

**THE COVERT MAGISTERIUM: THEOLOGY, TEXTUALITY
AND THE QUESTION OF SCRIPTURE**

By

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For Kira

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Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.

The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"

Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

- John 19:19 - 22, NAB

But we are still faced with the question of publication.

- Michel Foucault

CHAPTER I

A TALE OF TWO BIBLES

There is a structural problem within Protestantism that is not solved by reiterating a thousand times that sola scriptura is the hermeneutical principle of Protestantism. There must be concrete structures within the church through which the hermeneutical process takes place from day to day. In Protestantism, the structures have become shadowy, if not invisible.¹

As I write this there are two books on the desk in front of me.²

The first is *The Golfer's Bible*. In it are articles and chapters designed to help the reader improve swing and technique, in addition to expert advice to aid in the correction of common errors of play, tips on the selection of new clubs, and “100 action photographs.”³ It is intended, according to the introduction, specifically for those “with the motivation to do what it takes to become a top-flight player of golf.”⁴

¹ Carl E. Braaten, *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 2, *History and Hermeneutics*, gen. ed. William Hordern (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 151.

² I am adopting an intentionally personal, less “formal” voice in this dissertation. While I realize this is not a traditional academic style, the enactment of the personal nature of these analyses is important to the function and understanding of my project as a whole. Because I am writing specifically *against* a form of theological universality (or, perhaps better stated, “neutrality”) that does not configure the commitments of the subject in its self-understanding, the placement of my “literary self” *into* this present writing seems methodologically useful and, therefore, though unorthodox, defensible. In taking this position I am following, among others, the assertion made by Korean-American theologian Jung Young Lee: “Theology is autobiographical, but it is not autobiography...Telling my story is not itself theology, but a basis for theology, indeed the primary context for doing my theology...If theology is contextual [as I will here argue it is], it must certainly at root be autobiographical.” Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 7.

³ Frank Kenyon Allen, et al., *The Golfer's Bible: Revised Edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

⁴ *Ibid.*, page unmarked.

The second is also *The Golfer's Bible*. It contains the 66 books that are normally contained in the Protestant version of the Scriptures that are collected under the name "Bible," as well as a back section of inspirational devotions and other aids to study, which include an outline of the "Plan of Salvation" just after the table of contents.⁵ The indicia on the back of the four-color gift box indicate that this, too, is a book *specifically* for motivated golfers, reminding us that "[l]essons we learn on the golf course can make us better people, better spouses, better workers, better friends, and *better followers of Christ.*"⁶

Juxtaposition of these two extant, physical versions of *The Golfer's Bible* against one another leads us to note the intrusion of an interesting set of perplexities. The "Bibles" are both, explicitly, intended for "golfers," but do they serve the *same* population? Are they really both *Bibles*? *Can* they *both* be "Bibles"? Or does the affirmation of *one* of these as a "Bible" *believe* the possibility of the other one being a Bible as well? Is the authenticity of their respective "Bible-ness-es" to be determined *between* them, or by comparison to some *other* standard of "Bible-ness"? (What standard, then, would we choose? For example, both a "Catholic" Bible and an "Orthodox" Bible present *more* than 66 canonical books. A "Gideon New Testament and Psalms" Bible, by contrast, presents far *less*, as does Martin Luther's translation of the Bible.⁷ None of these versions, however, will help you correct common putting errors.)

⁵ *HCSB Golfer's Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

⁶ See box cover of HCSB / SPECIALTY / COMPACT version of the *HCSB Golfer's Bible with Slide-Tab Closure*, ISBN 978-158640323-2, my emphasis.

⁷ Or, at least, it presents certain of the canonical books (Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation) as having a very secondary status. See n. 49 of Philip Blosser, "What are the Philosophical and Practical Problems

In other words, is there yet some *form* of “the” “true” “Bible”—Platonic or otherwise—that might be invoked? Is there a form that transcends and adjudicates such accidental aspects of audience and canon? With all this confusion before us, simply as a result of setting these two books side by side here on the desk, we may ask the question: to what extent is the inclusion (or not) of those 66 books *reasonable grounds* for calling one of these books a *Bible* (or not)?

There is a set of correlating—and no less pressing—perplexities here, as well. These are perplexities that are raised with regard to the matters of *audience* and *identity*. I will mention the most obvious of these perplexing matters of identity, regarding my relationship to these two objects named “*The Golfer’s Bible*,” first: even if you charitably credit me for a few failed attempts to join my father on the links in early adolescence, the simple fact of the matter is that I am *not*, in *any* respect, a golfer. Moreover, I lack both the skills and the interest even to become a golfer. I do not currently, and probably never will again, play golf. *Am I thus disqualified* as a reader of either of these (quite specifically) *Golfer’s Bibles*? And if disqualified as a reader, how much less am I qualified as a judge of whether the (again, specifically invoked) community of golfers might rightly or wrongly point to *either* of these extant copies and claim it as *their* Bible?

Without belaboring the perplexities on both sides, it should hopefully be becoming clear that these questions are both numerous and serious. Indeed, substitute the label “Christian” (or “Catholic,” or “Protestant,” or “Mormon,” or “Gay / Lesbian,” etc.) in the place of “Golfer” in the above paragraph and the perplexities shift from humorous to poignant. What is (or is not) a Bible? Who is (or is not) a qualified reader or judge of

with *Sola Scriptura*?” in *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura*, Robert A. Sungenis, ed. (Goleta, CA: Queenship, 1997), 54-55.

the Bible? There is no trick involved in making these questions suddenly present and insistent; indeed, it will be claimed that “the trick,” if we are to speak of one, might arise rather in the fact that so often such questions seem to be hidden from our view, or are simply not mentioned.

I have set these two “Bibles” on my desk because they can function for us as a starting point for thinking through the connections and implications that arise from a series of what, at first glance, seem to be unrelated theological questions about Scripture. These questions are posed by Michael J. McClymond in a recent article in the journal *Theological Studies*, and by Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff in his book *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*. We will examine each of these questions in more detail momentarily, but first, some general statements about the present project should be made.

Hans Frei and George Lindbeck

As a seminary student in the late 1990’s, my training in theology was shadowed by the (almost always paired) names “Frei and Lindbeck.” Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, both, are credited with setting the stage for two dominant strands of late-20th Century North American theology, “narrative” theology and “postliberal” theology. Frei has been called “perhaps the greatest historian of modern biblical hermeneutics of his generation.”⁸ Since the publication of Frei’s book *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* in 1974, there has been no shortage of responses to its implicit challenge, as proposals for

⁸ William C. Placher, “Introduction,” in Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, George Hunsinger and William C. Placher, eds. (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 3.

“narrative interpretation” and “narrative theology” have abounded. These are defined, on the whole, as a set of theological positions “that stresses the power of language and the essential narrative quality of Scripture and of human experience” in their method.⁹

A decade later, the publication of *The Nature of Doctrine*, in 1984, “brought Lindbeck’s vision of religion, Christian doctrine, ecumenical dialogue, and the tasks of theology to the attention of a wide audience of Christian theologians and other students of religion.”¹⁰ This vision became a formative basis of postliberalism, also known as postliberal theology. Building on philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur and J. L. Austin, postliberalism attempts to clarify the theological project through grammatical metaphors. In other words, various religious doctrines “function as ‘rules’ for appropriate communal ways of speaking.”¹¹

For several decades, among the faculties of many seminaries, schools of theology, and divinity schools in America, these two names, and their attendant projects, marked the very definition of “the question of how the present task of theology should be conceived.”¹² Several of my seminary professors had studied directly under these men, and at least one of them, George Stroup, has been directly credited with “carrying on”

⁹ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), s.v. “narrative theology.”

¹⁰ Bruce D. Marshall, “Introduction,” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, Bruce D. Marshall, ed. (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 1990), 1-2.

¹¹ McKim, s.v. “postliberal theology/ postliberalism.”

¹² Bruce D. Marshall, “Introduction,” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, Bruce D. Marshall, ed. (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 1990), 2.

and furthering their projects.¹³ Thus, Frei and Lindbeck form a “background” for my theological studies.

In a similar manner, they will hover in the background here. Though their work will not be a matter of *direct* inquiry in the present project, Frei and Lindbeck need to be mentioned here because they inaugurate a conversation about the subjects of “Scripture” and “Tradition” that, in their wake, fans out in many directions with many interlocutors.¹⁴ Because of them, when we take up the discussion of the Bible in contemporary academic theology, we are joining one of *the* key debates of the last forty years. The question of what chief narratives comprise for us “Scripture,” and how the Bible is used in the “doctrinal grammar” of various Christian communities, has been shaped prominently by the methodological concerns put forth by these two writers.

Furthermore, as Hans Frei stated in 1967, “we may be in the position of understanding stories in a way far better than the account we can render of the methods or categories by which we understand them. *Our understanding of a text is often far greater than our understanding of how we can understand it.*”¹⁵ That is, we can tell a story, or read a text, and be compelled by the story or the text, without necessarily being able to

¹³ See, for example, George Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology: Recovering the Gospel in the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997).

¹⁴ According to Paul DeHart, “the best image for the ongoing influence of the originary Yale thinkers [Frei and Lindbeck] is that of a river delta. Like a powerful clear stream which gradually disperses into smaller branches, the characteristic ideas associated with Frei and Lindbeck have spread in several directions, watering a greater area but also becoming more shallow and indistinct as they are simplified and abstracted from their original contexts and mingled with other intellectual sources.” Paul DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 46-47. See chapter one of this work for a succinct overview of Frei and Lindbeck’s respective projects, influence, and legacy.

¹⁵ Hans W. Frei, “Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,” *Theology and Narrative* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) 41, my emphasis.

articulate the underlying structure—how it functions *as* a story or text—or without being able to articulate *why* a narrative compels readers in a certain manner.

Frei's claim stands as a challenge to the state of much American theology since the time of its utterance.¹⁶ In 2008, over forty years after Frei's statement, there is still a willful ignorance in many corners of the theological enterprise as to *how texts work*. This ignorance, moreover, has been combined in recent years with a growing allergy among some theologians to engage the biblical texts themselves. In other words, on the one hand, we can readily observe that some theologians have continued to undertake theological projects with greater and greater distance, not only from the biblical texts that once preoccupied systematicians such as John Calvin and Karl Barth, but from the very attempt to understand the textual nature of the Bible—the fact that it is, as a work, an *assemblage* of writings with palpable genealogies, ideologies and histories. Hence the challenge for these theologians is to recognize the importance of textualism and “cultural-linguistic” approaches in the first place.

Thankfully, this refusal to account for the workings of texts is not universal. There is a visible contingent of theologians, influenced by—or at least reacting to—the works of Frei and Lindbeck, have taken up the response to this challenge in a different manner. These theologians, among them Kathryn Tanner, Bruce D. Marshall, Peter Ochs, and David Kelsey, have worked to address the question of *how* we might better “understand our understanding” of the Bible. We will examine some of their responses in more detail in what follows. For now, it is enough to claim that it is in the spirit of

¹⁶ It is the claim of this dissertation that such attempts to defer the question of understanding the operation of texts has become an *obstacle épistémologique* (following Gaston Bachelard's work on this notion), though the concept of the “epistemological block” is here used in a non-scientific context.

this latter response to Frei's challenge—that is, the attempt to articulate how we understand our Biblical understanding—that this dissertation finds its home.

The Subject of the Present Work

The question of the Magisterium

When, in response to our “two Bibles” problem, we ask questions, like the ones above—questions such as *what is allowed? what is required?* and *who is qualified (and upon what grounds) to make such judgments?*—we are, whether we choose to call it by such a name or not, asking questions that have traditionally been related to the area of doctrines regarding (the existence of / the desire for / the denial of / etc.) the *teaching office* of the church. These are questions, in other words, concerning the theological notion of a *Magisterium*. This project is about the Magisterium—or perhaps at this point it is more proper to use the more general term “magisteria”—both as formal concept and as existing reality.

For purposes of this project, I will suggest an initial definition of *Magisterium*—a definition that will be expanded and reflected upon, certainly, in the sections that follow—as *that which has the power, in a given place and time, to articulate both what is to be read as Scripture, and how this Scripture is to be read*. In other words, a Magisterium sets both the limits of Scripture, as well as the *range of possible meanings* for that given limit, for a given community.¹⁷

¹⁷ Readers will wonder, perhaps, how such matters as the role of the Holy Spirit are accounted for in this definition (as the claim of the influence of the Spirit is a major factor in many explanations of the role and function of the Magisterium). While I do not deny the importance of such claims, for others or for my own understanding of magisterial authority, such claims are not essential to the analysis here of *magisterial*

***Sola Scriptura* as denial of Magisterium**

Much of Protestantism, throughout its history, has sought to define itself through explicit *denial* of magisterial influence. This denial has come to be mistakenly characterized—by Protestants and Catholics alike—through the polarization of the concepts *Scripture* and *Tradition* (more will be said specifically about the mistakenness of this polarization in a moment). Taking the first of these poles, Scripture, as a starting point, we can observe this claim of freedom from magisterial influence most clearly through the examination of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*—“*Scripture alone*”—which is itself a founding tenet of the Protestant Reformation.

There is a range of theological literature from the last four centuries that offers a spectrum of possible invocations of the doctrine of *sole scriptura*. One end of the spectrum posits this denial of Magisterium tentatively, in what we might call a “weak form” (e.g., “Protestants...cannot ignore the Catholic argument that the Bible needs interpretation”¹⁸). Even from the first days of the Reformation, however, there are also theological writings that posit the denial in a “strong” form, boldly and explicitly (e.g., “Protestantism differs from all forms of Catholicism in its insistence that the Church must always remain under the revelation that is known through the Bible”¹⁹).

Regardless of whether *sola scriptura* is invoked in its strong or weak form, however, the prevailing assumption at the heart of the claim across this spectrum is that

effects. A Magisterium can function, so goes my argument, by grounding itself in natural *or* supernatural authority, and most often by some mixture of both. The analysis of Textuality, which will be offered in Chapter III, will enable the reader to examine magisterial effects at work in physical artifacts of Scripture that take their authority from a variety of understandings of the work of the Spirit.

¹⁸ John Coleman Bennett, “A Protestant Conception of Religious Authority,” in Vergilius Ferm, ed., *The Protestant Credo* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 133.

¹⁹ Bennett, 132.

the traditions and institutions of the Church—no matter how helpful or salutary to proper understanding of the Scriptures—are most properly understood as *derivative*: they are secondary, dependent, and formed by the presence of the Word of God we encounter in the “strange new world” of the Bible.²⁰

Moreover, even where “tradition” is given a prominent place, there still remains a deep suspicion of any warrant for an explicit ecclesial “teaching office.” In such Protestant views, it is “Scripture,” and *not* the “doctrines of men,” that forms the norm of all Christian understanding and institutions. The claim is thus made from this premise that all forms of magisteria are assumed to be human in origin, and hence are dangerous, dispensable, and unnecessary. The normative influence of Scripture, as a result, runs only one way, from text *to* tradition, along a spectrum that, at one end, a) is comfortable with the claim that Scripture can be isolated and understood *in se*, and at the other, b) declares, with Yves Congar, that “Scripture has an *absolute sovereignty*” over all traditions and institutions.²¹

The thesis of the present work

It is the aim of the present project to demonstrate that such claims are, in both the formal and actual sense, false. It will be argued that, even when a given community explicitly *denies* the presence of a magisterial influence, such influences can still be

²⁰ The “strange new world” reference here is, of course, to Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, tr. Douglas Horton (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1978). It is not meant to indicate that Barth is being singled out, however.

²¹ Yves Congar, *La Tradition et les traditions*, II (Paris, 1963), 176, quoted in Donald G. Bloesch, “The Primacy of Scripture,” in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 126, my emphasis.

readily demonstrated. In other words, this project will seek to demonstrate that the historically perennial understanding of the exclusionary dyad of *Scripture* and *Tradition*—while rhetorically highly effective—represents a misapprehension of the structure of the “authority of Scripture” within communities that seek to claim Scripture’s “sole authority” or “sole sufficiency.” Such misapprehensions lead, moreover, to a false and ultimately indefensible polarization of Scripture “against” an always extant—though often unacknowledged—*Magisterium*.

In other words, it will be claimed 1) that the actual question is not (and in fact *cannot* be) whether a given religious body is bound to, or free from, a *Magisterium*; rather the question is *always* whether that body is bound to an *overt* *Magisterium*, or a *covert* one. 2) That the ubiquity of magisterial influence translates into the *material* organization of printed and marketed Bibles. 3) By “understanding how we understand” printed and marketed Bibles, we gain a means to interrogate these magisterial influences, transforming the covert influence to the overt. Finally, 4) once overt, we can ask of a given, local *Magisterium*, “To whom does it owe allegiance?” In other words, is a given *Magisterium* responsive to the call of the suffering, of “least of these” among us, or does it serve *other* interests? These claims and the question that follows them are, it will be suggested, profoundly ethical matters to which the theologian (styled here as a “professional reader and interpreter”) is *especially* bound.

These linked claims are, in short form, the thesis of this project.

As was said above, as we develop this thesis, the questions of McClymond and Wolterstorff will frame our examination. At the moment, however, more needs to be said about the way these terms “*Magisterium*” and “*sola scriptura*” are understood in the

present project, as well as who I understand the audience of this project—the “theologians”—to be. We will begin with this last issue first.

Key Definitions for the Project

Defining the term “theologian” for the project

The pair of *Golfer’s Bibles*, which began this inquiry, might be considered from a variety of perspectives: literary perspectives, sociological, philosophical, or economic perspectives, to name but a few. Certainly the sociologist, the business school graduate, and the literary critic might each have their piece to say in the analysis of these two readable objects, these two “Bibles.” In fact anyone, from a myriad of disciplines, wishing to take up the questions delineated above (again: *what is allowed? what is required? and who is qualified [and upon what grounds] to make such judgments?*) can propose a handle for attaching their own theoretical model to them. Each discipline, moreover, can make a case for a given model’s accurate explanation of our increasingly segmented and specialized Western “economies” (some economies concerned with commerce, others with salvation). Our current intellectual environment, in other words, offers us a legion of possible tools to understand, describe and cope with these, and similar, questions. There are many theoretical options from which to choose.

Without discounting the value of conversations undertaken by the many disparate types of critics named above, their various approaches will not occupy the focus of our concern here. Conversely, while the analyses that follow *may* be of interest to various literary and cultural critics, and of particular interest to practitioners of biblical studies

(by which I mean academically-based exegetes of the Old and New Testaments, homiletics, and the like), this is more a sort of happy accident. If the following analysis proves useful to them, their use of this project in the practice of their various disciplines is most welcome. I am thankful for such interest from such readers, but such readers are not the *primary* audience I envision for this work. My audience is, intentionally and specifically, *theologians*.

But who are the theologians to whom I intend to speak? To simply to deploy the noun “theologian” is not to have said a great deal, and so it is necessary to take a moment to narrow this term and hone its referent.

The honing is called for because, in the present context, the term “theologian” could refer—indeed does refer—to almost *anyone*. Its use in the academy is indiscriminate. For example, it has become in many divinity schools a synonymous term for “student.” It is often employed in the most general fashion possible, as when the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* defines “theologian” simply as “One who does theology or makes theological statements.”²² While such a use of the term may lexically accurate, such use is not sufficiently discriminate to indicate the primary audience to whom I am writing.

Introductory texts in theology are not always helpful toward fashioning a more precise definition of the term, either. Picking up a widely read, basic text in systematic theology—to take but one example, Shirley Guthrie’s *Christian Doctrine*—gives the reader little practical guidance in how to narrow the field of “theologian” from basically meaning “every reasonable, religiously-interested person” to something more precise.

²² Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 279.

The first chapter's title bears the question, "Who is a Theologian?"²³ The immediate answer, as one explores the first several pages, is clear: "You"—the reader of the book, no matter your background or training—are the theologian.

Such presuppositions of ubiquity with regard to theological identity are supported by anecdotal evidence as well. The current institutions with which I am associated (Vanderbilt University and American Baptist College, both in Nashville, Tennessee) each conscientiously deploy the rhetoric of "Theological Education" to the point that (as one of my fellow professors at American Baptist recently asserted, indicating the students), "we're *all* theologians here."²⁴

The audience to which I write in this project is far narrower than this.²⁵ By "theologian," I am here indicating chiefly the *professional* theologian; one who, for example, writes books for publication that are classified by bookstores and libraries under the subject headings "Theology" or "Theological Studies." The term "theologian", as I am using it, should also be understood to include the specifically *academic* theologian, by which I mean one who is employed by a college, university or seminary, and was hired to serve a teaching function located within what is often delineated as a "Department of

²³ Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine: Revised Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 3.

²⁴ Janet Wolf, conversation with author, April 17, 2007.

²⁵ As this statement is made, I have in mind James Cone's rejoinder, "Theology is always done for particular times and places and addressed to a specific audience." Cone also makes the broad statement, "*Human beings do theology*," which I interpret to mean that we should place our focus on actual flesh-and-blood practitioners of theology, and not theoretical abstractions (a sort of *ur*-theologian, not connected substantially to those here and now actually doing the messy acts of theologizing). Thus it is my intention to speak to a *particular* set of humans (professional theologians) doing a *particular* sort of (professional) theology. See James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), xix.

Theology,” or some other subsection of the college specifically devoted to technical study of doctrines and practices of (usually Christian) religious communities.

Thus the “theologian” I have in mind, as the primary audience of this thesis, is one who not only *produces* (i.e., thinks or publishes) “theology” (a field, it should be noted, that does not exist “in itself,” but rather, in our current context, exists *as a part of* the taxonomy of market forces and divisions of products noted above), but also one who *teaches* “theology” (an academic subject and vocation shaped by its own sort of “market forces” in the current context).²⁶ My hope, in other words, is to speak, not to some abstract homunculus called “the Theologian,” but to real individuals who write books and teach students.

Hence, to draw together these disparate trajectories, the intended audience of the current project is the audience who, by grace of history and market forces, currently practices and teaches a discipline known as “theology,” and is thus called, professionally, “theologians.” Moreover, I seek *especially* to communicate with that subset of theologians who, in their writing and teaching, can be observed appealing to “Scripture,” “Bible,” and similar related terms.

²⁶ Another way of understanding the “theologian” to which I write here is by making explicit a distinction (and its effects) which arise out of the current academic context. To wit: a “theologian” is a scholar who may be seen making reference to “scripture,” but who is not an active part of the technical conversations that make up the discipline known as “Biblical Studies.” In fact, the divide between these two disciplines (with concomitant ignorance on respective sides as to content, interests, and method) is such a truism in North American academia (both in universities and seminaries alike) that we may further define these bifurcated disciplines in tandem: A *theologian* may be found when terms such as “scripture,” “gospel,” and “Bible” are invoked without explication of the content of such terms. In similar manner, a practitioner of biblical studies, while better equipped to address those terms, has a contrapositive myopia with regard to systematic doctrine and technical dogmatics.

Magisterium, as understood in the current project

According to G. K. Chesterton, what are perceived as “differences” between Protestant and Catholic doctrinal positions are often better characterized as matters of *emphasis*. Chesterton maintains, for example, that “a Calvinist is a Catholic obsessed with the Catholic idea of the sovereignty of God”, and, similarly, “a Quaker is a Catholic obsessed with the Catholic idea of gentle simplicity and truth.”²⁷ In each case, and many more, Chesterton would characterize the “Protestant” as one who has taken a doctrinal position that has hyperbolized and centralized one particular Catholic doctrine to the exclusion of others. In other words, for Chesterton, the Protestant is not *necessarily* one who has broken with Catholicism and improvised wholly new doctrine. Thus, for Chesterton, Protestants and Catholics stand on a common, if commonly misunderstood, ground on most doctrinal issues—though these differences in emphasis lead to vastly differing self-perceptions and dogmatic articulations.

One area in which Chesterton’s contention seems to break down, however, is over the understanding of the authority of the “teaching office” with regard to both Scripture and Tradition. On this matter, Protestants seem not to be placing their emphases differently, but rearranging matters entirely. Protestants uphold Scripture as primary. Many Protestants, as well, acknowledge the importance of Tradition. They vehemently reject, however, any possibility of a third facet beyond these two: the facet of the Magisterium.

This point cannot be made too strongly: where a traditional Catholic ecclesiology sees a tripartite system of Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium (with the Magisterium,

²⁷ G.K. Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 80-81.

in key respects, functioning as the norm for the other two), the preponderance of Protestant ecclesial understanding allows *at most* only the binary system of Scripture and Tradition (which, as has been noted above, can come to mean for some Protestant communities the simple primacy of Scripture, with Tradition seen as a rogue and deficient supplement at best). To take one recent example, in Tyron Inbody's otherwise very commendable introduction to theology, *The Faith of the Christian Church*,²⁸ there are fourteen pages dealing directly with the concepts of Scripture, Tradition, and their interrelation. At no point in this discussion is the matter of Magisterium taken up, or even acknowledged. The closest Inbody comes is with the following: "Roman Catholics believe that authority in theology rests in Scripture and tradition together, one the written and the other the oral form of the gospel."²⁹ His source for this claim, notably, is not any direct Catholic writing, but rather German Lutheran scholar Bernard Lohse.

It might at first seem that such conflations are innocuous. Indeed, the collapse of formal distinction is such that these terms, "Tradition" and "Magisterium," seem now largely interchangeable. Those of us trained in Protestant theology may find it difficult to fight our instinct to elide the two terms together. This conceptual collapse leads to referring to the Magisterium, as above, with terms like "Catholic tradition."

When Magisterium *is* invoked, moreover, particularly in the more hostile corners of Protestant discourse, it becomes "code language" for *human made Tradition*, supposedly strongly condemned in certain readings of Mark 7:8 and Colossians 2:8 (as in the latter, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive

²⁸ Tyron Inbody, *The Faith of the Christian Church: An Introduction to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 29-43 and *passim*.

²⁹ Inbody, 39.

philosophy, *which depends on human tradition* and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” [NIV, my emphasis]). As a result of such positions, we do not need to range far to find Protestant assertions of the “Roman Catholic methods of *supplementing* and finally *controlling* the word of God in the Bible.”³⁰ Such positions, in other words, can be best understood as a simple opposition of the Tradition set *against* Scripture, as in: “The Roman Catholic starts with doctrine (e.g., Mariology) which goes beyond what is explicitly taught in the Bible, and he then attempts to reconcile this doctrine with the Bible.”³¹

This collapse of Magisterium and Tradition is not correct, but, because of the ubiquity of the conflation, the difference between the two concepts may not be immediately apparent. Thus, for this project to move forward properly, it is essential that the distinction be clear in the mind of the reader.

Let us first correct Inbody and Lohse’s incorrect description. According to Patrick Madrid, in Catholic understanding, “The terms *Scriptura*, *Traditio*, and *Magisterium* may be summarized this way: *Scriptura* is the object of the Church’s interpretation; *Traditio* is the Church’s lived interpretation of Scripture; and *Magisterium* is the authority of the Church that does the interpreting.”³² Thus we have not a *polarity* (Scripture and Tradition), but rather, as mentioned above, a *triad* in conceptual tension, a

³⁰ Bennett, 133, my emphasis

³¹ Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 75.

³² Patrick Madrid, “*Sola Scriptura*: Blueprint for Anarchy,” in *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura*, Robert A. Sungen, ed. (Goleta, CA: Queenship, 1997), 20.

triad that includes an intimate connection to the institution of the Church.³³ Madrid quotes from the Catholic encyclical *Dei Verbum* to expand upon his explanation:

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devotedly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed. It is clear, therefore, that Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.³⁴

³³ To help explain these triadic distinctions, I would offer an example from popular culture. Many readers of my generation will be familiar with the "cult film" phenomenon of the late 1970's and '80's surrounding *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. This movie, a campy pastiche of "B movie" elements set to a rock 'n' roll soundtrack, began to be screened at midnight showings around the country, and spawned a grassroots oral tradition that is equal parts sarcastic commentary and street theater, arising from dozens (and often hundreds) of repeat visits to see the film. Audience members dress as characters from the movie, smuggle paraphernalia related to events in the story into the theater to interact with narrative elements (e.g., throwing rice during a wedding scene, opening umbrellas and squirting squirt guns into the air during a rain scene), and shout responses in unison throughout the film.

Within this analogy, we can map the *film itself* onto our category of "Scripture," and this grassroots *participation* with the film itself onto the category of "Tradition." We can see that there might be some who would desire that the "film alone" be sufficient to the experience of *Rocky Horror* (if you will, an analogous position to *sola Scriptura*). However, participants would likely counter that the film itself is actually not very good, and that to simply watch it without the attendant participatory actions is to miss out on most of the value of the experience. Hence, at the very least, we have a rough analogue here to the normal debates between "Scripture" and "Tradition," and the ongoing discussions surrounding their interaction, or lack thereof.

But there is a third dimension to this analogy, as well. Among the various *ad hoc* communities arising in the many theaters showing the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, the majority of the participants are there for the experience of the event itself. However, in each community there are a small number who very clearly are concerned not only with the experience, but with the *proper staging of the event itself*. The authority of these "overseers" is complex; they are often not elected, nor do they have executive or enforcement capacities to their "offices." However, their influence is clear and their control of the behavior of the mass of participants and the propagation of certain traditions over others, though chiefly rhetorical and social, is clearly observable. Within this analogy, these "authorities" function as a "Magisterium." They authorize *which* Tradition of participation with the film will be observed in a given ad-hoc viewing community.

³⁴ Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* 10, cf. 23-25; *Catholic Catechism* 74-95. Quoted in Madrid, "Blueprint for Anarchy," 19.

The distinction should now be clear: Magisterium *is not* Tradition per se, but the authority by which *one* particular Tradition is judged as truth against competing Traditions.

Thus we can begin to see why the term Magisterium is controversial. When the Catholic Church invokes words like “exclusive,” and suggests an “authority” that is not *purely* Scripture, Protestant critics object. Of course, among all but the most hardline Protestant theologians there is, at the very least, a grudging agreement (and often much stronger affirmation) to the importance and positive effect of *some* manner of “tradition.” There is clearly little disagreement to the assertion that “Tradition is useful alongside Scripture.” As John Coleman Bennett puts it, “Even the lonely individual who rebels against the Church as an institution but who nourishes his soul on the Bible because he finds an authentic word of God there is himself dependent upon the fact that there has been a Christian community that produced, preserved and interpreted the Bible and which directly, or indirectly, had much to do with the moulding of his own mind.”³⁵ Some form of community-based Tradition, in other words, always governs individual interpretations.

If we were to substitute the term “Magisterium” for “Tradition” in that sentence, however, what was the moment before a rather innocuous and generic assertion now raises ire, draws a line, or elicits strong resistance among these same Protestant theologians. Thus “Magisterium” is observed to be a very energetic term to deploy here. We do well in this analysis to follow this energy—to remain attentive to the points when a given community feels *roused* to energetically assert or deny the place of a doctrine or concept in a discourse.

³⁵ Bennett, 133.

A second point should be noted. In addition to having a conceptual identity separate from Tradition, a Magisterium *has an address*. Thus, *unlike* “Tradition,” which often is afforded the status given to a “principle” and thus perceived as something impersonal, abstract, universally available and innocuous, a Magisterium (now understood as the authority in a given time and place by which a given Tradition and a given set of Scriptures are deemed valid) is *locatable*. Whether it be found in Rome, or found in the offices of the Evangelical Theological Society, or even found (as we shall discover) in the editorial staff of corporate publishers like Thomas Nelson or Zondervan, Inc., *a Magisterium has an address*.

Moreover, because a Magisterium has a location (or, in the case of multiple, perhaps competing magisteria, many conflicting locations), it lends itself to critical analysis in a manner that the more abstract (and non-local) notion of “Tradition” may not.³⁶ Something locatable can be examined.

Let us turn, then, to the term itself. I begin first with the definition of “Magisterium,” which arises from its establishment within the communion of the Roman Catholic Church. From there, I will expand its use to include instances not limited to Catholic practice, rendering it a general category of analysis for this project. It is important to note, however, that whether the term is used in reference to Roman Catholic *or* non-Catholic environments, the distinction made above with regard to Tradition should be maintained.

³⁶ There is certainly a strong argument to be made that *certain* understandings of “Tradition” would be a perfectly suitable term to establish this interest in “location” named here. I cede that it is a debatable point. My choice of this distinction between the more abstract, non-localized “Tradition” and the locatable “Magisterium” is to invoke what I perceive to be a provocative, and hence theologically interesting, dichotomy. I am, however, aware that not all theologians share this same sense of “provocation-as-

The term “Magisterium,” in its classic sense, refers in the Roman Catholic context not only to the normative authority of interpretation, but also to the vanguards of that authority:

The word *magisterium* means literally, the authority of the master or teacher. It has a long and complicated history. In classical Latin the term simply referred to the dignity, authority, or office of the teacher or *magister*. In the usage of the early Church it did not have the specialized meaning it carries today; more often when one wished to refer to the teaching office of the bishops one would use the Greek, *didaskalos*, or the Latin *praedicatio ecclesiae*. When the term *magisterium* was used it often referred to an authority pertaining not only to teaching but to many other forms of pastoral ministry. This usage gradually narrowed so that by the late Middle Ages “magisterium” primarily referred to the office and authority of teachers, both bishops and scholars. Then in the nineteenth century “magisterium” as a term began to be employed in reference to the officeholders themselves (namely, the bishops and pope). This more narrow usage is the most common one today.³⁷

Hence the Magisterium, as noted above, is closely tied to the institution of the church and its ecclesial hierarchy. Properly constituted bishops and scholars are understood to “speak with authority” for and to the wider church. This authority of the officeholders, according to the American version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is understood within the Catholic tradition to stem from divine authorization, the “authority of Christ.” In other words,

[t]he Roman Pontiff and the bishops are “authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them, the faith to be believed and put into practice.” The *ordinary* and universal *Magisterium* of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for.³⁸

generative-of-interesting-theology.” It is my hope that the ensuing analysis will justify my choice, to a majority of readers at least.

³⁷ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church*, Theology and Life Series number 41 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997) 159-160.

³⁸ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 491.

It is this final point that so often causes discord in conversations about the Magisterium and its authority. The fact that the office, as understood in the Roman Catholic context, purports to define truth and practice for the faithful has been considered in many Protestant (and, admittedly, some Catholic) circles as dangerous, sometimes to the point of being totalitarian. When such strong claims to authority are made, they are viewed with suspicion, particularly by those American and European Protestant communities that place a strong emphasis on the role of unrestrained volitional will in their theological articulations, and pattern their forms of governance on more modern, “liberal democratic” models.³⁹

As mentioned above, however, what is of note for the present discussion is that, for the Roman church, the divine authorization has a flesh-and-blood executor; a (relatively speaking) *local* (and therefore locatable) address. This is an important aspect of this concept “Magisterium” that will be highlighted in the present project: the term, as deployed in this writing, will indicate the *local and human* face of whatever divine authority might be invoked for justification of a given doctrine or set of scriptural

³⁹ “Religious freedom and the legal disestablishment of religion, as political ideas, find their origin in the early modern period of Europe. With other markers of modernity identified by scholars—the rise of the nation state, the maturing of the international market, the invention of modern warfare, the advent of printing and literacy, the emergence of a middle class, among others—a new relationship of religion to political governance was created with the breakup of the monopoly of the Roman Church. For perhaps the first time since Constantine, religious affiliation in Europe began to be detached again from political identity. National and religious identity no longer necessarily went hand in hand. To be sure, at first, new national religious establishments were created to take the place of the continental monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church, but over the centuries religion was both consciously and unconsciously remodeled to accommodate the new secular political order and new ideas of citizenship. Religions was thereby politically and legally divided into modern and antimodern, long before the appearance of ‘fundamentalism’ in the 1970’s. The precondition for political participation by religion increasingly became cooperation with liberal theories and forms of governance.” Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2005), 7.

interpretations—not merely for the Roman communion, but indeed for all communions and instantiations of the concept “church.”⁴⁰

A third aspect of Magisterium that will be explored within the present project is the presence of magisterial *mechanisms*, which operate in the public and social sphere for the purpose of limiting and controlling the propagation and demonstration of this divine authority through rhetorics and signs. For example, the Roman Catholic communion’s use of *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur* serve the semiotic function of, if you will, a *countersignature* for the divine authority.⁴¹ It implies and invokes the Holy Spirit through its own “imprint” upon material objects, indicating that these objects participate in the propagation of faith and/or do not hinder this propagation. However, as shall be seen, the Roman communion’s signs and countersignatures are only some of the more visible examples of these semiotic signifiers, which are in operation continually and variously (though not always as visibly) in Catholicism *and* Protestantism alike.

⁴⁰ This local and human aspect of divine authority is not being posited *in-stead* of the positions (outlined below in the discussion of *sola scriptura*) of Scripture’s various forms of *self* authority. Such self-authentication may well be a vital part of a given theological formation. However, even a “self-authenticating” or “Spirit-authenticated” Scripture must, finally, have its human and institutional *advocates*. Hence we are isolating and highlighting the local and the human here due to the fact that this aspect is so often forgotten and eclipsed—even in discussions where “tradition” is acknowledged. See e.g. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method, Second Revised Edition* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 176 and *passim* for further discussion of these interrelations.

⁴¹ A *countersignature* is a sign(ature) which itself is not itself the source of authority, but witnesses and attests to the *truth* of the signature which grants authority. We see evidence of such complex interrelation of signs at work in statements such as the following from the *Catechism Compendium*: “Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with the help of the Holy Spirit and under the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church according to three criteria: (1) it must be read with attention to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture; (2) it must be read within the living Tradition of the Church; (3) it must be read with attention to the analogy of faith, that is, the inner harmony which exists among the truths of the faith themselves.” Hence ultimate authorization, while coming from the Holy Spirit, is attested and confirmed by the series of countersigns of the Magisterium here delineated. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Publishing, 2006) 9.

Thus, while the term has its origins, and most visible anchors, in Roman Catholicism, “Magisterium” will here be deployed more broadly to indicate the *locatable* effects⁴² of whatever *teaching office, interpretational limitations, and/or exclusions* which may be at work⁴³—whether overtly or covertly. It is very important that the reader understands that, by “Magisterium,” I am here indicating a set of effects that can arise within Protestantism *as well as* within Roman Catholicism, and can be overt, or covert, in both. Furthermore, as it shall be demonstrated, the Magisterium of which we here speak is not in any respect confined to established ecclesial institutions, or the churches of these various communions. We will find that there are many instances of

⁴² There is a distinction being made here between locatable, *evidentiary* claims and non-locatable, *protreptic* (rhetorically hortatory) claims. For the purposes of this project, a certain minimalism will be maintained in describing effects from explicitly *divine* (if you will, *unmediated*) causes. Paul’s Damascus Road experience, for example, may well be a protreptic act of divinely self-authenticating communication, and may certainly serve a theological function, even though it is as-such “unlocatable” through demonstration of evidence (*viz.*, we would have to *be* Paul to feel *this* effect, and we are not, so his claims that we should be moved by his experience are understood as hortatory, not demonstrative). *Our* understanding of his experience, however, coming as it does through the mediation of human writing and speech, has a *locatable* trail of authorization that can be, to varying degrees isolated and analyzed. Again, this is not meant to deny the purely self-authenticated divine action, but to recognize that such events, once communicated, have a different epistemological nature than the “Damascus Road” moment and its ilk. The *pure* protreptic is unlocatable, the *communicated* protreptic has a definite location in the acts which communicate it, even if its pure nature remains mystery.

⁴³ To demonstrate more fully the point, consider the following two *overt* assertions of teaching, limitation, and exclusion—one Catholic, the other Protestant. The first, from the *Compendium* of the Catholic Catechism: “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the deposit of faith has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone, that is, to the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome, and to the bishops in communion with him. To this Magisterium, which in the service of the Word of God enjoys the certain charisms of truth, belongs also the task of defining dogmas, which are formulations of the truths contained in divine Revelation. This authority of the Magisterium also extends to those truths necessarily connected with Revelation.” [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Publishing, 2006) 9.] The second, from the “Westminster Confession of Faith”: “It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same; which decrees and determinations, if consonant with the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word.” [Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Part I: The Book of Confessions* (Louisville: PC(USA) General Assembly, 1996), 6.174 (162)]. In both cases, we have overt locations for the authorization of readings and Tradition, both operating through the logic of *countersignature* with the Spirit.

what we are here naming as the Magisterium, with each instance able to deploy effects from a variety of canonical *and* extra-canonical fronts (including those of financial institutions and global corporations).

In other words, to return again to our example of the *Golfer's Bible*: the influence of a Magisterium will be found at whatever points my, or another's, interpretation, *or indeed the physical version of the Bible I am interpreting*, is declared to be "divinely authorized" *by* some action of a *signifying mark or countersignature* (physical or social) made by a group of human beings in a locatable time and place, regardless of whether or not such locations are immediately apparent,⁴⁴ and regardless of whether that location is ecclesial or otherwise.

Formal Analogue: Syllogism and Enthymeme

A key assertion of this dissertation is that in any case, and indeed in *every* case, where the interpretation of Scripture is claimed to be theologically independent of and separate from a Magisterium, it can be clearly demonstrated that such separation has not, in fact, been effected. To make this more clear, let us render this assertion as a formal structural hypothesis. I will thus assert that the general state of affairs to which we are here referring is threefold: 1) the *rhetorical* suppression or obscuring of an *overt* Magisterium, and 2) when such rhetorical suppression has occurred, this Magisterium still exerts influence in a *covert* fashion. In the testing this hypothesis, it will be further argued that, 3) with an appropriate method of analysis, such rhetorical suppressions can

⁴⁴ For the purposes of this analysis, this will include even those occasions when this locatable group insists that these authorizations are *not* the result of countersignature, but are rather inherent and *in se* to Scripture. The reasons for this position will be developed more fully in the coming chapters.

be explicated and their obscurations countered. In sum, it is the claim of this dissertation that *any covert Magisterium can be made overt, and its governing influences more clearly shown.*

Because this hypothesis may seem abstract at first, I offer the following analogy to clarify what I am here suggesting. Following the theologian David Kelsey, let us first assume that theological positions can be thought of in terms of formal, logical arguments.⁴⁵ Then let us consider, following that assumption, an important, though somewhat obscure, construction within formal logic: the matter of the *enthymeme*.

An “enthymeme” is defined as “a syllogism in which one premise is left to be understood.”⁴⁶ It has also been described as that point in Aristotle’s analysis of the forms of persuasion where formal logic and rhetoric overlap; the point where formal logic employs brevity and audience awareness to gain agreement.⁴⁷ The following extended quotation may help to clarify what I mean by this:

The starting point of the deductive path is a general statement, or premise, whose truth would be accepted by ‘all rational persons.’ Those who travel this path proceed from the assumption of ‘common ground’ and are guided by a logical map that ensures that if each of a series of related premises is true, the conclusions will also be true. In its categorical form, consisting of a major premise, a minor

⁴⁵ David Kelsey, whose work we will examine more closely in the next chapter, puts it this way: “This, of course, does not mean that theology is usually written in the form of an argument, or even that theologians understand themselves to be arguing. The suggestion is only that it can be illuminating to take certain sections of theological writing *as* arguments in order to bring out some of the diversity and complexity in the ways scripture is in fact used.” See David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 3.

⁴⁶ enthymeme. *The New Lexicon Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language: Deluxe Edition* (United States: Lexicon, 1990), 315.

⁴⁷ “To be sure, Aristotle never says that suppression of an argument premiss [sic] is one of the conscious steps of argument building. Rather, he teaches that one of the characteristics of brief and effective arguments is that they often rely on a premiss that is not stated outright, and in so doing lead the audience to reflect on this premiss.” Marc J. Debanné, *Enthymemes in the Letters of Paul*. Library of New Testament Studies 303, Mark Goodacre, gen. ed. (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 11.

premise, and a conclusion, this map is called a *sylllogism*. In its rhetorical form, in which one premise of the syllogism is considered obvious enough to the audience to be unstated, it is called an *enthymeme*. In both forms, the path follows a ‘deductive’ logical progression in which the operative formula is ‘statement plus proof.’⁴⁸

For our purposes, it is this “un-statedness” of the major premise that is of particular note.

At risk of belaboring the point, let us consider one more quotation to adequately develop the field of meaning for this term: “An enthymeme is an argument *to establish a truth claim formed with commonly held opinions* rather than with categorical propositions that are absolutely certain as in the case of dialectic or scientific reasoning.”⁴⁹ The power of this commonality is its ability to establish *unstated, non-explicit* truths within a community. As such, it is fruitful here, by way of further development, to map this understanding of enthymeme onto recent work by Kathryn Tanner on the structural definition of the “*plain sense*” (a term in strong conversance, as we shall see below in chapter 5, with rabbinic discourses) of Scripture:

The plain sense of a *scriptural* text in specific would consequently be what a participant in the community automatically or naturally takes a text to be saying on its face insofar as he or she has been socialized in a community’s conventions for reading the text as scripture. As the sense of a text functioning as scripture, the plain sense is the sense of the text that establishes group identity: Christians are those who assume that sense as basic in their use of the text to shape and reform their lives as Christians. Because it is scripture’s, the plain sense, in the process of serving as a standard sense vis-à-vis other interpretive or applied senses, works as a standard for the community’s continuing self-identity. The plain sense, as the traditional distillate of communal practice, becomes the norm governing the ongoing practice of using such a text to shape, nurture, and reform community life: the product of traditional practice norms its further operation.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Lucretia B. Yaghjian, *Writing Theology Well: A Rhetoric for Theological and Biblical Writers* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), 40. Underlined emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ Debanné, *Enthymemes in the Letters of Paul*, 10. My emphasis.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Kathryn E. Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, Garrett Green, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 63, underlined emphasis mine.

When a believer in a given community “automatically and naturally takes a text to be saying” specific claims, and these claims become “the norm the ongoing practice of using such a text,” I aver we have a demonstrable location of an *enthymematic Magisterium*—one that is covert, assumed, and effectual.

From these definitions, having observed that the enthymeme is a *rhetorical* form that exerts logical force *as if* key facts (‘facts’ that are instead commonly-held opinions) are in place while leaving those key points unstated, hidden, or assumed, we can now consider the understanding of the Magisterium being developed in the current project in similar formal terms. Thus we can venture a structural claim that argues 1) that the *overt* magisteria function in the manner of the major premise of a classical syllogism, and thus the magisteria generally can be analogically compared to *syllogisms* to the extent they establish truth claims by means of clearly stated and analyzable assertions, with a “visible” major premise in place.

Following this analogy, we can further claim that 2) a *covert* Magisterium functions like an enthymeme. That is, it functions by *hiding*, in some manner, the explicit major premise, without actually *eliminating* it or its effect. The assumptions of a Magisterium, like the major premise of an enthymeme, are unstated but still demonstrably *extant* and *effective*. A covert Magisterium is thus both a rhetorical and logical performative, exerting its authoritative power while obscuring its influence, even hiding its connection to such exertions.

This analogy is further strengthened if we observe that the hiding or obscuring of the major premise, in both the enthymeme *and* in a covert Magisterium, is accomplished through similar means. This is demonstrably the case. Namely, both function to obscure

by virtue of being *assumed* by a given community, as part of the body of “commonly held opinions” of that community. The rhetorical power of both the enthymeme and the covert Magisterium is seen in their respective ability to exert normative influence, without all the key assumptions being explicitly *named*.

It is important to hold conceptually in place, moreover, that, while unnamed, these assumptions are still effectively *present*. That is, the enthymeme could not, and *would* not, function if the major premise was actually *eliminated*, as opposed to being hidden. In like manner, building on the quotation from Tanner above, the assumed norms of meaning, interpretation and practice for a community (even, and perhaps *especially*, for a community that espouses a strong notion of *sola scriptura*; see the following section) would not function if their particular Magisterium were actually eliminated, as opposed to being covert and obscure.

The final point of this analogical connection is to underline that any enthymeme can be analyzed and then rearticulated, such that its hidden premise is rendered explicit. At such a time, it becomes a “proper” syllogism again. It is thus the position of this project, following this analogy that in any community or interpretation in which the presence of a Magisterium has been explicitly denied, this denial can be analyzed, such that these covert authoritative influences and effects can be explicated. Thus, following Tanner, as every community using Scripture can be observed to have its own “plain sense” of the text, it is here claimed that, in all cases of communities using Scripture, the presence of a magisterial influence can be demonstrated.⁵¹

⁵¹ To put it in the words of my old high school rhetoric and composition textbook: “There’s nothing wrong or reprehensible about hidden generalizations. *What’s important is the ability to recognize and test them.*” Ray Kytte, *Clear Thinking for Composition*, Fifth Edition (New York: Random House, 1987), 109. My emphasis.

Thus, this structural analogy highlights the key points of the core hypotheses stated above, which this dissertation will examine. It remains in the following chapters to enact this demonstration, which will show that these covert magisteria exist, and allow the observation of their covert and rhetorical effects, *particularly at the physical level of printed and marketed Bibles*. Hence, if the present project is successful, and these hypotheses are borne out, the reader herself will be able to locate and demonstrate magisteria, even in communities and traditions where such structures are adamantly *denied* at the levels of Scripture and its proper interpretation. Thus it is appropriate that we now turn to an examination of a core claim of Protestantism, *sola scriptura*.

***Sola Scriptura*, as understood in the current project**

“Many scholars,” according to Jonathan A. Reid, “portray the Reformation as a religious revolt against the church animated by the core doctrines of justification by faith alone and *scripture as the sole authority* for belief and practice.”⁵² This notion of Scripture’s sole authority needs to be noted, though for many readers it will perhaps already have been assumed. While the scope of the current project does not allow for an exhaustive examination of the history of the development of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, some comment about the doctrine’s articulation—both during the initial phases of the Reformation and today—is useful and necessary. The term itself, of course, means “Scripture alone,” but the extremities and implications of this *prima facie* uncomplicated assertion demand further consideration.

⁵² Jonathan A. Reid, “France (Chapter 12),” *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 211, my emphasis.

The origins of the doctrine of *sola scriptura* are often traced to the period of Martin Luther, in the sixteenth century.⁵³ Luther has been regarded widely as the theologian who “gave poignant expression to the newly emerging consensus of the Reformation when he referred to the Word as the judge and creator of the church.”⁵⁴ From this characterization we can isolate a first factor to highlight: our reading of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, as understood in this project, includes strong concern for any theological construal (whether ancient or contemporary) that asserts Scripture’s capacity to *stand apart*, and be understood apart, from both the institutions of churches and traditions in order to be the *judge* of them.⁵⁵ In other words, we will remain keenly aware of the points where the adherents of this doctrine assert, following the observation of Avery Dulles, that “the Bible can function as a norm *against* tradition.”⁵⁶

This construal of the “sufficiency of Scripture” to judge both Tradition and church is not solely attributable to Luther, of course. There is strong evidence, from a variety of

⁵³ There are, certainly, Protestant authors who have made the attempt recently to trace a concept of *sola scriptura* much earlier than Luther, to Patristic and New Testament era writings. James White, R.C. Sproul, John MacArthur, John Armstrong, Lames McCarthy, and Norman Geisler are all prominent Protestant writers who have made a version of this claim. While I think the debate over this issue is worth having, the present project is not the place to fight it. For an overview of the key positions on both sides of the debate, the reader is encouraged to look at Don Kistler, general editor, *Sola Scriptura!: The Protestant Position on the Bible* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), and Robert A. Sungenis, ed., *Not By Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (Goleta, CA: Queenship, 1997).

⁵⁴ Bloesch, “Primacy,” 127. It should be noted that the “Word” here is indicative of Scripture *and* Christ. We do not yet have the articulation and hierarchy of these concepts that will later be found, for example, in Karl Barth.

⁵⁵ “This principle emphasizes the *sole sufficiency* of Scripture with respect to the content of revelation. All the revelation is contained in Holy Scripture, meaning that post-Biblical tradition *cannot* be a source of additional revelation. To be sure, tradition also contains all the revelation, but only so far as it is derived from the Scriptural source.” Carl E. Braaten, *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 2, *History and Hermeneutics*, gen. ed. William Hordern (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 148. My emphasis.

⁵⁶ Avery Dulles, “Scripture: Recent Protestant and Catholic Views,” in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 260. My emphasis.

historical writers, that the whole of the Reformation was steeped in such a mindset, which can be (and has been) interpreted as fomenting, sometimes to greater and sometimes lesser extent, this deep divide between “Tradition” and “Scripture.” As Robert Grant, a New Testament scholar at the University of Chicago,⁵⁷ once put it, “The spirit of the Reformation is diametrically opposed to the authoritative [that is, church-based, magisterial] interpretation of the Bible.”⁵⁸ Thus we find, according to Jaroslav Pelikan, that throughout the Reformation there is:

[b]oth the emphasis on the authority of the *primitive* church [over against the “degradation” of that original primitive purity by the developed and dogmatic church in the years prior to the Reformation] and the method of *recovering it by means of careful biblical study* received further impetus during the fifteenth century from the humanists [who, while struggling with the question of how much authority to grant to tradition, were clearly interested in creating a position] based on a *sharp distinction* between the word of God in “Scripture alone,” which was the only authority deserving of total credence, and the word of “all the saints except for Christ,” whether popes or church fathers or even apostles, apart from Scripture.⁵⁹

Within such quotations we see an obvious tension developing between the Reformation articulation of this doctrine of *sola scriptura* and the definition of the Magisterium we

⁵⁷ I am choosing to be explicit about the institutional affiliations of the scholars cited in this discussion, in order to meet the charge that could be leveled by some that these claims are dismissible as “fringe” positions, or “poor theology” (more will be said with regard to this type of dismissal in the discussion of the “No True Scotsman” fallacy in the following chapter). Reputed scholars at major schools have put forth these claims, and though they may not be in fashion at present, they were and have been taken quite seriously by our theological forebears.

⁵⁸ Robert M. Grant, *The Bible in the Church: A Short History of Interpretation* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 109.

⁵⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300 – 1700)*, vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 119. My emphasis.

examined above, *located* / *locatable* in the flesh-and-blood agents of countersignature, “whether popes of church fathers or even apostles”.⁶⁰

This tension, as reported by the historians, is itself subject to the tides of interpretational influence. On the one hand, there are historians *and* theologians who assert that *sola scriptura* was understood, both at the beginnings of the Reformation and/or in the present day, as the gentle and corrective partner to a (perhaps wayward) church tradition. On this side of the interpretive spectrum, there is a generous reading of the Reformers and those who followed them, seeing them in light of their desire to correct, not break with, the traditions of the church.

Thus, for example, Michael Horton has recently asserted, “The Reformation was not a criticism of tradition per se, but rather a demand that the proper criterion be used for judging the whole tradition or any part of it,” and he goes on to claim that the Reformation was, at its earliest, not a rejection of tradition but rather a search for *genuine* tradition (the “purity” of the “primitive” / early church, the originary apostolic positions, and the “Word of God” all thus become available criteria for this “genuine” article) over against the deformed institutionalism which had supposedly gripped the Roman church.⁶¹ In a similar vein, Hans Zimmerman, in his recent work *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, agrees with this position that the Reformation was not simply a stark blow against church tradition, claiming, “both Christians and non-Christians alike have

⁶⁰ “The high regard in which Protestants have held the Bible has been joined with an antithetical attitude toward the tradition of the church, its creeds and confessions.” Braaten, *New Directions in Theology Today*, 147.

⁶¹ Michael S. Horton, “Theologies of Scripture in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: An Introduction,” in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York and London: New York UP, 2006), 92.

reduced the heritage of the Reformation unfairly. [Luther's] interpretive principle of *sola scriptura* certainly included the use of tradition and entailed very much a sense of history."⁶²

Interpreters such as Horton and Zimmerman preserve a sense of “purity of intention” for the Reformers, an intention that understands Scripture as always entangled with (though clearly superior to) Tradition.⁶³ From interpretations such as Horton's and Zimmerman's it is often argued that any presently existing, sharp distinctions wherein Tradition is explicitly rejected in favor of a radical reading of “Scripture alone” reflect a *divergence* from the intentions of the early Reformers, and not their intentions themselves.⁶⁴

However, this view of history is not universally shared. On the other side of this tension are those historians who vehemently deny that the historical *détente* between “Scripture” and “Tradition” existed, even at the inception of the Reformation. Some writers even go to the point of claiming that Luther, Calvin and the other Reformers understood *sola scriptura* in radical terms that (according to some, rightly) rejected *all*

⁶² Jens Zimmerman, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 112.

⁶³ We see another example of this in Raymond Abba: “It was unfortunate, if inevitable, that at the Reformation the authority of the Bible was set over against the authority of the Church. The result has been an over-emphasis upon one or the other in the Catholic and Reformed traditions. Each side has frequently been right in what is affirmed but wrong in what it denied. A false antithesis has been set up which responsible in no small measure for the ecclesiastical fragmentation of the last four hundred years.” Raymond Abba, *The Nature and Authority of the Bible* (London: James Clarke and Co., 1958), 302-303.

⁶⁴ “As with many periods in Church history, the position of the “mainstream” Reformation tradition (Lutheran and Reformed) on scripture has often been misunderstood, by friend and foe alike. At least in our North American context, *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) has come to mean not simply that scripture alone is master over tradition, but that it is somehow antithetical to it.” Michael S. Horton, “Theologies of Scripture in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: An Introduction,” in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York and London: New York UP, 2006), 83.

human institutions and traditions. For example, Evangelical scholar Donald G. Bloesch, has insisted:

Against the prevailing view in their time that church tradition is on a par with Scripture, the Reformers resolutely maintained that there is only one source of revelation, Holy Scripture. Scripture, moreover, contains not only the revealed, divine truth but the *whole* revealed truth. For the Reformers the church is under the Word but does not authenticate or authorize it.⁶⁵

Bloesch's views are corroborated, moreover, by Pelikan's characterization of the rise of Reformation hermeneutical principles, in which he claims that this tendency, which seeks to deny *all* place to traditions of interpretive revelation, was present, *in nuce*, from the first blush of reform, especially among the spiritualist and pietist strands of the radical Reformation.⁶⁶ "The authority of scripture is prior to that of the church",⁶⁷ claims Grant, who goes on to state plainly that

Scripture for the reformers is not one of several pillars which uphold the house of faith; it is the sole foundation. And the reformers were willing to insist on their understanding of the Bible no matter what previous exegetes might have said, no matter whether they contradicted even the decisions of councils. The church was not to be the arbiter of the meaning of scripture, for scripture, the word of God, was the church's judge. Naturally the reformers insisted on an historical, literal, grammatical understanding of the Bible as they came to believe that a new authority must be set up to oppose the authority of the church.⁶⁸

In these latter views, then, historical claims for the coexistence and acceptance of Tradition as a partner alongside Scripture, even at the earliest points of Reformation, are flatly denied.

⁶⁵ Donald G. Bloesch, "The Primacy of Scripture," in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 126.

⁶⁶ See Pelikan, *Reformation*, 118 - 126.

⁶⁷ Grant, *Bible in the Church*, 114.

⁶⁸ Grant, *Bible in the Church*, 109-110.

In a more contemporary example of this, Karl Barth has asserted that, “Scripture is in the hands but not in the power of the church,”⁶⁹ and continues by claiming that:

the Church is most faithful to its tradition, and realizes its unity with the Church in every age, when, linked but not tied by its past, it today searches the Scriptures and orientates its life by them *as though this had to happen today for the first time*. And, on the other hand, it sickens and dies when it is enslaved by its past instead of being disciplined by the new beginning which it must always make in the Scriptures.⁷⁰

In other words, in Barth’s—and similar—readings by contemporary Protestant theologians regarding the history of the understanding of *sola scriptura*, it is “Tradition” (“the past” that “enslave[s]”) that is the disease (bringing “sickness and death”) for which the freshness (the “first time”) of pure Scripture is the cure. Note as well that Magisterium remains explicitly unmentioned—it is assumed simply, to the extent it is considered at all, to be a species of the pathogen of Tradition.

Thus we can see in these many divergent examples above that the answer to this question—the question of *to what extent* Tradition was “allowed” to affect the reading of Scripture under the strictures of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*—is, ironically enough, *itself* a matter subject to historical interpretation, with clear positions (and thus, over time, *traditions*) arising among numbers of reputable scholars on both sides of the debate.

It should furthermore be noted that both the positions outlined above (“Scripture *and* Tradition” or “Scripture *versus* Tradition”) perpetuate, in their own manner, the *mistaken* polarity of Scripture and Tradition discussed above, collapsing the Magisterium

⁶⁹ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 2: Church Dogmatics*, vol I, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrence (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 682. [Read this for its similarity to, for example, “The Reformers intended not to denigrate the church, but to make clear that the church must be the servant of the Word, not its master.” Bloesch, “Primacy,” 127.]

⁷⁰ Barth, *Dogmatics* II/2, 647, my emphasis.

into the considerations of Tradition on the latter pole. Hence, *regardless* of whether a given historian asserts the origins of *sola scriptura*'s antagonism to Tradition in the center *or* the fringe elements of the early Reformation, we can observe readily this common tendency to drop the triadic model, which includes the Magisterium, in favor of the simplified polarity of Scripture and Tradition. Similarly, moving from history to theology, we find the cognate of these mistaken dyadic attestations in the statements of the twentieth century's mainline Protestant theological traditions precisely because of this polarized (as opposed to triadic) construal.

This brief survey is not intended to present an exhaustive case. Rather, it is intended to establish evidence, within the present project, for the claim that a chief aim of contemporary Protestantism can legitimately be read as an attempt to establish Scripture as a location *fully superior* to any Tradition and *fully independent* of any interpreting Magisterium.⁷¹ Thus we can distill the defining characteristic of *sola scriptura* to the assertion by Robert Godfrey, for example, that "The Protestant position...is that all things necessary for salvation and concerning faith and life are taught in the Bible clearly enough for the ordinary believer to find it there and understand it."⁷²

The intention of such a claim, as should be clear from the above quotation, is the establishment of Scripture as the sole "judgment seat" of *all* institutional (historical,

⁷¹ "The Reformers also staunchly affirmed the perspicuity of Scripture, its inherent clarity. They meant by this that its basic message is clear even to the unsophisticated layman [sic], and therefore every person can go to the Bible directly to search and find the truth." Bloesch, "Primacy," 127 – 128. Also, "Protestantism rejects the Roman Catholic conception of the Bible because it believes that each individual Christian has the God-given right to interpret the Holy Scriptures to the best of his ability." Stuber, *Primer on Roman Catholicism*, 115.

⁷² Robert Godfrey, "What Do We Mean by *Sola scriptura*," in Don Kistler, general editor, *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 1-26, quoted in Madrid, *Not by Scripture Alone*, 3.

liturgical, interpretive, i.e., “magisterial”) practices.⁷³ As Grant has succinctly put it, this position holds that “[t]he Bible is not one standard of authority among others, as it was for medieval Catholicism. *It is the sole standard.*”⁷⁴ Simultaneous to this, moreover, is the positioning and elevation of individual human reason⁷⁵ (perhaps with divine assistance, but regardless unconstrained by any human *institutional* teaching authority) as the “judgment seat” of the meaning of Scripture itself.⁷⁶ Speaking broadly of this phenomenon, Dewey M. Beegle, formerly of Wesley Theological Seminary, in his book *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*, makes reference to the “extremely individualistic attitudes found within Protestantism” and the attendant difficulty of characterizing a

⁷³ “Protestantism rests its case upon the Bible. It has a Bible Christianity. Its final court of appeal is the Holy Scriptures. Here again Protestants are not being different just to be difficult, but they are following specific New Testament directives...Protestants believe that the Bible should come first because it is truly the Word of God. No man or institution, no matter how great, can supersede the Word.” Stanley I. Stuber, *Primer on Roman Catholicism for Protestants: An Appraisal of the Basic Differences Between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism* (New York: Association Press, 1957), 117.

⁷⁴ Grant, *Bible in the Church*, 117, my emphasis.

⁷⁵ The following quotation will serve as representative of the scholarly version of the sentiment of “It’s just me and my Bible” to which I am referring here: “It is important, therefore for every reader of the Bible to straighten out his [sic] own thinking about the authority of the Bible, deciding what the Bible *is*, and what it *is not*, and in what ways he can follow it as authoritative for his own life. Rather than be dismayed by the great variety of ways in which the Bible has been interpreted and followed in the past, he must accept the challenge to decide for himself what authority the Bible really has for him. As he does this, his decision must rest upon knowledge of what is in the Bible and what it actually says, not upon what others have said about it. Any doctrine or theory regarding its authority should be derived from the Bible and a genuine knowledge of its contents, and not be imposed upon the Bible because of what someone else tells us we ought to believe about it.” J. Phillip Hyatt, *The Heritage of Biblical Faith* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1964), 318, italics in original, underlined emphasis mine. The point should not be missed that Hyatt, at the time a respected professor of Old Testament at Vanderbilt and a former editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, has already spent the prior chapters of his book *telling* the reader what “The Message of the New Testament” and “The Meaning of the Story” are. The problem of such (seemingly) unaware self-referencing cries out for examination.

⁷⁶ Viz., “In particular, the Reformed doctrine of the authentication of Scripture by the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, which the Reformers never held in isolation from their churchmanship [sic], degenerated into the atomistic and secular idea of the right of “private judgment” in the interpretation of the Bible. The result has been the unbridled sectarianism which has produced in America no less than 256 religious bodies each claiming biblical support—a *reducto ad absurdum* proof of the fallacy of attempting to interpret the Bible apart from the Catholic faith of the Church.” Abba, *Authority*, 303.

common Protestant position with regard to tradition and authority.⁷⁷ “On the other hand,” he goes on to write, “the Holy Spirit can work through certain portions of the Bible so as to lead the simplest reader into fellowship with Christ.”⁷⁸

What remains in question is the ability of the doctrine of *sola scriptura* to actually make good on such claims of understanding and inspiration wholly independent of a Magisterium (*viz.* Beegle: “[T]here can be no constitutive tradition outside the biblical canon. Once the apostolic period was closed, ecclesial tradition could never be the criterion for the truth”⁷⁹). The indisputable fact, however, is that the doctrine—as observed in its contemporary and post-20th century North American varieties, articulated and understood by a vast number historians and theologians—has authorized, and continues to authorize, an ever increasing number of *highly individualized interpretations* of what was, until just after the middle of the last century, a relatively *common* set of Scriptures.

To adequately and fully examine this radicalized articulation of “Scripture alone,” and to bring this articulation together with the claims made above regarding enthymematic magisteria, we must raise here a parallel issue: not simply the problem of how the believer marks authority after the advent of a plethora of *interpretations*, each arising out of an individual reader’s reading, but also of the growing number of *physically differentiated* Bible versions, each now increasingly and *specifically tailored* to the individual reader, a state of affairs I will here refer to as “the Biblioplex.”

⁷⁷ Dewey M. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1973), 109.

⁷⁸ Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition*, 120.

The Biblioplex

The Rise of the Biblioplex⁸⁰

The experience of *choosing* a Bible in America can be, frankly, overwhelming. To begin with, there is the sheer fact that, unlike many other locations in the world today, and indeed unlike most other periods in Christian history, the possibility of such a choice exists in the first place. Next is the fact of the sheer *number* of possible choices, which is not only vast, but is indeed multiplying more rapidly than Bible-buyers could reasonably be expected to track. A visit to a major bookstore in any city will offer the “Bible consumer” not only a deluge of choices with regard to such cosmetic matters as size, shape, and color of binding, but also more critically of *version*,⁸¹ and moreover within any one particular version one will find a multiple—and continually increasing—number of choices.

Take, as but one example, the *New International Version* of the English Bible, first introduced on the market in 1978. If a buyer were going to the store to purchase such a Bible, she would first need to make a choice—again, not only among size, color,

⁷⁹ Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition...*, 121.

⁸⁰ This term is intended to indicate both the multiplying complexities of Bible versions as well as the notion of the Bible as a “multiplex” or perhaps a “Cineplex,” as these terms are used to signify in contemporary American “mall culture.” For an exploration of the disturbing implications of such conceptual fusions, see Tyler Wigg Stevenson’s recent (and excellent) critique, *Brand Jesus: Christianity in a Consumerist Age* (New York: Seabury, 2007).

⁸¹ It is important from the outset that the reader is aware that most of the Bibles available in English today are not, as is often mistakenly thought, distinct *translations* of the original text. Rather, the majority of Bibles available are one of several *versions* (often revisions) of a single strand of translation winding back through the King James Version to the Tyndale translation. Hence, when a new English Bible is introduced to the market (e.g. the NIV), it most often does *not* reflect a new process of translation as an informed *redaction* of a previous skeletal English text. For a good, concise history of this point, the reader is encouraged to consult Robert L. Thomas, *How to Choose a Bible Version: Making Sense of the Proliferation of Bible Translations* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2000).

etc.—but whether she wants the *True Images: The Bible for Teen Girls* model, or the *Revolution: The Bible for Teen Guys* model, or perhaps *The Archaeological Study Bible* model (the purchase of which, according to the website of Zondervan publishing, might qualify a lucky winner for a “trip to the Holy Land”). In addition to this, there are any of a vast number of other possible choices of Bible “models” available.

Years ago, the movie theater down the street with ten or fifteen screens was sometimes called the “cineplex.” I’ve been thinking of that name these past few years as these many and various Bibles have become more and more prevalent. Following the movie theater lead, I want to suggest that what we are now experiencing in America is something like a “Biblioplex”: Bibles of every shape, size and flavor—to fit every preference and taste. This variety is itself the novelty. The selling, and buying, of Bibles under these conditions becomes more than an evangelical task or a matter of piety; instead, Bibles become part of an overall style, or *lifestyle*. They are not just a part of our culture but a part of our *consumer* culture. In other words, Bibles have, in many cases, become *accessories*, like lipstick or shoes.

Our culture is increasingly media-savvy and tailor-made. Due to greater and greater controls over manufacturing and distribution, products of all types and origins are available to North Americans practically instantaneously, produced specifically to individual desires and whims. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that there are a growing number of publishers dedicated to the notion that you can (and should) have the version of the Bible you prefer, and have it more and more “your way”.

There are, for example, thinline versions for the pocket, audio versions for the car, and now even a downloadable “podcast” version for the iPod.⁸² Thomas Nelson Publishing, a prominent manufacturer of a range of Bibles and other “Christ-honoring resources,”⁸³ advertises a version that takes this concept one step further, offering Bibles that mimic the comfortable cultural shapes of other media, Bibles that quite literally *blend in* to the world of everyday life and objects: “Ever wish your Bible was as easy to pick up as your favorite magazine?” one Thomas Nelson advertisement asks, referring to their New Century Version *Align* Bible. “Now there’s a new BibleZine™ *created with today’s modern guy in mind.*”⁸⁴

This “BibleZine,” printed and packaged to look like a cutting-edge men’s magazine, is purported on its cover to be the “complete New Testament,”⁸⁵ and promises an “edgy, techno-savvy style that makes Biblical truth fresh and relevant.”⁸⁶ Thomas

⁸² I take this listing from a random selection found on the Zondervan website, <http://www.zondervanbibles.com/home.asp>. See also Mike Phillips, “For Every Age and Ability—a Digital Bible!” *Bible Reference Update: a Special Advertising Section by Christianity Today*, July 2007, B-7 - B-8.

⁸³ This is a term used by representatives of the Christian Booksellers Association (since 1996 simply known as the CBA) and their industry affiliates for the array of products—from T-shirts to music to statuary and beyond—that are marketed with and around Bibles. For a more detailed examination of this industry and its theological and social implications, see Tyler Wigg Stevenson, *Brand Jesus: Christianity in a Consumerist Age* (New York: Seabury, 2007), particularly chapter 17.

⁸⁴ My emphasis. It bears noting that the notion of placing a trademark on a Bible, though not without precedent, is troubling. Much more troubling, however, might well be this growing practice of mixing Mammon with a Marcionite version of the text stripped of its Old Testament. See below for more discussion of this practice.

⁸⁵ In light of how much, in terms of design, style, demographic assumptions, and “aids to reading” has been added to such a version, it must be asked what could be intended by the use of the term “complete” in such an assertion? The addition of such extra material must certainly imply a perceived *incompleteness* by the publishers on the part of the text.

⁸⁶ These three quotations from http://www.thomasonline.com/consumer/product_detail.asp?dept_id=120000&sku=0718010965&TopLevel_id=120000, accessed 18 June 2006.

Nelson is but one of a number of companies pushing this wave of niche marketing to the utmost, offering in the repertoire of “tailored” Bibles a growing plethora of choices, many now modeled to resemble a variety of special-interest magazines running the gamut from *Men’s Health* to *Cosmopolitan*.⁸⁷

Such versions are as notable for *what they lack* as they are for what they contain. For example, most of these contemporary Bible versions lack any significant critical apparatus (indications of sources, variants, etc.); many also lack introductions that explain the choice of textual sources, critical assumptions, and translation methods employed in their shaping; moreover, they often lack any indication that they are but *one of many* iterations of wording and translation available.⁸⁸ Significantly, many such versions also lack the Old Testament entirely, rendering the implicit claim that this is a “Bible”—at least by the standards of most historical Christian communities—heretical.⁸⁹ Such “New Testament only” versions create the ethos and illusion of a streamlined Christian faith, a faith that seems to have appeared *de novo* and *in toto* in the first and second century communities that wrote the New Testament Scriptures. This ethos, in turn, may mislead an incautious reader to conclude there is no need or requirement to attach these apostolic books to the Hebrew holy writings that were their predecessors, nor

⁸⁷ Nancy McLaughlin, “‘Biblezines’ Offer New Way to Get ‘the Word’ Out,” *On Religion*, *Washington News & Record*, sec. B, June 16, 2007.

⁸⁸ Being mindful that these sorts of matters are, often, dealt with in prefaces and introductions to Bible versions, I cannot make this as a blanket claim. However, in teaching and working with students at both small and large colleges over the last several years, I can safely say from my own experience that, overwhelmingly, readers of the Bible at a typical Bible college or divinity school are neither aware of nor avail themselves of these introductions in their approaches to Biblical reading.

⁸⁹ Of course, the omission of the first Testament is not a practice limited to contemporary publishers. It is a practice one can find throughout the history of the Bible, from Marcion to the Gideons and many others.

any need to weigh or consider the complex and tortured millennia of interpretational arguments, which followed the setting of *both* testaments to written form.

It also bears noting that the publication of these Bibles in truncated form does not appear to stem from any need on the part of the publishers to economize for space. This is clear from the readily observable practice of these publishers filling such versions with a host of creative redactions and additions. Bible versions of the sort being discussed here are replete with editorial materials, sidebars and talking points. These can take the form of a text box which adds extraneous extratextual material, such as a sidebar in a teen girl's version of the Bible offering "Vashti's fashion tips,"⁹⁰ or take the at first seemingly innocuous form of study questions to "focus" one's reading at the end of a chapter section.

Such redactions and additions do not serve a scholarly function so much as they serve a *marketing* and *demographic* function,⁹¹ of which more will be said in the following chapters. It is important, however, for scholars to begin to acknowledge these ever-present, but not always acknowledged, aspects of our physical Scriptures, because such redactions—though not explicitly theological—have theological influence and effect. Though distinct, the market aspects and the theological aspects of a Bible are not readily separable. For the whole of its history the Bible has functioned both as a

⁹⁰ While this particular example is facetious, it is not far afield from what can be readily found in the Bibles on your local bookstore's shelves. Consider the *Revolve Biblezine 2007* (Thomas Nelson Publishers), assuring young women, in a sidebar focused on makeup and complexion questions, that "blemishes may come and go, but God's word endures forever" [67]. And this is not merely a phenomenon targeting a younger audience. Take, for example, the *T.D. Jakes Holy Bible Woman Thou Art Loos'd* Bible, packaged eerily like a romance novel, complete with strings of pearls and roses adorning the cover.

⁹¹ Cf., Agneizska Tennant, "Ten Things You Should Know About the New Girls' Biblezine: Revolve is Getting Major Media Attention for the Way it Packages the Bible. What is the Message the Medium Brings with it?" *Christianity Today*, September (Web Only) 2003, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/septemberweb-only/9-15-21.0.html>

collection of holy writings *and* as a marketable object,⁹² and the balance of such influences has marked—and remarkable—effects.

It should be noted as well that producing a Bible version with an eye to market forces is by no means a new development.⁹³ There is evidence that translations and versions as old as the King James (remember its appellation as the “Authorized” edition, with attendant reverences), and even the Septuagint itself, were “marketed” to specific audiences, employing claims of miraculous origin, curses against emendation, and, to a certain extent, nascent public relations campaigns to make them more attractive to a reading—and eventually, purchasing—audience. These market forces are, as they were in those remote times, employed and manipulated to gain a place for one version of the text at the expense of other renderings.

⁹² The marketing techniques that work with other products have, indeed, been imprinted upon Bibles as well: “We would, perhaps, all benefit from greater transparency on the covers of today’s Bibles. Publishers and sponsoring organizations doubtless have their reasons for adopting the titles they do. If ‘new’ and ‘revised’ increase the sales for computers, cars and clothes, perhaps they work just as well for Bibles.” Leonard Greenspoon, “Ten Common Misconceptions about Bible Translation,” *Creighton University Magazine*, Summer 2004, 16.

⁹³ “The efforts of Jerome, in the late fourth century, that culminated in the Latin version eventually known as the Vulgate, were not—as it commonly thought—the first to produce a Bible in the reigning language of the Western Roman Empire. Rather, Jerome’s mandate, which he fulfilled with extraordinary industry, *was to prepare a text that would supplant* the many older Latin renderings already in existence.” Leonard Greenspoon, “Jewish Translations of the Bible” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler (Oxford: New York, 2003), my emphasis. Greenspoon also mentions phenomena such as the “Family Bibles” of the nineteenth century, and the Buber-Rosenzweig German language Bible, which are further representative examples of varied attempts to make a version of the Bible more appealing (using a variety of means at different times) than another.

“Your own personal Jesus”⁹⁴: Scripture as fetish

What is represented in this massive phalanx of “tailored” Bibles, whose surface we have just barely begun to explore above, is, however, completely *unprecedented* in the history of Bible reading and publishing. A veritable explosion of iterations of narrow-casted, niche-marketed⁹⁵ Bibles has come to flood bookstores in North America in the last twenty-five years, each iteration designed to reach the yearning, increasingly fractured and isolated, lost sheep of the reading public.

Resulting from this flood, we can observe an increasing shift of this concept of “Bible” from its previous existence as a *common* text, shared among believers (to the extent that this ever was the case), to become instead a *fetish*⁹⁶—an object that meets a deep, perhaps unconscious need, individually tailored to each reader’s place, context, comfort and taste.

A student at seminary today may hear professors invoke Karl Barth’s admonishment from forty years ago that one must preach the word “with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.” This urge to relevance is not in itself an issue of debate here, but rather the tendency to take this desire for relevance to an extreme that exceeds what we might call *authentic religious* need, in favor of (as shall be demonstrated in subsequent chapters) a decidedly artificial, *market-driven* need.

⁹⁴ Martin Gore, “Personal Jesus,” recorded by Dépêche Mode, from the 1989 album *Violator*, Mute Records.

⁹⁵ The notions of niche-marketing and ‘narrowcasting’ (as opposed to ‘broadcasting’) reflect a turn in marketing practices that began in the early 1990’s in North America. The idea was to find the taste of an increasingly narrowed and fractured set of markets and tailor products and experiences specifically to these markets. For a brief but provocative exploration of this matter, see Mark Fackler, “The Second Coming of Holy Writ: Niche Bibles and the Manufacture of Market Segments,” in Robert M. Fowler, et al., *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium* (New York: T & Clark, 2004), 72 – 88.

⁹⁶ And here “fetish” might be understood both in its religious and Marxist implications.

In our present state of affairs, these niche-marketed Bibles come to resemble more and more the daily feed of a website like Amazon or CNN.com, the various iterations of the physical Bibles almost transubstantiating as their publishers listen closely to our wants and needs, catering to our changing whims. We may each be “logged on” to the same pages, in a certain sense, but the pages, for each of us, are saying vastly different, and increasingly differentiated, things.

In a state of flux such as this, we can observe that the vital and the banal begin to intermix, with one reader’s heresy becoming another reader’s homepage. Thus the context in which we now find ourselves is one where, as Peter J. Theusen has put it, it is no longer simply “the Bible” serving as the mark of Christian faith, but now it is “the choice between RSV and NIV [that] often serves as a marker of liberal or conservative loyalties, even as dozens of other versions compete for the allegiances of particular constituencies.”⁹⁷

Moreover, though it is now more highly noticeable, this fragmentation is by no means a recent occurrence. It has *always* been extant, though largely unacknowledged. It is a theological issue that has been ever-present and imbedded in the notion of *sola scriptura* itself; an issue that has now seen its full flowering, thanks to a meeting of both religio-cultural and market forces, in North American late capitalism.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Peter J. Theusen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 14.

⁹⁸ I draw this term, “late capitalism,” primarily from the cultural criticism of Frederic Jameson, who has developed the concept from its roots in early 20th century Marxism, the writings of various members of the Frankfurt School, and the work of economists such as Ernest Mandel. “What marks the development [of late capitalism] is not merely an emphasis on the emergence of new forms of business organization (multinationals, transnationals) beyond the monopoly stage but, above all, the vision of a world capitalist system fundamentally distinct from older imperialism... its features include the new international division of labor, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges (including the

These cultural forces have been noted, particularly, in a recent study conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts, in the form of a survey on American religious identity within public life.⁹⁹ One of the main phrases the survey uses to describe this public sphere is as “A Very Competitive Religious Marketplace”¹⁰⁰—highlighting both the individuated competition *and* the overlap with more “worldly” market forces in this late-capitalist milieu. The survey itself is quite comprehensive, based on “interviews with more than 35,000 Americans age 18 and older,” and its main conclusion is “that religious affiliation in the U.S. is both diverse and extremely fluid”¹⁰¹—a fact that is consonant with what we have observed in the discussion above. The demographic conclusions of the study are similarly consonant, confirming that:

the Protestant population [in the United States] is characterized by *significant internal diversity and fragmentation*, encompassing hundreds of different denominations loosely grouped around three fairly distinct religious traditions—evangelical Protestant churches (26.3% of the overall adult population), mainline Protestant churches (18.1%) and historically black Protestant churches (6.9%).¹⁰²

These hundreds of denominations each have their own unique structures of authority and scriptural understanding, and their own strategies for adjudication. These structures and strategies can, of course, be assembled into larger general groupings according to

enormous Second and Third World debt), new forms of media interrelationship (very much including transportation systems such as containerization), computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale.” Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) xviii - xix. More will be said of this term in the chapters that follow.

⁹⁹ Pew Forum of Religion and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Pew Forum, *Religious Landscape*, 7.

¹⁰¹ Pew Forum, *Religious Landscape*, 5.

¹⁰² Pew Forum, *Religious Landscape*, 5, my emphasis.

traditions and affinities, but it is important to recognize that such groupings do not negate or erase the deep fracturing that sits at the heart of North American religious practice as a result of these individuating tendencies.

Thus, as “the Bible” fragments, in our time, into more and more ideologically differentiated “Bibles,” we can begin to see more clearly as well the relationship between *sola scriptura*’s self-authorization of *individualized* readings and the marketing of ever more narrow versions of Scripture *specifically tailored* to such readings. Whether lamented or celebrated, the fact of the fracturing is now undeniable.

Indeed, the fracturing may be related, on a deeper level, as suggested by the conclusions of the Pew study above, to a fracture of the “modern project” itself. Consider Stanley Grenz’s assertion that, “We are living in the midst of a widespread fragmentation and perhaps even disintegration that appears to be affecting all dimensions of Western culture, including the theological enterprise. Consequently, fragmentation has become perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the theological landscape today.”¹⁰³ His claim is not conjectural, but has deep resonance with the Pew study’s findings that:

[m]ore than one-quarter of American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion—or no religion at all. If change in affiliation from one type of Protestantism to another is included, roughly 44% of adults have either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 4.

¹⁰⁴ Pew Forum, *Religious Landscape*, 5.

Following Grenz's suggestion in *Beyond Foundationalism*, it is the position of this dissertation that the fragmentation, which I have described in the sections above with the term "Biblioplex," can best be analyzed within a broader theoretical position, put forth by a number of voices from within the current North American theological project, which can be collectively referred to here as "non-foundationalism."

Methodological Assumptions and Framing Questions

Foundationalism and non-foundationalism: Nicholas Wolterstorff

What constitutes a proper theological response to the advent of this denominational fracture and scriptural fragmentation? Certainly there are those who, at least with regard to the interpretation of Scripture, call for a return to a secure and unchanging stability. Thus, for example, Grant retreats to the claim that "[t]he Bible authenticates itself."¹⁰⁵ John Coleman Bennett, taking a more transcendental approach, stresses "the Reformers' emphasis on the witness of the Holy Spirit as the final validation of the revelation."¹⁰⁶ These, and countless others, in order to remove the hermeneutics of Scripture from the "traditions of men," have attempted to anchor its interpretation in solid and rationally available groundings. They have, in other words, engaged in a foundationalist project. As Bruce D. Marshall has described such attempts, the various projects often

involve trying to show that there are some beliefs which are basic or primitive, such that the primary justification for all other beliefs is some suitable linkage

¹⁰⁵ Grant, *Bible in the Church*, 117.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett, 133.

with those which are basic. What justifies the basic or foundational beliefs, however, is not other beliefs, but the world itself. So Descartes argues that other beliefs are justified insofar as they can be derived from clear and distinct ideas, and Locke holds that beliefs are justified to the extent that they can be traced to simple ideas of sensation; the “ideas” in each case are, it is claimed, directly and perspicuously tied to the world. It is this putative justificatory link to the world which makes some beliefs ineluctable and incorrigible, and so warrants our taking them as the justificatory foundation for the rest of our beliefs. Foundational beliefs thus impose themselves on all rational people; indeed recognizing the incorrigible truth of these beliefs and therewith their status as primitive is typically the *sine qua non* of rationality in foundationalist epistemologies. For our present purposes, the appeal of foundationalism lies mainly in the promise of a relatively unambiguous adjudication of competing truth claims on a basis which all parties to the discussion (including, of course, Christian theologians) can accept as binding, indeed must accept on pain of forfeiting their claim to be engaged in rational discourse.¹⁰⁷

The problem we have just observed, however, in this matter of the Biblioplex, is that where Scripture is concerned, “all parties to the discussion” have their own, increasingly variegated and often irreconcilable, positions regarding what they “must accept.” The appeal to Scripture’s *self*-authentication, *or* to the adjudication of the Holy Spirit guiding “proper” revelation, only seems able now to make the various claimants more acutely aware of how much we disagree over the criteria of authentication and how differently we hear the commanding voice of the Spirit.

This reality—that is, this disagreement over even these transcendental terms like “Spirit” and “revelation”—has driven many theologians of late to seek theological epistemologies that move *beyond* foundationalism, in search of a viable method that can account for these differences without collapsing into abject relativism. Taken as a group, we refer to such epistemologies here as *non-foundationalist*.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Marshall, 87.

¹⁰⁸ There is active debate whether “non-foundationalist” or “post-foundationalist” is the better term. For consistency with Nicholas Wolterstorff, I have opted for the former. There are, however, convincing arguments for the latter, and in a different project I would be tempted to take up “post-foundationlist” as a

These voices critical of epistemological foundationalism come from all sectors of the theological spectrum. For example, writers as disparate in their theological commitments as Walter J. Lowe (theologically and politically liberal) and the late Stanley J. Grenz (theologically conservative and evangelical) have asserted in various forums that an embrace of a reconceived Christian doctrinalism, one which can function apart from or beyond traditional epistemological foundations, is not only called for within the current milieu, but is, moreover, thoroughly warranted and necessary, arising out of their respective readings of the biblical witness.¹⁰⁹ These authors, along with others, claim that a non-foundationalist approach to interpretation is more thoroughgoing in its attendance to the *whole* of Scripture than its alternative in, perhaps more well established, modernist / foundationalist articulations.

I will thus suggest, in agreement with Lowe, Grenz, and others, that a non-foundationalist approach, both with regard to theological and epistemological method, offers the best way forward for addressing the concerns that preoccupy this project. However, this suggestion is made with the caveat that the numbers of non-foundationalist approaches, which heretofore have appeared, have, on the whole, failed to adequately attend to the *particular* theological problem of Scripture to be examined here. While it is the case that several recent attempts, which address the use of Scripture and its authority,

preferred term. See F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 25-43.

¹⁰⁹ With Lowe representing a strand of critical Barthianism attempting to continue certain commitments which arose in the Yale School of theologians and continued in critical engagements with post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida, and Grenz indicative of a rising trend in Evangelical Christian scholarship to undertake similar critical engagements. See for example Walter J. Lowe's contribution "Christ and Salvation" in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Theology* (Kevin Vanhoozer, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993). Also see Stanley J. Grenz, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (with John R. Franke, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

have arisen,¹¹⁰ there remains the need for a non-foundationalist analysis that attends to the cultural and market conditions in scriptural *production* and their affects upon theological reading. This is a key goal of the present project, which will address Scripture's structure and authority *within* the current market conditions (explicated, not as a literary or cultural residue, but as a thoroughly *theological* problematic).

In other words, it is precisely the acknowledgment of this tri-leveled *fragmentation*—1) at the structural level of Scripture-as-printed-object, 2) at the epistemological level of negotiating scriptural and doctrinal authority, and 3) at the theological level of the deep and abiding doctrinal disagreements that are the hallmark of the North American context—that makes clear the need for new methodologies that do not base themselves on an appeal to a (demonstrably unavailable) set of transcendent claims.¹¹¹ Post- and non-foundationalist approaches meet these criteria, attending to fragmentation without transcendent appeals, and thus present themselves here as the most effective methodological assumptions with which to undertake the present project.

Thus I propose to adopt one such non-foundationalist approach to the problems outlined above: Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, which will serve as a means whereby to frame and situate the work of this dissertation. There are three reasons for this choice. First, Wolterstorff's book provides a brief and coherent

¹¹⁰ We will look in detail at several examples in the following chapters.

¹¹¹ “As should now be apparent, we cannot think [about] the Bible without thinking of those who read it, who constitute the Bible as scripture in and through their reading of it. Unless we understand the interrelationship of text and reader, we cannot think the authority of scripture in other than a mystifying, magical way. This is what happened in those Protestant traditions that have taken the principle of *sola scriptura* as more than a polemical slogan, as if a text could so impress itself upon us that it somehow ceased to be a text in need of *reading*.” Gerard Loughlin, “Postmodern Scripture,” in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York and London: New York UP, 2006), 315.

overview of the major critiques of the foundationalist project, reviewing the philosophical difficulties that the foundationalist position engenders. Second, his book suggests a formally non-foundational epistemology, which does not depend on assertions of transcendent authority or particular sorts of truth claims. Finally, as will be discussed below, his project leaves an intentional lacuna that can be filled by the present project. That is, the present dissertation “fits” into the hole Wolterstorff has left by his framed set of “unanswered questions.”

Hence I draw upon Wolterstorff’s work, not because I am concerned with “Reformed epistemology” *per se* in the scope of this dissertation, but because the way Wolterstorff lays out his non-foundationalist project can serve as a background, a wider epistemological frame, in which this dissertation can be said to take place.¹¹² I will not focus on the details of Wolterstorff’s project in the present chapter; rather, they will be presented and examined in Chapter Six, after the pieces of the present dissertation (each of which plays a role in answering Wolterstorff’s lacuna) have been presented. For now, we will turn here simply to the examination of this lacuna left by Wolterstorff, and leave his wider project for discussion in the conclusion of this dissertation.

His lacuna, as noted above, takes the form of a set of “unanswered questions.” These questions appear as a part of Wolterstorff’s project that has been explicitly and intentionally left unfinished. Wolterstorff welcomes his readers to take up these

¹¹² It is not assumed here that Wolterstorff has exhausted the questions of non-foundationalist epistemologies. Nevertheless, if one is committed to a non-foundational conception of justification, while wanting to resist a reductive deflationist theory of truth (the notion that truth has just become a certain type of social gesture), such that one might come to affirm a type of objective truth (and objective truth as-knowable) without an appeal to foundations (and yet be able to make claims about religious authority that do not suffer a collapse into relativism and the criticism of being bare subjectivity), then Wolterstorff offers at least a reasonable position from which to proceed.

questions into further research. Hence I take them up here. Briefly stated, these “unanswered questions” can be summarized as follows:

- 1a) How ought Scriptures to be interpreted (i.e., what is the place of hermeneutics)?
- 1b) How ought Scriptures to be used for the work of the Christian scholar (i.e., what is the basis of authority)?
- 2) Given one’s beliefs at a certain time, are there some theories that one is warranted in accepting or not accepting (i.e., how can a nonfoundationalist approach be demonstrated to not collapse into just an “anything goes” sort of relativism)?¹¹³

It is my hope that the reader will easily apprehend an affinity of inquiry between Wolterstorff’s questions and the questions that arose around the two *Golfer’s Bibles* above: *what is allowed? what is required? and who is qualified (and upon what grounds) to make such judgments?*

These paired sets of questions, Wolterstorff’s and my own, are, I will claim, complementary. They are, as has been noted above, thoroughly *magisterial* questions. The advantage of asking such questions in explicit conversation with the inquiries from Wolterstorff’s project is that our questions are thus located in a well-explicated, formally structured, non-foundationalist epistemology, an epistemology that will chasten us from certain naïve transcendental assertions in our quest for their answers. Wolterstorff calls us toward local and particular effects that may be demonstrated and analyzed, rather than to abstract foundations, as we interrogate these matters of covert countersignature.

¹¹³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999) 101-102.

Annotation as market differentiation: Michael McClymond

Given our adoption of Wolterstorff's non-foundationalist framework, we will now briefly outline the analysis that will fill his lacuna. I submit that a rigorous attention to *printed Scripture* will offer us the most fruitful path regarding the magisterial questions of interpretation and authority raised by this chapter.

A Bible, printed and produced for a market—whether a mass market or a niche market—is, no matter how the devout might attempt to deny or attenuate the claim, primarily a *product*. The publishing trade is a business, and the publication and distribution of Bibles is a part of that business (and, in some cases, it is a *big* business). In the present North American market culture, products are sold on the strengths of their appeal and perceived benefits, as well as on the basis of how they differentiate themselves from other, visibly similar, products on the shelves.

As a *product*, then, any randomly selected printed Bible is subject to these market forces. Given that a Bible can be treated as any other product, it follows that we could open a book devoted to the business of selling products generally and find descriptions of market forces applicable to the *particular* product, Bibles, we are examining here. Thus, in one such business-advice guide (chosen from the many possibilities available in the business section of a local book store), we find the following:

...the more competing resellers there are, the faster [the] product goes extinct... It works like this: Reseller A sells the product for your recommended advertised price of \$50, then reseller B sells it for \$45 to compete with A, and then C sells it for \$40 to compete with A and B. In no time at all, no one is making profit from selling your product and reorders disappear. Customers are now accustomed to the lower pricing and the process is irreversible. The product is dead and you need to create new product. This is precisely the reason why so many companies

need to create new product after new product month after month. It's a headache.¹¹⁴

Substitute “Bible,” in place of the word “product,” in the above quotation, and you find a fitting description of the present state of Bible publishing in North America. Starting in the late 1980's, publishers discovered that adapting a generic Bible to a narrower market segment (say, at first, “women,” as in the *Women's Devotional Bible*, published by Zondervan in 1990), and supplementing the scriptural text with devotional materials and study aids, resulted in dramatically increased sales. This practice has proven a boon to the Bible publishers (who have seen their trade transform itself, over the past fifteen years, into a multi-billion-dollar annual industry¹¹⁵), but it has a downside. As Bibles are crafted for newer and narrower audiences, their “shelf life” diminishes. As in the quotation above, “new product” must constantly be created to stimulate interest and maintain a steady level of sales.

This is a state of affairs that has been overlooked in the theological discourse surrounding questions of authority and interpretation. How are we then to account for these conditions of Bible production and distribution? Wolterstorff's epistemology is useful to us as a framework, as noted above, but it was not designed nor intended by its author to address these matters. Thus his non-foundationalist epistemology will need supplementation. I will suggest his framework be read, in the course of this project, in dialogue with a set of analytical inquiries put forth by Michael J. McClymond's recent article, “Through a Glass Darkly: Biblical Annotations and Theological Interpretation in

¹¹⁴ Timothy Ferriss, *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich* (New York: Crown, 2007), 145-146.

¹¹⁵ \$4.63 billion, according to the CBA (formerly Christian Booksellers' Association) website. See “Size of the Industry” at <http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/media.htm>

Modern Catholic and Protestant English-Language Bibles.” McClymond describes his essay as a “first effort at characterizing the theological and interpretive functions of biblical annotations in modern Roman Catholic and Protestant Bibles.”¹¹⁶ In other words, his is an initial inquiry into the theological effects of textual additions to printed Bibles.

McClymond’s insights, while rather briefly stated in his essay, are excellent and suggestive. In articulating his own observations about present conditions, which we are here calling the Biblioplex, he offers us yet another parallel to our magisterial questions noted above:

Today’s tailor-made Bibles, along with the earlier annotated Bibles, raise intriguing questions, such as: What role do annotations perform in Bibles? What are their hermeneutical and theological functions? What arguments favor the inclusion or exclusion of annotations from Bibles? And why have biblical annotations been increasingly in vogue during the last generation or so?¹¹⁷

If we consider his last question in light of the constant need for “new product” referenced above, it can be suggested that biblical annotations have increased precisely because they have been an aid to increased market share and differentiation among various Bible “products” arising in the past twenty years.

Working backwards from this assertion through McClymond’s inquiries, we are drawn to ask, “What are the hermeneutical and theological functions that arise from this state of Bible marketing and market differentiation?” My claim is that, in following this

¹¹⁶ Michael J. McClymond, “Through a Gloss Darkly: Biblical Annotations and Theological Interpretation in Modern Catholic and Protestant English-Language Bibles,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006), 477.

¹¹⁷ McClymond, “Gloss,” 478.

line of questions, we will find ourselves pursuing the “silent countersignature” at work in Bible production and distribution, the covert Magisterium.¹¹⁸

Outline of the project

Having established the theological location and laid out the intended audience and definitions for some of the key terms of concern in the present work, it remains here to give an overview of the analysis, which is to come in the following chapters.

Chapter Two will explore the practice of *reification* that is applied to the concept “Scripture,” and will look in detail at David Kelsey’s *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*. Kelsey’s book is of interest here not only because it offers us a model for the type of formal analysis of Scripture with which the dissertation is concerned, but also because, by taking a critical account of Kelsey’s method, we will gain insight into *why* theologians have found it difficult to attend to the questions McClymond raises.

Chapter Three develops an expanded analytic methodology that addresses the difficulties highlighted in the second chapter. The chapter suggests the control term, “Textuality,” as a means of coordinating a trefoil analytic which allows the reader to examine a given version of Scripture in terms of a matrix of stabilities along the axes of “Work,” “Text,” and “Book.” The advantage of this trefoil analytic is its explicit attendance to market and annotative factors heretofore bracketed from theological consideration.

¹¹⁸ “A given set of annotations is, in effect, a hermeneutical code for the reading of scripture... More research on the theologies of annotated Bibles needs to be done.” McClymond, “Gloss,” 497.

Chapters Four and Five present two recent projects that incorporate certain insights sympathetic to the current project. Thus we can glimpse the practical outworkings of a pair of projects which, while both attentive to the issues of particularized versions of Scripture raised here, go about this attention in markedly differing manners.

Chapter Four offers a critical look at the development of postcolonial theological hermeneutics through a reading of R.S. Sugirtharajah's *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, highlighting and examining Sugirtharajah's concept of "hybridity" for its viability in addressing the issues of Textuality of the Scriptures, and listening attentively to the *theopolitical* questions the postcolonial project raises for North American theologies.

Chapter Five offers complement to the postcolonial project through a reading of the "Scriptural Reasoning" project that has arisen over the past decade among practitioners of the "Abrahamic traditions." The programmatic writings of Peter Ochs, one of the founders of the project, will form a focal point of this analysis. It will be suggested that the commitments in Scriptural Reasoning to *particularly located reading identities* and community-reading traditions are very consonant with the analytic aims of the present project.

The project concludes in Chapter Six by bringing together these strands of analysis with the suggestion that the matter of Bibles in North America is—and must be recognized as—an *ethical* concern for theologians. This final chapter will also offer remarks to suggest further trajectories to be explored.

CHAPTER II

THE REIFICATION OF “SCRIPTURE,” AND ITS CONFUSION WITH PRINTED SCRIPTURES

Most of us hear the word “scripture” without stumbling over it. Using it, we give the impression, even to ourselves...that we know what scripture is. On reflection, it turns out that is hardly the case.

- Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?*¹

At this point some readers likely may be scratching their heads and thinking to themselves, “This is a simple matter. The problem of those two Bibles is really no problem at all. Clearly, one of these books is *Scripture*, and the other clearly is not, and that makes all the difference.”²

I am willing to grant the point, at least initially. There is certainly no intention here to assert that the more *explicitly* sports-oriented version of the *Golfer’s Bible* (the one that contains chapters on “Golf Equipment,” but contains no “Gospels”) is Scripture. We could also agree with no hesitation that the other *Golfer’s Bible* (the one containing the 66 books of the Protestant canon alongside its sports references) *is* Scripture. But *why* are these two “clear” understandings possible? *How* are they possible?

¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, quoted in Justin Holcomb, editor, *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: New York UP, 2006), 1.

² I do not mean this assertion rhetorically. Several readers of early drafts of these chapters have raised this precise point. Thus, while the evidence is anecdotal, it seems reasonable to assume other readers will remark upon this matter as well. Hence it seems a good starting point for our discussion of David Kelsey and the other concerns of this chapter.

We have a need to define what this term “Scripture” means, or might mean, with regard to these statements. The purpose of this chapter is to explore this notion of “Scripture” critically, to set the stage for some suggestions that will be made in the following chapter. The definitions we locate will be by no means exhaustive—there are far too many books and differing arguments regarding the subject to make that possible. Instead, it is hoped that this chapter will present enough of a case to “trouble the waters” of some of the easy assumptions that surround the contemporary notions of Scripture within the practice of theology, shifting these assumptions enough that we can see around them.

To facilitate this shift, the latter part of this chapter will examine David H. Kelsey’s touchstone work on the subject, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*.³ We will explore *his* analysis of the term—both for the points where his approach to “Scripture” will prove helpful to the present project, and as those tangents where it can be used as a starting point for more complex analyses—as well as trajectories of scriptural consideration (particularly those of Kathryn Tanner and Bruce D. Marshall) that follow in his wake.

Clarifying the term “clearly”

Before turning to Kelsey, however, I would like to linger for a moment over a series of illustrations that will offer background to the discussion here, beginning with

³ David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

two issues, both arising out of the assertion with which we began a moment ago, to wit: “Clearly one of these books is Scripture, and the other is not.”

1) The first issue is a matter of observation, though an observation that is perhaps too quickly passed over by many commentators: Simply put, not all printed matter with the word “Bible” on the cover can be (or rather, by various construals, “is” or “should be”) considered *Scripture*. While this is not so controversial a claim to make about *certain* forms of printed matter with the word “Bible” on the cover (say, *The Travel Detective Bible*, *The Poisonwood Bible*, *The Macintosh Bible*,⁴ and, as we have just noted, at least one of these *Golfer’s Bibles*), the fact that we must make such a claim at all should give us pause. To call an object a “Bible” does not mean it is part of the grouping of texts referred to in our culture as *the Bible*. In other words, it is not necessarily *Scripture*. Of course, we do not simply observe this disjunction with regard to secular texts, which have co-opted the title “Bible.” There are examples of more “traditional” Bibles being denigrated or denied places on the shelves of “Scripture” as well.⁵ To

⁴ Peter Greenberg, *The Complete Travel Detective Bible: The Consummate Insider Tells You What You Need to Know in and Increasingly Complex World* (New York: Rodale, 2007); Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible: a Novel* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005); Cliff Colby and Cheryl England, *The Macintosh Bible: Ninth Edition* (Peachpit Press, 2004).

⁵ Indeed, I had an eye-opening visit to a local LifeWay Christian Bookstore recently. As my wife and I walked the aisles of the Bible section, we were awed at the number and variety of choices, but even more intrigued by a conspicuous pair of absences: though there were innumerable versions of Holman Christian Standard, New International Version, King James (“New” and older “Authorized,” both), New Christian, Today’s English, English Standard, and Scofield versions (and probably more that I wasn’t sharp-eyed enough to notice), there was nary a New American [NAB] nor a New Revised Standard version [NRSV] to be found. I located a store employee and asked about this. The employee, Pam, informed me that “those versions [the NAB and the NRSV] contain something called ‘the Apocrypha,’ and therefore our corporate headquarters made the decision not to carry them in stores, though we will be glad to order one for you.” It would be hard to find a more stark delineation of Bible preference than this. This corporate policy is, of course, complicated by the fact that not *all* NRSV’s contain the Apocrypha, and thus my suspicion is that this decision not to carry the version goes deeper, to a fundamental mistrust of the version itself. (I was not as surprised about the NAB. Though it is noteworthy that the Cokesbury Bookstore across town *also* fails to stock that version. They stock plenty of NRSV’s, though. Fascinating.) Pam (no last name offered), conversation with author, LifeWay Christian Bookstore, Cool Springs, TN, 2 November 2007.

restate the issue: a book with the word “Bible” on its cover might not function or be understood as a *Bible*. This assertion indicates a great deal.

A brief elaboration of the above assertion may be warranted. As North Americans, sharing among us some degree of common heritage, generalizations can be made. We can make the claim that most folks we might encounter, and ask, will “know” which the “real” Bible (the “Scripture Bible”) is, and know it “clearly” from an “imitation” (anything called “Bible” but not called “Scripture”).

We could easily imagine, however, a recently emigrated Thai Buddhist or Delhi Sikh, standing with us at the shelves of Borders Books (not necessarily in the “Religion - Christian” section) and nodding with approval at any “Bible” we might proffer, politely agreeing that it *is*, perhaps, a Holy Book, regardless of content, because it has the word “Bible” on the cover. Thus, to a certain extent, this innate understanding of what a “real” Bible is reflects a shared set of cultural presuppositions.

2) This issue from point 1 (i.e., not all “Bibles” are Scripture Bibles) overlaps the second issue: the matter of what this word, “clearly,” which has been tacked on to the assertions we make pro- or contra-Scripture, might mean. “Clearly” some printed materials with the word “Bible” in their titles are Scripture; “clearly” some are not. Yet such “clarity” (if we take the case of our imaginary émigré, crossing the Borders with us above) is *clearly* not universal. Those not born into our culture, or who do not share our sensitivity to these cultural markers, do not find these matters “clear.”

The reification of “Scripture”

How then are such discernments made? What *conditions* are in place (visibly or otherwise) that would render such an assertion “clear” (or, to put it in the words of the previous chapter, what is the *hidden major premise* at work here)? What we can observed here, I will argue, is a mechanism that enacts the *reification* of this notion of “Scripture”—conflating a theoretical concept of “Scripture” with the actual, physical instantiations of Scriptures (i.e., printed Bibles) that are, in fact, encountered by readers. Two examples—one visual, one textual—will help to illustrate this point.

Christ, Pantokrator

We turn first turn to a prevalent icon in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the image of *Christ, Pantokrator* (Fig. 1). Since its earliest known usage at Saint Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula,⁶ there have been numerous versions of the image of the Pantokrator (which translates most often in English as “all-powerful” or “almighty”) in Orthodox churches around the world, in some cases forming a central image of the iconostasis, though most often the Pantokrator is the sole image within the dome above the nave, directly above the congregation as it worships. Like the diverse churches in which they are found, there is a great variety among the Pantokrator icons. There are, however, some common features that can be highlighted.

Two features in particular can be our focus here. Both have to do with what Christ is doing with his hands. In the figure, it can be seen that the *right* hand of Christ is

⁶ Manolis Chatzidakis and Gerry Walters, “An Encaustic Icon of Christ at Sinai.” *The Art Bulletin* 49.3 (September 1967), 197-208.

held in a peculiar fashion, with two fingers touching the thumb and two fingers raised. While often thought of as a sign of blessing, this is better understood as an ancient symbol of an orator when teaching.⁷ Christ, in other words, “has the floor,” and is visually depicted in the process of transmitting wisdom. Through the visual rhetoric of the composition of the icon, this wisdom, moreover, is implied to be thematically connected to what is held in Christ’s *left* hand: a codex of the Scriptures.

Depending on the icon writer,⁸ different versions of the icon will depict the codex in diverse manners. In some examples, the codex is closed;⁹ in many others, it is open. When opened, the codex text is a stylized reference to sayings of Jesus, often taken from the Gospel of John. In our example here, the phrases translate as, *My peace I leave with you / I am the light of the world* (Jn 14:27 / Jn 8:12).

⁷ This is the claim made by Peter Brown. See his “Church and Leadership,” in Paul Veyne, et al., eds., *A History of Private Life, Volume I: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 272.

⁸ Within Orthodox tradition, the artist who paints an icon is referred to as having “written” it.

⁹ While this brief analysis is meant neither as an exhaustive nor authoritative interpretation of the icon, I might venture here the implication that the closure of the codex in these versions might signify, to some, the unity and completion of the Scriptures: the book is literally closed on the subject of the canon and what is (and is not) “Scripture.”

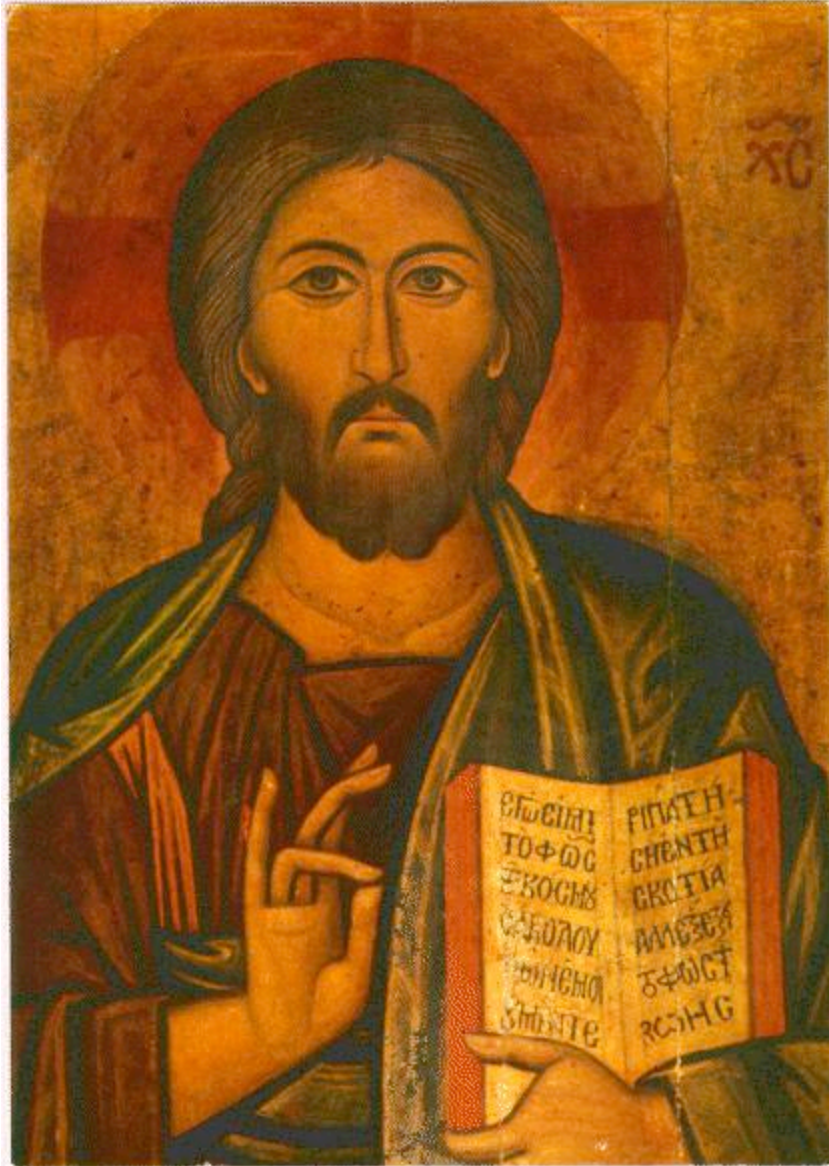


Figure 1. Christ, Pantokrator

It should be carefully noted that what we see in this image is a *stylized anachronism*. This anachronism is, namely, that the physical Jesus is depicted holding a physical, complete, *codex* of Scripture. Not a *scroll*, but a *bound book*. While I do not want to delimit all historically plausible claims of what may have happened after the Ascension with regard to Christ and Scripture, it seems important to note that *between* the historical points of his birth and Ascension¹⁰ the following can be said with a great deal of certainty:

- 1) The Gospels, and particularly John, did not exist in written form (and thus “Scripture,” as the term is now meant, was not complete, nor even collected, such that it could be bound in a codex).
- 2) Writings that did exist at that time of Christ were, in the vast majority of cases, transmitted in the form of scrolls, *not* codices. In other words, during the years of the *physical* presence of Jesus upon the Earth, he would not have had an occasion to hold what we here see him holding: a *book*. A codex of the sort seen in the Pantokrator icon did not become prevalent until the 4th century C.E.¹¹

It is likely, however, that when we look at this icon we do not see these anachronisms, and it is *this* fact in particular that is important.

When I first looked at this icon several years ago, for example, I did not think to myself, “That’s strange... How could Christ have a book to hold? Shouldn’t it be a scroll?” (like the scroll mentioned in Luke 4: 16-21). Instead, the visual elements worked together to reinforce, quite naturally, the sense of both a unity and completeness of Scripture (there it is, between the covers), and its endorsement by Christ (as he teaches,

¹⁰ ...bracketing, for the sake of argument, the healthy debate that surrounds the question of whether or not the Ascension could (or should) be considered an “historical point”...

¹¹ See e.g. Colin H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983).

or blesses, with it in his hand).¹² So there, in that initial viewing, despite the facts of history that would seem to indicate otherwise, I “clearly” saw an unproblematic and unified “Scripture” in this image. Scripture, in other words, was rendered “iconic” for me in that visual transaction.

This sense of unity and completeness seems to affect many observers, moreover, and lest Protestant propensities toward iconoclasm lead some readers to dismiss this “anachronistic viewing” as solely a problem of Eastern Orthodox churches and their imagery, let us turn, for our second illustration, to the New Testament itself (and a particularly Protestant approach to it) where similar anachronisms can be observed to arise.

Second Timothy 3:16-17

If the history of English-language Bibles were a map, then this short passage of Scripture, II Timothy 3:16-17, would constitute one of the most hotly-contested portions of real estate imaginable. The passage is invoked most often as a self-referential proof, or auto-justification, for the authority and/or unity of Scripture. Indeed, it is one of a handful of “go-to” texts for such purposes. Its terrain is hermeneutically and exegetically treacherous, with land mines threatening the wayward traveler who strays off the well-trod paths. Taking but a few innocent steps in a direction can lead to explosions among believers and the dismembering of bodies—both ecclesial, and, in less recent days, actual.

¹² I gratefully acknowledge a lecture by David Morgan for opening my eyes to these assumptions, and the possibilities for exploring this icon with regard to these present concerns. David Morgan, “The Authorized Version,” lecture given during the *Between Word and Image* series, Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, 26 October 2007.

The twentieth century opened with debate about the proper rendering and meaning of the words of this passage, and in many ways the disagreements have not ended.¹³

When I open my *Golfer's Bible*, for example, I find the II Timothy 3:16 rendered in this manner:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Moreover (and this is a point not to be ignored), *there is a footnote attached* to this passage, which reads, “*Lit breathed out by God*; the Scripture is the product of God’s Spirit working through men; see 2 Pt 1:20-21.”¹⁴

Following the direction of the footnote, when we turn to the referenced passage from Second Peter, we see that it goes on to state, “...no prophecy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.”

Hence the assumption, from these passages and their related notes, seems to be the following: when we read these passages all together we should have a clear idea of “Scripture,” not only from Paul’s intended meaning, but also as cross referenced with Peter, with any discrepancies made plain through a helpful editorial insertion, the footnote. Thus, it is implied, and our shaped understanding of the text purports, a reading that is solidly Protestant: “Scripture” is God-breathed, profitable for teaching and rebuking, and not from the “interpretations of men.” And when we say “Scripture,” we mean *all* of it.

¹³ See Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, particularly chapter 2, for a detailed rendering of these debates.

¹⁴ Note g, *The Golfer's Bible*, 1062.

But what does the word “all” mean here, in relation to Scripture? As has been the case with the term “clearly” above, this “all” needs to be examined more closely. Interrogating both the placement and functioning of this “all” in II Timothy 3:16 brings us closer, I will argue, to understanding the mechanisms of reification at work here.

For example: say I am a collector of Bibles, and have a wide variety of versions on the shelf. One of these is an 1881 edition of the Revised Version of the English Bible, and in turning to the passage in Second Timothy in *this* version I find the passage reads quite differently than the rendering we just saw above. In this version it says, “*Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness.*”¹⁵

There is a vast theological difference between a phrase saying, “*All Scripture is inspired...*” (implying that everything between the covers is), and one reading “*Every scripture inspired...*” (implying that some of the words between the covers *might not* be). So vast, in fact, that it lead many American church leaders of the time to flatly deny that the Revised Version, in that form, *was Scripture*.

Consider the irony of this for a moment: because the Revised Version’s rendering of II Timothy 3:16 could be read in such a way as to imply that not all Scripture was inspired, the rendering itself was claimed not to be inspired Scripture. In other words, one denies that *all Scripture* (i.e., a popular and widely available example of a “Holy Bible”) is inspired in order to affirm that *all Scripture* (i.e., the examples that agree with a certain predetermined field of interpretation) is inspired. The argument proceeds by denying that certain readily available examples of Bibles (in this case, an English Bible

¹⁵ Quoted in Thuesen, p 40.

of a certain version) are to be considered inspired, and therefore that a certain Bible is not a *true* Bible.

The “No true Scotsman” fallacy

Anthony Flew, in his brief primer on logic, *Thinking Straight*,¹⁶ identifies such arguments as a form of equivocation or “question begging.” An equivocation exploits an ambiguity in language in order to substitute a “contingent proposition” for a “necessary condition.”¹⁷ In other words, equivocation is at work where a disputed and socially located definition is offered *as if* it were a formal and analytic definition. To equivocate is to proffer a fallacious argument, at least from the standpoint of formal logic.

Flew illustrates this equivocation through an example he terms the “No-true-Scotsman” fallacy. We can paraphrase his example here:

Imagine Hamish McDonald, a Scotsman, sitting down with his Glasgow Morning Herald and seeing an article about how the "Brighton Sex Maniac Strikes Again." Hamish is shocked and declares, "No Scotsman would do such a thing." The next day he sits down to read his Glasgow Morning Herald again and this time finds an article about an Aberdeen man whose brutal actions make the Brighton sex maniac seem almost gentlemanly. This fact shows that Hamish was wrong in his opinion but is he going to admit this? Not likely. This time he says, "No *true* Scotsman would do such a thing."¹⁸

In other words, the No-true-Scotsman fallacy “consists in responding to the falsification of a contingent proposition by covertly so reinterpreting the words in which it was originally formulated that these now become the expression of an arbitrarily made-to-

¹⁶ Anthony Flew, *Thinking Straight* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1977).

¹⁷ Flew, *Thinking*, 53.

¹⁸ Flew, *Thinking*, 47; see also his 1975 video recording, “Thinking About Thinking.”

measure necessary truth.”¹⁹ It is the replacement of a position requiring argument with a position that simply asserts a “truth” as-if it was given and universally available. In other words, in the present example, the practitioner of the fallacy seems to be mistaking a Scot for a triangle.

A triangle, after all, is a figure with a formal definition. Within Euclidian space, at least, this definition is not dependent upon argument or interpretation for its establishment or proper function.²⁰ A triangle is, in that sense, *neutral*—its “meaning” is universally available and given, and arguing about it will not change these meanings or givens. What constitutes a true or proper Scotsman, on the other hand, *is* a matter of debate; the content of its definition is neither neutral nor settled. There are differing interests involved in the fixing of the definition.

The present dissertation maintains that a printed Bible is more like a Scot than a triangle, as understood in the discussion above. Thus, to make the claim that a clearly extant and available artifact with the words “Holy Bible” on the cover, published by a Bible publisher and sold in the “Bible/Religion” section of a bookstore, is somehow *not* a “true” Bible (as in our example of the RSV controversy above) *begs the question*. It is an example of this same sort of equivocation we see pointed out in Flew’s book.

The point here is that the question of what constitutes *true* Scripture is, like the definition of the Scotsman, a matter of differing interests and argumentation. The

¹⁹ Flew, *Thinking*, 49.

²⁰ While it is not important, for the sake of this example, to carry the argument to these lengths, it could be easily noted that the *choice* between performing one’s geometric proofs in, say, *Riemannian* space, as opposed to Euclidian space, *does* affect the definition of a triangle. So there is, at a higher level, a certain degree of argument involved. However, in making such a claim, we merely highlight the very point being made more generally in this dissertation: the type of space within which a triangle occurs could be considered to function, analogically, as the Magisterium for that triangle.

definition of a Bible is not—and cannot—be neutral; *it is magisterial*. Whatever propositions might be made, they will always be limited and in need of justification.

This need is not met by simply playing printed Bibles *against* some purportedly neutral concept of “Scripture,” either. When we find examples of triangles with four sides, we know that these are actually not triangles. When we encounter Bibles with which we do not agree, however, we must still wrestle with the fact that—at least for someone—this particular artifact does seem to function as Scripture. When such arguments are settled, those that carried the day are not, I submit, the arguments allied with propositional evidence, but rather those allied with the effective power of a Magisterium.

Playing the advocate for the “printer’s devil”²¹

Given that the contention of this dissertation is that positivistic claims about Scripture are fallacious, there is still the matter that many theologians we might consult hold to some version of these claims. Instead of lingering on what it might mean, in this case, to rob Peter in the act of paying Paul (that is, in this case, to rob the Revised Version Bible in favor of the Holman Christian Bible), let us instead, for the sake of argument, temporarily grant the point, and see what follows. Thus let us allow the premise: Perhaps the Revised Version of 1881 is *not “true” Scripture*.

Let us then say (again, just for the sake of argument) that *only* versions of the English Bible that render II Timothy 3:16-17 in a manner similar to the manner of *The Golfer’s Bible* (which would include examples such as the King James Version, the

²¹ “Printer’s devil” being a term for the assistant at the press, rumored to have been coined in reference to an associate of Gutenberg’s. See <http://teched.vt.edu/gcc/HTML/PrintingsPast/PrinterNSpy.html>.

Revised Standard, the New International Version, and a host of others) is *true* Scripture. What then?

We are still left with the task of determining the ultimate meaning of that “*all*,” and though we may now have a slightly more refined sense of what *isn't* included in the phrase “all Scripture,” the phrase still demands examination. What does this “all Scripture” mean? In particular, *if we assume Paul wrote the text*,²² what might *he* have meant by the phrase “all Scripture”?

1) **Minimalism:** We can begin with a “minimalist”²³ response to this question: by “all Scripture,” it is entirely possible and quite reasonable to assume that Paul was *not* referring to his own letters (though this point might be debated), since they were correspondence.²⁴ Furthermore, under this minimalist reading, it might be difficult to include the Gospels themselves in what the writer of the Epistle here meant by “Scripture,” as the earliest Gospel writings seem to be contemporaneous with Paul’s death in Rome.²⁵ Even if we posit that the synoptics are written *very* early (such that

²² And this is by no means a given. See, e.g., chapter 3 of Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 55-90; and Chapter 1, “The Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles,” in Mark Harding, *What are They Saying About the Pastoral Epistles?* (New York: Paulist, 2001).

²³ By “minimalist” I here mean that we restrict our interpretation to the least possible claims that can be directly made from the historical and textual evidence. While no such interpretation will be totally free from bias, we attempt to limit this bias as much as possible by restricting assumptions and “gap filling” in the process of reading. By contrast, “maximalist” readings attempt to explain what seem to be historical incongruities (or impossibilities) by means of narrative, as in, “Regardless of evidence to the contrary, Paul must have meant x, therefore ...” (and the lacuna is filled with a compelling explanation).

²⁴ For an extended discussion of this question of the canonicity of the Pastorals, from the standpoint of current scholarship, see Chapter 7, “The Pastorals as scripture,” in Frances Young, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Pastoral Letters*, James D.G. Dunn, general editor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

²⁵ A timeline from *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, for example, lists Paul’s death as circa 67 AD, and the synoptic Gospel writings as 60-100 AD. Different historical accountings will have shifts in

they would exist in their final written form *before* Paul penned Second Timothy, and thus could be included chronologically in the sense of the phrase), this still would exclude the Gospel of John and the Revelation of John, at the very least, from what was intended in the meaning of the phrase “all Scripture.” According to a great many scholars, these two books simply did not exist when Paul could have written the phrase.²⁶ And yet, by all accounts of the Bibles we have, and the contemporary interpreters reading them, these two late books are certainly “Scripture.”

The problem then is this: When one desires to bracket “Tradition” in favor of a pure, self-authenticating Scripture (which many who invoke II Timothy as a proof text seem to wish), it is difficult to argue for *any* sense of the phrase “all Scripture” which could refer here to much beyond the contents of the Old Testament. Any claim that other documents were considered “Scripture” by Paul (in the way scholars and others deploy this term today) seems difficult to argue, at least on the minimalist historical grounds adopted here.²⁷

Of course, one might then argue that Paul “knew” that these later books would be written (via divine inspiration) and thus intended and somehow prophetically *meant* their inclusion in the phrase “all Scripture.” Making such an assertion pushes the bounds of

these dates, of course, but these variations do not affect the main point here. John McManners, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1990), 686.

²⁶ And this is true even if we follow Kendall Easley in proclaiming II Timothy as Paul’s “Last Will and Testament.” Kendall H. Easley, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Nashville: Holman, 2002) p. 334.

²⁷ See, e.g., A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles: The New Century Bible Commentary*, Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, general editors (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 151-152, where Hanson can be seen making a curious inverse of my argument here, working from the presupposition that Paul *did not* write the letter, and thus it can be dated very late and encompass all of our present Scripture; Gordon D. Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 279-280.

the minimalist reading by introducing influences that are not apparent upon the pages themselves but are somehow external to the writing, and are not, therefore, readily evident to all readers. Such influences of the Spirit and inspiration are, of course, not only welcomed by many but are seen by those who do welcome them to be essential to the entire prospect of calling any writing “Scripture” in the first place. As attractive such claims may initially be, however, this alternative will be found similarly difficult. It raises different problems from those just observed with the minimalist position, but it does not solve them.

2) **Maximalism:** One of a pair of more *maximalist* readings of Paul’s use of the phrase “all Scripture” could start with Paul’s assertion that he is a Pharisee, indeed a supremely pious one (Acts 26:5, Philippians 3:4-6). This title is often invoked to develop Paul’s positions on grace and the law, but this appellation has historical implications for the question of Scripture as well, though these implications are not often explicated. Understanding the character of *historical* (as opposed to pejorative) Pharisaism, therefore, is instructive. The *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, for example, reminds us that the Pharisees were a “Jewish party during Jesus’ time that obeyed the written law of Moses *and its unwritten interpretations*, known as the traditions of the elders (Mark 7:3).”²⁸ To the branches of Judaism (such as the Pharisees, in contrast with the Sadducees) that go so far as to claim that the traditions of interpretation were given together on Sinai with the written Torah, these traditions are as authoritative and binding

²⁸ Pharisees. Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 208, my emphasis.

on the reader as the written Torah itself, according to scholars on the Pharisaic tradition.²⁹

If Pharisaism (following the argument from Paul, as a “Pharisee among Pharisees,” and thus “Pharisaism” meant here as the predecessor to these Rabbinic traditions of interpretation that find their roots there, and not in its more common pejorative sense) informs Paul’s understanding of Scripture, then it follows logically that there is no reason to *limit* the phrase “all Scripture” to *only* the written pages between the covers of the codex. *All* Scripture—here now meaning the written text *and* the oral tradition—is inspired of God and profitable. Assuming Paul is the author of this text, then it seems that, through his training as a Pharisee, all manner of ideas and practices that are *not* part of the *written* Bible might be considered “Scripture.” This position, of course, plays havoc with the limitations of Scripture tacitly assumed in contemporary readings of II Timothy 3:16.

Another maximalist approach of course, could begin instead with the presupposition that Second Timothy is pseudepigraphal. That is, an anonymous author, writing in Paul’s name, added the Epistle to the body of writings later collected into canonical Scripture.³⁰ As above, however, it is not evident that such a claim solves the theological problem still simmering here, for would this not again be a case of a latter-day voice “adding to” an established tradition of Scripture? Thus would its inclusion not

²⁹ See, e.g., Werner H. Kelber, “Orality and Textuality in Paul,” *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), 140 - 183; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 3-4; Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100*, David E. Green, tr. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 158.

³⁰ As mentioned above, this is Hanson’s view, and his is a representative position for a good deal of scholarship on the question.

erase the very barrier between what is “clearly” Scripture, and what is not, which contemporary readings of II Timothy 3:16 seek to erect?

To restate these two maximalist points: If Paul writes II Timothy, there are attendant difficulties (arising through his training with the Pharisees) that intrude, regarding his understanding of the limits of (and his access to) written “Scripture”; If someone *other* than Paul wrote it, this fact itself begs the question of the assumption of rigid limits of written “Scripture.” All the different combinations are attempting to account for historical, chronological, and textual difficulties that are demonstrable in an attentive consideration of the passage.

As we noted in the section above dealing with the “No true Scotsman” fallacy, in none of these readings—minimalist, maximalist, Pauline-authored or pseudepigraphal—can we say that “Scripture” is “clearly” presenting itself *apart* from these probelmatized historical and constitutive difficulties. That is to say, in other words, that the “clarity” of Scripture arises from a source always other than Scripture itself. This point, put in the form of a question, would then ask, does “Scripture” here for Paul (in consonance or contrast to the understandings of contemporary readers now) mean the Old Testament? The “Gospel”? The Gospels? The entirety of the *written* text of the Bible (and which ones, since this *unified* object is uncompiled in Paul’s time)? The writings *and* the oral traditions? The incarnate Word Jesus Christ? Or some other possibility entirely?³¹ No matter how one looks at the variables, the difficulties seem to multiply, *and Scripture itself cannot provide a clear answer.*

³¹ This is an ongoing question. For example, in Gordon Fee’s exegesis of the text, it seems to mean several of these contradictory possibilities at once, depending upon the paragraph of explanation one consults. See Fee, *New International Commentary*, 278 - 280.

And yet such difficulties are not to be acknowledged when this passage is invoked as a positivistic “proof” of the inspiration and collected unity of Scripture. When many contemporary ears hear II Timothy 3:16, “Scripture” is heard to refer without difficulty to the generic concept of a collected, settled, and printed Bible. In other words, what we observed in the case of the Pantokrator image above regarding “Scripture” is now here in literary (as opposed to visual) presentation: “Scripture” is rendered as an assumed unified whole, enshrining and making iconic the elision and covering-over of these demonstrable anachronisms.³²

This critique obtains where we can observe the invocation of a “Scripture” that somehow rises above the particularities of all contextual situations, history, and interpretive thorniness and that can speak *outside* them somehow. (As literary critic Stanley Fish has noted, one can always employ a higher level of generality than the level at which there is a dispute,³³ and in such manner “smooth over” problematic particularities of context. This is perhaps another way of noting the equivocation highlighted by Flew). And this, if the above analysis is accurate, is the equivalent of turning Scripture into an icon (and, as with an icon, making the complementary theological claim that the object is to be looked *through*, rather than at, to the truth that inheres beyond it).³⁴

³² E.g., “The Bible is the name given to the revelation of God to man contained in sixty-six books or pamphlets, bound together and forming one book and only one, for it has in reality one author and one purpose and plan, and is the development of one scheme of the redemption of man.” See entry for “Bible.” *Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1947), 93.

³³ Fish, *Reader* 77.

³⁴ I am choosing to let the critique rest at “iconization” and not press it forward into “idolatry,” though not because I don’t think such criticism can be made. Isaiah 44:9-20 can be read as not only applying to blocks of wood and the works of the blacksmith’s hands; it can also (and perhaps in these days more often does) apply to the fruits of processed wood and shaped-metal presses: printed Bibles themselves. Again, my

Steel-reinforced reification

Even when we *do* look at specific Bibles-as-objects, what we see often reinforces this sense of unity and iconization of the codex. In several contemporary versions of printed and marketed Bibles, we can find this hagiography of the codex taken, literally, to extremes. A number of teen versions of the New Living Translation, for example, feature embossed, camouflaged or faux-weathered *metal* covers.³⁵ Here the literary and visual iconizations of the codex converge, with a clearly delineated and indeed *armored* border between the “Scripture” and the “not-Scripture” surrounding it (“This Bible has the hippest exterior ever!” raves ChristianBook.com³⁶).

Taking this concept further, an English Standard Version Teen Bible with a metal cover is dubbed the “Battle Zone” edition.³⁷ Such galvanized Bibles could be considered an “improvement” over the limitation of earlier iterations. For example, the earliest versions of the “books” of the Bible were, as noted earlier, in scroll form, with the edges (borders) of the rolls left vulnerable, porous and flimsy. Later ancient versions, iterated into codex form, still suffered from such problems as flaking or moldy parchment and scarcity. Such mistakes of history are corrected and perfected in these metal versions: produced in massive quantity, printed on acid-free paper, bound in literal armor-plating,

intention here is not to undermine all claims of divine authority in printed Scriptures; I rather purport that the *self-referenced* appeals to authority from “Scripture” itself are hazardous in light of Isaiah’s stern warning. *Caveat lector*.

³⁵ NLT Metal Bibles: Cross, “Thirsty”?, and Camouflage covers, all published by Tyndale House.

³⁶ See http://www.christianbook.com/Christian/Books/product?item_no=372326&event=51500GUY%7C807107%7C55020

³⁷ ESV *Battle Zone Metal Cover Bible*, Wheaton: Crossway Books and Bibles, 2004.

these Bibles are themselves visually streamlined—their difficulties are simplified, their borders are hardened. These metal-cover Bibles are ready for battle in the culture wars.

The metal-cover Bible is in many respects semiotically parallel to the Christ, Pantokrator icon: it presents a symbolic field that can be “read” and understood to communicate information far beyond the mere text of Scripture. But one does not need the metal cover to achieve this effect in a Bible. In other words, the practice of invoking texts like II Timothy as a *proof* of Scripture’s unity, authority, and inspiration becomes itself the *literary* equivalent of the *visual* transaction that occurs in the viewing of the Christ, Pantokrator icon: we observe a unified, “booklike” (but not physically-located-in-a-particular-book) “Scripture” presented as a placeholder that suspends all difficulties of history and construction of the text, eliding attendant anachronisms into a phantom (used here as an indicative and intentionally degraded synonym for “Spiritual”) unity. This is a semiotics of reification.

In conversations with my colleagues, the invocation of reified Scripture is often precisely the recourse to which they appeal when issues similar to those enumerated here are raised. The argument runs thus: Of course our *actual* Scriptures (the books, the translations, etc.) are flawed and somewhat anachronistic, reflecting all manner of difficulty in terms of transmission and assembly. However, what each of these flawed Scriptures points to is “*Scripture*”—the ideal, perfect, unadulterated Word of God.³⁸

³⁸ “Despite the fact of the absolute inerrancy of the original writings of Scripture, it is recognized that changes and errors have intentionally and unintentionally entered the biblical text in its reproduction and translation...That most of these scribal changes and errors are known today and none affect primary biblical doctrine assures us of the reliability of present, unbiased, standard editions of the Scriptures. Thus, in so far as the present standard editions of the Bible accurately represent the original writings, they are the Word of God and to this extent they are infallible and authoritative in their teachings and commands.” Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology: Examining the Great Doctrines of the Faith, Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 29. This raises the question, however, of how such a comparison is to be made. The “original writings” are lost—which is why we have inferior, deviant contemporary versions—if

(Thus my claim that I hear such arguments, therefore, as of a species with theological claims made within Orthodox dogmatics about icons: the object is to be “looked through” to the spiritual reality beyond it.³⁹) This position has a certain appeal, as it seems to account for human error without sacrificing divine authority.

Such appeals, however, are too facile. Until such arguments make explicit the mechanics by which these flawed, earthly versions of Bibles are conformed by, and under constant revision to reflect, the heavenly norm, this sort of assertion seems to be little more than a fancy gilded shroud covering over the very human processes I am trying to lay bare here. I don’t wish entirely to close the door on such “Scriptural Platonism,” however, because I think there is value to being able to claim such conformities, *once certain conditions of evidence have been met*. However, the assertion is too often made with the goal of *ending* such inquiries, not beginning them (again reminiscent of the rhetorical effect of the “No true Scotsman” equivocation mentioned above). Even more significantly, such appeals are often made by way of rejecting notions of magisterial influence. It seems to be the case, however, that such appeals are the very *fruit* of these covert magisteria here being investigated.

In sum: We have observed that the visual and literary invocations of the concept “Scripture” involve, upon scrutiny, the comfortable elision of difficulties and

they were not lost we would simply use them instead of the deviant versions. The authority of the deviant versions is limited to the points where they “represent” the original writings, which are themselves lost and therefore not available for comparison (because, again, if they were not lost, we wouldn’t be comparing deviant versions to them; we would simply discard the deviant versions and use the originals). As often as I see these sorts of arguments mounted, I have yet to see one that explains the mechanism for such comparisons, given that the premise of the argument in the first place is that one of the comparands is inaccessible.

³⁹ See Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska, 2005), 324 n4.

anachronisms regarding the origin and assembly of Scripture. To point out these anachronisms, to ask about conditions that would cover over them, however, is to become preoccupied by a set of questions that are invisible so long as we talk about the term “Scripture” in the abstract or idealized form, but that arise plainly the moment we begin to relate the term “Scripture” to *printed and physical* materials bearing the name “Bible.” This indeed brings us right back to the magisterial questions introduced in the previous chapter. In other words, we should note that the invocation of “Scripture” in a theological conversation does not dispel the questions of authority and interpretation. Rather, it renders them all the more acute in their need to be addressed.

With these preliminaries in place, we can begin our turn to these matters of mechanics, looking at David Kelsey’s book to see how he organizes his examination of these issues, moving from there to points, in the following chapter, where his analyses might be expanded and elaborated.

Kelsey’s Formal Examination of Scripture

Against reification: Text, Con-text, and Pre-Text

Kelsey introduces his project in *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* through a series of questions, asking, “When a theologian takes biblical texts as scripture authoritative for theology, what decisions does he make about these texts? What decisions does he make about the setting in which these texts will be used? And what decisions does he make before ever turning to the texts at all?”⁴⁰ As was the case with

⁴⁰ David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), ix.

McClymond and Wolterstorff in the previous chapter, these questions resonate with the heart of the present dissertation.

In light of the difficulties highlighted in the sections above surrounding reification, it should be mentioned that Kelsey's logical analysis, following these questions and forming the bulk of the book, is that the actual employment of "Scripture" and "Tradition," in the authorization of Christian or theological speech, *cannot* take place by leaving these terms in their most general states. His is a move, therefore, *against* reification. For Kelsey, in order to understand the function of Scripture, concrete *particularities* must be foregrounded for given locations, times, and communities. It is not Kelsey's task to perform these foregroundings in *Uses of Scripture*, but that in no way lessens his claim to their necessity—so much so that Kelsey mentions in the Preface that his working title for the project was, for a great while, *Text, Con-text, and Pre-text*.

Reading his work in the idiom of the present dissertation, then, we can make the following synthetic claim: the problem with the sorts of unselfconscious invocations of Scripture (in the "iconic" fashions illustrated above) is that they function on the premise that "Scripture" is accessible *apart* from its theologically negotiated particularity (in other words, that it could be a functioning text apart from its con-text and pre-text). Remembering Flew's Scotsman, we recall that this is a confusion of a Bible with a triangle, and such confusions should be resisted.

Kelsey's project is an attempt to circumvent the appeal to such ready-made definitions and abstractions, claiming instead that *any* mention of "Scripture" is a mention of a *particular* set of writings used in a *particular* situation. If we want to understand the term, understand first these particularities. The type of particularity

Kelsey chiefly wants to analyze in his project, then, is a situating of the concept “Scripture” within one or another “imaginative theological construals” of God’s saving activity and presence.

Outline of Kelsey’s project

Kelsey divides his project into three parts, which we will examine in their turn below, after regarding his general comments about his project. He introduces the overall work, as “a study of method in theologians’ practices of their craft,” claiming that it “is a study of a variety of ways in which Scripture may be employed to authorize a theological proposal.”⁴¹ He is careful to note what this does *not* entail for his project, by contrasting the scope of his work against a similar project mounted by Langdon Gilkey in his book *Naming the Whirlwind*.

The contrast comes, Kelsey notes, in the difference between the differing notions, in these two projects, of the problem of “theological methodology.” When Gilkey uses this term, according to Kelsey, he means the problems a theologian solves (and must solve) to get started doing theology. When Kelsey uses the term, in contrast, he means what it is to explore what theologians are *actually* doing, the methods they can be observed to be using. Kelsey analogizes his model to literary criticism: a study of theologians’ methods, instead of a theological methodology.⁴²

⁴¹ David H. Kelsey, “Preface to the Trinity Press Edition,” *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999) ix-x. This is fundamentally the same book as *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, and it is the latter work to which we will chiefly refer. For purposes of clarity in citation this later edition will be cited as “*Proving*” and the earlier edition as “*Uses*.”

⁴² Kelsey, *Uses* 6-7.

In Kelsey's reading, Gilkey develops a theory about what theology *is* (it is one form of thought among many, and akin chiefly to anthropology⁴³), whereas Kelsey claims to put forth no general theory in *this* sense. Theology, so Kelsey claims, does not have one proper method, and his aim in the work is not to make theological proposals but rather to ask "fruitful questions" to "*anyone* interested in the matter" about the "intellectual structures Christians build" with an eye to "fairer ways to compare them and analyze them."⁴⁴ In this second sense, then, Kelsey *is* developing a general theory, or rather, a formal structure for understanding how Scripture might function in various communities of its use—a theory proceeding inductively from the various evidence he examines from the theologians he will analyze in the initial part of the book.

In its first argumentative movement, then, Kelsey's project begins with an attempt to account for "Scriptural authority" by analyzing a series of categories (particularly among various Protestants, though there is a gesture throughout the work for generalization to Roman Catholics as well) of *applied* biblical hermeneutics, from which, in its next movement, general principles might be inductively extrapolated. As Kelsey's own description of the project claims, the work "is not a study of particular theologians' uses of scripture to authorize their theological projects, nor a study of the structure of their theological projects and the place of scripture in those structures"⁴⁵ but more of a "grammar" that can be used to compare and analyze such concepts generally.⁴⁶

⁴³ Kelsey, *Uses* 7-8.

⁴⁴ Kelsey, *Uses* 9, my emphasis.

⁴⁵ Kelsey, *Proving* ix-x.

⁴⁶ Kelsey, *Uses* 96.

He then proceeds in the chapters that form the bulk of Part 1 to examine seven relatively recent and somewhat disparate theologians—B.B. Warfield, Hans-Werner Bartsch, G. Ernest Wright, Karl Barth, L.S. Thornton, Paul Tillich, and Rudolf Bultmann. In each case his aim is not so much to encompass their projects, or even theorize generally about their various uses of Scripture, but rather to isolate distinct moments in each that illustrate the three main forms of “recent use” of Scripture he analyses.

These analyses are found in the chapters on “Doctrine and Concept,” “Recital and Presence,” and “Event and Expression,” respectively. In each case he asks a series of questions upon which he will base his comparisons,⁴⁷ and uses these comparisons to demonstrate his repeated point that a theologian’s answer to the question, “What is the essence of Christianity?” is decisive for the way she construes Scripture and for her use of Scripture in making theological proposals.⁴⁸ The point of the concrete examples is to show how Scripture’s functioning as a source of theological appeal cannot in fact be divorced from a particular theological construal of the Christian reality and of God’s role within it.

⁴⁷ Kelsey’s four questions are:

- 1) What aspects of scripture is (are) taken to be authoritative? Is it the concept ‘scripture,’ or the doctrines, or the historical reports, or the liturgical utterances, or the “symbols,” or some combination of these, or something else?
- 2) What is it about this aspect of scripture that makes it authoritative?
- 3) What sort of logical force seems to be ascribed to the scripture to which appeal is made? Has it the force of a descriptive report, of an injunction, of an emotive ejaculation; is it self-involving?
- 4) How is the scripture that is cited brought to bear on theological proposals so as to authorize them?

Kelsey at several points admits that his range of interest and consideration is somewhat limited, and that “the range of ways of taking scripture here is probably not exhaustive of all the logical possibilities.” Kelsey, *Uses* 15.

⁴⁸ Kelsey, *Uses* 8.

Part 2 of Kelsey's book (which might be said to include the final chapter in Part 1, the chapter explicitly titled "Scripture") moves on from these various theological explications to a series of explorations of the general (formal) nature of the concept "authority" with regard to the concepts "Scripture" and "Christian community," finding them to be deeply intertwined. This relation leads Kelsey to what he terms a "functionalist" understanding of authority,⁴⁹ whereby it is understood that:

[t]he expression, "Scripture is authoritative for theology" has self-involving force. When a theologian says it, he does not so much offer a descriptive claim about a set of texts and one of its peculiar *properties*; rather, he commits himself to a certain kind of activity in the course of which these texts are going to be *used* in certain ways.⁵⁰

In other words, to say "Scripture is authoritative for Christian proposals [or for Christian theology]" is not, in itself, to make an informative or meaningful remark.⁵¹ For Kelsey (following Wittgenstein), such statements are mere tautologies, rehearsing a definitional aspect analytic to Scripture in the first place.

For the concept "Scripture" to function *meaningfully*, then, the following minimum preliminaries must be established: 1) what is meant by "Scripture," and 2) what is meant by "authority" *within* a scope of context and particularity. These, for Kelsey, will be established by analysis of the "function" and the "rules" by which a given "Christian community" construes "Scripture"—a community with which the theologian interfaces and identifies (or doesn't) in going about her work. It should be noted that Kelsey insists that the answering of questions 1) and 2) is *not* the intention of his project,

⁴⁹ Kelsey, *Uses* 154.

⁵⁰ Kelsey, *Uses* 89.

⁵¹ Kelsey, *Uses* 108-109.

as offering such answers would lock him into the type of essentialism that he explicitly disowned when speaking of Gilkey's project. He instead is offering a formal (and thus admittedly abstracted⁵²) set of conditions in which such proposals might be understood.

Moving forward from these claims, Part 3 is interested to draw a series of "purely formal morals" which yield "an entirely formal concept"⁵³ of theology, in which, according to Kelsey:

"Theological positions" are best seen, not as complex overall arguments, but as imaginative structures in which individual theological proposals dealing with various theological *loci* are balanced off one another in different arrangements...The actual way in which any particular "position" is structured is largely shaped by a root construal of the central reality in Christianity, the mode in which God is present. Like other works of the imagination, a "theological position" thus solicits critical analysis of its structure and of the roles played within it of its constituent parts, i.e., theological proposals.⁵⁴

Thus, as a consequence, "Scripture's bearing on theological proposals must then be analyzed first in terms of its bearing on the imaginative vision that gives a position its particular shape" holistically.⁵⁵ That is, "Scripture" is not preliminary to the doing of theology. Rather, the very notion of what "Scripture" is, and could be, is already reflective of such theological "root construals of the central reality in Christianity."

Kelsey is careful, in his analytic of these concepts of "Scripture" and "authority," to maintain, "it would be very misleading to discuss the notion of biblical authority...in a

⁵² At varying points in the work, Kelsey avers that his analysis is predicated on fundamentally mainline-Protestant-centered sensibilities regarding these concepts, though he gestures toward certain Catholic and evangelical construals of the concepts at certain points within the work as well. Therefore his formal analyses abstract from these various confessional positions, while remaining attendant and informed by them.

⁵³ Kelsey, *Uses* 206.

⁵⁴ Kelsey, *Uses* 206.

⁵⁵ Kelsey, *Uses* 206-207.

way that simply assumed that there is some commonly accepted standard or normative concept of “authority” that is “used” across the diversity of Christian construals of these terms.⁵⁶ As presented, this insight is fundamentally consonant with the claims made in the earlier sections of this chapter (these theological matters of “Scripture” and “authority” are not neutral or positivistic), and is very helpful as a caution to all theological inquiry in these directions.

Such a caution is helpful as another way of framing the critical analysis of this term “Scripture” and unmasking the (implicit or explicit) attempts observed above that deploy “Scripture” as a self-evident generality, to reify it, as in the iconic fashion of the Pantokrator or Second Timothy illustrations. The danger in such cases where this unified and generic term “Scripture” is used is that it becomes separated from all concrete objects, history, and anachronisms. The reification is at its most powerful when those uttering the word “Scripture” come to believe they *are* referring to a concrete “thing” that might be understood (or misunderstood) *in itself*, neutrally, without reference to particularities and contexts, and without need of argumentation.

Kelsey’s analysis, on the one hand, patiently and thoroughly demonstrates why the term “Scripture” is, in fact, empty and *in se* meaningless—even for content-driven construals of the category “Scripture” such as Warfield’s—apart from the various contexts in which it is used, framed, and defined. “Scripture,” as Kelsey avers, “is not something objective that different theologians simply use differently. In actual practice it is concretely construed in irreducibly different ways.”⁵⁷ The logic of the function *of the*

⁵⁶ Kelsey, *Uses* 151.

⁵⁷ Kelsey, *Uses* 2.

term “*Scripture*” is that of a variable. In order for the term to be functional in any actual concrete theological argument, however, it must be invested with particular meaning. Hence a *formal* notion of “*Scripture*,” for the purpose of logical analysis, can be inductively separated from concrete meaning (from concrete Scriptures) because it is a general signifier, standing in for a range of possible meanings, one or another of which must be actually chosen in order to contribute toward the resolution of any particular theological problem.

It is Kelsey’s point, on the other hand, that any move beyond the general concept of an authoritative “*Scripture*” to an actual theological use of Scripture-as-such will automatically take the form of just such a concrete connection to actual transformations (as above, “*Scripture*” cannot function like a triangle functions. To invoke the term is to invoke a dispute, not a settled case). Kelsey’s book is designed to lay bare this fact, to show that “*Scripture*” (as a general term) cannot straightforwardly “control” the answers to theological questions precisely for the reason that his formal analysis has shown: the functioning of Scripture, as authoritative for a theologian, is always already caught up in some concrete proposal about how God is at work in “concrete transformations.”⁵⁸

These transformations, we should note, are themselves never neutral. They arise out of our previously formed theological identities, and they touch the core of the theological individuals we *become* through interaction with Scripture.

⁵⁸ “...one can only become a Christian in some concrete fashion.” Kelsey, 164.

The *Misuses* of “Scripture” in Recent Theology

Thus “Scripture”—as theologians use the term—is never a value-free “fact” dis-embedded from an interpretive structure. This is Kelsey’s clear claim. “Scripture” is only Scripture within a dimension of assessment. Where Kelsey’s assertion could be strengthened is that this dimension of assessment *extends into the construction* of the artifact we are calling “Scripture” itself, and not merely its *post facto* interpretation and use. Kelsey declaims that what he has proposed has formal similarity to the “hermeneutical circle”⁵⁹ that encompasses “text” and “interpretation.” As we are beginning to see, however, this notion of the “hermeneutic circle” might not encompass *all* that must be accounted for in the theological discussion of Scripture.⁶⁰

Kelsey shows us that attending to such questions of con-text and pre-text is necessary, but a theologian picking up Kelsey’s book would not *necessarily* be driven to deal with them, as we shall see in a moment. This is due to the divisions Kelsey has placed in his project’s governing organizational structures. In other words, the structure of his project opens the possibility for a misreading that puts too far of a gulf between Parts 1 and 2, allowing for reification, for the assertion of “Scripture” *independent* of the con-text and pre-text decisions to which Kelsey beckons us. By offering this formal term “Scripture” as the variable to be analyzed, I fear it might be tempting for a reader of Kelsey’s project to discard his warnings that this term *must* be concretized to be meaningful and useful, and through such reification mistake the term *itself* as substantive.

⁵⁹ Kelsey, *Uses* 205.

⁶⁰ This claim will be elaborated in the following chapter.

This temptation must be resisted. We do not—as theologians, as congregants, or as academics—encounter “Scripture” as this abstraction toward or from which we make “imaginative construals” as second-order reflection. Instead, we encounter one (or more) of a competing number of concrete artifacts being presented to us as *Scriptures* that are *themselves* the physical artifacts of “imaginative construals” that have affected their construction in a very tangible sense. “Scripture,” in other words, does not have performative or transformative content as a general case. It is physically, interpretationally, and typographically stabilized in a given location at a certain time, and *this* is the actual artifact the theologian encounters.⁶¹

To give a linguistic example: We can speak generally of a term “English” because we conflate a certain dialect or accent of English with the general case “English.” From these dialects generic rules of grammar have been inductively extrapolated that may help in our understanding and analysis of actual dialects. No one, however, actually *speaks* this abstracted, perfected version of “English”—for as soon as it becomes *spoken*, it is yet another dialect. Many arguments in linguistics, of course, are fought over whether this descriptive grammatical version of “English” can function as a *prescription* for the speaking of “proper” dialect.

⁶¹ A quotation from Stanley Fish is apt here: “I don’t mean that everything is ephemeral. I mean that everything is real, and that what is *unreal* are the abstractions (fairness, impartiality, and all the rest) in relation to which the contingent, the rhetorical, and the political get their bad names. If those abstractions were either available to us or directing our actions from a position behind some veil, it would make sense to submit to their imperatives the merely local—that is, merely rhetorical, merely political—imperatives urged on us by our particular beliefs. But if those abstractions are themselves the space of contestation...and will be filled by our beliefs, they cannot be preferred to what is filling them, to the sense we have, at any moment, of what is right and of our obligation to put what is right into practice. That is what is real, and the grand items of theory’s vocabulary are what is unreal, are what is rhetorical in the old bad sense.” Stanley Fish, *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001) 228-229.

The trouble with such prescriptions is that the premise, “There is a perfect version of English,” combined with the assertion, “and I speak it, and you do not,” does not itself encounter universal acceptance. For many ears this sounds like paternalism and “power language,” which excludes certain speakers for reasons *other* than the purely grammatical. As the philosopher Mladen Dolar has put it:

Accent—*ad cantum*—is something which brings the voice into the vicinity of singing, and a heavy accent suddenly makes us aware of the material support of the voice which we tend immediately to discard. It appears as a distraction, or even an obstacle, to the smooth flow of signifiers and the hermeneutics of understanding. Still, the regional accent can easily be dealt with, it can be described and codified. After all, it is a norm that differs from the ruling norm—this is what makes it an accent, and this is what makes it obtrusive, what makes it sing—and it can be described in the same way as the ruling norm. The ruling norm is but an accent that which has been declared a non-accent in a gesture which always carries heavy social and political connotations. The official language is deeply wrought with class division; there is a constant “linguistic class struggle” which underlies its constitution, and we need only remember Shaw’s *Pygmalion* for an egregious demonstration.⁶²

As this quotation indicates, the problem is that—regardless of whether “English” in the pure sense actually “exists”—purified and grammatically perfect “English” does not present itself to us; *speakers* of English do, and speakers speak dialects and with accents. These speakers, moreover, engage in a political struggle when the claim is made that *theirs* is the voice *without* accent, without dialect—that theirs is the *pure* English.

Yet this purified notion of “English” has weight in many discourses, particularly those not disciplined and limited by attention to its formal structure, *as if* it were available without mediation and could be used as a standard *without* acknowledging the messiness of settling questions of interpretation and authority (remember our “true” Scotsman; “true” English functions here in a similar rhetorical manner). We, in like fashion, will

⁶² Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 20.

have a certain physical “dialect” of Scripture—a Bible or set of Bibles—which presents *itself* (and *not* the perfect, purified, “true” form of “Scripture”), but will be similarly elevated and/or critiqued by appeal to this formal abstraction of “Scripture,” as if *this* “Scripture” presented itself as “true,” and accessible without the mediation of physical artifacts.

Kelsey may indeed be correct that this abstracted variable term “Scripture” can be analyzed formally in a “theologically neutral” fashion. It is a mistake, however, for the theologian then to assume that assertions can be made about a concrete instance of Scripture (i.e., a printed “Bible”) in a “theologically neutral” manner—*apart* from the influence of a Magisterium (meaning here a set of *actual* commanding decisions about what [our] “Scripture” is to be) or a reference to a *physical*, locatable object-in-print.

This theological neutrality, maintained *beyond* the formal and extending to actual physical Bibles, could obtain only if it were possible to demonstrate a “Scripture” that exists outside the particularities of all contextual situations and yet could still speak *inside* those particularities with universal authority. In other words, this would be a Scripture that is simultaneously concretely instantiated *within* contextual situations and authoritatively substantiated *outside* those same contexts. Though I remain open to all attempts to do so, I have yet to see any instance of “Scripture” that can actually be demonstrated to exist or function in this manner.

What *can* be demonstrated is that these matters of con-text and pre-text are implicated not only in the *use* of both “Scripture” and Scriptures theologically, but that these matters are implicated in the very *assembly, construction, and printed reproduction* of these physical artifacts we are calling Scripture in the first place.

Kelsey has given us a live option for analyzing the structural relationship between “Scripture” and these questions of Magisterium I want to raise here. Kelsey’s book can be thought of as a helpful prolegomenon to the investigation of these magisterial influences. He has given us a clear means of grasping this formal term, “Scripture.” In following his thought we have, moreover, discovered *applications* of his analysis, put to use by theologians who fail to rigorously maintain Kelsey's formal strictures, which should give us pause. When there is a lack of formal rigor we observe that, through reification, this concept “Scripture” is utilized in a manner that works in the interest of covert magisteria. That is to say, such theologians make assertions about Scripture without argument, assuming givens where there is still a case to be made. Kelsey’s work is important, then, both in its intended applications, as well as these ancillary benefits of allowing us now a means to observe this process of the reification of formal “Scripture.”

Reading Kelsey reading Scripture

In the generation of theologians who have followed Kelsey and drawn upon his work in their own constructive engagements with the concepts of “Scripture” and “Tradition,” there are those who have definitely capitalized on his insights and strengths listed above. The majority, unfortunately, also share Kelsey’s blind spots with regard to the problem of reification. For our considerations of Scripture here, then, we should be attentive to this wider scope of discussion in contemporary theology. In particular, I would like to look briefly at this pair of essays by Bruce D. Marshall and Kathryn Tanner, both mentioned briefly in the last chapter.

Both Marshall and Tanner take Kelsey's work and build it into the background of their discussions on their *Christian* use of the concept of the "plain sense" of Scripture.⁶³ Both theologians employ Kelsey's insights responsibly and reasonably, but both also fall prey to making assumptions in the course of their projects that are reflective of the potential dangers highlighted above.

Beginning with Marshall, let us explore briefly a quotation from his essay "Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths." The essay seeks to apply the socio-linguistic claims of Kelsey's (as well as Lindbeck and Frei's linguistic postliberalism) to the task of understanding the mechanism by which Christians make meaningful truth claims:

Ascribing primacy to the plain sense of Scripture in the order of justification implies, more broadly, that beliefs and practices "internal" to Christianity are the primary criteria of truth. As I will use the term, a belief or practice is "internal" when the Christian community, in a given historical context, regards that belief or practice as (maximally) necessary or (minimally) beneficial in order for it to be faithful to its own identity.⁶⁴

At first glance, this assertion appears quite workable. However, the position risks collapse into tautology. The problem with a definition like this one is that it *assumes* that the location of the boundaries demarcating *the* "Christian community" in a "given historical context" is readily apparent and agreeable among all observers—whether in that context or an alien one.

⁶³ There are at least two approaches to the "plain sense" of Scripture that might be discussed. Marshall and Tanner offer one approach, examined in this section. This is a version of what can properly be called the "Christian" approach to plain sense. Here, "plain sense" indicates their understanding of a common set of readings that pertain across "the" Christian community (a concept that will be problematized somewhat in the following paragraphs). In contrast, we can also consider a "Jewish" approach to plain sense—what is often referred to as the *p'shat* of the text. Further examination of this approach will be made in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

But just what *is* “the” Christian community in a given context? Upon consideration, this is not so easily assumed as a statement like Marshall’s might suggest. Recent ecumenical gestures aside, it is an historical tenet of American Protestantism that a given locale will have multiple, incommensurable claimants to the title of “the” Christian community. How is this question to be *neutrally* answered, then, especially since we can so easily imagine a set of “given contexts,” even here in Nashville, where this claim of identity *would be* precisely the question under vigorous discussion, with different (and perhaps bitterly opposed) communities in the *same* context avowing their “true” Christianity and disavowing the “true” Christianity of other groups in that same context.⁶⁵

This notion of “the Christian community,” then, is difficult to maintain, as it is always precisely the *question* of what is essential—“internal”—and what is not essential to competing understandings of “Christianity” that lays the lines of division between historical communities in the first place. These groups are *in competition* for the title of “the Christian community” in a given location, and thus for such locations his insinuation of a unity is, at best, in need of further analysis.

That is to say (as above, in the “No true Scotsman” fallacy), an assertion is made and treated as unproblematic, when in fact it is masking an active and contentious

⁶⁴ Bruce D. Marshall, “Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths,” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, Bruce D. Marshall, ed. (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 1990), 73.

⁶⁵ For only one example of the sorts of permutations possible, imagine the conversation that occurs between a pair of well-meaning Mormon missionaries when they knock on the door of a local Church of Christ household. Both groups maintain, as a bedrock of their theological self-understanding, that theirs is the *exclusive* vessel of “true” Christianity, maintained against the vagaries of time and the corrupting “traditions of men.” Between these two groups, there is no neutral invocation of this term “the Christian community,” despite Marshall’s best intentions.

conflict of *magisterial* positions (and here we find applicable the set of questions that guided our discussion in the first chapter: *what is allowed? what is required? and who is qualified [and upon what grounds] to make such judgments?* These are precisely the questions that demand answer if we are going to speak of *the* “Christian community” in a given historical context”).

While Marshall’s work is by no means to be dismissed by the above criticism, we should be chastened by these insights, aware that even the best and most conscientious theologians can make such generalizations and become ensnared in such epistemic equivocations. Hence, in like manner, while we find a finer-grained approach to these issues in the work of Kathryn Tanner, we also observe some of these same difficulties.

Tanner’s essay is a comprehensive formal treatment of the “plain sense” of Scripture within (chiefly Protestant) Christian communities. In doing so, she identifies herself strongly with the “contextualist” school of theological hermeneutics following in the wake of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. Her intention in the essay is “to show how appeals to a plain sense of scripture work to distinguish [Christian] communities—to shape or structure a distinctive convention of Christian practice.”⁶⁶ Thus, in the following quotation, Tanner draws our attention to the issues that *intertwine* Scripture and community identity. These issues, of course, have preoccupied this and the previous chapter, and so her analysis is of particular importance to us in this regard. Here, acknowledging Kelsey, she gives us her functionalist understanding of the definition of Christian Scripture:

⁶⁶ Kathryn E. Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, Garrett Green, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 60.

According to Kelsey, as I read him, to say that a text is a part of either scripture or a sacred canon is not to ascribe a property to the text: in neither case is it to make an informative remark about the character of the text itself. It is rather to say something about the way the text functions in the religious community; it is to say something about the way the text is used, about what is *done with* the text. To call a text scripture is to say, in a Christian context, that the text is to be used (in some fashion or other) to shape, nurture, and reform the continuing self identity of the church.⁶⁷

What is most useful in this quotation is the attentive *particularity* ascribed to Scripture. A given Bible is not “Scripture” due to some positive quality attributable internally to the term itself, but rather (following Kelsey), a given set of writings is considered “Scripture” (and therefore a true “Bible”) because it passes muster with the continuing and self-reforming identity of a religious community concretely existing in a context with a history. Such grounds for identifying this object as a “true” “Bible” are what I am here terming “magisterial” grounds.

What Tanner does not do in the essay, however, is offer explicit analysis, mention, or even acknowledgment of “the Magisterium” or magisteria in these discussions of how Scripture is used and interpreted by communities. Instead, in her understanding, the regulative force is attributed to the “plain sense” itself, which now acts as a form of “unseen hand,” guiding the community through “hegemonic influence,” as in the following quotation:

Nothing we have said suggests that the Christian tradition is equally self-critical about established interpretive practices that have sedimented into the form of the plain sense. Moreover, nothing seems to prevent the plain sense of scriptural texts from exercising a repressive, hegemonic influence over the ongoing life of Christian communities, contemporary appeals to scripture being constricted through that influence into narrow channels of previous use.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” 62.

⁶⁸ Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” 72.

In other words, for Tanner, the habits of reading exert force that shapes and constricts future habits of reading. This is not a controversial claim.⁶⁹ What is notable, however, is that there is a field of discourse available to name and describe such influences, which Tanner explicitly eschews. “Plain sense” thus hovers in her discussion as almost a natural law, operating disinterestedly and anonymously. But Christian communities, as we have observed above, are not neutrally constituted. What is *not* being acknowledged or analyzed here is the third realm—the Magisterium—that affects *both* Scripture and Tradition.

As before, this criticism highlights, rather than undermines, the many valuable aspects of Tanner’s work. What is needed is a method of formal analysis of Scripture that builds on the groundwork laid by theologians such as Kelsey, Marshall, and Tanner. Such a method, however, will do us no good if it merely recapitulates the “blind spots” of these analyses as it builds on their strengths. Instead, the investigation will function best if it can explicitly incorporate discussion of both 1) the physical particularity of Bibles and 2) the insight of the previous chapter that magisterial influences exert effect even

⁶⁹ That is to say, few would contend that—to some extent—the traditions of reading shape the reception of a given Scripture. This is true even when the development of the “plain sense” *pulls away* from what might be called the “literal” reading to someone *outside* the reading tradition. In fact, we can find a similar claim from the “Jewish” approach to plain sense in the work of David Weiss Halivni: “I ought to remark that throughout I am using the word *literal* as a synonym for *peshat* (plain meaning). It is not intended to exclude metaphors or allegories, etc. from being *peshat*. Sometimes, in fact, a metaphorical or allegorical interpretation is the plain meaning, the *peshat*, borne out by the text. Rather, the terms *literal* and *peshat* exclude an interpretation which is not interpretation which is not implied by the extant literature, an interpretation which is extraneous to the text, which is being read into it from the outside. An interesting example is the putting on of phylacteries... They interpreted the verses “literally,” not metaphorically. However, the plain meaning, the *peshat*, supports the contention that the verses, particularly the verse in Exodus, ought to be understood metaphorically. Here the rabbis deviated from the *peshat* by being literal... It is characteristic of Midrash to posit untenable expositions and reject them. In connection with the putting on of the phylacteries, the possibility of a metaphorical interpretation was not even offered as an exposition, so convinced were the rabbis of the literal meaning of these verses.” David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 19.

when they are not directly visible, and indeed exert effect on the production and reproduction of these very Bibles.

A proposal for this style of investigation is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE ART AND ENTERPRISE OF (RE)PRODUCING BIBLES¹

Every literary theoretician these days needs a governing metaphor about texts: text as seduction, text as fabric, text as system. I suppose that my metaphor would have to be text as unassembled swing set. It's a concrete thing that, when completed, offers opportunities (more or less restricted depending on the particular swing set involved) for free play, but you have to assemble it first. It comes with rudimentary directions, but you have to know what directions *are*, as well as how to perform basic tasks. It comes with its own materials, but you must have certain tools of your own at hand. Most important, the instructions are virtually meaningless unless you know, beforehand, what sort of object you are aiming at.²

It is too much to ask that the prefaces be read?³

Of the many comments that might be made about my *Golfer's Bible*, one fact is so ubiquitous, so ready-to-hand, that it often goes without being mentioned (or even considered) at all. This is the fact that, however else it might be construed, *The Golfer's Bible* is a printed and marketed object. In other words, it is a *book*.

This fact has implications that can be formally generalized, even while keeping our eye on this specific book. We can examine this fact in great detail. What is notable and interesting is not just that the Bibles we read have been vetted and crafted for

¹ The phrase "art and enterprise" refers to Johannes Gutenberg's pamphlet *Kunst und Aventura*, wherein he is purported to have revealed, to his disgruntled investors, the "secret" of moveable-type printing.

² Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1987), 36-37.

³ George Arthur Buttrick, "How to Use the Interpreter's Bible," reprinted from Volume I of *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951), 2.

markets, but that we, as audiences for these Bibles, *pay so little attention* to this vetting and crafting. Walking through our neighborhood "big box" bookstore, or browsing online, the shaping of these various Bibles is practically invisible to many of us. At the very least, we often seem not to notice. For all intents and purposes, one Bible is as much the "word of God" as another. To the extent that the different versions on the shelves *aren't* interchangeable, this is attributable more to our individual *tastes* than to the perception of differences among their spiritual content.

Or is it? In America, demographic identities are not simply matters of race, gender, age and occupation. Over the past several decades, these identities have come increasingly to include one's *ecclesiastical* location: "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" is a germane question, certainly—but now, among these identities we additionally wonder, *Evangelical* or *Liberal*? Are you a literal, fundamentalist reader or a historical-critical reader? The spectrum of possibilities is certainly not limited to these, but such labels have become some of the well-known anchors, landmarks, if you will, for religious self-understanding in America.

Is it any surprise, then, that the Bibles on our bookshelves reflect a similar spectrum? There is not, for example, one standard "teen Bible," but several, each designed to appeal to its own particular "flavor" of teen. It is not even enough to say that there is one "Liberal" and one "Evangelical" version battling it out in the market. Instead, there are varieties of each, shading nuances of evangelicalism and liberalism against the other versions. Furthermore, what occurs in these teen Bibles occurs in all the other types of Bibles on the market—from men's Bibles to study Bibles to "recovery"

Bibles, and every stop in between. Each possibility has its ever-fragmenting facets, multiplying identities of intended readers into ever-differentiated affinities.

On the way to developing these point, let us take a moment and revisit the set of questions raised by Michael McClymond that I highlighted in the first chapter: *What role do annotations perform in Bibles? What are their hermeneutical and theological functions? What arguments favor the inclusion or exclusion of annotations from Bibles? And why have biblical annotations been increasingly in vogue during the last generation or so?* We can answer these sorts of questions only by turning away from the notion of “Scripture” as the reified, iconic (non)presence, to the proposal of a theological analysis of Scripture as an explicitly *printed artifact*. In other words, following McClymond (who has done well to point out these very *book-centered* apparatuses that intrude upon our reading experience), we should ask, *how does a Bible function as a book?*

What does it mean for the theologian that the Bible is a *textual object*? What, indeed, does the term “text” itself mean in such a question?

In the very act of being-available-to-read, the “Book of Books” *presents* itself (we might pause to ask, does *it* present *itself*?) in a manner of fashions. Thus the purpose of this chapter will be to establish a method for analyzing the Bible as book, and demonstrate the essentiality of such a predecessor analysis for the success of any future theological hermeneutic.

The Textuality of the Printed Artifact

The trajectory of the present inquiry

In his 1965 Presidential Address to the Society of Biblical Literature meeting held here at Vanderbilt, Kenneth W. Clark of Duke University addressed “The Theological Relevance of Textual Variation in Current Criticism of the Greek New Testament.” This document is well worth noting, historically poised as it is between 1) the then-recent controversies surrounding the publications of the *Revised Version*, *Revised Standard Version*, and the *Revised Standard Version-Catholic Edition* of the Bible, on the one hand, and 2) the then-yet-to-be ignited blaze of literary-critical methodologies arising in the wake of the inauguration of American post-structuralism (thanks to, among other factors, Jacques Derrida’s “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”) on the other.⁴

In his attention to the former (1), Clark anticipates the latter (2) in significant ways, raising *in nuce* certain tensions, which will be examined in detail in this chapter. Clark begins by stating the problem in terms that cross the normally accepted divides of academic religious disciplines:

We are concerned [with the possibility that] variation in a text, whether in the Greek original or in translation, involves a difference in interpretation which is important to the church and to the believer. In the light of such a principle, textual criticism would be allied with exegesis and theology and even the practical tasks in pastoral care.⁵

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1974) 278-294.

⁵ Kenneth W. Clark, “The Theological Relevance of Textual Variation in Current Criticism of the Greek New Testament.” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol 85, No. 1 (Mar., 1966) 1.

There may be two ways of reading this assertion. The first is somewhat banal: variations in texts will require different interpretations. While this fact is important to note, it will not be disputed in most cases.

However, I would like to offer a second possible reading of this passage: *variation in the physical corpus of a text—in other words, the extant, readable object among other readable objects—is, and can be understood as, a reflection of a prior interpretive difference.* In other words, it is not simply the case that there are extant variants of a text, which we are then tasked to treat differently in our subsequent interpretations; this “difference of interpretation” can itself be seen as *constitutive* of the existence of the readable object in its variations. This second possible reading, and its consequences, will form the trajectory of inquiry for the present chapter.

Theologian, exegete and literary critic

Clark goes on in his address to call explicitly for a “threefold alliance” of the text critic, the exegete, and the theologian—though the concern in his address is particularly on the expansion of the *exegetical* disciplines into greater considerations of theological questions.⁶ This concern was prescient. There have been varied attempts, in the years following his statement, to analyze these potential alliances between the theologian, the exegete and the literary critic. There have been so many attempts, in fact, that there now can be no doubt that Clark touched a pulse-point for contemporary *theological* discourse, as well as for the exegetical discourses to which he was explicitly speaking. Clark’s

⁶ Clark, “Theological Relevance,” 16.

address is prescient, and raises issues that have yet to be fully and adequately addressed methodologically by the practitioners of late-twentieth-century North American theology.

Recall Hans Frei's 1967 claim, mentioned in Chapter 1, that "*Our understanding of a text is often far greater than our understanding of how we can understand it.*"⁷ Setting aside for the moment the discussion of the truth of such an assertion, Frei's claim stands as an accurate description of the state of much American theology since the time of its utterance. In other words, theologians by and large have continued to undertake theological projects with greater and greater distance, not only from the biblical texts themselves, but from the very attempt to *understand* the textuality of the Bible—what it would mean, in other words, to consider the implications that the "Bible" is a marketed, readable object-among-others.

There are, of course, some noteworthy exceptions to the above statement. There has been some taking up of what could be called "vulgar" deconstruction⁸ (along with the more aesthetic styles of post-structuralist writing)—Mark C. Taylor and Stephen D. Moore come to mind—in recent theology. This has fomented a revolution of sorts in methods for analyzing and comprehending texts—through close readings, innovative critical approaches, and deep analyses of literary context and structure. These methods have become part of the vocabulary of some theologians, though admittedly they have found greater currency in the areas of Biblical Studies of the Old and New Testaments

⁷ Hans W. Frei, "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," *Theology and Narrative* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) 41, my emphasis.

⁸ By "vulgar" deconstruction, I mean here the tendency of some practitioners of post-Derridean and post-DeManian "deconstructions" to treat the process as a formulaic string of neologisms and wordplays, without the close reading and historical/philosophical rigor at work in, for example, Derrida's reading of Austin and Searle in *Limited Inc.*

(due in great part, no doubt, to the more “textual” nature of these disciplines). The wider discipline of theology, however, can and should employ these critical tools. It is important that theologians use such methods to return to Frei’s distinction (understanding vs. understanding how we understand) and push past the limitation to which this distinction points.

Let us begin to understand, and develop methodologies to explicate, *how* we understand texts, not as a faddish matter of literary affectation, or a supplement to our “true” task in theological reflection, but rather as the best way forward in the current theological milieu: an environment of discourse that can no longer rest on the sweeping claims of “narrative” alone.

The value of such an undertaking is evident in the context of reification and covert influence outlined in the previous two chapters, as these books we call Bibles have been, to a great extent, the vehicles through which these magisterial effects are communicated to the mass Christian audience in North America. Understanding what goes into the creation and distribution of these books will help us render these covert influences more overt.

Recompassing the Hermeneutic Circle

We must turn from current and prevalent antitheses, such as the polarities of “narrative” and “historical-critical” approaches, to a range of theological considerations that can begin to consider *both* of these elements, and others, as ranges within a wider field of understanding. In the previous chapter the comment was made that the notion of the “hermeneutic circle” might not encompass *all* that must be accounted for in the

theological discussion of Scripture. Or rather, it could be said that the attendant *parts* of the hermeneutic circle, as heretofore defined, are not sufficiently adequate to account for all the factors that must go into a proper theological discussion of Scripture. Thus, the hermeneutic circle needs rehabilitation in terms of its *scope*. Moreover, the concept of the hermeneutic circle can be observed to need rehabilitation at the *formal* level, as well. We will treat these two matters, scope and formal structure, in reverse order.

As a *formal* structure, the concept of the “hermeneutic circle” has had two major, and overlapping, articulations. Not only are these articulations themselves somewhat contradictory, but different versions of the *same* articulation will have, as we shall see, conflicting uses of the same or similar terms.

The first articulation finds its basis in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher,⁹ and maintains that, to understand the *whole* of a “text” (with the implication *here* that the “text” is a largely static object that exists *in such a way* that it can be interpreted¹⁰), the discrete *parts* of the “text” must be understood; conversely, an understanding of the *parts* is dependent upon an understanding of the *whole*.¹¹ Hence a “circle” of interdependence forms between these two points of *the whole* and *the parts* (see Figure 2). In this articulation, though the printed object is predominantly static, the understanding of the “text” continues to develop as its interpretation develops. Hence the “text” is

⁹ This is not only observable in Friedrich Schleiermacher but also later, in modernist critics such as Cleanth Brooks (these are but two examples of a very large list)

¹⁰ As will be elaborated below, this word “text” is confusingly over-used and cross-defined among various interpretive strategies. I ask for the reader’s patience. I will attempt to use the term as rigorously as possible once these preliminary remarks have been made.

¹¹ Hence Friedrich Hölderlin’s famous dictum, “There is only one quarrel in the world: which is more important, the whole or the individual part?” Cited in Arthur Krystal, “Too True: The Art of the Aphorism,” *Harper’s Magazine*, January 2008, 88.

paradoxically both static and dynamic,¹² arising from the interplay of understandings, which are constantly developing, between whole and parts. The “text,” in this articulation, is understood as *unitary*, but also evolving, over time.

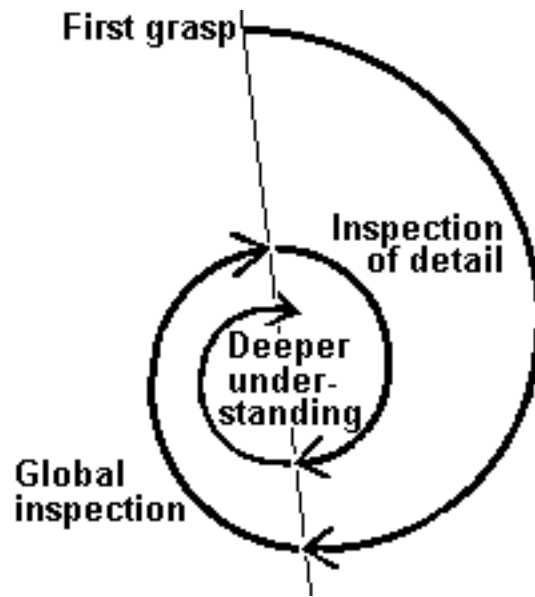


Figure 2: Hermeneutic circle (as spiral)¹³

The second articulation¹⁴ sees a similar interdependence between a written “work” (with the implication that the “work” here is a largely static object that exists in

¹² For a clear articulation of this sort of “static/dynamic” model, please consult Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978), in particular the fifth chapter, “Grasping a Text,” 107 - 134. For a succinct set of critiques of Iser’s project, see Stanley Fish, “How to Do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech-Act Theory and Literary Criticism,” in *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1980), 197-245, particularly 221-223, and “Why No One’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,” in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 68-86.

¹³ <http://www.uiah.fi/projects/metodi/eherm.gif>

such a way as it can be interpreted) and a large-unto-never-ending supply of “texts” which are generated by a reader’s interaction with this “work.”¹⁵ Hence, following an argument put forth by Peter J. Rabinowitz, the *single* “work”—in his example, Agatha Christie’s *Mystery of the Blue Train*—can give rise to *at least* two distinct, internally coherent and *irreconcilable* “texts,” depending upon whether the reader approaches the “work” as an example of the genre of “detective story” versus that of “romance novel.”¹⁶

Unlike the previous articulation, however, the mechanism of interpretation depends on the positing of a *static* entity (in Roland Barthes, this is the “work,” in others, it is often called the “text”) against which the hermeneutic construct (here, for Barthes, the “text,” and others will call it the “tradition” or “interpretation”) operates *dynamically*. It is my intention to take up argument with this dyadic understanding of the hermeneutic circle, and particularly with this model of static/dynamic relation. In what follows, a triad of elements, all in dynamic relations that may in varying fashions *appear* stable at given moments, will be suggested as a model for better understanding the hermeneutic field of contemporary printed Bibles.

Within the scope of this argument, the proposed *general* field where such understanding might take place will be termed “Textuality,”¹⁷ a term that (in this thesis)

¹⁴ This articulation is observable in structuralist and post-structuralist critics such as Roland Barthes, Peter J. Rabinowitz and Jacques Derrida (again, this list is not meant to be exhaustive)

¹⁵ A clear example of this second model can be seen, as has been mentioned in previous chapters, in Kathryn E. Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” in Garrett Greene, ed. *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 59 - 78.

¹⁶ Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 40-42.

¹⁷ There is a wide body of scholarship regarding the study (and disputation) of *Textualism* (as well as the so-called “Textualist position”), and the present use of “Textuality” is made in awareness of this scholarship. It is not my intention, however, to invoke “Textuality” here as an example of *Textualism* as it is understood in these debates (see next note). For elaboration of the rich discussion regarding *Textualism*,

will remain somewhat loosely-defined,¹⁸ except to gesture to it as the term that holds the place and establishes the space where our definitions—of the metrics and analyses mentioned below—might take place. The following sections will attempt to secure the key terms within this proposed metric field of “Textuality,” moving from general to more discrete areas of discussion. The argument will put forth “Work,” “Text” and “Book” as the three major axes for consideration within the question of Textuality, and suggest that, for each, a field of “stabilities” can be generated as a metric for understanding and comparison.

Analysis of Textuality: The matrices of stability along three axes

Let us deploy, into the space which has often been confusingly or contradictorily occupied by the term “text,” this alternative term of “Textuality,” which will hold open for us the moment through which we can differentiate between “text” and “Text,” and place this concept of “Text” among two other elements which must be considered, “Work” and “Book.”

see for example Floyd Merrell, *Sign, Textuality, World (Advances in Semiotics)*, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992), 141; Richard Rorty, “Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism,” in *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972 - 1980)*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1982), 139-159; Ralph A. Rossum, “The Textualist Jurisprudence of Justice Scalia,” online at <http://www.claremontmckenna.edu/salvatori/publications/RARScalia.asp>; and Stanley Fish, “There is No Textualist Position,” *San Diego Law Review*, Spring 2005, 629-650.

¹⁸ This is not meant as obscurantism, but rather its very opposite. The difficulty, which arises in present discourse, is that such terms as “text” and “textuality” are used so interchangeably and variably. Rather than account for the voluminous—and contradictory—literature, which deploys these terms, the hope here is to borrow them long enough that they might stay still (at least for a moment) so a fruitful analysis might be made. This is in the same spirit as the move we observed in Kelsey in the preceding chapter. “Textuality” will become for us something of a *variable*, allowing us to fill its space with specific contents. The possible advantage of this term over the term “Scripture” is that it is harder to *confuse* this variable with a concrete object.

I wish to taxonomically differentiate these three axes, “Work,” “Text” and “Book,” while recognizing that they do not, in fact, remain distinct or discrete from each other.¹⁹ What is being offered in this chapter is but one of several possibilities contemporary theologians might employ to develop a *metric* for such an “understanding of how we understand.”

“Metric” here is intended to indicate a means of analysis that is 1) explicitly demonstrable, and 2) allows for measurement or—at the very least—comparison among elements being considered, along one or more ranges. To measure the event of Textuality in its complexity suggests the entry-point of the present analysis to be the question of stability, as it offers us a very fecund set of ranges to explore. “Stability,” of course, has long been a catchword among text-critics and exegetes, though it is often deployed in a simplified (and perhaps naïve) manner (where the very questions of what “stability” and “text” actually mean are often perpetually deferred).

The Matter of “Stability” considered in its General Case

To give but one example here of the way “stability” is used in theologically-oriented discussions, Clark in his address reviews a cursory but representative sampling of the various (and voluminous) known manuscript variants of the New Testament, and then raises the issue of “stability of the text” (which is the very question this chapter seeks to explicate in more fullness) as a matter of central concern:

¹⁹ Such analytical differentiations should be seen as having the same logical structure as the differentiation between the wave and particle “properties” of a photon: reflective of differing metrics more than differing natures. The differentiations attenuate our experience (for the moment) of an event that encompasses, strangely and perhaps contradictorily, many disparate metrics at once.

We may begin to ask if there really was a stable text at the beginning. We talk of recovering the original text, and of course every document had such a text. But the earliest witnesses to N[ew] T[estament] text even from the first century already show such variety and freedom that we may well wonder if the text remained stable long enough to hold a priority. Great progress has been achieved in recovering an early form of text, but it may be doubted that there is evidence of one original text to be recovered.²⁰

Clark's quotation here both 1) points to the assumption of many scholars of the necessity and profitability of a unitary, "stable" text and 2) demonstrates that this assumption, at the time of his address, was beginning to be called into serious question by a significant number of Biblical scholars in the academy. (Note Clark's tone here, giving as it does the tacit assertion that, even if such a stable text is not available to scholarship, it would be a *preferable* state of affairs if it were.)

Reconsideration and skepticism of this assumption, and even the very possibility of the existence of an "original, stable text" has, to a great degree, replaced the former assurances. Such skepticism has become status quo in academic Biblical exegesis since Clark's assertion.²¹ The desire for a proto-autograph, which was the driving force behind the development of "lower criticism" in the 19th and 20th centuries,²² fell into great

²⁰ Clark, "Theological Relevance," 16.

²¹ There remains, of course, in both academic and popular exegetical practice a reserve that resists the reconsideration of this assumption, articulated variously in "verbal" or "plenary inspiration" models of autographic Biblical writings. Given limited space and the need to move forward, certain generalizations will need to be made on this front, with full awareness and acknowledgement that the field of Biblical exegesis is incredibly nuanced in terms of methodological assumptions. For more discussion of the development of these critical approaches to the Scriptures, see for example Emmanuel Tov, *Text Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001); Martin Jay Mulder, ed. and Harry Sysling, exec. ed., *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994); and Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

²² Textual criticism. James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics: A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods and Expressions* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 2005) 78.

debate as the Millennium drew to a close. It remains for theologians, however, to catch up with these debates: to grasp—and come to terms with—the precise and varied ways in which the Bible *can* be seen as a stable (and moreover as an *unstable*) artifact. In other words, this question of “stability” is, perhaps, too-easily assumed and too-infrequently interrogated in theology.

By the time the Bible comes to the position where it can be widely read (a state that itself presupposes certain levels of general literacy, sophistication with regard to reproduction and distribution, in addition to the attendant economic factors which would influence and allow such conditions in the first place), the general expectation is that matters such as structure, canon, translation, and narrative have already, to a great extent, stabilized (by which here we might mean “agreed-upon”) and solidified. It is useful to point out that such expectations are rarely made explicit because they are so much a part of the reading experience for both layperson and academic theologian alike. The sense of theology and hermeneutics as “second order” discourse arises from these commonly held notions.

In the case of many contemporary theologians, the implied assumption demonstrable in their methodology is that the Bible is *given*, extant and complete, and *then* it is read and interpreted.²³ It may be read in a variety of ways, and those ways of reading reflect to a great extent the reader’s location and circumstances, but the Bible itself is seen as having always already been *constructed* and stabilized, prior to the reading.

²³ For explicit examples of these assumptions at work, please see the following chapter.

A previously constructed Bible is, of course, one that can stand *independent* of reading during the process of reading, unaffected in its essence or basic structure by the reading, regardless of what “interpretations” might be laid *upon* it during the “act of reading.” The common notion, then, of the Bible *for contemporary theology* is that it is an artifact²⁴ that transcends and precedes the hermeneutic moment. Scripture as a “pure text” thus becomes the critical norm for all interpretations;²⁵ and moreover in Protestantism it also forms the critical vantage point for matters of Ecclesiology. From the mid-nineteenth century, such notions have been coupled with text-critical methods, which seek to unearth the “true meanings” enshrined in the purified text. We do not tell a text what it says, so goes the notion, but rather only seek to hear its voice more and more clearly. As Rudolf Bultmann puts it,

our exegesis must be without presuppositions with regard to the results of our exegesis. We cannot know in advance what the text will say; on the contrary, we must learn from it. An exegesis which, for example, makes the presupposition that its results must agree with some dogmatic statement is not a real and fair exegesis...²⁶

²⁴ As will become apparent shortly, to simply rely on the word “text” is to invite a certain level of confusion, as different theorists use this term so variously and flexibly. For this reason, the current analysis will delimit the notion of text as a portion of a wider field of investigation for which the term “artifact” is offered. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines ‘artifact’ as “An object produced or shaped by human craft, especially a tool, weapon, or ornament of archaeological or historical interest” as well as “An inaccurate observation, effect, or result, especially one resulting from the technology used in scientific investigation or from experimental error.” My use of this term is very intentional and seeks to encompass both senses of the word reflected in these definitions. The word ‘artifact’ in this analysis points to the physical and mental objects which are, in their various ways, *constructed, inherited, and mis-seen*. artifact. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/artifact> (accessed: January 20, 2007). For further consideration of print-object as artifact, see Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 42.

²⁵ For one contemporary example of this point, see Daniel Migliore’s discussion of Scripture in his *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991) 40-55. Throughout his analysis, the notion of “Scripture” is presented as a unitary, already-present entity that, while “extraordinarily rich and diverse” (47) is nonetheless a theological *given*, prior to any debate. It should be noted that Migliore’s book is often used as a text in introductory theology classes, and thus may be considered representative of a current position in theological education.

²⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner’s 1958) 49.

Despite Bultmann's contention, however, this notion of interpretation and hermeneutics as merely "second order" discourse has, in current theology, reached a critical impasse. The assumption that the task of hermeneutics is simply letting the (received) texts "speak for themselves" must be critically examined and reconsidered.

The phrase "stability of the text"

One means for such an examination can be found in the issue Clark points to with regard to the question of "stability of the text." From this, two matters follow that demand articulation: first, the question of what, precisely, is meant when the word "text" is deployed in discourse (and how this term, "text," might in fact figure into a wider field of possible analysis); second, what does "stability" mean in such a context? Both the fields of religious studies, and the wider field of literary criticism, offer a variety of possible answers to these questions. I will attempt to place and disencumber this term "text" in a moment, but first a few words need to be said about this matter of "stability" within the context of this analysis.

First, in the following sections, the term "stability" is *not* being applied with a valuation (positive or otherwise) attached. Rather, the term is being used to indicate a range of possibilities—from static to flux—that can be observed in a series of combinations. That is, when we speak of an artifact such as "the Bible," we are in fact invoking a *series* of simultaneous stabilities and instabilities, *none* of which (in the present analysis) are intended to be read positively or pejoratively.²⁷ Rather, these

²⁷ This point must be clear, due to the numerous ways in which the exegetical (and, by extension, theological) disciplines tacitly and explicitly prize "stability," in the various ways this term is construed.

metrics of stability and instability are meant to allow us to compare a variety of written artifacts (the Bible, the Talmud, etc.) such that we might examine very closely what might be indicated when a commentator such as Clark makes reference to a “stable text” *as if* such a statement could be made simply about an artifact such as the New Testament (and with the tacit assertion that it might be preferable if such a stable text could, impossibly, be located).

Second, this tacit commitment to stability as a simple and positive event is itself an inheritance that has interesting historical roots. Clark, for example, cites a history of nearly 300 years of religious scholars who attempt to come to grips with the ever-growing body of textual variants by asserting (with weaker and weaker confidence) that “...there is not one [variant] affecting the substance of Christian dogma.”²⁸ Such thinkers would have difficulty, perhaps, imagining *any* case in which any demonstrable instability of the Bible could be positive. On the other extreme, some contemporary theologians can be observed using the term very loosely, speaking about the *instability* of “the Biblical text” and celebrating it.²⁹ In fact, certain poststructuralist lines of interpretation go so far as to explicitly *resist* the possibility of stability as a fiction of a “Western” mindset.

It should therefore be reiterated that the present analysis is *not* trying to decide between these. I am rather reporting (and importing) the way theologians and other

The *non*-evaluative nature of stability in this analysis is in sharp contrast with the fashion by which this term is often deployed.

²⁸ Leo Vagany, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 12, quoted in Clark, “Theological Relevance,” 3.

²⁹ See, for example, Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1987).

religious scholars already speak, while attempting scrupulously to hold their attendant *sub rosa* valuations in reserve. In the analysis that follows, then, “stability” is the metric, not the goal. It is a means of describing a *demonstrable* state, not a preferred one.

The Axes of Textuality

Barthes on “Work” and “Text” and Genette on “Book”

The following sections will attempt to articulate these three moments, which, it should be noted, are not properly or actually to be differentiated. The terms most properly are understood as a skein or web where influences and iterations vibrate, replicate, and negotiate. Moreover, each axis is itself analyzed as a series of sub-categories, each with its own range of stability, forming a matrix of stabilities that each interactively influence each other and the whole of what we might call the “textual stability” of “the” Bible. Regrettably, the analysis that follows will suffer from the linearity associated with all writing: namely, elements that are here presented in chronological order are more properly understood as interdependent, and at least cyclical, if not simultaneous, in their manifestation. In other words, despite the fact that the elements are presented diachronically, the hope is that they will be understood synchronically, without the attendant hierarchies associated with being cited “first” rather than “second,” and so on. I will borrow from the work of literary critics Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette, who each offer theoretical tools for understanding the workings of printed books that will be, in the present analysis, woven together. Such a synthetic approach will, I believe, capitalize upon the strengths of their respective projects even as

we build upon them into new dimensions of analysis. The resulting dynamic triad of Work, Text and Book in their unity will thus be presented as one possible mechanism for the purpose of analyzing printed Bibles. For this to make proper sense, however, it is necessary first to examine each aspect in isolation.

1a. The “Work” as a general case

Within this analysis, a “Work” is what we (as theologians and other readers) likely believe we are referencing or referring to when we use phrases like “ancient manuscripts” or “autographs”: a relatively-fixed text³⁰ that comes to us—often from antiquity—as a written (physical and/or more often *conceptual*) object. As an object, the Work is that which appears most visibly as an “artifact.” It anchors our notions of the Bible as something historical and old. For Roland Barthes, the Work is a conceptual placeholder, the object to which our desires for interpretations attach. In his description (which will be modified somewhat in the present analysis), Barthes characterizes the Work as that which “occupies a portion of the spaces of books (for example, in a library).”³¹

Because the work is *most visibly* an artifact, the Work is often assumed to be the “source” or “origin” of the interpretation that accompanies or “follows” it (there is, of course, some difficulty entailed in all such claims,³² which will be examined in the discussion of Text below). That is to say, it is assumed, as in our examination of the

³⁰ n.b. the contrast of use of this term “text” with the term Text.

³¹ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 57.

³² There is an abundance of literature now available that interrogates this notion of “origin,” from Derrida and his literary heirs.

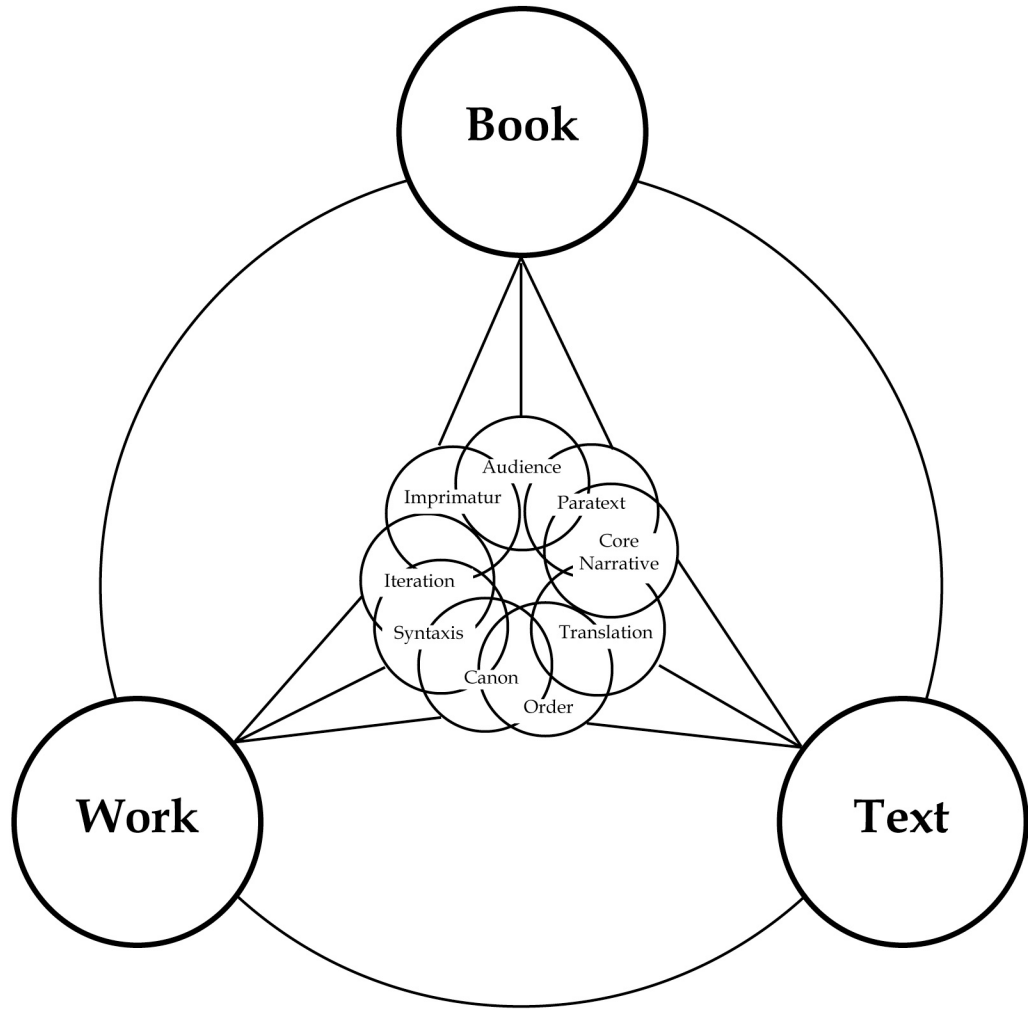


Figure 3: The axes of Work, Text and Book

“hermeneutic circle” above, that the Work *precedes* the acts of reading and discussion, which are grouped by the name “interpretation.” Thus, when “Scripture” is cited as a unitary, received source from antiquity (as it so often is by theologians and others, as we observed in the previous chapter) it is, following Barthes, occupying the space of the Work within the present analysis. In oversimplified terms, the Work is seen as the “dead letter,” which is so often opposed to the “living word” of interpretation.

“Work,” then, as a *general* category, considered formally in this analysis, will indicate these *certain* types of artifacts. To wit: the term “Work” will here indicate an (often, though not *necessarily*) antiquarian object, which undergoes acts of reading and interpretation primarily by biblical scholars. The Work is either to be *received in toto* through a mythico-historical lineage (e.g., “Moses wrote the Pentateuch”), or is (re)constructed by scholars from fragments, reassembled like a puzzle with perhaps one, or a limited, set of proper solutions. The Work, as was noted before, is the artifact that (as a result of such negotiations with what is assumed to be *ancient history*) most appears to us *to be* an artifact.

It should be noted that Roland Barthes, in his model of interpretation, draws the contrast between the *physical object* and its *interpretation* somewhat too strongly. If we adopt his model uncritically, we can fall prey to this assumption that the Work is in some manner a *given fact* rather than an *artifact*. Thus the present analysis will point repeatedly to the *constructed* nature of the Work—a nature that manifests both in antiquity *and* in the present day. We do not receive the Work as a static object to then be studied, but rather as a tempora(ri)lly stabilized dynamic matrix. Barthes himself does not take his analysis of the Work to this rigorous level, and hence he falls short of this

understanding the Work as an of assembly of stabilities. Thus the analysis that will be presented here will use this initial insight of Barthes as a starting point, but will push the analysis more fully and rigorously into this examination of stabilizations. It will help us to take this step if we turn now from the formal definition of “Work,” and instead examine the concrete modality of the Work in a tangible example.

1b. The “Work” as the physical artifact

Thus, one of us would throw open one of the volumes of the Talmud, say the tractate Berakhot, at page 10; a pin would be placed on a word, let us say, the fourth word in line eight; the [Rabbi] would then be asked what word is in the same spot on page thirty eight or page fifty on any other page; the pin would be pressed through the volume until it reached page thirty eight or page fifty or any other page designated; the memory sharp would then mention the word and it was found invariably correct.³³

There are numerous accounts, many apocryphal and some better documented, of the phenomenon described in George Stratton’s reporting, summarized in the quotation above, of the feats of Talmudic memorization exhibited by some rabbis. The so-called “pin test” can be used as a tangible means of exemplifying the initial level of stability to be considered here—stability of structure, which is the principal characteristic of what we are terming the Work.

The Talmud *as a Work* (that is, as a sort of “ur-document,” an assembly of sources unified for presentation as a type of “originary” document) is, in its untranslated form, highly congruent with reproductions in the form of physical instantiations (what we will later highlight in the discussion of “the Book”). This congruity is helpful for our discussion as it allows a very tangible, visible and sizable sample of artifacts. Thus, the

pin test, which is performed on a reproduction of the Work of the Talmud, is instructive for us about many aspects of the Talmud *as a Work* itself. We will now turn to these aspects and examine them.

In order for the feat of memory involved in the pin test to be possible, several factors must be in place with the received Talmudic text (that is, with the Talmud *as a Work*):

1) It must have a strong (or, in this case, a near absolute) *canonical* consistency; in other words, there must be consistency in the sources and wording of the text itself as an assembled document.

2) Moreover, it must have a *reprographic* (or one might say *iterative*) consistency; in other words, it must exhibit a strict adherence to the ordering of pages and books within each tractate, based upon the established (and here, another level, properly ordered) canon of the text. This iterative consistency is, in the case of the Bavli Talmud, taken to the extreme: in other words, “[a]ll the printed editions of the Talmud have exactly the same number of pages and the same words on every page.”³⁴

3) Moreover (and while the practice is not resisted so strongly as it is in the case of the Qur’an), there is a reticence and a resistance to the translation of the Talmud—a preference that it be considered and read in its Hebrew and Aramaisms as opposed to a target language.³⁵ Thus we might also speak of yet another sublevel of structural stability, the high level of *syntactic* consistency of the Bavli Talmud.³⁶

Thus the Talmud can be analyzed *as a Work*, which demonstrates high stabilities along the general metrics of *canon, iteration, and syntax*.

³³ George Stratton, “The Mnemonic Feat of the Shass Pollak,” *Psychological Review* 24 (1917) 244.

³⁴ Stratton, “Mnemonic Feat,” 244. While this can be seen as an artifact of the rise of the printing press, the printed versions reflect a level of standardization that arose from the times of hand-copied manuscripts.

³⁵ My experience in a graduate course on rabbinic thought and theology was one of being encouraged to learn Hebrew as much as possible to be able to engage the Scriptures and the Talmud at a more originary level.

³⁶ It should be noted that syntactic consistency does not necessitate a parallel *semantic* consistency. This will be examined in more detail in the second consideration, on hermeneutics within the Text.

With the generalization of these metrics, the claim can be made that all Works can be analyzed—and compared—using these metrics. Each of these areas can be examined as affecting a given Work to a greater or lesser extent. The Bavli Talmud is an example of a Work where each of these matters of structure (the analyzable sub-areas outlined above) has been rendered exceedingly *stable*. Thus the text of the Bavli Talmud can be demonstrated, across time and across geographic contexts, to remain canonically, reprographically, and syntactically stable in its printed/iterated structure; in other words, the physical text itself is consistent to the point where a feat such as the pin test becomes possible. These are the conditions (a state of extreme stability) under which a rabbi, properly trained and with the full text memorized and categorized with visual mnemonics, would be able to repeat the precision described in Stratton’s account with a text of the Talmud originating almost anywhere—whether it was produced in Jerusalem, Wichita, or Shanghai. Thus, within the present analysis, the Bavli Talmud would be considered a *very stable Work*, and we can see this readily because there is this high congruence between the Work and many of the reproductions of the Work.

Interestingly, a parallel example of this sort of structural stability can also be found in the *Book of Common Prayer*, in use by the Episcopal Church, U.S.A. Every copy of the 1979 revision—across editions, sizes and versions—shows remarkable iterative stability of the core text as well as this high congruity between reproductions of the Work and the assembled Work itself—from identical pagination to each copy being printed in the same Sabon font typeface. Like the Talmud, the congruity of the reproduction to the Work, coupled with the uniformity and stability of the Work itself, is seen as a point of importance for the worshipping community. Thus this congruity and

stability is built into the production of the text as a physical artifact, with each copy bearing a page that certifies that it has been compared to, and conforms to, the “Standard Book”³⁷ (with “standard book” here being exactly the sort of ur-object indicated by this term “Work” as we are trying to deploy it). As in the case of the Talmud, we would, by this analysis, classify the *BCP* as a very *stable* Work.

It should be noted that the Talmud and the *BCP* in their printed, reproduced form are more closely congruent with their respective Works than many of the holy writings we could examine. Therefore it is important to make the distinction, again, that a given *Work*, as it is being spoken of here, is not *necessarily* directly correspondent to the reproductions based upon it. However, these two examples—the Talmud and the *BCP*—happen to share both the aspect of high stability in their respective Works, as well as a high degree of congruence between these Works and the mass-market printed objects based upon them.

Now, in contrast, let us consider the analysis of the sources for printed Christian Scripture *as a Work*. In place of the consistency and stability we observed in the structure of such “ur-texts” as the Talmud and the *BCP*, the source texts that have been assembled by tradition and scholarship into the Work we call “the Bible” have a demonstrably *unstable* quality in terms of structure. In many respects, *as a Work*, the Bible occupies the opposite end of the spectrum of stability from the “originary

³⁷ This example highlights that not all Works are necessarily antiquarian. As Barthes himself indicates, “we must not permit ourselves to say: the work is classical” in *all* cases. Barthes, *Rustle*, 57.

document” of a Work such as the Bavli Talmud.³⁸ Again, let us take the areas considered above as a means of framing the examination.

First: canon. While there is great debate as to how this term even applies to Scripture, there can be no doubt that—*however* one chooses to define it—there is, demonstrably, considerably *less* canonical consistency to the “text” of the Bible than that of the Bavli Talmud.³⁹ Indeed, there is less canonical stability to the Bible than can be found in most *secular* texts, as well.⁴⁰

³⁸ The Bavli Talmud was canonically solidified between 450 and 550 CE. The proper dating of a stable New Testament canon is a matter of great debate. The current scholarship places the earliest datable canons with Eusebius in the early fourth century CE. However, as is clear from the *Lutherbibel* and other Reformation sources, the question of what actually is a canonically acceptable text in many ways remained open well into the 17th century. In fact, with the recent writings of members of the Jesus Seminar, it could well be argued that—for some scholars, at least—the question of canonical stability of the New Testament has *never* been settled. For a very cursory sampling of the variety of perspectives on this question, see Everett R. Kalin, “The New Testament Canon of Eusebius,” Geoffrey Mark Hahneman, “The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon,” and Lee Martin McDonald, “Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question,” each found in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002); William Horbury, “Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers,” in Martin Jan Mulder, ed., *Mirkra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004); Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, eds., *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995); Heinz Bluhm, *Martin Luther: Creative Translator* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965); Heinrich Bornkamm, trans. by Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, *Luther and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969); Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996); Gerald Harnett, “Classicism and the Canon,” *Hellas: A Journal of Poetry and the Humanities*, vol. 4, num. 2 (1993), 5-9; N. Clayton Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark’s Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003); and Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faith We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) and *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003).

³⁹ For a discussion of the non-unitary nature of the Biblical canon, see for example John B. Gabel, et al, “The Formation of the Canon,” *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 93 – 107.

⁴⁰ To cite but one example: Many sources claim that Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* is second only to the Bible in sales worldwide. If we simply consider editions in the English language alone, the distinction in canonical consistency is readily apparent. There is very little difference between the original 1936 editions of Mitchell’s work and any printed copy that can be obtained from presses today. In contrast, at the time of the original publication of *GWTW*, one could obtain English versions of the Bible from a multiplicity of possibilities: The King James, the Revised Version, the Douay- Rheims-Challoner (Catholic “American” Version), and the American Standard. Disregarding the matters of translation and editorial choices in terms of style, each of these versions was reflective of vastly different assemblies of source texts, codices, and fragments as the “canon” from which they drew, and each was a markedly different structural example of an English text of the Bible. The comparison of the Bible and Mitchell’s book is not simply a

As was stated above, this instability is apparent at all levels of consideration. For example, the very fact that there is a choice of which version of assembled documents one considers to be “the Bible” is indicative of the already extant instability of the Work. That is to say, when we designate whether we are referring to the Protestant or Catholic versions of Christian Scripture (even prior to the question of the *translation* of the texts—beginning rather with the matter of inclusion or exclusion of chapters, verses, and whole books at the level of the “originary document” that forms the Work) we have begun already to demonstrate the canonical *instability* of the Work we are calling the Bible.

For example, in the Old Testament, the multiple versions (and lengths) of the books of Esther and Daniel, along with the inclusion or exclusion of the Apocryphal texts, form a shearing point that highlights for the attentive reader the difficulty of any simple appeal to the Work we call the “Hebrew Scriptures,” when dealing with the creation of a historical narrative of “canon formation” in the Old- and inter-Testamental periods.⁴¹

When addressing the matter of the Work we call the New Testament, similar difficulties arise. Despite this Work coming to canonical stability relatively contemporaneously with the Talmud, in contrast to the Bavli Talmud there is *no* universally accepted set of autographs (or even a universally agreed-upon set of

facile one. It is meant to demonstrate that structural discrepancy is not predicated on the massive iteration of texts. Simply having a number of copies of a text in circulation does not lead to structural (in this case, canonical) instability. Nor, as we have seen with the Bavli Talmud, does a relatively ancient text necessarily have to be canonically unstable. The stability of a text at the canonical level is an isolatable factor from its age and iteration.

⁴¹ While this is not the moment for an extended discussion of the matter, it should be noted that the conflation of “Hebrew Bible” and “Old Testament” in recent scholarship can gloss over the marked *differences* between these two texts—namely the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish *TaNaKH*—as fully assembled, canonically arranged documents (both in their Hebrew and Greek versions, no less). This matter will be taken up more fully in the next section on literary stability of the Text.

assembled fragments into an “originary document”) of Christian Scripture of the New Testament from which we might authoritatively dispense with the thorny issue of the competing narratives of “canon formation.”⁴²

There are, demonstrably and historically, *multiple* New Testament canons, and *multiple* narratives of how a particular “true” canon came to be. Therefore, the appeal to any one canon as *the* New Testament canon, into which fragments should necessarily and clearly be assembled into an “originary document,” or the appeal to any one narrative as *the* correct “history of canon formation,” is reflective not of “the truth” so much as it is reflective of theological and contextual *presuppositions*, which should be carefully noted (but which, in practice, are not).

To sum up this discussion of canon: even with such a preliminary discussion, it is clear that the Bible, *as a Work*, can be demonstrated through this analysis to have a *high degree of canonical instability*, when compared to Works such as the Talmud and *BCP*. Again, it must be noted that this instability is not indicative of any sort of *inferiority* to these other, perhaps more stable, texts. The observation of relative canonical stability of instability is meant (as was mentioned above) to be comparative, not qualitative.

The reprographic/iterative stability of Christian Scripture is, in like manner, markedly different from more fixed texts such as the Talmud. When one is considering the source texts and fragmentary reconstructions, which have been preserved, lost, found,

⁴² Scofield and others have, it is true, hypothesized the existence of initial, perfect autographs which are now lost to us, but it is important to note that this hypothesis is by no means *universally* accepted nor authoritative. It is true as well that there have been discoveries of complete manuscripts dated in the fourth century CE—namely the Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. However, these discoveries are relatively recent (between the 1840’s and 1860’s CE), and as such they do not exert a measurable influence on the question of canon *formation* so much as recent scholarship *about* the various texts of the New Testament which have been assembled *as* canon(s).

reconstructed and reassembled from age to age, we can observe that it is less helpful to speak simply of a *Bible*—that is, of a unitary whole that has been reproduced.

Instead, we observe that Biblical scholarship has collected *differing iterations* of these fragmentary reassemblies/reproductions into major groupings (often referred to as “families”). These families include the Caeserean, the Western, the Alexandrian, and the Byzantine (this last being a disputed, later-emergent strand of iteration).⁴³ These families are reflective of a great many factors: divergent source fragments, emendations of scribes and copyists during iteration of the Work, loss or destruction of earlier versions, direct interpolation for political or theological reasons (not to mention the cumulative effect of translation and re-translation across Greek-, Latin-, Coptic- and Syriac-speaking cultures in the early centuries of the church, which will be addressed more fully in a moment). In contrast to a Work such as the Talmud, then, we can easily demonstrate that what is referred to as “the Bible,” *as a Work*, has a *marked iterative instability*. As it is reproduced, it is affected. In a word, it can be observed to mutate over time.

Finally, to bring to a close this set of comparisons to more stable examples of Works, in terms of syntactic consistency the contrast of Christian Scripture and texts such as the Talmud and Qu’ran is again marked. While the fact is often understated, it is of course the case that prior to the Reformation period there had been translated, vernacular versions of the Bible. With Protestantism’s full bloom, however, the *syntactic instability* of Scripture became not only commonplace, but also essential. One meaning of the rallying cry *ad Fontes!* reflects the earnest desire to put these sources—the Scriptures—

⁴³ For a thorough discussion of these family groupings, see Robert L. Thomas, *How to Choose a Bible Version: Making Sense of the Proliferation of Bible Translations* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2000) 59 and *passim*.

into the hands of the “commonest he.” That is, the words of the Scripture must be translated so that the people can understand it.⁴⁴

As Western culture has moved farther and farther in time from the days of the Reformation, we can observe that readers are no longer constrained by the language of the text, but the text is transferred (to a greater or lesser extent⁴⁵) into the language of the reader. Each new translation opens the door to a set of questions about what *sort* of translation this should be: literal, dynamically equivalent, colloquial, or paraphrased? Each of these possibilities will add to the observable syntactic instability of the Work in question (this matter of translation will be examined more closely in the analysis of Text below).

Having looked at these specifics in their turn, some general conclusions can be drawn. First, as should be apparent by now, the matters of stability and instability among the matrix of these sub-areas are not to be considered inherent or natural qualities to the Work itself. The Work nowhere exists as a natural thing, but only always *after a certain fashion* as a construction (or, as was noted before, the Work is often *misapprehended* as static, but it is in fact dynamic with observable local *stabilities*). Hence these matrices of

⁴⁴ A parallel could be drawn to the “read[ing]...with interpretation” that takes place at the Water Gate in Nehemiah 8 [NRSV]. In the story, the population has returned from the Babylonian Captivity, having spent seventy years in a foreign land. They weep when the law is read, presumably because they cannot understand the Hebrew words because they were raised to speak Babylonian. The people are gathered to hear, but they cannot understand the words of the Scripture until it is translated into their language.

⁴⁵ For a provocative analysis of this balance, see for example Rosenzweig’s essays “Scripture and Word” and “Scripture and Luther” in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994), as well as Rosenzweig’s “Afterword” to his translation of Jehuda Halevi’s poetry, found in Barbara E. Galli, trans., *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi: Translating, Translations and Translators* (Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 1995) 169 – 184. A lucid and brief explication of Rosenzweig’s positions can also be found in Oona Eisenstadt, “Making Room for the Hebrew: Luther, Dialectics and the Shoah,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69(3), 2001, pp. 551 – 575.

stability within the structure of the Work are themselves *social* and *contextual* in nature, though they are canny in masking this fact from casual observation. Pointing at a Bible on a shelf—whether a contemporary printed version or an ancient codex in an archive—one might feel certain that the Work we call “the Bible” is there as well, sitting still and stable. This, in fact, this is not the case.

Second, as was noted above, the claim that (speaking comparatively) the Talmud is a *stable* Work while the Bible is an *unstable* one does not indicate any superiority of the former or the latter. Rather, it is meant to highlight that when a theologian (or other reader) proceeds *as if* the Bible has the same structural stability as the Talmud (whether through appeal to text critical methods, “original autographs,” “history,” or other means), then this Work—that is demonstrably *unstable*—has been stabilized *locally* for a given time by some factor which itself has yet to be articulated.

Even in such a cursory survey, the spectrum of possibilities arising from considering the matter of stability of structure of the Work can be seen. Examples could be offered to show the complex variety of structural possibilities within various Works, where different texts highlight the various sub-areas analyzed above. However, what has been mentioned here should be sufficient to make the point clearly. This last sub-area of syntactic stability, particularly, overlaps on to the next focus of examination, stability of the *literary* form: the Text.

2a. The “Text” as a general case

“Text,” as it is being used in this analysis, is to be kept conceptually separate from its unavoidable doppelgänger, the common noun, “text.” Within this thesis, we will often

refer to small-t “text” when speaking of items that are and can be *read*. Given the ubiquity of the term “text” in all areas of literary and Biblical studies, this seems a plain necessity, though it may cause the reader some difficulty if a rigor is not maintained in reading. The present analysis will deploy the proper noun, capital-t “Text,” as a technical term. These two terms, “text” and “Text,” are *not* (for the purposes of this dissertation) interchangeable.

Within this analysis, “Text” indicates that conceptual field to which we believe we refer when we invoke phrases like “interpretation,” “Hermeneutic Circle,” “act of reading,” or any accounting of the “subjective” experience of the supposedly “objective” (or “literal”) Work.⁴⁶ This analysis will utilize the perception of this distinction between Text and Work for purposes of understanding, while reiterating the objection made above to the common *misconception* that the Work stands as an objective, literal fact to which the Text is added as a supplement. More of this will be said in the examination, which follows.

As was mentioned a moment ago, the idea of “Text” is here deployed as a strictly technical term, again following (though not completely conformed to) the schema proposed by Roland Barthes. Barthes presented “Text” in relation to its complementary technical term, “Work,” which was examined above. This schema was developed across a series of essays, and is summed up in “The Death of the Author” and “From Work to Text,” in his *The Rustle of Language*.⁴⁷ The use of this schema in the present analysis

⁴⁶ This analysis intends ultimately to show that the hermeneutic circle extends into the construction of the physical objects—termed here as the Work and the Book—themselves.

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

will require slight modifications from Barthes's original conceptions, but the spirit of the terms will remain intact.

Barthes contrasts the Text to the Work, defining Text as a "methodological field" of plurality, exploding and disseminating facets of the Work (which we have read here as the document assembled and presented through historical narration as the "ur-text" or "original source") into the play of interpretation.⁴⁸ The Text, therefore, is a network where even the "author" herself is only a guest, adding another voice to the cacophony of dialogical assertions about what the Work "means."⁴⁹ The present analysis offered in this dissertation will maintain, to some extent, this general notion of the Text as the field of voices that surround the Work, and whose relation to the Work is difficult to define and, at times, is considered "demonic" or "parasitic" in nature.⁵⁰

However, as with the previous analysis in the section on Work, the aim of the present analysis is intended to demonstrate the fallacy of this general notion. That is, it is a fallacy that the Work is the "thing" that exists (and which is often, confusingly, referred to as "the [literal] text"⁵¹) "prior" to interpretation, and it is a further fallacy that the field of interpretation (what we are here terming the Text) "follows after" the Text as the

⁴⁸ Barthes, *Rustle* 57, 59, 61. Thus Barthes falls prey to the difficulty noted above, the tendency to conceive of the "hermeneutic circle" in the second form, with the two foci of Work/Text construed as a static/dynamic dyad.

⁴⁹ Barthes, *Rustle* 61.

⁵⁰ For Christians who consider themselves to simply be reading the Bible, without interpretation, such characterizations of accumulated reading traditions as "demonic" or "parasitic" may be quite compelling. For the "demonic" conception, see Barthes, *Rustle* 60. For discussions of parasitism, see Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.* and *Of Grammatology*. For a succinct discussion of the difficulties of isolating Work from Text, see "Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What Goes Without Saying, and Other Special Cases" in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980).

⁵¹ See "Is There a Text in This Class?" in Fish, *Text*, in particular p. 305.

imaginary and social field surrounding it. Instead, I argue that the Text and the Work can be understood as an interdependent and coterminous matrix of possible stabilities, with no clear temporal procession. That is to say, the assumed progression from source to interpretation reflects an oversimplification of a much more complex and intertwined process, whereby the Text is as influential upon the Work as the Work is upon the Text. Moreover, these interdependent matrices of stabilization can themselves be analyzed, both as isolates and in mutual relation.

2b. The “Text” as the literary artifact

Some may argue that the call for a “literary” focus is an abstruse concern to theologians. Yet with the postliberal turn in recent North American theology, and its growing attention to matters of “narrative,” a strong case can be made that the literary structure of Biblical texts is a key—if not the sole—focus of vital strands of recent theological inquiry. Whether one considers the projects of Hans Frei or Brevard Childs, or those that follow in their respective wakes, the effect of the biblical writings as a *story*, and not simply as a collection of phrases or pericopes, has become a matter of greater concern to recent theologies.

But a story depends, to a great extent, upon the *telling*: the arrangement of parts, the choice of phrasing, the effects of cadence and style. The formal term we are calling “the Text,” within this analysis, is a balance of *literary* stabilities, just as the Work was seen as a balance of structural ones. To examine this axis of literary stability, then, we again have a series of sub-areas to consider. Among these are the matters of *order*, *translation*, and *core narrative*.

Order: It is one thing to have a *canon*, composed of a set series of books or tracts (as was considered at length in the previous axis). Once this is achieved, however, it is quite another matter to have these texts arranged in a particular *order*.⁵² For example, the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish *TaNaKH* are comprised of the same core books, but their arrangement differs considerably. This difference in order leads to two distinct and incompatible literary effects.

Let us consider one very notable example. The Old Testament concludes with the text of Malachi 4:5-6, proclaiming

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse [KJV].

A reader of this text in the *Christian* Scriptures would then turn the pages to Matthew's Gospel to find the account of the birth of Jesus and then, in the third chapter, the proclamations of John the Baptist, who, it seems naturally to follow, is a latter-day Elijah preparing the hearts of the parents and children for the coming day of the Lord. The literary effect of such an arrangement is the perception of unbroken continuity of the narrative; the *obvious* unity of the Old and New Testaments. The arrangement of the canonical texts of the Old Testament creates a literary effect of incompleteness, openness, and expectation.

⁵² These two concepts—*canon* and *canonical order*—are often collapsed together in a manner that is, in terms of the present analysis, unprofitable. The writings of James Barr, Brevard Childs, Rolff Rendtorff and Paul Ricoeur—though of great value in other respects—can each serve as prominent examples of this collapse, with the attendant difficulty that the nuanced matters of stability raised here are unable to be adequately addressed by their analyses.

In contrast, the reader of the *TaNaKH* comes to the end of the ordered Scriptural reading *not* in Malachi 4 but rather in Second Chronicles, where a markedly different proclamation obtains:

22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of HaShem by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, HaShem stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying: 23 `Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth hath HaShem, the G-d of heaven, given me; and He hath charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all His people—the HaShem his G-d be with him—let him go up.' [ArtScroll]

Thus, in contrast to the openness and expectation of the Old Testament arrangement that seems to naturally beckon for a continuation of the unfinished story, the arrangement in the *TaNaKH* points to completeness and closure. The Babylonian Exile is ended, and the Temple, which was destroyed, will be rebuilt by decree of Cyrus, a righteous king among the *goyim*. If we imagine our reader then turning the page to the book of Matthew, the literary effect is completely different. In the place of continuity we have disjuncture; a new story seems to begin, one unrelated to and disconnected from the previous, which has *obviously* come to a natural and tidy end.

Ordering of the (canonical) texts is, then, the first of the sub-areas of literary stability to consider. It is complementary to the issue of canonical stability, but forms a separate matter of consideration in its own right. Again, if considered across a spectrum, we see the example of the Bavli Talmud as having extreme stability of order, and the Old Testament / *TaNaKH* as an example of a set of texts exhibiting demonstrable instability of order. Thus, to begin the interrelation of these matrices, we can say demonstrably that a given stabilization of the canon of this Work we call “the Bible” can support, *as a Text*, multiple (canonical) orderings.

To attempt to settle the question of a “proper canonical order”—that is, to attempt to render a given canonical order *stable*—we are thus prompted to look *beyond* the Work itself to the Text. In other words, we are compelled to examine not only the Work but the community *reading* the Work and using the Work in its worship and common life. In the example above, then, a community for which this Work has come to be known *as a Text* by the name “the *TaNaKH*” will be able to point to a particular stable canonical ordering. This will also be the case with a community that refers to the Work *as a Text* by the name “the Old Testament.” Note that in this example the *Work* (the “originary source” of stabilized fragments) may be almost exactly the same (as analyzed by the metrics of canon, iteration and syntax) for both communities—but *the Texts arrived at from this common Work can already be observed to be distinct and different*. