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EVANGELICAL ROOTS

A Tribute to Wilbur Smith

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The Single Intent of Scripture *by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.*

Even before T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and their associates began to argue on literary grounds that the meaning of a biblical text was independent of an author's verbal meanings, evangelical exegetical practice had likewise begun to slip into an easygoing subjectivism. Words, events, persons, places, and things in Scripture were allowed to signify all they could be made to signify apart from any authorial controls of those prophets and apostles who claimed to have stood in the divine council and received this intelligible revelation.

Almost as if to prepare for the banishment of the author in later theories of literary criticism, evangelicals began to excuse their multiple interpretations of a single text as logical outgrowths of the fact that: (1) Scripture had two authors (God and the human writer); (2) prophecy had at least two meanings (the prophet's understanding and God's surprise meaning in the distant fulfillment); and (3) interpreters are divided into two groups: the natural man who fails to "receive the things of God" (1 Cor. 2:14) and the spiritual man who understands the deep things of God.

But such views were so antithetical to the actual statements and

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claims of Scripture that if any or all of them were consistently pressed, they would lead to outright departure from the concept of an intelligible revelation from God. Bishop Ryle likewise commented:

I hold it to be a most dangerous mode of interpreting Scripture, to regard everything which its words may be tortured into meaning as a lawful interpretation of the words. I hold undoubtedly that there is a mighty depth in all Scripture, and that in this respect it stands alone. But I also hold that the words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense, and that our first object should be to discover that sense, and adhere rigidly to it. I believe that, as a general rule, the words of Scripture are intended to have, like all other language, one plain definite meaning, and that to say that words *do* mean a thing, merely because they *can* be tortured into meaning it, is a most dishonourable and dangerous way of handling Scripture.¹

While few would directly challenge the general legitimacy of Ryle's principles, many would conveniently escape its full application to personal Bible study and the practical needs of the professional ministry. For this group of unconvinced evangelical exegetes, there are parts of the Bible that are given in terms unintelligible to the sacred writers themselves and, as a consequence, to their original listeners. Accordingly, on this line of reasoning, there must be parts of the Bible incapable of being interpreted by the ordinary aids and procedures of exegesis. These texts then become the exceptions that prove the rule that, by and large, biblical exegesis is to be placed outside the pale of the ordinary conventions of literary interpretation. Therefore, before any progress can be made in the area of general hermeneutics or any practical applications can be implemented in preaching and teaching, an examination must be made of a representative number of texts that point to the biblical writers' alleged ignorance, passivity, or mundane ap-

¹ *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels II* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953), p. 383.

prehension of the messages they were receiving and delivering to Israel and the church.

Alleged Proof Texts for "Double Meaning"

1 Peter 1:10-12

No text has appeared more frequently in the argument against the single meaning of the text as found in the author's verbal meanings than 1 Peter 1:10-12. I have treated this text at some length already,² but it must be included here because of its central place in the debate.

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Does this text teach that the writers of Scripture "wrote better than they knew"? Indeed it does not. On the contrary, it decisively affirms that the prophets spoke knowingly on five rather precise topics: (1) the Messiah, (2) His sufferings, (3) His glory, (4) the sequence of events (for example, suffering was followed by the Messiah's glorification), and (5) that the salvation announced in those pre-Christian days was not limited to the prophets' audiences, but it also included the readers of Peter's day (v. 12).

What they "enquired and searched diligently for" without any success was the *time* when these things would take place. The Greek phrase that gives the object of their searching was "what"

² For example, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of Evangelicalism: Promise Theology," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (1970), pp. 94-96.

[time] or “what manner of time” [*eis tina ē poion kairon*] this salvation would be accomplished. In no case can the first interrogative “what” [*tina*] be translated as the RSV, NASB, the Berkeley, the Amplified, and the NEB footnote have it—“what person.” Greek grammarians such as A.T. Robertson;³ Blass, DeBrunner, and Funk;⁴ the lexicon by Baur, Arndt, and Gingrich;⁵ and Moulton, along with such important commentaries as Charles Briggs and Edward G. Selwyn,⁶ are all emphatic on the point: *tina* and *poion* are “a tautology for emphasis”⁷ and both modify the word “time.”

