What Is Biblical Criticism?

When people hear the word *criticism,* most think of a disparaging remark. In reality, biblical criticism or various critical approaches to the Bible are not about attacking the Bible but rather relate to the careful, academic study of it. Unfortunately, due to the antisupernatural presuppositions of many prominent biblical scholars in the last 250 years, biblical criticism has gotten a bad name. The term is often associated with a disingenuous objectivity that in reality is anti-Christian in its assumptions and conclusions. There are diverse forms of biblical criticism, some of them quite ancient (e.g., text and source criticism) and others more recent. We will survey some of the most significant forms of biblical criticism under the headings below.

Text Criticism

Text criticism is the careful study of ancient texts in an effort to establish what the original manuscripts of the Bible said. We have historical records of extensive text criticism from at least as far back as Origen (A.D. 185–254), but the modern flowering of the discipline followed the introduction of the printing press in Europe (1454) and the revival of scholars' knowledge of Greek and Hebrew at the time of the Reformation. Text criticism has flourished especially in the last two hundred years, with the many discoveries of ancient manuscripts and a growing scholarly consensus on methods. See question 5 ("Were the ancient manuscripts of the Bible transmitted accurately?") for more information on the findings of text criticism.

Historical Criticism

Historical criticism is the careful historical study of the documents in the Bible and related writings, events, and persons. The historical-critical method

seeks to establish what actually happened in history and what a text meant to the original author and reader(s).[1] In a related vein, biblical scholars often speak of doing historical-grammatical exegesis. That is, beginning with a proper understanding of what the text says in the original language (grammatical), scholars investigate the Bible's claims about what happened (historical). Historical-grammatical exegesis can be done with Christian presuppositions (i.e., that what the Bible says is true) or with skeptical and anti-Christian prejudices. Because of abuse by liberal scholars, some conservative Christians decry the use of historical criticism (and most of the other criticism below as well). It must be remembered, however, that it is the presuppositions that accompany the method that result in anti-Christian conclusions. Surely, the call to study carefully the grammar and history of the biblical text cannot, in and of itself, be bad. However, some recent critics in the theological interpretation of Scripture movement have argued that, by making the modern application of the text secondary, the historical-critical method implicitly truncates the very nature of Scripture as God's Word to God's people (see question 39, "What is the 'theological interpretation of Scripture'?").

Form Criticism

Form criticism is the study of how various portions of the text (e.g., individual stories, laws, proverbs, poems) circulated in oral form before being written down. Much form-critical writing is devoted to speculation as to the historical settings in which the oral units originally circulated. For example, Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932) proposed extensive and often unfounded cultic backgrounds for most of the Psalms.[2] Liberal New Testament form critics have hypothesized a great deal about how the stories of Jesus were embellished or even created in periods of oral circulation.[3] Conservative form critics recognize the value of isolating and classifying formerly oral units, but they do not take a skeptical approach to the material's historicity.[4]

Source Criticism

Source criticism seeks to establish the literary sources the biblical author/editor drew upon. For example, Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), a liberal Old Testament scholar, argued that the Pentateuch was composed of

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1. Arthur G. Patzia and Anthony J. Petrotta, "Historical Criticism," in *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 58.
2. Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).
3. E.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).
4. E.g., Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1935).

four literary strands: the Yahwist or Jehovist (J), Elohistic (E), Priestly (P), and Deuteronomistic (D) sources.[5] The evidence for this JEPD construction is actually quite tenuous. The data support traditional Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, while obviously allowing for some gathering and editing of the Mosaic material.[6]

In the New Testament, source criticism is especially applied to Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the Synoptic Gospels) because of their close similarity in wording and order. The majority of New Testament scholars believe that Luke and Matthew used two main sources in their composition—the written gospel of Mark and "Q." "Q" is an abbreviation for the German word *Quelle* (source) and stands for a collection of written and oral sources that Matthew and Luke had in common. Indeed, Luke explicitly indicates that he drew upon multiple sources in the composition of his Gospel (Luke 1:1–4). As many early church fathers comment on the literary sources behind the Gospels (i.e., which Gospel author(s) were dependent on others), source criticism is truly an ancient discipline.[7]

Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism is the study of the role of the redactor (editor) in the final composition of the biblical text. In other words, while many biblical authors had both firsthand knowledge of events (e.g., the apostle John) and oral and written sources from which to draw (e.g., Luke 1:1–4), the redactor ultimately showed his theological interests and purposes through selecting, omitting, editing, and summarizing the material for his text. (Of course, Christians assume the Holy Spirit was working through the redactors in this process.) Roughly between 1950 and 1990, redaction criticism was an especially popular method for studying the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). The leading evangelical redaction critic is Robert H. Stein.[8]

Tradition Criticism

Tradition criticism seeks to establish the history of a text before it reached its final written form. Thus, tradition criticism encompasses both the oral

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5. The basics of the theory predated Wellhausen (especially in the work of K. H. Graf), but it "was given its classic expression" in Wellhausen's writings (R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969; reprint, Peabody, MA: Prince (Hendrickson), 1999], 21). The theory is known as the documentary hypothesis or the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis.

6. See Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction,* rev ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 113–26.

7. E.g., Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels* 1.1–2 (*NPNF1* 6:77–78).

8. Robert H. Stein, *Gospels and Tradition: Studies on Redaction Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

and literary background of a text. It includes form, source, and redaction criticism (see above).

