BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

A Beginner's Handbook

REVISED EDITION

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CHAPTER 11

Integrating EXEGETICAL PROCEDURES

The goal of exegesis is an informed understanding of a text. All the exegetical procedures and types of criticism which we have discussed in the preceding chapters have this as their aim.

At this point, the student may feel a bit overwhelmed by the diversity of critical aproaches which can be utilized in exegeting a biblical text and somewhat submerged in a mass of what appear to be prescriptive directions. Here one may wish to ask, "Is all of this necessary merely to understand a text?" "How is it possible to use and integrate all of these procedures?" Before discussing some of the more practical aspects of exegesis, several suggestions perhaps should be made at this juncture.

(1) The task of biblical exegesis is not unrelated to much of the work that is done in general theological education. In fact, many courses which involve the reading and analysis of sources, whether primary or secondary, present occasions for doing forms of exegesis. Whenever one encounters a text and asks such questions as, "How should I read this text?" "What does this mean?" "Why is this said this way?" "Why does the text say this and not something else?" "How can I rethink what is said so as to give it expression in my own words?" one is engaged in exegesis. Thus exegesis, even of technical works, is not an activity strange to theological students. We should recognize much of our work as exegetical in orientation and be conscious that much that is learned from the interrogation of a text in a non-biblical area has relevance for and can be carried over to the interrogation of a biblical text.

(2) Practically all biblical studies, even if they are not designated as "exegetical," are relevant to the task of exegesis. Introductory and other courses on the Bible explore facets of the nature and content of biblical documents, the history and religion of Israel and the early church, and the culture and background of biblical texts. Many of these topics

already contribute to an understanding of many of the procedures of exegesis as well as provide data and insights needed in exegetical work. Thus general biblical studies either engage in exegesis or provide substance and evidence that can be employed in exegesis.

(3) Not all the exegetical procedures we have discussed are relevant to every text. Frequently, for example, no significant textual problems will be encountered. Although there are thousands of variations among the Greek texts of the New Testament, most of these textual variants are not of any great consequence for interpreting a passage. With practically all texts, some forms of criticism will be of more significance than others but seldom will all be of crucial importance.

(4) Exegetical procedures are frequently carried out and critical methods utilized although the exegete may not be consciously aware of doing "grammatical analysis" or some other such activity. Most exegetical methods are based on the operation of common sense, intuition, and good judgment. Whenever a text is studied with these factors in operation, many of the technical forms of criticism are already being utilized. Although the terminology used for such criticisms and the conscious formulation of such methods are of rather recent vintage, good exegetes throughout the centuries have been concerned with the issues which the methodologies articulate. The same condition can certainly be equally characteristic of the contemporary situation.

In "doing exegesis," the student should realize that, as we suggested earlier, the various exegetical procedures are not related to one another in any strict architectonic fashion. That is, no mechanical system of steps or stages in the exegetical process can be set up and rigidly followed. One cannot, let us say, first do the textual-critical analysis, and then proceed to a second step and so on. Frequently, the interests and issues of the various criticisms are interrelated. Textual-critical conclusions, for example, may depend upon what conclusions have been reached from form-critical considerations. A particular textual variant may appear more original than another because it fits better the form of the material. Textual-critical conclusions could certainly be influenced by grammatical analysis.

An appropriate way of proceeding in doing an exegesis of a passage is to let the questions and issues arise from the text itself. This is often best achieved by reading and rereading the passage in its context several times. As the exegete rereads the passage, questions of various kinds will naturally present themselves to the reader. If the same questions or the same types of questions keep surfacing as the exegete rereads the passage, they should be listed and classified into appropriate categories. If, for example, certain words or phrases continue to remain obscure, and they do not "fall into place" in subsequent readings, they provide part of the exegete's agenda and may involve some word study. Or, if all the words and phrases themselves are clear, but they still continue to puzzle the reader, one may discover that the syntax of the sentence or paragraph needs to be untangled, and this will provide a different sort of agenda and move into grammatical analysis. It may be that on a first or second reading of the passage, the exegete notices a significant variation of wording referred to in a footnote, so significant that it might substantially alter one's final interpretation of the passage. In this case, the textual-critical problem sets the agenda.

To put it another way, the text itself should set the interpretive agenda whenever possible. This in no way suggests that the interpreter can bring to the text a mind which is a "blank tablet" for this is clearly impossible. In fact, every time we read a text, we bring to the text the total accumulation of who we are-our previous history, our previously accumulated knowledge, our outlook, our individual concerns, and our preunderstanding of what the text or passage means. It has been said that a literary work is like a picnic-the author brings the words and the reader brings the meaning. Although clearly an exaggeration, the saying nonetheless is partially true. Rather than denying that each interpreter reads texts with preunderstanding and many presuppositions, we should recognize that this is inherent in any kind of interpretation. Rather than denying it, we should rather recognize it, and capitalize on it. This is best achieved by admitting our presuppositions, trying as best we can to recognize what they are, how we came to hold them, and then allow for them as we interpret a passage. We should not simply read our own interpretation into a passage; that is eisegesis not exegesis. We should rather read a passage through our understanding which we bring to the text. This understanding can be broadened, modified, or deepened as we exegete the text.

Even if we bring our previous understanding to a text as we begin to interpret it, the text still possesses an autonomy which we should respect. The interpreter should allow the text to speak for itself. By this we mean that the text possesses its own voice, and at this stage the interpreter should learn to listen. Far too frequently, the interpreter is too eager to speak to the text, or even into the text, rather than listen attentively to it. When this occurs, the interpreter succeeds in hearing his or her own voice, not the voice of the text. By granting some autonomy to the text, and allowing it to speak its own message, the interpreter will discover that the text can not only set its own agenda, but a full one at that. As questions begin to surface, the exegete's task begins to take shape. The exegete's art consists in the ability to appreciate the nature and genre of the text at hand and what questions are appropriate to address to that particular type of text and to sort out the genuinely important questions, knowing which exegetical techniques and criticisms are most appropriate for addressing these questions, knowing which tools and books are most suitable for applying these techniques, and knowing how to deploy them efficiently and imaginatively so as to produce an informed and coherent interpretation of a text.

