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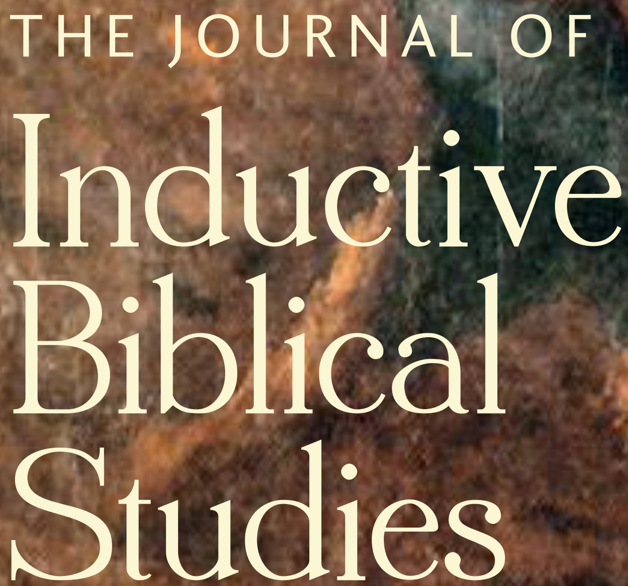
Inductive Biblical Studies



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The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies intends to promote the hermeneutical approach to the study of the Scriptures generally known as Inductive Biblical Studies. By Inductive Biblical Study (IBS) we mean the hermeneutical movement initiated by William Rainey Harper and Wilbert Webster White that was embodied in the curriculum of The Biblical Seminary in New York founded in 1900. This approach had precursors in the history of interpretation and has since the beginning of the twentieth-century enjoyed widespread dissemination, being taught at such institutions as Princeton Theological Seminary, Columbia Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Fuller Theological Seminary, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Azusa Pacific University, and Asbury Theological Seminary, as well as hundreds of other institutions and organizations around the world.

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The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies

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From the Editors

David R. Bauer

Inductive Bible study is concerned, of course, with hermeneutics; and hermeneutics is the science of meaning. Thus, one should expect that insights from biblical hermeneutics may be relevant and indeed may potentially inform in a significant way other disciplines in their search for meaning in their respective areas of knowledge. Yet, such an application of insights from biblical hermeneutics to other fields of knowledge has up to this point been practically nonexistent.

This volume of the *Journal* seeks to address this failure in cross-disciplinary conversation. It is particularly appropriate that the cross-fertilization between biblical studies and other academic disciplines should be broached by practitioners of inductive Bible study. For the pioneers of the inductive Bible study movement emphasized that all knowledge in the world is profoundly interconnected, and that one can enter into this vast range of knowledge at any point and move from discipline to discipline, with a view toward experiencing how every sphere of knowledge contributes to all the others. Indeed, the founders of The Biblical Seminary in New York, the institution in which the inductive study of the Bible was originally centered, dreamed of establishing a university in which inductive Bible study would inform every other discipline in the university curriculum, and conversely would be itself informed by every other discipline.

Unfortunately, such an institutional vision never materialized. But the epistemological vision has remained latent in inductive Bible study through the years.

This issue features articles by three scholars who represent diverse disciplines. But they share an understanding of, and enthusiasm for,

inductive Bible study; all of them took significant work in inductive Bible study during their seminary educations. And they share, too, a desire to see the insights of the inductive study of the Bible inform their own disciplines.

Dr. Lindy D. Backues explores ways in which biblical hermeneutics intersects with the hermeneutics associated with the social sciences, and especially with cultural anthropology. Both are concerned with the interpretation of narratives. For even the portions of the Bible that belong to genres other than narrative have a profound narrative sub-text. And cultural anthropology is concerned with the narratives embedded within human societies. Here Backues unveils the vast areas of overlap between the study of the Bible and the study of indigenous cultures. This article is actually the first of three installments from Backues. The other articles will appear in subsequent issues of the *Journal*, and will more specifically apply the principles of inductive Bible study to cultural anthropology.

Dr. Kenneth W. Brewer considers the contribution of inductive Bible study to systematic theology. Brewer notes the incongruity between the claim made by virtually all Christian bodies that their beliefs are based upon the Bible and the reality of increasingly disparate doctrinal views among them. Brewer traces this diversity in doctrinal formulations on the side of theologians to the (often unacknowledged) role of philosophical and ideological influences in the development of doctrine, and on the side of biblical scholars to the multiplicity of exegetical methods and hermeneutical perspectives. Brewer insists that inductive Bible study offers assistance in that it insists upon reading the biblical text on its own terms, with a process that seeks to reflect the very character of the text itself; it can thus lead the Church, in its various theological manifestations, to a consensual way of interpreting the Bible that will at least mitigate the chaos of multiple and sometimes conflicting doctrinal construals.

Finally, Dr. Anthony J. Headley probes the ways in which inductive biblical study, especially as presented in *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, by David R. Bauer

and Robert A. Traina,[1] can inform the field of counseling. Headley probes the similarities between the documentary character of the biblical text and document-like nature of human beings, and insists that these similarities form a bridge between inductive biblical hermeneutics and the practice of counseling. Such a bridge is suggested also by the consideration that both biblical study and counseling focus upon the meaning of language; insofar as counseling centers on verbal interactions with the counselee, the interpretation of discourse is just as central to the therapist as it is to the biblical interpreter.

A final note is in order regarding the sequencing of the volumes of *The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies*. The present issue of *JIBS* is the Winter Volume 6 No. 1 for 2019. Despite appearances, we have not skipped Volume 5; rather, Volume 5 is a dedicated stand-alone paper-printed collection of essays in Honor of Robert A. Traina: *Method in Teaching Inductive Bible Study—A Practitioner's Handbook* that also contains 54 pages of unpublished material by Dr. Traina, "Method in Bible Teaching," courtesy of his surviving children. In the volume, twenty-one essays treat Traina's Pedagogy; IBS and the Academy; IBS Impacting the Curriculum; Pedagogy, Assessments, and Technology; and Developing Disciples with IBS in the Church. Appendices include a number of syllabi for undergraduate and graduate level courses.

This book honoring Dr. Traina is the first of the new JIBS Monograph Series published by GlossaHouse and will be released in the early Spring 2019. Contributions in order of appearance are made by David R. Bauer, Fredrick J. Long, Chris A. Kiesling, Kenneth L. Schenck, Eugene E. Lemcio, John Dendui, Gareth Lee Cockerill, Dorothy Jean Weaver, John N. Oswalt, Lindy D. Backues, Michael D. Matlock, Rick Boyd, Mark Cannon, Alan J. Meenan, Eugene Wen Zhi Quek, Chad M. Foster, and Matt Friedeman. This book provides a breadth of information for the implementation of IBS in the classroom, curriculum, and church from the leading educators and pastors who have been formed by the pedagogy and IBS methodology of Dr. Traina.

[1] David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

Construing Culture as Composition—Part 1: The Narrative Nature of Truth

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Abstract

This is the first of three articles that attempts to repurpose an exegetical/hermeneutical methodology primarily designed for the study of the biblical text, with a view toward analyzing a particular cultural scene in West Java, Indonesia. By doing so, I attempt to illustrate the way in which methods in theological hermeneutics can cast light upon cultural hermeneutics. In this first installment, I take a close look at the narrative (as opposed to propositional) nature of all knowledge and knowing. I also illustrate that narrative nature by way of a look at a well-known anthropological methodology, one with its own strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses of this methodology will offer to us space for suggesting an alternative in future installments.

Key Terms: anthropology, theology, ethnography, social and cultural anthropology, hermeneutics, biblical studies, cultural anthropology, and biblical hermeneutics

Introduction

We are a meaning-seeking species, a simple realization that carries with it substantial implications. I unpack a few of these in this series of ar-

ticles on hermeneutics and the quest for a widened application of Robert A. Traina's interpretive methodology. Bruce J. Malina gets us started with this observation:

> All human beings carry on an interpretive enterprise. As a rule, people carry in their heads one or more models of "society" and "human being" which greatly influence what they look for in their experiences, what they actually see, and what they eventually do with their observations by way of fitting them along with other facts into a larger scheme of explanation. In this respect, every human being, tutored or not, is no different from any trained observer in our society.[1]

For me, this realization initially presented itself concretely and specifically. When I was in seminary, I made the hike from one end of the campus to the other several times on any given day. Typically, biblical studies classes would let out at twenty past the hour, which meant that I would make my way across campus to the School of World Mission and Evangelism—from the "biblical" to the "anthropological" end—often just in time before my next class began some ten minutes later. I have always thought it revealing that the disciplinary rift sometimes found between theological studies and anthropology on many a seminary campus seemed to be so dramatized by the actual physical layout of my alma mater.

More instructive, though perhaps less semiotic, was the resemblance in course content I frequently noticed at both ends of campus; a congruity which, ironically, often coincided with a disturbing lack of personal and relational affinity between the two departments. Much to my confusion, I would regularly walk out of an exegesis class, having

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[1] Bruce J. Malina, "Reading Theory Perspective: Reading Luke–Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 3–23, 15.

just been privy to a penetrating—and not infrequently moving—discourse on the fundamental principles of biblical interpretation and their application, only to find essentially these very same principles—albeit in social science dress—proffered in my next class by an anthropology or missiology lecturer. Yet, despite this seeming conceptual similarity, there appeared to be no love lost between individuals occupying chairs in each of these respective disciplines. Those involved seemed entirely unaware of their kinship to colleagues in other "competing" departments. I lived with this tension for my first few years of formal theological training. It troubled me then and it troubles me still, due both to its cognitive incongruity and to the unnecessary dissension it produced on campus.[2]

One day, toward the end of my seminary program, I stumbled upon a new spin on an old word that ultimately developed into a profound heuristic template for me. A guest speaker, a distinguished biblical scholar from another academic institution on the east coast, conceded in her presentation that the task at hand in exegeting a biblical text was that of *hermeneutics*—an involvement in the art and process of interpretation. This, of course, was not a new idea for me; on the contrary, it was simply common seminary knowledge. The topic of biblical hermeneutics was part of standard seminary fare virtually anywhere one chose to study. Instead, it was what she went on to claim that forced me to sit up and take notice. As an underpinning of *all* of life's activities, she said, from chatting with a neighbor to functioning on the local school board, from reading a newspaper to struggling for a promotion, in *all* these situations we are constantly involved in the inevitable undertaking of encoding and decoding. We are meaning-givers and meaning-seekers in every one of our daily affairs and thus, she said, hermeneutics can never be for us some removed-from-reality pro-

[2] Here I am reminded of the (possibly apocryphal) comment made by an eminent lecturer of missiology at a large North American seminary lamenting that the only thing connecting their school of theology and their school of world missions was the plumbing.

cess—a hermetically sealed-off, cabbalistic enterprise exclusively reserved for theologians reinforced by Greek and Hebrew scholars. The hermeneutic task—whether we realize it or not—embraces the very stuff of life itself.

This provided me much fodder for thought that so many of my lecturers overlooked—the very element that caused me to hear remarkably corresponding theories issue forth from members of two such sharply segregated parties! While one could find a lecturer from each of these disciplines championing principles of hermeneutics peculiar to his or her individual field, each, in fact, often unwittingly succeeded in mirroring those self-same ideas also being brandished as unique by his or her rival across campus. Thus, the two groups ended up sounding curiously (and revealingly) alike—a fact which would have been most disconcerting for those involved.

Consequently, hermeneutics came to occupy a special place in my thinking and since that time I have kept my eyes and ears open for its reappearance. My attentiveness was intended to test the hypothesis that a hermeneutically astute method aimed at probing biblical meaning applies to contexts wider than those normally supposed—it offers insight into the living of life itself. What follows will bear this out.

Of course, many more insightful people than myself have also come to advocate similar versions of this tenet, such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, and Clifford Geertz, who have offered their own calls for a widening of the hermeneutical terrain. But I do not intend the thesis here to be a mere echoing of their ideas. For another thought has also puzzled me since my seminary days: Why is it that those who are cognizant of the conceptual bridge between hermeneutics in the social sciences and hermeneutics in biblical studies seem only to want to traverse the trestle in one direction?

Note that it is not uncommon to come across studies in which social science constructs are applied to the biblical text as a means for gaining a deeper grasp of its import. I only need to mention Malina[3]

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[3] Bruce J. Malina, "Why Interpret the Bible with the Social Sciences," *ABQ* 2

or Jerome H. Neyrey,[4] both members of "The Context Group,"[5] in order give example. One of the fruits of their endeavors, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, is a fine contribution toward gaining insights from the social sciences to yield needed cultural cues for interpreting the biblical text. Or Kenneth Tollefson, the Christian anthropologist/missiologist at Seattle Pacific University, has examined the Old Testament book of Nehemiah more than once with a view toward providing guidelines for community organizers and cross-cultural missionaries.[6] Further examples are legion.

But once again, notice the traffic heads in only one direction. One is obliged to ask: where are all the biblical scholars enlisted in the task—those reputed to have the most experience with hermeneutically astute methodologies designed to quarry meaning from the biblical text? Would not their expertise be put to good use if employed in the analysis of cultural scenes as their hermeneutical foci? Where are those of similar ilk willing to set their sights on present-day cultural phenomena, savants sporting an array of finely-honed interpretive skills previously cultivated? Do these persons shy away from the task since culture as presently lived and experienced is so radically different from events encrypted in ancient codices? Is interpretation of written material a process so peculiar that it calls for an entirely different approach? By hearing from Dilthey, Heidegger, Ricoeur, and Geertz, I show this to be a false dichotomy.

(1983): 119–33; Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986).

[4] Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991).

[5] According to Neyrey, in 1986 this group of scholars "formed a seminar to apply the social sciences for interpretation of biblical texts" (*Social World*, ix).

[6] Kenneth Tollefson, "Nehemiah, Model for Change Agents: A Social Science Approach to Scripture," *Christian Scholar's Review* 15 (1986): 107–24; Kenneth Tollefson, "The Nehemiah Model for Christian Missions," *Missiology* 15 (1987): 31–55. In the second installment of this series of articles I also will look at Nehemiah to illustrate a biblical hermeneutical method that is transferable to the discipline of anthropology.

In this first article, we will take a short look at the history and development of the notion of hermeneutics. By broadening the term's utility, we will then be poised to analyze the interpretive process outside of biblical studies. Next, we will examine a representative example of this broadened interpretive process by looking at the social sciences—namely, that represented by anthropologist James Spradley's *Development Research Sequence Method.*

In the second article (the one that follows the present one), I will more fully explore a fruitful methodology that was birthed from within biblical exegetical studies—Robert A. Traina's methodology that he called "Methodical Bible Study."[7] Since this method is not widely known, I will offer there an illustration of Traina's procedure as applied to the scriptures, so that the reader might be clear as to what it includes. Features of striking similarity will be apparent between these two approaches.

Finally, in the third article of this series, given the paucity of cases in which the interpretation of a cultural scene borrows from biblical hermeneutical methodologies, I will employ Traina's method to interpret a specific cultural scene: small-scale peddling in West Java, Indonesia. Even this modest, brief, and solitary example will show that interpretive approaches in anthropology are impoverished if scholars continue to neglect their sister discipline, narrative biblical criticism.

The Notion of Hermeneutics

In discussing the origins of hermeneutics, Bernard Ramm makes the following observation:

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[7] What Robert A. Traina called "Methodical Bible Study" is now known as "Inductive Bible Study." I will also be drawing from notes gleaned from Traina's class lectures during his tenure at Asbury Theological Seminary (1966–1988), from his book that first laid out his methodology (Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002]), as well as the book he coauthored with David R. Bauer toward the end of his life (*Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014]).

> Arbitrary interpretation may be a wrenching of the truth of the text or it may be the overapplication of a legitimate procedure (as in typological interpretation). The conscious setting up of rules is hermeneutics (from the god Hermes, messenger of the gods, hence *hermēneuein*, to interpret; *hermēneia*, interpretation, commentary; and *hē hermēneutikē technē*, the skill or art of interpretation).[8]

The term ἑρμηνεύω (*hermēneuō*) and its cognates, from which we derive an array of related English words, enjoy a lengthy history in classical and biblical Greek. In classical sources, they have three primary meanings: (1) to speak or speak plainly, (2) to express or articulate, or (3) to translate.[9] In the Septuagint (LXX), the terminology relates to translation (e.g., Gen 42:23; Esth 10:3; Ezra 4:7), although at times "describing" is also present (e.g., Job 42:18).[10] In the New Testament over half of the 20 or so occurrences of this word group carry the idea of translation. In Luke 24:27, *diermēneuō* clearly involves exposition or interpretation. The remaining seven occurrences are all connected to the interpretation of tongues.[11] Thus, with etymological inspiration from the Greek mythological messenger Hermes, the term hermeneutics and its cognates as found in these ancient documents denote translation or the conveyance of meaning from one realm to another with a view toward comprehension.

Consequently, clustered around the term hermeneutics there arose a distinctive theological discipline concerned with the interpretation of sacred texts, primarily those of the biblical corpus.[12] A corresponding attempt was made to establish rules or principles which would prevent the process of interpretation from degenerating into a completely arbitrary discipline.[13] As G. H. Schodde states,

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8 Bernard Ramm et al., *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 7.

9 Anthony C. Thiselton, "Explain," *NIDNTT* 1:573–84, 579–80.

10 Thiselton, "Explain," 580.

11 Thiselton, "Explain," 581–82.

12 F. F. Bruce, "Hermeneutics," *NBD*², 476.

13 Ramm et al., *Hermeneutics*, 7. Of course, Midrashic hermeneutics has been in

> In nearly all cases, interpretation has in mind the thoughts of another, and then, further, these thoughts expressed in another language than that of the interpreter. In this sense it is used in Bib. research. A person has interpreted the thoughts of another when he has in mind a correct reproduction or photograph of the thought as it was conceived in the mind of the original writer or speaker. It is accordingly a purely reproductive process, involving no originality of thought on the part of the interpreter. If the latter adds anything of his own it is *eisegesis* [reading into the text] and not *exegesis* [culling from the text].[14]

A Broadening of the Term's Utility

Many now realize that the focus of hermeneutics must be expanded. Rouse makes the point well:

> Many of the objects of interpretation in the human sciences are not themselves texts, of course. But actions, artifacts, social relations, and individual lives are analogues of texts in an important respect. The terms in which we understand them, as clear or confused, significant or insignificant, are the same ones that guide our interpretation of texts. These various components of human life have a sense that can be expressed in words, even when not originally articulated this way. We interpret an action or artifact by saying what it means. This description proceeds with the same circular structure of presupposition and interpretation that characterizes the reading of a text. We interpret actions by using words; we interpret texts by using words different from the origi-

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existence since before the time of Christ. See Thiselton's discussion of the Midrashic tradition and its bearing upon contemporary understanding of biblical hermeneutics in general ("Explain," 580–81).

[14] G. H. Schodde, "Interpretation," *ISBE* 3:1489–90.

> nal ones. In either case, we understand them as already meaningful, and we take that same meaning to be expressible in a form different from the original.[15]

Thus, in response to statements like Schodde's just above wherein the hermeneutical task is envisioned as simple one-to-one correspondence (often deemed a "mirroring" approach to interpretation), the last couple of centuries have witnessed a wholesale deepening and widening of what is thought to be involved in the process.

The *deepening* has come about due to a realization of the naïveté of postulating interpretation as a mere detached "reproductive process." It is now realized that, in the enterprise of hermeneutics, the undertaking is far more than a mere indifferent clarification of the technical difficulties and challenges found in texts (often the German term *Erklären* is employed here—descriptive, technical explanation). Instead, the exegete must attempt to grasp the import of the communication event at its deepest levels (*Verstehen*—discerning comprehending or understanding).[16] Hence, Thiselton maintains:

> [I]f the interpreter is to understand a text adequately and correctly, due account must be taken of his own subjectivity. His own presuppositions, cultural orientation, and psychological capacities will shape his understanding of the text. Some of these presuppositions may act as a barrier to understanding; yet it is more important to note that they also serve as an indispensable point of contact with the subject-matter of the text, at least at the commencement of the ongoing process of understanding.[17]

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15 Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 44.

16 Ramm et al., *Hermeneutics*, 7, 134.

17 Thiselton, "Explain," 583.

The one sitting before the text—the interpreter—is no mere spectator; she or he undeniably figures in the equation. Remaining oblivious to this fact will not only distort the interpretive process but, as alluded to above, it will also deprive the exegete of a crucial realization that can prove quite helpful in the hermeneutical process: the awareness of "historicality."[18] Both the text and the interpreter are historical entities, each possessing a unique context. Hence, a meeting of these two entities can serve to engender a whole range of new insights. Thiselton argues, "the horizons of the interpreter and the horizons of the text must be brought into a relationship of active engagement and dialogue, until the two sets of judgments, or of question and answers, become eventually fused into one."[19] This view relates to an entanglement that philosophers deem "the hermeneutical circle." Its influence can be felt not only in biblical studies, but indeed it colors the entire quest for human understanding. We will examine its impact in more detail below.

The *widening* of the discipline of hermeneutics involves its purview being broadened beyond the confines of theological studies. Hence, the present-day science of hermeneutics now designates "the interpretation of or the search for meaning in texts, in human existence, in society, and so on."[20] This came about primarily by way of the realization that any cultural event or artifact seems virtually to cry out for interpretation. *Homo sapiens* is a meaning-giving creature attempting to make sense of life. Tellingly, the sociological phenomenon of communal meaninglessness has been labelled by Émile Durkheim, *anomie* (i.e.,

[18] Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Wolfhart Pannenberg are mainly responsible for developing the concept of "historicality" or historical relativity. Cf. Thiselton, "Explain," 583; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

[19] "Explain," 583. This is reminiscent of Hans-Georg Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" (*Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. [New York: Continuum, 1998]; Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* [Oxford: Polity, 1987]).

[20] Charlotte Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 136.

the lack or present irrelevance of a publicly accepted, socially-functioning set of interpretive principles).[21]

The collective endowment of cultural elements with public meaning is most generally a tacit process. This is due to its functioning by means of a socially agreed-upon constellation of implied standards and statutes, what sociologists and anthropologists call *Weltanschauung* (i.e., world view). However, whenever a crossing of world view channels between two or more social actors or groups of social actors arises, communicative dissonance occurs, whether it is due to temporal distance (generational variance), geographical distance (locality variance), philosophical distance (ideological variance), or any other potential distance. And if an increasing amount of dissonance is apparent, a person will become acutely aware of the interpretive process (i.e., the demand for and the process of interpretation will become exceedingly manifest as a conscious one). To philosophers and social scientists alike, this fact serves only to underscore the ubiquitous, hermeneutically-steeped enterprise latent in everyday affairs. For the average person, society is ultimately a text in need of exegesis.

Historically, the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey was one of the first to call attention to this fact:

> [He] argued that many nontextual features of human life, such as actions, tools, social roles, and individual lives, can and should be taken as meaningful in the same way as texts are…. Dilthey thought that only by taking meaning seriously could we have any

21 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967). Lesslie Newbigin links the diminution of biblical hermeneutics and the resulting appearance of anomie in the Christian community: "[In the biblical vision,] if there is no point in the story as a whole, there is no point in my own action. If the story is meaningless, any action of mine is meaningless. The loss of a vision for the future necessarily produces that typical phenomenon of our society which the sociologists call anomie, a state in which publicly accepted norms and values have disappeared" (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 91).

> hope of understanding human beings and the social milieu in which they—we—live.[22]

Embracing this line of thinking, philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Jürgen Habermas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and others have pushed the point even further.[23] Developing the science of hermeneutics into an all-encompassing philosophical system, these thinkers have sought to gild the very act of living with the paradigm's impressive analytical power. Thus, they have ardently opposed the

> traditional accounts of hermeneutics as the epistemology of a particular region of knowledge (the *Geisteswissenschaften*) [which] distinguish[es] sharply between the artificial language of the natural sciences and the ordinary language of human interaction…. [Instead, the broader form of hermeneutics] collapses both of these distinctions by insisting that everyday knowledge and scientific knowledge are not different in kind.[24]

This is a step that even Dilthey, a product of his age, was not yet prepared to take. For, while it is true that Dilthey was a pioneer in opposing an empiricist model of knowledge for what we today would term the social sciences, he still "conceded the adequacy of empiricist accounts

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22 Rouse, *Knowledge and Power*, 42. Cf. Bruce, "Hermeneutics."

23 Martin Heidegger *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962); cf. Stanley Rosen, "Squaring the Hermeneutical Circle," *Review of Metaphysics* 44 (1991): 707–28; Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1968); Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow and W. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press), 73–102; Thiselton, *New Horizons*; and David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 350–51.

24 Rouse, *Knowledge and Power*, 51. Robert N. Bellah et al. make a similar appeal for a dissolving of the division between the humanities and the social sciences (*Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* [New York: Harper & Row, 1985], 297–307).

of the physical and biological sciences but [simply] insisted that extending empiricism to account for the scholarly investigation of human life and culture was illegitimate."[25] With this step taken by Dilthey's successors, however, all of life has become subject to interpretation. Like breathing, they say, humans need to exegete to maintain life.

The Hermeneutical Circle

Picking up on Dilthey's analogy of life as a text to be explained, philosopher Paul Ricoeur has framed the interpretive process as a three-phase hermeneutical dialectic in which human inquiry moves (1) from understanding as a guess about the whole (2) to explanation as a moment of testing and structuring one's guesses and (3) back to understanding as comprehension.[26] Something like this three-fold mechanism has historically been labelled "the hermeneutical circle." Rosen describes it well: "The traditional version of the hermeneutical circle goes something like this: whereas the parts must be understood in terms of the whole, the whole can be understood only by way of the parts."[27]

With such a circuitous movement appears two terms briefly mentioned earlier: *Erklären* (to explain or interpret) and *Verstehen* (to understand), labels corresponding to Ricoeur's second and third movements above. In Ricoeur's thought, these two components which constitute the interpretive enterprise—explanation and comprehension—do not stand in opposition to each other since they serve together to dialectically illuminate and provoke the interpretive process. Here is how he lays out the process.

The initial phase, "naïve grasping," involves a revelatory moment in which insight dawns upon the interpreter at the commencement of

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[25] Rouse, *Knowledge and Power*, 42.

[26] Mark Kline Taylor, "Symbolic Dimensions in Cultural Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 26 (1985): 167–85, 168.

[27] Rosen, "Squaring the Hermeneutical Circle," 707.

the attempt to interpret.[28] As we will see below, it is the legitimacy of this very point that provides a base to spur the process on, thereby keeping interpretation from degenerating into thorough-going relativism. Thus, Rosen can say:

> What has been traditionally called the hermeneutical circle is not circular. We do indeed understand the parts in terms of the whole, and the whole in terms of the parts. In each case, namely, with respect to the whole as well as to its parts, *what initiates interpretation is understanding, which I am willing to call insight or even intuition, to say nothing of the many other names that this everywhere accessible but impossible to analyze phenomenon has been assigned.* Understanding becomes either circular or regressive when we attempt to explain it on the basis of a conceptual analysis of pre-understanding. But pre-understanding, after all is said and done, is just understanding.[29]

And this is just what Ricoeur calls it: "*understanding* as a guess about the whole." Ricoeur's "naïve grasping" constitutes a veritable "first principle" out of which everything else springs.[30] This points to the fundamental faith commitment which he believes is inherent in the entire process of living; faith being the crucial (and unavoidable) element.[31] Newbigin echoes this same idea, "[C]ircularity is … the mark

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28 Taylor, "Symbolic Dimensions," 168.

29 Rosen, "Squaring the Hermeneutical Circle," 727, emphasis added.

30 Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 286.

31 Cf. the underscoring of this principle by Thomas Kuhn as it relates to the physical sciences: "The man who embraces a new paradigm at an early stage must often do so in defiance of the evidence provided by problem-solving. *He must, that is, have faith that the new paradigm will succeed* with the many large problems that confront it, knowing only that the older paradigm has failed with a few. *A decision of that kind can only be made on faith*" (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd. ed. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970], 158, emphasis added). Kuhn's work, of course, has been of primary importance in the recent widespread repudiation of the fissure purportedly separating *Geisteswissenschaften* (humanities) from *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences).

of all fundamental thinking. One can stand outside the circle, declining to accept the starting point. But then, if one is to make any sense of things at all, one has to work in another circle."[32] Thus, a satisfactory hermeneutical approach will be forced to "recognize *belief* as the source of all knowledge and consciously embrace a 'fiduciary framework.'"[33] Or, in time-honored Augustinian terms, "unless one believes, one shall not understand."[34]

This is not the end of the issue. We will return to the hermeneutical circle momentarily. But following on with Ricoeur's logic we see that the second movement involves an attempt to arrange, organize, and validate based upon the aforementioned initial intuition. "It orders the whole and fills it out, identifying and relating its parts in 'systems' or 'structures,' in an effort to 'verify' or 'validate' the guess."[35] Hence, *Erklären*—the term that points to descriptive, structured, and analytical explanation—follows on from the intuitive hunch as a means of appraising its veracity in a tactile world. And in the third phase of this construct,

> [E]xplanation has led to comprehensive "understanding" of a possible whole world and a preferred "mode of being-in-the-world." … Departing from a naive guess, explanation makes it possible for interpreters to "comprehend" [*Verstehen*] the fundamental "boundary situations" and "existential conflicts" of human being-in-the-world. Explanation is, therefore, a mediation between the two stages of understanding [i.e., between intuition and comprehension].[36]

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32 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 94.

33 Michael Polanyi as cited in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 359, emphasis original.

34 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 359. The Latin phrase is *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*.

35 Taylor, "Symbolic Dimensions," 168.

36 Taylor, "Symbolic Dimensions," 169.

As Ricoeur himself puts it, "understanding precedes, accompanies, closes and thus *envelops* explanation. In return, explanation *develops* understanding analytically."[37] Within Ricoeur's framework, then, the hermeneutical circle is an ever-expanding spiral leading on to greater clarity in the evolving process of comprehending. This is very similar to the type of progressive dialectic movement found in Martin Heidegger's hermeneutical philosophy:

> Not to be confused with the kind of circular reasoning that consists in begging the question, [Heidegger's] hermeneutical circular [*sic*] way of thinking involves a continual interpretation and reinterpretation in which understanding of Being that is already given with human existence itself is rounded out and corrected while, correspondingly, human existence becomes progressively understood in the light of Being.[38]

However, remembering I promised to return to the earlier discussion concerning the more circular form of the hermeneutical circle, there does remain a problem. Whether we call upon Ricoeur's "naïve

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[37] Cited in Taylor, "Symbolic Dimensions," 168.

[38] John Macquarrie, as cited in Frank N. Magill, ed., *Masterpieces of World Philosophy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990). Cf. John Macquarrie, *Martin Heidegger* (Richmond: John Knox, 1968). Although in this series of articles I will exploit this threefold dialectical pattern by using slightly different nomenclature, it must be realized that *verstehen* (to understand) is not actually so much a step in the process itself as it is an evolving disclosure brought on by the first two phases. It parallels what Traina, whose hermeneutical method we will take up in the next article in this series, designates "application": "Theoretically, the application of a passage represents the sum total of [its] preceding two steps [observation and interpretation]. For once one has discovered the universal truth of a passage as well as the contemporary situation which falls within its province, then one may bring the passage to bear on the situation, and the result is application" (*Methodical Bible Study*, 215; Bauer and Traina later shift the terminology to "appropriation"; cf. *Inductive Bible Study*, 319–35). Thus, the verb *verstehen* can (and probably always should) shift from emphasizing the process of understanding as comprehension (the third moment) back to understanding as a guess about the whole (the first moment), only to begin the interpretive process all over again. This is what is meant by continual interpretation and reinterpretation which rounds out and corrects.

grasp" or upon Heidegger's "pre-understanding," we are still operating at an *a priori*, individualized, parochial level, reminiscent of Wittgenstein's language games. The problem is that this hooks all understanding (including any endowment of interpretive insight) into a privatized, self-fabricated process. Consequently, reality can easily degenerate into a mere by-product of a self-indulgent, cloistered mental process with all universal meaning finally left up for grabs. Where, then, is the arbiter in this quest for understanding? Are all attempts to interpret equally valid? Are all "naïve graspings" equally satisfactory? What about the world we experience every day? What prevents us from mistakenly reifying our idiosyncratic cognitive models and treating them as if *they* were reality?

Rosen suggests,

> If the process is entirely constructive, if in other words the sense of the perceived entity is entirely produced by the act of perception, then cognition is not world-construction (which requires subordination of cognition to general laws that cannot themselves be the products of a given and contingent world-horizon); it is an act of radical arbitrariness, and therefore it is not at all the production of senses but senseless or chaotic flux.
>
> Since we cannot evade this lapse into chaos by the construction of transcendental structures of spontaneity, there remains only one method for assessing and regulating the insights of the living intelligence, and this, not surprisingly, is by checking them against our experience, both discursive and silent. The traditional method for determining whether one has understood a … text is two fold: first, we attempt to explain all parts of the text as integral to a whole; second, we discuss our interpretations with other persons, whose competency we determine, not by rules and conformity to models, but on the basis of the understanding their words exhibit.[39]

[39] "Squaring the Hermeneutical Circle," 725.

Thus, the key to disarming a "vicious" (read: circular) form of the hermeneutical circle is by means of (1) an appeal to everyday life which is (2) lived out collectively amid others.

First, we will consider the "everydayness" of this proposal. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz attests, "common sense, or some kindred conception, has become a central category, almost *the* central category, in a wide range of modern philosophical systems."[40] One need not search far for validation of Geertz's statement. The view is so widely embraced that authorities in an array of disciplines echo this similar conviction.[41]

Geertz himself, in a chapter entitled *Common Sense as a Cultural System*, offers five seemingly universal "quasi-qualities" of common sense "as an everywhere-found cultural form":[42]

1. Naturalness	An air of "of-courseness," a sense of "it figures" being cast over all things;
2. Practicalness	The quality of being able to know what's what;
3. Thinness	The belief that the world is what the wide-awake, uncomplicated person takes it to be;
4. Immethodicalness	A shameless and unapologetical "ad hoc-ness";
5. Accessibleness	The belief that any person with faculties reasonably intact can grasp the conclusions reached.

[40] Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 76.

[41] As representative here, see Robert N. Bellah, "Social Science as Practical Reason," in *Ethics, the Social Sciences, and Policy Analysis*, ed. Daniel Callahan and Bruce Jennings (New York: Plenum, 1983), 37–64; Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History*. Especially note Appleby and associates' focus on "practical reason" and "pragmatism" and the role each has in the hermeneutical enterprise (247–53; 283–91). In fact, directly related to its rightful position in the interpretive task, Rouse contends that "the various versions of pragmatism that have emerged as responses to the collapse of empiricism can usefully be regarded as an attempt to universalize hermeneutics" (*Knowledge and Power*, 41).

[42] Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 85; these are discussed in 85–91.

While the entirety of Geertz's article is an attempt to illustrate the parochial nature of common sense as a cultural artifact (hence, his title: *Common Sense as a Cultural System*), the concept as discussed in the article itself is freighted with an overwhelming "pan-cultural" quality. Even speaking of common sense as a "system" and ascribing it five generally universal "quasi-qualities" implies something all-encompassing. Thus, Geertz claims for this phenomenon (or more correctly, "suggests") "an ingenerate order … capable of being empirically uncovered and conceptually formulated."[43]

For my purposes, the most striking feature of this sort of knowledge is not simply its affinity to Ricoeur's concept of insight emphasized above but also the fact that we are here speaking of a brand of knowledge accessible to all persons everywhere. This is no esoteric knowledge hidden away—scientific mantras stowed in private information caches to be scrutinized by an élite, privileged few. Instead, this is the sort of wisdom accessed by average communities of ordinary folk found everywhere (thus, *common* sense).

This appeal to proximal, everyday life corresponds nicely with Alfred North Whitehead's corrective for what he calls "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (i.e., the elevating of the ancillary to the primary).[44] The answer to this "very subtle fallacy—more a general limitation of conceptual thought than an error in logic"[45]—is a "recurrence

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43 Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 92.

44 Per Whitehead, this fallacy involves "neglecting the degree of abstraction involved in thought when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought" (Whitehead as cited in Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*, 2nd. ed. [Boston: Beacon, 1994], 36). Daly and Cobb summarize it this way: "it is the fallacy involved whenever thinkers forget the degree of abstraction involved in thought and draw unwarranted conclusions about concrete actuality. [In other words,] … neglecting the extent to which our concepts are abstract, and therefore also neglecting the rest of the reality from which they have been abstracted" (*For the Common Good,* 36). Ultimately, this is simply another way of rechristening the vicious form of the hermeneutical circle.

45 Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 41.

to the concrete in search of inspiration."[46] It is instructive that what Ricoeur presented above as the initiating element in the interpretive process (i.e., *insight*) corresponds quite nicely with that which, being found concretely tucked away in the hard-tack vicissitudes of everyday life, seems to function as our surest safeguard against excessive interpretive abstraction (i.e., *inspiration*). Hence, this same insight *qua* inspiration which initially serves to kick-start the interpretive process on its way also essays to anchor major concerns as major.

Consequently, if we combine this with Ricoeur's "naïve grasp," it now seems conceivable that there is a basic "common sense" correspondence between what we see and what actually exists and that it is this correlation which is the basis for our initial insight.[47] As Hiebert has said, "we see through a glass darkly, but we do see. We are not totally blind."[48] This being the case, it is now clear that alert participation in everyday life is what serves to set us on the path destined for comprehension.[49] Emulating Ricoeur, the process begins with insight—or, if you will, a naïve grasp—and continues through analysis and description (*Erklären*) to an ever-unfolding state of comprehension (*Verstehen*).

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[46] Whitehead, as cited in Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 36, cf. 41–43.

[47] Of course, a Christian understanding assumes this point from the start. First, the Incarnation signifies a primary correspondence between the uniquely transitory and the supremely universal and it blesses, sanctifies and employs this very correspondence. Second, a primary source (per Barth, seemingly the *solitary* source!) of biblical knowledge is imparted by means of oracle or prophecy; namely, via revelation—what could just as easily be labelled insight. For the Christian, the existence of the Scriptures in their entirety testifies to this fact.

[48] "Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism," *Missiology* 20 (1991): 263–81, 274.

[49] This call for "alert participation" bears a striking resemblance to what in anthropology—especially since Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead—has come to be called "participant observation." Cf. Julia G. Crane and Michael V. Angrosino, *Field Projects in Anthropology: A Student Handbook*, 2nd. ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1984), 64–75; James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980); and Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*, 215–16.

Yet, of course, we cannot travel this path alone. It must be admitted that the interpretive task is (or at least should be) a decidedly communal undertaking. In fact, the consensus is that any sort of ethically-oriented legitimate interpretation is literally impossible outside of a community structure. As Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen assert, "*homo ethicus* is *homo socius*."[50] And of course, this applies regardless of whether the interpretive significance rendered flows normatively (i.e., ethically) or descriptively. For, as development studies ethicist Muhammad Anisur Rahman reminds us, even "the scientific character of objectivity of knowledge rests on its social verifiability."[51] And, as if to reinforce Rahman's claim, Thomas Kuhn maintains that "a [scientific] paradigm governs, in the first instance, not a subject matter but rather a group of practitioners. Any study of paradigm-directed or of paradigm-shattering research must begin by locating the responsible group or groups."[52] Of course, while reinforcing my focus on communities of interpretation, this statement like those of Geertz's above could still simply shift us from an individual to a communal solipsism, with thorough-going relativism following quickly on its heels (a sort of communal or cultural relativism). Once again, we must ask ourselves, what forestalls this (now collective) tumble into ultimate uncertainty? What keeps our interpretation from becoming a thoroughly relativized undertaking? Besides our (now communal) common sense safeguard, there is yet one additional factor capable of coming into play.

This factor is intra- as well as inter-community dialogue, which together help to give rise to emerging, transcendent, cross-cultural interpretation. This is analogous to Paul Hiebert's call for the evolution

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[50] Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 125.

[51] Muhammad Anisur Rahman, "The Theoretical Standpoint of PAR," in *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research*, ed. Orlando Fals-Borda and Muhammad Anisur Rahman (New York: The Apex Press), 13–23, 15.

[52] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 180. The entirety of this book by Kuhn is focused upon the presence of scientific paradigms as hermeneutical devices and the historical role these have played in the natural sciences.

of a transcultural theology (issued with the world-wide Christian community in mind).[53]

> The critical hermeneutics that involve a dialogue between … different cultures can help us all to develop a more culture-free understanding…. On the one hand, it keeps us from the legalism of imposing foreign norms upon a society without taking into account its specific situations. On the other, it keeps us from a situational ethics that is purely relativistic in nature.[54]

Of course, the cultural gaps spanned here need to be of a wide variety, including those dividing peoples synchronically as well as diachronically. Speaking of exegesis as it applies to the biblical text, Ramm clarifies the point well:

> In that the interpreter is separated from his materials in time there is a historical gap; in that his culture is different from that of his text there is a cultural gap; in that the text is usually in a different language there is the linguistic gap; in that the document originates in another country there is the geological gap and the biological gap (the flora and fauna). In that usually a totally different attitude towards life and the universe exists in the text it can be said that there is a philosophical gap (German: *Weltanschauung*, the metaphysical manner in which the universe is put together; *Weltbild*, the

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53 Hiebert uses the word "metatheology" for what I am here calling "transcultural theology."

54 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 103, cf. 216–17. The only amendment needed to Hiebert's claim relates to his assertion that out of such a process will emerge a transcultural understanding "that transcends cultural differences" (Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 217). It is perhaps more accurate to state that transcultural comprehension of any given topic will not simply emerge definitively but will always be *in the process of emerging* in an exponentially evolving epiphany. This is the dialectic I examined above, the one I am now saying is at work in community. Hermeneutics is, by definition, a dynamic, never-ending, on-going process.

> physical manner [scientific or pseudo-scientific] [*sic*] in which the universe is put together).[55]

In other words, what has been sensed, interpreted, and comprehended by others in the annals of history must also have considerable bearing upon our present-day hermeneutical endeavors. Not only those beyond oceans and over mountains removed geographically, not simply communities possessing linguistic styles quite different from our own, but also persons from bygone eras—individuals found on the other side of the historical gap—these, too, must continue to be given voice in the hermeneutical community.[56]

A transcultural hermeneutical community intently concerned with meaning quarried from the detritus of everyday life will serve to safeguard interpretation in the face of parochialism and narrow-mindedness. Ricoeur's insight-initiated dialectic will then begin to take on a more universal quality due, in part, to the wide variety of individuals, communities, and perspectives involved in the process.

In what follows, I will attempt to dive into this ever-unfolding hermeneutical circle, assuming the above dialectic to be operative as I go. This is the very reason I have given space to the above discussion. For, without a clear understanding of Ricoeur's dialectic view of the interpretive process—and the critical role he gives to *insight* within it—the thesis of this essay will surely be rendered dubious at best.[57]

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55 Ramm, *Hermeneutics*, 7–8.

56 Historically removed persons (and communities) may also have lived out their days in places yet geographically divorced as well as linguistically separated from us. As Ramm implies above, the overarching element here is the distinctly different *Weltanschauung* brought about by a differing community. Note this from Birch and Rasmussen: "The 'seeing' so critical to the moral life is not something we can provide for ourselves by ourselves. It is almost wholly dependent upon relationships with 'significant others,' whether friend or foe, persons near or far, even real or imaginary. 'Seeing' is, in the end, a *community* achievement and gift, whatever the indispensable role of the 'I' in attaining sight" (*Bible and Ethics,* 102, emphasis original).

57 The communal safeguard highlighted above, of course, is underscored and acknowledged by the public accessibility of my analysis as presented here.

The Narrative Nature of Truth

If, as has been claimed above, "society is ultimately a text in need of exegesis" and, therefore, "humans . . . need to exegete to maintain life," then what we are principally dealing with here is a view of society (and the history of that society) which is analogous to narrative. Of course, this assertion has already been hinted at above.

In this series of articles, I will look at the application of this principle in relation to what are typically taken to be two distinct disciplines—the theological and the anthropological. Accordingly, it would amount to the better part of wisdom for us to first test the heuristic value of the concept of narrative as a hermeneutical vehicle in each of these fields. Clearly scholars like Appleby et al. take story as the very building blocks of human comprehension and understanding when they assert that "rejecting all meta-narratives cannot make sense, because narratives and meta-narratives are the kinds of stories that make action in the world possible. They make action possible because they make it meaningful."[58] Nevertheless, if neither biblical nor cultural materials are ultimately found to be compatible with a narrative understanding of truth, then my present effort to apply this premise as a principle will certainly yield for us obscurity as opposed to clarity.

The Narrative Nature of Biblical Truth

Since the Christian Scripture is made up of a vast collection of stories incorporating one grand, over-arching drama, or *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history) as Cullmann classified it, it might at first seem unnecessary to call for an adoption of the concept of narrative as the basis for a Christian understanding of truth. This is even more clearly the case when we consider how the discipline of hermeneutics originally derived from an on-going communal encounter with the biblical text, an

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[58] Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History*, 236.

encounter with a story that stretches across the pages of the biblical text. As Stanley Hauerwas affirms, "Christian convictions constitute a narrative, a language, that requires a transformation of the self if we are to see, as well as be, truthful.... To be Christian is not to obey certain commandments or rules, but to learn to grow into the story of Jesus as the form of God's kingdom."[59]

Yet, since the Enlightenment, scholars have not considered a narrative approach to Scripture as a legitimate focus for the discipline of hermeneutics until relatively recently. Instead, Robert Alter argues,

> [V]irtually all [hermeneutical] activity has been what we might call "excavative"—either literally, with the archeologist's spade and reference to its findings or with a variety of analytic tools intended to uncover the original meanings of biblical words, the life situations in which specific texts were used, the sundry sources from which longer texts were assembled.[60]

Perhaps this offers yet one more answer to my question posed above concerning the whereabouts of experienced biblical scholars who (it was hoped) could be enlisted in the task of analyzing cultural scenes as their hermeneutical foci. For if all cultural scenes in need of analysis are analogous to narrative and yet biblical interpreters have not historically approached the text as narrative, it naturally follows that these persons will not be as well-equipped as was perhaps previously assumed. But we might ask ourselves: How could this be? How could

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[59] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 30.

[60] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 13. This is, however, changing. As biblical scholar David Gooding admits, "forty years ago study of the literary structure of biblical books (or rhetorical criticism as it is called in some circles) was but a trickle; in the last decade or so it has become a flood" (*According to Luke: A New Exposition of the Third Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 7). For a probe into this type of biblical hermeneutical methodology under a different heading, see Mark Allan Powell's thoughts as found in the series, *Guides to Biblical Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) and *What is Narrative Criticism? A New Approach to the Bible* (London: SPCK, 1993).

biblical scholars miss all the rich narrative material so conspicuously arrayed in the Bible? How could the Scriptures' very substance not be manifest beyond doubt to them?

The answer seems to be that, ever since the Enlightenment, biblical exegetes (along with their secular counterparts) have tended to relegate to cellars of triviality the concept of "story" in most of their intellectual pursuits (with the rest of us generally following their lead). This seems due to the fact, with the dawn of the Enlightenment, "a different mode of rationality began to predominate. Reason supplanted faith as point of departure. Theology now differed from other academic disciplines only in its "object," not in its method or point of departure. It was basically comparable with other disciplines."[61]

Hence, in order to maintain respectability in this age of reason, theology—and as a result biblical studies—was forced to yield to the newly reigning paradigm.[62] Science, as the logic went, was certainly not based upon anything as arbitrary and fictive as story; all thinking persons should concede that insight worth having must be based upon "objective," cold, hard facts. Thus, most exegetes felt that

> they could no longer, as their predecessors were prone to do, ignore the [span of centuries between biblical times and the present] and [thus] enjoy direct access to the biblical story. They believed, rather, that their task was to re-create, as far as possible, the original story and glean a message from it for today's church.[63]

And of course, this resulted in the "excavation" activities that Alter spoke of above. What the biblical scholars were mining for, both in the soil and in the text, were facts—which all knew to be at loggerheads with story since in the reigning paradigm story is arbitrary and fictive. Persons such as Tillich, Bultmann, Jeremias and others attempted to

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[61] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 275.

[62] Cf. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 277–78.

[63] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 277.

distil from the narrative materials that truth which most pertinently spoke to the modern woman or man.

One of the problems with this approach, however, is that it simply does not do justice to the nature of the biblical text itself. As Hauerwas says, "[I]t is crucial for us … to see that [biblical truth] is not accidentally narrative.[64]

> Narrative is not secondary for our knowledge of God; there is no "point" that can be separated from the story. The narratives through which we learn of God *are* the point. Stories are not substitute explanations we can someday hope to supplant with more straightforward accounts. Precisely to the contrary, narratives are necessary to our understanding of those aspects which admit of no further explanation, i.e., God, the world, and the self.[65]

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann seems to agree:

> The rhetoric of the [biblical] narrative invites the listener out beyond the world of predictability into another world of thought and risk and gift, a world in which the unexpected happens, in which connections surprise us, and in which new life is miraculously given. The purpose and intent of these narratives is to break life open beyond our prosaic reductions, to subvert our domesticated expectations, and to evoke fresh dimensions of identity and faith.[66]

The primary reason for this breaking free into "another world of thought and risk and gift" is due to the heart of the hermeneutical quest itself: what we wish for in the process is an encounter with the very person of God himself. And as Donald Bloesch reminds us,

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64 Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 25.

65 Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 26.

66 Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 114–15.

> our language about God can be at the most analogical, not univocal, for there can be no direct or exact correspondence between human ideas and the veritable Word of God. It is also imperative for us to reaffirm the mystery of the accommodation of the Holy Spirit to the deficiencies and limitations of human language.[67]

Or, as Hauerwas says, "'God,' we must remember, is a common name, to which we can ascribe attributions only as we learn of God through history."[68]

> "[D]octrines" are themselves a story, or perhaps better, the outline of the story. Claims such as "God is creator" are simply shorthand ways of reminding us that we believe we are participants in a much more elaborate story, of which God is the author. Doctrines, therefore, are not the upshot of the stories; they are not the meaning or heart of the stories. Rather they are tools (sometimes even misleading tools), meant to help us tell the story better. Because the Christian story is an enacted story, liturgy is probably a much more important resource than are doctrines or creeds for helping us to hear, tell, and live the story of God.[69]

The above should make us mindful once again of Whitehead's caution concerning "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." While the excavation spoken of above[70] might at first blush seem simply an attempt to, in Whitehead's words, "recur to the concrete in search of

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[67] As cited in Howard Snyder, *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 196.

[68] Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 26.

[69] Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 25–26.

[70] E.g., searching for the historical Jesus, analyzing texts using form-criticism, speculating as to the nature and content of *Q*, synthesizing and molding the above concepts into elegant (or at least provocative) doctrines pertaining to the nature and work of God, etc. While these activities certainly have their place, the argument here is against their pre-eminence—their being treated as concrete and ultimate.

inspiration," it instead flirts dangerously with a "neglecting of the degree of abstraction involved in thought when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought." For in this case, instead of being some reified version of factual reality exhumed, the concrete happens to be the text itself—not the speculative encrustation of biblical criticism surrounding it.[71]

> The important point to be emphasized, to theologians especially, is that this story, however enigmatic, is the true story, the only story Christians have to tell, and that it has no unstoried form. If it sometimes seems so incredible as to strain the imagination and offend the reason, the wise theologians will attempt no defense beyond a reminder (paraphrasing 1 Cor. 1:25) that the fictions of God are truer than the facts of men.[72]

Unless we heed this counsel, Whitehead's warned-against "categories of thought" will most likely end up being none other than the distinctively Enlightenment influenced abstractions of "rationality" and "objective truth."

Finally, it is not merely to avoid corruption of the biblical text or to avert an abstraction of its contents that we celebrate the narrative form of the Scriptures. It is also owing to the narrative nature of the world itself and our place in it. Based upon the conviction that life is constantly lived out narratively, I will examine in the next article a bib-

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[71] Literary critic Northrup Frye argues that when idolatry is discussed within Scripture, it "is often regarded as a 'literal' projection into the external world of an image that might be quite acceptable as a poetic metaphor" (*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* [San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1982], 61). What we have here is the reification of narrative device as the essence of idolatry. Daly and Cobb, after characterizing idolatry as the act of "formally … treating as ultimate or whole that which is not ultimate or whole," go on to underscore the degree of correspondence this has with Whitehead's concept. As they say, "everyone commits the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. All of us are idolators [sic]" (*For the Common Good*, 389).

[72] Garrett Green as cited in Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 5–6.

lical hermeneutical methodology which takes seriously the literary nature of the Bible. In turn, the third article in this series will represent an attempt to apply this to a selected cultural scene. For the latter process to be viable, that is, for any utilization of a biblical hermeneutical methodology dependent upon the narrative nature of the Scriptures to bear fruit when applied to a real-life cultural scene, it stands to reason that the personal appropriation of the concept of narrative will have to have meaning for us. But for this to happen Christianly, the narrative quality of the Scriptures must first be seen as being of consequence. However, if the narrative timber of the Bible is deemed irrelevant then our hermeneutic will be rendered useless, not only in relation to interpreting the text but also as it relates to our own contexts. This is due to the contingent nature of our story in relation to the story of God. Hauerwas explains,

> we are provided with a truthful account of reality that enables us to see our life as more than a succession of events when we learn to locate our story in God's story. That does not mean our life has a singular goal or meaning; rather, the story of God we learn through Christ gives us the skills to go on even when no clear goal is present. We rightly seek neither happiness nor pleasure in themselves; such entities are elusive. Rather we learn happiness and pleasure when we find in a faithful narrative an ongoing and worthy task that is able to sustain our lives.[73]

Hence, for the Christian, not only reality with a small "r"—objective, detached, impersonal truth (the normal focus of hermeneutics)—but also reality with a capital "R"—our personal, lived-out, everyday experiences (what might be called existential interpretation)—finds its ultimate significance in the story of God. Life now comes clothed in meaning by way of personal embrace. And of course, meaning not embraced is ultimately no meaning at all.

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[73] Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 68.

The Narrative Nature of Anthropological Truth

I have already pointed to the emerging concept of "society as text" as found in the social sciences at-large. But what about anthropology—the field which I have chosen to look at in this series of articles? Is this discipline compatible with such an understanding?

While there certainly are dissenters, more and more anthropologists are now taking a hermeneutical approach to cultural analysis seriously. They are realizing that, quite frequently, "complex concepts elude current investigative [anthropological] techniques; and, at least for a while, more interest and importance may be learned through approaches informed by literary sensibility."[74] Thus, Gardner points out, "There has been at least a partial return to the view that anthropology ought to re-embrace the holistic methods of the in-depth case study, and perhaps align itself more with the humanities and less with the sciences."[75] Bellah seems to agree with this in respect to the social sciences as a whole, especially given the importance of the notion of story, as we saw above.

> [W]hat we need from history, and why the social scientist must also, among other things, be a historian, is not merely comparable information about the past, but some idea of how we have gotten from the past to the present, in short, a narrative. Narrative is a primary and powerful way by which to know about a whole. In an important sense, what a society (or a person) is, is its history. So a Habermas or a MacIntyre gives us his story about how modern society came to its present pass. Such stories can, and must, be contested, amended, and sometimes replaced.[76]

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[74] Howard Gardner, *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 358.

[75] Gardner, *The Mind's New Science*, 226.

[76] Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 302.

And with this has arisen a school of thought within the discipline known as *symbolic anthropology*. While at once embracing a wide and varied spectrum of views and theories, this way of thinking, overall, lays greater stress upon communication of purpose and symbolic meaning.[77] It shares much in common with the project in the field of cybernetics known as *semiotics*, "the science of signs and sign-using behavior."[78] And we are already acquainted with the anthropologist most normally associated with this approach: none other than Clifford Geertz himself.[79] For it is Geertz who frequently calls for a literary view of anthropology. He says,

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.[80]

And since there are many who have joined his program,

> the casting of social theory in terms more familiar to gamesters and aestheticians than to plumbers and engineers is clearly well under way. The recourse to the humanities for explanatory analogies in the social sciences is at once evidence of the destabilization of genres and of the rise of the "interpretive turn," and their most visible outcome is a revised style of discourse in social studies. The instruments of reasoning are changing and society is less and less represented as an elaborate machine or a quasi-organism and more as a serious game, a sidewalk drama, or a behavioral text.[81]

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77 Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*, 273.

78 Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*, 255.

79 Cf. Gardner, *The Mind's New Science*, 243–44, 250, 355–59.

80 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

81 Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 22–23.

As a natural outworking of the above, Geertz readily (and, for us, not surprisingly) looks to Paul Ricoeur for insight into the ethnographic task. He cites Ricoeur's concept of "inscription," a fixation of meaning in "some established recording process," which gives opportunity for the interpretive enterprise. Hence, doing ethnography assists the anthropologist to train her hermeneutical eye upon the symbols in question—it functions as "the key to the transition from text to text analogue, from writing as discourse to action as discourse."[82] Ethnographic activity thus serves as the inscription of social discourse—the fixation of meaning which allows for interpretation.[83]

> The great virtue of the extension of the notion of text beyond things written on paper or carved into stone is that it trains attention on precisely this phenomenon: on how the inscription of action is brought about, what its vehicles are and how they work, and on what the fixation of meaning from the flow of events—history from what happened, thought from thinking, culture from behavior—implies for sociological interpretation. To see social institutions and social changes as in some sense "readable" is to alter our whole sense of what such interpretation is and shift it toward modes of thought rather more familiar to the translator, the exegete, or the iconographer than to the test giver, the factor analyst, or the pollster.[84]

However, the issue is not as simple as all that. For, the procedure now being cast in hermeneutical terms can once again be easily infected by that very malady we attempted to stave off earlier: thorough-going (individualized or communal) relativism. Geertz makes mention of this

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[82] Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 31.

[83] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 19.

[84] Geertz, *Local Knowledge*, 31.

risk as well as its engendering cause: the lack of a suitable hermeneutical methodology.[85]

> The besetting sin of interpretive approaches to anything—literature, dreams, culture—is that they tend to resist, or to be permitted to resist, conceptual articulation and thus to escape systematic modes of assessment. You either grasp an interpretation or you do not, see the point of it or you do not, accept it or you do not. Imprisoned in the immediacy of its own detail, it is presented as self-validating, or, worse, as validated by the supposedly developed sensitivities of the person who presents it; any attempt to cast what it says in terms other than its own is regarded as a travesty—as, the anthropologist's severest term of moral abuse, ethnocentric.[86]

Buttressed by Ricoeur's hermeneutical dialectic previously examined, I will attempt, in articles following this one, to deal with this problem. By utilizing Robert Traina's hermeneutical methodology, it is hoped an interpretive program which can provide an ample amount of conceptual articulation and systematic modes of assessment can be formulated. By then applying it to a cultural scene I hope to show that the conceptual bridge between hermeneutics in the social sciences and hermeneutics in biblical studies need no longer be traversed in simply one direction.

The Interpretive Process Examined

To hammer out an operative methodology for cultural hermeneutics it will be helpful for us to recognize that human beings exhibit a far

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[85] It should come as no surprise that this is the same complication one also finds when engaged in interpretation of the scriptures.

[86] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 24.

greater degree of cognitive similarity than difference. As anthropologist Colin Turnbull has noted, "despite the outward appearance of almost irreconcilable difference between the way we and others do the same things, there is often much more similarity than might first have been supposed."[87] If these similarities—what some anthropologists call "world view universals"—could be isolated,[88] we could then hang our interpretive endeavors upon something far more credible than a mere thin-air approach. Put more simply, with an over-all idea as to how the human mind sorts and categorizes, we might "establish a framework with which we can describe and compare world views. The basic requirement of this framework is that it be applicable to any human world view without greatly distorting it. It is in this sense analogous to the diagnostic categories of doctors."[89]

Along with others in the cognitive sciences, Gestalt psychologists offer something akin to just such a framework. After having "examined a whole raft of 'form qualities,' whose phenomenal appearance could be explained in terms of analogous brain processes" they then

> put forth laws purporting to explain how perception is organized. For instance, they showed that objects that are close together tend to be grouped together (*the law of proximity*); the more symmetrical a closed region, the more it tends to be seen as a figure (*the law of symmetry*); and the arrangement of figure and ground seen is the one featuring the fewest changes or interruption in straight or smoothly curved lines (*the law of good continuation*)…. Though usually referring initially to visual demonstrations, versions of these

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[87] Colin M. Turnbull, *The Human Cycle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 17.

[88] It must be admitted that isolating world view universals in any indisputable fashion is not the goal of this essay, since asserting what those might look like would be nothing more than a highly contentious claim. The good news is, we are in no need of doing that here—instead, all we need do is identify a collection of likely, would-be postulates in order that we might illustrate my primary thesis, namely, that around something like these a robust interpretive model can be rooted.

[89] Michael Kearney, *World View* (Novato, CA: Chandler & Sharp, 1984), 65.

laws also applied to auditory sequences—for example, rhythmic patterns.[90]

In each of the chosen methodologies that follow we will witness an amazing affinity to these Gestalt groupings. A similar collection of "structural relationships" will ultimately be at the heart of what I offer as my own general interpretive methodology.

However, a caution is in order here. Even though the hermeneutical technique from anthropology examined below—a procedure known as the *Developmental Research Sequence Method*—derives from James P. Spradley, one of the key leaders in the cultural idealist branch of anthropology known as ethnosemantics, utilization of his categories certainly does not ipso facto lock us into his cultural idealist approach to anthropology. My utilization of his assortment of interpretive axioms—or, as he calls them, *semantic relationships*—is due far more to the similarity these share with Traina's structural relationships—whose ideas, once again, I will utilize in the third article in this series—than to any a priori spin on how anthropology must be done.[91] It is surely clear that my preference is for a Geertzian "text analogue" form of symbolic anthropology—where "culture is likened to a text or language."[92] But this does not preclude the possibility of others using the constructs I am promoting in a manner contrary to that presented. The reason for this, of course, is that Spradley's semantic relationships are broad, analytical patterns of logic not in themselves presupposing any *specific* content or meaning. Even the self-styled historical materialist Michael Kearney acknowledges that, alongside the content of a person's world view, "the description of which is the basic empirical ethnographic task," there is also "the *structure*—the basic categories of

[90] Gardner, *The Mind's New Science*, 112, emphasis added.

[91] Cf. James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, *Anthropology: The Cultural Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 360–61 and James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 107–12.

[92] Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History*, 224.

thought—which it has in common with all human world views."[93] I am simply suggesting that something like Spradley's (or, ultimately, Traina's) groupings be taken as the basic components in that universal structure.[94]

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[93] Kearney, *World View*, 3. By employing the expression "categories of thought" echoes Kant who, in the tradition of Aristotle, took these "elementary concepts of the pure understanding—such as *quantity* (unity, plurality, and totality); *quality* (reality, negation, and limitation); *relation* (substance and accident, cause-and-effect, and reciprocity); *modality* (possibility, existence, and necessity)—[to] constitute the mental equipment, the pure synthesizing concepts with which human understanding is endowed. These alone allow the individual to make sense of his experiences" (Gardner, *The Mind's New Science*, 58).

Cognitive linguist Steven Pinker says, "The universal plan underlying languages, with auxiliaries and inversion rules, nouns and verbs, subjects and objects, phrases and clauses, case and agreement, and so on, seems to suggest a commonality in the brains of speakers, because many other plans would have been just as useful. It is as if isolated inventors miraculously came up with identical standards for typewriter keyboards or Morse code or traffic signals" (*The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* [New York: William Morrow, 1994], 43). It always piques the interest of the theist when a person such as Pinker—probably an agnostic evolutionist at best—essays to explain the agent of a "miraculously" appearing universal characteristic by personifying it. I, for one, invariably find myself asking, "At what (or at whom) is he pointing?"

[94] Kearney echoes a dilemma about which I am keenly aware: "With respect to . . . universals, two issues persist: whether or not they are the most appropriate categories for describing, analyzing, and comparing world views, and whether or not they are truly universal. It is possible that these questions cannot be resolved absolutely. This indefiniteness results from an unavoidable relativism inherent in the selection of the world-view universals. Any attempt at world-view study can utilize only categories that are historically available to it at the time of analysis. At different periods, different choices are possible" (*World View*, 207–8). It must be remembered that, even though I will propose (or more accurately, borrow from Traina) my own list, the goal in these articles is not to isolate a definitive inventory of universal hermeneutical categories of thought. I am simply attempting here to illustrate the feasibility of applying a biblical hermeneutical methodology to a cultural scene. The fact that "at different periods [and in different places], different choices are possible" simply points to the need for the safeguard already called for above: an ongoing intra- and inter-community hermeneutical dialogue. With this, the appropriateness and actual existence of any proposed group of categories (including Traina's that I will essay to use) can be weighed and tested against that truly experienced by a wide variety of individuals and communities.

An Example from Anthropology—Spradley's *Developmental Research Sequence Method*

While identifying semantic relationships is an integral step in the ethnographic procedure James Spradley labels the *Developmental Research Sequence Method*, this is certainly not its only aim.[95] In fact, the cycle can be broken down into two somewhat overlapping steps: (1) identifying and analyzing cultural domains, which then serve as matrices for (2) identifying and analyzing cultural themes.[96] Central to this two-step process is the utilization of interpretive questions to plumb the depths of the domains and themes. Not coincidentally, identifying questions germane to the hermeneutical enterprise will also prove to be the chief objective of the general interpretive methodology I will offer in the two artciles that follow. In fact, all three of these elements—cultural domains, cultural themes, and interpretive questions—will hold significant sway there. Thus, it should now be helpful for us to look at these three facets one by one.