Literary Criticism

Beginning in the 1980s, various kinds of literary criticism became increasingly popular with biblical scholars. As most previous critical methods had sought to explain the reconstructed physical or literary history behind the text, here was an approach that now allowed for the text to be studied as a unity while sidestepping debated questions of historicity or authorship. Literary criticism seemed to promise a new middle way between polarized liberal and conservative biblical scholars.

At the most fundament level, a literary approach to the Bible recognizes the various literary genres within the canon and studies those works as unified pieces of literature. Evangelicals generally have used literary criticism to call attention to authorial intent and the message of the text. However, there are many different permutations of a literary approach to the Bible. Influenced by secular literary trends, a reader-response approach to the Bible celebrates the reader's creation of meaning with little or no concern for the authorial intent. Another approach, technical literary analysis, was especially popular among biblical scholars during the heyday of literary criticism (1985–1995). Many dissertations, articles, and monographs claimed to elucidate the biblical text through the use of countless obscure terms such as *implied reader, ideal reader, implied author, implicit commentary,* etc. The near disappearance of such technically laden publications testifies that a more commonsense approach to literary interpretation is the type that will endure. Narrative criticism, a subset of literary criticism, employs a literary approach to study the narratives (stories) in Scripture.

Rhetorical Criticism

When people speak of rhetorical criticism of the Bible, they generally mean one of two things. In reference to the New Testament, they are often speaking of the labeling of recognized Greco-Roman categories of speech in the New Testament. From 1970 to 1990, many New Testament scholars sought to offer new insights on the structure and purpose of New Testament texts through rhetorical analysis. Most scholars are now agreed that the overly technical labeling of New Testament texts with Latin and Greek rhetorical categories will not stand up to broader scholarly scrutiny.

"Rhetorical criticism" also can refer to the detection of beautiful and effective patterns of speech in the text. This is sometimes called "new rhetoric" to distinguish it from the method of illegitimately imposing Greco-Roman categories on the New Testament.[9]

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9. G. W. Hansen, "Rhetorical Criticism," in *DPL*, 824–25.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Before reading the material above, had you heard of any of these forms of biblical criticism? Which ones?

2. How does recognizing literary sources for biblical books affect our understanding of the authors' inspiration by the Holy Spirit?

3. Have you ever read an article or book in which a liberal scholar used one of the above methods with anti-Christian presuppositions and/or conclusions?

4. In your opinion, is it advisable for a Christian scholar to employ any of the above methods in the study of the Scripture? If not, what alternative approaches would you recommend?

5. Which of the above methods seems to hold the most promise for understanding the author's meaning in a text?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Carson, D. A., and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005. (See chap. 1, "Thinking About the Study of the New Testament," 23–76.)

Firth, David G., and Jamie A. Grant. *Words and the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Patzia, Arthur G., and Anthony J. Petrotta. *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker; London: SPCK, 2005.

What Is "Speech Act Theory"?

Evangelical scholarly publications of the last two decades frequently include some discussion of speech act theory.[1] Yet, for students uninitiated into this linguistic and philosophical approach, it is difficult to find a succinct, understandable introduction to the theory. A critical evaluation is more difficult to locate. Why, in fact, have evangelicals shown special interest in speech act theory, and can the theory really deliver what its practitioners promise?

Brief Explanation of Speech Act Theory

When my wife says, "It smells in the kitchen," she is not simply making a factual declaration. Rather, we can paraphrase her words: "I request that you take out the garbage." Her words are in actuality an action (requesting) that sets in motion another action (her husband taking out the garbage). In fact, most, if not all, utterances can be understood in relation to the actions they express or set in motion. In a nutshell, this is speech act theory—that is, the recognition that language at its root is action based. Or, as D. A. Carson and Doug Moo aptly summarize, "Words in contexts do not simply *mean* something, they may *do* something. . . . Words *do* things as well as *teach* things."[2]

History of Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory as a distinct linguistic, philosophical movement traces its origins to John L. Austin's lectures at Harvard University in 1955.[3] The

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1. E.g., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 49–104; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 153–57, 247–48; and D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 73.

2. Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 73.

3. The William James endowed lecture series. Austin, at the time, was a professor at Oxford University. Admittedly, the roots of speech act theory could be traced back further to the linguistic work of Wittgenstein or the theology of Karl Barth.

subsequent posthumous publication of the lectures (*How to Do Things with Words*, 1962),[4] along with John R. Searle's supporting studies, established the vocabulary and ground rules on which later speech act theorists continue to build.[5] Speech act theory has been widely hailed among literary critics and linguistic philosophers as an advance in understanding the way language works.[6]

The Vocabulary of Speech Act Theory

While more recent writers have greatly expanded the technical vocabulary of speech act theory, in this brief survey we will stay with three basic distinctions.

1. *Locutionary act:* the meaning of the utterance with respect to the normal sense of vocabulary and grammar.

2. *Illocutionary act:* the statement, with respect to the action performed in its utterance (e.g., request, command, promise, warning, blessing, etc.).