By insisting that the text possesses its own autonomy and by urging the interpreter to listen first and speak later, we do not wish to eliminate the possibility of coming to a text with a previously defined agenda. Quite often as one is engaged in a particular type of research, for example, an investigation in which one is trying to reconstruct the history of a particular period, it will become obvious that a biblical text, or a set of texts, provides the most useful set of sources for doing so. In this case, one may quite legitimately approach the biblical text with previously formulated questions, namely, "What historical information does it provide about the period under consideration?" Or, "How does it illuminate or illustrate the historical period?" The interpreter, thus, may come to a text, knowing in advance that certain kinds of questions and these questions only, will be asked of a text. The interpreter's task in this situation is being able to recognize, first, whether after reading the texts, this is a legitimate question or type of approach and, second, whether other kinds of questions may be asked of the text, perhaps with as much justification, and perhaps to greater benefit.

The beginning exegete, then, should bring all previous understanding to bear on a particular text, define as clearly as possible the kinds of questions one is asking of the text and that the text requires asking, and then determine which techniques and modes of criticism are most appropriate in addressing these questions.

Exegesis, as conceived and described in this volume, occurs when a person reads a biblical text and, based on an informed understanding of this text, develops a first-hand interpretation of the text. Throughout our discussion, it has been assumed that the primary encounter will occur between the reader and the biblical text itself and that all other investigations will be carried out toward this end. Consequently, we have emphasized the use of primary tools, such as dictionaries, concordances, and

encyclopedias, and other aids to inform the exegete's own formulation of the questions to be answered and the interpretation to be achieved.

This approach has been followed consciously because beginning exegetes often misconceive the nature and task of exegesis. Exegesis does not consist in consulting various commentaries on a given passage and from these commentaries constructing a single interpretation unifying the various observations and remarks of the commentators. Approaching exegesis in this fashion only produces a mosaic of commentaries, and ultimately means that the interpreter only directly engages the commentaries themselves, while the text is encountered only indirectly, if at all. When this approach is taken to exegesis, it is like an artist who paints a picture by cutting up other artists' pictures and pasting them together. To develop an understanding of a text through the exclusive use of commentaries on the passage can only produce a derivative interpretation because the questions asked by the commentators remain central and primary. Granting such dominance to biblical commentators also produces a kind of exegetical tyranny where the beginning interpreter assumes that the commentators' questions are not only the right questions to be asked of a text, but also the important ones, or even the only ones.

Rather than conceiving exegesis as the process through which the interpreter constructs a sort of collage of commentators' opinions, exegesis should be a more direct engagement between interpreter and text. By stressing the first-hand quality of the interpretive process, we want to underscore the autonomy of the interpreter. It is important for the beginning exegete to realize that the questions of a novice, even if they later turn out to be the wrong or ill-formulated questions, are nevertheless the questions a novice must ask. Only by asking the questions a text truly poses for the beginner will it be possible to develop skill in learning to interrogate a text. The beginning exegete should not be intimidated by the erudition of biblical commentaries and scholars, and in doing so allow them to set the agenda. Much is gained by reading a text for oneself, learning to formulate one's own questions and issues based on a careful reading of the text, and doing so with both independence and imagination.

In calling for this primary level of reading and interpreting the biblical documents, we are not minimizing the work of biblical commentators and the scholarly guild, for they render a valuable service to those who read, study, and interpret texts, both novices and veterans. We merely want to insist upon the primacy of the interpreter's task, and encourage even the beginning exegete to develop both independence and imagination. A better use of commentaries and other books or articles, which spell out the interpretations of particular books or texts, is as a source for secondary consultation and orientation rather than as a primary reference. Commentaries function best to provide a control for the interpreter's own hypotheses and intuitions. They are best viewed as the work of more experienced interpreters whose opinions and views can be consulted rather than taken as unquestionably authoritative. For this reason, for the student who wishes to develop some expertise in doing exegesis, they will always function in a secondary role. (Lists of commentaries on individual books may be found in the standard Old Testament and New Testament introductions and evaluations of individual commentaries and commentary series may be found in the standard biblical bibliographies; see the bibliography to chapter one.)

If exegesis is not merely the compilation of statements and opinions of various commentators, neither is it a report of one's research per se. Beginning exegetes often err in assuming that an exegesis paper consists in reporting or organizing into some systematic fashion all the research one has carried out in analyzing a passage. Some of this is done, to be sure, but exegesis is more than this. Rather than collecting and organizing all the ***data*** one has uncovered, exegesis consists of a coherent ***interpretation*** of the passage based upon a careful perusal of the data and an informed, competent reading. This requires an additional step, where one deploys rather than reports this information, arranging it into meaningful sections and patterns of argumentation so that the passage itself is unfolded in an illuminating fashion. Rather than constituting the exegesis, one's research on various facets of the passage provides that from which the exegesis is prepared. One's research informs the interpretation; it does not constitute it.

Quite often, beginning exegetes err by including within an exegesis paper numerous historical, lexicographical, linguistic, and many other types of details, without at the same time deploying them into an overall scheme which succeeds in genuinely illuminating the passage. This passion for details, though commendable in and of itself, should be coupled with a passion for coherence and overall clarity. The exegete must ask, at the end of the exegesis, whether the paper as a whole illuminates or obfuscates a passage. It may be full of factually correct information yet fail to illuminate or display an understanding of the passage in any appreciable fashion.

