

AFTER HISTORICAL CRITICISM, WHAT? TRENDS IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND ECUMENICAL, INTERFAITH DIALOGUES*

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PRECIS

The Bible has long played a major and important role in ecumenical and interfaith discussions, usually involving usage of various historical-critical methods to break old impasses. Today, many speak of a "paradigm shift" away from historical criticism toward literary/narrative approaches. The imagery of "window" and "mirror" helps one understand the change from looking back through a text for historical events to looking at a text as a finished work with an ongoing life of its own. Under the literary/narrative umbrella can be considered structuralist, social-world, rhetorical, and canonical criticism approaches, as well as literary/narrative ones and reader-oriented criticism. Some examples already exist of applications of these new methods in ecumenical discussions and systematic theology — Gabriel Fackre, narrative; Paul van Buren, "Jewish Christian reality"; and a "Yale School," including Hans Frei's pre-critical "realistic" narrative and George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach. Any evaluation calls for historical, literary, philosophical, and theological judgments.

The Bible and its interpretation have played an important role in ecumenical dialogues among Christians and, along with other sacred books, in interfaith discussions. Usually, historical criticism (or "criticisms," to reflect the subdisciplines) has proved valuable in breaking old impasses.¹

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¹See Raymond E. Brown, "The Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism to Ecumenical Church Discussion," in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger et al., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus, Encounter Series 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), pp. 24-49; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: Its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life," *Theological Studies* 50 (June, 1989): 244-259; Lawrence Boadt, Helga Croner, Leon Klenicki, eds., *Biblical Studies: Meeting*

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Today we stand at a series of possible turning points in biblical studies, at a time when the "second generation" of major English Bible translations is appearing.² Changes in them reflect not merely manuscript discoveries or shifts in English style but also "inclusive language" in its many facets – not only feminist but also Jewish and black and socioeconomic concerns. Commentaries are being redone.³ There are conservative attacks on "historical criticism,"⁴ and a plethora of new exegetical approaches has emerged. Above all, there are voices insisting that there has been a "paradigm shift" and that literary/narrative methodology is the only way to go.

Scripture, to which all Christians (and Jews for the Tanakh) have a basic commitment, has been an acknowledged meeting ground, ecumenically. However, it now threatens to become a battleground, not so much between confessions and denominations as within churches, denominational families, and religions,⁵ on issues of inclusive language and of methodology. The degree varies to which such concerns apply to sacred books among other world religions, and in many faith communities there is a resurgence of fundamentalism involving a book.

Our purposes here are (1) to report on current practices and emerging trends in scholarly approaches to biblical literature, and (2) to pose questions about use of scriptures and such methods in theology and in ecumenical, interfaith dialogue, for issues of major proportion loom as to how sacred books shall be interpreted.

I. A "Paradigm Shift" for the Interpretation of Scripture?

A "paradigm" is a model, as in a language a standard example for verbs or nouns of a certain type. In the sciences the term refers to "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by members of a given

Ground of Jews and Christians, Studies in Judaism and Christianity, A Stimulus Book (New York and Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980).

²The *New American Bible Revised New Testament*, many editions since 1986, including its use in Donald Senior et al., eds., *The Catholic Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). *The Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, 1989) updates the *New English Bible* of 1961 and 1970. The *New Revised Standard Version* supersedes the *Revised Standard Version Bible* of 1952. *Tanakh (tnk): The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

³E.g., Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990) (hereafter referred to as *N.J.B.C.*); and the *International Critical Commentary*, new series, published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh.

⁴Documented, e.g., in Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism," pp. 244-245.

⁵John Reumann, "The Bible, Ecumenical Meeting Ground – Inclusive Language Battleground?" in Joseph Armenti, ed., *The Papin Gedenkschrift: Dimensions in the Human Religious Quest: Essays in Memory of Joseph Papin* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1986), vol. 2, pp. 519-552.

community.”⁶ When the constellation of assumptions changes noticeably, a “paradigm shift” occurs.

Biblical studies over the centuries have been aligned with three main paradigms or models. The Bible was long controlled by dogmatic theology, allied, in turn, with philosophy. Recall the church Fathers, creeds, such doctrines as the Trinity or the Two Natures of Christ, and their use of Stoicism or Neopythagoreanism. Or, recall the Schoolmen in the Middle Ages and the rediscovery of Aristotle, or, more recently, Neo-Thomism, Existentialism, or process philosophy and theology.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came a move away from the dogmatic-philosophical model. Now “history” was the thing. The Renaissance and Reformation had prepared the way. The Enlightenment led to historical as well as rationalist understandings of scripture. Critical methods were devised to discover “what had really happened,” *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. Historical-critical approaches and a historical understanding of reality dominated.

In Protestant circles this rich heritage is now over two centuries old. Among Roman Catholics, efforts at critical study of the Bible suffered from attacks by “integrists.”⁷ The 1943 encyclical by Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, and other statements from Rome⁸ have now made the results of historical criticism commonplace for many Catholics, too—for example, the distinction in the Gospels of three stages: Jesus, the source level, and the sense of the Evangelist.

Although philosophy and church doctrine continue in many quarters to be important frames of reference for interpreting the Bible, the historical-critical approach is the one in which most students have been trained for several decades. However, in 1973 Walter Wink announced that the biblical-critical paradigm of historical objectivity was “bankrupt” and should be replaced by a “psychoanalytical approach,” “a new, more human way—for biblical study.”⁹ Now it is claimed that a literary approach is superseding

⁶Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962, 1970), p. 175; this “sociological” issue stands alongside one of “puzzle-solutions” in science, where a model “can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles” (cf. pp. 10, 23, 175-191, and the critical literature in p. 174, n. 4).

⁷Fitzmyer, “Historical Criticism,” p. 248; Gerald P. Fogarty, *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A History from the Early Republic to Vatican II*, Society of Biblical Literature Confessional Perspective Series [2] (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 80-84, 96-99, 119, 162, and passim.

⁸See *N.J.B.C.* 72:35, 39; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Biblical Commission’s Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospel,” *Theological Studies* 25 (September, 1964): 386-408; idem, “The Biblical Commission and Christology,” *Theological Studies* 46 (September, 1985): 407-479; and idem, *Scripture and Christology: A Statement of the Biblical Commission with a Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

⁹Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), pp. 1, 46, 83. Wink nonetheless reinserted the procedures of source and form criticism (pp. 49-65), even if the goal is personal and social transformation.

previous models. Peter Macky called this shift a "revolutionary change": in the future "we will see history as preliminary"; "there is a third dimension to the Bible," the "literary/aesthetic," which "must be plumbed."¹⁰ David Robertson wrote of the "increasing number of biblical scholars" who "are united in considering the Bible primarily and fundamentally as a literary document (as opposed, e.g., to considering it as a historical or theological document)."¹¹ A recent issue of *Concilium* stated:

Today, biblical scholarship is undergoing a shift in methodological emphasis towards an appreciation of the texts themselves as literary productions in reaction to the dominant scholarly preoccupation with the historical events behind the texts. This also involves a greater awareness of the role of the reader in the art of interpretation.¹²

One can speak of a "post-modern challenge" to historical criticism, a challenge characteristic not only of conservative Catholics and conservative Evangelicals.

Yet, work on the Bible in ecumenical endeavors has been primarily historical-critical, not literary/narrative. Articles in the fiftieth-anniversary issue of *Theological Studies* on biblical scholarship and in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* do not suggest the magnitude of the possible changes in paradigm.¹³ Attention must be given to this "shift in the focus of interest from past persons, events, traditions, literary forms, and conventions, to the now available texts and their impact upon present-day hearers and readers."¹⁴

¹⁰Peter W. Macky, "The Coming Revolution: The New Literary Approach to New Testament Interpretation," *The Theological Educator* 9 (Spring, 1979): 32-46; repr. in Donald K. McKim, ed., *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 263-279; quotes are from pp. 278, 279, and 267 in McKim.

¹¹"Literature, the Bible as," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 547.

¹²Wim Beuken, Sean Freyne, and Anton Weiler, eds., *The Bible and Its Readers*, *Concilium* 1991/1 (February, 1991) (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), p. vii; see especially pp. 3-12, 115-124. Cf. John R. Donahue, "Biblical Scholarship 25 Years after Vatican II: New Methods, New Challenges," forthcoming from the University of Notre Dame Press in the proceedings of a conference at the University of Notre Dame on the dialogue between biblical exegesis and philosophy of religion, held on March 16, 1990.

¹³In the Fiftieth-Anniversary Volume, Scripture Issue, of *Theological Studies* 50 (June, 1989), see especially PHEME PERKINS, "Crisis in Jerusalem? Narrative Criticism in New Testament Studies," pp. 296-313; and JOHN R. DONAHUE, "The Changing Shape of New Testament Theology," pp. 327-335. The material in *N.J.B.C.* 71:55-70 seems grafted in; cf. also 69:70-79.

¹⁴Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 221.

II. Texts: Window or Mirror?

The contrast can be pointed up through imagery of Murray Krieger, widely echoed in much recent discussion on the Bible.¹⁵ Usually a text in the Bible or any literature has been regarded as a *window*. The reader looks through the window at what lies behind it for historical evidence. This may mean a source or earlier oral form, which the author has redacted, and, behind redaction, source, and oral material, what was originally said or the event that once took place. An observer may also gain knowledge about the group (community, church) that produced this text or for whose use it was recorded. References in the text may point to realia in past history, details about a person or place, a chronological peg, or a social situation. The observer looking through the window of a text in Matthew's Gospel can focus on Jesus historically, Matthew's sources (such as Q), the Evangelist's own day and message for it, or other aspects such as the relation of the Matthean community with Judaism.

To illustrate, a pericope such as the Stilling of the Storm at Sea in Mt. 8:23-27 can be read to show Jesus as sovereign over apocalyptic tempests that afflict his disciples; or to show how several such stories were gathered together in a source (in this case Mk. 4:35-41, or an even earlier collection of miracle stories), reflecting a wonder-worker Christology; or how Matthew wove in an ecclesiology (ship = church), and "people" (v. 27, *anthrōpoi*), not just disciples, were amazed.