3. *Perlocutionary act:* an action created or brought about as a result of the utterance.[7]

An example from Scripture can illustrate this vocabulary. In Matthew 13:45–46, we read:

> Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

In this short passage, the "locutionary act" is the statement of Jesus with reference to the things described. Or more precisely, the locutionary dimension of this passage is limited to the Greek words written by Matthew with respect to their normal descriptive sense. The illocutionary dimension of this

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4. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

5. John R. Searle, *Speech-Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); and idem, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

6. W. Randolph Tate, "Speech Act Theory," in *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 349–50.

7. See Carson and Moo's similar summary in *Introduction to the New Testament*, 73. For a more extensive survey of speech act vocabulary, see Richard S. Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation: Toward a Hermeneutic of Self-Involvement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001).

passage can be paraphrased, "I, Matthew, as a follower of Jesus, urge and request you to accept the Lord's teaching (here faithfully translated and transmitted). I charge you—value his kingdom above all else!"[8] The perlocutionary force of the passage is seen when readers (both ancient and modern) respond to this text by turning away from idolatrous valuations, placing ultimate value on God's kingdom.

Evangelicals and Speech Act Theory

Evangelical scholars recently have demonstrated a fascination with speech act theory. This interest seems to be driven by several concerns. First, speech act theory offers a new philosophical basis for grounding a text's meaning in the intention of the author. Simply put, if actions are traceable to the intentions of their respective agents, must not "word-actions" likewise be so intrinsically connected with their authors? Jeannine K. Brown notes:

> Speech-act theory reaffirms the interpersonal nature of textual communication. Autonomous texts cut off from their authors do not warn, promise, or covenant. People warn, people promise, people covenant. This is the case even if we do not know who wrote a text. The author remains, in theory, connected to the text's communicative aims.[9]

Frankly, from my experience, most students who are exposed to speech act theory do not see the necessity of going down this philosophical road to defend authorial intent. In the murky depths of linguistic philosophy, however, evangelical proponents of speech act theory are performing a useful apologetic function—arguing for the objective grounding of biblical interpretation in a broader academy committed to relativism and subjectivity.[10]

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8. Vern Poythress warns, "Speech-act theory, if used simplistically, tends to make people think that each sentence-level act makes a single, simple speech commitment, defined as its 'illocutionary force': it either asserts, promises, commands, wishes, or the like. But a sentence in the Bible may often have, in addition to one more obvious and direct commitment, multiple, interlocking purposes, related in multiple ways to its literary context and its addressees. Speech-act theory, seen by some of its advocates as a way for enhancing our appreciation of multiple kinds of speech in the Bible, may at the same time artificially flatten and restrict the implications of any one kind of speech. The challenges increase when we move from considering sentences to considering the canon as a whole. The canon constitutes an exceedingly rich and complex product. It is easy to oversimplify if we try to fit it into a theory initially developed to deal with simple sentence-length utterances" (Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Canon and Speech Act: Limitations in Speech-Act Theory, with Implications for a Putative Theory of Canonical Speech Acts," *WTJ* 70 [2008]: 344–45).

9. Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 35.

10. Scott A. Blue, "Meaning, Intention, and Application: Speech Act Theory in the Hermeneutics of Francis Watson and Kevin J. Vanhoozer," *TrinJ* 23, no. 2 (2002): 161–84.

A second motivation for evangelical interest in speech act theory is the intersection of the theory with foundational Christian truths and the nature of Scripture. Theologians have long recognized the action-based dimension of God's words ("And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" [Gen. 1:3]).[11] The words of Scripture are not just propositions; they are "words on a mission," as Vanhoozer fittingly says.[12] In this sense, speech act theory simply recognizes the truth of God's testimony as to the nature of his words in passages such as this:

> As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:10–11)

Finally, evangelicals are interested (at least theoretically) in obeying the Bible as the Word of God. Consequently, speech act theory offers fertile ground for explaining possible relations between divine intentionality, the human author's intent, modern implications, and believing obedience to those implications. Evangelicals are still debating the exact relation of these practical hermeneutical dimensions and their purported grounding in speech act theory. For example, is the *modern* perlocutionary dimension of a passage (that is, obedience of the Christian to the text) included within the conscious intention of the human author? If not, how is it validly rooted in authorial intent?

Caveats and Comparisons

The current state of speech act theory can be compared with the use of rhetorical criticism in biblical interpretation. Following James Muilenburg's seminal work on rhetorical criticism in his 1968 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, there was a flowering of rhetorical studies, especially among New Testament scholars. Countless commentaries and articles, not to mention doctoral dissertations, promised new insights into the text

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11. McKenzie writes, "The word of Yahweh may be called sacramental in the sense that it effects what it signifies. When Yahweh posits the word-thing, nothing can prevent its emergence" (John L. McKenzie, "The Word of God in the Old Testament," *TS* 21 [1960]: 196).

12. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 179. Vanhoozer sees all speech acts in Scripture as infallible because of the divine origin of the Bible ("The Semantics of Biblical Literature," 95). Gregg R. Allison argues that a speech act theory approach to divine communication grounds both Scripture's infallibility and inerrancy ("Speech Act Theory and Its Implications for the Doctrine of the Inerrancy/Infallibility of Scripture," *Philosophia Christi* 18 [1995]: 1–23).

through labeling and discussing the rhetorical categories supposedly used by the biblical authors (e.g., *exordium, narratio, propositio, probatio, exhortatio*, etc.).[13]

As the fortieth anniversary of Muilenburg's address has come and gone, I think we can say that rhetorical criticism has come up short for several reasons. First, scholars often do not agree on the rhetorical labeling of the text. Indeed, if so-called experts in the field cannot agree on basic labels and divisions of the text, what is the likelihood that the average reader will be convinced or helped by these categories?

