

My Pilgrimage in Inductive Bible Study

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My first encounter with persons who talked about “inductive” Bible study occurred in the fall of 1958 at Marion College, located in Marion, Indiana, one of the liberal arts colleges sponsored by the Wesleyan Methodist denomination (later Indiana Wesleyan University and the Wesleyan Church by merger with the Pilgrim Holiness Church). God had called me to Christian ministry. I began preparation at Marion. Although the staff there presented what we were doing as “inductive” study of Scripture, minimal attention was given to elaborating a method that could be understood on its own terms. “Inductive” Bible study at Marion meant primarily “letting the Bible speak for itself.” It involved discerning the units of a passage along with limited attention to the relationships joining those units together. The structural relationships governing passages were periodically discussed. But no extensive presentation of literary structure occurred beyond attending to what an item was “there for” when the text contained the conjunction “therefore.”

Inductive bible study method was for all intents and purposes collapsed into two steps: observation and application, with no coherent method for moving from one to the other. To observe was to interpret. For the present I register my gratitude for the methodological gains my mentors at Marion helped me make. I left Marion with the conviction that the meaning of the text would first and foremost be discerned by meticulous observation of the text and its contexts.

The Real Thing under George Allen Turner

In the fall of 1962 I enrolled at Asbury Theological Seminary and came under the influence of Dr. George Allen Turner. George Turner was a widely known teacher of “English Bible,” as IBS was often called then, named with Howard T. Kuist, Donald G. Miller and the like. The “English Bible” title of the courses celebrated the collegiate and graduate level work done in the vernacular. The EB courses did not *assume* competence in the biblical languages but did celebrate their use. As a matter of fact, Wilbert Webster White (1863-1944), the teacher most responsible for the wide influence of the inductive method in biblical studies in North America and beyond was an accomplished Hebraist (Regarding White’s international influence, note his teaching at Tiensin Bible Seminary in China, Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal India, Union Seminary in Medellin, Columbia, as well as his influence on American seminaries such as Union in Richmond Virginia, Princeton and Asbury). He had spent four years studying Hebrew at Yale with William Rainey Harper. The brilliant Harper taught Old Testament and Semitic languages at Yale and then at the University of Chicago.

Turner had a S.T.M. from the Biblical Seminary in New York and a Ph. D. in New Testament from Harvard University. He taught biblical studies at Asbury from 1945 to 1979. But in spite of the high regard in which his students and colleagues held him, George Turner presented something of a methodological enigma. His work under W. W. White, the founder and guiding light of the Biblical Seminary, set the course for his method and his approach to instruction. This surfaced in an intense commitment to an inductive method and to the Socratic approach in all of his work. What some of his students and colleagues took to be something of a helter-skelter approach was actually a matter of deep conviction. George Turner resisted any exegetical move that depended on an extensively elaborated method that would stand on its own.

Dr. Turner’s resistance to such a methodological elaboration is obvious in his 136 page Portals to Books of the Bible (1972). This brief

resource reflects Dr. Turner’s approach to assignments, to lectures, to secondary sources—to almost everything in his work. As he explains in the preface to the work, “[Portals] is an introduction in the sense of *leading the student to the content of the Scriptures* with an effort *not* to come between the student and the message of the Bible books. The emphasis is upon the student’s *direct* contact with the Biblical message. It is not primarily a manual on method but is more like a workbook designed to compel the student to grapple at first-hand with the biblical material” (7). The most extensive presentation of inductive Bible study in it was a 23-page section on “The Application of the Inductive Method to the Study of the Bible” (32-55).

Portals itself seemed like a potpourri of various questions to be answered, tasks to be done, claims to be considered. Dr. Turner gives the reader *twelve* methods in Bible study, listed as follows: the rabbinic method, the haggadic method, the allegorical, devotional, historical, literary, biographical, topical, analytic, expository, inductive and deductive methods (38). Later we have a list of basic assumptions about Bible Story, one of many lists provided and assigned; then a brief essay on “The Uniqueness of the Book of Books” (141).

