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Mind Reader and Maestro: Models for Understanding Biblical Interpreters

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Models for Understanding Biblical Interpreters

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The task and results of biblical interpretation will vary greatly, depending upon the interpreter's own self-understanding and, at the same time, the interpreter's estimate of the character of the text to be interpreted. When we say, "the Bible is Christian Scripture," we claim at least that "it ought so to be used in the common life of the church as to nurture and preserve her self-identity."[1] It follows, then, that if the interpreter understands the text as Scripture,[2] then the interpreter's self-understanding of the interpretive task is grounded in the common life of the church, in the church's nurture and preservation of its self-identity.

Certain models of the interpreter's self-understanding within the interpretive task might be found more in keeping than others with the common life of the church, its nurture and preservation. I will explore several models of the interpreter's self-understanding of the interpretive task, pair them with the corresponding understanding of the text and evaluate their usefulness for interpreting

[1]David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 150. The interpretation of any text involves the text in relationship to itself, other texts, the author and its readers. The arrangement of these four factors in relationship with one another creates the spectrum of possible theories of interpretation. This essay explores only two of those possible arrangements: the one primarily normed by authorial intention and the other focusing on the contemporary readers or audience. In neither case are the other factors in the interpretation of the text ignored. The matter is one of degrees and emphases.

It is clearly possible to interpret the texts of the Bible without understanding them as Christian Scripture. They may be studied as literature or as a historical source by methods of inquiry unrelated to their status as Scripture. Here, I follow David Kelsey's discussion on Scripture, pp. 89-112.

[2]This essay is an exercise in systematic theology, not fundamental theology. My concern here is to examine possible models for the self-understanding of the churchly interpreter of the Bible. Therefore, no argument will be made as to the possibility of the truth of Scripture to any audience outside the church. Rather, I will be concerned to examine how Scripture functions for the Christian community. I do not intend this bracketing to imply that such an argument concerning the truth of Scripture cannot or should not be made. Indeed, I am convinced both that such an argument is necessary and possible; it simply lies outside the central concerns of this essay. Likewise, the doctrine of inspiration is not denied; however, it is not directly within the concerns of this essay.

the Bible as Christian Scripture.[3] Models that consciously begin with contemporary readers and audiences, I will argue, have significant advantages over those that primarily ground meaning in the consciousness of the author. Or, to put it another way, those models that seek first to bridge the gap between the life and practice of the contemporary audience and interpretive theory are relatively more adequate compared to those that primarily seek to bridge the historical gap

between what the text meant and what it means today.

HISTORICAL AND LINGUISTIC PARADIGMS

Two basic paradigms for the Biblical interpreter and text hold the field today: historical and linguistic.[4] The interpreter might understand his or her role primarily as that of historian and think of the Biblical text to some degree, as an historical document.[5] Such an interpreter would use the text to authorize claims either in reference to the events behind the text or to the "mind" of the community of the faithful who are witnesses to those events. In either instance the interpreter's task is essentially historical. The appropriate primary claims resulting from such an interpretation will tend to be historical as well.

Another interpreter might also understand the task from the side of the contemporary reader or audience and thereby downplay the historian's task, though not necessarily exclude it. In this self-understanding the text is essentially under-

[3]By the term "model" I am referring to the use of "an image employed reflectively and critically to deepen one's theoretical understanding of a reality." Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978) 19-37. Some models are readily imagined, for example, my Maestro and Player-Coach models, while others are more abstract, such as Deliberator and church as Sacrament of Dialog. The term "model" has for some time been in use in the physical and social sciences. I. T. Ramsey, among others, has shown its fruitfulness for theology. I. T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); *Models and Mystery* (New York: Oxford University, 1964); Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1962). In their use in theology, however, models renew the attempt to relate language and the ultimate mystery of reality. In this attempt, one must recognize that "religious experience has a depth that has no correlation in our experience of the physical universe..." (Dulles, p. 30).

I will be using models both to explain and synthesize what I believe is generally held by churchly interpreters of the Bible and to explore possible new insights into the interpretive enterprise. The Mind Reader model will be of the former type, and the other models of the latter. The exploratory and heuristic models in no way suggest that I have rejected the "abiding objective norm in the past, that is, in the revelation that was given once and for all in Jesus Christ" (Dulles, p. 32). I am using these heuristic models to order our abiding experience of that revelation.

[4]This truism can be seen by the arrangement of the various program categories of the 1980 Centennial Meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature. The call for papers was divided between approaches to the Bible through either historical or linguistic paradigms; cf. *Scholars Press Scholia* X, ed. Char Matejovsky (Missoula: Scholars, 1980) 5ff.

In this essay I shall mean by the term "paradigm" a model of interpretation that has received general acceptance and encompasses various models and types within it. Thus, the historical paradigm can include more than one type of interpretive method, for example, source, form, redaction or sociological criticism. The linguistic paradigm includes both traditional literary types of interpretation and structuralist and deconstructionist criticism.

[5]By speaking of the Bible as historical document, I in no way wish to ignore the many other literary forms besides historical narrative within the text.

stood as literary text which is not to say that it is exclusively fictional.[6] As in the earlier understanding of the text as history and the interpreter as historian, there are within this self-understanding two broadly construed choices. Either the text's authority lies primarily in its effect within the contemporary audience, or it has its authoritative status within its own structure.

