

# WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES HERMENEUTICS MAKE? HERMENEUTICAL THEORY APPLIED<sup>1</sup>

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## I. Introduction

*The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines hermeneutics as follows:

Hermeneutics, the "art of interpretation," was originally the theory and method of interpreting the Bible and other difficult texts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the organizers of the "Hermeneutics: Bible and Culture" conference at Alliance Bible Seminary in Hong Kong, especially Dr. Ivan Kwong. They asked me explicitly to offer a paper that gave a definition of hermeneutics and showed the interpretive results of various methods, and this revised paper is the result. I appreciate the opportunity to have engaged this subject, and the resulting stimulus it has provided for other hermeneutical research and writing.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Inwood, "Hermeneutics," in *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London: Routledge, 2005), 367-68; cf. W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 163; D.E. Klem, "Hermeneutics," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John H. Hayes; 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 1.497-502. The emergence of hermeneutics into the limelight is seen by the

I note first of all that hermeneutics is concerned with and, in the appositive phrase in this short statement, is defined as the "art of interpretation." I note further that originally hermeneutics was concerned with the theory and method of interpreting the Bible. The theologian, philosopher and biblical scholar, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whose romantic hermeneutical stance extended the notion of inspiration to books outside the Bible, believed that the Bible should be interpreted by the same methods as were used to interpret other literature.<sup>3</sup> This hermeneutical interest in interpreting the Bible continues to this day, on a wide range of fronts. These fronts include conferences on hermeneutics and the Bible and numerous publications with the word "hermeneutics" in the title. For many, this historically based definition continues to be sufficient to define the field of hermeneutics, in which hermeneutics is simply associated with interpreting the Bible. I hope to clarify this point further below,<sup>4</sup> but this paper is concerned, to a large extent, with hermeneutics as biblical interpretation. Whatever hermeneutics is and is thought to be, it traditionally continues to be concerned with interpretation and understanding of the Bible.

The definition from the encyclopedia, however, continues:

Wilhelm Dilthey extended [hermeneutics] to the interpretation of all human acts and products, including history and the interpretation of human life.<sup>5</sup>

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fact that the well-known and rightly highly regarded *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Paul Edwards and published in 1967 (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), does not have an entry for hermeneutics within its eight volumes, even though it has entries for virtually all of the important figures (writing before the date of publication) who are typically considered important in the field of hermeneutics.

<sup>3</sup> Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: From Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> As well as in a projected forthcoming volume on hermeneutics in which I lay out a linguistically based hermeneutical model.

<sup>5</sup> Inwood, "Hermeneutics," 368. On Dilthey, see Stanley E. Porter and Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory: Philosophical, Theological, and Biblical Perspectives* (forthcoming), ch. 2.

Here hermeneutics is extended (by Dilthey [1833-1911]) beyond the realm of textual interpretation to interpretation of other forms of human behavior, including the things that have been done, which becomes the realm of history, and the doing of things, which becomes the realm of human life. This broad and encompassing definition reflects the way that the term hermeneutics has come to be interpreted outside of the field of biblical studies, with growing and expanding numbers of areas where hermeneutics is seen to be important. These include not only history and human behavior, but the physical sciences, where humans interact with the data and phenomena of the physical world in an apparently different way than they do in others.

The definition has still more to offer:

[Martin] Heidegger, in *Being and Time* (1927), gave an "interpretation" of the human being, the being that itself understands and interprets. Under his influence, hermeneutics became a central theme of Continental philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Heidegger (1889-1976) remains one of the central figures in hermeneutics. The major shift brought about by Heidegger was to change the focus of philosophy and hence hermeneutics from ontology or questions of being, to what it means to be a human being, or beingness.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, continental philosophy, as opposed to the kind of philosophy that more typically developed in Britain and North America with its emphasis upon logical positivism, has been concerned with matters of interpreting human existence, and saw the rise of such philosophical discussions as existentialism and deconstruction.

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<sup>6</sup> Inwood, "Hermeneutics," 368.

<sup>7</sup> Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 2. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996 [1962]).

The definition also has this to say:

Hermeneutics generates several controversies. In interpreting something do we unearth the author's thoughts and intentions, imagining ourselves in his position? Or do we relate it to a wider whole that gives it meaning?<sup>8</sup>

One of the major questions of twentieth-century hermeneutics has been the question of the role of the author in relation to the text and the audience. Romantic hermeneutics, with its emphasis upon the individual author, advocated authorial psychological intention as being important for discerning the meaning of a text. However, in the twentieth century a shift took place, in which there occurred a continuing movement from the author to the text to the audience as the locus of meaning.<sup>9</sup>

The definition concludes with these words:

The latter view [that relates meaning to a wider whole] gives rise to the hermeneutic circle: we cannot understand a whole (for example, a text) unless we understand its parts, or the parts unless we understand the whole. Heidegger discovered another circle: as we inevitably bring presuppositions to what we interpret, does this mean that any interpretation is arbitrary, or at least endlessly revisable?<sup>10</sup>

The hermeneutical circle has become one of the most important images in contemporary hermeneutical discussion, sometimes modified, as it has been in both Anthony Thiselton's and Grant

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<sup>8</sup> Inwood, "Hermeneutics," 368.

<sup>9</sup> This movement and its implications will be addressed in my forthcoming work on hermeneutics.

<sup>10</sup> Inwood, "Hermeneutics," 368.

Osborne's work, into the image of the hermeneutical spiral.<sup>11</sup> The image first became prominent in the hermeneutical thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), who, in response to Heidegger, departed radically from the hermeneutics of intention to explore the hermeneutics of response and influence.<sup>12</sup>

With this brief overview of hermeneutics providing a common definitional foundation, I wish now to ask several important questions that will help us to understand hermeneutics in the contemporary biblical interpretive environment. The first is the question of — what constitutes hermeneutics today? I will address that question by discussing contemporary hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics, and biblical interpretation theory. The second is the question of — what difference does hermeneutics make in terms of actual biblical interpretation? After answering the first question, I will select a number of representative biblical hermeneutical stances and illustrate their interpretive differences. The third and final question is that of — how does one go about evaluating such interpretive biblical work for its interpretive significance and possible implications? My attempt will be to uncover some significant insights that will help us to understand the nature and framework of the current hermeneutical endeavor in biblical studies.

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<sup>11</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 104; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2002 [1960]). In my forthcoming work on hermeneutics, I address the question of hermeneutics and culture and context, attempting to come to terms with the kind of reciprocal relationship of which Heidegger and Gadamer speak.

## **II. Hermeneutics Today: Secular and Biblical**

In this section, I wish briefly to survey the field of hermeneutics as it is understood within three different disciplines. The first is that of secular hermeneutics, the second is the area of biblical hermeneutics, and the third is the field of biblical interpretation, with particular emphasis upon the New Testament. At first glance, this may appear to be an odd mixture, especially my adding the category of biblical interpretation to the hermeneutical mix. However, when we realize, as I noted above, that the field of hermeneutics developed, especially in the work of Schleiermacher and others of his time, as a response to and as a means of biblical interpretation, it makes sense to consider them together as part of the common interpretive enterprise. Schleiermacher's work, as well as that of others who were posing important interpretive questions, such as Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781), were prompted to ask their questions in response to the development of higher criticism, especially in Germany in the eighteenth century. Higher criticism is one of the products of Enlightenment thought. Enlightenment thought is distinguished by a number of features that help to explain the development of hermeneutics. These include the rise of modern science, by which mechanisms were developed to aid in describing the natural world; the spread of democracy, which broke down barriers regarding elitism, whether this was found within the church, society, or education; and the promotion of knowledge and thought, so that barriers and constraints such as those imposed by the church and traditional theology were opposed. The Enlightenment was less of a unified movement than it was a propulsive force and orientation toward the world, which resulted in a wide variety of intellectual exploration. One of these areas of investigation was higher criticism as a naturalistic means of explaining the origins and development of the Bible—once considered sacrosanct and beyond such questioning and now considered a book like many other ancient documents important for the formation of culture and civilization. In response to this development, Schleiermacher and others undertook to

understand the ways in which the Bible, as a book to be read like any other, should be interpreted.

In this section, I will begin by examining a couple of well-known secular hermeneutics books, then will move to treatments of biblical hermeneutics, and will conclude with biblical interpretation books.

Let me deal with a small number of general secular hermeneutics books first, because, after all, they use the word "hermeneutics" in their title, and so I think that it is reasonable to believe that they in some way represent the area as the author of the volume understands it.

The philosopher Richard Palmer published his significant book in 1969, which marked a watershed in bringing hermeneutics to the attention of the English-speaking world. It is entitled: *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*.<sup>13</sup> This book essentially selects the major proponents of the two major streams of what has come to be called philosophical hermeneutics, the romantic tradition represented by Schleiermacher and his major advocate, Dilthey, and the hermeneutics of being represented by Heidegger and Gadamer. These figures stand at the head of the two major trajectories of thought that Gadamer assessed in his bringing to fruition what, in the sub-title of his major work, he characterized as "philosophical hermeneutics."<sup>14</sup> The term philosophical hermeneutics has become the title given to the work of those philosophers who undertake to examine questions of understanding and interpretation. Palmer's book concludes with a hermeneutical manifesto, including thirty theses on interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969). When this book was published, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (see next note) had not yet been published in English.

<sup>14</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (*Truth and Method: Elements of a Philosophical Hermeneutics*) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960).

<sup>15</sup> Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 242-53.

