.

Our universe is complex and beautiful. Complexity theorists propose that complexity emerges from a few simple rules (Lewin, 1999). Also, "homeostatic mechanisms" come about as a result of a complex system self-adapting to the "edge of chaos" (Lewin, p. 118). Simply put, complexity is the middle ground between chaos and orderliness. Force interactions, molecular synthesis, galaxy formation, the New York Stock Exchange, and tornadoes are all examples of complexity. The human constitution itself is an important example of complexity. Each cell presents a wide variety of irreducibly complex systems (systems in which it is impossible to leave out any of the parts and still have functionality) (Behe, 1996). Our cells and organs all interact with one another in complex ways based on a few simple rules. Complexity reveals the purposeful composition of a few simple rules which are used to guide the interaction of diverse particular entities. A programmer, wanting to explore complexity, writes a computer program using only a few simple rules which computer simulants are to follow. These

simulants are then "let loose" and begin performing tasks not explicitly specified in the program itself (Lewin, 1999). Without a few simple rules, complexity is impossible. The amazing amount of complexity in the cosmos and the precision with which natural complex systems interact with one another seems to bring up a pressing question: "Where did all of these rules come from in the first place?"

Beauty is yet another pointer to God. Werner Heisenberg once said that he was "strongly attracted by the simplicity and beauty of the mathematical schemes with which nature presents us" (1971, p. 69). The physical cosmos is brimming with objects of immense beauty. The beauty that exists in the world can be grasped by humans, who in turn are able to create their own works of beauty. Many scientists throughout the centuries (including Einstein) have adhered to beauty as an indicator of the truthfulness of a hypothesis (Barnett, 1957). Beauty also points to the existence of an artist.

The existence of information and information systems in our world seem to be another indicator of a transcendent Creator. Information theorists admit that life "was brought about by the production of information mechanisms" extremely complex and intricate in their makeup (Angrist and Hepler, 1967). Living organisms are amazing in their ability to temporarily reverse entropy (Angrist and Hepler). These information systems (which are an integral part of living organisms) are irreducibly complex and are complete functioning wholes. The improbability of their existence is astounding (Angrist and Hepler). God is often legitimated as the only capable source of the "life principle" and existence of organisms (Angrist and Hepler). Information is intelligence, and must have an intelligent source for its existence (Gitt, 1997). A code, a storage device, an intelligent source, and a mechanism for processing, understanding, and performing

actions prescribed by the information are all necessary components in information systems (Gitt, 1997). The abundance of complex information systems in our world (such as DNA, languages, migration) suggests the existence of an intelligent Designer and Creator.

The Danger in Purely Natural Revelation

Nature was created by God (as was reason). Science is ordered knowledge and it should bring humanity to the Divine (Tomlin, 1963). According to Augustine, when humans encounter truth in nature, history, or themselves, they begin to ponder God's existence and essence (Tomlin). The Evangelical theologian Millard Erickson states that nature is "objective, valid, and rational" according to Scripture (1998, p. 194). Natural theology includes God encountering humans in the world through scientific discovery (Weaver, 1994). Paul Davies believes that nature is a surer way to God than religion (Weaver). Carl Sagan claims that science has more prophetic accuracy and reliability than any religion or human institution, and is flexible and self-correcting as opposed to the staunch and unyielding truth claims of Scripture and religion (1995). Many prominent philosophers, theologians, and scientists during the Enlightenment deified the roles of reason and empiricism, attempting to construct a purely natural theology or to do away with theology altogether (Bray, 1996). There are three main dangers to a purely natural theology.

First, and most importantly, nature offers us no saving knowledge of God. Religion based on science can lead to an anthropocentric theology, to a theology in which God is just another person like us, or to a view of God as distant and uncaring (as in Deism) (Weaver, 1994). Science can give people reasons for belief in God, but natural

theology merely supports theism, not Christianity (which is supported by special revelation) (Weaver). Belief in a God is no guarantee of salvation (James 2:19). Belief must extend beyond a mere assent to God's existence and creative ability, and must become a personal faith in God's words, actions, and relationships with the world (James 2:23). Without special revelation, honest inquirers cannot know about Christ's death on the cross for their sins (Rom. 10:13-5), or the specific purposes of God for His creation (Rom. 8:19-22).

Second, while nature is objective, natural theology (if divorced from Biblical theology) may become overly subjective. Scientific hypotheses are transitory. Major paradigm shifts in the understanding of nature, history, and humanity (the three aspects of general revelation) occur so frequently that a theology based on modern theories would flounder on the rocks of constant change (Weaver, 1994). "Science is made by men" (Heisenberg, 1971, p. vii). A theology based solely on science's understandings of nature would in the end be merely human conjecture and hypothesis. What happens when hypotheses conflict with one another? Steven Weinberg claims that "the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless," and that scientific experimentation lifts us above the false security in religion and gives us a view of the cosmos more akin to a tragedy than a comedy (1993, p. 154). While some find hopelessness in the cosmos, others find a personal God revealing Himself as a transcendent Creator and an imminent guide of evolution (Weaver, 1994). John D. Barrow and Joseph Silk see the following two views as incompatible: 1. simplicity and orderliness in the cosmos are evidence for God; and 2. the breaking of cosmic order (miraculous events) is evidence for God (1983, p. 228). Barrow and Silk conclude that

there is no designer responsible for our world, only "a naked singularity" (p.228). Heisnberg and Einstein both viewed God as an impersonal order or compass in our world that is reachable through scientific investigation (Heisenberg, 1971; Barnett, 1957). Science can objectively explain much about **how** things happen in our world, but nothing about **why** they happen (Barnett, 1957). Nature, when taken alone as revelation from God, leaves us with only a subjective theology which is transitory and open to debate.

Third, the presence of evil in the world presents a major problem for a purely natural theology. What kind of a God would create a world in which evil exists? The presence of evil argues against a good God (or any God at all) (Weaver, 1994). Without special revelation (specifically concerning the fall of the created order described in Genesis 3 and Romans 8:19-22) evil's existence is a major problem for any form of theism (Allen, 1989). Special revelation tells us that evil exists because of sin. General revelation is distorted by the evil in the world. Nature is under a curse, as are humans: "the testimony to the Maker is blurred" (Erickson, 1998, p. 195). Humanity's fall brought sin into the world (Rom. 5:12), and people must hear the gospel to escape it (Rom. 10:14). A complete theology cannot be fully constructed from general revelation (Erickson). In summary, a purely natural theology cannot bring us to a saving knowledge of God, it may become subjective, and it cannot account for the evil in the world.

Christianity and Natural Evidence

Special revelation is able to bring us salvation and transformation, and equips us to do God's work on earth (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Through special revelation, believers may attain knowledge of God, the world, and humankind. Single revelation theology teaches the sole authority of the Bible (Ross, 1991). God's truth is biblical truth. Nature is so

distorted that it is no longer reliable as a witness to truth. Pascal had a piece of literature embroidered onto the inside pocket of his jacket, part of which read: "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—not of the philosophers and sages" (Heisenberg, 1971, p. 215). There are three major problems that are encountered when a person excludes natural revelation as providing evidence for the existence and creative power of God.