There are, then, at least four possible basic types for the interpreter's self-understanding and, broadly construed, four possible theories of the text. They need not be mutually exclusive; they can be integrated in various ways. Such an integration, however, first requires some clarity

on their essential characteristics and functions. Before I attempt such an integration, I shall briefly describe these four types from the side of models for the interpreter's self-understanding of the interpretive task. The first two, historical types, and the fourth, a linguistic type, will be given short and, by implication, secondary consideration; the third (also linguistic) will be given a more extensive and developed consideration.

Historical Paradigm: Two Types[7]

The interpreter can understand the interpretive task as an attempt to discern what actually took place in the history to which the text refers. For example, when Vincent Taylor interpreted Mark, he was concerned to underline its value or use as history.[8] Taylor was by no means uninterested in the gospel's literary style and formal characteristics; he was, however, concerned to subordinate such observations in service of his goal to establish the outline of Jesus' ministry.[9] The motives of the author (whom Taylor identified as John Mark, a follower of Peter) were taken into account and carefully subtracted from the text in order to discern the events behind the text. Apologetic aims, liturgical interests, and doctrinal motives were taken into account in order to ascertain what Jesus actually said and did.[10] In spite of textual redaction, Taylor could, in his role as historian, confidently speak of the "objectivity of the gospel."[11] For Taylor, Mark could authorize claims regarding the life and ministry of Jesus that could in turn be normative for

[6]I choose to avoid a fast terminological distinction between fiction and history. To a great extent I am in sympathy with Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), especially pp. 45ff. She rejects the overt distinctions and categories of poetry versus history in recognition of the "covert" categories, that is, "categories implicitly acknowledged and respected in the culture, and learned by its members, but cutting through and across the explicit distinction presumably reflected in traditional terms such as poetry, prose, literature, fiction, and non-fiction." As I will say below, I wish to distinguish between historical and literary criticism, but not propose the great divide imagined by interpreters who hold one paradigm over the other.

[7]By the term "type" I am referring to particular developments of either the linguistic or the historical paradigm that might be methodological types, but still within the same general paradigm. Thus source criticism is clearly within the historical paradigm as is redaction criticism, but each orders the historical enterprise quite differently.

[8]Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes* (2nd Edition; London: MacMillan, 1966) 130-149; hereafter, *Commentary*.

[9]Vincent Taylor, "The Original Order of Q," *New Testament Essays* (London: Epworth, 1970) 95-118.

[10]*Commentary,* 131-135.

[11]Ibid.,135.

the life and ministry of the contemporary Church; though the delineation of such norms was beyond the scope of Taylor's endeavor.

A second, and perhaps more subtle, type of the first paradigm (the interpreter of Scripture as historian) focuses on a particular historical event: the mind or consciousness of the author and the original audience. In this second type of the interpreter as historian, the goal of the interpretive task focuses on repeating the intention of the author in relationship to the original audience. For example, Willi Marxsen, in his interpretation of Mark, consciously speaks of the interpreters task as "repeating (*nachsprechen*) what the author had meant to say to the original audience."[12] Marxsen can clearly distinguish between what he calls "exegesis" and "history,"

insofar as history would be viewed as an attempt to go behind the text to establish what really happened in the life of Jesus. For Marxsen the exegesis of Mark excludes "from the outset...what really happened" as the subject matter for its investigation.[13] In this way he makes clear his polemic against the form critical school which had sought to isolate the earliest reliable synoptic material as the basis for a reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

Interpreter as Mind Reader

To a great extent this second type of the historical paradigm for understanding the interpreter and the character of the text dominates the use of the Biblical text in major portions of the Church today.[14] We clearly distinguish between what the text meant and what it means.[15] The norm, of course, is what it meant. We say to ourselves, "How would the original author have meant this expression?" Or, "What did the original author and audience have in their minds when they wrote and heard this text?" The interpreter, then, must "psych-out" the original author and audience. The authority of the text depends upon the possible analogies between the minds then and now. Interpretations within this type receive titles like

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[12]Willi Marxsen, *The Beginnings of Christology: A Study in Its Problems* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 3; *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969); *New Testament Introduction: An Approach to its Problems* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 134-145.

[13]Marxsen, *The Beginnings of Christology*, 3ff.

[14]Norman Perrin wrote: "We need to be able to understand the language in which a text is written, the nature of the text itself as a historical and literary artifact, the circumstances in which and for which it was written. We need, further, to understand as far as we can the intent of the author in writing the text and the meaning understood by those for whom the text was written." *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 4.

[15]Raymond Brown states this general principle when he writes that "to determine the sense of a written work is largely to determine what its author meant when he wrote it" and that "the principal task of interpretation centers around the author's intended meaning," *Jerome Biblical Commentary,* II, 606, art. 5. In his last major publication before his death in November, 1976, Norman Perrin wrote: "Biblical scholars tend to be primarily historical scholars, so much so that 'Biblical criticism' almost always means 'historical criticism of biblical texts.'" *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom,* 5. Nor is fascination with and acceptance of this historical approach restricted to the professional experts. Indeed, as Edward Krentz (writing in 1975) points out, the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis is generally accepted as a valid, indeed as a *necessary* approach to the biblical writings, not only in scholarly circles but also at the level of official pronouncements of various Christian churches. Edward Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (London: SPCK, 1975) 2-3.