This passage does not teach that these men were curious and often ignorant of the exact meaning of what they wrote and predicted. Theirs was not a search for the *meaning* of what they wrote; it was an inquiry into the *temporal* aspects of the *subject*, which went beyond what they wrote. Let it be noted then that the *subject* is invariably larger than the verbal meaning communicated on any subject; nevertheless, one can know *adequately* and truly even if he does not know comprehensively and totally all the parts of a subject.

Daniel 12:6-8

And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?

And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times,

³ *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (1923), pp. 735-36.

⁴ F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, rev. and trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 155.

⁵ W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 691.

⁶ Briggs, *International Critical Commentary on I Peter* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), pp. 107-08; Selwyn, *The First Epistles of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1955), pp. 134-38.

⁷ Blass, DeBrunner, and Funk, *Greek Grammar*, p. 155.

and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.

And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

Attention usually moves from 2 Peter 1:10-12 to this statement of Daniel. “I heard, but I understood not.” But again, what was it that Daniel did not understand? Was it the words he was speaking? Not at all; the words he did not understand were those of the angel, not his own! Furthermore, the fact that these words of the angel were to be “closed up and sealed until the time of the end” was no more a sign that these events were to remain *unexplained* until the end time than was the equivalent expression used in Isaiah 8:16, “Bind up the testimony, seal the law.” There, as here, the “sealing” of the testimonies was a reference primarily to the certainty of the predicted events.

Moreover, Daniel’s question in verse 8 involved the temporal aspect and consequences of the angel’s prophecy: “What shall be the end of these things?” One of the angels had asked in verse 6, “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?” But Daniel asked a different question: “What” would be the state of affairs at the close of “the time, times, and an half?” Concerning this question he was given no further revelation. Therefore the “sealing up” of the prophecy only indicated its *certainty*, not its *hiddenness*.

Let it be admitted, however, that whenever the prophet received his revelation in a vision (for example, Dan. 8 or Zech. 1-6), the objects presented to his mind’s eye were usually a preparation for the verbal prediction that accompanied that vision. Thus, in those cases the interpreting angel did not refuse to clarify the prophecy. So clear was Daniel’s understanding of the meaning of his prophecy and so dramatic was its effect on him that he “was overcome and lay sick for some days” (Dan. 8:27, RSV).

To say that we now understand the predictions of the apostles and prophets better than they did contributes nothing to the present

debate about authorial controls over meanings. Certainly a man who visits a country can understand the description of a place better than one who never personally saw it. But this is to confuse fullness of consequences or fullness of a total subject with the validity, truthfulness, and accuracy of contributions to that subject. And should this lead to the argument that God is the real Author of Scripture, it would still make no important difference. God did not make the writers omniscient. Rather, He imparted just as much as they needed to make their message effective for that moment in history and for the future contribution to the whole progress of revelation.⁸

John 11:49-52

And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all,

Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.

And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;

And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

Relentlessly the argument is pressed into the New Testament. There it is hoped that Caiaphas could be a witness for the double-author theory of hermeneutics.

Caiaphas pronounced an accurate judgment on his colleagues, "You know nothing at all" (John 11:49). But as Rudolf Stier asked, "What better, then, [did Caiaphas] know?"⁹ His suggestion was one of political expediency: it is better to let one man be a sacrificial lamb to save the Jewish cause than to have everyone

⁸ For a discussion of this passage, see Moses Stuart's "On the Alleged Obscurity of Prophecy," *The Biblical Repository* 2 (1832) pp. 239-40; "Remarks on Hahn's Definition of Interpretation and Some Topics Connected With It," *The Biblical Repository* 1 (1831), pp. 146ff.; *Hins on the Interpretation of Prophecy*, 2nd ed. (Andover: Allen, Morrill & Wardwell, 1842), pp. 56-58.