In a more recent work, the philosopher Lawrence Schmidt addresses the question of *Understanding Hermeneutics*.<sup>16</sup> Writing nearly thirty years after Palmer, the main contents of his book concentrate upon the same four philosophers as does Palmer: Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer, to the point of devoting the same number of chapters as does Palmer to each of them. In that sense, it appears that the bases of hermeneutics remain constant, with the same four figures standing tall on the hermeneutical field. Schmidt's volume, rather than concluding with a proposal for the future, instead singles out representative figures involved in continuing hermeneutical controversies. These include E.D. Hirsch (1928-), the literary critic, on the question of intention; Jürgen Habermas (1929-), the social scientist and philosopher, who criticizes philosophical hermeneutics for its failure to provide a basis for critique; Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), the phenomenologist, who argues for a theory of understanding and explanation for validation; and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), the deconstructionist, who criticizes Gadamer for remaining within the ontological tradition. The major points of hermeneutical dispute, so far as Schmidt is concerned, all revolve around the questions raised by Gadamer concerning meaning and understanding, validity in interpretation, the question of method in interpretation, and the grounds and foundations for such belief.

A third and final book to notice—from many that could be cited—is Josef Bleicher's *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique*.<sup>17</sup> Published in 1980, between Palmer's and Schmidt's volumes, Bleicher's sub-title describes the content of his book. Bleicher takes Emilio Betti (1890-1968) as the major and principal representative of hermeneutics as method. Betti

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<sup>16</sup> (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> (London: Routledge, 1980).



is characterized as preserving the subject and object divide, and believing in the possibility of objective understanding of the author's intended meaning. The response of transcendental philosophy to this view of understanding is seen in the work of Heidegger, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), and Gadamer. Bleicher labels Bultmann's approach as a theological hermeneutic, in distinction to Heidegger's existential-ontological and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic. Bleicher concludes with a critique of hermeneutics, as proposed by K.-O. Apel, Habermas, and materialist hermeneutics. The first takes an anthropological, the second a social science, and the third a materialist approach. Bleicher concludes with a section on Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics as a new perspective. Bleicher's volume extends some of the categories of hermeneutical discussion, although the major trajectories remain in place. These revolve around the questions of meaning and understanding, objectivity, method, and how one engages in critique of these various positions. Overall, philosophical hermeneutics and its critics remain at the heart of secular hermeneutics, with the major questions defined by the major figures in the history of hermeneutical thought.

Having completed this brief survey of what has come to be called philosophical hermeneutics, I now wish to turn to biblical hermeneutics, to see how it is defined by those who use the term in their titles. The number of books with hermeneutics in their titles is far too large to survey here individually, so I will look at these volumes in general categories.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> I will not discuss such useful volumes as Donald McKim's *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), as they are simply compendia of what others have done. I also mention here Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002). This book purports to represent an evangelical hermeneutics, but is actually a defense of the grammatical-historical method against what the author perceives to be numerous onslaughts by a wide range of alternative interpretive strategies. Thomas does not deal directly with the major hermeneutical issues as presented here.

Before I undertake to discuss the two major categories of work in biblical hermeneutics, I must make several observations about two particular recent hermeneutical endeavors. The first is the biblical hermeneutical work of Anthony Thiselton. Though at one time he was one of few doing work in hermeneutics in the British university system, Thiselton has clearly done the most significant work in biblical hermeneutics.<sup>19</sup> His *Two Horizons* focuses upon Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). Thiselton's work definitely follows the line of philosophical hermeneutics noted above, one of the few biblical hermeneutists to demonstrate such widespread interest, the ability to interpret and present such ideas, and the potential for advancing biblical interpretation. As a result of creative interaction with two literary critics, Thiselton refines and develops his thought regarding action models of language in *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics*, later revised and expanded as *The Promise of Hermeneutics*.<sup>20</sup> Taking some ideas from earlier work, Thiselton pursues the issue of what it is that language can be made to do, especially for doing things other than stating propositions. In his second major hermeneutical work, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*,<sup>21</sup> Thiselton ranges even further, by going back to the ancients such as Irenaeus, Philo and Chrysostom, by returning to familiar figures that he has treated before such as Gadamer, Wittgenstein, and Bultmann, and also by treating a host of (for him) new interpreters and hermeneutists, such as Schleiermacher, Betti, Ricoeur, Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Derrida, John Searle (1932-), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1923-), Habermas, Richard Rorty (1931-2007), Apel, Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007), Umberto Eco (1932-), Jonathan Culler (1944-), and Stanley Fish (1938-) (I am sure there are others I have missed).

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<sup>19</sup> See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 10, for treatment of Thiselton.

<sup>20</sup> Thiselton is one of the contributors, along with Roger Lundin and Clarence Walhout: *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Sub-titled *The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

There are three major trends in this significant work by Thiselton. The first is the reinforcement of the major hermeneutical issues by his attention to questions of meaning, authorial and textual centrality, method in interpretation, and authorial intention. The second is his extension of this debate into the work of contemporary philosophy and hermeneutics, adopting the speech-act or action model of interpretation that he began to argue for earlier. The third is his development of an interpretive model based upon speech-act theory, especially in reaction to pragmatically based reader-oriented models. *Thiselton on Hermeneutics* is a collection of mostly previously published essays and some new pieces.<sup>22</sup> In this volume Thiselton well illustrates how his hermeneutical agenda developed, showing his hermeneutical interests from the outset of his academic and publishing career, so that even articles that appear to be very practical and exegetical in nature are shown to be hermeneutically grounded. The pinnacle of Thiselton's work in many ways is his *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*.<sup>23</sup> The usual hermeneutical suspects are present in new and insightful ways, but with the difference that he devotes a significant amount of the book to developing the notion of hermeneutically grounded doctrine by considering many of the major Christian doctrines, such as humanity, sin, Christology, and the like. This work has made a major effort at bridging several chasms—one between hermeneutics and interpretation, and another between hermeneutical theory and systematic theology. Thiselton has not only defined through discussion but defined by pertinent and sustained examples the field of theological hermeneutics.

The second recent hermeneutical endeavor is the series of volumes on hermeneutics, entitled Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, and involving a number of major figures in hermeneutics and biblical interpretation, including Thiselton. This on-going series of volumes

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<sup>22</sup> Sub-titled: *Collected Works with New Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

is focused on raising various hermeneutical questions and then providing a forum for discussion of possible answers. As the series has developed, the understanding of what is meant by hermeneutics has apparently expanded to encompass a large and diverse range of topics. The first volume in the series is on hermeneutics and biblical interpretation, the second on language and biblical interpretation (dedicated to Thiselton on his formal retirement), the third on the thought (including hermeneutics) of Oliver O'Donovan, the fourth on history and biblical interpretation, the fifth on biblical theology and biblical interpretation, the sixth on interpreting Luke's Gospel, the seventh on canon and biblical interpretation, and the eighth on the Bible and the academy.<sup>24</sup> There are several points worthy of note. The first is that the growing interest in biblical hermeneutics has merited an entire scholarly series (based on a continuing series of conferences) dedicated to exploring the issue of hermeneutics as it relates to the Bible. The second is that in a series on Scripture and hermeneutics there is not a single volume (to date) dedicated to many of the major issues and figures in the secular field of hermeneutics itself, especially as they relate to biblical hermeneutics. Instead, it appears that the notion of hermeneutics for this series is to be equated with interpretation, and the interpretation is clearly focused upon the Bible. In fact, strangely, in two of the volumes the only reference to hermeneutics (according to the index) is a single passage on the "hermeneutic(s) of suspicion."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Craig Bartholomew et al., eds., *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Bartholomew et al., eds., *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Bartholomew et al., eds., *A Royal Priesthood? A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); Bartholomew et al., eds., *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Bartholomew et al., eds., *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Bartholomew et al., eds., *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation* (Grand Rapids: 2005); Bartholomew et al., eds., *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Bartholomew et al., eds., *The Bible and the Academy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Bartholomew et al., eds., *Out of Egypt*, 81-82; Bartholomew et al., eds., *Reading Luke*, 44.

Works on biblical hermeneutics—besides the works of Thiselton and the series in *Scripture and Interpretation*—fall into two general categories—those that focus upon exemplifying one particular hermeneutical approach and those that are concerned with method.<sup>26</sup> Concerning particular hermeneutical approaches, I have found older volumes that adopt the New Hermeneutic and structuralism. I have found several more recent volumes on hermeneutics and science, cultural hermeneutics, Barthian epistemology, speech-act theory, and theological hermeneutics. I think that the distribution of works chronologically is telling. The New Hermeneutic, a distinctly theological hermeneutical model derived from the philosophical thinking of Bultmann, was promoted by Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs (1903-1983), and had its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>27</sup> The New Hermeneutic was popular because of its attempt to dissolve the subject-object divide in interpretation and to be transparent to the text, which was seen to be experiential and not propositional. The New Hermeneutic, though it continued to raise important hermeneutical questions, has faded from the scene.<sup>28</sup> Structuralism, though a hugely important intellectual movement with abiding significance in other fields, has had relatively little overt abiding significance in biblical

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<sup>26</sup> I am sure that my survey is skewed by the fact that I have not attempted to cover all of the books published in biblical studies with the word "hermeneutics" in their title; nevertheless, what I have come across is revealing. I do not include any books that may use the term hermeneutics in the title but are focused upon a particular biblical author.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970 [1954]); Gerhard Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutics" (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 56 [1959], 224-51) in his *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963 [1960]), 305-32.