A third mistake beginning exegetes often make is assuming that the best way of unfolding the analysis is in a verse-by-verse fashion or in a series of word studies. While this is true in some instances, it is not true in every instance. Some biblical passages lend themselves quite readily to such an organizational structure while others do not. The most important consideration in deciding on the structure of an exegesis is whether it is sufficiently comprehensive to do justice to all the important aspects of the passage, yet pliable enough to provide the framework for unfolding an illuminating and coherent interpretation.

Here again, the text itself must offer the best guidance. Some texts, because they unfold an argument in sequential, step-by-step fashion or reflect a particular genre structure, may require an exegetical outline which both exposes and illuminates this structure. Other texts, by contrast, perhaps because they are narrative, are best treated thematically or in some other fashion. The exegesis may be arranged according to major themes which emerge from the passage, and under the treatment of these themes it may be possible for the exegete to treat all the important questions which arise throughout the passage.

It should be remembered that an exegesis is an informed understanding of a passage based on a first-hand engagement with and a thinking through of the text. How one's understanding of the text is actually presented finally becomes a decision of the exegete, and at this point the exegete learns first hand how vitally related form is to content and how both shape meaning. Once the exegete has developed an understanding of content and has articulated the meaning of the passage, the remaining task is to decide upon the appropriate form in which both of these can be conveyed.

Throughout our discussion of the various techniques of exegesis, we have introduced the more practical concerns only incidentally as we have explained the more theoretical nature of each of the types of criticism which might inform an understanding of a passage. At this point, we now turn to the more explicitly practical concerns of preparing an exegesis.

(1) Allow the text to set the agenda. We have already stressed the importance of allowing the questions to arise out of dialogue with the text itself. As the exegete reads a biblical passage, then rereads it several times, preferably in the original but in at least more than one translation, questions and issues of various sorts will begin to emerge. As these become formulated, the exegete will naturally begin to sift them out and arrange them in some order of priority, so that all the crucial ones are addressed.

(2) Let the questions point to the appropriate methodology, exegetical

technique, or type of criticism. At this stage, the exegete will need to possess a general understanding of the various dimensions of a text and how they have been or may be approached by the various exegetical techniques which we have discussed in the earlier chapters of this book. For example, if it becomes clear that the text contains references to historical persons, places, or events with which the interpreter is unfamiliar, the exegete should recognize that such questions belong to the general category of historical criticism. Accordingly, one should proceed to the investigation of different issues and problems by consulting and using the reference books and tools useful for providing such information.

(3) Utilize the tools appropriate to a given exegetical technique. As we have noted earlier, some exegetical tools and reference books are especially useful in unfolding certain dimensions of a text while others are more appropriate for other dimensions. A critical edition of the Bible which supplies information for variant wordings may be especially useful for textual-critical questions but only of little value for broader literary questions. At this point, the exegete is required to know what tools are available, the types of information each will yield, and how they may be used in concert with each other. This is best gained by developing first-hand acquaintance with them.

(4) Correlate the questions and answers addressed to this point. After the first several readings of a passage, and after several sets of questions and issues have been isolated and addressed, the exegete gradually discovers how interlocking these are. Quite often, a literary question will be seen to be related integrally to a historical one, and the answer to both may ultimately hinge upon the answer to a more theological question. At this point, the exegete's task must become more sophisticated as the attempt is made to correlate various kinds of techniques and types of criticism. In fact, what often emerges is another, entirely new set of questions or a set of old questions now more refined and sharpened. These the interpreter addresses in much the same fashion as earlier, always attentive to the various dimensions of a text and the various kinds of tools useful to addressing them.

(5) Conclude the analysis. These initial levels of investigation may be viewed as analysis, in the stricter sense of "breaking down" the exegetical work into its component parts. Here the exegete's task is to "break down" the passage, examine its language, structure, and all its various components, with a view to seeing them both in isolation and in relation to each other. Sometimes, pursuing one exegetical procedure will lead to another, but just as often, one will have to make a concerted effort to examine each part of the passage and to pursue various exegetical techniques, even if they seem to bear no clear relation to the other parts and procedures. The goal here is to make sure that one has tackled all those aspects of a passage which might conceivably be related to producing an overall interpretation. It often happens that the exegete spends much time in examining aspects of the passage which turn out, in the end, not to be very relevant to the final exegesis at all. Unfortunately, this is in the very nature of research and cannot easily be avoided.

(6) Synthesize the findings into a coherent interpretation of the passage. This usually turns out to be the most difficult stage of an exegesis, primarily because it requires selectivity. After the exegete has completed the formal stage of analyzing the passage, it now remains to survey the field, assess one's findings, and then decide how they may best be put together to produce an illuminating interpretation of the passage. This often means that the material will be presented in the exegesis paper itself in an order totally out of sequence from that of the investigation. For example, one might have engaged in historical criticism at the very end of one's analysis, and the nature of the text may have required this. Yet, upon reflection, the exegete may decide that it is precisely this aspect of the passage which will need to be discussed first in an exegesis paper. Thus, the order in which the basic exegetical research was carried out may not necessarily be the order in which the final exegesis is unfolded.

This stage of synthesis requires the exegete to weigh each part of the investigation in light of other parts. In the analytical stage, a great amount of time might have been spent on answering certain questions, yet, on reflection, the exegete may decide that all of this research may be telescoped into a very short space.

Conversely, what might have required only a short amount of research time may actually require several paragraphs of elaboration in the exegesis itself. Here, it becomes a question of balance. The exegete must have developed enough familiarity with the passage to be able to decide which aspects of the passage need full elaboration and which do not. No clear-cut answer to this aspect of synthesis can be given in the abstract.