⁹ *Words of the Lord Jesus VI* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1865), p. 56.

implicated, with Rome's wrath falling on the whole body politic. John's comment on Caiaphas's speech was: "And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied"

Now, several things must be observed:

1) These words are not to be classed along with later rabbinic alleged examples of unintentional prophecy, as cited by Strack and Billerbeck on John 11:51 and 2 Peter 1:20,21 (II, 546). Nor is this proof that the earlier prophets belonged to such a category as Rabbi Eleazar (ca. A.D. 270), who argued, "No prophets have known what they prophesied. Only Moses and Elijah knew." Indeed, according to the same line of logic, even "Samuel, the master of the prophets, did not know what he prophesied."¹⁰ Thus it is argued that Caiaphas illustrates the same process. But Caiaphas said what he wanted to say and mean. There was no compulsion or constraint here any more than there was in the superscription Pilate put over Jesus' cross. Rather, in these words John immediately saw there was "a grand irony of a most special Providence"¹¹ in the case of both Pilate and Caiaphas.¹²

2) The truth-intention of Caiaphas (v. 50) is to be sharply contrasted with the *significance* (v. 51) John found in these words, especially since Caiaphas was high priest when he uttered his cynical estimate of the situation. For John there was a strong contrast (note John's word, "on the contrary" [*alla*]) between what Caiaphas said and meant and what John under the inspiration of the Spirit of God disclosed by using many of the same words.

¹⁰ As quoted in Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed., (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 412; Charles K. Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John* (London SPCK, 1960), p. 339.

¹¹ Stier, *Words of Lord Jesus*, p. 57.

¹² Brooke F. Westcott, *Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 175. Other examples of John's use of irony are listed: John 7:41, 42; 19:21.

3) With that John *corrected* Caiaphas's provincial statement with its ethnicities and turned it into a comprehensive statement of the universal implications of Jesus' death (v. 52). Whereas Caiaphas had used the expression, "on behalf of the people" (v. 50), John corrected those words of cynical political expediency and expanded them to match the value of Jesus' death; it was now, "on behalf of the nation" (v. 51) and on behalf of the "children of God scattered abroad" (v. 52). Caiaphas had said that the nation was going to perish—therefore Jesus must die. John said that the people and nation were perishing—therefore Jesus must die to unite all the children of God, including the nation, into the true "people" of God as Jesus had proclaimed in John 10:15, 16 and as Paul would later describe in Ephesians 2:14.

4) John's evaluation of Caiaphas's speech was that "he did not speak on his own authority, but being high priest that year, he prophesied." The expression "on his own authority" is unique to John and occurs in six passages (John 5:19; 7:18; 11:51; 15:4; 16:13; 18:34). In three of the instances, it clearly means to say something on one's own *authority*: "The Son can do nothing on his own authority" (5:19), "a person who speaks on his own authority" (7:18), and "The Spirit . . . will not speak on his own authority" (16:13). If this meaning is also correct for John 11:51—and we believe it is—then John's point was not the *method* in which Caiaphas spoke (unconscious or involuntary prediction), but that since he was in the office of high priest when he gave this somewhat bitter proverb, it had the *significance* of an official prediction.¹³ One cannot miss the

¹³ Three interpretations are given to this "prophesying": (1) The accidental lots or circumstances of life were echoes by which the heavenly revelation was given to men; (2) Involuntary [?] prophecy like Balaam's words in Numbers 23-24; and (3) The high priest as bearer of divine revelation—usually through the Urim and Thummim.

The second view is certainly wrong since Balaam and Scripture claimed divine authority for what he said. The first view is possible since Pharaoh, Saul, Nebuchadnezzar, and Pilate all were in act and word witnesses to the truth, but then "prophesied" would have a secondary sense in John's use. The third is likewise deficient in that the Urim and Thummim were used to obtain a yes or no answer. The office of prophet and apostle was God's channel of biblical revelation.

repeated emphasis of verses 49 and 51, "He being high priest that year."