The Mind of Mark[16] and *Community of the New Age;*[17] the former emphasizes the authorial side of this interpretive type and the latter the audience side. This search into the consciousness of the original author or community might well be called the Mind Reader model.

The churchly interpreter who would use the Mind Reader model should note possible pitfalls. Quite often this model ignores the various senses in which the word "author" can be used. The expression "author" can refer to several different personae. First, it can refer to a biographical flesh and blood person. For example, Paul of Tarsus would count as the biographical author. Within this biographical "author" would be the peculiar personal idiosyncracies that might be hinted at in Galatians and in the First and Second Corinthians,[18] but are unavailable to anyone but his closest intimates. Second, there is the career author. In the case of Paul one can discern a career author by tracing the supposed development of Paul, the career

author, from First Thessalonians through Romans.[19] Third, there is the public figure which in the case of Paul can best be characterized by his portrayal in Acts and, subsequently, in the Church's development of his public character to this day.[20] Finally, there is the implied author, the persona that the reader creates in his/her mind and projects into the text in order to follow the narrative.

    Without further detail, I hope that the outline of a spectrum of possible meanings and theories of author can be discerned from these four possible meanings for the expression "author."[21] Each might be the appropriate meaning of "author" in the expression "author's intention," depending upon the situation in which the expression is used and the text with which it is used as an interpretive device. For example, in the case of Mark, the "author's intention" has a very lim-

[16]Quentin Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark: Interpretation and Method through the Exegesis of Mark 6:52* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969). The search for the author's intention springs from the Romantic hermeneutical tradition of Schleiermacher and Dilthey and its insistence on the fact that genuine understanding of a text involves and aims at "a 'congenial' coincidence with the 'genius' of the author." Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976) 92. Thus, for example, Benjamin Jowett, an important 19th century English New Testament scholar and contributor to the programmatic *Essays and Reviews* published in 1860 is quoted as having declared that "the true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation and leave us alone in company with the author." E. C. Blackmann, *Biblical Interpretation: The Old Difficulties and the New Opportunity* (London: Independent, 1957) 206.

[17]Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia Westminister, 1977). Note especially the praise of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. for his defense of the author in *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1967) where Kee discusses Hirsch's contribution to the hermeneutical discussion, p. 1 of Kee.

    Recent surveys of Markan interpretation bear this observation out: H. Conzelmann, "Literaturbericht zu den Synoptischen Evangelien," *Theologische Rundschau* 37 (1972) 220-272; H. C. Kee, "Mark's Gospel in Recent Research," *Interpretation* 34 (1978) 353-368; J. Kingsbury, "The Gospel of Mark in Current Research" *Religious Studies Review* 5 (1979) 101-107; T. A. N. Vo, "Interpretation of Mark's Gospel in the Last Two Decades," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 2 (1972) 37-72; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HTKNT: 2 vols. Freiburg/ Basel 1/Wein: Herder, 1976-77) contains exhaustive bibliographies.

[18]Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 29f.

[19]Ibid., 1-24, 63-92.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Power and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 268.

ited use. We do not have enough data to say much about the biographical or career "author" and not much more to say about the public author. We are left more often than not with the implied author of Mark, that *persona* the interpreter creates to bring a consistent meaning to the entire text.[22]

    And yet it is insufficient, though necessary, to chasten this model with these various references for the word "author." Quite often the Mind Reader model ignores the great complications in deciphering another human consciousness.[23] Fishing expeditions in the territory of another person's consciousness, even one who is present with you in conversation, are tricky at best. How much more difficult must it be to attempt the same feat with a person dead two thousand years! With a contemporary person we have at the minimum the numerous nonverbal signals of body language and pre-linguistic background that we share. In some cases this may follow a relatively long period of familiarity with this person. The experienced interpreter of

human nature would be reticent to claim to understand, without considerable reservations, the mind of any person who might out of the blue speak to him or her. Though the Bible may not speak out of the blue, it is for us devoid of many contextual pre-understandings that a conversation implies. In the case of Mark, for example, where we have primarily the implied author, little or none of the complex contextual material is present that would make reading Mark roughly analogous to a conversation or even a letter from a contemporary.

I hope that even with these short observations, the impasses that confront the Mind Reader model are evident. This is not to say it does not have a place among appropriate means of interpreting the Biblical text. I hope to leave with you, however, the significant reservations and limitations involved in such a model. It should be clear that such a model would be insufficient for the churchly interpreter, and certainly an extremely limited manner in which to have the Bible be Scripture for the Church. If the Bible is to be used "in the common life of the church as to nurture and preserve her self-identity," then other models would have to supplement and perhaps encompass it.

The Linguistic Paradigm: Two Types

Other models are available as a result of contemporary hermeneutical discussions. The hermeneutical principle of authorial intention, which provides the major hermeneutical grounding for the historical-critical method in Biblical exegesis, has been brought into question by opposing theories.[24] L. Griffin, for ex-

[22]Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1978) 18.