First, a single revelation theology neglects certain Biblical passages and ideas. Karl Barth, an important proponent of single revelation theology, claimed that God's revelation in nature was so marred nothing could be made of it (Weaver, 1994). The only revelation of God remaining was in the Bible, with the culmination of that revelation in the person and work of Christ (Erickson, 1998). This view seems to contradict certain Biblical passages like Romans 1:19-32, 2:12-6, Psalm 19, Acts 14:17, and 17:22-31 which clearly reveal a world that is showing forth God's splendor, wrath, power, divinity, and care for His creation (Erickson). Single revelation theology cannot account for the Biblical ideas of beauty, complexity, or design in the cosmos, and fails to see the image of God in modern man (Acts 17:28-9).

Second, if the natural evidence for God's existence and creative power is denied, the Christian's apologetic approach is severely limited. A Christian cannot answer an unbeliever's questions using the Bible if the unbeliever refuses to accept the authority of the Bible. Science-based reasons to believe can help lead unbelievers to traditional reasons to believe (Ross, Our wonderful Creator, 2003). Unbelievers should be approached on their own grounds (as Paul did on Mar's Hill) (Acts 17:22-31). As Augustine once said, "Egypt's gold is still gold" (meaning that there is no such thing as secular truth) (Tomlin, 1963). Thomas Aquinas attempted to provide a systematic

philosophical and theological apologetic to the adversaries of Christianity in his day (Tomlin). Rene Descartes' work sought to establish the existence of God based on general revelation (Tomlin). Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason,* sought to synthesize empiricism and rationalism to provide a bulwark to religion (1990, p. 476). General revelation can be (and has been) used effectively as a tool for bringing unbelievers to a point of faith.

Third, an only-Scripture view of revelation separates faith from the real world. A single revelation theology creates an unnecessary dichotomy between the natural and spiritual worlds. This creates a separation between the Christian life of faith and the practical side of life. People can become surrounded by the facts of nature, history, and humanity and become unsure of their personal faith. Natural theology is based on encounter and experience (Weaver, 1994). Scientists (both secular and Christian) are full of insights into how the world works (Weaver). If these insights are completely denied, we are left with a subjective physical world that is so marred that humans have no reason to believe what they see (our world is illusory). Albert Einstein has said that the free flow of scientific knowledge throughout society enlivens the philosophical spirit of a people and leads to spiritual enrichment (Barnett, 1957, p. 9). A single revelation theology ignores certain parts of special revelation, limits a Christian's apologetic response, and unnecessarily dichotomizes the world we live in. An approach to theology which encompasses both general and special revelation is necessary if one is to avoid the three dangers of a purely natural theology and the three problems encountered by Christians who deny general revelation's ability to support God's existence and creative power.

Developing a Biblical Apologetic

A Biblical apologetic must be developed based on the compatibility between nature and the Bible. Genesis 1:1-2:3, in my opinion, provides the clearest description of God's power in creating and sustaining the universe. The passage reveals explicitly the general creation events of everything in the cosmos and implicitly reveals a sustaining God who is caring for His creation. After a general introduction to the text we will endeavor to use the passage as an apologetic.

The literary form used in Genesis 1:1-2:3 is prose (with the exception of verse 27, which is poetry) (Barker, 1995). "No other story in the Bible better embodies the paradox of majesty in simplicity" (Ryken, 1999). This passage is used by the author (or compiler) as an introduction to the Pentateuch. The wider context of Scripture gives us great insight into these first few words (by providing a more comprehensive worldview). Literary aspects of the text include recurrence, symmetry, structural design, and variety (Ryken, 1999). Structurally, Genesis 1:1-2:3 is a "chronological catalogue of God's creative acts during creation week" (Ryken, p. 92), instead of a plot conflict as in other ancient Mesopotamian creation myths (Ryken). The account is flexibly formulaic and precise, establishing the existing order of the physical world (Ryken). The passage does not attempt to be a full scientific account of how God created everything (such an account would not be possible, given the constraints of human language and the mystery surrounding Divine causation) (Boice, 1985).

Genesis 1:1-2:3 describes God's creation of the cosmos. The setting is in the realm of God's transcendence (outside the natural cosmos). While an earth-bound point of view has been argued for by some (on the basis of verse two: "the Spirit hovered over

the surface of the deep) (Ross, 1991, pp. 165-6) the argument breaks down at verse seven (God separates the "water above" from the "water below," the former belonging to the earth, the latter to the sky). If the Spirit is on the surface of the water of the earth in verse two, He is outside of the earth's future atmosphere (not earth-bound). The reference in verse two should be seen as God working presently in His creation transcendently, not as a point of reference around which the unfolding story revolves. The actor in this entire drama is God. There is no birth of God, and no biography given about His life before creation (as in other ancient creation myths). The actions in the story include speaking, creating, naming, blessing, and separating. The actions are viewed anthropocentrically (the functions of creation are detailed in how they relate to humans). The cosmological questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how concerning the universe's origins are answered in simple yet elegant ways. The passage contains a frame of reference, an indication of initial conditions, a chronological account of events, and a conclusion (much like the scientific method) (Ross, 1991, p. 164).

The scope of the passage is universal. The phrase "the heavens and the earth" in verse one probably refers to the three heavens (the sky, outer space, and heaven) and the earth. "The heavens and the earth" in the Hebrew language always means the entire physical cosmos (Ross, 1991). There is a unified progression (known as a developing sequence) in the story, building up to a climax with the appearance of humans in chapter 1 vs. 26-31 (Ryken, 1999). The Bible shows a world planned for man as the centerpiece (the center of functionality). In contrast, other ancient creation myths presented various gods as the apex of creation, with humankind's appearance as an afterthought (humans were to be slaves of the gods) (Walton and Matthews, 1997).

George Berkeley points out that most people consider miracles to be better evidence for God's existence than normal occurrences of nature, but that both miracles and the natural order depend on God's existence, care, and freedom of action (Tomlin, 1963). Each day of the creation week builds upon the work of the prior day (except the first day, which is seen as coming from nothing). This continuity is dependent upon a God who can sustain His creation continually throughout the creation week (God is free to change His creation just as He is free to have it function orderly). When God rests on the seventh day, He rests only from His work of creating (not His work of sustaining). The Spirit of God hovering over the waters of the deep in chapter one verse two provides a powerful picture of God's hen-like care for His creation (Barker, 1995).