<sup>28</sup> For a trenchant and telling critique, see Anthony C. Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 308-33; repr. in *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, 463-88.

studies.<sup>29</sup> One of the major reasons for this is probably that, by the time structuralism had penetrated Europe and then North America, it had already begun to be transformed into poststructuralism and deconstruction in the 1970s. As noted above, hermeneutics has become a topic with far-reaching consequences, for example, into the area of the hard sciences, where hermeneutical questions also have important implications.<sup>30</sup> There have been several attempts to define hermeneutics in terms of socially locating interpretive practice, and defining hermeneutics in terms of the role of cultural embeddedness.<sup>31</sup> The role of Karl Barth (1886-1968) as a hermeneutical and not just a theological thinker warrants further exploration than the topic has so far received.<sup>32</sup> Barth's interpretive stance has been suggestive for a number of hermeneutical methods, including what is known in recent parlance as theological hermeneutics. Speech-act theory, as we have already noted in the work of Thiselton, has been highly influential in recent biblical hermeneutics. Some hermeneutical writing has attempted to establish an entire hermeneutical model on the basis of speech-act theory, to the point of equating biblical hermeneutics with

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<sup>29</sup> See Edgar V. McKnight, *Meaning in Texts: The Historical Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Alfred M. Johnson, Jr., ed., *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Collection of Essays* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979). Probably the most important overt structuralist in New Testament studies is Daniel Patte. See his *The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts: Greimas's Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis*, Semeia Studies 19 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Science and Hermeneutics: Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Sugirtharajah, ed., *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). I address the issue of context and culture in detail in my forthcoming work on hermeneutics.

<sup>32</sup> Rosalind Selby, *The Comical Doctrine: An Epistemology of New Testament Hermeneutics* (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2006). Exceptions are Thomas E. Provence, "The Sovereign Subject Matter: Hermeneutics in the Church Dogmatics," in *Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics*, ed. McKim, 241-62; and Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 9.

such a model.<sup>33</sup> Speech-act theory, however, is more often seen today as one of the tools or methods of theological hermeneutics. There are a number of diverse kinds of works that choose to label their interpretive stance as theological hermeneutics.<sup>34</sup> Several of these ground their theological hermeneutical position in earlier philosophical and hermeneutical thought, such as the work of Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer, as well as invoking earlier church interpreters. Theological hermeneutics, therefore, can be defined by its desire to return to what most characterize as pre-critical scholarship (at least pre-modern) and to appreciate the interpretive practices of the early church, alongside those of modern hermeneutics. The goal of theological hermeneutics, as evidenced in the work of Thiselton already cited above, is to understand a wide range of theological thought, including not only biblical texts but also theology, doctrine, and the nature of God. The agenda of philosophical hermeneutics, as expanded and developed especially by Thiselton, is clearly seen to have insinuated itself into the current interests of theological hermeneutics. As a result, framed by the agenda of contemporary biblical hermeneutics, theological hermeneutics continues to be concerned with meaning and understanding, contexts of interpretation, and the groundedness of interpretation, with both added emphasis upon pre-modern interpreters being as hermeneutically astute as their post-Enlightenment counterparts and an accompanying realization of the theological assumptions regarding humanity, language, and the world embedded within interpretive stances.

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<sup>33</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM Press, 1991); Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); A.K.M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); cf. Roger Lundin, ed., *Disciplining Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

The other type of hermeneutical works, though they may refer to some earlier significant figures in the development of hermeneutics and may even take a particular approach to interpretation, are focused for the most part on interpretation in terms of its categories, procedures, and methods.<sup>35</sup> These handbook-like volumes are clearly in the majority, and range over an extended period of time, from the early works of Bernard Ramm to the latest volumes. Even if these works do not always or even usually advance hermeneutical thought, they do emphasize that, for those in biblical studies, one of the important elements of any hermeneutical discussion is the interpretive results that emerge, and the clear way in which this process is performed in light of the kinds of hermeneutical difficulties discussed in more detail in the theoretical works.

Whereas there is a reasonably significant number of important biblical hermeneutical volumes, there is a plethora of books that define themselves as being concerned with biblical interpretation. This is the third major category of books I wish to discuss in this section. Many of the hermeneutics books noted above make reference to interpretation. I find it interesting to note how the reverse is not always the case—that biblical interpretation books clearly do not usually make reference to hermeneutics. There is apparently a sense in which hermeneutics needs to be defined in terms of interpretation, but interpretation is not

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<sup>35</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants* (Boston: Wilde, 1956); Ramm et al., *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), which appeared at the advent of hermeneutical discussion; J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987); Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Klaus Berger, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, UTB (Tübingen: Francke, 1999); Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hermeneutics*, trans. Lilian M. Rosa (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Bruce Corley et al., eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002); Oda Wischmeyer, *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments: Ein Lehrbuch* (Tübingen: Francke, 2004); Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*; Henry A. Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayao, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); among others.



necessarily seen to be hermeneutical in orientation. There are three types of interpretation books for those in biblical studies, with varying degrees of hermeneutical informedness.<sup>36</sup> The first type is the history of interpretation.<sup>37</sup> Several of these volumes devote more space to pre-Enlightenment biblical interpretation than post-Enlightenment study,<sup>38</sup> despite the cataclysmic and abiding influence of Enlightenment thought on contemporary interpretation and hermeneutics. Some of these volumes are even noticeably un-hermeneutical in nature, for example not mentioning Schleiermacher's role in the advent of hermeneutics. This would tend to indicate that many books on biblical interpretation are more concerned with a traditional definition of hermeneutics as "methods of interpretation" than with the notion of hermeneutics as the theoretical understanding of interpretation.

This impression is perhaps confirmed by the second type of interpretive book—interpretation volumes dedicated in whole or in large part to the methods, techniques, and procedures of interpretation. A few of them are simply manuals of interpretation,<sup>39</sup> but many offer some theoretical discussion of hermeneutical or interpretive issues,

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<sup>36</sup> Tate (*Interpreting the Bible*, 163) notes that exegesis and interpretation are considered the two poles of hermeneutics. I do not consider the topic of exegesis here, not least because I am not convinced that his analysis is correct. There are many exegesis books that do not seriously grapple with hermeneutical issues, but are virtually completely methodological in scope.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) but which in the new section on p. 410 offers a confusing use of the term "hermeneutics." See also Royce Gordon Gruenler, *Meaning and Understanding: The Philosophical Framework for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> E.C. Blackman, *Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957); Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1984); Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996); William Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> E.g. John Frederick Jansen, *Exercises in Interpreting Scripture* (Philadelphia: Geneva, 1968); Bennie Wolvaardt, *How to Interpret the Bible: A Do-it-Yourself Manual* (Hertfordshire: Veritas, 1999).

before launching into sections sometimes differentiating between general and special hermeneutics or the like.<sup>40</sup>

What is surprising, however, is how many of these volumes have virtually no discussion of hermeneutics. For example, *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, in its section on "Lines of approach," has only a single chapter on "Biblical studies and theoretical hermeneutics," by (as one might expect) Anthony Thiselton.<sup>41</sup> This volume does, however, devote separate sections to "Poststructuralist approaches: New Historicism and postmodernism" and "Feminist interpretation."<sup>42</sup> Some of these types of volumes do not have a single chapter on hermeneutics or, so far as I can tell, any significant discussion of the concept—theoretical, philosophical, or otherwise—as I have been discussing it here.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: Word, 2004); Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton: Victor, 1994); Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis: CPH, 1995); David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001); Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> John Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 95-113.

<sup>42</sup> Barton, ed., *Cambridge Handbook*, 50-66, 81-94.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation* (I don't count the chapter by Thiselton on the New Hermeneutic, because this is seen as a particular type of interpretation); Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae, eds., *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Scot McKnight, ed., *Introducing New Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews, and Robert B. Sloan eds., *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

The final group of interpretation books includes those focused upon a particular interpretive method. Volumes have recently been produced that focus upon a liberal Catholic interpretive method, a type of genre-based interpretation, a literary approach to biblical interpretation, and theological hermeneutics. Much traditional Catholic interpretation is fairly conservative, but there have been attempts to break free of such constraints and realize the personal and transcendent elements of the text. Sandra Schneiders places such an interpretive stance within a modern hermeneutical framework, especially that of figures such as Gadamer and Ricoeur.<sup>44</sup> A genre-based interpretation is in many ways similar to a literary-based interpretive framework, in that it selects what is seen as a fundamental interpretive key as the basis of interpretation. Realizing the need for different approaches based upon genre, John Goldingay's interpretive model also reflects elements of canonical criticism and theological hermeneutics.<sup>45</sup> Tremper Longman's literary approach to the Bible places it within both secular literary studies and the historical-critical method, although when he undertakes readings of texts he categorizes the texts according to broad generic categories.<sup>46</sup> The notion of theological hermeneutics, a very broad category as noted above, is evidenced by a number of different works that identify with the rubric, culminating in an entire

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<sup>44</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

dictionary focused upon theological interpretation.<sup>47</sup> These volumes illustrate that interpretation of the Bible is not seen to be a single thing, and not necessarily even a hermeneutical thing at that. Even those who undertake a historical retrospective on interpretive practice do not necessarily recognize the importance of the hermeneutical turn that occurred in the eighteenth century and led to the development of modern hermeneutics. Much interpretive thought is geared toward the mechanics of interpretation, placed somewhat precariously within a larger, imprecise hermeneutical framework, or at least within the scope of a recognition that there are larger interpretive issues at stake. Those interpreters who do mark out their domain often have surprisingly much in common, whether it be literary or even theological concerns.

