Biblical Hermeneutics

FIVE VIEWS

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Introduction

Trajectories in Biblical Hermeneutics

Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell

The issue of interpreting the Bible has a long history and vast complexity,[1] even if the term *hermeneutics*, which is often used in conjunction with biblical interpretation, is of more recent vintage.[2] Students and scholars alike struggle to differentiate between the meaning of terms like *biblical exegesis, interpretation* and *hermeneutics*.[3] This very tension in defining the concepts of biblical interpretation, hermeneutics and exegesis leads to one of the major questions influencing the debates in this book, which in turn justifies its creation. Anthony Thiselton, one of the leading figures in biblical hermeneutics, especially in evangelical circles, provides a helpful distinction among these important terms.

> Whereas *exegesis* and *interpretation* denote the *actual processes* of interpreting texts, *hermeneutics* also includes the second-order discipline of asking

[1]For major histories of Old Testament and New Testament interpretation, see Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation,* 4 vols., trans. Leo G. Perdue and James O. Duke (Atlanta: SBL, 2009–2010); William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992–), with the third volume for the period after Bultmann still forthcoming.

[2]Recent treatments of hermeneutics with a focus on the Bible include Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Petr Pokorny, *Hermeneutics as a Theory of Understanding,* trans. Anna Bryson Gustová (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Stanley E. Porter and Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

[3]Some scholars use *interpretation* and *hermeneutics* interchangeably (see W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach,* 3rd ed. [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2008], p. 1), while others differentiate between exegesis, interpretation and hermeneutics (see Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], esp. "Hermeneutics 101," pp. 17-26).

> critically *what exactly we are doing when we read, understand, or apply* texts. Hermeneutics explores *the conditions and criteria* that operate to try to ensure responsible, valid, fruitful, or appropriate interpretation.[4]

This book thus focuses on the question of what hermeneutics is specifically as it applies to biblical interpretation. While other books have addressed this issue in the past, this book uses a new format to address the question of biblical hermeneutics. One can broadly classify most books on the topics of biblical hermeneutics or biblical interpretation according to two major types.[5] The first type of book presents students with step-by-step instructions on how one should interpret the biblical text; in other words, hermeneutics is an exegetical procedure.[6] These books may provide some explanation of the variety of methods available, but their goal is primarily the practical application of a specific method as a tool for biblical interpretation. A second type of book provides an introduction to the variety of different methods of biblical interpretation. These books may move historically through the various methods, or they may discuss the strategies, goals and outcomes of these methods in synchronic perspective. In either case the authors of these books frequently display (whether intentionally or unintentionally) their own preference through their presentations of the various views, or sometimes they present the range of positions

[4]Thiselton, *Hermeneutics,* p. 4.

[5]For a more detailed overview of the issues, see Stanley E. Porter, "What Difference Does Hermeneutics Make? Hermeneutical Theory Applied," *Jian Dao* 34/*Pastoral Journal* 27 (2010): 1-50, esp. 13-21.

[6]Examples include Otto Kaiser and Werner G. Kümmel, *Exegetical Method: A Student Handbook,* trans. E. V. N. Goetschius and M. J. O'Connell (New York: Seabury, 1981); John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook,* 3rd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 2007); Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*; Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors,* rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993); Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors,* 3rd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Werner Stenger, *Introduction to New Testament Exegesis,* trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Scot McKnight, ed., *Introducing New Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989; Craig C. Boyles, ed., *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Mary H. Schertz and Perry B. Yoder, *Seeing the Text: Exegesis for Students of Greek and Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); Richard J. Erickson, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Exegesis: Taking the Fear out of Critical Method* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006); Craig L. Blomberg with Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

in a historical fashion rather than directly engaging the debate.[7] Both types of book tend to overlook the larger hermeneutical issues involved in biblical interpretation and often do not do justice to the diverse range of opinions in biblical hermeneutics. In other words, they fail to raise and address questions regarding the nature of interpretation itself: what it involves, what its presuppositions and criteria are, what its foundations need to be, and how it affects the practice of interpretation and its results. We are not saying that there are no books on biblical hermeneutics that present hermeneutics as hermeneutics,[8] only that it is difficult to capture the diversity of the discipline from a vantage point that focuses on procedure, history, or even the perspective of a single viewpoint or author.