Let us now endeavor to develop an apologetic from this passage. Four ideas are involved in my argument—God's existence, the nature of the universe, the problem of evil, and the personal response of the reader (Weaver, 1994). Let us start with God's existence. "In the beginning God . . ." (Gen. 1:1). Verse one firmly rejects atheism, materialistic naturalism, and pantheism (Holdcroft, 1996, p. 15). The Hebrew noun *Elohim* (the mighty One) is used 32 times in Genesis chapter one (Ryken, 1999), emphasizing God's central role in creation. "God's existence is not defended, but His activity is described, and that proves His existence" (Holdcroft, p. 15). Science cannot prove (or disprove) the existence of God, "but very many aspects of this world cannot be understood at all if God is excluded" (Gitt, 2001, p. 124). The arguments for God's existence, even if they fall short of being proof, may provide reasons for belief (Nash, 1999). The teleological argument (which focuses on design in the world), the ontological argument (which focuses on the necessary existence of God), and the Kalaam argument

(which focuses on the nature of infinity and causes) may be used in combination to present a holistic argument for the existence of God (based upon the cumulative evidence) (Nash). They are helpful tools for the Christian in presenting their faith to unbelievers.

"And God said . . . and it was so" (Gen. 1:6, 7). God created using His spoken word. "What God said and what was done were one and the same, and there were no limitations or restrictions upon what He was able to do" (Holdcroft, 1996, p. 18). The Hebrew word used for creation in the text is *bara*. The word always refers to a divine creative work (never to human activity or chance appearance) (Ross, 1991). The Scripture does not reveal how this was accomplished, but only points to the action as a fact. Some may point to the cosmos as a fact, and seek to understand it on its own terms (naturalism), but in the beginning of time/space and matter there is the necessity for a cause. The world's origins are beyond our powers of observation and testing, but the existence of something rather than nothing points to the necessity of an uncaused cause. In Genesis the creation is presented not as a series of conflicts ending in the birthing of cosmos deities (as in other ancient creation myths) but as a spoken word taking shape in the reality of the physical world (Divine language is seen as causing the fine-tuning, complexity, and order in the cosmos) (Walton and Matthews, 1997).

"So God created man in His own image" (Gen. 1:27). "One of naturalism's major problems then is explaining how mindless forces give rise to minds, knowledge, sound reasoning, and moral principles" (Nash, 1999, p. 57). While the naturalist Frederick Engels argued that labor is responsible for the development of man (1940), "there is no clear evolutionary connection [between humans and] . . . other hominids" (Ross,

Evolution: It doesn't add up, 2003, p. 21). Our DNA is unique (Munyon, 1997)). The fossil record doesn't bear out the evolution of our species (Lubenow, 1992). God's existence is pointed to by man's existence (as a conscious, self-aware, psychosomatic being) (Weaver, 1994). We are special. Humans are able to discover truth and express themselves in far more complex and diverse ways than any other creatures. Genesis 1:27 tells us why: God has made us like himself. Kant's gravestone reads: "Two things fill my mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe . . . the starry heavens about me and the moral law within me" (Gaarder, 1996, p. 337). This ability to muse about the world and to attain self-awareness (of morality and beauty) belongs to humans alone among all of earth's creatures. The existence of God shines through His image bearers.

The next step in our apologetic is to discuss the nature of the physical universe according to Genesis 1:1-2:3. The universe seems to be purposeful. As we mentioned earlier, the fine-tuning, order, complexity, information, and beauty in our world all point to a designer. Genesis chapter one gives a description of God designing a habitat fit for human life (which is seen as the function or purpose for creation). "The functioning of the cosmos was much more important to the people of the ancient world than was its physical makeup or chemical composition" (Walton and Matthews, 1997, p. 17). While Jacques Monod claims that "chance alone is the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere" (qtd in Ross, 1995, p. 107) others see purpose in the cosmos (as evidenced by the speculations of scientists concerning the Gaia hypothesis and the anthropic principle) (Gibbon, 1993; Lewin, 1999). The biological evidence points to "repeated optimal designs" like wing and eye structures, and irreducibly complex systems (systems that cannot function without all of their parts in working order) (Behe, 1996;

Ross, Our wonderful Creator, 2003). Robert Adair says that the beauty of life and existence can be found in the complexities and vastness of outer space, and plainly seen in a grain of sand or a delicate flower (1987, p. 366).

"God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Genesis chapter one gives insight into God's relationship with the cosmos. God created everything (1:1). He named the day, night, sky, land, and seas (1:5, 8, 10). He blessed all of the animals and insects on the earth, as well as the humans (1:22, 28, 30). He established categories of heredity (1:21, 24, 25), and gave His creatures food to eat (1:29-30. He made humans in His likeness (1: 26-7) and gave them a leadership role over all the creatures of the earth (1:26, 28). In all of these aspects God is seen as having authority over the physical cosmos. These snapshots from creation reveal a God who sustains His creation by His power. The goodness of the Creator is reflected in the goodness of His creation. The goodness that scientists and others discover in the world is a direct pointer to a God who intentionally created all things good. Often, though, instead of finding goodness in the cosmos, we are confronted with evil.

Our apologetic must now turn to the problem of evil. Sin and the fall of the natural order are causes for great amounts of evil and suffering (Gen. 3; Rom. 8:20-22). While Genesis chapter one presents a good world, this perfection no longer exists. Humans are responsible for the evil in the world because of their disobedience (Gen. 3). Humanity responds to evil and suffering with cries for something beyond this realm (Strobel, 2000), for the perfection of an untainted and fair world (as in Gen 1). God has entered into our suffering through Christ, and will eventually eradicate evil and suffering from the earth (Weaver, 1994). The fall of humanity has caused the distortion of

creation, but the Biblical hope is in Eve's "seed" (3:15) who will bring justice, transformation, and God's rest to creation (Gen. 2:2,3; Rom. 8:2; Heb. 4:1-11; Rev. 20-22) (Geisler, 1977). Some point to the existence of evil as evidence against theism, but the existence of evil, its eventual destruction, and the future renovation of creation are congruent with the idea of a God who willingly creates a volitional humanity in His own image (as in Genesis 1).

The last step in our apologetic based on Genesis 1:1-2:3 is the personal response of the reader. The reader may ask "Is it rational to believe in a supernatural Being who created everything?" Rationality is "that which follows logically from a given set of assumptions" (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994, p. 74). Four tests of a worldview (the set of assumptions we use to understand our world) are reason (does it contradict itself?), outer experience (does it cohere with what we know of our universe?), inner experience (does it cohere with what we know about human volition, emotion, and thought?), and practice (can a person actually live out his beliefs in the real world?) (Nash, 1999, pp. 25-8). The worldview presented in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and throughout the Bible seems to be non-contradictory and coherent with a world that is fine-tuned and full of design and complexity (and evil). It is coherent with human volition, emotion, and thought, and is pragmatically possible (Jesus lived unswervingly by this worldview). When all is said and done, judgment must be passed (Nash, 1999). A person must enter a life of belief if the knowledge they attain is to do them any good. Openness to the truth of God and His purpose for humanity must extend to both the head and the heart (Allen, 1989). "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb. 11:2).