This represents a survey of the major works that have been produced recently in the field of hermeneutics and biblical interpretation. This is not a historical survey of the development of hermeneutics, but a reflection of how it is that hermeneutics has come to be practiced within biblical studies in recent times. There are several observations that can be made regarding hermeneutics and biblical interpretation. The first is that biblical studies has made a significant and positive contribution to hermeneutical theorizing by expanding

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<sup>47</sup> Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), with the biblical articles published separately as Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). Cf. Dieter Lührmann, *An Itinerary for New Testament Study*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1989), 71-125.

and developing certain hermeneutical categories of importance. Whereas secular hermeneutics has tended to concentrate upon the major figures in hermeneutics, especially those identified with philosophical hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics has either pursued investigation of these figures further, introduced new figures into the hermeneutical discussion, emphasized the significance of still others, or undertaken some combination of these. The second observation is that biblical scholars have tended to be responsive rather than proactive in their use of hermeneutical theory. Rather than developing their own hermeneutical models, they have tended to respond to the models of contemporary philosophical and hermeneutical thought, even if they have modified these in sometimes significant ways. The third observation is that there is still plenty of biblical interpretation that is only superficially and tangentially informed of developments in hermeneutical thought. Much biblical study remains focused upon the mechanics, procedures, and methods of interpretation, and often jumps to exemplification of such practices in treatments of interpretation. Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, often cited as the foundation of philosophical hermeneutics, questioned truth and showed that any attempts at finding it were not the result of method. In other words, much recent work on interpretation in biblical studies has apparently not learned the lesson of Gadamer—or has chosen to ignore and hence not even to address his claims. In spite of this situation, the fourth and final observation is that in some instances biblical scholars have developed their own interpretive models, ones that they claim lead to promising interpretive results. These models may have philosophical and hermeneutical links to other interpretive models, but they have their own integrity as interpretive models as well, and continue to be developed and promulgated as promising methods of interpretation. The most obvious of these is theological hermeneutics, although various types of literary hermeneutics are to be found as well.

### III. Hermeneutics and Interpretation of the Bible

In the above section, I summarized a number of recent hermeneutical and interpretive studies. In this section, I wish to illustrate the differences that various hermeneutical and interpretive models make to biblical interpretation. In a forthcoming volume that I have co-authored with a colleague in philosophy, entitled *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, we identify a number of different hermeneutical schools of thought. These include the romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, the phenomenology and existential hermeneutics of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Heidegger, the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer, the hermeneutic phenomenology of Ricoeur, the critical hermeneutics of Habermas, the structuralism of Daniel Patte (1939-), the deconstruction of Derrida, the dialectical theology of Barth and Bultmann, the theological hermeneutics of Thiselton and Kevin Vanhoozer (1957-), and the literary hermeneutics of Alan Culpepper (1945-) and Stephen Moore (1954-). In this volume, we have tried to identify the major forces and movements in hermeneutical and interpretive thought, especially over the last several centuries as they have direct impact upon the field of theology and especially biblical studies. Several of these hermeneutical approaches are clearly identified with biblical studies. These include the dialectical theology of Barth and Bultmann, the theological hermeneutics of Thiselton and Vanhoozer, and the literary hermeneutics of Culpepper and Moore. All three of these hermeneutical approaches (if not the individual authors) have been mentioned above as being utilized in recent works on hermeneutical and interpretive thought.

In this section, I would like to lay out the presuppositions of each of these methods, and then offer a brief interpretive sample as a means of exemplifying each of these methods. I will draw some of the contrasts rather strongly, so as to illustrate the unique contribution of each of these hermeneutical stances.

## 1. Dialectical Theology

Dialectical theology is associated with the work of Barth and Bultmann. These two scholars had both common intellectual origins and serious debates and disagreements throughout their careers. My purpose here is not to expound upon their personal lives or careers or to offer an evaluation of their relationship, but to present an exemplification of dialectical theology through brief examination of what they mean by dialectical theology and how it is evidenced in their biblical interpretation.

I begin with Barth.<sup>48</sup> For Barth, dialectical theology and the resulting dialectical hermeneutic of biblical interpretation is predicated upon a move away from the human-centeredness of liberal theology to a position where God is not an object knowable and controllable and explainable by humans—he is wholly other. Instead, as Barth attempts to show, for example, in his commentary on Romans, God reveals himself to humanity, who in faith are open to the Word of God, rather than relying on themselves or any other means of access to God, including religion. Dialectical theology is encapsulated in the expression of extreme paradoxes in which God is wholly other from humanity, yet reveals himself in the Word of God. The three major planks of dialectical theology, which find their way into dialectical hermeneutics, are that God is God, the Word of God is expressed in Jesus Christ, and there is no other foundation for theology.<sup>49</sup>

In terms of specific hermeneutical principles, Barth distinguishes biblical hermeneutics from general hermeneutical principles, which he believes impose interpretive constructs from outside the text. Language itself, according to Barth, is referential, and hence points to the subject

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<sup>48</sup> See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Alasdair I.C. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 79.

of a text. Jesus as the Word of God is the subject of the Bible and is to be understood by the interpreter, which process is only possible by God making his Word known to limited human interpreters. Critical interpretive methods are also not capable of penetrating the text and understanding its subject. Instead, understanding comes from interaction with the subject of the Bible, Jesus Christ, even though known through words. Any methods of interpretation that are used must be subordinate to Scripture, and the interpreter must be in an attitude of recognition of creaturely dependence upon God.<sup>50</sup>

When we turn to Barth's commentary on Romans, we see his dialectical hermeneutic at work, right from the outset. There is no introduction to the commentary, only Barth's prefaces. In the preface to the first edition, he notes that Paul "addressed his contemporaries," while still being a "child of his age." "[C]areful investigation and consideration" would "no doubt" reveal insights concerning the audience and author, but Barth characterizes such investigation as "purely trivial," because, though he claims the historical-critical method to be legitimate, such understanding cannot compare to the "venerable doctrine of Inspiration." The "doctrine of Inspiration is concerned with the labour of apprehending, without which no technical equipment, however complete, is of any use whatever." Barth's interpretive energy is directed toward seeing into the "spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit." In other words, "[w]hat was once of grave importance, is so still. What is to-day of grave importance... stands in direct connexion with that ancient gravity." The result, in a move of radical contemporaneousness, is that "our problems are the problems of Paul."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Thomas E. Provence, "The Sovereign Subject Matter: Hermeneutics in the *Church Dogmatics*," in *Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics*, ed. McKim, 241-62, as summarized in Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 1, in the Preface to the First Edition. For the German, see Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1940 [1922]).



The commentary itself continues in the same vein, now with reference to Paul as opposed to Barth as interpreter of Romans. Barth begins with Romans 1:1a: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle." He deals with being a servant first: "However great and important a man Paul may have been the essential theme of his mission is not within him but above him—unapproachably distant and unutterably strange" (1:1). This further applies to his apostleship (1:1b): "'The call to be an apostle is a paradoxical occurrence, lying always beyond his personal self-identity' (Kierkegaard)." Though he does not refer to the Pauline phrase "set apart," Barth characterizes this description of Paul as being "in distinction from all others," which he interprets in light of Paul as a Pharisee—one who is, he says, "'separated,' isolated, and distinct."<sup>52</sup> However, for Barth, Paul is "a Pharisee of a higher order," which he defines in terms of his unique relation to God. It is this relation of "resting in God" that makes "his words be regarded as at all credible." As a result, "Paul is authorized to deliver—**the Gospel of God**" (1:1c). Even though the phrase is "Gospel of God," for Barth this is not a "religious message" of theological content that informs humanity, but the "Gospel proclaims a God utterly distinct from men. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are, as men, incapable of knowing Him, and because they have no right to claim anything from Him." This gospel of which Barth speaks is not experiential, but it is substantial: "it is the clear and objective perception of what eye hath not seen nor ear heard." Rather than attention or study, it "demands participation, comprehension, co-operation; for it is a communication which presumes faith in the living God."<sup>53</sup> Concerning Jesus Christ our Lord (1:4), Barth continues similarly by stating that "[t]his is the Gospel and the meaning of history." In the formulation "Jesus Christ our Lord," "two worlds

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<sup>52</sup> Barth, *Romans*, 27.

<sup>53</sup> Barth, *Romans*, 28.

meet and go apart, two planes intersect, the one known and the other unknown." For Barth, these two planes are the "known plane" of "God's creation, fallen out of its union with Him," that is, our world of fallen humanity. This plane of humanity is "intersected" by the plane of the unknown: "the world of the Father, of the Primal Creation, and of the final Redemption." These two planes do not have a clear point of intersection except at one point, the historical Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>54</sup>

This exposition by Barth encompasses only portions of Romans 1:1-4, yet nevertheless gives clear evidence of his exposition of three fundamental theological notions: God, humanity, and their relation in Jesus Christ.