[23]No more sophisticated and thoughtful "defense of the author" exists than in Eric Donald Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967) and *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976). He attempts to avoid both pitfalls to which I refer in this essay, but in the end, I believe, succumbs to both. For an excellent analysis of Hirsch's failure on this score see David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature and History in Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978) 11-35.

[24]While it is clear that historical-critical Biblical exegesis makes use of a wide variety of methods and approaches, I shall in this essay use the terms "historical-critical method" and "historical-critical exegesis" to refer globally to these various methods insofar as they are governed by the principle of authorial intention and are thus (ultimately) directed toward discovering the author's intention or intended meaning as understood by the original readers or addressees in the historical situation in which the writing arose.

ample, writes of a "new tendency" which questions "the adequacy of the author's intention as an explanation of his product" and claims "that the author's intention is only a partial explanation, and that in fact any real explanation must be had through insistence on the work itself which in fact may exceed the author's intention or indeed may fall short of it."[25] In Anglo-American literary-critical circles,[26] the principle of authorial intention has for some time been the subject of lively debate, and indeed this principle has been dubbed by Wimsatt and Beardslay the "Intentional Fallacy."[27] As Amos Wilder puts it:

In literary criticism attention has now for some time been directed to the given work as a self-sufficient aesthetic whole which should be allowed to make its own impact apart from extraneous considerations having to do with the author and his

circumstances or intentions....[28]

As I stated above, there are two broadly construed choices within the linguistic paradigm. The one would focus on the "world" created by the text in its effect on the contemporary reader. Likewise, this choice would take note of the complex relationship the reader establishes with the text. Of this choice I will later have much to say. The second alternative within the linguistic paradigm is the structuralist approach to texts,[29] which is in many ways the antithesis of the historical paradigm. If the historical approach provides the tools for uncovering and analyzing the author's intended meaning, structuralism aims at uncovering and analyzing the deep structures of the text itself, which are quite independent of what the author mayor may not have intended.[30] For the structuralist approach, to use Paul Ricoeur's words, a text is "an absolute object for and in itself."[31] Therefore, the text's meaning is a function of the interrelations among its elements. Authorial intention is thus considered irrelevant so far as the meaning of the text is concerned. Though considerable and fruitful discussion has been dedicated to the use of structural analysis of the Biblical text, models dependent on

[25]L. Griffin, "Hermeneutics," *Irish Theological Quarterly,* 37 (1970) 237-38. Of this "new tendency" Griffin writes that it "does have the good effect of taking biblical hermeneutics out of its isolation and inserting it into the larger field of general interpretation..." 242.

[26]I refer here not to what is commonly known as "literary criticism" among biblical scholars but to what R. W. Funk calls "literary literary criticism;" cf. "Foreword" to *Semeia* 8 (1977) vii. Throughout this essay, the term "literary criticism" shall be used in this sense.

[27]See G. Hermeren, "Intention and Interpretation in Literary Criticism," *New Literary History* 7 (1975-76) 57-82, especially p. 57; W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1967), especially the essay written in collaboration with M.C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," pp. 3-18.

[28]Amos Niven Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972) xxv.

[29]For a good introduction to the structuralist approach to texts see R. Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974). See also R. Barthes, "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits," *Communications* 8 (1966) 1-27.

[30]Robert Everard C. Johnston, *Text and Text-Interpretation in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur* (unpublished licentiate dissertation presented to the Higher Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven, 1977) 2. Mr. Johnston's dissertation and a book manuscript (yet unpublished) on Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory have been of considerable help in sorting out some of the argument of this essay.

[31]Paul Ricoeur, "Du conflit à la convergence des méthodes en exégèse biblique," *Exégèse et herméneutique* by R. Barthes et al. (Paris: Ed du Seuil, 1971) 38.

this type of interpretation will not be my major concern in this essay. I have, instead, chosen to focus on that choice within this paradigm which concerns itself with the relationship between the contemporary audience and the world that the text creates.

Recently much discussion of the Bible as Scripture and as authoritative has focused on models of interpretation that are roughly within this broad type. I will call it the contemporary audience type. Instead of understanding the Biblical interpreter's task as negotiating the gap between what was once said and what might appropriately be said today, what the text meant and means, much recent thought has turned to negotiating the gap between hermeneutical theory and pastoral praxis. To one degree or another they have taken seriously Johannes-Baptist Metz's

observation that "the fundamental hermeneutical problem of theology is not the problem of how systematic theology stands in relation to historical theology, how dogma stands in relation to history, but what is the relation between theory and practice."[32]

David Kelsey, though in many important ways quite unlike Professor Metz in theological outlook, suggests that Scripture's authority is conferred upon it and is in a reciprocal relationship with audience, or community, that understands it as authoritative.[33] Kelsey, I believe, rightly observes that the church's influence on the interpreter's view of Scripture is crucial. Professional interpreters might make suggestions as to how the text should be understood, but such suggestions grow out of and respond to the common life of the church both in its liturgical and moral forms.[34] It is then quite sensible to argue, as I have suggested above, that *the fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of Scripture is the life, activity and organization of the Christian community.*

Interpreter as Maestro[35]

Such interpretation can, I believe, be understood best under the category of performance of the Biblical text. By analogy this might mean comparing the interpretation of the Biblical text to a chamber orchestra playing a Mozart symphony. We have a group of people interpreting a text. It is possible that they are playing the piece incorrectly, or at best, poorly. The score may include misprints, or the orchestra may simply misunderstand the signs on the score, or the players may lack the basic technical skills to perform the score. Even if the orchestra is quite capable technically of performing the score, critics might conclude that it is unfaithful to the score; the performance lacks a certain truthfulness. Though all of these faults might be present, the text could be to some degree faithfully enacted.