All this is familiar enough from historical-critical biblical studies. Such an approach helps us see the meaning of Matthew (or of Jesus) for Gospel-hearers and readers of the day. The problem, of course, is how to deliver that message to, and correlate it meaningfully with, the modern situation.

The alternative in literary criticism is to treat a passage as a *mirror*, into which one looks. There need be no concern with what lies behind the text—sources, forms, community, even author, or what originally happened (if anything). One seeks plot (action, dialogue), characters, and values in the story. The aim is to read the text as a whole. The reader makes the mental moves for which the text calls. Meaning lies "in front of" the text (Ricoeur), not behind it. Some might say "in the text," but more commonly meaning is said to lie "on *this* side of the text." The reader becomes involved in the narrative world of the text; its norms and claims impinge on the reader's own "real" world. To "understand" means to find a satisfactory relationship between these two worlds.

¹⁵Murray Krieger, *A Window to Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 3-4 and passim; reflected, e.g., in Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, New Testament Series (hereafter referred to as G.B.S./N.T.) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 19; and R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, Foundations and Facets: New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 3-5. The earliest usage of the figure in biblical studies I have noted is in Dan O. Via, Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 85.

To illustrate for Mt. 8:23-27, forget about the Synoptic parallels, the sources, the "form" of a miracle story, and even the historical Jesus. What are we told about the characters in the narrative? The disciples appear as those who follow Jesus into the boat, obeying his command to sail "to the other side" (8:18), but they prove to be fearful persons of "little faith" (v. 26). Jesus shows surprise, not sympathy (v. 26), but aids them in their crisis. The emphasis on faith is heightened by repetition (8:10; 9:2, 22, 29). Can that shape our world?

This may seem to bypass historically crucial steps of exegesis (but, for some, unpalatable ones) about what happened. More weight is placed on the narrative whole and the reader-interpreter. However, literary/narrative criticism is not sheer subjectivity; it has its often complex methods, too. It aims to discover the "symbolic universe" of the text and so to alter the reader's perception of the "real" world in which we live. The world of the text becomes more real and influential than the world where we normally exist.

We may now look in more detail at aspects of the "window" and the "mirror" approaches.

III. The "Window" of the Historical-Critical Method

A series of techniques for investigating texts have grown up, collectively called the "historical method."¹⁶ Biblical scholarship learned from classical studies first to raise questions about text and translation.¹⁷ Are there variant readings in the manuscripts? How has the passage been transmitted over the centuries? In what ways has it been translated into English? From methods developed in studying the Greek and Latin classics also came questions as to author, date, and situation when the work was composed (including "general

¹⁶See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), on background. For recent, basic introductions for students, see Daniel J. Harrington, *Interpreting the New Testament: A Practical Guide*, New Testament Message 1 (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1979), pp. 85-95; and Christopher Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament: Methods of Interpretation* (London: S.P.C.K.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 41-67. I. H. Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 126-138, reflects conservative Evangelical views. For recent overall assessments, see J. C. O'Neill, "Biblical Criticism (History of Biblical Criticism)," in David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) (hereafter referred to as *A.B.D.*), vol. 1, pp. 725-730; and William Baird, "Biblical Criticism (New Testament Criticism)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 1, pp. 730-737.

¹⁷See Ralph W. Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: From the Septuagint to Qumran*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series (hereafter referred to as *G.B.S./O.T.*) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible*, *G.B.S./O.T.* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Harrington, *Interpreting the New Testament*, pp. 16-24; Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament*, pp. 21-40; Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation*, pp. 11, 36-37, 132, 222, and passim; *N.J.B.C.*, section 68. The importance of textual criticism is agreed upon by all; cf. John Reumann, ed., *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 52, for U.S. Lutheran discussion. Transmission of the text and history of interpretation do not always receive the attention warranted but in ecumenical dialogue have often proved fruitful.

introduction" and *Zeitgeschichte*). Study of words and phrases in a passage was often involved.

Students of the Bible also learned from classical studies to ask about sources behind a passage and what the author's own hand had contributed. It was from folklore studies and investigation into how ancient or primitive societies transmitted whole epics by word of mouth, without as yet having written them down, that early-twentieth-century Old and New Testament scholars went into oral forms and their history of usage prior to the Pentateuch or the written Gospels.¹⁸

On the basis of such methods biblical scholars have become accustomed to go through the window of a text. Mk. 14:36 will be used as an illustration, where Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, prays, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (*N.R.S.V.*). Of all the Gospels, Mark alone has Jesus call God "Abba" or "Father." (The term also occurs at Gal. 4:6 and Rom. 8:15, retained as an Aramaic word in Greek writings.) It was, in Aramaic, an intimate word that a small child might use of an earthly father; it seems not to have been employed in Judaism for God.¹⁹

Behind Mark lie pre-Markan tradition and similar usage in the Q source (material common to Matthew and Luke), namely, in the address Jesus taught his disciples for God, in the "Lord's Prayer": "Abba, Father" (Lk. 11:2; cf. Mt. 6:9). This prayer form, using the bold, intimate term that Jesus had employed, made a great impression on Jesus' disciples. They prayed with each other, "Our Father," but they never put themselves in the same category with Jesus, as is shown by the distinction between "my Father" and "your Father" when Jesus speaks (Mt. 10:29, 32; Jn. 20:17). This suggests that (our, your) "Father" was reserved for use by disciples, not by other people, and was distinguished from Jesus' own use of "my Father." His relation to God was that of "the Son" to the Father (Mt. 11:27), whereas the disciples' use was a derivative relationship from Jesus.

All this raises, behind the Gospel sources and oral forms, the possibility of an "Abba experience" on the part of Jesus. He had discovered "the ground of his own life in God." He came to a particular awareness of God and God's coming rule and of his own role as a messenger, heralding God's reign, and of

¹⁸See Edgar V. McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?* G.B.S./N.T. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969); Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament*, G.B.S./O.T. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Norman Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* G.B.S./N.T. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969); Harrington, *Interpreting the New Testament*, pp. 56-84, 96-107; Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament*, pp. 78-135; Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation*, pp. 139-195; John Barton, "Form Criticism (Old Testament)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 2, pp. 838-841; Vernon K. Robbins, "Form Criticism (New Testament)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 2, pp. 841-844; John Barton, "Redaction Criticism (Old Testament)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 5, pp. 644-647; and Robert H. Stein, "Redaction Criticism (New Testament)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 5, pp. 647-650.

¹⁹See especially Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), pp. 36-37, 61-67.

doing God's will, obediently, even in Gethsemane and to the death, in trust of the Abba-Father. So Schillebeeckx has argued (though others disagree).²⁰

The historical-critical method thus allows us to claim that (a) Jesus of Nazareth experienced God uniquely as Father and acted accordingly. That event in his life can be traced through (b) oral forms and sources in the early church and (c) into our Gospels. It is at that point, with our completed Gospels, that literary approaches noted above in Part II would begin.

Historical-critical exegesis is "philology plus": it seeks textual meaning, contextual meaning in a paragraph or episode, and relational meaning in the setting of a book, corpus, or testament.²¹ Its steps begin an arch stretching from a text to us but anchored in historical study, producing levels of meaning for event, source, and biblical book.²²

Such steps of exegesis (see Chart 1) reflect longtime Protestant treatment of scripture, as practiced together in the World Council of Churches and its Faith and Order Commission, Catholic standards in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, and treatments from conservative churches.²³ These steps in exegesis to treat (a) event, (b) oral testimony to it, (c) sources, and (d) redacted document (all part of the "window" approach) can be expanded to include (e) the collection of biblical documents into one corpus or another and then (f) into a testament (Old or New) and eventually (g) a single book, the Bible, along with (h) the subsequent history of interpretation of each passage and (i) usage in a lectionary, set (j) within a "church year" calendar.²⁴ That is an ecclesiastical pattern of development (canon, lectionary, calendar); more recent types of exegesis sometimes build on parts of this outline and other times offer alternatives.

Overall, the historical approach to scripture, employed with varying

²⁰Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, tr. Herbert Hoskins (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 270; also see pp. 256-269 (including literature on pp. 256-257). For a contrasting view, see Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 100-106; and the differing conclusions in the article by Gerhard Kittel on 'abbā in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI, and London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 5-6; and by Gottlob Schrenk on *patēr* in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 984-995; James Barr, "'Abbā Isn't 'Daddy,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (April, 1988): 28-47; and Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), pp. 210-213.

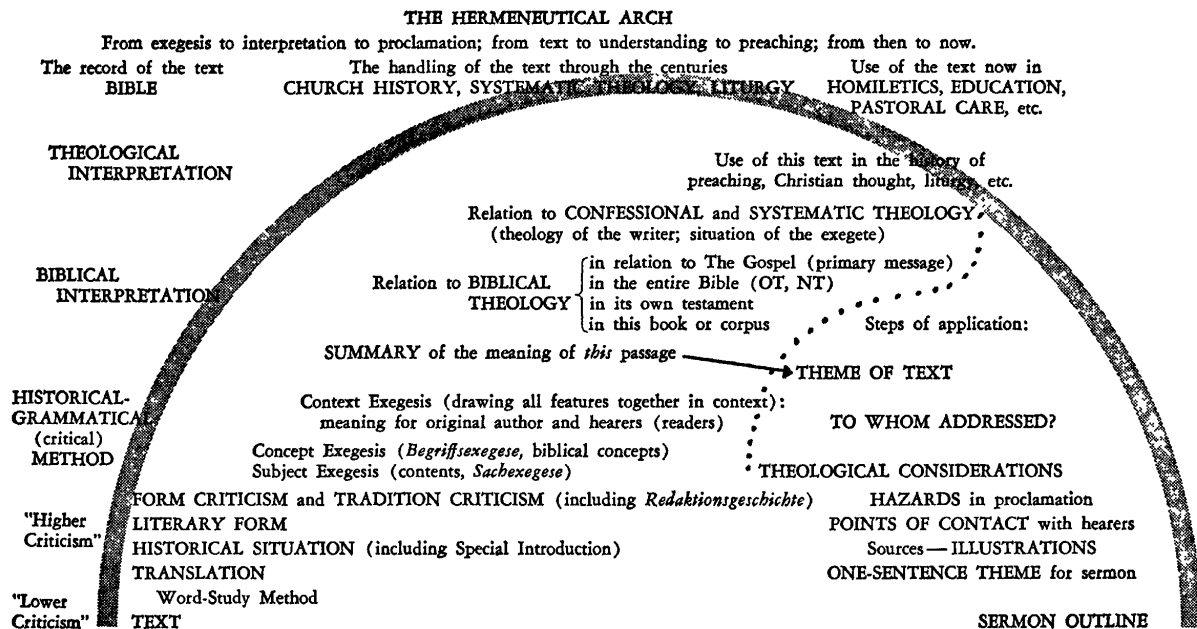
²¹Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism," p. 254.