I now turn to Bultmann.<sup>55</sup> Bultmann too rejects theological liberalism and accepts the notion that revelation needs to be perceived by faith. Reflecting his dialectical hermeneutic, Bultmann believes that talk about God has no sense, as, in talking about God, God loses his wholly otherness. Therefore, Bultmann criticizes rule-based hermeneutics for failing to grasp the importance of arriving at understanding of the text. Understanding is not based on hermeneutical rules, but upon other factors. These include the role of pre-understanding, existential encounter, questioning the text, and the hermeneutical circle, all of these areas in which Heidegger exerted influence upon Bultmann. Pre-understanding for Bultmann means that understanding of a text is always determined by a prior understanding of what it is about, including a sympathetic understanding of the subject matter. Bultmann also believes that the interpreter needs to have an open rather than closed pre-understanding, so that one can have an existential encounter with the text, asking fundamental questions about the nature of oneself and of human existence. One must be existentially

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<sup>54</sup> Barth, *Romans*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 9.

alive and open to the text. The notion of pre-understanding leads to questioning of the text as a specific objective for understanding the text. Finally, Bultmann's hermeneutic has a reciprocal spiral of growing understanding as the interpreter brings his or her pre-understanding to interpretation and then that pre-understanding is confirmed, denied, or modified in dialogue with the text.

Rather than examine Bultmann's treatment of Paul as found in his *Theology of the New Testament*,<sup>56</sup> which readily reflects his dialectical and related existential hermeneutics, in order to facilitate comparison with other hermeneutical positions, I wish to look at Bultmann's commentary on 2 Corinthians. This is entirely appropriate, as, according to his editor, Bultmann "is more strongly influenced by the theology inherent in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians than by any other letter or Gospel of the New Testament canon—to the extent the theme at issue here is 'the word of proclamation,' a theme which coincides with that of the 'apostolic office.'"<sup>57</sup> Bultmann begins the commentary with short "Preliminary Remarks," in which he clarifies the intent of 2 Corinthians. The letter is not primarily biographical or a depiction of Paul's personality, but, as Paul conceptualized it, an "apostolic writing": "Paul's person is at issue only insofar as he is bearer of the apostolic office, and the theme of the epistle is the apostolic office." As a result, Paul "does not preach himself, but Christ Jesus as Lord ([2Co] 4:5)." Thus, Bultmann observes that an "exegesis which intends to pursue the peculiar intention of the letter thus has its real object of understanding in the apostolic office or, since it is primarily the office of proclamation, in the word of proclamation. What is Christian proclamation, both as to content and execution?"<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 2 vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1951, 1955 [1948-1951]).

<sup>57</sup> Erich Dinkler, "Editor's Foreword," in Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 7.

<sup>58</sup> Bultmann, *Second Letter*, 16.

The rest of the traditional introductory questions are quickly covered, including the situation in Corinth, date of composition, and theories of 1 and 2 Corinthians being composite letters.

The commentary itself is written in the classical format, with close comment on selected elements of the Greek text, but is only secondarily attuned to dialectical hermeneutical observations. In his comment on 2 Corinthians 1:1, Bultmann observes that the verse, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" is "just as in 1 Corinthians 1:1...—thus the emphasis on apostolic authority...", which he turns into a historical statement by saying that this is "as in almost all the epistles, with the exception of 1 (2) Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon."<sup>59</sup> In his comments on 2 Corinthians 1:3, Bultmann labels the section "Characterizations of God in the genitive," but does not derive any dialectical observations from these characterizations. In 2 Corinthians 1:5, however, Bultmann draws attention to the phrase "For as we share abundantly in Christ's suffering, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too."<sup>60</sup> He states that "[e]verything Christ has encountered, he has encountered not as a historical individual. Rather, it all has cosmic significance (cf. the Gnostic idea of the Christ-Aion), though Paul does not conceive the connection between Christ and his own in a natural way, but through faith, and thus as historically mediated."<sup>61</sup> Bultmann explains these sufferings as becoming the sufferings of Christ "only by virtue of the sufferer's union with Christ, that is, through the new understanding of one's own existence (a new existence is not theoretical, but existential, since self-understanding is a structural element of existence)."<sup>62</sup> Bultmann continues by talking about how the sufferings of Christ are understood in faith. Bultmann thus draws some dialectical and existential comments from historical and theological history-of-religions observations.

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<sup>59</sup> Bultmann, *Second Corinthians*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Bultmann, *Second Corinthians*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Bultmann, *Second Corinthians*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Bultmann, *Second Corinthians*, 24.

In contrast to Barth, who thoroughly exemplifies his dialectical hermeneutics in his commentary, Bultmann clearly displays the historical-critical method, along with a number of his other hermeneutical interpretive interests. Thus, for Bultmann, though faith and history can be combined in existential dialectical categories, they are fundamentally separable.

## 2. Theological Hermeneutics

Theological hermeneutics, as noted above, has seen a recent proliferation of studies and expositions of the method.<sup>63</sup> As a result, there are many who are clear exponents of this hermeneutical method that has seen a groundswell of recent activity and interest—besides Anthony Thiselton, Kevin Vanhoozer, Stephen Fowl, A.K.M. Adam, Francis Watson, and Daniel Treier. In the recent dictionary of theological interpretation edited by Vanhoozer, Treier offers a useful exposition of this growing movement.<sup>64</sup> As he notes, "Theological hermeneutics'...is fast becoming a term with its own history." He defines two major agendas for this theological hermeneutics. One is the "need to develop an account of text interpretation or even human understanding in interaction with Christian doctrine(s)." The other is to "develop an account of how biblical interpretation should shape, and be shaped by, Christian theology."<sup>65</sup> The first is focused upon the relationship of theological interpretation to general hermeneutics, and the second upon the relationship to special hermeneutics. Sometimes they are both pursued, at other times only one is pursued, and sometimes one or the other is rejected. Both agendas, however, clearly indicate the importance of Christian theology as an essential foundation of biblical interpretation—in reaction to historical criticism

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<sup>63</sup> See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel J. Treier, "Theological Hermeneutics, Contemporary," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, eds. Vanhoozer et al., 787-93.

<sup>65</sup> Treier, "Theological Hermeneutics," 787.

that is seen to have been relatively unconcerned with theological questions and to have distanced itself from the life of the church. In light of these theological and doctrinal interests, the history of interpretation, and especially pre-modern exegesis, is often important in theological hermeneutics. The early interpreters, rather than being characterized as pre-critical, are to be seen in the non-pejorative sense of being pre-modern, critical in their own way and important in the history of interpretation, especially interpretation concerned with theological interests. Early readers of the Bible such as Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, and even the Reformers are looked to with fondness and even nostalgia, and such interpretive stances as allegory and multiple senses of Scripture are invoked as acceptable interpretive approaches. Because he is often perceived as critical of modernist interpretation, as noted in his commentary above, Barth has also been appropriated by theological hermeneutics. Barth is perceived as critical of or at least selective in his use of higher criticism, as opposed to Bultmann, who was able to separate faith and history.

There are a number of issues that remain highly debated and with a range of responses by those who claim to be following a form of theological hermeneutics. Some of these issues include the role of pre-modern exegesis, the validity of interpretation, and the place of historical criticism. These reveal the breadth and diversity of the movement. One of the most important of these issues is the relation of theological hermeneutics to general hermeneutics. In his introductory essay to the biblical essays taken from the dictionary of theological interpretation, Vanhoozer himself attempts a definition of theological hermeneutics. In saying what theological hermeneutics is not, he puts in bold the following statement: "Theological interpretation of the Bible is not an imposition of a general hermeneutic or theory of interpretation onto the biblical text."<sup>66</sup> Treier notes further that, rather

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<sup>66</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Introduction: What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?" in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, eds. Vanhoozer et al., 15. The same introduction is used in the volume on the Old Testament.

than simply imposing general hermeneutics upon interpretation of the Bible, there have been efforts to "assess the influence of biblical interpretation upon general hermeneutics, or even to address general hermeneutics by way of understanding biblical interpretation."<sup>67</sup> As examples, he notes the thought of Ricoeur, the work of Thiselton, Nicholas Wolterstorff's development of speech-act philosophy, forms of literary criticism, and Vanhoozer's concern with interpretive ethics. Similar questions are raised regarding special hermeneutics. Treier notes the interaction of theological hermeneutics with canonical approaches and biblical theology. He observes that, whereas some scholars, such as Watson, come to the aid of biblical theology, others, such as Fowl, argue against it as reflecting historical interpretive interests.<sup>68</sup> Thus, theological hermeneutics is seen as a very broad field that brings together a variety of interpretive stances into a hermeneutics grounded in theologically informed exegesis.

Vanhoozer's one-volume collection of essays on the New Testament books presumably offers examples of the kind of theological interpretation that Vanhoozer and other envision. I will summarize two of them in order to give a sense for the kind of comments made on Romans and 2 Corinthians by theological hermeneutists.

The treatment of Romans, by Christopher Bryan, has many of the earmarks of an essay in historical criticism, along with some elements of theological hermeneutics. He appears to consider theological interpretation as comfortably situated within historical-criticism as a form of general hermeneutics. He thus begins with discussion of genre, where he defines Romans as following the rhetorical form of a

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<sup>67</sup> Treier, "Theological Hermeneutics," 788.

<sup>68</sup> Treier, "Theological Hermeneutics," 790.

*logos protreptikos*, that is, "a persuasive discourse."<sup>69</sup> After discussing occasion, place, and date of writing (A.D. 56-57 from Corinth or Cenchreae), Bryan offers an outline of the book, within an epistolary structure, following the three parts of the *protreptic*: 1:16-4:25, the refutation; 5:1-11:36, the positive demonstration; and 12:1-15:13, the appeal and exhortation. Drawing upon Bultmann's study of diatribe,<sup>70</sup> Bryan uses this rhetorical stance as a way of characterizing the teaching style of the letter. Bryan also treats two issues that are fundamental to theological hermeneutics. He first discusses Romans in Christian history, beginning with Augustine and proceeding through Luther to John Wesley and Barth. Bryan then concludes by identifying three points of theological significance in Romans: the gift of salvation through justification, redemption, and propitiation; unity in Christ through the church; and Christian hope, or eschatology.