Cultural Domains

Spradley makes it clear that

> any symbolic category that includes other categories is a domain. All the members of a domain share at least one feature of meaning. In the process of discovering domains we will look especially for the similarities that exist among folk terms. Domains are the first and most important unit of analysis in ethnographic research.[97]

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[95] Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 41–204; Spradley and McCurdy, *Anthropology*, 355–69.

[96] Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 94.

[97] Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 100.

He then continues by listing four features of every cultural domain.[98]

First, every domain can be categorized by means of a *cover term*. As the expression implies, this classification points to any category which itself embraces many other terms and concepts, with the possibility that these too might function as cover terms for yet smaller domains. Hence, within domains one frequently finds domains. Which of these finally become the object of study simply depends upon one's focus.

Second, as already suggested, "all domains have two or more *included terms*. These are folk terms that belong to the category of knowledge named by the cover term."[99] Again, from a different angle, these included terms may themselves function as cover terms.

Third, all domains exhibit a collection of semantic relationships. "When two folk categories are linked together, we refer to this link as a semantic relationship."[100] We should be especially mindful not to confuse semantic relationships with cultural themes—a concept we will examine rather closely in the third article of this series. The former refers to the way ideas and artifacts relate one to another whereas the latter refer to a general meaning or idea implied by the existence of these relationships. Domains are the fruit of observation and interpretation (*Erklären*); themes, the fruit of unfolding comprehension proper (*Verstehen*) based upon observation demarcated by domains. In other words, while cultural themes are distinguished by taking note of and interpreting semantic relationships within domains, the two are not identical.

Finally, domains are always delineated by means of *boundaries*, with "some folk terms belong *inside* the domain and others belong *outside* the domain."[101] Consequently, domains can be and are isolated from one another.

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98 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 101–2.

99 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 100.

100 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 100.

101 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 101.

Spradley and McCurdy state that one of the best ways to identify cultural domains is by means of trying to locate cover terms. Furthermore, "a helpful way to find cover terms is to recognize the semantic relationships that organize a domain."[102] Hence, as already stated above, identifying semantic relationships serves as a fundamental step in the *Developmental Research Sequence Method.* Citing several studies in which "investigators have proposed similar types of semantic relationships,"[103] these two gentlemen offer a list of "universal semantic relationships" as an aid to isolating cultural domains.[104]

1. Strict inclusion	X is a kind of Y
2. Spatial	X is a place in Y, X is a part of Y
3. Cause-effect	X is a result of Y, X is a cause of Y
4. Rationale	X is a reason for doing Y
5. Location for action	X is a place for doing Y
6. Function	X is used for Y
7. Means-end	X is a way to do Y
8. Sequence	X is a step (stage) in Y
9. Attribution	X is an attribute (characteristic) of Y

Looking curiously like the Gestalt groupings commented upon above, this list provides an example of what universal hermeneutical constructs might look like. Spradley himself realizes that "the ethnographer can take any proposed list of universal relationships and use

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102 Spradley and McCurdy, *Anthropology*, 360.

103 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 109.

104 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 111; Spradley and McCurdy, *Anthropology*, 361. Slight differences are evident when the lists in these two cited publications are compared. Spradley's list contains nine relationships as opposed to the eight that appear in Spradley and McCurdy (the category Attribution does not appear in the latter). In addition, the nomenclature utilized in each is somewhat different. The point I am making here, however, is simply that these types of universal groupings are widely thought to exist. Once again, in the next article in this series I will make use of a different collection (those borrowed from Traina) for identifying a general interpretive methodology.

them to search for domains."[105] Most important for our purposes is the fact that, by utilizing relationships akin to these, the conceptual articulation Geertz deplores as so often lacking in interpretive approaches to culture can in this way be supplied. In my attempt to offer such in my next article, I will lean rather heavily upon a grouping quite like Spradley's.[106]

Cultural Themes

The concept of cultural themes was first advanced by anthropologist Morris Opler when he claimed, "a limited number of dynamic affirmations … can be identified in every culture and that the key to the character, structure, and direction of the specific culture is to be sought in the nature, expression, and interrelationship of these themes."[107] Others have since acknowledged the existence of such axioms.[108] Michael Kearney sees E. Adamson Hoebel's *postulates* of the Cheyenne culture, Francis L. K. Hsu's contrasting *postulates* concerning the cultures of China and the United States, and George Foster's concept of *Image of Limited Good* as being like Opler's.[109] In fact, in work centering upon the Mexican village of Ixtepeji, Kearney himself "also derived a set of interrelated propositions that organize sociocultural behavior and beliefs."[110] He gives to all of these similar constructs the designation *logico-structural integration*: "It is in this study of Ixtepeji, in Opler's discussion of how themes balance one another, in Hoebel's corollaries, and in Foster's 'cognitive orientations' … that we can see a suggestion

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105 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 110–11.

106 It will later be evident that the list I propose, borrowed from Traina, more closely parallels the Gestalt listing than it does the list put forward by Spradley.

107 Morris E. Opler, "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture," *American Journal of Sociology* 51 (1945): 198–206, 198.

108 As representatives here, cf. Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 18; Kearney, *World View*, 30, 62; and Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*, 65.

109 Kearney, *World View*, 30–31.

110 Kearney, *World View*, 30.

of what I refer to . . . as *logico-structural integration*."[111] But regardless of nomenclature, one strand remains constant throughout: a shared, integrating premise or group of premises embraced by a people which resound(s) repeatedly throughout their world view concerning a certain aspect of life lived out individually or together.

Moreover, for the purpose at hand a more interesting feature stands out. Returning to Opler's original term, if we seek dictionary definitions most relevant to our use of the term *theme*, what we find encompasses "the subject of a talk, piece of writing, exhibition, etc.; a topic" as well as "an idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature."[112]

The connection to the notion of narrative here is obvious. The definition suggests that synonyms for the term *theme* could quite easily be a piece of writing, subject, or topic, each bearing a literary or aesthetic connotation by way of its recurring appearance. In like manner, Opler, in the portion of his article cited above, refers to "the character, structure, and direction of the specific culture," as if pointing to a piece of literature in need of review.

Hence, the resemblance to Geertz's literary spin on culture is not difficult to discern. It appears that as we take note of and interpret semantic relationships within domains, we are brought closer and closer to comprehending those domains' themes as they function comparable to literary leitmotifs whereupon culture as text analogue should begin to bear fruit in understanding.

Interpretive Questions

Any parent can attest to the power of the question. Even though children have a limited range of psycho-linguistic capabilities allowing them to verbalize their intended meaning, they are sufficiently equipped at least by age three to begin using questions as a meaning-

[111] Kearney, *World View*, 30–31, cf. 123–45.

[112] http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/theme.

seeking device—and often to the point of driving parents mad! But is it any wonder that when humans are at this stage of unprecedented personal growth and development (ages 0–5) the medium most frequently called upon just so happens to be this ever so puissant one? For, as was alluded to above, strategically broached questions provide the key to the hermeneutical process, or the "making-sense-of-the-world" process.

However, the preferred procedure here is not some superficial, rapid-fire discharging of any old set of questions (something a beleaguered parent often feels is happening when caught face-to-face with an inquisitive three-year old.) In attempting to get at the meaning of someone else's world view, questions must be posed which take seriously those beliefs and categories accepted by first-hand participants in the context in question. This is even more so for the ethnographer.

> It could be said of ethnography that until you know the question that someone in the culture is responding to you can't know many things about the responses. Yet the ethnographer is greeted, in the field, with an array of *responses*. He needs to know what question people are *answering* in their every act. He needs to know which questions are being taken for granted because they are what "everybody knows" without thinking…. Thus the task of the ethnographer is to discover questions that seek the relationship among entities that are conceptually meaningful to the people under investigation.[113]

Development theorist Robert Chambers echoes this same sentiment as it relates to that most question-oriented of all devices: the survey questionnaire.

> Unless careful appraisal precedes drawing up a questionnaire, the survey will embody the concepts and categories of outsiders rather

[113] Black and Metzger as cited in Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 84.

> than those of rural people, and thus impose meanings on the social reality. The misfit between the concepts of urban professionals and those of poor rural people is likely to be substantial, and the questions asked may construct artificial chunks of 'knowledge' which distort or mutilate the reality which poor people experience.[114]

Hence, a battery of inductively-discovered, strategically-framed questions can serve as the ideal underpinning for the entire ethnographic process.

Spradley agrees with all of this when he underscores that "the ethnographer's main tools for discovering another person's cultural knowledge is the ethnographic question."[115] In his *Developmental Research Sequence Method* he lists three main types of ethnographic questions: descriptive, structural, and contrast.[116] The first type attempts to "elicit a large sample of utterances in the informant's language."[117] It essentially asks the *What* question (i.e., it solicits definitions). The second variety, structural questions, are intimately tied to the make-up and arrangement of given domains. Hence, these seek to answer how information is organized on the part of informants—how their world "hooks and eyes" together. Finally, contrast questions, the third type, "enable the ethnographer to discover the dimensions of meaning which informants employ to distinguish the objects and events in their world."[118] Also, "the meaning of any folk term depends on what it does not mean. Whenever we use language we call attention to what things *are*; but we also call attention to what they *are not*."[119] Spradley believes that, armed with these three general types of questions, the ethnog-

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114 Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London: Longman Scientific & Technical, 1983), 51.

115 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 60.

116 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 60, cf. 78–91, 120–31, 155–72.

117 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 85.

118 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 60.

119 Spradley, *Ethnographic Interview*, 158, emphasis original.

rapher can attempt to analyze cultural domains, thereby arriving at cultural themes which offer a window into the world view in question.[120]

It is here, in discussing the use of ethnographic questions, that Spradley's cultural idealist tendencies seem to me most evident. His questions appear entirely based upon verbal responses elicited from "informants." Hence, there is an assumption commonly embraced in ethnosemantic circles that "the naming of things is an important indicator of cognition" and, in fact, that cognitive mapping functions as *the* causal element in all indigenous world view fashioning.[121] This being the case, the goal is to get the informant to talk about his or her situation and then, based upon answers given during interviewing, reconstruct a rationalized, ideal model of the informant's perceived picture of reality.

Historical and cultural materialists have challenged this mental model of cognition on the premise that it does not take into consideration the impact a person's material surroundings and its accompanying vicissitudes can (and, they say, will!) have upon the world view embraced.[122] Consequently, with this feedback ignored, mere mental categories can easily become reified due to an over reliance upon a theory concerning cognition which historical materialists say is overly influenced by structuralist linguistics.[123]

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120 As has already been stated, Spradley lists these categories as his three main groupings of questions. Each grouping encompasses its own collection of types and subtypes (cf. *Ethnographic Interview*, 85–91, 126–31, 160–72). Thus, it would certainly be erroneous to give the impression that he recommends the use of only these three varieties of questions.

121 Kearney, *World View*, 32. Without denying that cultural participants influence the ongoing formation of culture, framing it this way makes it sound as if a world view is something consciously tailored by cultural participants—analogous to a favorite set of clothes worn. Of course, this neglects the fact that world views are: first, tacitly operative and thus not consciously chosen at all; second, significantly shaped by external factors and not simply internally arranged. This last point, as we are about to see, is the primary assertion of historical and cultural materialists.

122 E.g., Kearney, *World View*; Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture* (New York: Random House, 1979).

123 Kearney, *World View*, 33–34.

In a following article, in order that I might have opportunity for illustrating the viability of Traina's hermeneutical model when applied to a cultural scene, I, too, will concern myself primarily with information provided by informants elicited by questions. However, these types of questions are quite different from those we will later classify as interpretive questions (adopting Traina's terminology). The latter are employed in the interpretive process which best fits in the second phase of Ricoeur's three-phase hermeneutical dialectic, what was called *Erklären* above, (i.e., that phase of interpretive honing which serves as a moment of testing and structuring one's initial guess).[124] In contrast, Spradley's compendium of questions more appropriately serve to poise the interpreter for the "naïve grasp" phase—that point of preliminary understanding functioning as a guess about the whole.[125] Of course, we too will venture a guess as to which unique structural relationships are found operative, thus making our attempts ostensibly like Spradley's array above.[126] The difference, however, is that our interpretive variety is directly affixed to specific structural relationships identified at the time of the intuitive hunch (only Spradley's *structural* questions seem to display a similar tethering—and then only in relation to informants' *verbal* responses).[127] Being thus employed differently than Spradley's semantic relationships, these structural relationships are not as critically reliant upon verbal responses from informants. Instead,

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124 This occurs *after* the ethnographer interviews or engages in participant observation and the semantic or structural relationships are tentatively isolated.

125 In contrast to those mentioned earlier, these are the questions posed *during* interviewing or participant observation. These are very like what Traina calls *observational questions*. They do not ask the meaning of something, instead they inquire as to presence or existence.

126 In Traina's methodology as I experienced it, he also put forward three overarching categories of questions; namely, the definitive, the rational, and the implicational. However, the nature of these, as we shall see, are quite different from Spradley's variety. In addition, the sequentially progressive relationship existing between these three types of questions—which I will give attention to below—also seems to be unique to Traina. All of this will become more obvious in our forthcoming discussion.

127 This design element will be more evident once explained and illustrated in our subsequent analysis.

they might just as easily present themselves straightaway by means of non-mediated community involvement.[128] This is due to the fact that their engendering methodology. originally designed with the biblical text in mind, is more intentionally literary and aesthetically-oriented and thus better equipped to handle non-verbal as well as extra-verbal cultural events.[129] In short, it is more in keeping with Geertz's text analogue approach. The methodology suggested in this series of articles exploits the advantages of this sort of approach as over and against other methods, such as the method of Spradley, not particularly germane to a narrative understanding of culture.

Conclusion to Part 1: The Narrative Nature of Truth

This look at Spradley's *Developmental Research Sequence Method* has assisted us in several ways. First, we have seen that his approach is based upon (1) identifying universal semantic relationships by means of (2) accompanying ethnographic questions to (3) isolate cultural themes useful for constructing a world view model. This method and its three resulting movements are very like what we will see in the next article when we

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[128] To be fair to Spradley, his *Developmental Research Sequence Method* above has been taken exclusively from his book entitled *The Ethnographic Interview* (1979). Hence, it only stands to reason that he would focus upon interviewing and informants there. However, as a glance at one of his other works makes clear, his is still a (conspicuously) cultural idealist approach, see *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980). Hence, what appears overtly in his methodology of ethnographic interviewing also asserts itself in his other works.

[129] In fact, as we will see as we delve deeper into this discussion, the shape and content of Traina's structural relationships were greatly influenced by the English writer, art critic, and reformer John Ruskin and what has come to be called his *Essay on Composition*, a tract taken from "the latter half of Letter Three in his Elements of Drawing, published in 1857" (Howard T. Kuist, *Scripture and the Christian Response* [Richmond: John Knox, 1947], 160). Hence, Traina's constructs find their source in writings initially focused upon artistic composition.

more closely examine Traina's methodology. Hence, the affinity between hermeneutics in anthropology and hermeneutics in biblical studies has been underscored once again.

Second, the now widely-accepted search for cultural themes evident in much of anthropology points us to a methodological modus operandi: theme identification in a culture patterned after the way a literary critic searches for leitmotifs in a story. Hence, Geertz's call for a "recourse to the humanities for explanatory analogies in the social sciences" also rings true.[130]

Third, given that the Gestalt groupings of cognitive universals as well as Spradley's (and McCurdy's) universal semantic relationships both bear a striking resemblance to Traina's structural relationships, and given that Traina's methodology promises to provide the conceptual articulation so sorely needed (and so often lacking) in interpretive approaches to culture, the way is now cleared for us to endorse the use of Traina's structural relationships in the analysis of a cultural scene. In fact, with culture understood as text analogue, appropriation of Traina's method seems an obvious next step. First, however, we must know what this step entails. The next article in this series (Part 2) will take a closer look at Traina's methodology, which should then poise us for the final installment where I will attempt to apply something like Traina's hermeneutical method to a cultural scene.

130 Cf. n. 87 above.

Interpretative Anarchy, Ecclesial Fragmentation, and Doctrinal Chaos: IBS in the Present Pluralist Age

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Abstract
The method of Inductive Bible Study (IBS) and hermeneutical principles associated with it may help to mitigate against excessive interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos in the present pluralist age. These also challenge the practice of foisting a philosophical system or theological grid upon the biblical text. These contributions from IBS can help bridge the gap between Biblical Studies and the study of theology.

Key Terms: pluralism, hermeneutics, post-modernism, theology

The Present Pluralist Age

Despite Jesus's high priestly prayer for those who will believe in the Apostle's message "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21), there are more than 30,000 Protestant denominations today (including non-denominations!). If we include the Eastern Orthodox Church as well as the Roman Catholic tradition, the varieties of Christianity are bewildering. Alongside so many denominational varieties are a great assortment of doctrinal beliefs. While there is common theological agreement among most Christian churches embodied in the Apostle's Creed, many dispute scores of doctrinal beliefs. For example, there are disagreements about:

- the inspiration of Scripture
- the creation accounts in Genesis
- how to understand the Trinity
- the nature and attributes of God
- how God acts in the world
- the nature of humanity
- the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
- what salvation, justification, and sanctification mean
- the nature, mission, and marks of the Church
- women in ministry
- the number and significance of the sacraments
- the destiny of those who never heard the Gospel
- and endless positions related to eschatology[1]

Most all churches would say that they base their beliefs upon the Bible. Some churches even stress that they "teach the Bible and nothing but the Bible!" Recently, I heard a pastor say that all he needs is the Holy Spirit and the Bible and he and his congregation will figure it all out themselves. How did Christianity get so fragmented? If everyone claims to derive their beliefs from the Bible and nothing but the Bible, why so many interpretations, churches, and disputed doctrines? In the present pluralist climate, who has the authority to say which interpretations and doctrines are correct and/or authoritative?

Fragmentation is not only a characteristic of contemporary churches and their beliefs, one also finds it in the academy. Sharply defined divisions of academic disciplines in post-Enlightenment Christianity have separated the Christian curriculum into ever more specialized arenas of biblical, theological, and practical studies. The typical college or seminary curriculum typically includes courses in each of these areas. Yet, the further one climbs the academic ladder, the more

[1] For example, see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

one becomes a specialist in a narrower sub-discipline within that field of study. At the level of doctoral degree, a biblical studies person must choose not only between the OT and NT, but also among the various subcategories that exist within the Hebrew Bible and the NT. The same is true for those pursuing a doctoral degree in theology. One must decide upon specific subcategories within historical, systematic, philosophical, spiritual, or practical theology. Moreover, if you look at the various groups, units, meetings, and events at annual scholarly theological conferences, you find a wall of separation between biblical and theological disciplines (not just at the AAR/SBL!). While there is much benefit to ever specialized arenas of research, one of the unfortunate consequences is that many people in theology do not tread very deeply into biblical studies nor do many biblical scholars read theological studies very extensively. There is presently a gulf between biblical and theological studies to the detriment of both disciplines. This can degenerate to the level of disdain between biblical scholars and theologians with each group claiming to have the upper hand.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer points out that in the past it was fitting for theologians to exegete the meaning and truth of Scripture and for biblical scholars to make significant contributions to theology. Vanhoozer claims, however, that this

> has not generally been the case in the modern academy, where biblical studies is seen to be an enterprise of neutral and objective historical description. In contrast, theology is thought to be a confession-based prescriptive activity that reads Scripture through the conceptual grid of doctrinal frameworks. The exegete says what people in the past—the biblical authors—thought about God; the theologian says what the church should believe about God today.[2]

[2] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Systematic Theology," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 773–74.

On the one hand, biblical scholars have a legitimate concern that confessional theologians have and continue to impose their denominational distinctives or theological trends upon the biblical text or they selectively rummage through Scripture to find proof texts to support their doctrinal positions. In addition, biblical scholars, at least since the time of Rudolf Bultmann, now acknowledge that they too are not immune from importing their own assumptions, presuppositions, and theological biases upon their reading of Scripture. Bultmann claimed that: "*no* exegesis is without presuppositions, inasmuch as the exegete is not a *tabula rasa,* but on the contrary, approaches the text with specific questions or with a specific way of raising questions and thus has a certain idea of the subject matter with which the text is concerned."[3] On the other hand, theologians note that Christianity passed from the first-century Jewish cultural context and worldview, when Judaism had already been Hellenized in the 3rd century BCE, to the later Hellenistic, Medieval, Reformation, Modern, and Contemporary cultural contexts and worldviews. Theologians argue that just repeating what the Bible said in the first-century AD is inadequate for people to understand the message of the gospel and its significance for their own language, time, and culture. Applying the Bible to contemporary questions and issues is an important task of the Church.