This book represents a new way of presenting several of the major views within biblical hermeneutics. Rather than introducing the individual hermeneutical approaches in survey fashion or providing a step-by-step instruction guide to interpretation, this book provides a forum for discussion

[7]Examples include Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1999); A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Christopher Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament: Methods of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986,* new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics,* trans. Robert Yarbrough (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994); Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: BridgePoint, 1994); David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Mathews and Robert B. Sloan, eds., *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study,* rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994); Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke and Grant I. Lovejoy, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture,* 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006); William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006); Henry A. Virkler and Karelynne Gerber Ayayao, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

[8]Besides the volumes in notes 2 and 3 above, see also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); as well as other of his works.

by including contributions from several of the major advocates of these diverse models.[9] Each contributor provides a position essay describing the traits that characterize his perspective and a response essay describing his position in comparison to the other approaches.[10] By using this format, this book allows the reader to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each position by listening in on a scholarly debate over the major hermeneutical stances and issues. This introduction and the conclusion of the book, prepared by the editors, are designed to orient the discussion and set it within the wider history of biblical hermeneutics. Toward this goal of orientation, this introduction will survey many of the key issues of biblical hermeneutics by tracing their context within the history of traditional and modern biblical interpretation, using the literary categories of "behind the text," "within the text" and "in front of the text."[11] This survey will highlight some of the key questions and issues in debates surrounding the subject of biblical hermeneutics. It will then place the particular views represented in this book in that broader context and explain the structure of the book.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

This is not the place to offer a full or complete history of biblical hermeneutics. Such histories are offered in a number of works and in more detail than we can present here.[12] Nevertheless, our threefold orientation to the text provides a useful framework for capturing the major issues in biblical

[9]A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Francis Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), includes the written opinions of the four authors, but they all represent similar viewpoints.

[10]We consciously use the masculine singular pronoun because each of the advocates is a man.

[11]This triad develops a pattern in the approach of Paul Ricoeur, who pointed to what was "in front of the text" over what was "behind the text." As Ricoeur explains, "The sense of the text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed." Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 87-88. The apparent correlation with the hermeneutical triad of author–text–reader is not accidental. See now also Joel B. Green, "The Challenge of Hearing the New Testament," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation,* ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 1-14, esp. 10-13.

[12]Besides Thiselton, *Hermeneutics,* and Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* see Manfred Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction,* trans. Joachim F. Vette (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2006). Cf. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1989).

hermeneutics as they have unfolded. As a result of the shape of this volume, we will orient our comments specifically, though not exclusively, to New Testament hermeneutics on interpretation, but without neglecting the Old Testament.

Behind the text. In some ways, the history of biblical hermeneutics begins as early as the biblical account itself. In the Old Testament, the latter writings, like the Psalms and the Prophets, reinterpret the story of Israel presented in the Torah, and the New Testament continues to reinterpret this continuing story in light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (an approach that later redemptive-historical scholars would appropriate).[13] Some scholars trace the beginnings of historical exegesis to the historically based exegesis of the Antiochene school, which was responding to the allegorical methods of the Alexandrian school.[14] The majority of scholars, however, point to the Enlightenment as a critical turning point in the field of biblical interpretation.[15] Through the influences of Cartesian thought, Pyrrhonian skepticism and English deism, Enlightenment scholars began to question the historicity of miracles,[16] to search for the historical Jesus,[17] to explore different types of texts and sources[18] and

[13]For an example of biblical allusions within the Old Testament corpus, see Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, eds., Bringing out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion and Zechariah 9-14, JSOTSup 370 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003). Scholars focusing on intrabiblical interpretation often discuss the role of New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament. For discussion on rabbinic models of interpretation and their impact on the early church, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[14]Kurt Anders Richardson rightly points to problems with this approach; our modern perspectives tend to skew the methods of the Antiochene school. Richardson, "The Antiochene School," in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation,* ed. Stanley E. Porter (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 14-16.

[15]See Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Testament Interpretation in Historical Perspective," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation,* ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 10-36 (one of the articles deleted in the second edition).