In many respects, Bryan's analysis of Romans—like his independent treatment of the same letter—fits comfortably within the range of interest of many recent historical-critical interpretations of Romans. His analysis raises most of the standard historical-critical issues and appreciates possible elements of its rhetorical structure, to which he adds consideration of the history of interpretation and a summary of the theological significance of Paul's letter. At the most, these interpretive and theological issues appear to fit within the interests of biblical theology.

In her treatment of 2 Corinthians, Edith Humphrey offers in many ways a contrastive exposition of this letter, by emphasizing throughout

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<sup>69</sup> Christopher Bryan, "Romans," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, ed. Vanhoozer, 84. Much of this treatment is similar to that found in Bryan, *A Preface to Romans: Notes on the Epistle in Its Literary and Cultural Setting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), which follows the same outline of Romans. Though his preface is not represented as an effort in theological interpretation, he cites pre-critical exegetes widely in his work.

<sup>70</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), though this work is not cited in his bibliography, which appears to be saved only for distinctly theological interpretations of Romans.



her study both a number of elements of theological hermeneutics and a framework that exemplifies its hermeneutical stance. She does this to the point of indicating her belief that theological interpretation is a form of special hermeneutics. Humphrey begins with a brief literarily-influenced summary of the major trajectory of 2 Corinthians: "In all this we see the apostle at his most impassioned and his most astute, as he plays pastor, theologian, and even 'fool.'"<sup>71</sup> She then turns to the history of interpretation. She notes that contemporary commentaries "normally" begin such a survey with the historical-critical period, rather than with the pre-critical interpreters. She briefly mentions such interpreters as Augustine, Chrysostom, Aquinas, Gregory Palamas, and Charles Wesley and their positive contributions, before moving to eighteenth-century criticism and after, with its emphasis upon what she calls "more mundane concerns" such as multiple letter hypotheses.<sup>72</sup> Humphrey also discusses the major issues, themes, and messages of the book, such as knowledge, apocalyptic, and Jesus. She then turns to 2 Corinthians and questions of canon, where she affirms the value of 2 Corinthians in the New Testament. She closes with a brief section on 2 Corinthians and theology, where she characterizes the "theological drive" of 2 Corinthians as "integration" of pastoral, academic, and theological elements.

Humphrey's discussion of 2 Corinthians is clearly more in line with the definition of theological hermeneutics offered by Treier and Vanhoozer. In distinction to the examination of Romans by Bryan, Humphrey clearly and consciously distances her interpretation from historical criticism and places theological hermeneutics within what might be characterized as a special hermeneutics framework, including appreciating literary and canonical hermeneutical issues as part of the theological hermeneutical enterprise.

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<sup>71</sup> Edith Humphrey, "2 Corinthians," in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, eds. Vanhoozer et al., 108.

<sup>72</sup> Humphrey, "2 Corinthians," 109.

### 3. Literary Hermeneutics

The third and final hermeneutical position I will discuss is literary hermeneutics.<sup>73</sup> Literary interpretation has been mentioned above as having some relationship to other recent hermeneutical developments, including theological hermeneutics. However, in a number of ways literary hermeneutics has developed its own theoretical and practical interpretive framework, and merits separate attention as a viable hermeneutical stance.

There are a number of scholars who are associated with literary hermeneutics in New Testament studies, including in its early days Alan Culpepper, David Rhoads, Charles Talbert, Werner Kelber, Robert Tannehill, and Jack Kingsbury, among others. More recently, literary hermeneutics has undergone a formalization into what has been called "narrative criticism," which is represented by such figures as Mark Alan Powell and James Resseguie, among others. However, I do not believe that this latter form of criticism has its own generative theoretical foundation, but it is instead derivative of other forms of hermeneutical and interpretive thought, and so I will not discuss it here.

Literary hermeneutics is associated in the twentieth century with the shift in interpretive focus from the author to the text and the audience.<sup>74</sup> In the first third of the twentieth century, a transformation occurred in literary and hermeneutical thought, as the locus of meaning shifted from the traditional focus upon the author to the text. Such criticism, sometimes referred to as formalism or phenomenological criticism or, in North America, the New Criticism, ushered in a new set of expectations regarding the reading of literary works. The shift from author to text was precipitated in part by a revaluation of romantic

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<sup>73</sup> Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics and Interpretive Theory*, ch. 11.

<sup>74</sup> I will say more about this in my forthcoming work on hermeneutics.

hermeneutics with its emphasis upon the inner experience of the author as determinative for meaning. Along with the rise in logical positivism especially in North America, and with development of structuralism in Europe, there was a new emphasis upon the structures of literary works. There was also a corresponding revaluation of the place of the author and the role of authorial intention, for both determination and validation of meaning. With the focus upon the text as the source of meaning, the integrity and structure of the literary work became the central focus. Works of literature came to be viewed as self-contained artifacts, to be interpreted by their readers with regard for their unity and coherence. The momentum gained from the shift from author to text logically continued to shift to reader or audience. The rise of reader-oriented criticism was a natural development as readers came to realize the role that they played in interpretation of these self-contained artifacts. Reader-oriented criticism soon fragmented into a number of different streams of thought. There were those who were reader-focused, that is, they realized the importance of the role that readers played, if not in creating meaning, at least in the process of determining meaning. For these readers, the original audience tended to be the focus in the triad of sources of meaning. Another stream of thought took a more radical line and came to be called reader-response criticism, that is, not only was the role of the reader recognized, but the reader became both the focus and origin of meaning. Readers were the ones who created meaning, and texts had no meaning without a reader to interpret them. These readers are not the original readers but contemporary readers—those who are currently interpreting the text. The other line of development—clearly related to reader-oriented perspectives—led to deconstruction. Deconstruction is not a necessary outcome of reader-oriented criticism, but it is an observable and logical progression. The reader not only is a participant in, or possibly the source of meaning, but the one who determines textuality itself. The text becomes an object of play in the hands of the reader, who is free to create or destroy meaning, such as it is.

The kind of literary hermeneutics found in most biblical studies, or at least New Testament studies, does not usually progress to the most aggressive forms of deconstruction. Most forms of literary hermeneutics, such as that of Culpepper who was one of the first to develop a full-orbed model of literary interpretation,<sup>75</sup> focus upon the text with recognition of the important and vibrant role of the reader. Culpepper adopts the image of the text as a mirror, rather than as a window, to reflect the text rather than to be used to look through the text to its background. The process of reading the text transpires in terms of Seymour Chatman's communications model that moves from the real author to an implied author and to the narrator that indicates a narratee and an implied reader and real reader.<sup>76</sup> This model works particularly well with narrative texts, such as the Gospel of John that Culpepper analyzes so famously in his *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. This raises a number of interpretive questions, such as whether literary methods developed for interpreting modern literature apply to ancient texts, the appropriateness of methods designed for interpreting fiction being applied to the Bible, and whether the epistles constitute suitable subjects of literary criticism.

Literary hermeneutical treatments of Romans and 2 Corinthians are not widely available. Nevertheless, I will examine two of them. The first, by Luke Timothy Johnson, presents what he calls a literary and theological commentary on the book of Romans. The general editor of the commentary series, Charles Talbert, defines what such a literary reading means, when he states that the "volumes in this series do not follow the word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, verse-by-verse method of traditional commentaries. Rather they are concerned to understand large thought units and their relationship to an author's

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<sup>75</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>76</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), esp. 267.

thought as a whole. The focus is on a close reading of the final form of the text." As a result of this close reading, such a commentary involves a number of further specific concerns: first, it "involves a concern both for *how* an author communicates and *what* the religious point of the text is." Secondly, "[c]are is taken to relate both the *how* and the *what* of the text to its milieu: Christian..., Jewish..., and Greco-Roman," so as to clarify the "communication strategies and the religious message to be clarified over against a range of historical and cultural possibilities."<sup>77</sup> Johnson's own statement on his methodological approach says that, "[i]n the spirit of this commentary series, I have tried to give a single, strong reading of Romans from beginning to end."<sup>78</sup> He further clarifies this as consisting of several purposes within the commentary itself: "to enable the present-day reader to engage Paul's composition as directly and freshly as possible"; "to understand Paul's original meaning insofar as we can recover it," while denying having access to Paul's authorial intention; to "help present-day readers construct the meaning of Romans *through the process of reading*, coming as close as we can to the way the first readers experienced it" as a sequential argument; and to try "to maintain the 'otherness' of Romans."<sup>79</sup>

The introduction to the commentary proper begins by noting the "obvious and powerful impact on the history of Christianity" of this letter, from Marcion, through the patristic writers such as Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, and Ambrose of Milan to Augustine, Luther, Barth and Ernst Käsemann.<sup>80</sup> Johnson then treats a number of critical issues that he believes will help the reading process. These include occasion and purpose, the question of theology versus moral instruction, and genre

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<sup>77</sup> Charles H. Talbert, "Editor's Preface," in Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), ix.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, xi.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 2-3.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 1.

and rhetoric. When he turns to the text of Romans, Johnson suggests that "we," presumably himself and his readers, "place ourselves at the level of the implied readers whom Paul supposed to be members of the Roman church," and try "to be 'ideal readers' of Romans," who have read the text many times before and already understand its unfolding argument.<sup>81</sup> Johnson notes the form of the opening of Romans, and discusses the greeting (Ro 1:1-7) first. After an overview of the major elements of the greeting, he offers detailed comments on the expanded part of the greeting concerning the sender, which he separates out for individual treatment. The first element is Paul as slave of Jesus Christ (Ro 1:1a). Johnson notes the slave terminology used elsewhere in Paul's letters and the sense of "personal commitment and submission" indicated by the term.<sup>82</sup> The second element is the phrase "called to be an apostle" (Ro 1:1b), which Johnson explicates as the description of Paul's mission as commissioned by Jesus.<sup>83</sup> Johnson then goes into more detail regarding Paul's presentation of the traditions regarding the earthly life of Jesus, explaining that some of the details are more readily found in other early Christian texts. He concludes with treatment of some specific terminology, especially faith, that is important here and elsewhere in the letter.