²²John Reumann, "Methods in Studying the Biblical Text Today," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40 (November, 1969): 655-681; copyright 1969 Concordia Publishing House. Chart 1 is reproduced from p. 660 of this article, with permission from C. P. H.

²³Cf. the "Oxford Report" of the World Council of Churches' Symposium at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1949; the encyclical of Pius XII; and "A Lutheran Stance toward Contemporary Biblical Studies" (St. Louis, 1966); as well as subsequent statements from the Faith and Order Commission, the Biblical Commission, and other groups. See more recently the steps listed by Leander E. Keck and Gene M. Tucker in "Exegesis," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*, pp. 296-303.

²⁴John Reumann, "Exegetes, Honesty, and the Faith: Biblical Scholarship in Church School Theology," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5 (February, 1978): 16-32.

Chart 1. STEPS IN AND BEYOND THE
HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD



Historical, Biblical, and Theological Interpretation cannot, of course, be completely separated; textual decisions, e.g., may involve theological factors.

Major steps in the left side of the arch are given in capital letters. However, the sequence of steps may vary from text to text (e.g., literary before historical); not all steps may be applicable to every verse; one must often be doing several steps at once, and may have to reexamine earlier findings in light of later ones.

OT texts will require special handling not only with regard to Tradition History down to the Israelite author involved, but also with regard to later NT use of the text ("OT and Christian theology").

In the *Synoptics* one will have to deal (moving backwards chronologically) with (1) the evangelist's meaning in context; (2) use in the source(s); (3) oral usage; and (4) use by Jesus. In the *epistles*: 9 (1) meaning in present (edited) context; (2) Paul's own meaning and that of his hearers; (3) meaning of pre-Pauline material(s).

degrees of detail and rigor, has long proved fruitful in academia and church and is what many have in mind when referring to the use of scripture ecumenically.²⁵

IV. The "Mirror" of Literary/Narrative Criticism and Other Recent Approaches

Other methods than the historical-critical have come to the fore in recent years for approaching texts. Some redevelop older approaches that had dropped out of vogue. Others arise from new insights in general literary criticism or linguistics. These new approaches vary in their attitude toward historical criticism. Some accept and employ its steps. Others ignore them or regard them as superseded. What often unites the new methods is their bypassing what stands behind a text. The emphasis is on this side of it or perhaps around the text in its social-cultural world or beneath the text in the depths of language structure.

Why have so many new approaches arisen in the last twenty years or so? Why a shift, when the achievements of the historical-critical method have been so considerable? Scholarship, of course, always moves on. A cynical reaction is that academia needs new Ph.D. topics, but there are other factors:

(1) The frequent failure of historical-critical scholarship to achieve consensus is apparent, whether over the existence of an Elohistic (E) source, the place of apocalyptic thought in Israel or the early church, or the "historical Jesus." Any scholarly consensus likely shifts from decade to decade.

(2) Students, pastors, average readers, and even professors are often overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data and opinions on historical matters. The surveys in the Society of Biblical Literature's centennial volumes on "The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters" or perusal of the program at any learned society bears out this impression.²⁶

(3) Biblical studies have often been the victim of the common-sense, popular reaction, "History is bunk" (Henry Ford). People have, therefore, looked elsewhere than in history and the hard work of studying it that critical methods increasingly demanded, in order to find meaning.

(4) The rise of many new methods coincides with the period in the United

²⁵Cf. note 1, above, and see Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, and John Reumann, eds., *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg; New York: Paulist Press, 1973); and Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and John Reumann, eds., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

²⁶In the Bible and Its Modern Interpreters series (Scholars Press and Fortress Press), general ed. Douglas A. Knight, see Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker, eds., *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (1985); George W. E. Nickelsburg and Robert Kraft, eds., *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (1986); and Eldon J. Epp and George W. MacRae, eds., *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (1989).

States of the civil-rights movement, the Vietnam War, and ecological debate.²⁷ People wanted the Bible to speak more directly and urgently to such current social problems. There was frustration with the historical-critical method because it did not provide answers or motivation for the causes in which readers were interested. Scripture was not malleable to these interests when interrogated merely as a window.

(5) The trend is part of the vast dethroning of authority over the last century or so.²⁸ Freud had decentered the individual as a unity from its place held in both the humanist and Christian traditions as he began to map the unconscious and its contradictions, much as Copernicus had decentered the cosmos (no longer geocentric or theocentric). Marx decentered history in that the human subject (or philosophy or historical events) was no longer the center of history, but economic forces were. Ferdinand de Saussure decentered language in that "the signifier" could no longer be understood "to be preceded by an anterior truth, a meaning, the *presence* of a signified whose existence ultimately necessitates a transcendental signified (God, Man, the Mind, etc.) to which all truths can be referred."²⁹ Finally, in literature the author was dethroned. Small wonder that one hears of "de-centering biblical scholarship."³⁰

It was long assumed in common-sense interpretation that "literary texts . . . tell truths"³¹ and express the insights of their authors. Structuralism had challenged such "expressive realism." The New Critics of the 1940's and 1950's set aside the intentions of an author as "neither available nor desirable";³² one ceased searching for the mind of the author behind the text. The text is public, "because language is public."³³ The reader then becomes the authority for meaning in the text. Reader-power, not authorial intention,

²⁷Noted by Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, G.B.S./N.T. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 13-14. James Barr, in "The Literal, the Allegorical, and Modern Biblical Scholarship," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44 (June, 1989): 3-17, claims modern study has been allegorical, with a concern for appropriate context and cultural setting.

²⁸For this and the next five paragraphs, see especially Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, New Accents (London and New York: Methuen, 1980). In the same series, see Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977); Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge Chapman Hall, 1982; rev. ed. — New York: Routledge, 1991); and Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984). Further, see Edgar V. McKnight, *Meaning in Texts: The Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

²⁹Belsey, *Critical Practice*, pp. 136-137, emphasis in original (reflecting Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], p. 49); cf. pp. 130, 133.

³⁰Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Interpretation: De-Centering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (March, 1988): 3-17; see p. 9 especially: "decentering the dominant scientist ethos of biblical scholarship by recentering it in a critical interpretive praxis for liberation."

³¹Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p. 2.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 15, quoting W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 3.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 16.

became a phenomenon in the 1960's. Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, sought to focus on "a structure of words for its own sake," a world or universe found in the text by the reader.³⁴ The term "implied author" (implied by the text and our reading of it) arose to describe the "speaker" in a novel or the one who tells a tale.³⁵ Meanings become "events in the reader's consciousness."³⁶ Since different readers may have different experiences and literary competencies, a plurality of readings results. Therefore, a "reception theory" is necessitated. An "implied reader" emerges, "constructed by the text," embodying the "predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect."³⁷

Common-sense "expressive realism" was undermined even more by post-Saussurean linguistics. Language became not "a way of naming things which already exist, but a system of differences with no positive terms." By this view, "language precedes the existence of independent entities."³⁸ "Signs function . . . not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position."³⁹ Always this occurs within a social group, and an ideology is involved. For example, "man" is used for both "people" and "males"; women are represented as a "secondary sex." Children, in learning a language, are thus really learning "*socially constructed signifieds*,"⁴⁰ for language reflects a world constructed in language. Neither the author's mind nor the world we all know can guarantee the meaning of a text. Instead, there is a plurality of meanings. However, the primacy of language over subjectivity means decentering of individual consciousness, which is no longer the "origin of meaning, knowledge and action"⁴¹ (farewell to "Cogito, ergo sum."). The subject who reads the texts is him- or herself constructed by language and discourse and their symbolic order and ideology.⁴² Classic realistic texts are "declarative," imparting knowledge to stabilize the reader and "suppress the contradiction in the subject," but other "interrogative" texts "unfix" the subject, inviting answers to the questions posed.⁴³

Once texts are regarded as constructs, a further possibility is "deconstruction," analyzing a text to show its point(s) of contradiction, where it transgress-

³⁴Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 74; see idem, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of "The Bible and Literature"* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990); also see note 80, below.

³⁵Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p. 30, with reference to Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 70-71.

³⁶Ibid., p. 32, with reference to Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 387-388.

³⁷Ibid., p. 35, quoting Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 34.

³⁸Ibid., p. 38.

³⁹Ibid., p. 40, quoting Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, tr. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana, 1974), p. 118.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 44, emphasis in original.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 60.

⁴²Ibid., p. 61.

⁴³Ibid., p. 85.

ses the limits of its realist form and becomes “*plural*, open to re-reading,” an object for the reader to work at and produce meaning(s).⁴⁴ According to the deconstructionists, one cannot understand any experience of the past, because texts always leave out what the teller thought unimportant. Such omissions keep written history from being reliable evidence about reality. (If only the exodus from Egypt were presented in other than doxological or “Holy War” terminology, or the canonical Gospel tradition had described Jesus’ resurrection, or Peter or Paul had recorded for us their Christophanies!)