This sample from Portals illustrates Dr. Turner’s disinclination to elaborate his understanding and execution of the/an inductive Bible study method at any great length. On the contrary, in his view it was the students’ responsibility to draw from the scattered lists, teachings and countless questions an inductive approach *of their own* to Bible study. I came to Asbury with insufficient grasp of the hermeneutical moments to be touched in inductive Scripture study to realize just how disordered Dr. Turner’s presentation could be. Instead, beginning with the Gospel of John, I enthusiastically followed Turner’s directions assigned in Portals. The result was a typed, single spaced, 200-page notebook of my findings. These included long lists of accumulated data—titles for each chapter and each paragraph in the book; a list of all the questions in the book of John, all the persons in the book of John, all the places named, all the Old Testament references and allusions, and so on. Most of these had been marked in my wide margin ASV with color coding—blue for persons, green for times, brown for places, orange for OT references, and so on. I did not have an

understanding of the literary structure of the Gospel of John or comprehension of how I had arrived at the interpretive and applicational conclusions, which were also here and there throughout my notebook.

What I did have was profound excitement over what I had learned about the Gospel of John just by careful observation and focused reflection on those observations. George Turner and the famous story of Professor “Agassiz, the student and the fish,” which he distributed early in the course, had worked their magic on yet another seminary junior. I was sold completely on inductive Bible study, my lack of methodical clarity notwithstanding. As it turned out, Dr. Turner had only managed to redirect my approach to Bible study. I was ready for the teaching of Robert Traina, author of Methodical Bible Study (Privately published, 1955, 1968).

Beyond Induction to Order with Robert A. Traina

Robert Traina was among the most highly regarded scholars advancing the legacy of W. W. White and the Biblical Seminary in New York where he had studied and taught for a number of years. Dr. Traina came to the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary in 1966 and taught there until his retirement in 1988. Methodologically doctors Traina and Turner stood at opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to inductive Bible study—conceptualizing it, using it, teaching it. This is seen already in the title of his book, *Methodical Bible study* (emphasis added) (1952).

Whereas Dr. Turner *listed* various steps in Bible study with minimal attention to the relationship between these, Dr. Traina taught *five* steps in inductive Bible study, explained each one of these clearly, and insisted these steps be executed in a specific order, while allowing for the methodological ebb and flow of actual Bible study. For Robert Traina the steps of good Bible study were observation, interpretation, application, evaluation, and correlation—in that order. Dr. Turner worked and taught Socratically; Traina taught, exquisitely modeling inductive Bible study and

sharing the results of his own interpretive work on the text in class. A significant part of Traina's genius was his ability to engage students in class in such a way that, while the students' contributions seemed to be the basis for his notes on the blackboard, by the end of any class period the board was full of Traina's own work, carefully designed long before the class period and the "spontaneous" interaction there.

Truth be told, Robert Traina was as much a brilliant biblical theologian as he was biblical interpreter. He made it his business to include conversation with major biblical theologians past and present in his teaching. This theological dialogue made for rich, exciting class sessions. As it happened, biblical studies at that time at ATS was often pressed into the service of defending some point of fundamentalism. Traina had no hesitation entering "battle" when necessary, but not before he had understood his dialog partners' main contentions and the important questions that drove their work. Traina's approached all of his work inductively.

I had already taken my EB requirements for the B.D. when Traina arrived at Asbury, so getting into his classes would cost me requirements I needed to use elsewhere. I was only able to get into a Hermeneutics seminar, but I experienced Traina's inductive approach to critical studies itself. That was as far as I was able to go in formal classes with Traina for the time being.