Johnson's literary commentary is clearly the descendant of both a traditional historical commentary and elements of a literary analysis of a text. Johnson's primary focus is the original audience, but he also incorporates features of a reader-focused literary reading. However, his exegesis, despite several nods toward literary interpretation, remains firmly historical-critical in orientation.

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<sup>81</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 18.

<sup>82</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 21.

The second study is Jerry McCant's "literary-rhetorical" commentary on 2 Corinthians.<sup>84</sup> In his introduction, McCant characterizes 2 Corinthians as a "species of judicial rhetoric" on the basis of its formal features, but maintains that "Paul's goal is not self-defense," because Paul, as an apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will, does not need a defense, and hence the Corinthian opposition does not threaten his apostolic standing. Instead, Paul's rhetorical strategy "seeks a reorientation of Corinthian criteria for apostleship." Paul's "disavowal of 'defense' at [2Co 12:19], after presenting a sustained defense suggests that irony and parody are frolicking on every page."<sup>85</sup> McCant further develops parody as the major approach that Paul takes in 2 Corinthians, as has been recognized to varying degrees by other scholars before him. McCant then considers other areas of introduction, such as genre, the autobiographical element of Paul's apostleship, the Corinthian opponents, the role of the fool's speech in Paul's presentation of himself in the letter, and the integrity of the letter and the nature of Corinth and the Corinthian church.

McCant then begins his commentary proper with this statement regarding 2 Corinthians 1-7: "Paul presents a parodic defense of his apostolic behavior in 2 Corinthians 1-7." In his discussion of the epistolary greeting (2Co 1:1-2), McCant notes that Paul adapts the "customary opening formula of a Greco-Roman letter," and in so doing "identifies himself" as an apostle. There are other elements of the opening that resemble those of letter openings as well. In what he calls the "congratulatory benediction" of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, McCant notes that Paul shifts the thanksgiving to a benediction in which he refers to himself.<sup>86</sup> These self-referring elements include God

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<sup>84</sup> Jerry W. McCant, *2 Corinthians*, Readings (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), back cover.

<sup>85</sup> McCant, *2 Corinthians*, 13.

<sup>86</sup> McCant, *2 Corinthians*, 29.

comforting Paul as the channel of comfort for others. The purpose of such a benediction is that "the speaker praises God as the giver of the blessing while congratulating the recipient of the gift."<sup>87</sup>

As a literary commentary, McCant's work is firmly built upon a historical-critical foundation that assumes a number of traditional conclusions regarding Paul and the Corinthian situation. However, he draws upon one particular recent critical approach—rhetorical criticism—as his orienting exegetical framework. In this regard, McCant's commentary on 2 Corinthians resembles that of Bryan on Romans.

The two literary hermeneutical approaches of Johnson and McCant—though clearly availing themselves of a number of literary interpretive tools—are still firmly wedded to a historical-critical platform of interpretation. Despite some comments to the contrary found in or on the individual volumes, the historical questions seem to provide the interpretive framework upon which a literary hermeneutical set of conventions is stretched. As a result, in both commentaries, regardless of whether one finds the individual exegeses convincing, there is a question of what is distinctly literary about such an approach if it is so easily subsumed within a traditional commentary approach.

#### **IV. Assessment of Contemporary Hermeneutical Theories**

Having presented these three interpretive methods, I wish now to offer a brief evaluation of each of them individually and collectively, in order to illustrate both internal features of each and their comparative

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<sup>87</sup> McCant, *2 Corinthians*, 30.



contribution. I will not offer general comments on each of these hermeneutical theories, as these are available elsewhere and take me beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I will offer comments on the hermeneutical principles offered here and the particular interpretations given in order to help to answer my earlier question of evaluating the difference hermeneutics makes in interpretation and its implications.

### **1. Dialectical Hermeneutics**

Barth and Bultmann clearly approach the issue of dialectical hermeneutics differently, with resulting differences in biblical interpretation.

Though both appear to take a referential view of language, Barth makes clear that his dialectical approach is opposed to or offers a critique of general hermeneutics, by addressing some of the major hermeneutical issues in an anti-hermeneutical way. Further, he distances himself from the methods of exegesis, and even historical criticism, substituting instead the notion of Inspiration. For Barth, understanding comes from God revealing himself to humanity about the subject of the Bible, Jesus Christ. In his exegesis of Romans, it is very clear that Barth's dialectical hermeneutics is firmly in place and drives his interpretation. As a result, there is no typical commentary introduction, and it appears that questions of exegetical interest are governed by how they are important in the revelation of Jesus Christ by God. This theological move results in a transformation of ancient and modern audience, so that Paul's situation becomes our situation, and the bridge between ancient text and modern world is transcended by conflation of the two, united by the common feature of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Further, Barth's belief in the otherness of God and the mediating role of Jesus Christ drives his exegesis to see this otherness of God within Romans and prompts his analysis of the two planes of existence coming together in the phrase "Jesus Christ our Lord," which embodies both the divine and the human realms.

In light of Barth's heavily theological exegesis—if it can indeed be called exegesis, because it departs so far from traditional exegesis, both in method and in execution, and even engages in dubious analysis (e.g. Barth's introduction of the issue of Paul being a Pharisee, to talk about being separated)—it is surprising that Barth was accused of being a Biblicist.<sup>88</sup> Barth attempts to explain this criticism by Paul Wernle that Barth should have left certain relics of Paul's age untouched. This criticism apparently grows, so I think, out of the fact that Barth does not use the historical-critical method as a means of differentiating issues within the text. Barth has two responses. One is to agree to the charge of Biblicism as the very thing that encourages his attempt to interpret every text. The other is to appropriate the charge in support of his use of a dialectical hermeneutic, when he claims that every verse is difficult, and leaves much still unexplained, certainly for historical critics and for dialectical hermeneuts as well.<sup>89</sup>

In the work of Bultmann, the issue of the separation of faith and history that Treier raises is evident. In his theoretical works on hermeneutics, Bultmann rejects rule-based hermeneutics and endorses the notions of pre-understanding, existential encounter, questioning the text, and the hermeneutical circle. When he approaches a text, however, Bultmann appears to take a different line. Even though his introduction to his commentary on 2 Corinthians clarifies that the letter is not autobiographical but about the proclamation of the apostolic office, such a notion does not emerge as clearly in his exegesis as it does in Barth's interpretation. Bultmann is still thoroughly the historical-critical exegete, even though he recognizes an existential element to the text and the role of faith within a historical context. This historically based stance is readily seen in his attention to textual and grammatical detail, his cross-referencing both biblical and other works, his introduction of Gnostic parallels, and his invocation of religions-historical comparisons.

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<sup>88</sup> Barth, *Romans*, 11-12.

<sup>89</sup> Barth, *Romans*, 12.

From comparison of these two proponents of dialectical hermeneutics, one can see why Barth has been appropriated by other hermeneutical positions, especially those that wish to distance themselves from historical criticism. Barth, at least in his commentary on Romans, does not present himself as an overt historical critic—nor, in many ways, as a very faithful exegetical guide. However, he is clearly a theologian. Bultmann by contrast is very much a historical critic, and exemplifies the very shortcomings that other hermeneutical theories have brought against it. He tends to brought against his historical criticism, and it is very difficult to see how his theological perspective and historical-critical conclusions relate to each other in a sustained way. Whereas Barth rejects general hermeneutics and wishes to utilize a theologically based special hermeneutics, Bultmann attempts a general hermeneutics *perhaps* in an effort to discover theology—although the relation between the two is not clear.

## 2. Theological Hermeneutics

The notion of theological hermeneutics—perhaps because of its recent emergence on the hermeneutical scene, or its eclectic methodology that places theology at its core—is varied and widely divergent. There are still significant fundamental questions to be discussed, such as the relation of general hermeneutics to theological hermeneutics, what can and should legitimately be included within special hermeneutics (such things as canonical criticism are included by some but not others, and some promote biblical theology while others do not), what constitutes the appropriate method of interpretation (some endorse speech-act theory, while others are highly critical of it), what is the notion of meaning that is being endorsed (some want a strong sense of meaning to be equated with authorial intent or literalism, while others do not), the place of historical criticism in theological hermeneutics, and even the role of pre-critical or pre-modern exegesis in interpretation. Overall, what remains unclear is how it is that Christian theology or doctrine exercises a controlling

influence upon interpretation, even if it is readily acknowledged as important. Even this fundamental concern is treated in widely different ways. Some believe that the tradition needs to be appreciated, while others treat it as determinative; some tend to use it to justify not engaging in historical criticism, while others use the two in conjunction, with one informing the other.