5) When verse 51 comments that he (Caiaphas) was prophesying *that [hoti]* Jesus was about to die, John is not giving us the contents of Caiaphas's prophecy, but only that the significance of his otherwise witty speech could be found in *reference to the fact that* Jesus was about to die. In Caiaphas we do not have the words of a true prophet coming with authority from God. Instead we see an erring high priest giving wicked counsel. However, God was pleased to turn this advice back on the speaker as a most appropriate explication of the very principle he was intent on denying.

Thus we conclude that if Caiaphas had prophesied in the ordinary sense of the word, there would have been no need for any immediate corrections on John's part. But when an official like himself or Pilate gave a verdict that could take on a proverbial status and significance which accorded with the plan of God, only the God of providence could be praised, for now the wrath of men had been turned into the glory of God. But such examples could not be used to support a double-author view of normative revelation. Even if every part of our previous argument failed, it still remains true that Caiaphas never belonged to the class of the apostles and prophets who received revelation.

2 Peter 1:19-21

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Scholars of the standing and stature of E. W. Hengstenberg have appealed to 2 Peter 1:19–21 to show that the prophets did not always understand nor could they always interpret their own words. But Peter makes the opposite point. Christians, he argues, “have not followed cleverly devised fables” (v. 16), for not only was Peter among those eyewitnesses who saw Jesus’ glory on the mount of Transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16–18), but “we have the stronger or more secure prophetic word” found in the Old Testament prophecies (v. 19a). If readers would attentively contemplate what was said in these Old Testament prophecies, they would find the day dawning and the day star rising in their own minds; they would become instructed, illuminated, and satisfied by means of the light shed from these prophecies (v. 19b).

These Old Testament Scriptures were not a matter of one’s own “loosing” (*epiluseōs* v. 20), “because prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (v. 21).

To make the word *epiluseōs* mean in this context an “explanation” or “interpretation,” as some do, would be to argue that no prophet can interpret his own message—hence he had to write better than he knew. So argued Hengstenberg.

However, the claim is too bold for the following reasons:

1) The substantive *epiluseōs* in classical usage is a “freeing, loosing” or “destroying”; in other words, it is an unleashing from life. The only example of this form in the New Testament is 2 Peter 1:20; the Septuagint exhibits no instances of its usage either. However, the verbal form in its original meaning would appear to be “to set at liberty, to let go, to loose,” while secondarily it came to mean “to explain, unfold, or interpret,” as in Mark 4:34.

2) Even if that secondary meaning were intended by Peter here, it would claim too much. Can it be said that *all* prophetic writings were closed to their writers?

3) Peter’s readers are urged to give heed to the Old Testament prophecies, “as unto a light that shineth in a dark place”

because the Spirit of God has revealed through these prophets what is certain, plain, and intelligible. The light offered in the text came not from the ability of men, but from the “Father of lights” above. Had Peter’s logic been, “Give heed to the light shining in a dark place since no prophet understood or could even explain what he said, but wrote as he was carried along by the Holy Spirit,” then the light would have been darkness and how could any, including the prophet, give heed to that enigmatic word? No, since the prophets were enlightened, instructed, and carried along by the Holy Spirit, they too were thus enabled to understand what they wrote. Otherwise we must ask for a second miracle—the inspiration of the interpreter.

John 14:25,26; 15:26,27; 16:12–15

Some, of course, will not shrink from following this last suggestion to its ultimate end. After all, they say, did not the Spirit promise to “teach us all things” (John 14:26) and then take what was His and declare it to us (John 16:15)?

But as any serious New Testament student will immediately recognize, the “you” intended in these passages was not the body of believers at large but the future writers of the New Testament. This is clear from its larger contextual setting (the “upper room discourse”) and from the immediate contextual notations such as:

John 14:26 “. . . he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you when I was with you” (RSV).

John 15:27 “You also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning [of my earthly ministry]” (RSV).

John 16:12,13 “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now [while I am still on earth with you men]. When the Spirit of truth comes, we will guide you into all the truth . . .” (RSV).

Therefore, believers must refrain from using these texts as proofs of their own inspired interpretations as against those meanings derived through the hard labor of exegesis. Almost every cult or aberration from historical Christian doctrine has appealed at one time or another to these three texts as their grounds for adding to the inscripturated Word of God, but all have failed to meet the demands of the text. They have never personally walked with the Lord while He was on the earth. They have never heard from His lips His instruction, and they were not witnesses from the start of His three-year ministry. But the apostles were! Therefore, that special band of men could record the life, words, and works of Christ in the Gospels with the Spirit’s aid of recollection (John 14:26); teach doctrine (“what is mine”—John 16:14,15); and predict the future (John 16:12). They were eyewitnesses of what had happened to the Christ (John 15:26,27).

If believers complain that this principle, if applied consistently, could signal the ruin of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) for contemporary believers, let it be noted that this was the precise problem William Carey faced when he launched the modern impetus for missions. Believers resisted the appeal to “go and make disciples” by arguing that that command was delivered to the disciples alone. But Carey answered wisely that the principle was extended to all, for that same text also said: “And lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age”! Hence the divine intention would admit no such easy excuses as the one Carey’s generation offered at first. Such is also the solution to our texts; where the extension is made, it must be observed.

2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 2:29; Rom. 7:6

As a final line of defense, some will appeal to the contrast

between the dead exegesis of the “letter” of Scripture, (according to them, the author’s verbal meanings) versus the freedom of viewing the text under the fresh and immediate aid of the “Spirit.”¹⁴ But this stems from a false dichotomy that pretends to use the method it assails in order to substantiate the validity of its practice, only to depart from it once it is aloft. However, it is wrongheaded on both counts.

2 Cor. 3:6 “. . . the letter kills, but the spirit gives life” (NASB).

Rom. 2:29 “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter . . .”

Rom. 7:6 “. . . we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (NASB).

The Pauline word for “letter” in these verses is *gramma*, not *graphē*. Paul assails outward, fleshly, uncommitted “letterism”—a perfunctory external observance of the law which has no antecedent commitment of the life by faith to the God who has given the law. Such ceremonialism was a “serving in the oldness of the letter.” But the *graphē* was sacred to Paul: it was the very Word of God.

Paul’s complaint is not about the inadequacy of what was written or about what the words of the text meant grammatically and syntactically as used by individual writers. His complaint was rather with those who *by means of* observing the outward letter of the law and *by means of* [instrumental use of *dia* in Rom. 2:20] circumcision were actually breaking the law. Circumcision was

¹⁴ See, for example, Peter Richardson, “Spirit and Letter: A Foundation for Hermeneutics,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (1973), pp. 208–18. He concludes (p. 218) that while Paul based his argument on “what is written,” Paul’s method and results show a great deal of freedom so that there is “. . . no final and authoritative interpretation, nor even, perhaps, a final and authoritative principle of interpretation”!

really a matter of the heart *by means of* the Spirit and not a matter of letter-keeping (*gramma*).¹⁵

Once again, Scripture is abused if such contrasts as "the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive" is turned into a slogan to allow so-called "Spirit-led" interpreters to bypass the authorial verbal meanings in each text in favor of more practical, personal, relational, spiritual, or sensational meanings obtained allegedly from the Holy Spirit as promised in these three texts. But the promise is nonexistent and the method is therefore subbiblical and ultimately heretical.

The work of the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:14ff. must not be used in a dialectical way that relates understanding to an existential response or to the tension that exists between the "letter" and the "Spirit" as Peter Richardson and others have proposed. The source of our understanding in 2 Corinthians 3:14 is still located in our "reading." What Paul prescribed for the removal of the veil that prevented a personal reception and application of either Moses' or Paul's words was that men should "turn to the Lord" (v. 16), who is the Spirit (v. 17).