Second, scholars not engaged in rhetorical criticism are in general agreement that the rhetorical approach has produced little, if any, new insights into the text.[14] That is not to say that rhetorical critics have not offered helpful observations on the text but rather that their rhetorical-critical method is not indispensable.

Third, where insights have come through rhetorical critics' careful attention to the biblical author's argumentation, those insights often have been obscured by the overly technical vocabulary of rhetorical criticism. The same observations could have been made without the use of a dozen Latin words ending in *-tio*. Indeed, at its best, rhetorical criticism draws our attention to the persuasive and beautiful features of the authors' writing without parading itself as a faddish method.

Biblical scholars who use speech act theory can learn an important lesson from the history of rhetorical criticism. At its best, speech act theory will remind the interpreter of an often ignored dimension to language, namely, its inherent action component. When it is hermeneutically significant to note the action-related dimensions of speech, interpreters should do so, but with as little recourse to technical vocabulary as possible. Intelligibility and relevance will determine whether speech act theory is a passing fad or of lasting use in the study of Scripture. In one hundred years, speech act theory will likely only be an entry in dictionaries of hermeneutics. But, if speech act theorists are successful in awakening a generation of biblical interpreters to the action-dimension of language, then the movement will have succeeded, even if most of its technical vocabulary dies a well-deserved death.

Similarly, speech act theorists can learn from the story of verbal aspect theory. Some variation of verbal aspect theory is arguably the best way to understand the Greek verbal system. Very succinctly, verbal aspect theory says that the writer's subjective description of an action (viewed as a whole, in process, or completed with results) is the primary dimension of a Greek

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13. For a brief overview of rhetorical criticism, see G. W. Hansen, "Rhetorical Criticism," in *DPL*, 822–26.

14. I am basing this observation on comments made by colleagues in biblical studies.

verb, with time of secondary importance *only* in the indicative mood.[15] Verbal aspect theory has been accepted nearly universally in some form among New Testament scholars and continues to influence the best of Greek grammars, New Testament commentaries, and other academic studies. What are some of the features that led to the theory's quick adoption and use? First, the theory has obvious implications for the reading of almost every sentence in the New Testament. If speech act theorists are going to exercise similar influence, they will need to improve in demonstrating the relevance of their theories.[16] Second, verbal aspect theory, while using a "technical vocabulary" (e.g., perfective, imperfective, stative), does not introduce too many new terms. Additionally, the terms are clearly defined and amply illustrated. Indeed, one could conceivably use verbal aspect theory without having any knowledge of the technical vocabulary—as long as the key insights are understood.[17] If speech act theorists can make their key concepts readily accessible and well illustrated, it is likely that they will exercise broad influence.[18]

At this point, the future of speech act theory is a bit uncertain. Biblical scholars are at the stage where they know they must offer some obeisance to the theory in their academic writing. It is yet to be shown whether speech act theory can really take hold in biblical studies through demonstrated relevance, clear and limited terminology, and understandable concepts. It is important to remember that insofar as speech act theory is actually a true description of reality, it only classifies undeniable language functions.[19]

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Does the description of all language as being fundamentally action based seem correct to you?

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15. Stan Porter, one of the primary proponents of verbal aspect theory, thinks that even in the indicative mood, time is only contextually determined (Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], 20–49).

16. One pioneer in this field is Anthony Thiselton. See especially his commentary on 1 Corinthians (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000]).

17. See the simplified description of verbal aspect theory advocated by Robert E. Picirilli, "The Meaning of the Tenses in New Testament Greek: Where Are We?" *JETS* 48, no. 3 (2005): 533–55.

18. For *locution, illocution,* and *perlocution,* Jeannine Brown proposes the following synonymous expressions: *speaker's saying, speaker's verbal action, hearer's response* (*Scripture as Communication*, 33).

19. Vern Poythress offers this helpful caveat: "Speech act theory, or genre theory, or any other theory, is not comprehensive in its attentiveness. So the danger arises that it . . . may overoptimistically be used as if it were the key to understanding, rather than a reminder of one more dimension of communication" ("Canon and Speech Act," 343).

2. In two minutes, could you explain the basics of speech act theory to someone else? Is the theory understandable and relevant?

3. Challenge: Choose a short passage in the Bible and discuss these dimensions: locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary (see above).

4. In the discussion above, speech act theory was compared with rhetorical criticism and verbal aspect theory. Can you think of any other academic approaches or theories that offer lessons to speech act advocates?

5. Can you think of any more accessible terms to substitute for *locutionary, illocutionary,* and *perlocutionary?*

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Briggs, Richard S. "Speech-Act Theory." In *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 763–66. Grand Rapids: Baker; London: SPCK, 2005.

_____. *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation: Toward a Hermeneutic of Self-Involvement.* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics.* Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

_____. I*s There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

What Is the "Theological Interpretation of Scripture"?

Biblical scholars gather once a year at the annual professional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. At the November 2008 meeting in Boston, some of the liveliest sessions focused on the "theological interpretation of Scripture" (TIS). Indeed, the recent publication of many titles related to TIS demonstrates that the fascination with this hermeneutical approach is only beginning.[1] At the same time, TIS is so new that even many Christian scholars have no clear sense of what it is. In a sentence, TIS is an academic movement that seeks to return reflection on the biblical text to the purview of the confessing Christian church. Below, we will survey the terminology, history, and characteristics of the theological interpretation of Scripture movement.