Readers, according to modern criticism, move from being “consumers” of what someone has written for them to producers of meaning. Instead of saying about an author’s message, “Yes, that’s how it is,”⁴⁵ reader/critics seek out the plurality of the text and of language and, indeed, produce a text themselves. Belsey notes as one result: “The possibility of a plurality of worlds and a plurality of atonements put in question the unique relationship between God and humanity which had been essential to Christian thinking.”⁴⁶ A world without fixity results:

Since Copernicus, we have known that the earth is not the ‘centre’ of the universe. Since Marx, we have known that the human subject, the economic, political or philosophical ego is not the ‘centre’ of history—and even, in opposition to the Philosophers of the Enlightenment and to Hegel, that history has no ‘centre’ but possesses a structure which has no necessary ‘centre’ except in ideological misrecognition.⁴⁷

Now authors are dethroned too. Texts provide raw materials to be “transformed by the critic” through “the work of *reading* the text,” that is, a “close” reading using new techniques.⁴⁸

A. Structuralism

Underlying many, though not all, of the approaches that follow is structuralism. It concerns not the structure of a book or unit, such as form critics pointed out for a miracle story (situation, method of cure, result) but the “deep” underlying structure of all languages (*langue*, not *parole*). From the work of Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others developed the view that every language is a coherently ordered system of signs and rules. This structured relation may be treated in a “diachronic” way, that is, related to antecedents in language and to change and development “over time,” or treatment may be “synchronic,” that is, the language state as it is mutually and simultaneously interdependent “at the same time,” at any one time.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 104, emphasis in original.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 132-133, quoting Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 201, which has particular reference to Jacques Lucan’s reading of Freud.

⁴⁸Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p. 139, emphasis in original.

Many of the terms employed above in Belsey's general analysis come from this structuralist approach, such as "that which is signified" (*signifié*) and "that which signifies" (*signifiant*) in the language of a community. Structural linguistic schools blossomed in Prague (Trubetzkoy), Copenhagen (Hjelmslev), and the United States (L. Bloomfield). "Semiotics," the discipline that studies the life of signs within a society, was applied to narrative by Roland Barthes in 1966, and A. J. Greimas and others have developed structural study of narrative.

The approach—with its pairing of terms in a text, intricate charts, and attempts to account for the structure that generates a text—has especially been the preserve of French scholars; in the U.S., notably Daniel Patte and pupils.⁴⁹ There has been something of a shift, in that, in the 1960's and 1970's, one sought the abstract "deep structure" beneath a text, but more recently one uses underlying structures in order to deal with the "surface structure," so as to explain, for example, in Matthew what that Gospel really means by "faith" or "God-the-Father" language.⁵⁰

B. Social World and Sociological Approaches

Biblical studies have long paid attention to the ancient Near Eastern environment of Israel and "the world of the New Testament." Often these "backgrounds" have been treated negatively (as in the American "Biblical Theology Movement"). Sociology as a discipline was applied to the Bible by the "Chicago School" (Shailer Mathews *et al.*) in the early decades of this century. Such treatments fell out of vogue in the heyday of biblical theology (1947-70, or so). At times the community of Israel or the church has come to the fore, as in form criticism. There has more recently been a renewal of "social world" concerns.

In part, this is due to the availability of new source materials and the rise of interest in previously neglected groups, such as women or "the poor." One approach has sought to explore the data more systematically and to apply them toward understanding places (for example, Antioch, Corinth, or Galilee) or aspects of the Hebrew scriptures and Israelite society.⁵¹

⁴⁹Daniel Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis?* G.B.S. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); and idem, *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics*, G.B.S./N.T. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), with annotated bibliography on pp. 129-134. See Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament*, pp. 151-166; and John Barton, "Structuralism," *A.B.D.*, vol. 6, pp. 214-217. For the generalization offered in the next sentence, see Via's introduction to Patte, *Structural Exegesis*, p. ix.

⁵⁰E.g., Daniel Patte, *Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel: A Structural Introduction to the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); and idem, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

⁵¹See Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, Society for Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study Series 13 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978); Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Sean Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); and Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

A further step is the attempt to read the data in light of modern sociological theories, for example, about apocalyptic sects (based on our knowledge of storefront churches or "cargo cults" in the South Pacific); or a Marxist analysis of the tribes of Yahweh; or how leadership and institutional structures evolved in the Pauline churches, in light of "Berger and Luckmann's thesis about the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social world."⁵² Such efforts, of course, raise the question of which sociological (cultural, political) stance shall be adopted.

One can also make psychology or "cultural anthropology" the frame of reference. Compare Gerd Theissen's book on the Pauline understanding of the person⁵³ or Bruce Malina's "Mediterranean world" approach,⁵⁴ or one can, more along history-of-religion lines, set Israel's thought in the matrix of "the common theology of the ancient Near East."⁵⁵

Some object that such approaches sell out "theology" for sociology, but the approaches can be combined with theological interests and, in any case, raise the question of the relation of divine activity to the world of human beings. Numerous treatments exist on sociological approaches.⁵⁶

C. Rhetorical Criticism

While "mere rhetoric" has often been disparaged, it was a basic part of ancient education and life. The *ars rhetorica* was important for church Fathers such as Augustine (himself a rhetorician) and was part of the *trivium* for classical and medieval education. One can trace a history of classical rhetoric over many centuries. Amos Wilder's *Early Christian Rhetoric* (1964) was a

⁵²Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 60 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 11. Also see John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975); and Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

⁵³Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

⁵⁴Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981).

⁵⁵Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (September, 1952): 146; cf. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, pp. 671-675.

⁵⁶On method, see Howard Clark Kee, *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective: Methods and Resources* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980); idem, *Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989); Robert R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament*, G.B.S./O.T. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Daniel J. Harrington, "Sociological Concepts and the Early Church: A Decade of Research," *Theological Studies* 41 (March, 1980): 181-190; idem, "Second Testament Exegesis and the Social Sciences: A Bibliography," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 18 (April, 1988): 77-85; Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament*, pp. 136-150; N.J.B.C. 71:68; Bengt Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990); Norman K. Gottwald, "Sociology (Ancient Israel)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 6, pp. 79-89; and Susan R. Garrett, "Sociology (Early Christianity)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 6, pp. 89-99.

harbinger of modern renewal, exemplified in the work of C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca.⁵⁷

G. A. Kennedy has called attention to five stages for today in such criticism: define the rhetorical unit, its situation, disposition or argument employed, technique or style, and, out of all its diachronic parts, the synchronic whole with its effects on the audience/readers. Kennedy and others have applied this model to the teachings of Jesus as well as to epistles. While it may seem to fit only the New Testament, excursions have been made into Jewish study of rhetoric and even possible reflections in the Hebrew scriptures.⁵⁸

Rhetorical criticism often interrelates with structuralism, literary approaches, and the Greco-Roman social world. "All religious systems are rhetorical," and there has been a *theologia rhetorica* throughout much of Christian history.⁵⁹ The approach can have obvious ties to proclamation and theology. Since texts involve writing *and reading*, who the reader is will also play a role in the process of meaning for today. What, for example, is the reader's social, political, cultural, or confessional orientation? What is the reader's gender? W. Wuellner therefore sees rhetorical criticism as leading "away from a traditional . . . content-oriented reading of Scripture to a reading which generates . . . personal, social, and cultural values," where readers are

⁵⁷See Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*; Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, tr. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN, and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971; orig. — *La Nouvelle Rhétorique: Traité de l'Argumentation* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958]); Thomas O. Sloan and Chaim Perelman, "Rhetoric," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropaedia, 15th ed. (1975), vol. 15, pp. 798-805; Martin Warner, ed., *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); and "Almost Persuaded—Rhetorical Criticism in Biblical Studies," *Tic Talk* (United Bible Societies, New York), no. 9 (Fall, 1989). On the history of the theme, see the programmatic essay by Wilhelm Wuellner, "Hermeneutics and Rhetorics: From 'Truth and Method' to 'Truth and Power,'" a special issue (S3) of *Scriptura: Tydskrif vir Bybel en Teologie in Suider-Afrika* / *Journal of Bible and Theology in Southern Africa* (1989), pp. 1-54; further, see Ruth Majercik, "Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism (Rhetoric and Oratory in the Greco-Roman World)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 5, pp. 710-712; Thomas B. Dozeman, "Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism (OT Rhetorical Criticism)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 5, pp. 712-715; and Benjamin Fiore, "Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism (NT Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism)," *A.B.D.*, vol. 5, pp. 715-719.

⁵⁸George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). See Bruce C. Johanson, *To All the Brethren: A Text-Linguistic and Rhetorical Approach to 1 Thessalonians*, *Coniectanea biblica, New Testament* 16 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), pp. 39-45, for application of Kennedy's proposal within a "communications-theory" analysis of the epistle. Also see Isaac Rabinowitz, "Pre-Modern Jewish Study of Rhetoric: An Introductory Bibliography," *Rhetorica*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1985), pp. 137-144; and Yehoshua Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion: A Study of Isaiah 40-48*, *Forum Theologiae Linguisticae* 14 (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica Bonn, 1981).

⁵⁹Wilhelm Wuellner, "Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (July, 1987): 449, quoting Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, p. 58. On p. 462, Wuellner cites William S. Bouwsma, "Calvinism as Theologia Rhetorica," in W. Wuellner, ed., *Protocol of the 55th Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies* (Berkeley CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1987).

the validators.⁶⁰ It becomes “something more inclusive than semantics and hermeneutics.” A range of appeals, emotional as well as rational, emerge. Persuasion transforms us, leading to faith.⁶¹ Considerable work has been done classifying New Testament books and units rhetorically. The approach gives promise of becoming a fruitful overarching matrix for hermeneutics and interpretative analytics.⁶²

D. Literary/Narrative Criticism

Since the beginnings of Christianity, as well as in rabbinic Judaism, there has been attention to figures of speech, tropes, and literary devices as part of biblical interpretation. Historical-critical exegesis long employed literary observations to discover sources, forms, and redaction. The Bible has often been regarded as “a literary masterpiece.”⁶³

Under the impact of various approaches in literary studies generally – the New Critics, deconstructionists, and others – literary criticism changed. The final author or editor, whom redaction criticism highlighted, was swept aside, along with any authorial intentionality. The text became the mirror for the reader. The referent shifted from “historical events” depicted in a text to a literary world of relationships signified by that text. Readers were to appropriate the text’s symbolic world into their own.