Another important consideration at this stage of preparing an exegesis is to allow sufficient time for the synthesis to occur. A common mistake made by beginning students is failing to allow enough time for the information gained in the analysis stage to jell. In fact, one of the reasons that exegesis papers often turn out to be a potpourri of miscellaneous facts and observations is that the analysis stage was hurried and not enough time was allowed for the interpreter to sift out the less important details in order to discern those aspects of the passage which truly require illumination and elaboration. This is best remedied, first of all, by establishing a definite point of terminating the analysis stage. The exegete will soon discover that the analytical stage is, in one sense, interminable, for there may be literally no limit to how far one can investigate a passage. Yet, realistically the analytical research must be concluded, and it can be, as long as one has established appropriate time limitations and provided one has focused on centrally important questions.

Second, once the exegetical analysis has been concluded, it is quite often most helpful to let the material set for a while. This will often allow the exegetical dust to settle long enough to enable the exegete to see the overall terrain from a better perspective. Moreover, this jelling period will often allow time for certain parts to fit into a larger scheme, and the synthesis, in this case, will have already occurred to a large degree before the final writing of the exegesis paper actually begins. Obviously, as in every writing project, certain things will not become fully clear until one begins writing, but much will have become clear, and the more synthesis one can achieve before the final writing, the better.

CHARTER 12

Employing the Fruits of BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

The Bible is read, used, and interpreted in many different contexts and in many different ways in contemporary culture. The manifold ways in which the Bible is read and studied range from individual reading for general knowledge to college and university literature courses. In the former, it may be treated as one of the classical documents about which the educated person should be informed. In the latter, it may be treated as any other document from classical antiquity or explored for its literary and other influences on modern culture.

Within Judaism and Christianity, the Bible, of course, has the status of sacred text. Within these two religious communities, the Bible, as Scripture, has been ascribed and plays a normative role. As such, it is read and employed in special ways, in ways that are different from those of the general reading public or of the student in a comparative literature course. Within these communities of faith, the Bible has various functions.

Both Jews and Christians use the Scriptures to reconstruct the early history of their communities. Both communities use the Bible as a resource for understanding and formulating their beliefs and theologies. Both use the Scriptures within the context of public worship where they are read and used for preaching and proclamation. Both Jews and Christians utilize the Bible for personal appropriation and for insight and guidance in multiple aspects of life.

Exegesis is involved in all of these uses of the Bible, in its general and "non-religious" use as well as in its specific employment within the life of religious communities. How exegesis is done and the impact of exegesis on the use of the Bible is of special significance within the life of these religious communities. It is within these communities and the academic institutions associated with them that exegesis and biblical interpretation are most frequently a matter of concern and raised to the level of conscious discussion. It is within the life of these communities that exegetes function in their most significant roles.

Within the life of the church and synagogue, exegesis should be a conscious operation in all phases of the use of the Bible-in historical reconstruction, in the formation of theology, in preaching and proclamation, and in personal appropriation.

In this final chapter, we want to explore how the exegetical process is related to these aspects of the use of the Bible in the life of the church and synagogue and how the student can move from the performance of exegesis to the utilization of exegesis in the various disciplines of biblical usage.

For Historical and Archaeological Reconstruction

One of the results of post-Enlightenment investigations of Scripture was the change in perspective toward biblical texts and their utilization for historical reconstruction. Prior to this time, the story of Israel and the early church as it was unfolded in the narratives of the Bible and in the traditional interpretation of these narratives was regarded as historical. How the Bible presented this story was assumed to be the "way it happened. " The narratives were read so that the course of events was identified with the story line of the texts.

This unqualified identification of the biblical story with the history of Israel and the early church came to be modified for several reasons. The rise of modem science posed a serious challenge to biblical chronology. It became clear that the earth was more than the six thousand years old which a strict adherence to biblical chronology suggested. Historical and documentary criticisms made clear that the Bible unfolds not one but several "stories of Israel. " Analysis of the literature uncovered various sources or accounts within the Pentateuch and the historical books, each of these presenting a different point of view. The narrative literature was seen as motivated primarily by religious and theological interests rather than purely historiographical concerns. That is, they were seen to be advocating particular perspectives or viewpoints on the history as much as reporting history.

Similar changes occurred with respect to the New Testament. For centuries it had been assumed, more or less uncritically, that the story of the life of Jesus and the early church as unfolded in the four Gospels

and the Acts of the Apostles was the way it happened; the biblical story was also biblical history, it was thought. What was assumed to be needed for the Gospels was a harmonization of their accounts. Gradually it dawned on biblical interpreters that the Gospels are more theological than historical in nature. Acts also was acknowledged as a theological writing. Scholars recognized that far from presenting a comprehensive account of the early church, it actually only presented an account of its growth and development westward, from Jerusalem to Rome. Moreover, its choice of important characters was seen to be highly selective. Rather than being a comprehensive account of "the acts of the apostles," on closer inspection it was discovered to be actually an account of "some of the acts of some of the apostles," most notably Peter and Paul.

The radical impact on biblical studies of the post-Enlightenment period can be seen in the way it forced interpreters to take history and historical perspectives seriously: the Bible is a product of a historical process and therefore has its rootage in human culture; the Bible is a book anchored in the past and is therefore distanced in thought and outlook from the present; and the Bible is an anthology of ancient writings and therefore should be subjected to the same critical analysis as all other such writings.

Today historians of Israelite and early church history, like their "secular" counterparts, take certain stances toward the Bible and the reconstruction of history that differ considerably from their earlier counterparts. First of all, this involves a more critical stance toward the sources. These are no longer taken as purely factual reporting but as documents influenced by various theological and sociological concerns, different historical contexts, and different purposes and intentions. Thus a biblical text or narrative must be thoroughly exegeted and evaluated as to how it can be used for historical reconstruction. The exegesis of reports about what happened and the reconstruction of what might have happened are thus closely related but are by no means identical. Second, attempts are made to reconstruct the history without appeal either to special divine intervention in history or miraculous occurrences which might have altered the course of events. This represents a rather radical break with the outlook of the sources themselves which speak of divine involvement in historical events. The modern historian tends to consider this theological dimension in the texts to be a reflection of the faith and theology of the communities and the authors rather than a datum of history itself which can be studied and confirmed. Third, historians are aware that they are not writing a definitive history-' 'the history"-and narrating once and for all the ways things actually happened. Historians recognize that they are children of their age with biases and limited knowledge and perspectives and that "history" is a reconstruction of the past based on the knowledge and experiences of the present-often informed by a lot of intuition.