Terminology

At present, a number of interchangeable terms are used to identify a TIS approach to the Bible.

1. Theological interpretation of Scripture
2. Theological interpretation of the Bible
3. Theological interpretation
4. Theological hermeneutics
5. Theological commentary on the Bible
6. Theological exegesis

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1. The Baker Academic Web site lists twenty-one books under the category of "theological interpretation." Included are a number of commentaries in the new Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series (www.bakeracademic.com [accessed December 13, 2008]). Baker appears to be the leading evangelical publisher in the area of theological interpretation.

Additionally, some recent works fit within the TIS framework but do not identify themselves explicitly with the terms listed above.[2]

History of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture Movement

As is clear from recent TIS authors' struggles to describe their movement, the theological interpretation of Scripture is still emerging as a defined approach to the Bible.[3] It is difficult to find a monograph before 2005 that uses the identifier "theological interpretation" in the technical sense that it has quickly acquired.[4] At the same time, advocates of theological interpretation do not see themselves as proposing something new but as returning to the church-based, transformative study of the Bible that characterized generations of Christians before the Enlightenment.[5]

Daniel J. Treier traces the interests of TIS authors to precursors in Karl Barth and the Yale School (a movement in literary criticism birthed at Yale).[6] Other more recent pioneers (from the 1990s) include Francis Watson, Stephen Fowl, and Kevin Vanhoozer.[7]

Indeed, as the movement has coalesced so recently, it is difficult to gain a balanced historical perspective on its origins. It seems, however, that a number of scholarly trends have intersected and combined, resulting in a new movement that only recently has found enough unity to consistently describe itself with its own moniker (i.e., TIS). The trends leading to TIS include: disillusionment with the historical-critical method and far-fetched ideologically driven interpretations (e.g., homosexual readings of Scripture), a desire for theological continuity with the pre-Enlightenment church, a growing acceptance in the academy of interpretive movements that bracket out skepticism and critical questions (e.g., reader-response approach,[8] canonical criticism, canonical process approach, narrative or literary criticism,

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2. E.g., N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).
3. See Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker; London: SPCK, 2005), 19–25.
4. But see Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997).
5. Note the subtitle of Treier's book—*Recovering a Christian Practice*.
6. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 17–19.
7. Ibid., 11.
8. Interestingly, Erik M. Heen describes TIS as a kind of reader-response approach. He writes, "The 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture' has emerged as a new discipline within biblical studies. In this approach to the Bible the 'social location' of the contemporary interpreter is taken seriously. 'Theological Interpretation' can, therefore, be understood as kind of 'Reader-Response' criticism. In Theological Interpretation the primary interpretive community of readers is not understood to be a subset of the academy, as is assumed in many varieties of Reader Response Criticism; rather, the interpretive body is made up of those who self-identify as members of church communities. Theological Interpretation seeks then to bring together newer methods of biblical studies with confessionally based

reception history, effective history, etc.). For further descriptions of these precursors to TIS, see question 40 ("What are some other recent trends in biblical interpretation?").

Characteristics of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture Movement

"Can you tell me in one sentence what the theological interpretation of Scripture is?" Thus queried a colleague of mine at a recent gathering. Indeed, as the TIS movement is still developing, it is difficult to briefly define without being reductionistic. Below, I shall list some dominant characteristics and accompanying assessments of the TIS movement.

1. Practitioners of TIS generally are disillusioned with the historical-critical method, biblical theology, principles of interpretation, and ideologically driven interpretation as ends in themselves. It is important to note that TIS is in many ways a rejection of the status quo. To recent scholarly work on the Bible, TIS advocates would give two assessments: "Not enough" (by leaving theology in the cerebral realm) and "not faithful to the nature of Scripture and our identity as Christians" (by not reading as followers of Jesus who encounter God in the words of the Bible). Those advocating TIS are not advocating the complete neglect of historical criticism or other interpretive methods. But these methods in themselves (and what they have produced) are not enough.

   TIS authors especially dislike the idea that hermeneutics is a process of learning interpretive methods, applying those methods, and arriving at a propositional statement of authorial meaning. Such a hermeneutical model, it is argued, eviscerates and objectifies the text. The interpreter approaches the text as master rather than as servant.[9] Scripture becomes an ancient word to others rather than God's living Word to us today. While I certainly am sympathetic to criticisms of any method that would reduce hermeneutics to a cold semantic equation, it is equally true that many of the church fathers (generally revered by TIS) enumerate interpretive methods similar to the ones used in standard hermeneutics textbooks today.[10]

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theological reflection in ways that historical-criticism did not always encourage" ("The Theological Interpretation of the Bible," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21, no. 4 [2007]: 373).

9. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 92.

10. See, for example, the interpretive rules of Augustine in Book 2 of *De Doctrina Christiana* (*NPNF1* 2:535–55). Of course, in addition to standard interpretive principles, Augustine

Practitioners of TIS emphasize confessing Christians as participants and the audience of interpretation. According to TIS, interpretation must take place in the church and for the church. Some TIS authors are liberal Protestants, others are Roman Catholics, and others are evangelicals. But all desire to remain self-consciously ecclesiastical in confession and concerns.