At the same time a Methodist OT scholar, Dennis Kinlaw joined the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary. He was an ancient Near Eastern studies specialist, committed to studying the OT against the background of the languages, literature, history and culture of that testament. Although Kinlaw did not use Traina's terminology for elaborating his hermeneutic, he did share his passion for inductive study. Kinlaw also shared Traina's ability to engage students in the study of Scripture with an almost magnetic attraction. In 1965-67, while doing a Th.M. in Old Testament under Kinlaw at Asbury, I taught biblical languages as a teaching fellow and then as a full time Instructor in Hebrew and Greek. This put me on the biblical studies faculty where I was able to listen to these two men and other biblical scholars interact professionally. In the process I picked up more of Traina's method. In 1968 I began work on a Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern studies at the

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD. Class attention to Traina's work came to a halt. But this did not prevent my own study of inductive Bible study, now buttressed by a desire to work as much as possible from primary sources.

A break through in understanding Traina's approach to inductive Bible study came, interestingly enough, while I studied the book of Romans in preparation for teaching a Sunday school class on this book. With Traina's *Methodical Bible Study* in one hand and the Greek NT in the other, as I prepared for the class I poured over notes of Traina's teaching that I had acquired before leaving Asbury and moving to John's Hopkins. In the process several aspects of inductive Bible study became clear, mostly matters related to discerning and describing the literary structure of a book like Romans. There my understanding of IBS stood for some time. My doctoral dissertation focused on the syntax of Hebrew poetry and offered few points of entre to IBS.

Upon graduation from the Johns Hopkins University I accepted an invitation to teach biblical studies at my alma mater, Indiana Wesleyan University (1973). The assignment had me teaching bible courses across the canon, mainly in book studies, along with biblical languages. This gave me opportunity to introduce IBS to the biblical curriculum and to experiment with various ways one could shape a syllabus for an IBS class designed to instruct under grads in the whole IBS "package." Limited as my grasp of IBS was, I tried to emulate Traina in these experiments.

About a year and a half into my work at Indiana Wesleyan, Dr. Traina came as guest lecturer and preacher at College Wesleyan Church. I attended carefully to Traina's "repackaging" of IBS for a lay audience. Traina visited a couple of my classes, and he invested extensive time in conversation with me for one-on-one instruction in IBS. He apparently sensed my enthusiastic commitment to the IBS method as I understood it, for within a year I received an invitation to join the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary. In the fall of 1976, I began to teach biblical studies (IBS and some other exegetical courses in Greek and Hebrew seminars) at Asbury Theological Seminary.

During my first year at Asbury Dr. Turner invited me to share his faculty office in the four room suite of offices directly over the main

entrance to the H. C. Morrison Administration building. He also gave me the extension lamp from his desk. All of this meant he had given me enough of his space and goods that he had to move his academic work home. Every time I sit down to work at my desk I think of George Turner and the ways he engaged me for IBS, because that old lamp is still affixed to my desk, along with the fluorescent bulb that it came with in 1973. At the same time, Dr. Traina arranged for me to teach a reduced load so that I could audit as many of his classes as possible and have time left over to serve as his grader. It was a crash course in methodical Bible study. I was exposed to his interpretation of the Gospel of Mark and of the Pentateuch. I finally saw for myself his mastery of classroom instruction about which I had heard so much and upon which I took extensive notes. First hand exposure to Traina was a fitting climax to a meandering journey of formal and informal preparation for this IBS assignment at Asbury Theological Seminary.

IBS in the Trenches of the Nation's Capital

In the spring of 1982 the Aspen Hill Wesleyan Church in Rockville, MD, invited me to come to the Washington D.C. area to pastor this church. This was the church we had attended during our years at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. It was in a Sunday school class at this church where my study of Romans had contributed so significantly to my understanding of IBS. After wrestling in prayer and conceding that downward mobility was always a viable option for disciples of Jesus, a la Traina's Mark class (!), our family took the strong promptings in our hearts to be the call of Christ. I resigned, effective the coming year.

We packed up and moved our family from Wilmore to Rockville, MD. The longer we served at Aspen Hill, however, the more I began to question our move to DC. If I were to be the person through whom God raised up a strong church in Washington through our congregation, the more I would need to think of a lifetime at this church, not a three-to-five-year rescue mission as I had anticipated. And that would be someone else's call. Teaching was still the deeper call on my life.