Just as historians no longer write the history of Israel and the early church by retelling the biblical story, neither are they any longer bound just to the evidence of the Bible. In recent years, the discipline of archaeology has entered the picture. Archaeological excavations and remains, especially in the last century, have become available which can be utilized for reconstructing historical events and conditions. Some of these remains are written sources-inscriptions and other texts-but most are non-written artifacts. Texts can usually be dated, on the basis of contents, language, and mode of writing, to general historical periods and often offer specific historical information. Other artifacts, such as pottery, architectural remains, skeletons, and jewelry, provide general types of knowledge-information about people's styles of life, levels of culture, means of livelihood, and types of habitation. All of the unwritten archaeological evidence comes out of the ground uninterpreted. The archaeologists and historians must interpret the data, generally in light of other evidence and particularly the written sources, especially the Bible. Contrary to much popular opinion the purpose of archaeology per se is neither to prove nor disprove the Bible. Archaeology is by nature a neutral discipline. While archaeology can illumine the actual course of Israelite and early Christian history, it can neither prove nor disprove the theological and faith claims of the biblical record.

In using a biblical text to reconstruct a part of the history and archaeology of ancient Israel and the early church, that is, in moving from exegesis to historical reconstruction, the biblical student must keep several factors in mind.

(1) Exegesis of the material is a prerequisite. Exegesis will allow the interpreter to answer such questions as: To what genre of literature does the text belong? What type of historical information can one expect to gain from such a genre? To what source or sources does the text belong? What are the tendencies and theological concerns of this source which may have influenced the particular presentation in the text? From what historical period does the text or source come and how

might this context have influenced the text? What cultural and sociological knowledge might be gained from the text? If the text does not provide explicit and intentional historical evidence, does it provide any implicit or unintentional evidence that can be used for historical reconstruction?

(2) Other texts relevant to the same event or time must be exegeted and correlated with the primary text. Often different presentations of the same episode will be found. This is the case, for example, with many narratives, such as those about the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1-12 compared with Judges 1) and some events in the reign of Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:48–49 compared with 2 Chronicles 20:35–37). After these parallel texts have been exegeted, they must be compared, differences noticed and appraised, and historical probability assessed.

(3) Non-biblical source material which might relate to the issue under consideration should be brought into consideration. Even such non-biblical material must be submitted to exegesis with similar procedures applied as those used in biblical exegesis.

(4) Relevant archaeological data should be drawn upon where this exists or its absence noted where this is the case. Where archaeological evidence exists, it can generally be utilized to supplement the textual evidence. To take a specific example, this would be the case with such evidence as material from Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer from the time of Solomon if one were working on the passage in 1 Kings 9: 15-16. In other cases, archaeological evidence raises questions about the historical reliability of a biblical report. For example, Joshua 7:1—8:29 reports on the Israelite capture of a large, fortified city at Ai. Excavations at the site of ancient Ai (et-tell in modern Palestine) have shown that the site was unoccupied from about 2000 to 1150 B.C. and that after reoccupation, the site was actually a small village not a major city. Here we have a case where archaeological evidence calls into question the historicity of a biblical account and requires a reassessment of how one reads and uses the biblical account.

The reconstruction of an event in biblical history must, therefore, be the consequence of correlating various forms of evidence drawn from biblical and non-biblical literary evidence and from non-literary archaeological evidence. The importance of each of these aspects must be evaluated in each particular case. At the very heart of reconstruction, however, is exegesis. Since the Bible is the primary, and at times the only, source for reconstructing biblical history, this only emphasizes the indispensability of the exegetical process.

For Doing Theology

The task of theology, as a specialized discipline, is to articulate the faith of the synagogue and the church for each new generation of believers. Professional theologians, both academic and ministerial, do this on a sustained, regular basis. Active and intentional theological reflection, however, is not the exclusive prerogative of professional theologians. Nonprofessional or lay theologians engage in the same type of activity. In fact, anyone who makes a conscious, concerted effort to reflect on one’s faith and give organized shape to these reflections is engaged in doing theology.

A dynamic way of viewing the theological task is to see it as giving shape to all of those aspects and dimensions of faith which figure in-the explicit formulation of belief. The theologian becomes responsible for the whole of reality, and for all fields of knowledge, and finds it necessary to bring these to bear on faith, both as a phenomenon in its own right and as a system of thought.

As theologians reflect upon the reality of faith, its multiple dimensions, and the settings in which it occurs, they find it necessary to organize and arrange these more systematic and theoretical reflections into meaningful patterns for the benefit of the believing communities. The theologian works from a bifocal vantage point which seeks to do full justice both to the experiential dimension of faith, the “lived lives” of the believing communities, as well as to the more intellectual, theoretical,,’ or cognitive dimension of faith as it comes to be formulated in discursive language. Consequently, the theologian is both informed by as well as informs the community of believers whose faith is being systematized and articulated.

Theologians seek to articulate the faith of each generation not only by relating it to previous formulations of the past but also by formulating it in terms drawn from the present. The faith thus finds itself responsible to history but also responsible to the present as it attempts to explain the faith to the modem world in light of modem thought and knowledge. For this reason, the work of theologians has to be redone in each generation.

Theology achieves its task by seeking to explicate the ways in which believers have thought about central theological realities, issues, and problems such as God or anthropology and also by suggesting appropriate ways for this to be done given the current status of intellectual thought. In this constructive task, theologians naturally regard the Bible as an indispensable source, not only because the Bible itself, in one sense, represents the earliest (Jewish and Christian) theological thought but also because the Bible still functions as normative in shaping faith and practice within modem communities of faith.