At its best, this bold call for a believing interpreter and audience demonstrates that TIS authors are "not ashamed of the gospel" (Rom. 1:16). At its worst, writing in and for the church can be a capitulation to the secular world's demands that religious faith remain subjective. That is, in embracing the church context as the *only* legitimate realm for theological reflection, Christians become just another reading community rather than those who believe the truth they hold is for all people.

2. Practitioners of TIS respect external theological parameters as guides for interpretation. If one writes in and for the church, it is legitimate to be bound by ecclesiastical confessions, argue TIS authors. That is, one can unashamedly appeal to the "rule of faith" (early Christian summary of fundamental beliefs), creeds, confessions, and the contours of the Christian canon. TIS authors point to the early church's use of the "rule of faith" as one of its main interpretive principles.[11]

Admittedly, most interpretations of Scripture are influenced by prior theological commitments, whether formalized in a creed or not. Yet, ultimately, Scripture demands an authority above any doctrinal précis. We do not want to lose what our forefathers in the faith fought for in the Reformation. As Luther courageously declared in his defense at the Diet [Assembly] of Worms (1521),

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endorses a reverent, church-based, confessionally informed approach—the very desire of TIS practitioners.

11. Treier's description of the new Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series illustrates the TIS commitment to doctrinal parameters: "The series 'presupposes that the doctrinal tradition of the church can serve as a living and reliable basis for exegesis.' This tradition, more specifically, is that doctrine surrounding the Nicene Creed. The series promotes 'intratextual analysis' as its key 'method,' along with drawing upon 'the liturgical practices and spiritual disciplines of the church as a secondary dimension of the canonical context for exegesis of scriptural texts.' Such an approach can lead to various senses of Scripture, including 'allegorical' readings, and requires that contributors engage the history of exegesis, not in order to provide readers with a summary of past interpretation, but in order to shape exegetical judgments in conversation with the tradition'" (*Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 40). The quotations within Treier's remarks are from a Brazos document describing the purpose of the series to contributors.

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.[12]

3. Practitioners of TIS appreciate the narrative story line of Scripture. Scripture is approached not primarily as a set of propositions but as the story of the living God and his saving revelation of himself to wayward humans.[13] The language of drama is seen as a powerful metaphor for God's story in Scripture and the ongoing participation of Christians today in God's work in the world.[14]

4. Practitioners of TIS respect the way the Bible has been interpreted by previous generations of Christians. In fact, another scholarly trend that led directly into the TIS movement is the recent scholarly fascination with ancient church beliefs, writings, and practices.[15] While we can learn much from the early church, some TIS authors are too uncritical in their praise and appropriation of ancient and medieval church interpreters.[16] Martin Luther, on the other hand, judged Origen's exegesis as

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12. *W.A.* 7:838. English translation by Roger A. Hornsby, "Luther at the Diet of Worms," in *Career of the Reformer II*, ed. George W. Forell, in *Luther's Works,* ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 32:112–13.

13. Vanhoozer writes, "We [as practitioners of TIS] do affirm the ecumenical consensus of the church down through the ages and across confessional lines that the Bible should be read as a unity and as *narrative testimony* to the identities and actions of God and of Jesus Christ" (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Introduction: What Is the Theological Interpretation of the Bible," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker; London: SPCK, 2005], 19 [my emphasis]).

14. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

15. E.g., Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008); The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Series (IVP); and The Church's Bible (Eerdmans).

16. E.g., David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 26–38; Stephen E. Fowl, "The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 35–50; and R. R. Reno, "'You Who Were Far Off Have Been Brought Near': Reflections on Theological Exegesis," *Ex Auditu* 16 (2000): 169–82.

"altogether useless."[17] Luther could make such a statement because of his commitment to the Bible's authority and clarity (as distinguished from Origen's allegorical flights of fancy, which added meaning unintended by the biblical authors).

5. Practitioners of TIS show an interest in the way the Bible has affected culture, art, politics, science, and other fields of knowledge. Technically, this subset of TIS is termed the study of a text's "effective history." Obviously, this sort of cross-disciplinary approach makes for interesting reading and allows readers to intersect the message of Scripture in ways quite foreign to traditional biblical studies. As TIS calls for the return of the Bible to the church (and the church is composed of much more than professional scholars), it is appropriate to ask how the Bible affects all of God's people and their lives.

6. Practitioners of TIS desire that the study of the Bible be transformative of the individual and the individual's faith community. Tying in with a growing interest in biblical spirituality, TIS authors advocate spiritually transformative study. Scripture cannot simply be viewed as a historical puzzle to be solved but as a word from God to his people.[18]

Projections

A colleague of mine recently noted that many people are writing books *about* the theological interpretation of Scripture, but very few are actually engaging in theological interpretation.[19] Of course, this situation is beginning to change with the new Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series and other forthcoming books. Still, it is difficult to evaluate the TIS movement until more of its interpretive fruit is available for sampling.

It is perhaps foolhardy to offer projections about how the TIS movement will develop, but I will offer some tentative projections. Initial euphoria over this new middle ground in biblical scholarship will likely give way to splintering. The issue of ultimate authority (Scripture? tradition? human reason?) will cause liberal Protestants, evangelicals, and Roman Catholics to part ways. Evangelicals will likely face division among themselves—some

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17. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5,* in *Luther's Works,* ed. J. Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:233. Luther writes, "It is the historical sense alone which supplies the true and sound doctrine" (ibid.).