Pastoring in the suburbs of the nation's capital, however, I had learned a good bit about myself, about IBS and about pastoral ministry. Perhaps most important for our present topic, I discovered that as I studied Scripture employing the very IBS approach I had taught at Asbury, I never lacked for ideas or material from which to minister week after week. I approached the preaching task by doing book surveys in one "semester" on the biblical books I planned to minister from during the next "semester."

My approach in most cases was to minister first with a sermon/lesson on a book as a whole, and then to follow up this overview with a series of sermons based on some of the strategic passages inductively identified from the book's own literary structure. From this approach came sermon series on the book of Mark, the book of Genesis, the book of Romans, of Deuteronomy, of I Corinthians, of Hosea and of Ephesians. There was, e.g., "All We Were Meant to Be," from Genesis; "Religion to Master Metro Madness," from Deuteronomy (6:4-5); "Holiness for Hurting People," Ephesians. The overall project was simple—get the main points and major content from Scripture; communicate in simple, contemporary language. I was nurtured by the preparation; the congregation was well fed. The fountain of the living Word never went dry.

It also became clear that this IBS hermeneutic/method could be taught effectively to lay persons. Several in the congregation were interested in learning to study the Bible as I was modeling for them. Periodic seminars on Bible study method were well attended. The difference between a lay introduction to IBS and a more advanced presentation was primarily a matter of the text selected (biblical languages or vernacular), the level of terminology employed (e.g., "cause and effect" or "causation"; "question and answer" or "interrogation," precision in grammatical terminology, the difficulty of the biblical passage selected for lessons and other similar points. Part of my call has been the communicating of the IBS method and the hermeneutic entailed in it to lay persons. That desire led eventually to the publication of *Bible Study That Works* (revised edition, 1994), a 128 non-technical presentation of IBS.

Back to Asbury and Resources for Continued Growth

Meanwhile the provost at Asbury Theological Seminary had been saying the biblical studies faculty needed to fill the vacancy my departure in 1982 had left. If I was going to return to that teaching post, I should do so now. In the summer of 1986 our family moved back to Wilmore I left to pastor in Maryland. Regarding the development of my understanding of IBS itself, the most significant point in this transition was the opportunity to work with Dr. David Bauer who had joined Robert Traina in the IBS department in 1984.

David Bauer had graduated from Asbury Theological Seminary, where he studied extensively under Dr. Traina. Among the most gifted students with whom I had had the opportunity to work, by the time he graduated with the M. Div. from Asbury David had a formidable grasp of the IBS method of biblical study. In the few classes he took from me his work was penetrating, creative and full of insight. Upon graduating from Asbury David had gone to Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA. Faculty explicitly dedicated to the Biblical New York's approach to inductive Bible Study method no longer flavored biblical studies at Union with the inductive study tradition from the biblical seminary in New York, as Howard Kuist, Donald G. Miller, and Patrick Miller had done in earlier years. But the biblical studies faculty at Union was still populated by outstanding critical scholars like Paul and Elizabeth Achtemeier. David Bauer was particularly influenced by the premier NT scholar, Jack Kingsbury. Kingsbury's interest in literary criticism and the final form of the text provided a platform from which David could pursue his interest in literary structures as understood by Traina and other IBS scholars. His studies at Union under Kingsbury culminated in a dissertation on the literary structure of the Gospel of Mathew. This excellent work was published in 1989 as *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel, A Study in Literary Design* (JSNTS).

Thus my return to Asbury Theological Seminary in 1986 provided a priceless opportunity to learn from both of my colleagues, Traina and Bauer. Bauer followed Traina in incorporating the

standard critical methods, especially text criticism, literary criticism and form criticism, into IBS, buttressing the assertion that IBS was itself a comprehensive critical method. He also followed and extended Traina in his moves to clarify the process of induction by which observations were made and inferences drawn from evidence gathered in order to make interpretive claims leading to an interpretation of a passage. These emphases prove especially helpful in the interpretation of contested passages. Attention to both of these features of IBS strengthened my work.