A model of the interpreter of the Biblical text based on this analogy would not exclude the important work of the historical critic. The corruption of the score would require careful textual criticism. The range of possibilities for the particular

[32]Johannes-Baptist Metz, "Relationship of Church and World in the Light of Political Theology," *Theology of Renewal 2. Renewal of Religious Structures,* L. K. Shook (New York: 1968) 260.
[33]Kelsey, *Uses,* 150.
[34]Ibid., 208ff.
[35]I use the term "maestro" in the sense of the master of any art. In this case, the conductor of a chamber orchestra has clarified the model. This model first came to mind upon hearing a lecture by N. L. A. Lash which, to my knowledge, has not been published.

form of symphony, its *Sitz im Leben,* and the editorial developments of the form in the hand of the master, would certainly require the work of the form and redaction critic. But these would not be the focus; nor would the problems raised by them be the primary concern of the performance. Any model based on this analogy between the performance of a symphony and the performance of the Biblical text would focus on the performance itself as the crucial context and norm for the interpretation. This shift of focus, though not rejecting the historical-critical method, places the conclusions and significance of those conclusions in a completely different order of value. The interpreter, let us say on a Sunday morning, changes from Mind Reader to Maestro.

I have recently had the opportunity to observe the work of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Pinchas Zukerman. Mr. Zukerman's delightful manner, his expressive care

for the truth of the performance and the fidelity of the music, have helped crystalize my thoughts on this model. The director of a chamber orchestra is perhaps not quite as crucial as the director of a symphony orchestra. Nonetheless, the director's task is primarily to allow the individual members as an ensemble to create the music. As the principal interpreter of the text, the director leads the ongoing discussion called interpretation. Each member of the chamber orchestra must and does have an interpretation of the piece. In the case of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra many of the members offer considerable skills and detailed information about the history and form of the text. The director must identify the interpretation most appropriate, not only for the original performers, but most especially for the contemporary performers.

Interpreter as Player-Coach[36]

Perhaps the Maestro model is too elitist. At any rate, it could lead to too great an emphasis on the virtuoso character of the interpreter. It is, however, true that much of the necessary and crucial work of interpretation is done alone and then brought to the community for discussion and enactment. In this case, the Player-Coach model might help clarify the role of the interpreter in the interpretation of Scripture within the community.

In this model the text is the playbook, often referred to as the Bible of the Game. Any player caught not only in ignorance of but also unable to execute the playbook—to inwardly digest it—in the moment of action will suffer rather grave consequences. The character of the interpretation of the text as a cooperative team play suggests the communal character of the Bible as Scripture.

Once again to lessen the possibility of an authoritarian model of the interpreter, each coach, too, must venture onto the field of play. In the heat of the skirmish, each interpreter must bring about a mutual interpretation that is finally judged by its success on the playing field. This model recognizes the vulnerability of the interpreter who has not developed the community of trust and high morale

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[36]In using the model of Player-Coach I am drawing an analogy with games and the interpretive enterprise. In doing so I recognize many possible misunderstandings as to the capricious or even skeptical appearance this might create. Neither should be the case. Considerable discussion of game theory and interpretation theory exists. For further material read: Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Power and Limits of Pluralism,* 29-30.

necessary for the test of the community in the game. Anyone who fails to include the community in his or her interpretation risks getting sacked.

Two other possible objections might arise out of the Player-Coach model of interpreter. First, one might object to the analogy between interpreting Scripture and a game. "Interpreting Scripture is serious business, not a game," one might object. This is true. On the other hand, one need only observe the professional athlete before the beginning of the game or in the heat of a crucial play. Think of the hours of individual and team practice and study, long and tedious repetitions of exercises, the struggle for excellence in mind, body and spirit. If the average professional interpreter of Scripture within the community of the Church engaged in such "play" one might not make such an objection.

A second objection might be to the violent images employed in some instances of this model: the player-coach may play on a hockey team. Surely no model can be effectively

analogous at all points, nor sufficient for all moments in this argument. However, the possibilities of violence, especially the possibilities for oppression both within and without the community of interpreters, must not be forgotten. In fact, the churchly interpreter might well be quite suspicious of any model of interpreter that ignores the possibility of such systemic distortion within and without the community.[37]

Interpreter as Deliberator

In noting the possibility of violence and oppression within the community of interpretation, Johannes-Baptist Metz's concern for theory and praxis comes home again. Though my focus is on the imaginative character of interpretation of the Bible as Scripture, this "does not make it any less political activity;"[38] it truly is a political act. The imaginative and the political character of interpretation are equally significant and necessary.[39] This political character of interpretation might be developed under the model of the interpreter as Deliberator.