Now does the Spirit set us free from the verbal meanings of the Word of the text (supposedly the *gramma*)? We answer with a decisive no! The Spirit is the Unveiler of significance, relevance, personal application, but not the Releaser of additional or delayed verbal meanings. This latter ministry of the Spirit was focalized in the apostles and prophets. They received the gifts of revelation, truth, verbal meanings, and valid teachings; their readers, on the other hand, received the ministry of reception, application, and significance—sometimes called "meaning-for-me." To confuse meaning and significance is to reduce all hermeneutics to shambles.¹⁶

¹⁵ For further discussion on these texts, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 187-88.

¹⁶ Once again E. D. Hirsch, Jr. has clarified this issue best in his *Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 2-4. " . . . 'meaning' refers to the whole verbal meaning of a text and 'significance' to textual meaning in relation to a larger context—another mind, another era, a wider subject matter, an alien system of values"

Evangelical Exegetical Procedure

If each of the above arguments can be successfully sustained (and we believe they will bear even more intense scrutiny than is possible in the short scope of this chapter), then all alleged biblical grounds for finding some sort of *superadditum* or *sensus plenior* in addition to the human writers' supposed nominal or prosaic meanings is cut away. We are back to searching for God's revelation for our generation through the verbal meanings and contexts supplied by the ancient writers of Scripture.

That is exactly where the Pauline claim of 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 figures so prominently. Indeed, this may be one of the most neglected, yet most significant texts in the whole inspiration-hermeneutical debate. Paul located the source of his inscripturated wisdom in God. It was altogether different from that wisdom found in empirical sources or from pockets of political savvy (1 Cor. 2:6-9). And this wisdom God had revealed (aorist tense) to the apostle (the "us" of v. 10 and "we" of vv. 12 and 13 are used editorially; cf. 3:1, "I") by means of the Holy Spirit. The words Paul wrote, then, were not merely the result of his own human intelligence, but the result of "words taught by the Spirit" as he "explained spiritual truths with words given by the Spirit" (note the Greek grammar here versus the misunderstanding of most modern translations on 1 Cor. 2:13). An identical claim was repeated again in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: ". . . you received the word of God which you heard from us . . . not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (RSV, italics mine).

But it is the organic unity between the words of the writer and the work of the Holy Spirit that is the key point of the 1 Corinthians 2:13 reference. There the Holy Spirit *teaches* the apostle in words. Consequently, the writer was not oblivious to the import or verbal meaning of his terms: he himself was taught by the Holy Spirit. Such a claim can only mean there was a living assimilation of God's intended truth into the verbalizations of the writers of Scripture, rather than a mere mechanical printout of semi-understandable verbiage.

Therefore evangelicals are urged to begin a new "hermeneutical reformation" to correct this type of growing malpractice our profession has allowed in recent years. As a contribution towards that end, it is urged that the following axioms be adopted and implemented in our preparation of lectures, sermons, home Bible studies, and personal devotions:

- 1) God's meaning and revelatory-intention in any passage of Scripture may be accurately and confidently ascertained only by studying the verbal meanings of the divinely delegated and inspired human writers.
- 2) Only one verbal meaning is to be connected with any passage of Scripture unless the writer of the text gives literary and contextual clues that he has several aims in view for this exceptional passage (for example, the two or three questions asked at the beginning of the Olivet Discourse).
- 3) That single, original verbal meaning of the human author may be ascertained by heeding the usual literary conventions of history, culture, grammar, syntax, and accumulated theological context. And if it cannot be ascertained by these means then it cannot be ascertained at all.
- 4) This authorial meaning can be understood by all readers who will allow the writer to first say what he wants to say without introducing conservative or liberal prejudices as a pre-understanding.
- 5) The personal impact, significance, application, reception, and value this text has for particular individuals or situations is directly linked to the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit takes the single truth-intention of the author and in His convicting, comforting, teaching, and motivating power urges us to apply the principle taught in this text to scores of different situations.