CHAPTER 18

DRAWN TO FAITH: REVELATION, REASON, AND A PERSONAL APOLOGETIC

There is a God who has created all things and left His mark in them. His creation cries out in many forms of His continuing creative presence. Through special and general revelation our Creator reveals Himself to humans. The scientific community may be drawn by reason to have faith in this God. An apologetic must be developed to help bring rationally minded people to a point of decision. God is drawing all flesh to Himself through nature, the Scriptures, reason, and the apologetic of thoughtful Christians.

General and Special Revelation

Let us focus on a biblical example of general and special revelation found in Psalm 19. In verses 1-6 David gives a poetic description of God revealing Himself through nature's workings. Nature pours out speech and knowledge, is immense in its workings, and is aesthetically pleasing, all of which point to a Creator, sustainer, designer, intelligence, and artist beyond the universe. God is working in His creation and is purposefully revealing Himself to all the earth through nature (which is known as general revelation) (Erickson, 1998). David perceives God as a glorious craftsman whose work speaks constantly of His presence and power. Isaac Newton reflects David's own thoughts when he says "This most beautiful system of sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being" (in Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994, p. 91). Nature does not reveal a personal God who communes with a people He has chosen, but rather a Creator who brings humankind to awe Him through His creation (Erickson, 1998).

Special revelation is dealt with in verses 7-14, which is an encomium on the greatness of God's personal revelation of Himself recorded in the Scriptures (or more specifically, the law) followed by a short musing about sin and redemption. These verses concentrate on the greatness of God's special revelation and what it does. According to David, special revelation revives, makes wise, gives joy, illuminates, endures, purifies, warns, and rewards (Ps 19:7-11). Through special revelation, David perceives God as perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, sure, righteous, precious, sweet, and compassionate with the individuals to whom He reveals Himself (7-14). Special revelation is God's disclosure of Himself to humans in a process of inspiration (His words and thoughts are communicated through the medium of a human author) (House, 1992). By general revelation we may come to know a Creator. By special revelation we may come to know a Redeemer, His covenants and laws, and His kingdom in our lives. The focus narrows "from the heavens to my heart" (Ryken, 1992, p. 192).

God has personally revealed himself to me using both general and special revelation. In the night sky I see the beauty of his craftsmanship as well as His immense power and purpose. I am brought to the throne of the Almighty Creator. When I search the Scriptures I am touched by the incident recorded in Genesis chapter 22 in which Abraham offers up his son Isaac to God. God tests this great man of faith, provides the sacrifice for him, covenants with him, and speaks to him. Here I find a God who provides, who is caring, who is intimately involved in the affairs of individuals, and who is purposefully building His kingdom among humans. I have been touched by God's general and special revelation. Can more rationally minded people be moved in the same way?

A Reasonable Faith for the Scientific Community

Why should scientists have faith in God? Observations show that the world is fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent life (Ross, 1995). Design appears everywhere for the scientist (DNA, hemoglobin, hair follicles, force interactions) and order is even more abundant (snowflakes, elliptical orbits, the smooth expansion rate of the universe) (Gitt, 1997; Ross, 1991). Naturalistically this seems extremely improbable, and points to the existence of an intelligent Creator (Ross, 1995). If it is reasonable to posit some form of the anthropic principle to account for humanity and the universe's existence, it is at least equally plausible to argue for a designer's intentional focus on humanity. The universe had a beginning (as evidenced by cosmic background radiation and the second law of thermodynamics), and it will have an end if it continues on its present course (Ross, 1991). What existed before the physical universe? And what will be after it? Science is incapable of explaining everything naturalistically or according to uniformitarian presuppositions. A step must be made from the gaps of empiricism to a holistic life that is open to physical, mental, and spiritual realities.

Christianity's belief in the Bible and the existence of God are often disregarded as irrational and unscientific. Some scientists have held to a view of rationality that is a form of materialism, i.e. it is irrational to believe in anything not within the realm of science (Pearcey and Thaxton, 1994). But modern historians of science hold to a definition of rationality similar to this one: Rationality is "that which follows logically from a given set of assumptions" (Pearcey and Thaxton, p. 74). Reason can be used as a tool of the scientist to discover which explanations for the universe are the most valid, but reason must be open to all aspects of reality. The Bible is historically accurate and its

accounts have been verified time and again (Strobel, 2000). It is true that occurrences which are not presently observable (including the creation of the universe and the inspiration of Scripture) cannot be perfectly proven scientifically. But we may test their historical, scientific, and experiential reliability and coherence. God's existence answers difficult questions that science cannot answer, such as "Why does anything exist in our cosmos?" and "Why is the world the way it is?" (Allen, 1989). Humans have inner needs that cannot be met in this world we live in, pointing to the existence of another world (Allen). Reason, when open to the existence of God (and the truthfulness of his revelation), makes sense of our cosmos' existence and fine tuning.

Steps toward God's Existence and His Creation of the Universe

Let us now turn to the task of developing a personal apologetic for God's existence and His creation of the universe. John Weaver outlines several steps that a person could take in presenting such an apologetic, particularly emphasizing purposefulness and suffering (1994). Based on Weaver's own work, a brief outline that might be followed is: 1. discuss purpose; 2. focus on the existence of God; 3. work through the problems of suffering and evil; and 4. present the need for a personal response (pp. 192-7).

Purposefulness is all around us. Purely scientific explanations fail to address this supernatural element in the cosmos. Design, order, and fine-tuning all point to an intelligent Creator who seeks to move along certain purposes in the cosmos (Ross, 1991). These purposes seem to find humanity at their focus (as scientists who espouse the anthropic principle would admit) and may open us up to questions concerning our own existence and place in the world.

This turns the mind to pursuing the question of the possibility of God's existence and creative abilities. Some transcendent intelligence must be behind all of the world's order and complexity (Gitt, 1997). This Being's existence is pointed to by man's existence (as a conscious, self-aware, psychosomatic being), the existence of the cosmos (which seems to require a prime mover and sustainer), and by God's special revelation of Himself (Weaver, 1994).

Next we must address the problems of suffering and evil. Here the Christian position is an important key to understanding (Strobel, 2000). Sin and the fall of the natural order are causes for great amounts of evil and suffering. Humanity responds to evil and suffering with cries for something beyond this realm (Strobel). God has entered into our suffering through Christ, and will eventually eradicate evil and suffering from the earth (Weaver, 1994).

In the end, the apologetic should move toward a personal response to the scientific evidence for God and his creation event, and the actions of God in history recorded in the Bible. A person must enter a life of belief if the knowledge they attain is to do them any good. Openness to the truth of God and his purpose for humanity must extend to both the head and the heart (Allen, 1989).

Truth is revealed in many forms and must be examined thoroughly. This trek toward truth is made through God's revelation, reason, and the apologetic of faithful Christians. God has sent His own Spirit to lead us (John 16:8-14). We are drawn to faith through the witness of God in creation, Scripture, and humanity. Let us not resist our Creator and Redeemer, the source of human reason.