In the face of violence and oppression the community needs to deliberate; at its best, it acts out its shared hope as a result of a deliberative and persuasive discourse. When the professional interpreter of the Bible engages in the enactment or performance of the text within the community, she or he leads such deliberation. The sermon, for example, need not, in its concern for the truth, be an edict or prescription of the dos and don'ts of the community. It can be a winsome deliberation upon the truth that the community shares, without lessening the proclamatory or prophetic character of the interpretation. For the Christian deliberator cannot escape pronouncing the mercy and judgment of God, nor escape its way

[37]The integration of theory and practice in the various discussions of hermeneutics represents important discussions in political philosophy too broad to do more than hint at their implications. On the specific topic of systematic distortion within the community of discourse, see Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon, 1975) and his *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon, 1971).

[38]Stanley Hauerwas, "The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering," *Interpretation* 34 (1980) 364.

[39]Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Seabury, 1976). See especially Gilkey's discussion of "Politics and Meaning," pp. 57ff., for the intimate relationship between the imaginative character of interpretation and political activity and meaning.

in her life.[40] Such pronouncing includes all the members in the community in a same-saying (*homilia*), not in angry fiats and coercive sophistries.[41] Either the power of the promise that calls us together and the hope it engenders is sufficient for creating servants of the world, or the community will ultimately fail.

Under the model of Deliberator the interpreter would not be set afield to force members of the community to the truth.[42] Deliberation dependent upon the proclamation of the promise that has brought the community of the faithful into existence draws the community into enacting the text in daily life. Deliberators do not need canned solutions, nor any authority other than their shared trust in the promise that enables the community. Deliberators persuade; Christian deliberators give good reasons for the hope we share.[43]

Interpreter as Storyteller

These good reasons that deliberation discovers can take the shape of a story. Some would

argue that the character of the Biblical text is far closer to story than it is to history.[44] Others would characterize Scripture, along with Hans Frei, as having a "history-like" quality, but they would also say that the real meaning of the text does not reside in how accurately or inaccurately it reports historical events.[45] Such an understanding of the text of Scripture might mandate the model of the interpreter as storyteller.

Stanley Hauerwas, in a most insightful essay, integrates his concern for the political and ethical use of Scripture in the Christian community with the role of

[40]These models of interpretation underline the old saw that the preacher cannot escape the message preached. The interpreter is never external from the interpretation; perhaps alienated from it, but not outside it.

[41]As a student pastor I served as assistant to a pastor who would translate his text each Monday morning and spend the rest of the week working the text over with members of the parish. No hospital visit or administrative meeting went by without some shared reflection on the text. Those who had been in contact with him during the week would probably recongize much of Sunday's sermon as a part of their own interpretation of that text during that week.

Some might suggest that this model would have us talk the church to death. It is possible, of course, to talk the church to a standstill. If it is the word of life who calls us into conversation, however, we can also be talked to life.

[42]For a further development of this theme, I would suggest Hans Küng's short meditation, *The Church: Maintained in Truth* (New York: Seabury, 1980), and the discussion of infallibility versus indefectibility in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI,* ed. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978).

I find the introduction to *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) by Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, most instructive, especially in their call for a "holistic view of preaching," which includes four factors: "the preacher, the listener, the churchly context including the institutional organization, and the message. Any really comprehensive view of preaching must do justice to all four factors, without focusing unduly on any one of them," p.1f.

[43]For a general introduction to how stories might be a form of persuasion in our contemporary situation, see Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago University of Chicago, 1974, especially pp. 180ff). For a marvelous development of this rhetoric of persuasion in a Christian theologian, see Robert W. Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

[44]James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 147f. See also James Barr's "Story and History in Biblical Theology," *Journal of Religion* 46 (1976) 1-17.

[45]See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974).

narrative and imaginative *discrimen*[46] in the interpretation of the Bible as Scripture.[47] He speaks of the moral authority of Scripture under the heading of the "Morality of Remembering: the Scripture as Narrative."[48] The "narrative of Scripture not only 'renders a character'[49] but renders a community capable of ordering its existence appropriate to such stories."[50] Thus, Scripture need not be ordered by a dogmatic canon within a canon, but one can understand the whole of Scripture as "one long 'loosely structured non-fiction novel' that has sub-plots that at some points appear minor but later turn out to be central."[51] The character of the community that it creates and requires "must be able to make the narratives of Scripture central for its life."[52] It is a community that "knows it has a history and tradition which separates it from the world."[53]

I would not want to reduce this model to this ethical dimension, nor would I want to exclude it. It should, however, be encompassed within a broader theology of narrative. Gabriel Fackre has made just such an attempt to explore the Christian story. He sets out to do a Christian systematic theology based on and reflected in a "narrative interpretation of basic Christian

doctrine."[54] He understands as his "ultimate source of the Christian Story...the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament." The authority of the Bible rests in "its testimony to the decisive events in the faith narrative."[55] The story is subject to the norm of the Bible; "it must be 1) rooted in the biblical source and accountable to its storyline norm, 2) continuous with the traditions of the Church, past and present, 3) intelligible to those to whom it is addressed, connected to the realities of their time and place, and illuminative of their lived experience."[56]

Fackre seeks the "core"[57] of the Christian faith under the imaginative *discrimen*[58] of several "acts in the Christian drama," which are "the chapters in the Story: Creation, Fall, Covenant, Christ, Church, Salvation, Consummation, with their Prologue and Epilogue, God." This development of the Storyteller model still has several steps to go before completely bridging the gap between story and audience, but it points in the right direction.[59] It is sufficiently exciting to see the shape of a new relationship between Biblical interpretation and systematic theology in this development of this model.