The examples considered above are also widely divergent in their approaches and their results.<sup>90</sup> The treatment of Romans by Bryan has the appearance of fully incorporating the results of historical criticism, including such elements as genre analysis according to categories of ancient rhetoric (*logos protreptikos*), the occasion, place, and date of writing, the outline in terms of ancient letter form (identified by such historical critics as Adolf Deissmann),<sup>91</sup> and the use of Bultmann's conception of diatribe. None of these concerns has a particular theological orientation, and their use in other forms of theological interpretation is subject to censure. The historical-critical method that stands behind these traditional issues—or whatever method it is—is never articulated, but the results are clearly incorporated by Bryan into the further study of Romans, especially those regarding the rhetorical stance, the orientation of the book to its readers, the letter form, and the use of diatribe. Bryan, therefore, clearly sides with those who see close relations between theological hermeneutics and general hermeneutics, and employs a method that is more reminiscent of Bultmann than of Barth. It is in his treatment of pre-critical interpreters and theological themes that one would expect Bryan to best illustrate theological hermeneutics. However, I confess to being disappointed

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<sup>90</sup> I realize that there is a wide diversity in theological interpretations. This is clearly seen in Fowl, ed., *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, where he has a number of theoretical discussions, and then a variety of readings of three passages: Exodus 3; Isaiah 52-53; Matthew 5-7; and Romans 9-11, each with readings by pre-critical interpreters.

<sup>91</sup> See Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. Lionel Strachan, 4th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924).

on these issues. Bryan's discussion begins with Augustine, in contrast to that of Johnson, who, we noted above, goes all the way back to Marcion. There is not much interpretive significance in noting the importance of the book of Romans for Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Barth, as many even traditional commentaries have done the same. If I understand the method correctly, the most important result for a theological interpretation should be its appreciation of the theology of the biblical book and how it interacts with Christian theology as a whole, when seen in the light of the history of interpretation within the church. Bryan identifies one of the major theological emphases of Romans as the gift of salvation, through justification, redemption, and propitiation. There are two comments to make here. One is that other commentators, including those who are not explicitly identified with theological hermeneutics, have made similar observations. The other is that Bryan has missed crucial theological insights that other non-theological hermeneutical interpreters have discovered, such as the relationship of reconciliation to salvation along with justification, and sanctification and life in the Spirit.<sup>92</sup>

The treatment of 2 Corinthians by Humphrey is definitely focused more toward special hermeneutics and away from historical criticism and general hermeneutics than is the treatment of Romans. This is both an illustration of the breadth of the approach and a limitation respecting its conceptualization. I must admit, however, that I find Bultmann's characterization of Paul and his apostleship in 2 Corinthians more convincing than the apparently autobiographical approach that Humphrey takes. Though Humphrey is correct that

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Stanley E. Porter, "Peace," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T.D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 682-83; Porter, "A Newer Perspective on Paul: Romans 1-8 through the Eyes of Literary Analysis," in *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson*, eds. M. Daniel Carroll R., David J.A. Clines, and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 366-92; Porter, *Καταλλάσσω in Ancient Greek Literature, with Reference to the Pauline Writings*, *Estudios de Filología Neotestamentaria* 6 (Córdoba: Ediciones El Almendro, 1994).

most modern commentaries neglect pre-modern interpreters, she draws the distinction too boldly, because there are numerous critical commentators who are interested in much more than simply partition and source theories of the letter. Such a stereotype unhelpfully skews the discussion. Whereas this commentary is clearly more attuned to the description of theological hermeneutics as envisioned by its theorizers, Humphrey's commentary is decidedly lacking in theological insight. The discussion of pre-modern interpretation is very brief, and the discussion of the theological thrust of the book as "integration" is highly reductionistic.

### **3. Literary Hermeneutics**

Literary hermeneutics has been practiced for some time, and as a result, as noted above, the theoretical position has consequently developed as well, so that today a literary interpretive approach can mean a number of different things. Many of the perspectives that have made their way into literary hermeneutics reflect issues that are still highly contentious in other hermeneutical circles. These include the debate over the center of meaning of texts, the roles of the author and reader in determining textual meaning, the role of authorial intention in interpretation, and the stability of meaning, especially as interpretive models move away from the text and toward the reader. As a result, models that differentiate the types of authors and readers have been usefully developed, along with such categories as the real author, implied author, narrator, etc.

Literary hermeneutics makes an explicit claim to be concerned with the final form or integrity of the text. Talbert makes such a claim that Johnson endorses. However, it is clear from Johnson's exegesis that he envisions traditional historical criticism as able to be fully integrated with a literary framework, and many of his conclusions are predicated upon historical-critical analysis. Talbert further claims that the analysis is not going to be word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, or verse-by-verse, but that is exactly what Johnson's analysis appears to

be, especially phrase oriented, with much consideration of individual words. In fact, Johnson's desire for a single, unified sequential reading is mitigated by the kind of attention to detail that he offers, which has a tendency to atomize his exegesis to the point of losing sight of the flow of the argument. However, although this commentary does not appear to fulfill the intended literary model, Johnson does a better job than some theological interpretations in appreciating pre-critical exegesis, when he notes the history of interpretation of Romans all the way back to Marcion. This commentary is labeled "literary and theological" in nature, and it fulfills the title with reference to the history of interpretation.

The commentary by McCant is a type of literary interpretation, at least the way that it is packaged and advertised in this particular commentary series. The "literary-rhetorical" label is fulfilled when McCant speaks of the commentary in terms of its rhetorical species (judicial) and its major literary trope, the parody. Without necessarily saying whether I find McCant's view of Paul correct or not, he does at least address some of the difficulty in characterizing Paul's function and representation in 2 Corinthians—whether the orientation is autobiographical or proclamatory—on the basis of his depiction of Paul as parodic. He is thus able to maintain the self-referring elements of the opening of the letter, while also clarifying how they are used by Paul to further his proclamatory purposes as an apostle. In this sense, McCant's reading is a successful attempt at a literary reading that also promotes a number of theological interests.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to perform several important tasks. The first is to set the stage for discussion of what hermeneutics is by offering an extended definition of it by example and practice. The definition of hermeneutics is not simple and straightforward, and

involves a variety of important factors and influences, with a number of resulting and potentially conflicting approaches. With regard to hermeneutics and New Testament studies, scholars frame and treat the subject in a number of different ways. Consequently, there are a noticeable number of limitations in books on hermeneutics, because of their failure to pursue significant hermeneutical issues in order to advance the discussion. Biblical scholars themselves often take the path of less resistance and develop perspectives on the nature of biblical interpretation, rather than hermeneutics proper. Sometimes this interpretation is issue and topic oriented, while in many instances their treatment becomes an exploration of techniques and major topics in New Testament interpretation. In light of this range of thought regarding hermeneutics, I selected three major, recent hermeneutical schools of thought, with the intention of analyzing their similarities and differences, especially as they treat common texts. These three methods—dialectical theology, theological hermeneutics, and literary hermeneutics—have each displayed potential for theoretical and practical interpretation in the course of the last fifty or so years, and merit further exploration. I believe that my analysis has shown both the promise of these various hermeneutical approaches, and several of their serious shortcomings.

In characterizing these three approaches, I believe that all three have identifiable strengths, such as dialectical theology its attempt to be relevant to the contemporary world and its dependence upon God for interpretation; theological hermeneutics for its healthy reminder of the need to consider the theologically embedded position of both Scripture and the church and to bring these interests to bear in interpretation; and literary hermeneutics in its attention to the literary character of a work, such that exegesis need not be concerned merely with technical matters, but with characterization, the development of plot, and the role of the reader in interpretation (even if the examples above do not contain all of these strengths). However, I also believe that each of these methods lacks in certain essential features.



One is a clear definition of what it means to interpret a text. As a result, there are few clear and explicit articulations of each of these methods. A second is the failure to provide controls on the limits of interpretation, so that one can identify what constitutes relevant data for interpretation. A third is establishment of a rigorous method that is as inclusive as possible without losing methodological and interpretive definition.

I believe that all of these methods—and some others that I have not discussed here—clearly lack what might best be described as a linguistically informed and semantically inclusive method of interpretation that appreciates the place of the author, the text, and the reader in interpretation, is grounded in the reality of both the text and the world, and addresses how it is that a text is best interpreted within its context and co-text. These issues merit discussion on another occasion.

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I wish to ask several important questions that will help us to understand hermeneutics in the contemporary biblical interpretive environment. The first is the question of what constitutes hermeneutics today? I address that question by discussing contemporary hermeneutics, biblical hermeneutics, and biblical interpretation theory. The second is the question of what difference does hermeneutics make in terms of actual biblical interpretation? Here I select a number of representative biblical hermeneutical stances and illustrate their interpretive differences. The third and final question is that of how does one go about evaluating such interpretive biblical work for its interpretive significance and possible implications? My attempt will be to uncover some significant insights that will help us to understand the nature and framework of the current hermeneutical endeavor in biblical studies.

## 撮 要

作者在本文旨在提出一些重要問題，以助讀者在當代聖經詮釋的氛圍下，明白詮釋學的底蘊。問題一：構成今天詮釋學的要素是甚麼？作者透過討論當代詮釋學、聖經詮釋學，和詮釋聖經的理論，來回應這個問題。問題二：在實際解釋聖經上，詮釋學究竟帶來哪些不同地方？作者選取一些聖經詮釋的代表例子，說明詮釋學對解釋聖經上的區別。問題三（也是最後一個問題）：對這種詮釋聖經的作業，我們會怎樣評估其意義與可能的指涉？作者嘗試揭示一些關鍵的洞見，來幫助讀者認識在聖經研究上聖經詮釋的本質與框架。