Because theologians operate with general categories and because the Bible constitutes one source for doing theology, along with philosophy, science, humanistic studies, as well as other fields of knowledge, the way in which theologians use the Bible is functionally different from the way in which a historian, a minister, or the ordinary person uses it. In attempting to construct an imaginative theological statement about God, the theologian will naturally consult, appeal to, and adduce those parts of Scripture or biblical formulations and concepts which bear most directly on this topic. At an earlier period, constructing systematic theologies was achieved in a type of proof-texting fashion, where all the passages pertaining to or assumed to be supportive of a particular doctrine were collected and arranged in some ordered fashion. In the light of modem biblical criticism, theologians now recognize this to be an improper use of Scripture. Consequently, in their constructive theological work, they too take into account the historical dimension of the biblical texts. Not every text concerned with a particular topic will be seen to have equal value merely because it appears in the Bible. Theologians are also heavily indebted to critical exegesis for its assistance in uncovering the various theological perspectives within the Bible. Although at one time it was more or less assumed that the Bible, from start to finish, presented a single theological message, theologians now recognize the wide diversity or plurality of theological perspectives within Scripture and take this into account in their theological work.

*For the beginning exegete, the work of theologians can be valuable in several ways. Because of their long-standing commitment to Scripture as a central source in doing theology, they too engage in exegesis and are dependent upon the results of exegetical work. The form in which their exegetical results are presented naturally differs from that of biblical exegetes whose work most often takes the form of commentaries or books and articles on specific passages of Scripture.

Because theologians have examined biblical texts systematically by proceeding from broad and general universal categories and because they have examined a wide variety of texts as they relate to a specific topic or category, their angle of vision can be quite useful to the beginning exegete. In working on a passage, the exegete may discover that it makes significant claims pertaining to the nature or work of God. At this point, consulting those sections of both biblical and systematic theologies devoted to the doctrine of God will often introduce the beginning exegete not only to rich discussions of the passage being exegeted but also to similar treatments of other related biblical passages. Because the form of commentaries or more specialized monographs normally does not permit this scope of treatment, comprehensive biblical and systematic theologies provide a major resource of insights for the biblical exegete.

Not only should the exegete consult the work of theologians but also the exegete who investigates biblical texts also becomes engaged in doing theology. Any attempt to study a biblical text, to understand it in its setting and relate it to other portions of the Bible which bear directly on it, often engages the exegete at a profound level. The exegete not only seeks to understand the issues presented by a text but also to engage those issues and to allow this intellectual engagement both to inform, sharpen, and challenge one's own understanding of reality. At this stage, the exegete who makes the move to more generalized perspectives is making the same move as the biblical or systematic theologian. When one allows the text to inform and call into question one's own self-understanding and one's understanding of the world, theology is being done;

What is important for the beginning exegete to realize is that in moving from doing exegesis to doing theology certain conceptual shifts are made. There is clearly a broadening of focus when one moves from a specific text to a broader range of texts. Yet, just as often, the movement is reciprocal, because as the exegete consults a broader range of texts and then returns to a particular text, a deeper understanding is brought to the exegetical process. In making these moves, the beginning exegete does well to remember that the autonomy of the text and its message must be respected. If one discovers the message of the text being exegeted to be in serious tension with previously conceived theological positions or reconstructions, rather than resolving the tension too easily or too quickly, the exegete may be called on to reexamine and even radically modify previously held theological convictions. By the same token, one may discover that exegesis of a text tends to reinforce previously held theological convictions. By recognizing that such tensions are present even within the biblical texts themselves, the exegete may not feel as compelled to resolve them as might be the case otherwise. Familiarity with the history of exegesis may introduce the interpreter to various possible resolutions and thus provide a series of hermeneutical options for interpreting the text itself.

The exegete who also engages in doing theology should remain responsible to the canons and norms of biblical exegesis. Indeed, in doing exegesis one will discover how pervasively exegetical the theological enterprise is and how theological the exegetical enterprise is. Where sacred texts exist, exegesis is required and remains indispensable to all systematic attempts to relate the message of a specific biblical text to the broader theological message and the formulation of belief.

For Proclamation

Employing the Bible in preaching presupposes that the biblical text is a central ingredient and for this reason exegesis is a fundamental prerequisite. Yet it is just as important to remember that exegesis and proclamation are distinct activities. The transition from text to sermon is a natural transition, but it is a transition nevertheless. It is as much of a mistake to assume that proclamation consists of doing exegesis as it is to assume that exegesis is essentially a form of preaching. Both exegesis and preaching may inform each other, but they should not be merged into a single, undifferentiated activity.

Using the Bible for the purpose of proclamation constitutes a distinctive function and presupposes a clearly defined "life setting." What distinguishes this use of the Bible from the one previously discussed, that of doing theology, may be said to be its occasional nature, as much as anything else. Both the professional theologian and the preacher have as their task the articulation of the faith in a modern setting. They both seek to bring to bear the whole of reality on the biblical text as they seek to interpret it, but they also seek to appropriate the text for a modern setting as it too is informed and shaped by the whole body of knowledge. Here we see that the minister, too, is theologian, albeit in a qualified sense. Both obviously are professionals in that both have clearly defined vocations and both take seriously the canonical status of the Scripture and its revelatory value.

The minister's task differs from the academic theologian's task in at least two ways. First, the situation which the minister addresses in the act of proclamation is more concrete and more specific and for this reason the act of proclamation is more occasional. When the Word of God is brought to bear at a given moment for a people congregated for the express purpose of "hearing the Word of God," something momentary and unrepeatable happens. No attempt is being made to state in a broad, generalized sense the meaning of faith for the contemporary setting.

Preaching is rather quite specific in its focus, and there is the awareness that once the congregation disperses, the moment of proclamation is over. The sermon may be preserved in the form of a written manuscript or tape recording but the initial act of proclamation cannot be recovered. This occasional dimension of proclamation is distinctive.