18. Joel B. Green favors "interpretive practices oriented toward shaping and nurturing the faith and life of God's people" (*Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2007], 79).

19. A comment by Jonathan Pennington. He is currently working on a book that seeks to apply concretely the TIS approach to the Gospels.

enamored with the broader academy's praise of TIS at the expense of biblical faithfulness.

A generational divide also will likely characterize evangelicals. Some younger evangelicals who embrace TIS will denigrate the work of their exegetical forefathers. Older evangelicals will misunderstand and dismiss the new movement, uncritically lumping it together with other recent trends (the emergent church, postmodern theology, post-conservative theology).

In spite of some dour expectations, I genuinely hope that my fears are unfounded and that the better aspects of the movement (especially the call for reverent submission to Scripture) influence evangelical colleges, seminaries, and churches for years to come.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Before reading the material above, had you ever heard of the theological interpretation of Scripture (TIS) movement?

2. What aspects of the TIS movement do you find most promising?

3. Do any characteristics of the TIS movement concern you?

4. Have you noticed any characteristics of the TIS movement in recent books you have read or speakers you have heard?

5. A few projections for the future of the TIS movement were made above. Which of these projections seem most likely to you?

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Adam, A. K. A., Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson, eds. *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

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Vanhoozer, Kevin J., ed. *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker; London: SPCK, 2005.

_____. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

What Are Some Other Recent Trends in Biblical Interpretation?

As this book is limited to forty questions, it is necessary to combine into one section a brief survey of some other current issues in the field of hermeneutics. It is my desire that the discussion below would give a concise introduction to trends and terms that the readers of this book may encounter in the area of biblical interpretation.

Biblical Theology

When used in the more technical sense, *biblical theology* refers to an approach to the study of the Bible that seeks to hear the nuances of the diverse biblical texts. The discipline often is criticized for being atomistic and having little concern for confessional application.[1] Any synthesis in biblical theology usually is attempted by exploring a common theme through the biblical books—again, with primary attention to the distinctions among the texts.

Biblical theology as a discipline traces its origins to the seminal address by J. P. Gabler (1787), in which he called for biblical scholars to focus on the grammatical-historical meaning of texts. Gabler then suggested that the conclusions of biblical theologians would be taken up and articulated to the current situation by dogmatic or systematic theologians. Modern scholars often decry the separation and competition that exists between systematic and biblical theologians. The theological interpretation of Scripture movement hopes to remove this divide between historical meaning and current-day significance (see question 39, "What is the 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture'?").

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1. D. A. Carson, "New Testament Theology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 796–97.

Canonical Criticism

Canonical criticism is a scholarly approach to the study of the Bible that traces its origins to the writings of Brevard Childs (1923–2007) and the Yale School (i.e., a movement of literary criticism birthed at Yale). In actuality, Childs eschewed the label "canonical criticism," as he was not trying to set up another sterile academic approach to be lumped together with other "criticisms."[2] Still, many people see Childs as the grandfather of canonical criticism, an approach that embraces the completed canon in the context of confessional Christianity as the appropriate boundary within which to study texts and biblical themes. In other words, according to canonical criticism, biblical scholarship should not focus on hypothetical literary precursors or supposed historical influences but on the actual completed biblical books as they appear in the canon of the Christian church. Critics of canonical criticism have noted that, despite the benefits of viewing texts in their final form in relation to other canonical documents, valid literary and historical questions often are neglected by this approach.

Canonical Process Approach

Similar to canonical criticism, a canonical process approach to the Bible takes the completed canon as a starting point for studying the biblical writings. A canonical process approach respects each biblical author's original meaning, while seeing a progressive revelation of God's purposes in later biblical writings. Such later revelations give further insight into the original biblical author's intentions. An advocate of the canonical process approach, Bruce Waltke, explains:

> By the canonical process approach I mean the recognition that the text's intention became deeper and clearer as the parameters of the canon were expanded. Just as redemption itself has a progressive history, so also older texts in the canon underwent a correlative progressive perception of meaning as they became part of a growing canonical literature.[3]

Reception History

Reception history focuses on the way a biblical text has been received or understood by Christians throughout church history. In recent years, some

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2. Gerald T. Sheppard, "Canonical Criticism," *ABD* 1:863.
3. Bruce K. Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 7. Waltke also writes, "In contrast to canonical criticism . . . according to which the ancient texts were reworked in the progressive development of the canon in such a way that they may have lost their original historical significance, the canonical process approach holds that the original authorial intention was not changed in the progressive development of the canon but deepened and clarified" (ibid., 8).

biblical scholars have called for a focus on reception history as one way out of the impasse and confusion in the discipline of biblical theology.[4] Scholars must admit that even most experts know little about the way biblical texts were read before the eighteenth century. Moreover, attention to a text's history of interpretation possibly provides a more objective basis for ongoing discussion and helps reignite scholarly recognition of practical and confessional concerns. Unfortunately, a celebration of the way a text has been received can be a subtle acceptance of polyvalence (i.e., receiving various incongruous understandings as equally valid). Avoidance of the thorny issue of a text's truthfulness can be an implicit denial of that claim.