[46]Kelsey, *Uses,* 160. Kelsey in turn borrowed the concept from Robert C. Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959) 15.

[47]Hauerwas, "The Morality of Scripture," 364.

[48]Ibid., 365.

[49]Kelsey interprets Karl Barth in this manner, *Uses,* p. 39.

[50]Hauerwas, "The Morality of Scripture," 366.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid., 367.

[53]Ibid; one need not take a sectarian position to affirm this notion.

[54]Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978) 1-2.

[55]Ibid., 22.

[56]Ibid., 39.

[57]Ibid., 14. Fackre follows the suggestion of Martin E. Marty in his *The Fire We Can Light: The Role of Religion in a Suddenly Different World* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), 219, where he suggests that we core and care.

[58]Fackre, *The Christian Story*, 15.

[59]The same might be said of Hans Frei's development of his theoretical work, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIONS

Several questions and objections can and should be raised to the theory of interpretation that supports these latter models. Every performance or enactment of a musical score or a dramatic or literary text is a new event in the history of the meaning of the text. Texts, as Paul Ricoeur notes, have itineraries.[60] Or, as Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it, "The discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process."[61] In the case of great classical texts or scores this is quite clear. But is this apparent relativism not contrary to the finality of God's work in Jesus the Christ? Do these models imply a diminution of Christian claims to truth ? Is it entirely true of the texts of Scripture to suggest that they are merely "history-like," or "fictional" narratives? Have we given up on the historical claims of the Christian texts?

We do ourselves a disservice if we appropriate these models based upon a linguistic paradigm of text and interpreter without addressing these important theological and historical

truth questions. Though I cannot give any complete argument here, some suggestions follow. It is possible to perform Mozart, not only badly, but incorrectly. The incomplete character of the interpretive enterprise does not legitimate all interpretation. To say that historical perception and enactment of truth is always partial, always provisional, does not lead to the conclusion that we are simply incapable of acting and speaking truly. Certain ways of enacting, performing, enlivening the Christian texts are false. Though the cases are seldom clear-cut and often require centuries of mutual conversation, truth claims regarding interpretation of the Christian Scriptures remain appropriate.[62]

Such conversation cannot be judged by some supposed external principle that will provide a final test.[63] Only in a community which I would like to charac-

[60]Paul Ricoeur, "The Bible and the Imagination" (unpublished manuscript presented at The William Rainey Harper Conference on Biblical Studies, October 3-5, 1979, The Divinity School of The University of Chicago), 2.

[61]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 265.

[62]Several important distinctions should and can be made regarding the character of the truth claims of the Bible. First, the character of the Biblical text is in most cases practical conversation in which arguments or claims to truth are basically superfluous. However, in those places within the Bible where certain arguments or thematic discourse predominates truth claims appear. Secondly, the character of much preaching may not require such explicit arguments or truth claims, but eventually the professional interpreter of the Bible as Scripture will need to make argument for its explicit truth claims. For a further discussion of the relationship between truth claims and practical and thematic discourse see Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien," *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion* (Festschrift für Walter Schulz; Pfullingen: 1973) 211-265.

[63]This is, of course, at odds with the correspondence theory of truth quite often presumed in discussion of the truth claims of theology. This does not reject the possibility of critical appraisal of interpretations, as if to say, "Any interpretation will do, as long as you feel strongly enough about it." It is dependent upon whether or not a claim can be justified, that is maintained (cf. Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien," 211f). What I am trying to underline in this essay is that such arguments of justification cannot ignore the question of worth or value in maintaining truth claims. The participation of the interpreter with the text can have a moment of critical explanation, but must return to a moment of second naiveté (cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning,* 71-88, and *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work,* ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart [Boston: Beacon, 1978] 149-166).

terize as "a sacrament of dialog,"[64] can this conversation take place. In such a sacramental community the truth of the Christian texts becomes present in the community's mutual trust and hope. This is a trust and hope called into existence by the word of promise and manifested in the sacramental presence of Christ in his Church.[65]

This model of the Church eschews the constraint of conversation concerning the truth of the Christian texts as to what has previously been established as what they "originally meant." Without denying the place of the text, form, and redaction critics, it is still necessary to seek appropriation in the present situation. On the other hand, we cannot forsake understanding what the author meant. Here, however, I prefer Gadamer's description of this search for authorial intention as an attempt "to recapture the perspective within which he...formed his views" and endorse Collingwood's dictum: "We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer."