CHAPTER 19

SUPERNATURAL APOLOGETICS IN LUKE-ACTS

Luke begins his gospel with a formulaic statement of purpose in keeping with the introductions of several ancient Greek historical writings (Alexander 1993; Palmer 1993). In Luke's introduction to his two-volume work (Luke 1:1–4; cf., Acts 1:1), he reveals that many written and oral sources (compiled accounts) were extant and available to his audience (Luke 1:1–2). In addition to using sources, Luke "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3 NIV), and decided to write an "orderly" (*akribos kathexes,* "accurately ordered") account for Theophilus (whose name means "dear to God") (Bruce 1954, 31). Verse four sums up Luke's reasons for writing Luke-Acts—so that his reader would "know" for certain what had already been taught. The importance of Luke 1:4 to the present research is twofold: (1) it is a statement of intentionality by Luke that points to the didactic nature of his historical narrative; and (2) it is a statement of intentionality by Luke that points to the (at least partially) apologetic nature of his historical narrative. Luke intends to teach and to defend the "certainty" of what Theophilus had already been taught. Luke will do this by composing a two-volume historical narrative that is based on eyewitness accounts and oral and written traditions.

Acts 1:1–2 is a retrospective summary of Luke's gospel content (Jesus' words and deeds) (Witherington 1998, 106) and a prospective summary of Acts (Palmer 1993, 21–24). Luke records what Jesus "began" (*erxato*) to do and teach. "The verb *began*, frequently found in the three Gospels, is called an inchoative verb, which expresses the inauguration, the beginning, or the initiating of an action but not the termination of the

action/activity initiated" (George R. Stotts, personal communication, April 25, 2005). In Acts, the disciples continue Jesus' words and actions by the Holy Spirit (Strongstad 1984, 49). The preface to Acts points to the continuity in intent between the gospel of Luke and Acts (making both volumes apologetic and didactic), and directs the reader to the continuity of action between the kerygma and the words and deeds of typological prophets in Acts and beyond. How does Luke fulfill his didactic and apologetic intentions in Luke-Acts?

Luke is a master storyteller who is subtle in his methods of persuasion. His characters are realistic, but not drawn out in detail. Luke rarely comments on the significance of the events that transpire within his narratives. Recurring scenes and summaries in Luke-Acts (e.g., Paul's accounts of his conversion) are never precisely the same but reveal in each new instance some previously unrevealed detail or emphasis. Luke is not merely recounting the history of Jesus and the early church with no didactic or apologetic aim.

Luke uses historiographical and rhetorical methods to present an apologetic of Christian beliefs. Luke uses detailed and summary signs and wonders narratives to convey a sense of the persuasiveness and continual reality of Spirit-empowered miracles in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Signs and wonders prove the value, validity, and veracity of the *kerygma* (the content of gospel preaching concerning the messianic life, death and resurrection, and ascension of Jesus). Supernatural events (in the form of languages, healings, resurrections, and exorcisms) point individuals in Luke and Acts to the truth of the kerygma. Signs reveal that there is power. Wonder is a supernatural response to signs that seeks to ascertain the source and/or purpose of the

power or event. The power is God's power, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the purpose is to draw people into God's kingdom.

As an interpreter of biblical signs and wonders, my personal supernatural experiences are extremely important to my understandings of the texts. These supernatural experiences have given immediacy to Luke's purposes in the signs and wonders narratives and provide the backdrop for my personal quest into the importance of signs and wonders in Luke-Acts. I have personally experienced speaking in tongues, visions, and prophesying. I have witnessed many miracles. See the appendix for the author's personal testimony of experiences with signs and wonders. At the center of all of these personal experiences were the importance of the person of Christ and the growth of the kingdom of God. All of these signs and wonders were powerful presentations of the truth of the gospel, and people were drawn to Christ as a result.

Apologetics in Luke-Acts

The Apologetic Nature of Lucan Historiography

The apologetic nature and purpose of Luke's two volumes should be assessed before narrowing in on the apologetic nature and purpose of signs and wonders narratives in Luke-Acts. The universality of the gospel and a widespread Jewish rejection of the gospel are two key overarching themes in Luke-Acts. Witherington (1998) argued that in Luke-Acts the author is attempting to legitimate the Christian faith, not to defend Christianity from outsiders (37). Bruce (1952, 29–30), Dockery (1992, 35), Gasque (1989), Squires (1993, 191–194), and Witherington (1998, 37) found in Luke-Acts an apologetic intended for "insiders" (probably Hellenized Christians). Specifically,

Dockery (1992) considered Luke-Acts to be a history of the church and an "apologetic for its existence based on the revelation of God in the Old Testament" (35). Eighteenth-century scholar C. A. Heumann argued that Luke was the first and foremost early Christian apologist (Gasque 1989, 21–22).

Having established the apologetic nature and purpose of Luke-Acts as a whole, an interpreter can move on to assess the apologetic nature and purpose of signs and wonders narratives in particular. In his evaluation of Luke's handling of miracle stories in Luke-Acts, Witherington (1998) suggested that "since Luke is something of an apologist and rhetor seeking to persuade his audience, it appears that he has simply left out tales he felt were lacking in credibility and historical substance" (222). Luke's selectivity in his choice of material reveals the implicitly apologetic intent of his writing (Satterthwaite 1993, 347; Palmer 1993, 18). The functions of the speeches in Luke-Acts are to give examples of the kerygma and to "offer defense of the apostles and their task" (Marshall 1993, 179).

Signs and wonders narratives are likewise apologetic in intent and Christocentric in focus, serving as examples to Luke's readers of how God's power can bring about God's salvation through obedient individuals. The power of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and ascension (i.e., the heart of the kerygma [Witherington 1998, 100]) are all attested to by Luke's accounts of signs and wonders. The following words of David Peterson (1993) are particularly apt: "As they debated with their contemporaries, Luke's readers would have been encouraged to claim that God was truly at work in their movement, fulfilling his ultimate saving purposes for the nations" (104).

The disciples' boldness on the Day of Pentecost and afterward, however, was not merely due to Christ's ministry, death and resurrection, and ascension. Their boldness came as a result of the empowerment by the Spirit of God with signs that accompanied the empowerment (Stronstad 1984, 60). Thus, the signs and wonders were part of a confirmation and validation of what the Holy Spirit was doing and what Christ had done. "Chiefly, in the Lucan view of things, miracles serve conversionist ends, either by attracting people to the faith or by validating that the faith is powerful once believed" (Witherington 1998, 579). The original supernatural events attracted people to the message of Christ (and were part of the message of salvation and a realized eschatology), while Luke's retelling of the events seem to be aimed more at validating the faith of those who already believed (Luke 1:1–4).