Effective History

The effective history of a biblical text looks not only at the way the text has been understood throughout church history (i.e., reception history) but also at the way a text has influenced the lives and environments of those reading the texts. Thus, *effective history* is a broader term than *reception history,* encompassing a text's influence on Christian behavior, church practices, art, culture, etc. Like reception history, the study of effective history has been proposed as a way forward in the splintered field of biblical studies.[5]

Intertextuality

Recently, at a graduation commencement at my seminary, the dean read the title of a doctoral dissertation that included the word *intertextuality*. A colleague leaned over and whispered, "I've never heard that word before." I replied, "It's a hot topic in biblical studies." In brief, intertextuality gives attention to the way that one biblical text is alluded to or used by another biblical author. Depending on a scholar's interests, an intertextual study can lean more toward literary, theological, or historical issues. Looking at the Bible as a unified book, some intertextual critics study the development of motifs throughout the diverse perspectives of the biblical writers. Patzia and Petrotta note:

> Generally the study of biblical intertextuality focuses more on the *processes* by which biblical texts were reworked and the *differences* between the texts: texts were extended in meaning but also transposed or even refuted. The

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4. E.g., Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ,* Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1–38.
5. Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 64–68; and Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 31–38.

emphasis tends toward exploring the *plurality* of possible readings rather than the *conformity* of readings.[6]

Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic

A redemptive-movement hermeneutic (or redemptive-trajectory hermeneutic) approaches the Bible with the supposition that the Scriptures provide a certain ethical trajectory that points to conclusions beyond (and possibly in contradiction to) those issues explicitly addressed in the text.[7] William Webb, an advocate of the redemptive-movement hermeneutic, writes,

> The Christian seeking to apply Scripture today should examine the movement between the biblical text and its surrounding social context. Once that movement has been discovered there needs to be an assessment of whether the movement is preliminary or absolute. If it is preliminary and further movement in the direction set by the text would produce a more fully realized ethic, then that is the course of action one must pursue. The interpreter extrapolates the biblical movement towards a more just, more equitable and more loving form. If a better ethic than the one expressed in the isolated words of the text is possible, and the biblical and canonical spirit is headed that direction, then that is where one ultimately wants to end up.[8]

For example, though slavery is regulated and assumed in the Old and New Testament, according to a redemptive-movement hermeneutic, we see an increasing recognition throughout Scripture that slavery is objectionable to God. Though the biblical text does not explicitly state abolitionist conclusions, if one continues to trace the redemptive critique of culture beyond the text, one will be led to see the sinfulness of slavery. Thus the redemptive-movement hermeneutic is the recognition of progressive patterns that reach their climax beyond the actual written words of Scripture. Scholars also have used a redemptive-movement hermeneutic to argue for the full participation of women in pastoral ministry. This interpretive method, especially in arguing for women pastors (in clear contradiction to 1 Tim. 2:12), has been cogently critiqued by Thomas Schreiner.[9]

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6. Arthur G. Patzia and Anthony J. Petrotta, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 63. Emphasis in original.

7. See, e.g., I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); and Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

8. William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 36.

9. Thomas R. Schreiner, "William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*: A Review Article," *SBJT* 6, no. 1 (2002): 46–64. This article is available online under the "Resources" link at www.sbts.edu. See also the forthcoming dissertation critiquing the

Missional Hermeneutic

Missional is a relatively new word that continues to face some ambiguity in definition. The word has been taken up by a number of churches and biblical scholars as helpful in identifying the perpetually "sent" nature of the church. In other words, a church that is "missional" considers all of its beliefs and practices in light of the reality that God has sent that church to proclaim and embody the gospel to outsiders, especially in its immediate context. Likewise, a "missional" reading of the Scriptures or a "missional" hermeneutic sees God as the ever-sending God. The Bible contains a missional story because it reports God revealing himself savingly to wayward humans and commissioning other humans to this task as well. Advocates of a missional hermeneutic argue that when the Bible is extracted from its missional context and read solely as a systematic theology text, a fundamental dimension of God and his revelation is ignored.[10]

Philosophical Hermeneutics

One of my mentors, the New Testament scholar Robert Stein, once told me, "I wrote my text on hermeneutics because I could not understand the other books on the subject." While partly spoken in jest, his comment is instructive.

Many academic hermeneutics texts are difficult for the average lay reader to understand. Why? For one reason, a number of these books focus on foundational, philosophical issues. For example, how do we know that we know anything at all (epistemology)? How does language transmit meaning (semantics)? These and many other philosophical conundrums are explored, usually with a high frequency of obtuse terms. While exploring such issues is a worthy intellectual task, the majority of Christians are not aided by these rarefied treatises. Readers with a philosophical bent are referred to Anthony C. Thiselton's *The Two Horizons* for an analysis of philosophical questions that intersect hermeneutics.[11]

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Of the terms and trends outlined above, which were new to you?

2. Do you see any commonalities among the recent interpretive approaches outlined above? What might those commonalities reveal about our current cultural context?

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redemptive-movement hermeneutic by Benjamin Reaoch, a doctoral student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

10. E.g., Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

11. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

3. Does being aware of the missional nature of Scripture really make a difference in our understanding and application of it?

4. Challenge: Choose one of the methods explained above and study a specific biblical text in light of the chosen approach.

5. Challenge: Read Thomas Schreiner's review essay available at the Web site cited in the footnote in this section. Do you agree with Schreiner's assessment of Webb's redemptive-movement hermeneutic?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Bockmuehl, Markus. *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study*. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

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