Like other students of IBS I have been helped immensely by the publication of Traina and Bauer's recent, significant work, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, (Baker Academic, 2011). This "full length" (446 page) treatment allowed for more extensive, welcome work on evaluation, application and correlation. The extensive foot notes, bibliography and hermeneutical reflections in this book have been especially helpful to me. The work is as much a reference work as it is an analysis and model of the major aspects of IBS.

Another exceptional student with whom it was my privilege to labor and from whom I have learned much at ATS was Dr. Joseph Dongell. He came to the ATS faculty in 1988. Like Dr. Bauer, Joe Dongell was also a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary (M.Div., 1981) and a student of Robert Traina's. After his M.Div, at Asbury and a Masters in Classics at the University of Kentucky (1986), like Bauer he also had done doctoral work at Union Theological Seminary, VA (Ph.D, 1991), mentored by Jack Kingsbury. Taking advantage of Kingsbury's expertise and interest in literary criticism, Dongell's dissertation was a discourse analysis of the structure of the Gospel of Luke. rmati

Joe Dongell's interest in discourse analysis injected a linguistic precision into the department's already strong attention to literary structure. This became obvious in his handout on "Working With Literary Structure," one of a number of helpful studies of key aspects of IBS which he produced essentially as teaching aids, but which were more like concise, informative fascicles. His revised charts, combining titles for special materials, with attention to semantic, rhetorical and

correspondence structures proved helpful for both analysis and presentation of materials. With Dongell on board, the IBS staff at Asbury Seminary was now arguably one of the best in the world. I benefited tremendously from these and many more aspects of the work of Traina, Bauer and Dongell.

Several of my own interests were strengthened by the work of these brothers. My own efforts to integrate IBS and standard exegetical method took the form at first of OT seminars in which the text of reference was the MT, with the various English (and other) language versions standing among the front line of respected commentaries. So, for example in a prophets seminar we began by doing a book survey in the MT of the book of Micah, followed by segment and paragraph studies with assignments virtually the same as a conventional IBS course, but in this case executed in the biblical language. Of course this brought to IBS simultaneously both the precision and the ambiguity resident in the biblical languages. A Job seminar, using essentially the same method, began with a vernacular survey of the book as a whole and then proceeded by doing “thought-flows” of the speeches of Job. (No students and few faculty could have done an IBS book survey in Job’s Hebrew!) These thought-flows were a way of surveying segments by discerning the logic of Job in each speech, essentially a structural analysis of each speech. This set up the interpreter for discernment of the inter-speech (segment) structure. This structure could be reported as in a standard IBS survey and/or a map of the logic in terms of literary structure. Themes were readily discerned, structural clues (e.g., repeated conjunctions) often obscured or lost in the vernacular translations were clear.

The Canonical Dialogue and Its Preferences

My most important contribution to my students’ understanding of IBS has come, I think, at the point of evaluation. Having interpreted the passage, one must discern whether and how the passage as interpreted relates to the modern interpreter’s world. Evaluation was a hermeneutical move still open to more attention,

even after the excellent work of Drs. Traina and Bauer. Just as the metaphor of the interpreter as a detective helps students understand the processes of observation and interpretation, so the metaphor of the canonical dialogue or canonical town house meeting helps picture the evaluation process. The canonical dialogue imagines the biblical writers seated around a conference table, perhaps arranged by a pre-critical chronology. The placement of the biblical witnesses will be accomplished eventually by critical scholarship that attempts to date the “publication” of the biblical books. Here one must differentiate the date of the events or ideas in the book from the date of their publication in their canonical form as a matter to be clarified in the course of the discussion. We make charter claims regarding the canonical dialogue, presenting the effort as a Trinitarian endeavor. 1) Evaluation is sponsored by the Father; 2) chaired by the Son, the arbiter of the Word (e.g., Mark 2:28); and 3) enabled by the Holy Spirit. One traces the interaction among these canonical participants, much as one would trace the thought flow of a seminar. The goal is to answer the question: How does this text speak beyond its own time and place?