Such literary criticism has been applied especially to narrative portions of the Bible. The quest was for an “implied author” (a literary version or second self of the writer), an “implied reader” suggested by a text (rather than traditional views or scholarly guesses about who was writing to whom), and the “symbolic world” of the text – a complex system of actions and words that set forth the self-understanding of a group whose language it was. Rhetorical techniques and the omniscient narrator help us see the meanings of texts, pluralistic meanings determined not by the author but a story open to the meanings readers give it, beyond the author’s control.⁶⁴

⁶⁰Wuellner, “Where Is Rhetorical,” pp. 460–461.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 445; cf. his “Hermeneutics and Rhetorics,” p. 37, with reference to James I. Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Klaus Dockhorn, “Luthers Glaubensbegriff und die Rhetorik,” *Linguistica Biblica*, nos. 21/22 (1973).

⁶²See Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), as an “apologetic letter”; and idem, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), as “administrative correspondence.” However, on Galatians, cf. in Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, pp. 67–73, the alternate rhetorical analyses of Kennedy and Mack. Frank W. Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement 30 (Sheffield, 1989), sees 2 Thess. as “deliberative” rhetoric. Also see *N.J.B.C.* 71:65–66.

⁶³See Norman C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*, G.B.S./O.T. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); and William A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament*, G.B.S./N.T. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

⁶⁴Petersen, *Literary Criticism*; Culpepper, *Anatomy*; and Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christol-*

Particularly influential has been the late Hans Frei, of Yale. He pointed to an "eclipse" of the "realistic" biblical narrative, which reigned from the patristic period to the eighteenth century in the church. Its apex he saw in the Incarnation. Because historical criticism had eroded this narrative, Frei argued for the restoration of a pre-critical, "history-like" (*geschichtsähnlich*) story as normative for the church as its own story; indeed, the church is a part of it.

In line with the New Critics, this approach stressed the literary work itself (through "intrinsic criticism") and was willing to set aside factors outside the text ("extrinsic criticism"). Historical criticism might tell us bits about certain references in the text, but narrative criticism brings to us, or brings us into, the world of the text. The *geschichtsähnlich* or literal meaning of biblical narrative, it was lamented, has all too often "been confused with its 'ostensive' reference to actual historical events" and so "reduced to the meaning of the events."⁶⁵ One must, instead, grasp "the narrative" and its world. To illustrate, in the late-nineteenth-century "quest" for Jesus, the Gospel of Mark was viewed as biography, its meaning "located in the events to which it referred," what Jesus "did and thought." This "confused Jesus the narrative actor and his relations with other actors with Jesus the man and his relations with other men. . . . The narrative 'world' created by Mark was eclipsed by the real-world events envisioned when his narrative was construed as a window."⁶⁶

Today, narrative criticisms sometimes work in tandem with historical criticism, but other versions claim to replace it. Narrative critics may or may not be guided by principles derived from study of modern fiction and may or may not ignore theology entirely. Examples abound.⁶⁷

On the positive side, the narrative approach has links to all "theologies of story," to preaching, and to the possibility of a meeting ground here with

ogy of Mark (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) are helpful in introducing readers to the praxis of such literary criticism. Also see Harrington, *Interpreting the New Testament*, pp. 1-15; *N.J.B.C.* 71:55-59; Amos Wilder, *The Bible and the Literary Critics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990); Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* G.B.S./N.T. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990); and Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "Narrative, Hebrew," *A.B.D.*, vol. 4, pp. 1023-1027.

⁶⁵Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 20-21. Hans W. Frei's two books are *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1974); and *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

⁶⁶Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, p. 21.

⁶⁷E.g., David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). See the Fortress Press (Philadelphia) Stories of Jesus Series: Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (1985); Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (1979); O. C. Edwards, Jr., *Luke's Story of Jesus* (1981); and Robert Kysar, *John's Story of Jesus* (1984). Also see Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, 1990). For Old Testament examples, see volumes in the Society of Biblical Literature *Semeia* series, published by Scholars Press (Missoula, MT; Chico, CA; Atlanta, GA).

conservative Evangelicals.⁶⁸ On the negative side,⁶⁹ are modern literary methods the right criterion for ancient documents; or comparisons with fiction, for scripture? Can a faith committed to the cross and Incarnation ignore history and settle for *Geschichtsähnlichkeit*, a term that arose in eighteenth-century-German debate over myth?⁷⁰ Finally, much of the Bible is not narrative; apocalypses and epistles are not.

E. Canonical Criticism

The canon has become an object of new interest. James A. Sanders has been credited with coining the term "canonical criticism," though "canonical hermeneutics" or "comparative midrash" might better describe his approach.

Sanders⁷¹ has treated the process of how the canonical writings developed. Texts are viewed as fixed and stable at various times in this process but as adaptable and reapplied at others. Texts in their stability may experience repetition; in their adaptability, "resignification" and thus pluralism in meaning. To illustrate, the "Abraham tradition" known to us from Genesis was reemployed by Ez. 33:21-33 to show consolation but by Is. 51:2-3 for encouragement. Tradition and interpretation thus exist within the canon. Functioning in one way, the canon serves as a norm that norms all else (*norma normans*), but scripture passages may also be a norm that is normed by something else (*norma normata*), a passage or theme in light of which other segments are interpreted; this gives "shape" to the canon. For example, the Yahwist epic carried its story beyond the account of the conquest to include the climactic capture of Jerusalem. In the canon, however, Sinai, where the law was given, is the climax, and so the shape becomes "Torah-centered." Sanders has also exalted the theocentric nature of the Bible. A "monotheizing thrust" serves as norm for the "polytheizing" tendencies in some passages. Here, Sanders even included some christologizing verses such as Jn. 14:6 and Acts 4:12; these he would make subject to biblical monotheism. A program of tradition criticism is thus apparent within the emerging canon; God is norm, the God of the whole Bible but especially of the Hebrew scriptures.

Brevard Childs,⁷² who prefers to avoid the term "canonical criticism," has

⁶⁸Bernard Brandon Scott, *The Word of God in Words: Reading and Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). That Evangelicals will welcome literary/narrative approaches is the suggestion in Mark Ellingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative: Story in Theology and Proclamation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990).

⁶⁹Cf. Culpepper, *Anatomy*, pp. 8-11.

⁷⁰Frei, *Eclipse*, p. 59 (refers to Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft*, Schriften der Studiengemeinschaft der Evangelischen Akademien 2 [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1952], pp. 15, 59, 135, *passim*); cf. p. 54.

⁷¹See the following Fortress Press books (Philadelphia) by James A. Sanders: *Torah and Canon* (1972); *Canon and Community*, G.B.S. (1984); and his collected essays, *Canon as Paradigm: From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (1987). Also see N.J.B.C. 69:72, 71:72; and Gerald T. Sheppard, "Canonical Criticism," *A.B.D.*, vol. 1, pp. 861-866.

⁷²See the following Fortress Press books (Philadelphia; Minneapolis, MN) by Brevard S. Childs: *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979), *The New Testament as Canon: An*

emphasized the result of the canonical process: the finished books and their combination as a collection into one book. In opposition to certain books (such as Romans) or themes (such as "reconciliation") as "canon within the canon," he regards the entire collection as the literature that the church community has accepted as authoritative. Books influence each other in their intertextuality, of course, but the canonical setting is what matters in this view, not some supposed "original situation" when a book arose historically. The very order of the books is significant, for example, that the Pentateuch is Torah-centered, or that Luke's Gospel is part of a four-Gospels collection, separated from the author's second volume, Acts, which provides an interpretative umbrella for the epistles.

It is within this canonical context and its construals that "the church" (which church? all churches?) does theology. The results of the canonizing process and the role of the patristic church are given priority, perhaps more than is warranted when one recalls how varied and disputed development of the canon was historically. The post-apostolic age, not the New Testament authors, thus gives "the witness of Jesus Christ . . . its normative shape through an interpretive process."⁷³ The way is open to an ecclesial hermeneutic.⁷⁴ Ironically, as Childs presents such a "church emphasis" and Raymond Brown a "text emphasis," Protestants have become Catholics, and *vice versa*.⁷⁵ Childs' earlier commentary on Exodus treats historical-critical questions thoroughly, but the final emphasis is not on the historical Israel or Jesus or on narrative but on the canonical scriptures.

F. Reader-Oriented Criticism

The ultimate outcome of certain approaches, especially literary criticism, is that the reader is enthroned as authority, not the author, sources, ancient historical setting, or canonical combinations. The reader brings new possibilities of meaning to the text, studied as literature, with no fixed sense but polyvalent.

The case for such "post-modern" use of the Bible has been chronicled by Edgar V. McKnight,⁷⁶ who has looked beyond the historical-critical method

Introduction (1984), *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (1989), and *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (1992). Cf. his *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974). Also see *N.J.B.C.* 69:71, 71:71-74.

⁷³Childs, *New Testament as Canon*, p. 28.

⁷⁴Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 544-547.

⁷⁵Cf. D. Moody Smith's review of Childs' *New Testament as Canon*, in *Interpretation* 40 (October, 1986): 410.