Ancient Jewish Supernatural Apologetics

Jervell (1996), Rosner (1993), and Sterling (1992) considered Luke-Acts to be Hellenized Jewish apologetic history. Luke-Acts is "about the fulfillment of the ends of sacred history caused by divine intrusion in human lives and situations" (Witherington 1998, 38). Supernatural attestation of the onslaught of the Messianic Age was something that Jews in the intertestamental period were desperately seeking (Stronstad 1984). Even Bultmann (1961) admitted that the existence of miracles and the supernatural were an accepted presupposition of first-century Christians, Jews, and individuals in the wider Greco-Roman cultural-religious context (1–5).

A general Jewish openness to divine validation by signs and wonders is attested to in the Gospels (especially John) and is highlighted in Gamaliel's speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:35–39) and Philip's encounter with the Samaritans (8:5–13). Often in

the Gospels, the crowds desired to see a sign that would validate Christ's ministry and message, but Jesus responded with rebuke at the people's lack of faith and obedience to what they already knew (often His messianic identity is in view [Luke 11:29–32]). The early Christian tradition concerning false signs and wonders accompanying the coming of the "lawless one" could also be cited as an example of the widespread belief that signs and wonders were intended (by God or Satan) to persuade people (2 Thess. 2:9). Paul argues with the Corinthians that the signs and wonders he performed (which he says are "the things that mark an apostle") should have elicited the people's commendation of his ministry (2 Cor. 12:11–12). The two primary signs and wonders narratives in Acts (Pentecost and the healing of the lame man at the temple [Acts 2–4]) both record that very large crowds of devout Jewish people gathered to hear the gospel as a result of signs and wonders. Signs and wonders were an effective apologetic tool in early Christian ministry among Hellenistic Jews.

In a section of the Talmud written in the second century A.D., Jesus is called a sorcerer and is said to have "enticed Israel to apostasy" (translated by Epstein 1935, 281). Christianity's Jewish opponents in the second century did not deny Jesus' miracle-working power and corresponding claims to Deity (Corduan 1993, 200). Apparently Christianity's supernatural apologetic was persuasive enough to draw many Jews.

Ancient Greco-Roman Supernatural Apologetics

It is often assumed that all ancient peoples were undiscerning when it came to miracles and the supernatural, or what was acceptable as historical evidence when it came to supernatural phenomena. The ancient Greek and Roman historians Thucydides, Polybius, and Tacitus were often skeptical about claims of supernatural intervention in

the world, while other ancient historians, particularly Plutarch and Herodotus, were more open to claims of the supernatural as long as the claims had evidence to back them up or seemed credible (Witherington 1998, 222). Ephorus was against recording supernatural events for merely entertainment purposes but allowed supernatural examples if they were intended to teach morality or justice (31). Thucydides was against the inclusion of accounts concerning the miraculous into a historical monograph, while Herodotus, who has been called the "Father of Greek Historiography," utilized a theological historiography in which supernatural events were central to the narrative.

Semeia, Luke's primary term for "signs" in Luke-Acts, was used to mean "proof" in the context of reasoning in some ancient Greek literature and is so used in the works of Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, and Antiphanes (Liddell and Scott 1894, 1383). In Aristotle's *Logic*, a sign was "a probable argument in proof of a conclusion." But more likely in Luke-Acts *semeia* assumes a more Septuagintal meaning, as a sign from God, such as is found also in the Greek works of Sophocles and Plato. *Terata* (Luke's primary term for "wonders" in Acts) was used in ancient Greek literature to refer to "any appearance or event" that seemed to have supernatural origins (1541). The pairing of *semeia* with *terata* seems to be unique to the Septuagint, further revealing Luke's firm Septuagintal heritage (especially in his theology of supernatural apologetics). Luke's inclusion of signs and wonders narratives into Luke-Acts should probably be seen as an intentional continuation of Old Testament historiography and conservatively supernaturalistic Greek historiography.

The most common means of defending the validity of something in the Greco-Roman world was to use rhetorical methods of speech to persuade the audience.

Quintilian, a contemporary of Luke, offered three aims of the rhetorical introduction (known in Latin as the *exordium*): (a) to secure good will, (b) to get attention, and (c) to arouse curiosity (Myrick 1965, 55). The context of an oration was also of prime importance. Two of the three purposes of the *exordium* are fulfilled when a miraculous sign occurs before a speech (as in the speeches of Acts 2 and 3 that are made to Diaspora Jews, some of which were Hellenistic). In signs and wonders narratives, the context for the speech is set by offering an example of the power of the God to whom the speaker refers. Thus, the miraculous sign in an ancient Greco-Roman (or Jewish) setting is a rhetorical tool that brings the crowds to wonder, in order to persuade the crowd of the validity of the speaker's argument. As Kraft has argued, though, Jesus' miracles were part of His message (of salvation, kingdom rule, divine empowerment, and love), not just His method (1986, 24–27). The disciples likewise seemed to refer back to the precursor signs as part of the kerygma (Acts 2:16, 19, 22, 33, 38; 3:12; 4:9, 10, 30).

Conclusions on Lucan Supernatural Apologetics

The three research questions of the current study focused on apologetics. First, is there a consistent pattern in Luke-Acts for the use of signs and wonders as an apologetic for the Christian faith (i.e., did signs and wonders have an apologetic purpose in the original events)? Second, are the signs and wonders in Luke-Acts intended to be an apologetic for Luke's readers (i.e., does Luke intentionally argue for Christianity by recording signs and wonders)? Third, does Luke intentionally present a paradigm of supernatural apologetics (i.e., is Luke's supernatural apologetic intended to be transferred to contemporary apologetic ministry)? These three research questions were answered by an analysis of all of Luke's signs and wonders narratives in Luke-Acts that used Luke's

primary terms for signs and wonders (*semeia* and *terata*). The findings were divided into patterns (which were identified, analyzed, and presented in five separate tables) and precedents, paradigms, and programs (which were presented in diachronic exegeses of the texts).

The patterns in the signs and wonders narratives of Luke-Acts revealed forceful Lucan and original emphases on Christocentrism, apologetics, eschatology, and prophetic ministry. Every signs and wonders narrative in Acts described the supernatural ministry of a typological prophet. Central characters in Luke-Acts extensively used signs and wonders as an apologetic. Luke uses signs and wonders as a powerful defense of the gospel (though they often resulted in persecution and rejection). Supernatural ministry was presented as a God-empowered corollary of the gospel message.

Jesus' identity as God or the Messiah was defended in all but three of the signs and wonders narratives (making it the strongest pattern in all of the narratives). This fact, coupled with the extensive use of explanatory dialogues in these narratives, argues for a strong relationship between preaching the gospel and performing signs and wonders. Almost as strong was Luke's own creative interpretation of the events in his summaries, which make up a large bulk of the remaining narratives. Acts 2:1–41 and 4:1–22 were found to be at the center of Luke's signs and wonders theology. Luke seemed to have intended signs and wonders to be part of an apologetic of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and ascension, and this is presented most clearly in the patterns that are evident in these two narratives. Luke seems to have derived this emphasis from the original intent of the events. The precedents, paradigms, and programs in the signs and wonders narratives in Luke-Acts revealed similar conclusions.