Moreover, within the field of modern biblical studies itself, biblical scholars approach the critical study of Scripture from a wide variety of angles, e.g., textual, source, form, redaction, historical, rhetorical, social, literary, etc. A large group of biblical scholars employing the variety of methods of biblical criticism have come to emphasize the diversity of sources, editors, and competing communities with quite different theological interests. Whereas the sixteenth-century Reformers maintained that there was overall unity and continuity in the biblical witness on major themes and that Scripture helps interpret Scripture,

[3] Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Living Age Books, 1960), 289.

it seems that many biblical scholars today view Scripture as radically diverse and emphasize its discontinuity. An example of this is Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*.[4] Brueggemann structures that work around Israel's core testimony, counter-testimony, unsolicited testimony, and embodied testimony. Brueggemann offers this assessment of twentieth-century models of exegesis and theology: "It is fair to say that much of the old critical consensus from which theological exposition confidently moved at mid-century is now unsettled, if not in disarray."[5] He is resigned to the fact that there is "a multilayered pluralism" within OT studies which includes a "pluralism of faith" and views of Yahweh, a "pluralism of methods" beyond the historical critical, and a "pluralism of interpretative communities" with specific epistemological, socioeconomic, and political interests. Brueggemann cannot accept a simplistic view of the unity of Scripture but he also seeks to avoid a reductionist approach by finding a "consensus" among the various and often conflicting testimonies within the OT. This consensus does not negate the "plurality of testimonies in the text," but rather, the exegete is to work with "the pluralistic interpretive context (reflected in the texts themselves, in biblical interpreters, and in the culture at large.)."[6] The acceptance of a pluralism of interpretations is not new but the view that the biblical witness itself is radically diverse and plural in its sources, history, and theological concerns has caused some concern. There is fear that multilayer pluralism within Scripture itself not only attacks the idea of the unity of Scripture but also threatens the principle that Scripture helps to interpret Scripture. If we add the current discussions on biblical hermeneutics to the diversity of methods of biblical criticism—particularly more postmodern approaches that question the authoritative role of the author in interpretation, affirm the indeterminacy of texts, and prioritize the context or horizon

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[4] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

[5] Brueggemann, *Theology*, xv.

[6] Brueggemann, *Theology*, 710.

of the reader—we have a perfect storm for interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos.

The aim of this essay is to explore how the Inductive Bible Study (IBS) method and hermeneutical principles associated with it help to mitigate against excessive interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos in the present pluralist age. Although the IBS method and hermeneutical principles are not without assumptions, they do challenge the blatant practice of foisting a philosophical system or theological grid upon the biblical text. These contributions from IBS can help bridge the gap between biblical studies and the study of theology. But first, it is important to see how we got into this messy situation in the first place.

The Roots of Interpretative Anarchy, Ecclesial Fragmentation, and Doctrinal Chaos

How did we get into the present situation of interpretative anarchy, ecclesial fragmentation, and doctrinal chaos? Biblical interpretation has a long history. This history reveals not only that there are differing interpretations of biblical passages but also that there is a great deal of disagreement among those interpretations. We find evidence for this not only in the Jewish tradition where hundreds of rabbis debated a myriad of biblical passages and topics in the more than 6,000 pages of the Talmud, but also in the vast history of interpretation within the Christian tradition.

There are at least four reasons why biblical interpreters come to diverse and conflicting interpretations. First, the many and diverse interpretations of Scripture are due to the nature of Scripture itself. Scripture has been likened to a well where one can draw infinitely without ever reaching the bottom. Scripture has an infinite depth dimension. Therefore, new interpretative discoveries are the natural result. Second, we are finite beings with a limited perspective; we read, see, and understand partially and in diverse ways. No one has a God's-eye view of reality, except God of course! Third, we use different methods

of interpreting Scripture. As mentioned above, there are many ways to critically read and approach the text of Scripture. These diverse ways of critically reading Scripture yield different insights and emphases. Fourth, interpretative differences also result from the fact that we recognize different interpretive authorities to decide what a text means. For example, if we recognize the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church as authoritative, then we will interpret texts in ways congruent with that authority.

During the medieval period of the Church, the standard method of biblical interpretation was the "fourfold sense of Scripture." This method of interpreting Scripture extends back into the patristic age and the approach developed by Origen of Alexandria. The first sense is the literal sense, wherein interpreters take Scripture at the surface level (at face value). The second sense is the allegorical sense, wherein interpreters located certain obscure or hidden doctrines of the faith. The third sense is the tropological or moral sense, which gave direction for Christian behavior. The fourth sense is the anagogical, wherein interpreters thought Scripture held divine promises of future events. The fourfold method of interpreting Scripture led to wide-ranging and highly imaginative interpretations and doctrinal beliefs. The Roman Catholic Church, however, managed to keep interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos at bay by employing the rule of faith, church councils, creeds, authoritative doctors of theology, the concept of the magisterium, and the exercise of papal authority even if some Roman Catholic theologians and lay folks veered away from these norms. Today, if anyone wants to know what the RCC believes, all one has to do is read the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church*[7] or Denzinger's *Sources of Catholic Dogma*.[8] The main doctrines of the Christian faith and what good Roman Catholics are to believe have already been determined through a long process of biblical interpretation and theological evaluation by

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[7] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1994).

[8] Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, 13th ed. (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2007).

church councils, teachers, and official papal announcements. These discouraged innovative interpretations and novel doctrinal speculation, which are not authoritative in matters of faith and practice.

One of the unintended consequences of the Protestant Reformation, however, was what Christian Smith calls the problem of "pervasive interpretative pluralism."[9] In addition, Alister McGrath contends that Protestantism impacted the world with a "dangerous idea," namely,

> that all Christians have the right to interpret the Bible for themselves…. It was a radical, dangerous idea that bypassed the idea that a centralized authority had the right to interpret the Bible. There was no centralized authority, no clerical monopoly on biblical interpretation. A radical reshaping of Christianity was inevitable, precisely because the restraints on change had suddenly—seemingly irreversibly—been removed.[10]

Martin Luther was intent on translating the Bible into German. He wanted every Christian to have a Bible and to read it for themselves. However, Luther naïvely thought that everyone who employed a historical grammatical surface reading of Scripture would interpret Scripture just as he did. He soon learned that the German Peasants and other Reformers were interpreting the Bible in ways that Luther disapproved.

The classic example is Luther's dispute with Zwingli over the interpretation of Christ's phrase "this is my body" at the institution of the Lord's Supper. The point of contention was how to understand the presence of Christ in the bread and wine. Although Luther interpreted "this is my body" literally, he disagreed with the Roman Catholic concept of transubstantiation and instead affirmed a real physical presence of Christ in, above, under, and around the bread and wine. Luther's contemporary, the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli, contended that

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[9] Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 3.

[10] Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (San Franscisco: HarperOne, 2007), 2–3.

we should understand the phrase "this is my body" as an *alloeosis* or a figure of speech. Zwingli thought that Christ had literally and physically ascended to the right hand of God the Father and, therefore, could not be physically present at the Lord's Table.

After much back-and-forth in writing to one another, things came to a head at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529 with fifteen points of disputed doctrine on the agenda. The Lutherans and the Reformed churches could agree on fourteen of the fifteen disputed points. The last point concerned "On the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood." They all could agree against transubstantiation and that people should partake of both the bread and the wine, that the mass was not a "good work," and that the Lord's Supper was ordained by God. However, they could not agree among themselves on the presence of Christ in the bread and the wine and thus the Lutheran and Reformed traditions separated and remain so until this day.[11]

Overlapping with the issue of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper was the Anabaptist reading of the New Testament on Christian baptism. The Anabaptists took the premise of Luther and Zwingli regarding *sola scriptura* literally and rejected the practice of infant baptism because the Bible does not explicitly mention it. Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Christians all viewed Anabaptists as heretics and persecuted them to the point of death. Here we have the beginnings of Protestant interpretative anarchy, ecclesial fragmentation, and doctrinal chaos that proliferated as time went on. The aftermath of the Protestant Reformation was a series of religious wars that bred intolerance, pluralism, and national patriotism (the Schmalkaldic Wars, the Thirty Years War, the French Wars, the Dutch Revolt, and the British Civil Wars). Following the Reformation period, the Enlightenment period with its emphasis on individual autonomy and thinking for oneself only exacerbated the profusion of interpretations, churches, and doctrines.

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[11] "The Marburg Articles (1529)," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 280–82.

This situation raised a new issue for Protestant churches: How should we adjudicate the differing interpretations of Scripture and whose interpretation is authoritative? Luther answered the question by affirming that the laity were capable of understanding and interpreting Scripture rightly because of the clarity of Scripture itself, the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and the employment of the historical and grammatical interpretation of the text. However, it is clear from his writings that Luther thought his interpretations of Scripture were not only superior to that of lay folks but also to the interpretations of other Reformers.[12] In Zurich, Zwingli settled matters of biblical interpretation through debate before the city council. They took a vote! Anabaptists held that the individual Bible reader guided by the Holy Spirit could come to authoritative interpretations, while some Radical Reformers bypassed Scripture altogether and claimed that they had authoritative direct revelations from the Holy Spirit. John Calvin proposed that his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* could serve as an interpretative lens by which to read Scripture properly. Lutherans and Reformed Christians went on to make catechisms to help guide the reading and interpretation of Scripture along denominational lines.

Roman Catholics feared the interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos generated by the Protestant Reformers and responded at the Council of Trent (1546) by defending the church's magisterium as the authoritative body to interpret the Scriptures. This decree was issued on interpreting Sacred Scripture at the Fourth Session of the Council in 1546:

> Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume

[12] Martin Luther, "Confession concerning Christ's Supper" (1528), in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 262–79.

> to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, had held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published. Those who act contrary to this shall be made known by the ordinaries and punished in accordance with the penalties prescribed by the law.[13]

The more than 30,000 Protestant denominations make it difficult to say that these fears were unfounded.

Critical Assessment and Recent Proposals

How should we assess this aspect of the Protestant Reformation? Is the Bible the sole or the primary source for theology? Was it wise to want every Christian to have and read the Bible? Did this open the door to "unbridled spirits" to interpret the Scripture any way they wanted? There are many critics of the Protestant Reformation on this point. As mentioned above, Alister McGrath thought that it was a radically dangerous idea to let individuals interpret the Bible for themselves. He assesses that

> this powerful affirmation of spiritual democracy ended up unleashing forces that threatened to destabilize the church, eventually leading to fissure and the formation of breakaway groups…. By its very nature, Protestantism had created space for entrepreneurial individuals to redirect and redefine Christianity.[14]

[13] *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978), 18–19.

[14] McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 2, 4.

Christian Smith, focusing more on American Evangelicalism, challenges some of the central assumptions that derive from the Reformation about the Bible and biblical interpretation. Smith labels these assumptions as "Biblicism," by which he means "a theory about the Bible that emphasizes together its exclusive authority, infallibility, perspicuity, self-sufficiency, internal consistency, self-evident meaning, and universal applicability."[15] Reflecting on the manifold disputed doctrinal issues within American Evangelicalism, among which each group claims that their theology is based upon the authority of Scripture, Smith comes to this assessment:

> that on important matters the Bible apparently is not clear, consistent, and univocal enough to enable the best-intentioned, most highly skilled, believing readers to come to agreement as to what it teaches. That is an empirical, historical, undeniable, and ever-present reality. It is, in fact, the single reality that has most shaped the organizational and cultural life of the Christian church, which now, particularly in the United States, exists in a state of massive fragmentation.[16]

Brad Gregory offers the most devastating critique of the Protestant Reformation charging that it led to the secularization of society, the relativizing of doctrine, church fragmentation, the subjectivization of morality, the rise of capitalism and consumerism, and the secularization of knowledge. The root of these negative consequences, Gregory assesses, lies with

> the Reformation's failure derived directly from the patent infeasibility of successfully applying the reformer's own foundational principle. For even when highly educated, well-intentioned Christians interpreted the Bible, beginning in the early 1520s they did

[15] Smith, *Bible*, viii.

[16] Smith, *Bible*, 25.

> not and manifestly could not agree about its meaning or implications. Nor would anti-Roman Christians change or compromise their exegetical claims about the meaning of God's word on points they regarded as essential…. 'Scripture alone' was not a solution to this new problem, but its cause…. This was the case throughout the Reformation era and has remained so ever since.[17]

Stanley Hauerwas's solution to this problem is this:

> No task is more important than for the Church to take the Bible out of the hands of individual Christians in North America…. Let us rather tell them [little children] and their parents that they are possessed by habits far too corrupt for them to be encouraged to read the Bible on their own.[18]

This solution might be too radical for many. Is there another way forward?

In a recent monograph, *Biblical Authority After Babel*, Vanhoozer challenges the idea that the Reformers and their principle of *sola scriptura* are to blame for interpretative anarchy and calls for a retrieval of the distinctly Reformation insights of grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone, and the Glory of God alone as hermeneutical guides and interpretative authorities for a "Mere Protestant Christianity."[19] Vanhoozer admits that "the proliferation of opinions and disagreements over just about every single passage in the Bible is staggering."[20] He asserts that the multiplicity of interpretations from Scripture is due to the fact that that there is no "viable shared criterion or central

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[17] Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 368–69.

[18] Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 15.

[19] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

[20] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority*, 16.

authority" to sort out the various interpretations. Moreover, this leads to "communal interpretative egoism" whereby individual churches ignore all interpretations except those found in their own interpretative communities. Vanhoozer's proposal is not simply to repeat and reassert the Reformers' views but to "retrieve" and "translate" creatively what the Reformers said to move forward faithfully as the Church. His aim is twofold:

> Mere Protestant Christianity is an attempt to stop the bleeding: first, by retrieving the *solas* as guidelines and guardrails of biblical interpretation; and second, by retrieving the royal priesthood of all believers, which is to say, the place of the church in the pattern of theological authority—the place where *sola scriptura* gets lived out in embodied interpretative practices.[21]

With this goal in mind, Vanhoozer analyzes what Luther and Calvin meant by each of the *solas*, evaluates other views, and then offers creative retrievals of each *sola* in view of the Bible, Church, and Interpretative Authority. Throughout the book, Vanhoozer offers twenty theses that frame the contours of his vision of a Mere Protestant Christianity. The final authority of Mere Protestant Christianity is the Triune God who speaks and acts in the diverse testimonies in Scripture. Vanhoozer maintains that for interpreters to have a better understanding of what God is saying in the Scripture biblical interpreters must attend to the work of other interpreters, including those outside one's own tradition. He desires to steer a middle course between absolutely certain interpretations and relativist skepticism. Mere Protestant Christianity affirms the canonical principle that Scripture interprets Scripture and also the catholic principle that acknowledges the role of church tradition. Vanhoozer insists that *sola scriptura* is not to blame for sectarianism, fragmentation, and schism in the Church. Rather, *sola scriptura* is a "call to listen for the Holy Spirit speaking in the history of

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[21] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority*, 32.

Scripture's interpretation in the church."[22] He calls this a "catholic biblicism." Moreover, Mere Protestant Christianity asserts that local churches have the authority to say what is binding in matters of faith and practice. However, they have an obligation to do so in dialogue with other local churches. Vanhoozer believes that dialogue and conferencing trans-denominationally will limit the amount of individual autonomy and interpretative anarchy and bring glory to God.

A more critical recent proposal to retrieve the past in order to move forward from the pluralist age into the twenty-first century is the group of scholars who gather under the banner "Canonical Theism" and are led by William J. Abraham. Like Vanhoozer, Abraham and others are dissatisfied with the theological and ecclesial situation in the contemporary North American context. However, Abraham and his crew propose a grander retrieval than that of Vanhoozer's retrieval of reading Scripture through the lens of the Reformation's five *solas*. Canonical Theists reject the concept of *sola scriptura* and believe that the Holy Spirit not only gave the Church a canon of Scripture, but also "an abundant canonical heritage of materials, persons, and practices" found in canonical creeds and statements of faith, canons of liturgy, canons of bishops, canons of saints, canons of authoritative theologians, canons of Church councils, and canons of iconography and architecture.[23] Canonical Theism views the canon of Scripture as just one canon among many others that the Holy Spirit has given as a gift to the historic Church.

Douglas Koskela focuses upon the authority of Scripture in the context of the Church. Speaking on behalf of Canonical Theists, he asserts:

> [A]t a very basic level, the biblical texts are considered authoritative because they are thought to yield special revelation to the

[22] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority*, 145.

[23] William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk, eds., *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 27–28.

> community of faith. But the process of interpreting the scriptures such that revelation is faithfully received is a very complex matter indeed. To compound the problem, one significant consequence of the Protestant Reformation was the detachment of the Bible from the ecclesiastical practices that were intended to facilitate healthy interpretations. Embracing mottos such as *sola scriptura*, heirs of the Reformation espoused a notion of an authoritative Bible that stood alone, free from the entanglements and distortions of church tradition. The problem, of course, was that their Bible proved to be anything but self-interpreting, and competing interpretations of scripture abounded.[24]

Canonical Theists do not deny the authority of Scripture. Rather, they claim that the canon of Scripture requires "the Rule of Faith" as a key to interpretation. As noted above, the Rule of Faith includes creeds, liturgies, bishops, saints, theologians, Church councils, icons, and architecture. Abraham, seeking to calm the fear of Evangelicals, says: "On this analysis scripture has its own magnificent way of depicting the beauty and of the full expression of that grace in Jesus Christ… scripture is not pitted against, say, the trinitarian faith of, say, the Nicene Creed but as complementary to it."[25] Canonical Theists, then, understand the canon of Scripture as one of many canons that function as a source for Christian theology. Scripture does not compete with tradition as a theological resource; it is part of the heritage of canons given by God to guide the Church's faith and practice.

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[24] Douglas M. Koskela, "The Authority of Scripture in Its Ecclesial Context," in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*, ed. William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 210–11.

[25] William J. Abraham, "Canonical Theism and Evangelicalism," in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*, ed. William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 260.

Should Athens Impose Itself upon Jerusalem?

In addition to excessive interpretative anarchy and theological chaos created by a lack of a central interpretative authority, the history of Christian theology reveals that theologians and biblical interpreters tend to impose philosophical and theological systems or doctrinal grids upon their reading of Scripture. The Patristic period of the Greco-Roman world was permeated with Plato's philosophy with its subsequent developments in Middle and Neo-Platonism. Although many early Church Fathers were careful in employing Platonism in its many forms in their theology and biblical interpretation regarding the soul and other matters, there were many who were not. This tendency to integrate Christian faith with Hellenistic philosophy triggered Tertullian to ask, "what indeed does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?"[26] Tertullian was concerned that non-biblical and non-Christian categories of thought were distorting the Christian faith.

After the rediscovery of Aristotle in the Middle Ages, Aristotle's philosophy and metaphysics were employed within scholastic theology. Scholastic theology emphasized the rational justification of religious beliefs and the systematic presentation of those beliefs. Scholasticism was not a specific system of beliefs, but a way of organizing theology. It was a highly developed method of presenting material that made fine distinctions and attempted to achieve a comprehensive view of theology. The goal of scholastic theology was to demonstrate the inherent rationality and harmony of Christian theology by an appeal to philosophy.

Scholastic writings tended to be long and argumentative, relying on closely argued distinctions. Each scholastic system tried to embrace reality in its totality, dealing with matters of logic, metaphysics, and theology. Scholastic proponents showed that everything had its logical place in a comprehensive intellectual system. The systems of Thomas

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[26] Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics* (*ANF* 3:246).

Aquinas and Duns Scotus are prime examples of the scholastic method. Luther, Calvin, and other Protestant Reformers rejected the scholastic method and, as mentioned above, proclaimed *ad fontes* (back to the sources) of Scripture and the writings of some early church fathers, especially St. Augustine. However, the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the rise of Protestant scholasticism with two clear camps, Lutheran and Reformed. The same type of impulse that characterized Medieval scholasticism, namely, carefully reasoned comprehensive systems of thought with long arguments and fine-tuned distinctions, characterized Protestant scholastic theologies.

The scientific revolution and the Enlightenment significantly impacted biblical studies and theology as rationalism and empiricism became the chief methods of discovering truth and reality. The philosophy of Kant put limits on knowledge and tried to make room for faith in the realm of the ethical. However, the philosophy of Hegel and the birth of German Idealism restored an optimistic view of reason that some interpreters then applied to the Bible and theology in the form of panentheism.

When we come to the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, the imposing of philosophical systems upon theology continued with the rise of existentialism, phenomenology, analytic philosophy, and postmodern hermeneutics. Diogenes Allen, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Princeton Theological Seminary, provides a comprehensive analysis of the historic interrelationship of philosophy and theology in his work, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Allen impressively demonstrates that no matter what period, philosophical ideas have influenced the way we read the Bible and think theologically. His central thesis is that: "Everyone needs to know some philosophy in order to understand the major doctrines of Christianity or to read a great theologian intelligently."[27]

[27] Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), iii.

In a recent book, *The Essentials of Christian Thought*, Roger E. Olson contends that the Bible itself has an implicit philosophy and metaphysics of reality, the world, God, and humanity. He argues that our pluralistic culture promotes "eclecticism" but that "Biblically committed Christians, however, *should* want to purify their worldview of beliefs radically alien to and in conflict with the worldview implied in the biblical story."[28] Olson claims that one does not have to accept the de-Hellenizing project of Adolf von Harnack in the early twentieth-century to criticize the influence of Greek thought upon the Bible and Christian theology.

Throughout the book, Olson makes clear how Hellenistic thought, metaphysical dualism, pantheism, emanationism, absolute idealism, panentheism, naturalism, and humanism are radically different systems of thought with remarkably different ideas about reality, the world, God, and humanity. Moreover, Olson contends that the narrative of Scripture assumes and implies a duality without dualism, a God who is a being rather than being itself. This God is personal, supernatural, vulnerable, and exists in time while being eternal and invisible. Whereas Hellenistic and rational-speculative philosophy and metaphysics view God as "absolute," "impersonal," "unconditioned," "immutable," "impassible," "immovable," and "self-sufficient," Olson highlights that the biblical and Christian view of God is demonstrably dynamic, personal, open, changeable, and relational.

There is also a contrast with the metaphysical vision of the world. Olson points out that Scripture is not world denigrating or dualistic like in Platonism. Nor is the world viewed in a monistic, pantheistic, Hegelian panentheistic, deistic, idealistic, or naturalistic manner. Rather, the biblical Christian view of the world is both positive and realistic. Scripture affirms that God created the material realm "good," but sin resulted in its corruption. Moreover, the God of the Bible has a dialectical relationship with the world, sustaining, guiding, and caring for it. In addition, there is a continuity and discontinuity of God and

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[28] Roger E. Olson, *The Essentials of Christian Thought: Seeing Reality Through the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 13.

the world. God is both independent of the world and highly relational within it. Olson further contends that there is a distinctly biblical and Christian view of humanity found within Scripture that differs from all the other philosophical and metaphysical systems. The biblical view of humanity is the "original humanism" where God created humans good, in the image and likeness of God, and with freedom and responsibility (Gen 1:27). Moreover, God crowned humanity with glory, honor, and the dignity of caring for God's good creation (Ps 8:4–9).