Nothing within this understanding of truth in relationship to the sacrament of dialog, which takes place in the church, is incompatible with the finality of the work of Christ. Indeed, it recognizes and takes account of the radical eschatological character of the message and work of

Christ, the principally promissory character of it.

I am not prepared to suggest that the linguistic paradigm can be sufficient for the interpretation of Scripture, nor that my concern for relating theory and practice so intimately can leave behind the historical questions that might be raised. To take the interpretation of Mark as an example: it is one thing to question Vincent Taylor's hierarchy of values when he interprets Mark; it is another to claim that he is quite mistaken in detecting and examining historical referential claims in the text. Mark does not simply give symbolic expression to certain pervasive features of the human drama; his Gospel also expresses the author's confidence in the person Jesus and the promise which he embodied. Certain historical claims are made that remain subject to historical examination and are characteristic of the Christian teaching.

I hesitate to make some great divide between literary criticism and historical interpretation. All too often such differences are exaggerated. Some perceive the literary critics' judgments to be "merely subjective" in character, lacking any significance as knowledge.[66] On the other hand, so many non-historians suggest that historical methodology is hopelessly positivistic, a claim I cannot support.[67]

[64]This develops Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963). God initiates this dialog and continues to authorize it by means of the promise proleptically available in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and continually present by the promise of the Spirit.

[65]In his *Models of the Church,* Avery Dulles develops five models for the Church: Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald, and Servant. I envision an ecclesiology congruent with my models for understanding the Biblical interpreter as a community which encompasses the church as institution, mystical communion and servant with the Church as sacrament and herald.

[66]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 87, criticizes Kant by insisting that "art is knowledge and the experience of the work of art is a sharing in this knowledge."

[67]Against the positivist critical philosophers of history, such as Popper and Hempel, significant response has been made. Positions which are in some way supportive of my proposal are the critical philosophers of history who understand history primarily under the genre of narrative (e.g. Gallie, Danto, and Morton White). Earlier forms of this viewpoint are to be found in Dray's continuous series model of explanation, in W. H. Walsh's account of history as "significant narrative," and in certain aspects of the theories of Croce and of Collingwood. A moderating position between the realists and the reconstructionists that holds considerable persuasive power is Maurice Mandelbaum's *The Anatomy of History Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1977).

There is, nonetheless, a difference between literary criticism and historical criticism.

Here I must appeal both to the complexity and perhaps essential mystery of the reality to which the Christian texts point and the importance of the ongoing conversation of the community, the sacrament of dialog which is grounded in the Gospel and the promise of the Spirit.

Advantages

In the meantime, certain advantages accrue from these linguistic models that, by way of summary, commend them to the professional interpreter of the Bible as Scripture within the Christian community.

First, though they downplay the historical gap, they are strong in their ability to address the relationship between the Christian message and Christian living today. Their dependence upon a close tie between theory and practice avoids the bracketing of preaching, pastoral care and

counseling, and political issues away from direct implication in the interpretive process. They counteract the opinion of one of my exegetical teachers who said at the conclusion of a strenuous textual, source, form, and redactional analysis of a text, "The rest is homiletics," as if to say the rest is either easy, or worse, less significant.

Second, these models restore the devotional and liturgical uses of Scripture to a fuller place in the interpretive process both in the understanding of the text and the self-understanding of the interpreter. In this way, they take more seriously the place of pre-understanding and elevate its often secondary and solely negative role to a positive source for the interpretation of the text.

Third, these models imply a re-evaluation, but not a rejection, of classical nineteenth century hermeneutics of suspicion, e.g., historical consciousness.[68] These models point beyond what some have described as "critical description and capricious faith" of much Biblical interpretation.[69] Rather than disparaging

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[68]In principle I would argue that all of the classical hermeneutics of suspicion could be encompassed within this argument, if it were to be developed. The work of Freud, Marx, Neitzsche and Feuerbach need not be neglected or ignored but can be incorporated into and encompassed by the experience of good will and trust engendered by the promise of Christ, to which the Christian texts are a witness, and which the community experiences.

[69]Martin J. Buss, "Understanding Communication," *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible; Semeia Supplement* 8, ed. Martin J. Buss (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 33. Buss argues that much "biblical scholarship...oscillates between critical description and capricious faith, calling the one 'historical' and the other 'theological.'" I can only agree with his analysis of much of the churchly interpretation done with the best of intention to reproduce the author's intention consistent with the historical context. Unfortunately, much of the interpretation of Scripture that follows the literary paradigm, especially some of the interpretation done under the category of "story" engages both in capricious faith and irresponsible description. Slapping a story onto a pericope is not at all what my models imply or mandate.

the accomplishments of historical critics, my intention has been to bring as much discipline to the side of appropriation and enactment of the texts as has been the case in the historical analysis of the texts. The work of the historian need not be neglected but can be incorporated critically and encompassed by a more complete understanding of the interpretive enterprise.

Fourth, the focus on performance and enactment leads the Christian community to action. The model of the Church as Servant to the world can find a much more conducive environment within these models of the interpreter's self-understanding of the interpretive task than in the Mind Reader model. Moreover, they can perhaps be a step on the road to the oft spoken, but seldom manifested, theology of the laity both within and without the doors of the local congregation.