⁷⁶Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988). On what "post" is, cf. Stephen D. Moore, "The 'Post-'Age Stamp: Does It Stick? Biblical Studies and the Postmodernism Debate," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57 (Fall, 1989): 543-559. How literary criticism leads to deconstructionism is artfully argued in Moore's *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge*

and such approaches as biblical theology, canonical criticism, and Stuhlmacher's "hermeneutic of consent."⁷⁷ An end has come for the "Constantinian paradigm," which dominated since the time of Augustine, where the "cognitive function of the text has been assumed as . . . paramount" and the Bible read in the institutional church under some philosophical system.⁷⁸ Now the landscape has been changed irrevocably by structuralism, linguistics, and culture. Increasingly dominant is the role of the reader.

Yet, scripture still has a role, for "the Bible as literature . . . discloses the sacred" to the reader, who in turn images the sacred.⁷⁹ It is claimed that the literary approach mediates this function as one enters into the world of the text. The Bible's dogmatic/narrative horizon may be brought into a unity for readers today in terms of structures of plot in the myth-story (Frye's "great code")⁸⁰ or style (comedy, tragedy) or images (shepherd, bride, bread) or characters (Abraham, Mary). The divine is imaged in language – the language of faith.

The reader's role also includes the "actualizing of biblical discourse." One "begins with the words on the page."⁸¹ Readers actualize this verbal content by selection, by determination of meaning, and by providing context, through a "grammar" of their own. The Bible, not an object to be subjected to scientific codes, is to be read in its ambiguity, which is sometimes grammatical, sometimes content or contextual ambiguity. For example, in Gen. 22:8 (N.R.S.V.), "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son," is "my son" vocative or in apposition, or will only the narrative unfold the meaning?

Readers further actualize texts by deciding genre (such as "gospel") or themes (such as "reconciliation") and by interpretation (shall one use theological, historical, existential, or poetic terms to enliven the Bible's metaphorical language?). Finally, the "actualization of the reader" takes place, in the process of reading, through the reader's "creation of worlds of the text,"⁸² that is, the symbolic universe of the text, with which readers find

(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). The comment of Northrop Frye is pertinent that Boehme's "books are like a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning. The remark may have been intended as a sneer at Boehme, but it is an exact description of all works of literary art" (cited in E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1967], p. 1). Further, see Bernard C. Latagan, "Reader Response Theory," *A.B.D.*, vol. 5, pp. 625-628.

⁷⁷Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Towards a Hermeneutics of Consent*, tr. and intro. Roy A. Harrisville (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); idem, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testament: Eine Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979; 2nd ed., 1986).

⁷⁸McKnight, *Post-Modern Use*, pp. 102-103.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 167; see chap. 4, "The Role of the Reader: Imaging the Sacred," pp. 167-215.

⁸⁰Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

⁸¹McKnight, *Post-Modern Use*, p. 217; see chap. 5, "The Role of the Reader: Actualizing of Biblical Discourse," pp. 217-272.

⁸²Ibid., p. 258.

some continuity in their world(s). The hope is that really reading a text will challenge or transform our world.

McKnight thus "advocates a hermeneutic reader-oriented literary approach to the Bible."⁸³ We the readers make sense of the Bible in light of our world by means of methods supplied and validated by that world. In the process a "fit" takes place between two worlds. The goal of Bible study is not historical "facts" or dogmatic truth but that we are changed. God exists for us in our imagining, in "the imaginative work of readers in front of texts."⁸⁴ We today are the givers of meaning.

This survey has not dealt directly with feminist, liberationist, and other approaches. They sometimes rely on historical-critical methods, sometimes on newer methods of exegesis, sometimes on a combination of methods. Feminist and liberation efforts have on occasion been termed "advocacy exegesis,"⁸⁵ but most methods over the years have been enlisted in the service of various causes, for example, historical criticism to support Protestant liberalism or Vatican II reforms. At issue is the degree of semi-scientific control and the catholicity of use—over the years diachronically, and among a mix of varied groups synchronically—for each exegetical method approach.

G. Sketching the Options

Chart 1 seeks to show the historical-critical approach in a fuller setting. Chart 2 suggests where different approaches find meaning for a text. The historical-critical method sees that meaning in and behind the text; many of the new approaches, on this side of the text; Sanders' canonical criticism, in the development of the tradition in the canon; Childs' method, in the finished books, developed canon, and intertextuality; social approaches, in and around the world of the text; structuralism, in and beneath the text; reader-oriented criticism, as with much of literary/narrative study, in the reader's engagement with the text; Frei, in a pre-critical biblical narrative. There can also be a tradition-history approach, emphasizing the development of texts and their subsequent history of exegesis.

A further way to point up the several approaches is to ask where "the significant moment of meaning" is located in the development and use of any text. Chart 3 points up some of the answers given by various interpreters. This may involve, as in the case of Bultmann, both the historical-critical method

⁸³Ibid., p. 263.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 264-266; quote from p. 266.

⁸⁵*N.J.B.C.* 71:76. Cf. the use of "advocate" in the editorial to the issue of *Interpretation* on "The Bible, Theology, and Feminist Approaches," 42 (January, 1988): 3-4. In contrast, Mark Noll's "Review Essay: The Bible in America," on Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Publications, makes the point that only Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Scholars Press, 1985), raises the challenge (as denominational, confessional postures long had) to the established guild's supposed "presuppositional neutrality" (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 [September, 1987]: 508-509). Further, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Hermeneutics," *A.B.D.*, vol. 2, pp. 783-791.

Chart 2. HISTORICAL-CRITICAL AND LITERARY-CRITICAL APPROACHES TO MEANING(S) IN TEXTS

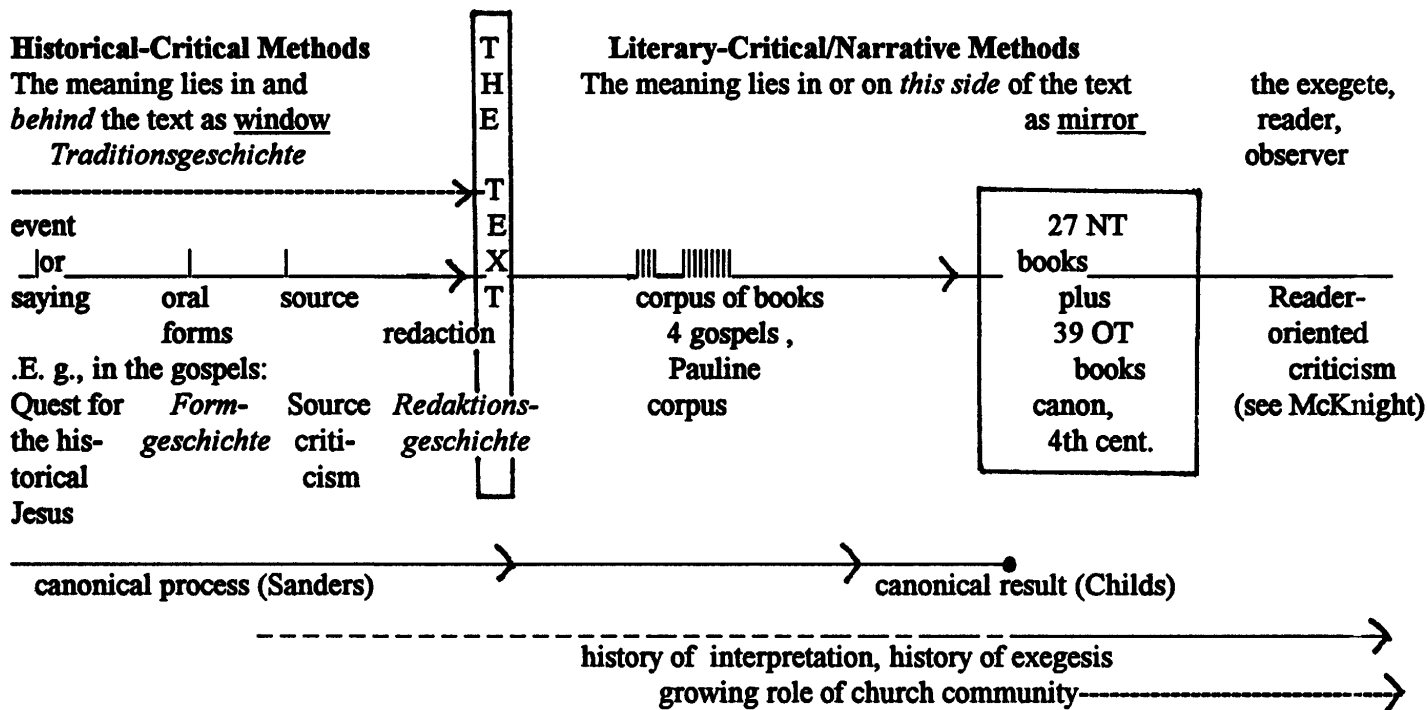
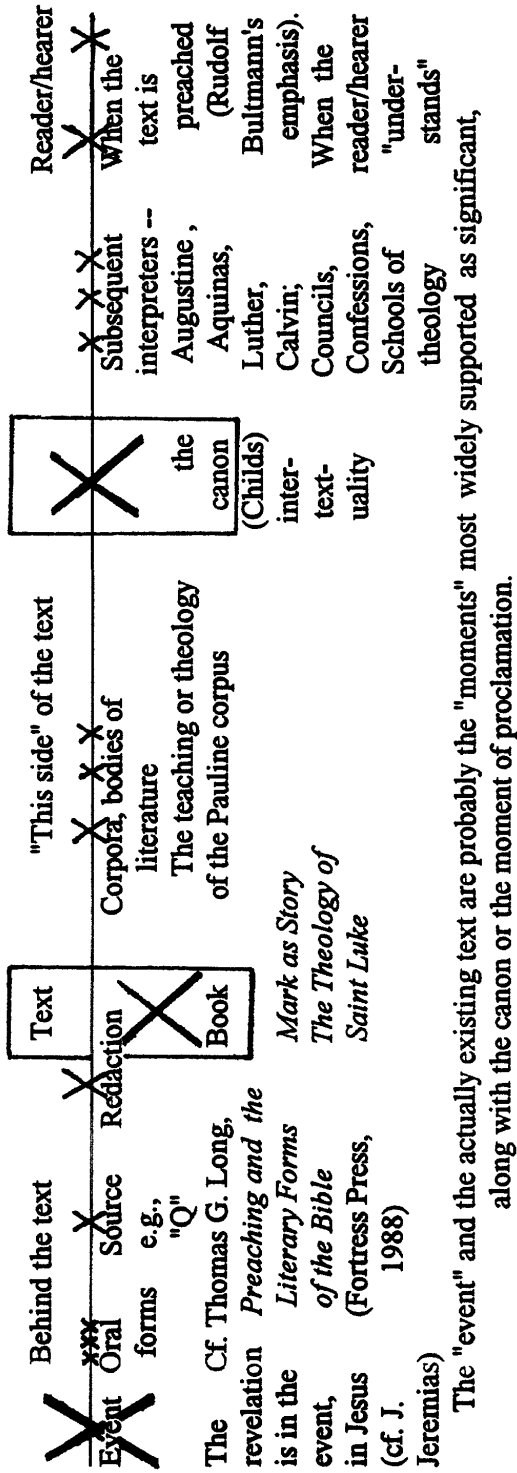


Chart 3. THE "SIGNIFICANT MOMENT OF MEANING" FOR A TEXT



and a hermeneutical stance concerning the proclamation of the word of God today.