[16]For further discussion, see R. M. Burns, *The Great Debate on Miracles: From Joseph Glanvill to David Hume* (Lewisburg, N.Y.: Bucknell University Press, 1981).

[17]For a fuller discussion of the various quests for the historical Jesus, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 3-124. This depiction of the quests has been strongly criticized by several scholars. See Walter P. Weaver, *The Historical Jesus in the Twentieth Century: 1900-1950* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), pp. xi-xii; Dale C. Allison, "The Secularizing of the Historical Jesus," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27, no. 1 (2000): 135-51; Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals,* JSNTSup 191 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 31-62.

[18]For example, Johannes Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) and Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812)

generally to ask the kinds of historical questions we see in contemporary Old and New Testament introductions.[19]

Responding to this Enlightenment tradition, Friedrich Schleiermacher—often said to be the founder of modern hermeneutics—introduced a form of interpretation frequently described as romantic hermeneutics.[20] This form of hermeneutics focused on the mind of the author, along with the impact of his or her sociohistorical setting, as the means of gaining meaning from a given text. Wilhelm Dilthey followed in Schleiermacher's footsteps in focusing on the relationship between author and text in interpretation.[21]

These various developments had a formative influence on the hermeneutical model that we will broadly call "traditional criticism," which is still frequently associated with biblical exegesis. One can delineate three salient features that distinguish traditional criticism: evolutionary models of biblical texts, historical reconstructions, original meaning[22]—although not all traditional critics would accept all of them or emphasize them in the same way.

As Norman Petersen explains, "Essential to the historical-critical theory of biblical literature is the evolutionary model upon which it is constructed."[23] This feature of traditional criticism points to the desire to determine the backgrounds of our biblical texts and to develop theories

are two important figures in the field of textual study. See Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 44-129; F. F. Bruce, "The History of New Testament Study," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods,* ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 21-59. For a more detailed description of many of these important advances of the Enlightenment period, see Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 1:3-195.

[19]See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 19; Thiselton, "New Testament Interpretation," pp. 12-14.

[20]See J. R. Hustwit, "Open Interpretation: Whitehead and Schleiermacher on Hermeneutics," in *Schleiermacher and Whitehead: Open Systems in Dialogue,* ed. Christine Helmer et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), p. 185; Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 23-33.

[21]Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies,* 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 33-45.

[22]These categories reflect those of John Barton for historical criticism: genetic questions, original meaning, historical reconstruction, and disinterested scholarship. See Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation,* ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 9-20.

[23]Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 11.

tracing how we gained our current text from that background.[24] For example, form criticism—often a tool employed in traditional criticism—uses the theories of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* ("history of religions school") to differentiate the individual units of the oral tradition that evolved into our biblical text.[25] This form-critical analysis is usually based on source-critical analysis; thus this evolutionary model begins with the existence and relationship of sources as part of their evolution. Redaction criticism—another of the tools of traditional criticism, and usually dependent on source and form criticism—seeks the context within the church that caused the editing of the biblical text to be tailored to meet the theological needs of the community at hand.[26]

Often the goal of traditional criticism is to access the authenticity of the biblical texts or the stories behind the texts. We can see this trend in the source-critical attempts to identify the earliest sayings of Jesus and stories within the biblical accounts.[27] The various levels of authenticity in form criticism serve a similar function. At times biblical scholars have followed the philosopher Baruch Spinoza in bracketing out aspects of the biblical text to create a historical reconstruction of the background of the Bible.[28]

Seeking the original meaning of the text sounds somewhat similar to the goals of scholars looking "within the text" (see the next section below), yet the traditional search for the original meaning of the text not only

[24]For example, scholars within the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* sought the prehistory of Jewish and Christian religious concepts and practices using anthropology, ethnology, and the newly made discoveries in archaeology and ancient languages. See Neill and Wright, *Interpretation of the New Testament,* pp. 175-77.

[25]For discussion on some of the key players in form criticism, see Edgar V. McKnight, *What Is Form Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

[26]*Redaktionsgeschichte* ("redaction criticism") came to the fore in the 1950s in New Testament studies with three major German scholars: Günther Bornkamm, Hans Conzelmann, and Willi Marxsen (although they were preceded by other scholars, such as R. H. Lightfoot). Each suggested a different theological situation for the churches of the individual Evangelists, pointing to the life of the Evangelist as the third *Sitz im Leben* ("situation in life," or "context"), in addition to that of the early church and Jesus. See David R. Catchpole, "Tradition History," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods,* ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 181-95; and Robert H. Stein, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), pp. 238-39.