The precedents, paradigms, and programs in the signs and wonders narratives in Luke-Acts revealed an emphasis on belief, behavior, and experiences, and centered on the value, validity, and veracity of the kerygma. The kerygma was able to save people from judgment, sickness, and demon possession. The miraculous events in the kerygma were shown to be true by the miraculous events that were performed by its defenders. Jesus was shown to be the messianic prophet in His life, death and resurrection, and ascension, through the powerful works that He (and later His disciples) performed. Jesus' miraculous ministry was ongoing in the ministries of His successors Peter, John, the Jerusalem apostles, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, and Paul. In the following paragraphs, the strongest cases for Lucan and original apologetic intent in the signs and wonders narratives of Luke-Acts are identified and evaluated, in order to ascertain whether or not Luke intended to present a paradigm of supernatural apologetics.

In the Gospel of Luke, Herod sought a sign as a defense of Jesus' identity (23:8–11). Luke presented this in an explanatory aside, which was an indicator of Lucan intent (especially in this case where Luke's material differs from both Matthew and Mark). Though Herod's search for a sign was negative (it revealed his unbelief), the search for a sign occurred in the context of a defense of Jesus' identity (as if a sign were a valid means of identifying the Messiah). This pointed to Lucan intentionality concerning the apologetic nature and purpose of signs in Luke.

The sign that the angel gave the shepherds proved Jesus' identity (Luke 2:8–12). Simeon's prophecy concerning Jesus' ministry included that Jesus was to be the sign (2:34–35), and Jesus was explicitly presented in His own words as a sign like Jonah

(11:29–32). All three of these Christocentric sign narratives occurred in explanatory dialogues, revealing the original intent of the signs as pointing to (or being) Jesus.

In Acts, signs and wonders were explicitly said to have confirmed the ministries and message of Jesus, Philip, Paul, and Barnabas (2:22; 8:5; 14:3). Jesus' confirmation by signs and wonders was elucidated in an explanatory dialogue (revealing the original intent of the signs and wonders), and Philip, Paul, and Barnabas' messages were confirmed by signs and wonders in summaries (revealing Lucan intent). All three of these narratives explicitly revealed the relationship between the preaching of the word and the validation of the word by miracles. Jesus' ministry was said to have been accredited (*apodeiknumi*) by signs and wonders. This same word was used by Luke in Acts 25:7 in a judicial sense. The Jews could not "prove" any of their charges against Paul before Festus. O'Reilly (1987) noted that *apodeiknumi* "in the sense of attesting or legitimating is rare in the Greek Bible," making Luke's usage significant and pointedly Hellenistic (179; Esther 3:13). Signs and wonders were evidence that helped to prove Jesus' messianic and prophetic identity.

Stephen's Moses-Jesus parallel occurred in an explanatory dialogue (showing Stephen's original intent) that is part of an apologetic of the gospel and Stephen's prophetic words and actions (including signs and wonders) (Acts 6:8; 7:35–39). The original intent of Stephen's sermon (which included an account of the signs and wonders of Moses as validations of his ministry and pointers to the coming Messiah) was to defend the gospel against those who had seen the words and miracles of Jesus, but who had rejected and killed Him.

The disciples prayed for signs and wonders (4:23–31) in an explanatory dialogue (revealing original intent). This narrative revealed the purpose of signs and wonders—to point to the name of Jesus in the accompaniment of bold (and Spirit-inspired) preaching. God answered the prayers of the disciples and enabled them to perform signs and wonders (5:12–16). Luke recorded this in a summary (revealing Lucan intent) and the resulting signs and wonders must be understood as a confirmation of what the disciples believed concerning the relationship between preaching the kerygma and signs and wonders.

Signs and wonders in Luke-Acts defend the messianic and prophetic character of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, and ascension. Signs and wonders were historically apologetic, leading people to belief or rejection of the gospel. Luke used signs and wonders in his narratives to prove to his readers the value, validity, and veracity of the kerygma. Luke intended his signs and wonders narratives to be apologetic, and to be used as models for future supernatural apologetic ministry.

Implications

The existence of patterned, precedent-setting, paradigmatic, and programmatic elements in the signs and wonders narratives of Luke-Acts point to Luke's intentional establishment of a supernatural apologetic in his two-volume work. Luke intentionally presented a paradigm of supernatural apologetics. Two of the purposes of Luke's two-volume work were (1) to teach through historical narrative and (2) to defend the gospel and Christianity (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1). Luke's past teachings and apologetics have present applications for readers today. Luke's supernatural apologetic was intended to be transferred to the apologetic ministries of his contemporaries. Luke seems to have

presented a powerful supernatural apologetic in order to teach his readers the normative manner of gospel dissemination. Each of Luke's main characters performs signs and wonders in their presentation and defense of the gospel. From the announcement of Jesus' birth to the Pauline ministry to the Gentiles of the nations, Luke presents signs and wonders as a corollary and defense of the kerygma. Signs and wonders and signs and wonders narratives were useful apologetic tools in the first century A.D. and continue to be important in a postmodern global context.

CHAPTER 20

DEVELOPING A CONTEMPORARY SUPERNATURAL APOLOGETIC IN LIGHT OF LUKE-ACTS

Contemporary Supernatural Apologetics

Many rationalists (Flew 1967; Hume 1955; Nowell-Smith 1955) viewed biblical and modern-day miracles as propaganda, superstition, and foolish contrivances of a premodern worldview. For instance, according to Ferdinand Baur and his student Eduard Zeller, Acts could not be considered reliable because it contained accounts of miracles (Gasque 1989, 44–45). Even many important conservative evangelical theologians and scholars have voiced their disbelief in modern miracles, signs, and wonders (Edgar 1988; Morris 1960; Ruthven 1989; Warfield 1918). The rationalists and the cessationists share a common disregard for modern evidences of signs and wonders, but a growing contingency among evangelicals and other more liberal mainstream churches recognizes the importance and validity of contemporary supernatural apologetics. Christiaan DeWet (1982) cited George Ladd's argument that contemporary exorcisms are signs of the kingdom (26). In 1982, the Lausanne Committee's "Consultation On the Relationship of Evangelism to Social Responsibility" stated in a report that some of the contemporary signs of God's kingdom were "making the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the sick whole, raising the dead, stilling the storm, and multiplying loaves and fishes" (Wagner 1992, 58). A growing number of evangelicals (especially those involved in mission work) are becoming aware of the importance of signs and wonders in evangelism (DeRidder 1975, 222; Wagner 1992, 45–59; Warner 1985). "Contemporary peoples, like

the ancient Israelites, are very desirous of gaining more spiritual power to enable them to deal better with the vagaries of life" (Kraft 1991, 305).