V. Applications and Implications in Ecumenism and Systematic Theology

If it is true that we have moved from window to mirror, from historical to literary paradigm for scriptural interpretation, what are the implications for ecumenical dialogue and the underlying systematic (foundational or constructive) theology?

In bilateral dialogues (such as Anglican-Roman Catholic) and in multi-lateral discussions (such as Faith and Order), much of the advance has stemmed from use of the historical-critical method by churches in concert. Examples can be documented, for instance, in the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue with regard to a "Petrine function" in the New Testament and beyond or on the scope and variety of righteousness/justification in early Christianity.⁸⁶ Such methods have also brought new understandings for documents from Trent and the two Vatican Councils and for the Lutheran Confessions.

The impact of historical study can be seen in the Faith and Order statement, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, with regard to threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. This is now seen as a position not prescribed in the New Testament but emerging only in the second or third century, according to much recent historical examination of the evidence.⁸⁷

The historical-critical approach has thus enabled considerable ecumenical advance. However, if such a methodology is passé,⁸⁸ how will the literary approaches, which see meaning on this side of the text, function in ecumenical dialogue? How will they prove helpful in overcoming barriers if meaning comes especially from the reader or the religious-linguistic community to which we each belong? The danger is that every community (or individual) will simply be confirmed in its own truth by its reading of the scriptural evidence — not only each church community but also feminists, patriarchists, and others. Worse yet, people may settle on a common stance that subjectively reflects our age. Then modernity would determine meaning, but meaning will shift from time to time.

Yet, examples do exist of how ecumenical discussions and theology can employ newer methods of biblical interpretation:

⁸⁶See Brown, Donfried, and Reumann, *Peter in the New Testament*; and John Reumann, with responses by Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Jerome D. Quinn, *"Righteousness" in the New Testament: "Justification" in the United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

⁸⁷*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), Ministry section, sections 19 and 22.

⁸⁸Such an impression is given, e.g., in Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 1-43, 269-296; cf. 203-268.

1. The U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue may be noted for the use of structural, linguistic analysis on "infallibility" and occasional attention to social history. In the eighth round, on the saints and Mary, attention to feminist issues was excluded as not part of the divisive sixteenth-century problem.⁸⁹ By and large, the method of working has been historical-critical and theological. The 1975 Accra Statement by Faith and Order, on the way to *BEM*, seems to pay more attention to societal setting than the Lima declaration does.⁹⁰

2. The book on *Reception* by William Rusch raises the question of a parallel here with modern literary studies. To receive an ecumenical statement requires a "reader-response"!

A method of literary criticism—and, when it is applied to the Bible, of hermeneutic criticism—has been developed in which the reader is deliberately included in the process of interpretation and analysis. Here the very reality of a literary work is considered to be dependent on comprehension by a reader. Thus attention is given to what happens on the receiving side in communication and to what role the reader plays in determining the meaning of a text. Questions have been raised about whether a text has any existence apart from its reception by its readers and about whether a text has one or several possible meanings. Reception is seen as an existential event implying an individual and personal decision regarding the meaning of the text. As a result, texts are seen as having trajectories that are determined by the extended process of reception and reinterpretation during their histories.

There appears to be no direct connection between the theory of reception in literary criticism and the discussion now being carried on in ecumenical theology. Nevertheless, to be inattentive to literary criticism here could impoverish ecumenical thinking about reception, for some parallels do exist between the two discussions. Both are concerned about written texts and about how readers (individuals or churches) understand and finally receive the texts existentially so that both receptors and texts are changed.⁹¹

Here the New Criticism and Reader-Response are applied to church reception of ecumenical statements.

3. Systematic theologies that integrate findings from biblical studies with other areas of human and ecclesial knowledge and experience may well lag behind "the latest" in exegetical methods, yet there are ample examples of

⁸⁹Cf. George H. Tavad, "Infallibility: A Structural Analysis," and Joseph A. Burgess, "The Historical Background of Vatican I," in Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 6 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1980), pp. 169-185, and 287-297, respectively. On Mary, see H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 8 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

⁹⁰*One Baptism, One Eucharist, and a Mutually Recognized Ministry: Three Agreed Statements*, Faith and Order Paper 73 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975), sections 70-87.

⁹¹William G. Rusch, *Reception: An Ecumenical Opportunity*, LWF Report 22 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 31-32.

theology's being done with awareness of historical criticism and sometimes of newer methods. Gabriel Fackre's volumes, *The Christian Story*,⁹² are a consciously "narrative interpretation of basic Christian doctrine." Volume 1 attempts "metaphorical Story-telling" about such core themes as God, creation, fall, covenant, Christ, church, salvation, and consummation. Volume 2 deals more specifically with methods of using scripture in a systematics for the pastor as the church's "steward of identity."⁹³ Among the many options (including the canonical and feminist debates),⁹⁴ Fackre especially affirms, "Historical-critical inquiry is a valuable instrument for the interpretation of Scripture,"⁹⁵ but he also gives considerable attention, beyond "common sense," critical, and canonical interpretations to "the gospel as narrative."⁹⁶ "Story" involves exegesis, the church, and the exegete's story. Fackre's work can be sampled in his paradigm treatment⁹⁷ of Jn. 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (*N.R.S.V.*), treated in a way that is sensitive to the text and to questions of universality.

4. For interfaith discussions, biblical studies have at times been recognized as a meeting ground for Jews and Christians and, in a more general way, a factor with other religions, though canons differ.⁹⁸ One significant attempt at a "systematics" along these lines is Paul M. van Buren's three volumes, *A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality*.⁹⁹ Such an endeavor would scarcely be possible without the impact from historical-critical study of the texts of Judaism and Christianity. At points, van Buren has reflected such work,¹⁰⁰ while narrative is less frequently reflected.¹⁰¹ The treatment of the Lord's Prayer¹⁰² provides a good example of van Buren's approach to biblical material.

5. The most detailed proposal involving theological use of new approaches, notably the literary/narrative, is George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, wherein he has presented a theory of religion and "conceptualization

⁹²Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978); and idem, *The Christian Story: A Pastoral Systematics*, vol. 2: *Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987). Fackre's exegetical hermeneutics are visualized and explained in vol. 1, pp. 14-51, and vol. 2, pp. 341-350. See also his "Evangelical Hermeneutics: Commonality and Diversity," *Interpretation* 43 (April, 1989): 117-129.

⁹³Fackre, *Christian Story*, vol. 2, p. 1.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 92-124.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 158-188, 209-210, 240-243, 251-253.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 256-340.

⁹⁸Cf. Boadt, Croner, and Klenicki, *Biblical Studies*.

⁹⁹Paul M. van Buren, *A Theology of Jewish Christian Reality*, Part 1: *Discerning the Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); Part 2: *A Christian Theology of the People Israel* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983); Part 3: *Christ in Context* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 13-16, 43-44, 101-103, 143-144, 155-156, 269-270, 347-348; vol. 3, pp. 9-10, 15, 40-41, 145-146, 167-170.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 74-75; vol. 3, pp. 56-67, 260-261, 278-282.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 288-294.

of doctrine."¹⁰³ His proposal is meant to be "ecumenically . . . neutral"¹⁰⁴ and applicable to interreligious discussions. In chapter 6, Lindbeck argued that, for his approach, "literary considerations are more important than historical-critical ones."¹⁰⁵ A particular debt was acknowledged to Hans Frei¹⁰⁶ and colleagues at Yale who have worked along literary-canonical lines.

Lindbeck noted three types of theories about religion and doctrine:¹⁰⁷ (1) The cognitive-propositional approach, in which "church doctrines function as . . . propositions or truth claims about objective realities." Although common in traditional orthodoxies, heterodoxies, and "modern Anglo-American analytic philosophy," this approach has been undermined by historical-critical study of scripture. (2) The "experiential-expressive" approach, found in Schleiermacher and Protestant liberalism, in which doctrines are viewed as "symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations." The movement is from experience to expression. (3) Lindbeck's own "cultural-linguistic" model, which combines the two. The cognitive-propositional and expressive-symbolic dimensions have been brought together in the work of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan.