Also distinctive, as compared with the task of doing theology, is the nature of the audience. The intended audience of the theologian is normally the church at large, while the intended audience of the preacher is a visible, local congregation. The respective "life settings" are distinguishable in both size and location.

The exegetical task in these respectively different "life settings" is similar in some respects, different in others. The preacher, like the professional theologian, stands at the end of a long process of interpretation, and is responsible for recognizing the multiple dimensions of the biblical text, such as its historical and literary dimensions. Similarly, the preacher does well to acknowledge the diversity of theological outlook reflected within the biblical writings.

Because the homiletical task is so often directly anchored in a biblical text, whether in the form of a lectionary where the texts have been chosen in advance, or whether the choice of text is made by the individual preacher, proclamation often bears a more genetic relationship to exegesis than does theology. Especially is this the case with expository preaching, where the intention is to expound a biblical text or to invite the audience to enter and share the world of the text.

Whether a sermon is explicitly expository in that it seeks to unfold a biblical text for a congregation, or whether it is only implicitly expository in that it alludes to biblical texts or images in the course of making a broader point, the preacher nevertheless should be responsible to the canons of biblical exegesis. In fact, it might be said that biblical exegesis is as essential to the preacher's task as the Bible is to the preacher's sermon. If the sermon is pervasively biblical, the preacher's task is preeminently exegetical. If the sermon is only occasionally biblical, the preacher is no less obligated to practice responsible exegesis than is otherwise the case.

Moving from an exegesis to a sermon is not a simple matter. In fact; the process has two foci: the text with its ancient context and the sermon with its modem context. The tasks and problems involved in this move may be stated in three questions: How does one translate the form and content of the original text into another form and content? How does one assess both the ancient and modern contexts in order to see analogies and

patterns of relationships? How can one be responsible to both the text and its context or the sermon and its context?

One way of beginning to grapple with the movement from text to sermon is to explore the way in which a text or tradition may have functioned in its original context or within the life of Israel and the early church. Broadly speaking, a text and its message can function in at least three ways: constitutively, prophetically, or advisorily. These three functions may be related to the three basic forms of ministry: priest, prophet, and sage (or teacher). This division is, of course, somewhat artificial and is offered merely as a lens through which to view the various ways a text can be used. Just as the various functions of ministry overlap and were and are frequently embodied in the same person or in a single act of ministry, so also a single text or tradition may function in more than one fashion depending on the manner and context of its usage.

To speak of a constitutive or priestly function of a text refers to its use in a supportive, enhancing, and celebrative fashion. Priestly orconstitutive functions deal with human existence in terms of the reenactment of past experiences and traditions, normal sacred practice, and routine conditions. Festivals and rituals give expression to this mode of ministry which is oriented to the stabilization and encouragement of the community and individual and the appropriation of the past with its structures and words of salvation and redemption. In such, identity and self-understanding are not really called into question. This does not mean that judgment is not an aspect of the priestly function and usage since the traditions and rituals embody the ideal and thus function as a means of assessing present realities.

The prophetic function and text challenges the present, its commitments and orientation, and calls for new and sometimes radical revision and alteration. The prophetic perspective critically views the present and the contemporary in terms of new viewpoints and different orientations. These perspectives challenge and sometimes threaten the identity, self-understanding, and customary behavior of the community. The prophetic may issue its challenge by drawing upon the traditions and views of the past or by appeal to the future. It may be a word of judgment and conviction or a word of hope and persuasion. It may announce death or life, but it is a word strongly evaluative of present conditions. It seeks not to constitute but to reconstitute.

The advisory function-the function of the sage or the wise-has as its goal the offering of instruction, wisdom, or insight without the overt desire either to confirm the present and its conditions or to call for reconstitution or reformation. It makes its appeal on the basis of general experience and seeks to illuminate rather than create conditions. Such illumination, however, may itself be catalytic and open up new perspectives which can lead to reconstitution.

The exegete in moving from an exegesis of the text to a sermon on the text should keep in mind both the original function of the text and the perceived function of the sermon. The function of the sermon within its context should not do damage to or be irresponsible to the original function and meaning of the text. The exegete as minister will, of course, have to assess the present needs and conditions of the audience as well as the intent of the preaching occasion and determine whether the sermon should function constitutively, prophetically, or advisorily. When bringing the message of the ancient text to bear on the modem situation, the role of analogy is important. The preacher should ask such questions as the following: What situation in the contemporary world and the immediate congregation is analogous to the situation addressed in the text? How are the participants in the modern situation analogous to those-the speaker, the audience, ancient Israel, the early church-in the original situation? What form and content should be given in and to the sermon in order for it to serve an analogous function in the modem situation as the text in its situation? How can the total context of "what it meant" inform and enlighten -"what it means"?

Preaching from the Bible and attempting to remain responsible to tho text do not mean that the minister cannot orchestrate the text differently, by calling forth and emphasizing dimensions of the text that are actually recessive rather than dominant within the text. The minister may choose to tone down or modify dominant themes within the text. Here, the minister's role is not unlike that of the orchestra conductor who interprets a musical score. By respecting the autonomy of the text, the conductor may leave the score completely intact, making no attempt to change the original composer's musical message, yet after having thoroughly examined and studied the score, the conductor may feel free to interpret the piece for a particular occasion. This form of orchestration does no injustice to the composer's intentions. It is rather the conductor's responsibility to interpret the text for modem listeners.

Similarly, the minister's task is to read and to understand, and also to interpret the text for the modem congregation of believers. This may mean that the minister's sermon "orchestrates" the text variously from time to time, but this can be done without doing injustice to the text or without engaging in irresponsible exegesis.