[27]Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches," 11.

[28]Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundburg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 30-45; Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza,* ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 383-407.

looks at linguistic and philological questions but also locates the text within its context among earlier texts and locates the original readers within their historical context.[29] Modern scholars have recently joined traditional scholars in this quest. Modern practitioners of forms of traditional criticism include social-scientific critics such as Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey, and sociorhetorical approaches such as that of Ben Witherington.[30] Composition criticism, similar to redaction criticism, also follows traditional methods to varying degrees, even if it reflects newer developments.[31]

Within the text. In response to perceived weaknesses of the traditional approach, which looks behind the text, many biblical scholars began to look for new hermeneutical orientations and excitedly embraced approaches that looked within the text itself, such as forms of literary criticism prominent in the 1970s.[32] A form of phenomenological biblical literary interpretation emerged from several of these types of literary criticism, which New Testament scholars dubbed "narrative criticism."[33] One of the proponents of this shift, the New Testament scholar Norman Petersen, argues that this approach was the answer to the historical and literary questions that redaction criticism raised.[34] Narrative criticism has its literary and theoretical basis in what was known in secular literary criticism as New Criticism, a form of literary reading that dominated literary theory from at least the 1950s to the 1970s.[35] These methods, with their philo-

[29]See Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches," pp. 10-11.

[30]See, for example, Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986); Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993); Bruce Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); and Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[31]See Norman Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), pp. 65-67.

[32]For a history of this development, see Stanley E. Porter, "Literary Approaches to the New Testament: From Formalism to Deconstruction and Back," in *Approaches to New Testament Study,* ed. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs, JSNTSup 120 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 77-128.

[33]Stephen D. Moore traces the label "narrative criticism" to David Rhoads's appraisal of the nonstructuralist literary studies of the 1970s in Mark, in an article titled, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark" (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 [1982]: 411-34). Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 7.

[34]Petersen, *Literary Criticism,* pp. 18-19.

[35]For the history of narrative criticism, see Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels,* pp. 3-68;

sophical roots in Anglo-American logical positivism, developed out of a hermeneutical tradition that focused on the text as the autonomous means of transmitting meaning. Many of these approaches also had interpretive roots in elements of the all-embracing interpretive movement of the twentieth century, structuralism, as well as connections to the New Hermeneutic.[36]

By accepting this form of literary theory, biblical scholars shifted their focus from behind the text to within the text, moving from an evolutionary model to a communications model of hermeneutics.[37] With this shift, many biblical scholars inadvertently (or sometimes intentionally) removed both authorial intent and historical background from the equation, replacing these with an emphasis on poetics, narrative and textual unity. Poetics includes an emphasis on the literary or even rhetorical means by which texts are constructed and convey their literary quality, such as the use of character, setting, irony, metaphor, symbolism and other literary tropes. Narrative—in part because the New Testament does not contain much if any genuinely poetic material—is the dominant genre or textual type of the New Testament, as well as constituting much of the Old Testament. Scholars came to emphasize and interpret elements of narrative, such as plot (motivated events) and the literary opening, closing and development. Emphasis on the autonomous text also led to a focus on textual unity, in which all of the elements of the text, even those in tension, contributed to its overall sense.

In front of the text. Stephen Moore argues that narrative criticism naturally moves into more reader-oriented (in front of the text) hermeneutical models, such as reader-response criticism, because critics often discuss the effect the text has on the reader, whether original or contemporary.[38] The movement to consider the factors in front of the text includes both focus on the formation and hence reception and interpretation of the biblical canon in the scholarship of canonical criticism,[39] and the reader-centered

cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 274-96.

[36]See Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics,* pp. 471-515; cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 154-67, 237-39.

[37]Petersen, *Literary Criticism,* p. 33.

[38]Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels,* p. 73; cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 285-87.