Lindbeck built on this third model, using philosophical, social-scientific, and literary-linguistic arguments.¹⁰⁸ His postliberal model moves from expression in texts to experience. The expression is for him "an external word, a *verbum externum*, that molds and shapes the self and its world."¹⁰⁹ Lindbeck stands Jesus' "Abba experience" on its head. We do not enjoy an "experience" of God and then fit Jesus' language of "Abba" into this mold; rather, it is Jesus' language of "Abba" that creates and empowers the distinctive Christian experience of God. Hence it is important to learn "the story of Israel and of Jesus"¹¹⁰ and the language of the Christian community.¹¹¹ Church doctrine is "regulative" and functions as "rule," not proposition.¹¹² It shows ranges of utterance or activity possible.¹¹³

Lindbeck's analysis does not seek to present a "true" approach over against "false" ones but to show that the cultural-linguistic model is preferable.¹¹⁴ It shapes us, as a Wittgensteinian "language game."¹¹⁵ Instead of "ontological" truth statements,¹¹⁶ it yields intrasystemic coherence,¹¹⁷ but

¹⁰³George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 8.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13; 137, n. 7, *passim*.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 64.

for some that is precisely its weakness: it relativizes truth.¹¹⁸ If such be doctrine, theology as explanation can vary even more,¹¹⁹ and "There is no faith once for all delivered to the saints."¹²⁰ Doctrine is a guide, but an imperfect guide, within the grammar of a religion.¹²¹

Lindbeck's proposal takes a literary approach rather than a historical one, in that the Bible is seen as a "vast, loosely-structured non-fictional novel" (echoing David Kelsey on Barth's view of scripture).¹²² It is to be treated in an intertextual way. That means finding the meaning in the world of the text, not outside the text "either in the objective realities to which it refers or in the experiences it symbolizes."¹²³ One needs no extraneous references to the world of the writer's day or to theories of our day. "[N]o world is more real than the ones [the authoritative texts] create. A scriptural world is thus able to absorb the universe."¹²⁴ Typology helps make the story of the Bible our story. Extrabiblical materials must not become the framework for interpretation.¹²⁵

The believer, so an intratextual approach would maintain, is not told primarily to be conformed to a reconstructed Jesus of history (as Hans Küng maintains), nor to a metaphysical Christ of faith (as in much of the propositionalist tradition), nor to an abba experience of God (as for Schillebeeckx), nor to an agapeic way of being in the world (as for David Tracy), but he or she is rather to be conformed to the Jesus Christ depicted in the narrative.¹²⁶

Nonetheless, there are problems. It is recognized that "[i]ntertextual theologies can . . . disagree on the norm" and also "dispute over whether realistic narrative is the best or only way to identify the . . . interpretive framework of the Christian canon" and "the extent and unity of the canon."¹²⁷ Scripture is, with Frei, "history-like,"¹²⁸ and "literary considerations . . . more important than historical-critical ones."¹²⁹ Yet, for Lindbeck, "It remains an

¹¹⁸Cf. *ibid.*, p. 63-69, on religion and truth. Against Lindbeck's theory (p. 18), that doctrines are "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action," must be considered Fackre's criticism that it is unclear about "the relation to objective reality" (in Fackre, *Christian Story*, vol. 2, p. 219, n. 7, in which he also quotes Avery Dulles' Roman Catholic point of view, from his unpublished paper, "Observations on George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*," delivered at the Divinity School at Yale University on September 14, 1984: "... the church's claim to impose a doctrine in the name of revelation implies a claim of conformity to the real order, rather than a mere claim or a power to regulate language").

¹¹⁹Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, p. 76.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹²²*Ibid.*, pp. 120-121, quoting David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 48.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 123.

open question, however, whether the intratextual path will be pursued. There is much talk . . . about . . . narrative theology, but little actual performance." Only occasionally is "the universe" absorbed into the biblical world.¹³⁰

Lindbeck's literary approach is exemplified in an essay he produced with Avery Dulles in 1980, in which the Augsburg Confession is regarded as a literary world of its own, a text almost completely sealed off, hermeneutically, from the historical setting in 1530, from views expressed elsewhere by Luther or Melancthon, and from subsequent developments. Only a single exception is allowed, namely, bringing in one earlier source, so that bishops can be said to be the chief issue around which the entire text revolves.¹³¹

VI. Evaluating the New Trends

Various implications and questions arise out of a shift from a historical to a literary frame of reference:

1. There is new emphasis on "trust in the community's language" as "the fundamental stance of believer and minister"; on appropriation to the self or indeed the shaping of one's self by communal story and relationships; and on ministers as "stewards of the community's language."¹³² However, will the various religious communities buy into such propositions?

2. How, for Christians, let alone Jews or other groups, is the "story" of Israel and Jesus to be told? Frei never presented in any detail what he called "the biblical narrative." Seemingly it would heavily reflect Augustine and the church Fathers.¹³³ Does Fackre's depiction of God suffice?¹³⁴ Is this story to be structured according to each of our communal (denominational) versions or in the style of *Heilsgeschichte* or through a literary world? Whose salvation history? Whose symbolic world?

3. What such understandings mean for the education of religious leaders is unclear. Will biblical studies become literary-appreciation classes or efforts at learning the language of "the story"? What of "church history"? Are we creating a history-like, supposedly nonfictional narrative world that will hover somewhere between what historical studies say about antiquity and what the sciences say about our universe today?

Any shift from the historical to a literary paradigm prompts the following

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 135.

¹³¹"Bishops and the Ministry of the Gospel," in George Wolfgang Forrell and James F. McCue, eds., *Confessing One Faith: A Joint Commentary on the Augsburg Confession by Lutheran and Catholic Theologians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1982), pp. 147-171. Cf. John Reumann, "A New Way for Reading Confessional Documents on Bishops and Ministry?" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 18 (August, 1991): 245-255.

¹³²Robert Imbelli, *Church*, charter issue (1985), p. 56.

¹³³Frei, *Eclipse*, pp. 1-2. For patristic examples, see John Reumann, *Stewardship and the Economy of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), pp. 34-42.

¹³⁴Fackre, *Christian Story*, vol. 1, pp. 52-61, 230-244.

comments, lest the obituary for the rigors of historical study be written prematurely:

1. The literary emphasis is not new. Older efforts include Moulton's *Modern Reader's Bible* and the literary analysis eighty years ago by Eduard König and others.¹³⁵ Those of us trained in this sort of thing feel a sense of *déjà vu*, even as the current practitioners seek to dissociate their work from past ventures, as New Criticism does. Much of "historical criticism," especially about sources, has always been literary in nature, resting on the shoulders of predecessors.

2. Many persons urging new methods have been trained in classical historical-criticism and continue to practice it to some degree. The danger is that people who no longer understand how historical criticism works or who reject it will seek to practice *only* literary approaches. Most working biblical scholars urge a both/and policy. Tuckett, after exploring the emerging methods, writes that "the historical-critical method is and remains vitally important in interpreting the New Testament"; it acts "as a check and a control on our suggestions" and "cannot be jettisoned."¹³⁶ While Lindbeck calls literary considerations "more important than historical-critical ones,"¹³⁷ it remains to be seen how fully the historical would be dropped, especially in religious dialogues.

3. The literary approach varies considerably and seemingly more and more among those who practice it.¹³⁸ Can "narrative theology" or a "cultural-linguistic model" cover all that different practitioners put under such a heading? McKnight's book, which may be a step ahead of Lindbeck's "postliberal" proposal, offers the following classification, beyond (1) dogmatic method and (2) historical-critical methodology. "Post-modern" is divided into (3) those who redefine or revise the historical method (for example, Stuhlmacher); and (4) literary perspectives climaxing in reader-oriented approaches (Hans Frei, Paul Ricoeur). McKnight classifies sociological interpretation under (3) and his own proposal under (4). Note also François Dreyfus¹³⁹ on exegesis at the Sorbonne and exegesis in the church: the two share certain things but differ on others; some exegetes have been playing on both terrains for years. It

¹³⁵Richard Green Moulton was professor of literary theory and interpretation at the University of Chicago; his edition was published by Macmillan (New York) in 1895 and often reprinted. See Eduard König, *Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik in Bezug auf die biblische Literatur komparativisch dargestellt* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1900); see also his article, "Style in Scripture," in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New York: Scribner's, 1905), pp. 156-169.

¹³⁶Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament*, p. 180.

¹³⁷See note 129, above.

¹³⁸One might expect that Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1987), would present a definitive expression of the trend. Its variety of approaches is shown by Edgar V. McKnight's review in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57 (Summer, 1989): 385-391.

¹³⁹François Dreyfus, "Exégèse en Sorbonne, Exégèse en Église," *Revue Biblique* 82 (July, 1975): 321-359.

remains to be seen whether *Heilsgeschichte* in history can become *Heilsliteratur* in language. How would that work ecumenically?

4. Reader-oriented (and community-oriented) literary trends are a mirror image, in a way not intended, of our age, for they may easily reflect its subjectivity, individualism, corporateness, and diverse ideologies. By relativizing questions of truth and history, such approaches can cause all ideas to be regarded as equally valid, each intrasystemically infallible in each observer's world. Unless texts are relativized in some other way, ahistorical or nonhistorical approaches may leave us in entrenched and separated camps, each group celebrating its own story.

We live in a time when any center for the New Testament or the entire Bible is suspect and things seem to fall apart into chaos methodologically. Despite recent claims about emerging methods for reading texts, I find none of them the absolute wave of the future (though rhetorical criticism may prove the most helpful among newer methodologies, but that would require another article to demonstrate). I, therefore, would argue for a balanced approach. Continuing use of historical disciplines is demanded, as is exploration of literary factors, though not without awareness of philosophy and systematic theology.

Theology and especially biblical studies may be the last bastion of the liberal-arts tradition. Perhaps we are in a quandary, as Dan Via put it with regard to New Testament scholarship, in "the time between two Bultmanns" — Rudolf not quite any longer the dominant solution, his successor not yet identified. Yet, we work on texts, as modern women and men — and many of us, to one degree or another, in both the Sorbonne and the church. The religiously concerned college or university with a multidisciplinary faculty, seminary communities, and ecumenical, interfaith dialogue are meeting places not only for interpreters of varying outlooks but also for history, literature, social sciences, philosophy, and language to come together in the understanding and using of scripture.

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