At the forefront of the fight for the importance and validity of signs and wonders in the contemporary church are the Pentecostals. Since the early part of the twentieth century, Pentecostals have witnessed a tremendous outpouring of God's supernatural manifestations. Pentecostals view their own role as "restoring to the church the sense of the supernatural stolen by the enlightenment" (York 2000, 151; Pomerville 1985). Menzies (1987), a Pentecostal scholar and theologian, argued for the importance of supernatural experiences in the hermeneutical processes of presuppositions, exegesis, theology, and verification/application. Modern experiences of miracles enable Pentecostals "to understand the charismatic life of the apostolic church, as Luke reports it, better than those contemporary Christians who lack this experience" (Stronstad 1995, 57–58). C. Peter Wagner (1991) argued that modern Pentecostals have been such a powerful force in modern mission endeavors because of their belief "that the Holy Spirit would accompany the preaching of the word with supernatural signs and wonders" (271). Consequently, thousands in the Pentecostal movement in America have testified to being healed from sickness and demon possession (McGee 1991; Thomson and Elwell 1984).

Signs and wonders have been witnessed outside of America in even greater numbers. A few examples should suffice. In the animistic culture that lives in the Maredumilli Samitha jungles in India, a man named Prem Sagar cast out demons, healed people, and witnessed an answer to prayer in an instance where a person had been bitten by a poisonous snake and was protected from any harm (Sargunam 1992, 181). Close to two hundred thousand people attended meetings in Argentina where American evangelist

Tommy Hicks ministered, and many were healed, and "miracles and prophecies were widely reported" (Wilson 1991, 80). In Sri Lanka, missionary Richard DeRidder (1975) cast out demons in the name of the Lord. Two students of Fuller Theological Seminary cast out demons from people in Costa Rica (Wagner 1992). Three other missionaries witnessed signs and wonders (56). On the continent of Africa, where exorcisms and divine healings are almost too numerous to reckon, theologian A. O. Igueza (1985) pointed out that, based on Luke 11:20 and Acts 1:8, Spirit commissioning and empowerment are central to biblical and modern exorcisms and healings (181).

A Contemporary Theology of Supernatural Apologetics

Contemporary experiences of healing, prophecy, miracles, tongues, and exorcisms are evidence that God continues to act in the world as He did in the past (Ervin 1981, 24). While some disbelieve in contemporary signs and wonders, those who have experienced miracles firsthand can attest to their authenticity. But miracles (in biblical or postmodern times) are not merely for entertainment value or for emotional ecstasy. The purpose of signs and wonders continues to center on defending the gospel's validity and power. Malek (1991) asserted that miraculous signs may soften an unbeliever's heart so that they are more responsive to Christ's claims (183).

If supernatural intervention in the world is accepted as a reality (and this was a fundamental presupposition of many people in the first century), miracles may serve to attest to the truth of Christianity (Corduan 1993, 147). But what do apologists do with other religions' supposed miraculous validations? One effective way to deal with this problem is known as the "power encounter," a term created by the missionary anthropologist Alan Tippett (1971). "A power encounter is an open, public confrontation

between opposing forces," one of God, and one of unsaved people and evil supernatural beings (Malek 1991, 181). This idea was developed from the biblical examples of Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:16–46), Gideon's encounter with the people in his town after he destroyed their idol (Judg. 6:25–32), Philip's encounter with Simon the magician (Acts 8:4–13), and Paul's encounter with Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:6–12). When God's power is shown to be superior, often people will be drawn from their false religion to Christianity. Don Newman (1992, 153) and Sobhi Malek (1991) emphasized the importance of power encounters in evangelism and apologetics among people groups who are open to supernatural manifestations (especially Muslims and animists).

The related term, "power evangelism," originated by John Wimber and Kevin Springer (1986), has less confrontational connotations. When healings and other miracles are used to point a person to Christ, the signs and wonders are referred to as power evangelism. "For most of the peoples of the world, healing is a theological problem," and presenting Christ without mentioning (or demonstrating) the power of Christ over spirits and diseases is seen as inadequate (Kraft 1991, 303). Contemporary missiologists recognize that many Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and animists find rational explanations or arguments for Christianity not as convincing as miraculous validations of Christianity in signs and wonders (Wagner 1991, 272).

It is significant that no founder of a major world religion made claims to deity comparable to Jesus' own claims (Olson 1998, 67). The claims that were made by Jesus and His followers provide a context in which to properly understand signs and wonders narratives. Unnatural events that occur seemingly without reason, or that lack a context of

supernatural claims, may be branded “scientific anomalies,” but supernatural events that contain contextual circumstances that point to a particular interpretation of the events are deemed apologetic in character (Corduan 1993, 160–161). Not only do signs and wonders provide a backdrop and apologetic of the truth of Christianity, they also serve as fulfillments of supernatural claims made by Christianity.

A Biblical Model for Supernatural Apologetics

There are no hints in Luke-Acts that Luke believed supernatural gospel ministry to be a phenomenon of the past. In fact, the opposite is true. Luke presents signs and wonders as evidences of the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God (Acts 2:1–41). This kingdom is still growing, and the end times are still upon the world; therefore, the signs and wonders of the eschatological kingdom of God should still be occurring in contemporary gospel ministry. The present study has already touched on the existence and importance of contemporary supernatural apologetics, but several things should be said about the nature of contemporary supernatural apologetics in light of the present research.

A contemporary supernatural apologetic must be biblical. The prophetic words and actions of the Old Testament prophets (among whom Moses is perhaps the foremost), Jesus, Peter, John, the Jerusalem apostles, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, and Paul should serve as examples of the nature and purpose of signs and wonders. Contemporary signs and wonders must be Christocentric. Miracles that do not point to Christ are not signs or wonders (signs and wonders are always Christocentric in Luke’s theology of supernatural apologetics). Contemporary signs and wonders must point to the eschatological kingdom of God. Miracles that do not present a choice between both belief and salvation on the

one hand, and rejection and judgment on the other, are not signs and wonders. Contemporary signs and wonders must be soteriological in aim. Miracles that do not bring (or point to) salvation from sin, sickness, or demon possession (while they may be interesting and necessary in their own right) are not signs and wonders. Contemporary signs and wonders should accompany the defense of the gospel. Miracles should be seen in their apologetic light, as powerful presentations of the value, validity, and veracity of the kerygma.

While the terms *signs* and *wonders* are Hellenistic-Jewish in origin, the ideas that they convey are still useful in contemporary apologetics. The Septuagintal-Lucan terminology may be antiquarian, but the usefulness of supernatural apologetics in contemporary missionary, evangelism, and apologetic ministry remains. Terms such as *power evangelism* and *power encounter* have been coined in an effort to contemporize Luke's theology of supernatural apologetics, but the focus remains the same—on showing the value, validity, and veracity of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and ascension.

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