We discover that the biblical participants exhibit many of the logical moves present/possible in any other wide ranging dialogue or consultation. For example, some passages support another by essentially repeating the passage being evaluated (Exod 20:1-17 and Deut 5:1-21). Others support the first by appropriating it for their own use, which assumes agreement (e.g., Exod 20:8-11 and Amos 8:4-6). Some passages revise others, as we see already in Deut and Exod. Some contradict or refute others (Eccl 9:1-6,11-12 and 1 Cor 15:51-58). In the course of tracing the canonical consultation the way the theological claims of the passage under evaluation relate to the dialogue and to the reader often becomes clear(er). The various interactions are not novel, but the image of the interaction itself often fosters breakthrough insight.

The evaluator must remember that the entire conversation has been given to us as revelation, not just the resolution or evaluative verdict in the process (2 Tim 3:16-17). Persons valuing a biblical canon assume the relevance of the entire Scripture by the very nature of

canon. All Scripture comes to us as the Word of God; not all Scripture comes to us as the command of God, normative for Christian readers. Thus we note Jesus' pronouncement that food is no longer germane to spiritual "cleanness" (Mark 7:14-23 [notice Mark's note on the significance of considerable tracts of Torah in vs. 19]). Related passages in Torah remain informative for us (e.g., Lev 11), though they are no longer normative for the Church. At the highest level the dialogue itself has been given to us by the canonizers, reflecting the use of the books in the Church. Thus the books of Proverbs, Job, Qohelet generate a lively discussion simply by being put in canonical proximity to one another. Adding any one of the Gospels or the book of Romans will extend, enrich, and at many points revise their witness. Sometimes the dialogue has been intentionally engaged by the participants (perhaps Paul on 1 Cor 15 on Qohelet 9?). Evidence will not always allow a clear judgment. How the dialogue came to surface in a given passage will usually not be as important as the fact that it is present.

In order to arrive at an evaluative conclusion, the interpreters must bring evaluative criteria to the table. The evaluator should not expect an immediate "silver bullet" passage which by itself will provide all the information necessary for reaching evaluative conclusions regarding the degree of transcendence a given passage carries. It will often be necessary to cite several converging pieces of evidence in order to discern a satisfactory evaluative conclusion. Several criteria or passages heading toward criteria emerge. Some of the more significant are the following:

A. The hermeneutic of Jesus himself, as preserved, e.g., in part in the Gospel of Mark:

- Subordinate Torah to the purpose of the Torah Giver (Mark 2:27-28; 7:6-7).
- Evaluate a passage in its theological-cultural context. Note Jesus' appeal to the Pharisees' "hardness of hearts" as the reason God allowed divorce as Moses presented it (Mark 10:3-5, referring to Deut 24:1-4).

- Follow the canon's own subordination guidance. Thus Jesus follows up his response to the Pharisees' appeal to Deut 24 by subordinating it and the ethic found in it to Gen 2:21-24 where the Creator's higher will was found.

B. The two testament canon introduces an evaluative bias into the entire evaluative task by subordinating the Old Testament to the New (e.g., as treated extensively by the book of Hebrews).

C. The Christo-centricity of the NT provides an intra-testamental evaluative preference. This is seen, among other places, in the apostolic tendency to cite Jesus as the preferred pattern of response to their preaching/writing. See, e.g., "Walk in love, *as Christ loved us* and gave himself for us" (Eph 5:2).

D. Chronological development. Given the historical flow of biblical revelation, one might expect later Scripture to be preferred over earlier revelation. Sometimes this is so, but not necessarily. Consider the book of Deuteronomy in this regard. Though set relatively early, it can scarcely be improved upon in its presentation of the structure and content of the Sinai covenant.

The hermeneutical steps of evaluation and correlation with the demands of their synthetic purposes commends IBS as a truly "comprehensive guide" to the practice of hermeneutics, as the sub-title of Bauer and Traina's new "Inductive Bible Study" claims. While accessing as necessary all aspects of critical scholarship we keep the final form of the text central for the edification of the Church and every person in it.