Although humanity is dependent upon the Creator, humans are the Creator's co-creators. Nonetheless, Scripture is also realistic about the human condition—it is broken due to sin and in need of redemption. Olson contrasts the biblical Christian view of humanity with anthropologies in Gnosticism, Eastern thought, naturalism, and secular humanism. If we grant that Christianity has a distinct and explicit worldview and metaphysics of reality, God, the world, and humanity that is implicit within Scripture, the question arises as to how one discovers the implicit worldview and metaphysics found within Scripture and how do we avoid imposing our philosophical assumptions, theological systems, and conceptual grids upon Scripture?

Can the Inductive Bible Study Method Help in the Present Pluralist Context?

The challenges of excessive interpretative anarchy, church fragmentation, doctrinal chaos, and the imposition of alien systems of thought upon Scripture in the present pluralist age are enormous. It would be naïve to think that there is some silver-bullet remedy or quick fix to this situation. In addition, there are some, such as Merold Westphal, who celebrate interpretative, ecclesial, and theological pluralism.[29] In fact, Westphal urges readers to embrace different readings of the biblical text.

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[29] Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

Acknowledging that we live in an interpretative and theologically pluralistic age and will continue to do so in the future, we at once confront the question as to whether there are ways to restrict, limit, or mitigate against excessive interpretative and theological pluralism. We may not be able to stop the interpretative and theological bleeding, but could we identify shared interpretative and theological procedures, methods, tasks, sources, and rules to at least slow or reduce the bleeding? In addition, are there not some criteria that are useful in adjudicating between contested and conflicting biblical interpretations and theological doctrines?

For the remainder of this essay, I argue that the IBS method and its hermeneutical principles are a vitally important, albeit limited approach to counteract excessive interpretative and theological pluralism. Its principles of observing, interpreting, and applying the biblical text, while modern, prohibit reading the Bible in just any way the reader wants and as a result provide theological guidelines. Although there are different methods, tasks, sources, and purposes between IBS and theology, there is a mutually beneficial relationship between the two. This section will highlight five contributions that the IBS method and hermeneutical principles make in response to the many issues in our pluralist age named above.

First: The Principle of Canonical Study

Karl Barth was perhaps the greatest theologian of the twentieth-century. One of Barth's legacies is that he returned Christian theology to "the strange new world within the Bible."[30] Theology had become estranged from the Bible due to deistic Enlightenment rationalism, which denied miracles. Also, the historical critical method came to dominate the academy and universities. Hans Frei contends that: "the realistic narrative reading of biblical stories, the gospels in particular,

[30] Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (Glouchester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 28–50.

went into eclipse throughout the period" of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries.[31]

In addition, the German liberal tradition beginning with Schleiermacher sought to situate the Christian faith upon the human experience of God rather than upon Scripture or tradition. By the beginning of the twentieth century, many academic circles questioned the Canon of Scripture or sidelined it as a credible source of Christian theology. During WWI Barth became disillusioned with his liberal teachers. He saw the flaws in building theology upon human experience or upon liberal ethical ideals. Barth, therefore, reconstituted divine revelation in the Word of God as the criterion of Christian theology. Barth's influence extends today among many groups, particularly those associated with Narrative Theology, Post-Liberal Theology, and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movements. However, the theological landscape has shifted dramatically since the mid-twentieth-century when Neo-Orthodoxy and Biblical Theology were in their heyday. Theologies of Liberation have reemphasized the priority of human experience as a starting point for theology and various postmodern theologies have come of age. Postmodern theology, in general, does not prioritize the Canon of Scripture, but rather, privileges the horizon or context of the reader. Considering all the various interpretations and theological movements that exist today, there is once again a need to reassert the priority of the Canon of Scripture as the primary source and norm as well as the starting point for Christian theology.

The IBS method contributes to the study of theology in our pluralistic age by affirming the Canon of Scripture, it is the starting point for observation, interpretation, and application. In the words of David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina,

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[31] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 324.

> [T]he notion of *canon* involves a rule or norm. The canon of Scripture, then, points to the reality that the community of the Christian church has claimed that these books, read as a canonical collection, have normative authority within the Christian community. More specifically, the canonizing process involved the judgment of the church that God somehow reveals God's self and God's will through these writings in unique ways, with the result that taken together as a canonical whole, they function as a theological norm and as the means of Christian formation.[32]

Bauer and Traina affirm that there is both unity and diversity among the many books in the Canon of Scripture. The fact that there is diversity within the texts of Scripture points to the fact that the Bible is a dialectical interplay between the human authors and divine inspiration. Bauer and Traina emphasize that recognizing the Canon of Scripture is important in seeing how the relationship of the individual books of the Bible relate to one another and point to the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Giving priority to the Canon of Scripture as the rule and norm of Christian theology helps restrict excessive interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos. Making the Canon of Scripture the primary source, norm, and authority does not exclude church tradition, other sources of knowing, or human experience. Giving priority to the Canon of Scripture also does not preclude one from using such methods of study as source, form, or redaction criticism. Bauer and Traina acknowledge that these methods can make valuable contributions but are limited because they move "behind the final form of the text" and create "certain tensions" because, "For its part, *historical criticism* presents alternative narratives that necessarily differ from those the biblical writers presented to the implied readers in the biblical text."[33] While prioritizing the Canon of Scripture as the primary

[32] David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 66.

[33] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 396.

source, norm, and authority of Christian theology will not halt excessive interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos within our pluralistic age, it provides a rule and measure by which to assess and evaluate the plethora of interpretive and theological proposals on offer today.

Second: The Principle of Inductive Study

Bultmann was right to say that there is no exegesis without presuppositions. However, it is well known that Bultmann himself interpreted Scripture through the grid of Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. IBS forestalls imposing an alien philosophical worldview or a theological system/grid upon the text of Scripture because it is based on an *inductive* approach. Bauer and Traina clarify the importance of inductive study by contrasting it with a deductive approach as follows:

> The present discussion employs the term *inductive* synonymously with *evidential*: that is, a commitment to the evidence in and around the text so as to allow the evidence to determine our understanding of the meaning of the text, wherever that evidence may lead. *Deduction* is used synonymously with *presuppositional*: that is, a commitment to certain assumptions (whether stated or implicit) that we allow to determine our understanding of the meaning of the text.[34]

Bauer and Traina note that an inductive approach to interpreting Scripture has two important aspects.

First, the reader needs to possess an openness to accepting what the scriptural text is saying regardless of what are one's personal philosophical assumptions or theological commitments. It is true that no one comes to the biblical text without prior assumptions, commitments, values, experiences, and from some particular tradition that in-

[34] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 17.

fluences how we read texts. However, this only underscores the importance of the principle of inductive study if we genuinely want to let Scripture speak for itself.

Second, the principle of inductive study refers to a certain process or method of reasoning akin to what one finds in good scientific reasoning. The scientific method works on the principles of induction rather than deduction. A researcher makes observations and forms a preliminary hypothesis. Then, the researcher makes experiments to test if her hypothesis is verified or falsified. Whether a hypothesis is verified or falsified is based upon evidence, valid inferential reasoning, and the best explanation. All along the way, good scientific reasoning is open to more evidence and a commitment to revision if deemed necessary. It allows the evidence to dictate what is true and not the assumptions or presuppositions of the researcher. In the same way, inductive bible study allows the evidence from the text of Scripture to dictate the interpretative and theological conclusions one draws rather than what the reader assumes or presupposes the Scripture to be saying. Bauer and Traina point out that a danger in reading Scripture through our interpretative and theological grids is that we can miss challenging aspects of the biblical message: "the tendency on the part of those in the faith community to uncritically bring their theological assumptions to the reading of the text can dull the sharp and challenging message that biblical passages were originally intended to communicate to the faithful."[35] In this way, the principle of inductive study mitigates against interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos. It also restricts from the start the impulse to impose a philosophical system or theological grid upon the text of Scripture. While we do not come to the text of Scripture as "blank slates," the inductive approach urges interpreters to avoid foisting their systems and beliefs upon the text so that Scripture may speak for itself.

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[35] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 382.

Third: The Principle of Literary Context

In addition to imposing a philosophical or theological system or grid upon the text of Scripture, there is also a tendency among theologians and biblical interpreters to read Scripture selectively to justify a doctrine or interpretation that one has already come to affirm. This is not only a problem with scholars. Having taught theology for 20 years or so, I have met many students who use the Bible selectively to back up what their ecclesial tradition, pastor, or family taught them to believe. When asked to justify why they interpret a passage of Scripture a certain way or believe a particular doctrine to be true, many students simply say, "That's what I was taught to believe growing up." In fact, many of them do not even know that there are interpretations or theological positions other than the ones they have learned. Scot McKnight relates a similar observation from his ministry experience:

> What I learned was an uncomfortable but incredibly intriguing truth: Every one of us adopts the Bible and (at the same time) adapts the Bible to our culture. In less-appreciated terms, I'll put it this way: Everyone picks and chooses…. We pick and choose. (It's easier for us to hear 'we adopt and adapt,' but the two expressions amount to the same thing.)[36]

To mitigate against reading the Bible any way we want and picking and choosing what we want to believe by selectively reading and citing Scriptures that support our cherished views, Bauer and Traina maintain the principle of literary context. This principle asserts that interpreters should study Scripture as books-as-wholes since the biblical writers constructed and planned them as such. An example of this would be determining the meaning of "faith" and "works" as used by Paul and the Book of James. Both cite Genesis 15:6 to talk about the relation of

[36] Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 13.

faith and works but the meaning of "faith" and "works" in Paul and the Book of James can only be determined by how each author uses these terms in their books as a whole. This is related to the principle of compositional study of Scripture:

> The study of the Bible ought to be compositional study. This principle derives from the previous claim, namely, that the Bible is a collection of discrete books, and as such, individual passages must be interpreted in light of their literary context, which is to be understood finally as the context of the book-as-a-whole.[37]

To quote one of my former teachers at Asbury Theological Seminary, Robert W. Lyon, "Context is Everything." This dictum ought to guide and direct how we determine the meaning of words and concepts within Scripture. The meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence derives from the immediate context that precedes and follows that word, phrase, or sentence. Likewise, the meaning of sentences or verses derives from the paragraphs and larger units and sections of the book and extends to the context of the book-as-a-whole. This principle applies to reading the whole Canon of Scripture together so that Scripture can truly help interpret Scripture. The principle of observing and interpreting words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs in the literary context of larger units, sections, and books-as-wholes correlated with all the other books-as-wholes within the Canon of Scripture allows the reader to follow the thought-flow of the biblical author and forces the interpreter to deal with the whole Bible and not just the parts that happen to support their particular theological interests or preferences.

Fourth: The Principle of Correlation

The principle of correlation also helps to mitigate against our tendency

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[37] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 64.

to pick and choose verses or passages of Scripture that selectively support our theological systems or ecclesial traditions. Correlation comes after we have observed, interpreted, evaluated, and appropriated the text of Scripture. Bauer and Traina explain that: "Correlation is the process of bringing together, or synthesizing, the interpretation (and appropriation) of individual passages so as to arrive at the meaning of larger units of biblical material."[38] Correlation happens at two levels, literary and canonical. Correlation at the literary level functions to formulate a biblical theology of an author's writings, such as Paul or John, or to develop theological themes found within an author's writings as a whole. Canonical correlation is looking at correlation of theological themes within individual books or the canon as a whole. Bauer and Traina point out that correlation involves recognizing both the unity and discontinuity of theological viewpoints within Scripture.

Because there is unity and discontinuity of theology within Scripture itself, it is no wonder that biblical interpreters arrive at different theological conclusions. Some, like Brueggemann, despair of finding a unified biblical theology. By contrast, Bauer and Traina think that a correlation of biblical theology, while difficult, is an important task. It is difficult because it is complex due to the work it takes to pull together all the individual passages of Scripture and relate them into a coherent whole. Since there are no fixed rules on how to do this, the process is open to the subjective judgments of interpreters. Yet, despite the dangers, Bauer and Traina contend,

> [C]orrelation is not finally a matter of subjective individual judgments because correlation focuses on the objective data of the text. Like all phases of induction, correlation is transjective: it includes both objective and subjective aspects working together. Thus, the process of correlation, which leads to biblical theology, is possible, but it may not be easy.[39]

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[38] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 337.

[39] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 341.

In addition, the principle of the Canon of Scripture assumes that interpreters do not read individual passages or books of the Bible in isolation from one another but rather as a whole. Those who emphasize the discontinuity of biblical theology exaggerate the situation. It is evident that Scripture is not univocal on such matters as the practice of sacrifice, or kingship in Israel, or the status of the Temple. There is also a tension between the violent acts of Yahweh in the OT and the enemy-loving, cheek-turning nonviolence revealed in Jesus's life and teaching. Furthermore, there is room for various interpretations of how God acts in the world, the nature of the atonement, the nature and extent of justification and sanctification, how to govern the Church, what happens to those who have never heard the gospel, the duration of hell, and a host of other disputed theological issues. However, there are theological themes at the metanarrative level of Scripture that are univocal, such as: God is the one sole creator, humanity was created glorious but is now fallen, God became incarnate to redeem the world, Jesus was in some way both divine and human, God is somehow both one nature and three persons, the cross of Jesus somehow reconciles us to God, Jesus was raised from the dead, the Holy Spirit awakens, regenerates, and sanctifies those who believe, Christ is coming again, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth at the consummation of human history. If we stay at the metanarrative level of Scripture, there is a more unified biblical theology. The more we get into the weeds of exegeting specific passages that have nothing to do with the metanarrative of Scriptural themes, the more likely we are to have interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos.

Fifth: The Principle of Communal Study

Vanhoozer contends that his vision of Mere Protestant Christianity is not a call to uniformity in interpretation, church, or theology. Rather, what he envisions is "a kind of Pentecostal plurality" likening it to the Spirit's outpouring on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Everyone was testifying about the "wonders of God" but they did so in their own

linguistic forms and languages. Vanhoozer affirms a unity of the gospel without a uniformity in interpretation or theology. He explains,

> [T]he various Protestant streams testify to Jesus in their own vocabularies, and it takes many languages (i.e., interpretative traditions) to minister to the meaning of God's Word and the fullness of Christ. As the body is made up of many members, so many interpretations may be needed to do justice to the body of the biblical text. Why else are there four Gospels, but that the one story of Jesus was too rich to be told from one perspective only? Could it be that various Protestant traditions function similarly as witnesses who testify to the same Jesus from different situations and perspectives? Perhaps we can put it like this: each Protestant church seeks to be faithful to the gospel, but no one form of Protestantism exhausts the gospels' meaning.[40]

I noted earlier that Vanhoozer proposes that the Reformation's five *solas* should serve as interpretative guides while reading Scripture and that churches should engage in interdenominational conferencing as a check on "communal interpretative egoism" and interpretative anarchy.

Bauer and Traina also acknowledge that biblical passages can legitimately be interpreted in various ways since,

> No passage, understood in its context, can mean just anything; a passage that means anything means nothing. The recognition of boundaries of plausible interpretations points to the fact that all passages are determinate: they have determinacy. But within those boundaries is always some range of more specific construals. The recognition of a range of plausible interpretations points to the fact that all passages are somewhat indeterminate or have some indeterminacy.[41]

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[40] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority*, 223–24.

[41] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 59.

So, not only do individuals interpret the Bible in several ways but the Bible itself invites a certain amount of diversity.

For this reason, Bauer and Traina think it is important not only to read the Bible individually but also in a community of interpreters. The community of interpreters have a vital role to play in assessing and evaluating both the process of biblical interpretation and the conclusions drawn from biblical study. Through dialogue with other interpreters, one can not only assess their observations, interpretations, and applications, but one can also self-evaluate one's own work in this same regard. This critical dialogue and assessment performed in community using the IBS method and hermeneutics discourages the unbridled reading the text and reveals ways that we might impose alien ideas or systems of thought upon our interpretation of Scripture. In addition, conferencing within a community of interpreters may shed new light on one's own observations, interpretations, and how we might apply the text today.

Bauer and Traina contend that we should not restrict the community of interpreters to scholars. Instead, they think that "we can learn a great deal about the meaning of biblical passages by examining how these passages have been used in a broad range of forms, for example, in poetry, hymnody, liturgy, paintings, or fiction."[42] It should be added that the community of interpreters not only includes scholars living today, but also the vast number of biblical commentators throughout Church history. The community of interpreters might also include the canons of faith heralded by Canonical Theists, i.e., creeds, liturgies, bishops, saints, theologians, Church councils, icons, and architecture. In any case, the principle of communal study is essential to mitigating against excessive interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos. The IBS method and hermeneutical principles employed within the community of interpreters could function as part of a central legitimating authority that guides and assesses how we observe, interpret, and apply Scripture in the present pluralistic age.

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[42] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 61.

Conclusion

It is the central claim of this essay that the method of Inductive Bible Study (IBS) and hermeneutical principles associated with it may help to mitigate against excessive interpretative anarchy and doctrinal chaos in the present pluralist age. It also challenges the practice of foisting a foreign philosophical system or alien theological grid upon the biblical text. While the ISB method and principles do not settle specific doctrinal disputes and are limited in the task of reigning in doctrinal chaos, they do contribute to helping bridge the gap between Biblical Studies and the study of theology.

Hermeneutics: Interpreting Sacred and Living Texts

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Abstract
The aim of this article is to demonstrate the application of hermeneutical principles espoused in *Inductive Bible Study* by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina to the field of counseling. In approaching this task, the author focused on sections of the Bauer and Traina text that focused on observing and asking, answering and interpreting and evaluating and appropriating. In this article, the author presents the interpretive task as an interpersonal process influenced by the background issues of both writer and interpreter. As an interpersonal process, the interpretive principles apply whether one is seeking to interpret a written text or spoken words. Moreover, the author argues that hermeneutical principles are relevant to the counseling process for two major reasons: First, persons can be considered living texts to be understood through similar interpretive processes used in biblical interpretation. Second, the principles are also relevant because of the common medium of language encountered in written and spoken words.

Key Terms: hermeneutics, counseling, living human documents, integration

Introduction

How might insights from the discipline of hermeneutics apply to the field of counseling? Answering this question is the purpose of this article. Specifically, I will seek to demonstrate how the hermeneutical

principles discussed in David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina's book on *Inductive Bible Study* may apply to counseling practices.[1] This expectation appears reasonable for a number of reasons. First, this effort represents the relatively common practice of interdisciplinary integration. This type of integration is often described as theoretical or conceptual integration. It aims to provide meaningful comparisons and contrasts between two considered disciplines. Additionally, it endeavors to apply insights from one discipline to another. However, a fundamental goal is to demonstrate how elements such as a discipline's assumptions, conclusions, and methodology might be meaningfully integrated with another.[2] Furthermore, conceptual integration seeks to demonstrate how each discipline might mutually benefit from engagement with the other.

Second, efforts to integrate biblical and theological disciplines to psychology, counseling, and other therapeutic disciplines are not new. For some time, various authors have sought to bring about a rapprochement between psychology and counseling and biblical and theological disciplines. For example, Christian psychologists have expended much effort to demonstrate the relevance of theological and biblical concepts to the field of psychology.[3] Given these efforts, it seems plausible that the therapeutic disciplines might likewise benefit from the insights and methods of biblical hermeneutics.

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[1] David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

[2] Steven L. Porter, "Wesleyan Theological Methodology as a Theory of Integration," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32 (2004): 190–99.

[3] Al Dueck and Thomas D. Parsons, "Integration Discourse: Modern and Postmodern," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32 (2004): 232–47; Garzon, Fernando, "Interventions That Apply Scripture in Psychotherapy," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 33 (2005): 113–21; William L Hathaway, "Scripture and Psychological Science: Integrative Challenges and Callings," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 33 (2005): 89–97; Marcus K. Kilian and Stephen Parker, "A Wesleyan Spirituality: Implications for Clinical Practice," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 29 (2001): 72–80; Porter, "Wesleyan Theological Methodology as a Theory of Integration," 190–99.

Third, attempts to integrate therapeutic disciplines and biblical hermeneutics already exist. These efforts have largely involved the application of therapeutic insights to the field of biblical interpretation. For example, Kamila Blessings has demonstrated how principles from the family therapy field might be meaningfully applied to biblical interpretation. Besides her own efforts, she noted an increased interest in the use of psychological theories in biblical interpretation. She points out that such interests have led psychology and biblical study groups to meet in order to discuss psychologically-based interpretive tools.[4]

The Nature of Hermeneutics

Before proceeding further, it seems wise to discuss the nature of hermeneutics, and to give particular attention to the Inductive Bible Study (IBS) approach. This appears a necessary step before one can make meaningful application to the field of counseling. Hermeneutics involves the science of interpretation and stems from early work in biblical criticism which was later applied as a method for understanding scripture.[5] Hermeneutics permits the interpreter to enter into another's experience and frame of reference. As such, it involves a way of listening by which one seeks to interpret and make sense of another's words and messages.[6] Given this reality, hermeneutics is inherently interper-

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[4] Kamila Blessing, "Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory as Bible Hermeneutic," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 19 (2000): 38–46; idem, "Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures," in *From Gospel to Gnostics*, ed. J. Harold Ellen and Wayne G Rollins, 4 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, 2004), 3:165–91.

[5] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 1; Zoë Boden and Virginia Eatough, "Understanding More Fully: A Multimodal Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Approach," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11 (2014): 160–77; Tom Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 31 (2003): 259–72; Richard Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors: Hermeneutics as a Way of Listening," *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies* 11 (2012): 304–20.

[6] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306, 313.

sonal; it permits interpreters of written or spoken words to engage empathically the author of the text in an I-Thou relationship.[7] Accordingly, it has been noted that "… the interpreter (I) relives and reenacts empathically the experience, both cognitive and transcognitive, of the writer (Thou)."[8] This means that in any interpretive act, there is an ongoing relationship between the author and the interpreter. Moreover, there is a two-way flow of influence between text and interpreter making for a dialogue rather than a monologue.[9]

The engagement between writer and interpreter incorporates culture and history. In fact, interpreters bring all of their background issues, which are sometimes covert, to the interpretive process.[10] Elements such as the interpreter's cultural experience, makeup and other background issues come into play.[11] Additionally, an interpreter also brings various espoused values and preferences. In short, while seeking to understand another's speech, however delivered, an interpreter's *Sitz im Leben* always comes into play. From this perspective, efforts to understand the meaning of another individual is an act of interpretation influenced by all aspects of the interpreter.[12] However, this is not simply true of interpreters; writers also bring their own makeup, cultural experiences and other background issues to the text. As a result, the interpretive process involves a kind of dance in which writer and interpreter move in sync with each other with the ultimate goal of determining the meaning the writer or speaker intended. Given the con-

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[7] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313.

[8] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 370 quoting Wilhelm Dilthey.

[9] Samuel Park, "History and Method of Charles V. Gerkin's Pastoral Theology: Toward an Identity-Embodied and Community-Embedded Pastoral Theology, Part II. Method," *Pastoral Psychology* 54 (2005): 61–72.

[10] Clara E. Hill, *Helping Skills: Facilitating Exploration, Insight, and Action*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009), 40–44; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 261.

[11] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 371.

[12] Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 261–62.

tributions of writer or speaker and interpreter to the interpretive process, one might consider the hermeneutical task as involving a kind of negotiated meaning.[13]

These realities generally apply to any written or spoken language. In fact, it is language itself that carries many of the personal truths and cultural dynamics which influence communication and understanding.[14] Indeed, it has been noted that language "… transmits a hidden load of shared assumptions, a collective and shared set of interpretations of reality that make up the culture of a particular group."[15] Given this reality of language, it is not surprising that hermeneutical principles have even been applied to fields such as qualitative research which focus on interpreting written language and narratives.[16] Hermeneutics has also been applied to pastoral care and counseling by practitioners such as Charles Gerkin and Donald Capps.[17]

Approach to Hermeneutics according to Inductive Bible Study

Having discussed the general nature of hermeneutics, it is important to also discuss the interpretive process particularly as it relates to the IBS approach. Bauer and Traina describe this approach to hermeneutics as a "… comprehensive, holistic study of the Bible that takes into account every aspect of the existence of the biblical text and that is

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[13] Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 263.

[14] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306.

[15] Yusak Tridarmanto, "An Inductive Approach to Paul's Theology: A Methodological Note," *Asia Journal of Theology* 27 (2013): 57–69.

[16] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 161–64; Petra Munro Hendry, "Narrative as Inquiry," *Journal of Educational Research* 103 (2010): 72–80; David L. Rennie, "Qualitative Research as Methodical Hermeneutics," *Psychological Methods* 17 (2012): 385–98.

[17] Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*, Theology and Pastoral Care Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984).

intentional in allowing the Bible in its final canonical shape to speak to us in its own terms, thus leading to accurate, original, compelling and profound interpretation and contemporary appropriation."[18] This approach emphasizes the need for a first-hand study of the biblical text itself while endeavoring to understand its meaning. In addition, these authors consider the process spiracular, holistic and integrative. The spiracular emphasis means the IBS interpreter knows that just as observation leads to interpretation, the latter can likewise lead one to correct initial observations and make new observations. The emphasis on the holistic and integrative means that the inductive interpreter carefully and comprehensively investigates all of the evidence found in all parts of a written document.[19]

The Inductive Spirit

An inductive spirit characterizes the IBS approach. Bauer and Traina identify the inductive spirit with a radical openness that takes seriously any evidence presented in the text.[20] This inductive spirit seems analogous to a spirit of inquiry marked by curiosity which follows the narrative wherever it leads. Accordingly, a spirit of curiosity has been highlighted in the interpretation of sacred texts such as the book of Psalms.[21] Curiosity frees the interpreter to follow the text and the multiple meanings that may be present therein. Indeed, curiosity has been described as an attitude that facilitates the generation of "… multiple descriptions and voices."[22] Consistent with this radical spirit of openness and curi-

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[18] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 6.

[19] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 2–6.

[20] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 18.

[21] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 19; Christine Jones, "Lessons Learned: Applying a Hermeneutic of Curiosity to Psalm 78," *PRSt* 44 (2017): 173–83.

[22] Lynn Caesar and Marjorie Friday Roberts, "A Conversational Journey with Clients and Helpers: Therapists as Tourist, Not Tour Guide," *Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies* 10 (1991): 47.

osity, the IBS approach also emphasizes a willingness to accept the conclusions generated by this process. Evidence in the text serves as key in that it becomes the main factor in determining its meaning.[23]

However, although the inductive interpreter comes with a degree of openness and curiosity, this does not mean pure objectivity exists. Given background issues and preunderstandings, the inductive interpreter knows pure objectivity is illusory. Rather, she knows that one approaches the text with objectivity and subjectivity, a reality described as *transjective*.[24] Given these realities, openness means a willingness to temporarily suspend one's worldviews and assumptions in order to understand in an unbiased way the meaning of a given text. One can contrast the openness in IBS with deductive approaches. In a deductive approach, the reader brings his or her own assumptions and biases to the text rather than allowing it to speak for itself. Those presuppositions then become guiding factors in determining the meaning of a text. In reality, the interpreter working from this stance imposes personal biases on the text.[25]

The Inductive Process

The IBS approach also includes a clear methodology described as an inductive process. However, this process is not rigid or inflexible. Rather, since it is shaped by the individual differences of the interpreter. One may consider it an individualized approach to the interpretation

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[23] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 18–22; Joshua E. Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *JETS* 55 (2012): 155–58.

[24] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study,* 28–32; Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 155–56.

[25] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 17–23; Justin Marc Smith, review of *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *RBL* 15 (2013): 482–84 available at https://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=8103.; Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 156.

of a text. In fact, the authors emphasize the need for students to develop their own skills as they study the Bible. The approach seems individualized in another sense; namely, the interpreter determines what approaches are bested suited to a text. As such, the authors described it as doing "… whatever is most effective and efficient in determining the meaning of the text and thus effectuating or implementing an inductive attitude."[26] In parts 2–5, the authors described this experimental process as one that includes observation, interpretation and appropriation (application) and correlation.[27] These parts and their corresponding chapters lie at the heart of the inductive process. Part 5, which focused on correlation, involves integrating smaller parts of the Bible with larger parts. Correlation serves to help one arrive at the meaning of larger sections of biblical material.[28] Although this section may contain ideas relevant to counseling (such as its emphasis on overgeneralization), this author will focus on parts 2–4 that begins with observing and asking.

Observing and Asking

The initial procedure in the IBS approach emphasizes detailed observation that leads to asking pertinent questions of the text. Observing serves as a valuable tool for yielding evidence from which general conclusions may be drawn.[29] It focuses systemically on all parts of a written document including books-as-wholes, its divisions, sections and segments.[30] Here, the authors appear to utilize the idea of the hermeneutical circle whereby exploring parts and wholes promote understanding of each other. This idea of the hermeneutical circle also "… means that

[26] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 20.

[27] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 75–361.

[28] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 337; Walter M. Dunnett, review of *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, by David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *AThR* 94 (2012): 342.

[29] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 73–175, esp. 73 and 75.

[30] See chs. 11–12 in Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 79–151.

the interpreter can enter the circle of possible narratives at any point, that each narrative modifies the whole and that the experience of the circle opens up new horizons of meaning for the enquirer."[31]

In my judgment, the described characteristics of observation that facilitates effective questions appear important. Bauer and Traina describe these characteristics as perceptivity, exactness, persistence and impartiality. These four characteristics serve as important elements in the IBS method and bear some brief explanation. Perceptivity means the interpreter becomes aware of what is actually present in the text. This implies that one does not bring material foreign to the text as would be true in a deductive process. Exactness refers to a focus on accuracy and precision in seeing what is present in the text. It also indicates a process that is specific and depth-focused rather than superficial. The authors suggest that labeling one's observations can facilitate exactness. Persistence involves continually seeking to discover what is present in the text. This appears of crucial importance since a document or text might possess many layers of meaning. Finally, those who observe a text need to exhibit impartiality. This involves being aware of one's preunderstandings, prejudices, and biases brought to the text that can color what one observes.[32]

As noted earlier, in the IBS approach keen observation leads to asking questions. This makes sense since asking questions lies at the heart of inquiry.[33] Although I will discuss questions more thoroughly in the section that follows, it seems appropriate here to note the nature of questions asked in the IBS process. I note that the questions asked were open in nature. Open questions typically begin with how, what, when, where and why.[34] They require a fuller response than one normally gets when the question elicits a minimal response or a simple yes or no. Examples of such open questions would include "Where are the

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[31] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 307.

[32] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 75–78.

[33] Hendry, "Narrative as Inquiry," 73.

[34] Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper*, 9th ed. (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2010), 139–40; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 117–23.

problems here? What are the questions that pertain specifically to the major problems?"[35]

Answering and Interpreting

The authors titled this section "Answering and Interpreting" for a specific reason. Persons using the IBS approach begin to answer and interpret the material by answering significant questions raised in the first phase.[36] Here, the budding interpreter determines which of the questions formulated earlier are most important. But how does one determine which questions to pursue? Here, Bauer and Traina discuss selection criteria such as importance, difficulty, interest and interrelatedness. In relation to importance, the interpreter should seek to focus on those questions which are most likely to bring one into contact with a passage's central concerns. One should also focus on questions that facilitate addressing the major problems in a passage. Of course, one should also focus on those questions that will address the personal or professional concerns with which one approached the text. While considering these various factors, one ought also to be aware that questions interrelate and impinge on each other; that is, answering one question often encompasses answers to other questions raised.[37]

As one seeks to answer significant questions, two broad elements come into play: identifying appropriate evidence that becomes the basis for devising premises and drawing inferences germane to the text.[38] In addressing the first element, Bauer and Traina highlight a number of evidences that facilitate answering the questions. For the purpose of this article, this author will briefly mention the evidences that seem to possess particular relevance to counseling. These would include word usage, kinds of terms used, inflection and syntax, tone or atmosphere,

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[35] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 180.

[36] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 177.

[37] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 179–80.

[38] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 180.

author's purpose and viewpoint and historical background.[39] As one wrestles with these evidences, one also begins to formulate premises that lead to various inferences. In some sense, in pursuing this process, the interpreter makes hypotheses and carefully tests them out. Through these aspects, one enters into the interpretive task of understanding the meaning the writer intended.[40] Bauer and Traina described this in the following manner: "Interpretation involves precisely and specifically ascertaining the sense of the text by identifying, on the basis of evidence within and surrounding the text itself, the communicative intent of the implied author toward the implied reader, that is, the reader that the text itself assumes. The interpretive process thus depends on the guidance the text gives to the reader in the construal of meaning."[41] Of course, in the interpretive process, paying careful attention to context is also vitally important. In fact, the literary context of a passage provides the most significant evidence for interpretation.[42] Moreover, it should be noted that the contexts of the writer and interpreter also play an essential role in the communication process.[43]

However, in seeking to make valid interpretations of a text, the possibility for various fallacies arise. These can serve to negatively influence the discovery of meaning. Bauer and Traina highlight several possible fallacies. However, this author will focus on the fallacies of premise, fallacies of lexical reductionism and psychological fallacy. The first of these errors involve starting with an invalid or ambiguous premise which virtually assures false interpretations. The fallacy of lexical reductionism revolves around deriving meaning from statements simply by paying attention to the cumulative definition of terms. In the process, one misses the relationship of terms to each other. At the same time, the terms and their meaning become delinked from their

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39 Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 186–221.

40 Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 239–48.

41 Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 177.

42 Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 183–86; Stewart, review of *Inductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 156.

43 Tridarmanto, "Inductive Approach to Paul's Theology," 60–62.

literary, historical and cultural contexts. The psychological fallacy involves imposing an emotional interpretation on the text when such a reading is not present within the passage or its original context.[44]

Evaluating and Appropriating

How important and valuable is interpretation if it lacks relevance for life in the world? This appears to be the intent of the section on evaluating and appropriating. Evaluation deals with the validity of the scriptures in both a general and specific sense. In the general sense, evaluation inquires as to the validity and worth of the scriptures for contemporary persons. In the specific sense, evaluation relates to whether biblical passages possess continuing value that makes them suitable material for appropriation and how relevant they might be to specific situations.[45] As one can see, evaluation has appropriation, that is, application in view. In fact, the text indicates that the focus here is to "… ascertain what values for thinking, character and behavior they may derive from the interpretation of the text for the formation of contemporary personal and community life."[46] Appropriation is all about applying biblical truth discerned through interpretation to the contemporary situation. From this standpoint, interpretation is not an end in itself; it is not strictly intended to promote understanding and insight. Its ultimate goal ought to inform how persons and communities respond to truths gained through the interpretive process. In effect, this section highlighted IBS as having moral and ethical implications rather than serving as simply an academic and scholarly exercise.[47]

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[44] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 210–12.

[45] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 282–88.

[46] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 279.

[47] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 319–25.

Hermeneutics and Counseling: From Sacred Text to Living Text

Before showing how insights from the IBS approach to hermeneutics apply to counseling, it is necessary to settle a couple of questions that likely arise from the title of this article. From the title, two questions likely arise. First, one might reasonably wonder about the meaning of the words *living texts*. Second, one might question the presupposed link between the interpretation of sacred texts and living texts. In fact, when I related the nature of this writing project to a colleague, he wondered aloud about the connection between hermeneutics and counseling. So, these are legitimate questions worth addressing.

By the term *living texts*, I refer to human beings who possess the inherent capacity for communication through language, whether in spoken and written forms or through non-verbal language. Given this capacity for language, the phrase means that humans are texts in the sense that they possess life stories and narratives which can be communicated.[48] Similar to the interpretation of sacred texts, the phrase implies that counselors can plumb individual stories and narratives for meaning as they seek to comprehend a speaker or writer. Moreover, referring to humans as texts (or documents) within the healing arts is not new. For example, in 1984, Charles Gerkin, drawing from the work of Anton Boisen, the founder of clinical pastoral education, espoused the idea of individuals as living human documents. Gerkin construed human persons as documents capable of being read and interpreted in a similar fashion to the way in which one would interpret a historical text. Furthermore, he thought human documents revealed a depth of

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[48] Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics,* 12; Park, "History and Method of Charles V. Gerkin's Pastoral Theology," 66; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306–7.

experience that needs to be respected just as interpreters respect historic texts.[49] In the same year, Donald Capps also utilized this concept when he applied the discipline of hermeneutics to pastoral care and counseling.[50] Given this history, one can consider my use of living texts as synonymous with the notion of living human documents.

Language: The Common Denominator

On what basis can one relate a living human text to written sacred texts? What do human and sacred texts have in common that permit the application of hermeneutical principles to both types of documents? How can processes developed to interpret sacred texts serve as suitable instruments for understanding the meaning of living texts? The answers to these questions lead to a consideration of the common medium of language present in sacred and living texts. Living texts who come to counseling possess the capacity for language and through it, they generate meaning. More importantly, in living human documents language serves as a major root of personal identity and is deeply connected to personal truth and culture. Given its nature and the focus on language, hermeneutics appears an appropriate discipline for exploring human texts as well as sacred texts. In fact, it is germane wherever one seeks to understand spoken or written language.[51] Its principles and processes appear relevant whether one is seeking to understand a biblical or religious passage or endeavoring to make sense of the spoken

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[49] Gerkin, *The Living Human Document : Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*; Rodney J. Hunter, "Conversations about Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms," *J. Pastoral Care* 15 (2005): 75–83; K. R. Mitchell, "The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 38 (1984): 64–72; Park, "History and Method of Charles V. Gerkin's Pastoral Theology," 66; Paul D. Steinke, "Living Human Documents Write Books," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 50 (1996): 405–8; F. B. Wichern, review of The *Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*, by Charles V. Gerkin," *BSac* 141 (1984): 374.

[50] Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics,* 37–60.

[51] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306.

(and written) words clients bring to counseling. One might even go further in comparing sacred texts to living texts and thereby reinforce the relevance of hermeneutics; because of language, even in sacred texts there exists a human element. As the Apostle Peter informs us, although scripture came inspired by the will of God, men yet spoke (and wrote) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21).

However, other connections exist between sacred and living texts that make the application of hermeneutical principles relevant. First, as is true with sacred texts, history and culture also play an influential role in living texts as individuals bring these ways of knowing to their narratives.[52] As such, the task of understanding the meaning of sacred and living narratives largely involves the same hermeneutical processes. In fact, understanding itself involves an effort to interpret the meaning of language.[53] However, understanding these texts does not happen casually or without effort; understanding necessitates paying keen attention to the text or otherwise actively listening in order to comprehend its meanings.[54]

Second, hermeneutics becomes important to sacred and living texts for another reason; namely, these texts do not necessarily carry one meaning; written or spoken words may possess multiple meanings.[55] In other words, as is true in sacred texts, the narratives of living human texts are also polysemic.[56] Human language, written and spoken, through its rich use of metaphor, possesses the ability to conceal multiple meanings and the depth of a message.[57] This ability of language to

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[52] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 288–325; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 261, 269; Tridarmanto, "Inductive Approach to Paul's Theology," 57–59, 60–62.

[53] Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 266.

[54] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306.

[55] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 77.

[56] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162–64; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 269; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 308–13.

[57] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully, " 163–64; Linda Finlay, "Sensing and Making Sense: Embodying Metaphor in Relational-Centered Psycho-

conceal multiple meanings invites interpretation as a way to discern and discover those various levels of meaning. At the same time, listening and discovering the multiple meanings also requires openness and curiosity to hearing and accepting the possible layers to a message.[58]

Counseling as an Interpersonal Process

Earlier in this paper, the author described hermeneutics as an interpersonal process.[59] Counseling is also a deeply interpersonal process that brings together counselors and clients in dialogical encounters. It involves interpersonal processing whereby a counselor shares in the experience of a client. One might also consider it intrapersonal since counselors utilize skills that help clients to internally process their experiences.[60] In this encounter between counselor and client, there also exists a two-way flow of influence.[61] Moreover, as in the hermeneutical process, counseling necessitates empathic encounter of the counselor with the client. As a result, noted authors such as Carl Rogers and Gerard Egan emphasized the need for empathic engagement with the client as a way of comprehending his or her internal frame of reference. They also considered empathy as one of the necessary and sufficient conditions for effective therapy.[62] Furthermore, as in interpretation,

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therapy," *The Humanistic Psychologist* 43 (2015): 338–53; Alia Sohail Khan, "A Hermeneutic Interpretation of Metaphor and Meaning Making in Read Alif Only," *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry* 10 (2012): 55–75; Lena Wiklund, "Metaphors—A Path to Narrative Understanding," *International Journal for Human Caring* 14 (2010): 61–69; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 308–13.

[58] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 370; Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 161; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313.

[59] Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 267–68; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313.

[60] Robert R. Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 9th ed. (Amherst MA: HRD Press, 2009), 17–24.

[61] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 59–60.

[62] Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 82–83; Hill, *Helping Skills*; Carl R. Raskin and Nathaniel J. Rogers, "Person-Centered Therapy," in *Current Psychotherapies*, ed. Danny Corsini, Raymond J. Wedding, 6th ed. (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock, 2000), 133–67; Worsley,

one has to *listen* to the messages inherent in the words of a client. This demands careful attending and bias-free active listening to the words the client is speaking.[63] Without such careful attention to the client's language, both verbal and non-verbal, it is almost impossible to discern the meaning and intent of the words.

Understanding the meaning and intent of a client's words is also no easy task. Comprehending meaning is a difficult task in itself. However, the task becomes more arduous because of the multiple meanings language can conceal.[64] Background issues such as personality, beliefs, values, demographics, and culture further complicate the process and can distort the message the client intends.[65] But in counseling, it is not simply these factors that bias what one sees and hears; the counselor's theoretical orientation and professional experience can also bias accurate interpretation.[66] Background issues in a counselor or interpreter makes the temporary surrender of one's own worldview, a necessary element to interpretation and understanding the essential message.[67] It is only through the surrender of one's own viewpoint that one is able to enter the client's internal frame of reference. Wise counselors, like successful interpreters, also know that background issues and preunderstandings bring a degree of subjectivity to the process. Likewise, they know that given their subjective biases, full objectivity is not possible. Nevertheless, they strive to balance their acknowledged subjectivity with a degree of objectivity. In the words of Bauer and Traina, they strive to be transjective.[68]

"Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313.

[63] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 80–91; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 106–7.

[64] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 160–64; Finlay, "Sensing and Making Sense," 338–39; Wiklund, "Metaphors—A Path to Narrative Understanding," 61; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 317–18.

[65] Hill, *Helping Skills,* 40–44; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 262.

[66] Hill, *Helping Skills,* 40–41.

[67] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 29; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 40–44.

[68] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 28–37.

However, one would be in error to assume that it is only factors related to the counselor that distort meaning and understanding. Factors within the client can also generate *noise* that distorts the process. Beyond elements such as personality and demographics, a client's expectations regarding counseling, desire and readiness for change and problem situation might also enter into the process.[69] Because of these realities, successful counseling requires the collaboration of both client and counselor, a requirement described as collaborative empiricism.[70] In effect, similar to the interpretation of sacred texts, counseling involves a kind of dance. In this dance, client and counselor try to get in step and in rhythm with each other. In the process, they engage in a kind of negotiation whereby interpretations and meaning are co-constructed or co-created.[71] One writer described this dynamic interaction in which the background issues of counselor and client actively interface, a moment-by-moment interactional sequence.[72]

The Inductive Spirit in Counseling

As in biblical interpretation, counseling includes an inductive spirit that revolves around radical openness. Earlier, I associated radical openness with a spirit of curiosity.[73] One cannot overemphasize the importance of openness and curiosity to the counseling process. Along with characteristics such as empathy and genuineness, openness is a critical characteristic of the effective counselor.[74] This radical openness

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[69] Hill, *Helping Skills,* 41–43.

[70] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 39–41.

[71] Ibid.; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 265–66, 269.

[72] Hill, *Helping Skills,* 41, 47–56.

[73] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 161–64; Caesar and Roberts, "Conversational Journey with Clients and Helpers," 41–43; Marianne Schneider Corey and Gerald Corey, *Becoming a Helper*, vol. 5 (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2006), 133–34; Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 263–67.

[74] Corey and Corey, *Becoming a Helper,* 151–54; Ed Neukrug and Alan Schwitzer,

means the counselor takes seriously the linguistic material clients bring to counseling. Openness also means the counselor approaches the client from a non-judgmental stance.[75] As in the interpretation of sacred texts, the counselor demonstrates a willingness to follow the client's narrative wherever it leads, and accepts as legitimate the conclusions derived from the dialogical encounter.[76] Additionally, openness means the counselor maintains an active curiosity in the multiple layers of messages inherent in a client's words.[77]

In relation to openness and curiosity in the counseling process, some have pointed to the importance of metaphor.[78] Metaphor serves the important function of promoting and facilitating meaning making as one seeks understanding of clients' stories. Metaphor also serves to connect language with felt sense. Felt sense refers to bodily being and knowing that lies at the periphery of human consciousness. Felt sense represents real lived experience, even though it is pre-reflective and prelinguistic.[79] Through ongoing openness and curiosity, the counselor remains attentive to the importance of metaphor in understanding the verbal and felt meanings clients bring to counseling.

The Inductive Process in Counseling

Observation and Questions

Counseling employs a methodology similar to that employed in IBS. As a result, one can easily relate the dynamics of the inductive process

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Skills and Tools for Today's Counselors and Psychotherapists: From Natural Helping to Professional Helping (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 2005), 75–76; Raskin and Rogers, "Person-Centered Therapy," 170–72.

75 Raskin and Rogers, "Person-Centered Therapy," 170–72.

76 Strong, "Getting Curious about Meaning-Making in Counselling," 262–63.

77 Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313.

78 Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 163; Finlay, "Sensing and Making Sense," 338–43; Wiklund, "Metaphors—A Path to Narrative Understanding," 61–67; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 306–13.

79 Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162.

to counseling in multiple ways. As noted earlier, observation stands as the first part of the interpretive process. Since parts and wholes mutually inform each other, observation includes a perusal of those elements.[80] Applied to counseling, observation dictates the need to understand the parts and the whole of a client's narrative. Sometimes, in order to gain greater insight into the entirety of the client's problem, the counselor might explore one aspect of the client's story in greater detail. On the other hand, once comprehending one part of a narrative, the counselor might seek to understand how this part pertains to the whole. Moreover, because the parts and whole of a client's narrative are inextricably linked, a counselor can enter the client's story at various points and still grasp the meaning inherent in the whole narrative.[81] One might also think of this reality theoretically. Different theories in counseling often place differential emphasis on cognition, affect or behavior that forms parts of a client's story. Depending on theory, one counselor might focus on the affective as a way to understand the client's story. Another counselor might look to cognition to yield the clearest comprehension of the client's narrative. A third counselor might pursue a behavioral focus. Because the affective, cognitive, and behavioral are all parts that link together in the client's story and life, counselors can enter the client's narrative at any of these points and still gain a holistic understanding.

Beyond this aspect, one cannot overstate the value of keen observation to the counseling process. Various explanations of the therapeutic process place a heightened emphasis on the skill of observation.[82] For example, in Allen Ivey's microskills hierarchy, observation lies at the base of his model, preceded only by the skill of attending.[83]

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[80] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 307.

[81] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 307–8.

[82] Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 59–66; Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 74–80; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 99–116; Allen E. Ivey, Mary B. Ivey and Carlos P. Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 9th. ed. (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2017), 83–104.

[83] Ivey et al., *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling,* 12.

Attending involves a way of letting clients know the counselor is tracking with them; it involves being fully tuned in emotionally and physically.[84] It is my opinion that attending itself includes observational features and thereby enhances focused observation on clients' verbal and non-verbal language. Given our earlier discussion, observing verbal language makes sense. However, one also needs to observe clients' non-verbal language as this too communicates meaning. I associate the non-verbal with felt sense. Similar to felt sense, non-verbal language is also pre-reflective and prelinguistic but carries the client's message in a significant way.[85] As a result, it can play a major role in interpreting and understanding clients' meaning. For example, non-verbal language can *punctuate* verbal messages. It can also corroborate, obscure, highlight or otherwise regulate verbal language.[86] This ability to observe non-verbal language and thereby gain a greater comprehension of clients' meaning represents one advantage interpreting livings texts holds over the interpretation of sacred texts.

As in the interpretation of sacred texts, counselors also need to pay keen attention to word usage, inflection, syntax and tone.[87] Keen observation of a client's vocal qualities such as tone, pitch, fluency, intensity and pauses can assist a counselor in understanding and interpreting clients' messages.[88] Once a message is received and understood, it may prompt a counselor to make new observations leading to new questions. For example, the initial interpretation of a client's message might lead a counselor to perceive the presence of other meanings.[89] This often leads a counselor to inquire about the other layers of meaning in the client's narrative. Additionally, sometimes a client's speech carries an overt message as well as an implicit message. The

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[84] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 74–78; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 99–116.

[85] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162.

[86] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 75–76.

[87] For word usage pages 186–91; for inflection and syntax pages 201–8; for tone pages 212–13 in Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*.

[88] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 75–76.

[89] Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 313, 315–18.

counselor who makes keen use of observation might perceive this implicit message and endeavor to make it explicit through the verbal skill of advanced empathy.[90] Advanced empathy occurs when a counselor senses meaning not readily apparent to a client. In addition to making the implicit explicit, it also seeks to make connections to various elements in a client's speech and to identify themes therein.[91] Identifying themes refers to repeated ideas or beliefs that appear in a client's speech. Typically, clients might not be consciously aware of the themes that occurs in their narratives.[92]

Finally, as in the IBS method, careful observation informs and leads to questions that can further clarify a client's message and meaning. One observes this close connection between observation and questioning in Ivey's microskills model. In Ivey's model, the skill of questioning or probing comes right after the skill of observation.[93] Significantly, learning to ask important questions is just as important a skill to a skilled counselor as it is to the biblical interpreter.[94] How and when one utilizes questioning might partly depend on individual differences, preferences and style. However, in probing a client's message for meaning, the counselor should focus on the use of open questions. As stated earlier, open questions employ words such as how, what, when, where and why. These questions allow for an in-depth exploration of a client's words and meaning.[95]

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[90] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 176–83.

[91] Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 87–114; Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 176–83.

[92] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 179; Biance Cody Murphy and Carolyn Dillon, *Interviewing in Action in a Multicultural World*, 4th ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2011), 115–17.

[93] Ivey et al., *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling,* 12.

[94] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 179–80; Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 136–47; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 117–28.

[95] Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 89; Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 139–40; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 117–20.

Characteristics of Effective Questioning

In the IBS text, the authors focused on perceptivity, persistence, exactness and impartiality as qualities of effective questions.[96] As will be seen in the discussion that follows, each of these qualities are significantly relevant to the work of a counselor. Perceptivity involves being aware of what is actually present. This is absolutely important to counselors as they respond to clients' stories. In fact, Gerard Egan considers perceptiveness one of three important responding skills. Along with perceptiveness in seeing what may be present in a client's speech, one also needs to know how to deliver an appropriate response and be assertive enough to deliver that response.[97] For example, a counselor might perceive a contradiction in a client's story. The appropriate response to contradiction is a verbal challenge that highlights the discrepancy in the message.[98] However, because challenging possesses some degree of confrontation, a counselor might lack the requisite assertiveness to deliver the response. Alternately, a counselor might fear the client's response and therefore not make the challenge.[99]

As in the IBS approach, persistence is also a necessary counseling characteristic. Persistence means a counselor does not simply settle once making initial observations or interpretations. This is because a counselor is keenly aware of the depth and layers to a client's narrative. The idea of multiple meanings and different layers to a client's message finds support in the therapeutic literature. For example, Gestalt approaches to counseling speaks of *peeling the onion*. This imagery acknowledges the presence of multiple layers in clients' stories which are reflective of underlying neuroses and resistances.[100] One also finds an emphasis on multiple layers in Aaron and Judith Beck's downward

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[96] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 75–78.

[97] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 112.

[98] Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 161–68; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 227–31.

[99] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 112.

[100] Gary Yontef and Lynne Jacobs, "Gestalt Therapy," in *Current Psychotherapies*, 6th ed. (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock, 2000), 303–39.

arrow technique, also called vertical descent. This technique seeks to plumb clients' narratives for deeper meaning attached to core beliefs or schemas. In this approach, the therapist begins by examining the client's thoughts that lie on the surface. Thereafter, the counselor probes for a client's core beliefs. In response to a client's answer, the counselor typically queries what it would mean if it were true.[101] Given this knowledge base, counselors know that meaning is polysemic. Accordingly, the effective counselor demonstrates persistence in searching out other possible meanings.[102] However, persistence also means "…investigating an experience more comprehensively by acknowledging and exploring its sensory aspects, thereby producing a more layered and nuanced account of the phenomenon."[103] Nevertheless, persistence also has relevance for counseling beyond the skill of questioning; counselors know client change involves hard work and they are persistent in their willingness to accompany their clients through this difficult process.[104]

True to the IBS approach, one ought also to aim for exactness which involves striving for accuracy. This, too, is an important trait in counseling in several ways. As it relates to observation and questioning, it involves seeing what is really present in a text. As stated earlier, it also involves moving beyond superficial observations.[105] However, its benefit goes beyond probing a client's narrative for understanding. For example, pursuing exactness has relevance for other aspects of the counseling process including empathically listening to the client's story and assessing the problem.

In listening to a client's story, a counselor does not simply aim to demonstrate cognitive or affective understanding of the story. The

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[101] Judith S. Beck, *Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2011), 261–63.

[102] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162–64; Worsley, "Narratives and Lively Metaphors," 308–13.

[103] Boden and Eatough, "Understanding More Fully," 162.

[104] Corey and Corey, *Becoming a Helper,* 14.

[105] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 76.

counselor ought also to aim for accuracy. Writers such as Gerard Egan and Robert Carkhuff express the need for accuracy in one's empathic statements.[106] Carkhuff even developed an accurate empathy scale that labels counselor statements as subtractive, accurate or additive.[107] Subtractive statements involve a failure in accuracy that detracts from the client's narrative. Such statements typically involve giving advice or failing to accurately reflect feeling or content. Inaccurate statements can destroy the therapeutic relationship. However, one can also make statements that accurately reflect the client's meaning. Beyond this, one can make additive statements that accurately capture the implicit in client's words and then make them explicit.[108] Accuracy in delivering empathic statement thus serves as one of the basic necessities of effective counseling.

A counselor also needs accuracy in assessing a client's problem situation. Assessment involves the procedures counselors use to grasp clients' nature and problem situations as they interact with the environment. Sundberg classically defined assessment as involving the methods practitioners use to develop impressions of individuals and their overall pattern of characteristics. It also entails examining hypotheses made about individuals. However, assessment also has the larger goal of making decisions relevant to clients' situation.[109] As such, assessment plays a major role in planning for the effective treatment of clients. To make errors here potentially carries major negative consequences for clients.

The final characteristic Bauer and Traina described was impartiality; that is, seeing what is truly there and being aware of the biases one

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[106] Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 92–104; Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 114–19.

[107] Neukrug and Schwitzer, *Skills and Tools for Today's Counselors and Psychotherapists,* 101–3.

[108] Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 137–42; Neukrug and Schwitzer, *Skills and Tools for Today's Counselors and Psychotherapists,* 102–3.

[109] Norman D. Sundberg, *Assessment of Persons* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 22.

might bring to the text.[110] This, too, carries major implications for counseling. Here, one might recall the earlier discussion about culture and background issues and how they impinge on the interpretive process. These issues can contribute to blind spots in counselors which they bring to counseling relationships. Blind spots can prejudice counselors to see things that are not actually present in clients' speech. Because of these, they may make false interpretations of clients' stories. Counselors might also be unaware of how their own situations and stories align with clients' narratives. As a result, they might impose their own expectations and interpretations on clients. At the core, this often leads to countertransference whereby counselors transfer their feelings onto clients. Seeing what is actually there might also be influenced by the particular theoretical orientation counselors hold and use within sessions. Counselors might become so locked into a particular way of seeing, it prevents them from truly understanding clients' perspectives which differ from their own paradigms.

Answering and Interpreting

Once an interpreter has observed and asked the important questions, how does she determine which ones to select that will focus on the central issues in a passage? It is at this point that IBS discusses the selection criteria of importance, difficulty, interest, and interrelatedness.[111] This author believes these qualities are critically relevant to the counseling process. To begin with, importance is essential to effective counseling. Just as biblical interpreters seek to unearth the central concerns of a passage, effective counselors likewise seek to explore and work on clients' important concerns. They need to decide on the important questions worth pursuing and which allow them to better understand clients' stories. Moreover, counselors need to strive for an accurate understanding of the central issues as well as the goals a client

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[110] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 78.

[111] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 179–80.

wishes to achieve and which are worth pursuing. They should also seek to determine key strategies needed to accomplish therapeutic goals.[112] One sees this concern reflected in counseling models such as Egan's. For example, in his three-stage model, the third point in the first stage involves helping clients to work on issues and concerns that will actually make a difference in their lives.[113]

Bauer and Traina also offer considerations that can help one determine importance. Among these considerations, they indicate the relevance of context and grammatical structure, that is, inflections and syntax.[114] For me, context and the grammatical makeup of client's words are significant concern for counselors. Counselors need to understand clients' problem situations in context since it carries implications for determining important foci. Egan described this attention to context as a *people in systems framework*.[115] Counselors should also help clients work on resolving key problems which can contribute to enhancing their lives within their various contexts. Moreover, counselors also need to pay attention to the way in which clients structure their language within counseling sessions. What words and terms do they emphasize? How fluently do they speak? What are the vocal qualities inherent in their voices when they speak? What viewpoint do they reflect? All of these are important considerations as one seeks to discern the salience of a client's message.[116]

In addition to working on important questions, counselors ought not to avoid tackling difficult questions. Difficult questions include those that touch on sensitive areas the counselor or client would prefer to avoid. More importantly, difficult questions are those which aid the counselor in understanding the central message and meaning(s) of a client's problems. Once counselors gain a fuller understanding of

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[112] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 342–72.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 201–8.

[115] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 14–15.

[116] Egan, *Skilled Helper*, 75.

problem areas, they target those challenging areas for meaningful and lasting change.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the questions and the answers deriving from them are not necessarily separate from each other. As Bauer and Traina indicate, answering one question will often entail addressing other questions raised.[117] The same is true in counseling. This author believes the interrelatedness counselors encounter in counseling situations essentially springs from the holistic nature of the human text. All elements of a person's life exist together. Given this systemic nature of human life, answers to given questions might also pertain to the other aspects of a client's life.

Finally, counselors ought to approach answering and interpreting by pursuing personal or professional interests. In the IBS text, the authors emphasize the personal and professional interests with which the interpreter approached the text.[118] Although these interests can be important considerations in counseling, greater weight should be placed on pursuing the client's personal or professional interests. That is, counselors ought to work on the issues that lie at the heart of the client's interest. Working on interests of importance to clients not only enhances rapport but can also facilitate treatment outcomes.[119]

In the section on implementing interpretation, Bauer and Traina highlight a number of fallacies that can distort interpretation. In this author's earlier discussion, he focused on the fallacies of invalid or ambiguous premises, lexical reductionism and a psychological fallacy.[120] How might these fallacies relate to counseling? First, counselors are not immune from a number of difficulties brought on by holding wrong premises. Making invalid or ambiguous premises can spring from the counselor's covert background issues, countertransference or even from the theoretical orientation a counselor holds. Such factors

[117] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study,* 179–80

[118] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 180.

[119] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 270–81.

[120] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 250–51, 255–56.

often lead counselors to minimize the importance of the client's actual words and meaning. They might also serve to distort the client's meaning. Alternately, misunderstanding the client's words can also spring from failing to interpret the client's words in context. Counselors can even engage in psychological fallacy through which they interpret clients' words while guided by emotional or psychological elements foreign to the client's situation. In effect, this often represents an imposition of the counselor's assumptions and worldview onto the client. Together, these fallacies function to distort the meaning of the client's words and message. Moreover, such errors inevitably breed resistance in clients. More importantly, they can lead to grievous outcomes; namely, they can lead to wrong assessment and diagnosis eventuating in ineffective treatment.

Evaluating and Appropriating

The interpretation of a client's words, message and meaning are not ends in themselves. Interpretive encounters should lead individuals to the discovery of truths that holds significant relevance to their lives. In the IBS approach, Bauer and Traina suggested that engagement with the written text ought to help the interpreter establish values which influence "…thinking, character, and behavior."[121] To these areas, this author would add the idea of affective change. In short, interpretation relates to all of life and intends radical change. It possesses real world focus. It reveals truths that can lead to a consideration of how individuals and communities might apply these same biblical truths to present situations and dilemmas.[122] As such, interpretations possess moral and ethical implications.[123]

The application of discovered truth is a significant consideration in counseling. Counseling encounters are not simply meant to promote

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[121] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 279.

[122] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 279.

[123] Smith, review of I*nductive Bible Study* (by Bauer and Traina), 484.

insight and understanding; they should facilitate real and meaningful change. They should impact schematic change whereby a counselee's thoughts, feelings and behaviors change for the better and which eventually leads to positive transformation.[124] Simply put, counseling should maintain a real life focus rather than serve esoteric purposes.[125] Truths gleaned and discovered need to influence significant transformation in counselees; they should influence change in their internal psyches and their interpersonal relationships. Moreover, truths discovered in counseling ought to lead counselees to effectively grapple with and effectively accomplish their various responsibilities in their external worlds. In short, truths gleaned in counseling relationships ought to be generalized to all areas of a client's life in the world outside of the therapeutic room.[126]

Developing Skills and Discovering a Counseling Style

So far, this author has discussed several elements of the IBS approach and their relevance to counseling. Before concluding, it appears important to address the development of skills and style. The authors of the IBS approach spoke to the first of these when they emphasized the need for students to develop their own skills.[127] In addition to the development of skills, this author would emphasize the need to develop one's style. Just as budding biblical interpreters learn hermeneutical skills that permit understanding sacred texts, beginning counselors study and acquire a number of skills for engaging living texts. These skills include microskills like attending and observing.[128] To these, one adds a number of verbals skills like feeling reflection, restatement,

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[124] Hill, *Helping Skills,* 249–50.

[125] Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 314–15.

[126] Hill, *Helping Skills,* 56–57.

[127] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 4, 20, 57, and 152.

[128] Ivey et al., *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling,* 63–113.

probing, reflection of meaning, challenge, self-disclosure and interpretation.[129] One can learn and understand all of these skills. However, it takes continual practice with human texts to develop mastery in real life situations. Mastery is not gained overnight. Rather, it comes from continual practice and engagement with clients. Such experiences typically begin with courses which teach procedural models and verbal skills for counseling. In addition, such courses provide opportunities for practicing these skills with living human documents. Students then develop a greater grasp of these skills and develop their own style through practica and internships. In each phase, just as the biblical interpreter engages the sacred text, beginning counselors must also continually engage the human text if they will master the skills and develop a personal style. In reality, the development of skills and style is a lifelong endeavor that continues even after one has completed formal training and entered the field as a professional. In short, enhancing one's skills and discovering and developing a style is a lifelong journey requiring ongoing practice.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate the relevance and application of the IBS approach to counseling. Of course, I am not under the illusion that I have unearthed or discussed all possible insights and applications. Other investigators of this approach to hermeneutics might discover additional elements that effectively relate to counseling. However, it is hoped that enough has been discussed to provoke further thought about the relevance of hermeneutics to counseling.

In many ways, this article has emphasized the mechanics of hermeneutics. This process pursues an experimental method as it seeks to arrive at systematic knowledge. It is experimental in the broadest sense of the term since it involves a distinct methodology that includes keen

[129] Carkhuff, *The Art of Helping*, 92–111; Egan, *Skilled Helper,* 104–90; Hill, *Helping Skills,* 117–268.

observation, investigating evidence, laying out premises and drawing inferences from them.[130] However, in this author's opinion, it would be an error to think of the process as one that is solely guided by an experimental procedure. More to the point, this author believes interpretation of sacred and human documents also employs a kind of *art*. It is art in the sense that each interpreter of written or spoken words brings his or her own skills and creativity to the interpretive process. It is also art in that each individual might creatively utilize these skills in different ways. Much of this creative process will also depend on the unique personality of the interpreter or counselor as well as other factors such as one's preferences, personal history and culture. One might also discern the artistic in the distinctive style or approach an interpreter or counselor brings to sacred and human texts. Earlier in this article, I described the interpretive process as a kind of dance between client and counselor. The same may now be said about the wedding of experimental and artistic elements; they too dance with each other in the interpretation of sacred and human texts.

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[130] Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 1.

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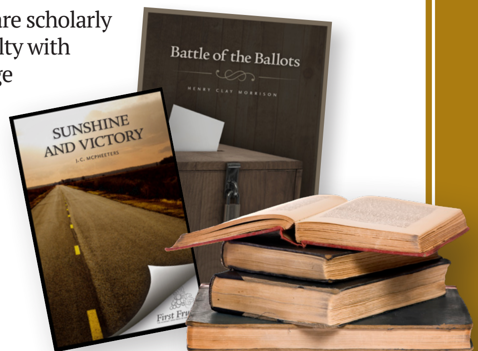

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