The exegetical procedures, when they detect the multilayered quality of some texts, may in fact open up a text to multiple preaching possibilities. A parable of Jesus, for example, may be orchestrated in preaching according to a diversity of "original" contexts-in the ministry of Jesus, in the oral tradition of the church, and in its diverse usage in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Finally, the exegete-preacher must be warned that the one who engages in thorough exegesis may often discover that certain interpretations of texts, even cherished ones, are not viable, and cannot be incorporated into a sermon. Here, the negative function of exegesis is at work, placing limitations on the minister, even as it does in other ways on the historian or theologian.

For Personal Appropriation

Just as the Bible is the possession of historians, theologians, and preachers, so is it the possession of all who read it for moral guidance, spiritual edification, or even pleasure. The person who reads the Bible for these purposes may not be motivated by professional interests, but this does not mean that exegesis is any less absent or necessary. If exegesis is the process through which one comes to an informed understanding of a biblical text, it becomes as essential for the nonprofessional reader as it is for the professional reader. For that matter, the professional reader who reads the Bible for personal appropriation does not cease to do exegesis when such a shift in purpose occurs. That one does exegesis does not change, although why one does exegesis may change.

Rather than viewing the work of biblical scholars and other professional theologians and historians as preliminary or as that which can be laid aside when one reads the Bible for personal profit, the everyday reader can see oneself as part of a larger circle of interested readers and interpreters who, in the end, have a common interest. Those who have devoted full-time study to the Bible have most often done so in order to render service to those who cannot. When scholars are seen as working in the service of communities of faith, even if their work and the results of their research may appear to the layperson to be inimical to the faith and their efforts not always applauded, they should at least be taken seriously as one seeks to read and understand the Bible.

When the Bible is read for moral and spiritual guidance, the reader may be said to assume the position of "hearer," analogous to that of the original hearers to whom the writing was addressed. It will never be possible to escape the “third party” perspective discussed earlier, for subsequent readers of the Bible will always be those who overhear, rather than those who hear directly. Yet, the biblical writings have become canonized precisely because of their demonstrated capacity to transcend the immediate situation which they addressed, and historically they have done so. Regardless of their time-conditioned quality, they nevertheless possess an immediacy and the capability to address hearers and readers of subsequent ages quite directly. What distinguishes the one who reads the Bible for moral and spiritual guidance from the one who reads it in the service of history, theology, or preaching is the immediacy of the relationship between text and reader. Behind this stance is the assumption that the text is speaking or can speak directly to the needs of the reader.

This need not mean that one should read the Bible any less rigorously, certainly not any less critically, for the purposes of personal appropriation. Under no circumstances should one suspend critical judgment in reading the biblical text. Reading the Bible for moral and spiritual guidance also requires the reader to interrogate the text, and to do so rigorously, but the set of questions one brings to such a reading may differ vastly from those the historian brings to the text. One does well to remember that many of the procedures of biblical interpretation developed in response to questions which had arisen in the context of reading the Bible for personal and spiritual guidance. In fact, most, if not all, of the types of criticism discussed in the earlier chapters have been developed and refined as a means of making this type of Bible reading more, not less, understandable. Reading of the Bible for personal appropriation should be as attentive to the various dimensions of the text which these various techniques address as reading the Bible for professional reasons.

One way of articulating the stance or perspective of those who read the Bible for personal and spiritual guidance is to recognize that they “look along” the text more than “look at” the text. The former stance suggests the picture of one who is inside the text, standing within the tradition as it were, adopting the perspectives and outlooks suggested in the text, or at least, doing so provisionally. On reflection upon such reading, one may decide to adopt the posture and paradigms of the text, adapt them, or even reject them as unacceptable, but there is at least the initial willingness to place oneself within the range of the voice of the text and be willing both to hear and see. The latter stance-“looking at”-suggests the picture of one standing outside the text, “looking in,” as it were. This need not imply a negative stance, nor even a detached, disinterested relationship to the text, but it is correct to say that the historian and theologian, as well as the preacher, are all using the text for some other purpose. For them, the biblical text has an indirect rather than a direct function, whereas for the one who reads the Bible for personal and spiritual edification, the text is often being read for its own sake. It is not unlike the difference between one who reads Shakespeare as a literary critic and one who does so for pleasure, for sheer intellectual stimulation, or for moral edification. While the latter sorts of concerns may originally have motivated the literary critic, and while they may continue to occur even as the literary critic carries out his or her professional work, the work of literary criticism, by its very nature, requires the reader to “look at” the text in a way that is functionally different from “looking along” the text.

Reading the Bible for personal appropriation should not be conceived in a narrowly personalistic sense as if the person's own spiritual or moral needs are always the primary end in view. Even the use of the Bible by artists should be included here. When the Bible is read and appropriated through artistic creativity, whether it is in the form of music, painting, drama, or any of the other forms of artistic expression, exegesis is also carried out, even if it appears to be implicit. Handel's Messiah presupposes an exegesis of various portions of the Bible, as does MacLeish's *JB,* and in both cases the biblical text has been read and exegeted prior to the artistic production which has resulted from such interpretation. Indeed, these resulting interpretations are not essentially different from other forms of interpretation, including historical, theological, homiletical, or ethical interpretations. They differ only in form, not in essence. Professional exegetes may also learn much from these artistic appropriations of the Bible and biblical themes.

The beginning exegete should be alert to the various ways within modern culture in which the biblical text is appropriated and should by now realize that exegesis is common to all of them. One might well ask whether Zeffirelli's film, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew,* is best understood as a form of historical reconstruction or artistic appropriation, or even as a kind of theological reconstruction if not biblical proclamation. It may turn out to be some of each, but this should come as no surprise, for we have seen that even the historian who deals with the biblical texts, at certain junctures, must also deal with literary, theological, homiletical, moral, and artistic dimensions of the texts. Modern readers of the Bible often find themselves sensitive to the many dimensions of the biblical text. The beginning exegete who wishes to read the Bible with an informed understanding can do no less.

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