In addition to these axioms, the following clarifications should

be added if exegetical practice is to be worthy of the Bible:

- 1) The "original meaning" of any text can be defined, as John F.A. Sawyer reminds us, in two different ways: "original" in an etymological sense, and "original" in the meaning it had in its original context.¹⁷ Exegesis is interested in this second usage. The object of exegesis is to discern the original meaning of the present canonical shape of the text rather than the root meaning of words or even the original meaning of the text's separate units (if indeed it had such a prehistory).
- 2) "Theological exegesis" of a passage is most important if we are to transcend the chasm between the scientific dissecting of the text into its philological components, complete with parsings and grammatical notes. However, a premature use of the *analogia fidei*, "analogy of faith," is as destructive of true meaning as no interaction with the accumulated and antecedent theology that "informed" that text. The "analogy of faith" is the sum of the prominent teachings of Scripture gathered from all its parts without regard to any diachronic considerations. This "rule of faith" was first set forth by Augustine and further defined by men like Chemnitz (*Examen*, VIII, I) to say that the articles of faith were to be derived from clear passages and in no case was a clear passage to be set in opposition to a difficult or problematic passage. Hence a principle of harmonization or proportionality was introduced.¹⁸

But can the analogy of faith function as a "pre-understanding" with which the interpreter approaches his task of exegesis in a distinctively Christian way? I believe not! The interpreter must not even carry such high and worthy goods as

¹⁷ "The Original Meaning of the Text and Other Legitimate Subjects for Semantic Description," *Questions Disputées d'ancien Testament*, C. Brekemans, ed. (Leuven University Press, 1974), pp. 63-70.

¹⁸ For a sympathetic discussion, see John F. Johnson, "Analogia Fidei as Hermeneutical Principle," *The Springfielder* 36 (1972-73), pp. 249-59.

these to his task. Only the doctrine and the theology prior to the time of the writer's composition of his revelation (which theology we propose to call here the "Analogy of Scripture")¹⁹ may be legitimately used in the task of theological exegesis, in other words, where the writer directly cites or obviously alludes to the theology that preceded his writing and formed a backdrop against which he cast his own message. Only the discipline of biblical theology, if it traces the buildup of doctrine from era to era within each of the Testaments, will supply the extremely important theological data necessary to rescue an otherwise dull philological and grammatical exercise.²⁰ The "analogy of Scripture" then was the "pre-understanding" of both the writer and of those in his audience who were alert to what God had revealed prior to this new word of revelation. Likewise, the interpreter must employ the identical method if he is to be successful in aiding modern hearers to hear the total word in a text.

Having arrived at the original historical, cultural, grammatical, syntactical, theological meaning of the text, the exegete may now use the analogy of faith (of the whole of Scripture) in the summaries and conclusions he offers to each section of his exegesis and to the whole message, for what is learned in this context may relate to what was later revealed in Scripture. However, our methodology must be clean and there must be no confusion about these two methods in the name of orthodox or pragmatic results.

¹⁹ The editor of this volume, Kenneth Kantzer, has wisely suggested that a better name for the phenomena described here would be something like the "Analogy of the Revelational Context," in other words, that part of Scripture which served as the context of revelation received prior to the writing of the immediate context under investigation. The "Analogy of Scripture" has been employed to designate various things in the history of the church. See my limited defense of this term in "The Present State of Old Testament Studies," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (1975), pp. 73-74.

²⁰ See the strong stand on this matter taken by George M. Landes, "Biblical Exegesis in Crisis: What is the Exegetical Task in a Theological Context?," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 26 (1970), pp. 275-77. "Any exegesis that refuses to expound the theological dimensions in these writings overlooks their *raison d'être*."

Nowhere, then, does Scripture support the view that the Bible has a multi-track concept of meanings. If the human author did not receive by revelation the meaning in question, then exegetes and readers have no right to identify their meanings with God. Only by following the careful distinctions set forth in the authorial autonomy view can the Word of God be preserved for future generations and be handled as what it is indeed—the powerful and authoritative Word from God.