[39]See Robert W. Wall and Eugene Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism,* JSNTSup 76 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

approaches often associated with poststructuralism, which reacted against an arid structuralism and embraced the role of the subject in interpretation. While canonical criticism is concerned with the impact of the shape of the canon on its readers and thus has been described as a "mediating position" among author, text and reader,[40] poststructuralism is closely associated with the heavily reader-oriented deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida. The term *poststructuralism* describes a literary-philosophical movement beginning in the late 1960s, which is still having some effect today.[41]

Poststructuralism developed in response to the assumption, common in structuralism, that meaning resides within texts themselves, or at least within their deep linguistic structures. Besides deconstruction and the work of Derrida, philosophical and phenomenological hermeneutics deeply influenced the continuing influence of structuralism and helped lead to the emergence of poststructuralism. Philosophers like Hans-Georg Gadamer, with his philosophical hermeneutics, and Paul Ricoeur, with his hermeneutic phenomenology, questioned the epistemological neutrality of any given interpreter, especially foundationalists who grounded their hermeneutics in supposedly neutral deep structures, by focusing on the interplay between the assumptions of the interpreter and their interpretation and by demonstrating the interpretive gap between the reader and the original context in ancient texts.[42]

Poststructuralism was only one of the developments within the broader scope of postmodernism, which encompassed a variety of theories having an impact on understanding meaning. In the resulting developments of postmodernism, whereas previous traditional and modern hermeneutical models suggested that meaning was to be found by searching behind and within the text, postmodern hermeneutical theories offered no such guar-

[40]Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral,* pp. 492-93.

[41]For discussion of poststructuralism in relation to postmodern hermeneutics, see Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics,* pp. 495-99; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 201-3, 327-49; Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 190-213.

[42]See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989); Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics,* ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974); Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*; Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination,* trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). See also Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 74-104, 105-30.

antee, and in some instances reveled in the resultant interpretive and hermeneutical uncertainty. Postmodern theorists rejected as a fallacy the epistemological neutrality claimed by the proponents of traditional methods, as one could no more easily discover an objective reading of a text than divine the intention of the author. These theorists further rejected the claim to have unmediated access to history and replaced this claim with subjective interpretations standing in opposition to power, hierarchy and other foreseen evils within the text. These questions of power and hierarchy have been influenced by the thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud—each of whom has been interpreted in very different ways.[43]

Poststructuralism began to significantly influence biblical scholars in the late 1980s, and some today still use it.[44] While some biblical scholars, like Moore, have hailed these new theories as joyous tidings and liberation from authorial and textual captivity,[45] others have been more cautious or negative in their response. The mixed response among biblical scholars is largely related to the implications of various postmodern/poststructuralist approaches, as we have noted above.

As one can see, biblical hermeneutics is a complex field—one might even venture to say, a minefield—of potentially competing orientations, assumptions and foundations for determining meaning. As a field, it is highly dependent on developments in hermeneutics not primarily concerned with the Bible, such as the romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, structuralism, literary hermeneutics, the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer, the phenomenological hermeneutics of Ricoeur, and the poststructuralist hermeneutics of Derrida and others. Nevertheless, biblical hermeneutics also brings with it, naturally, its primary focus on the Bible, with its own lengthy and complex traditions of interpretation, from biblical times through the rise of the Enlightenment—with its

[43]A. K. M. Adam, *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), p. 92.

[44]For a more detailed description of poststructuralism and deconstruction, see Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982).

[45]Moore concludes his book on literary criticism and the Gospels with praise of poststructuralist theories and a suggestion that this is the way forward for biblical studies. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels,* pp. 171-78.

historical methods such as form, source and redaction criticism—to modern and postmodern interpretation. The result for biblical hermeneutics is a varied and intertwined mix of models and fundamental orientations, each competing with the others to establish itself as the basis for biblical interpretation.

ORIENTING QUESTIONS AND ISSUES IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Due to the variety and complexity of the field of biblical hermeneutics, it is helpful to point to some of the orienting questions that the contributors to this volume will discuss either directly or indirectly. Some of the contributors tackle these questions head-on, often in response to other hermeneutical positions, while others address them more circumspectly by incorporating them into (or even rejecting them from) their hermeneutical framework. These questions include:

1. Where does meaning happen? Is meaning to be located in the author's intent? What about the reader's engagement? What is the role of the ancient believing community, the continuing community or the modern community in reading the text today?
2. 2. What is the basis or foundation of meaning? Is it to be found in grounded substance, such as the text or the mind of the author? What if there is no foundation for meaning? Are texts simply constructs created by readers? How does one know?
3. Is meaning limited to the author's original intent (if we can in fact be certain of finding the author's original intent)? What about the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament (as in our example[46])? Does meaning change from one context to another (whether from Old Testament to New Testament or from biblical text to reader)?
4. Who or what arbitrates a "correct" reading or at the very least a "helpful" or "harmful" reading?
5. What is the role of theology in biblical interpretation? Is it assumed, primary or merely derivative?

[46]We asked the contributors both to define their particular assigned hermeneutical stance and to apply it to a common passage, Mt 2:7-15, which quotes Hos 11:1.

6. What role do events occurring after the original composition play in interpretation? For example, the Christ event, the process of canonization, the experience of a given reader and so on.
7. What other disciplines should be used to help provide greater clarity to biblical studies? Philosophy? Theology? Literary studies?

Each of the contributors to this volume attempts in some way to answer these (and other) questions in different ways. While some of their answers may at times overlap, the differences in these answers provide aspects of each contributor's unique position on biblical hermeneutics.

FIVE VIEWS OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The five views of biblical hermeneutics both capture this diversity and depict many of the major shifts within biblical hermeneutics. Craig Blomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary in Colorado and author of two books on biblical interpretation,[47] represents the historical-critical/grammatical view. This category brings together the major emphases of traditional criticism noted above, including the rise of the historical-critical method during the Enlightenment, as well as placing emphasis on the grammar of the biblical text, which goes back to the time of the Reformers. Scholars do not usually refer to this traditional hermeneutical model by this name,[48] but it is often the most common in evangelical circles. The historical-critical/grammatical view seeks insight for interpretation from taking a critical view of the history behind the text, on the one hand, and utilizing a grammatical analysis of the text, on the other. This approach includes various forms of critical analysis such as source, form, redaction, tradition and textual criticism. Blomberg functions with a conservative form of this criticism, basing his assumptions on what might be termed "maximalist" views of historical and biblical evidence. Other historical critics might be much more "minimalist" in their approach, while practicing in many ways a similar biblical hermeneutic.

Influenced by intellectual movements in literary and social-scientific

[47]See Blomberg with Markley, *Handbook of New Testament Exegesis;* Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*.

[48]Scholars often refer to their approach as historical-critical or grammatical-critical, but each often uses the tools of the other, as Blomberg's essay makes clear, even if not accepting all of the same interpretive presuppositions.

studies, Scott Spencer, who is professor of New Testament and preaching at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia, and an avid practitioner of the literary/postmodern approach that he demonstrates here in this volume,[49] views the biblical text as relevant to today's reader. Spencer draws these connections through his focus on the role both of ancient and modern readers in interpretation. In light of this perspective, literary/postmodern interpreters use a synchronic approach instead of the diachronic approach more common in traditional criticism,[50] and they are attuned to literary questions of style, character and narrative, as well as to hermeneutical issues raised by poststructuralism, postcolonialism and reader-response theories.

Richard Gaffin, emeritus professor of biblical and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and a well-known Reformed theologian,[51] presents the redemptive-historical approach. Proponents of a redemptive-historical view, following the theological interpretation of the Reformers as well as scholars such as Geerhardus Vos,[52] argue that the role of Christ in his redemptive work is central to interpreting the whole of Scripture, whether the Old or the New Testament. Gaffin offers a very concise and straightforward exposition of the redemptive-historical approach. His emphasis that the theme of redemption explains the Old Testament in light of the New, as one might expect, influences Gaffin's interpretation of the biblical text that was assigned to each contributor. Due to his redeptive-historical view, Gaffin is particularly attuned to the impact of the redemptive work of Christ in reading Hosea in relation to Matthew's depiction of Christ.

Following in the footsteps of Brevard Childs,[53] the Old Testament

[49]See F. Scott Spencer, *Dancing Girls, "Loose" Ladies, and Women of "the Cloth": The Women in Jesus' Life* (London: Continuum, 2004); Spencer, *Journeying Through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004).

[50]Synchronic and diachronic approaches (terms growing out of structuralism) contrast an approach that examines all phenomena on the same (temporal) plane versus one that views them through the course of (temporal) development and succession.

[51]See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978; reissued as *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1978]); Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2006).

[52]For example, Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

[53]Among many works, see Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Valley

scholar known for his view of the importance of canon for interpretation, Robert Wall, who is professor of New Testament and Wesleyan studies at Seattle Pacific University in Washington State and well-known for his own canonical studies,[54] represents canonical criticism well by arguing for the necessity of reading the entire canon in relationship to each part of the canon. Thus the Old Testament should be read in light of the New Testament and the New Testament in light of the Old Testament. More than this, however, even the parts of the canon should be read in light of each other, such as the placement of Acts within various canonical groupings and how this determines interpretation of the Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, or the Catholic Epistles. This framework influences the goals, procedures and results of a canonical approach to biblical hermeneutics.

Representing the philosophical/theological approach, Merold Westphal, who is emeritus professor of philosophy at Fordham University in New York City and author of a number of philosophical and hermeneutical works,[55] addresses the question of biblical hermeneutics through the insights of scholars who can be very broadly labeled as following a form of philosophical hermeneutics, such as Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Wilhelm Dilthey.[56] Westphal's approach is certainly highly philosophical in its focus (understandable for a well-known career philosopher), but philosophically oriented biblical hermeneutics provides an awareness of many of the major issues also influencing what might be called theological hermeneutics as it addresses questions in biblical hermeneutics through a philosophical lens. Westphal cannot be expected to address all of the questions for a philosophical *and* theological hermeneutics, but his philosophical reflections raise important issues that must be addressed.[57]

Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994).

[54]See Wall and Lemcio, *New Testament as Canon;* Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *New Interpreter's Bible,* ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:3-370.

[55]See Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*; Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death: An Existential Phenomenology of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[56]Along with Westphal, we here lump together these philosophers who are also hermeneuts. For the distinctions among them on the basis of the type of hermeneutics they practice, see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 7-8, 10-12. For an even more expansive view of philosophical hermeneutics, see Donald G. Marshall, "Philosophical Hermeneutics," in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation,* ed. Stanley E. Porter (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 275-77.

[57]This of courses raises but does not answer the question not only of the relationship of theological hermeneutics to philosophical hermeneutics but also, perhaps even more importantly, the

CONCLUSION

A volume such as this cannot raise or answer all questions regarding biblical hermeneutics. No volume is able to ascend to such lofty and intellectually satisfying heights. However, we believe that the essays included within this volume go a long way toward asking the right questions, differentiating the major issues involved, proposing possible answers and then attempting to show how various biblical hermeneutical stances have practical results in biblical interpretation. We expect that some readers will come away from contemplating these essays having at least as many questions afterward as they had beforehand. Others may simply find in these essays evidence and arguments to reinforce hermeneutical positions that they already hold, now greatly strengthened. Our preferred hope, however, is that these essays will challenge all of our readers, even those who are the most firmly entrenched in their hermeneutical position, to reexamine and rethink their approach to biblical hermeneutics. This volume offers a snapshot of five such approaches reflective of current interpretive practice. We are optimistic that examination and engagement with their arguments will lead to further developments in this field crucial for the interpretation of Scripture.

relationship of theological (philosophical) hermeneutics to what is readily known as theological interpretation. Our impression is that theological interpretation is less a hermeneutic than it is a theological vantage point that utilizes various hermeneutical models in subservience or in relation to the theological tradition of especially premodern biblical interpretation. Theological hermeneutics, therefore, is probably better characterized as distinct from theological interpretation and in closer relation to philosophical hermeneutics as a hermeneutical position, hence philosophical/theological hermeneutics, whereas theological interpretation, whatever its relation to theological hermeneutics and other hermeneutical models, is not a hermeneutical approach itself per se. See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 245-73, on Thiselton and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, who despite their formative roles in theological interpretation are better seen as proponents of a theological hermeneutics grounded in deep philosophical thought, what we are calling here philosophical/theological hermeneutics (as opposed to philosophical hermeneutics as represented by Gadamer; see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics,* pp. 74-104).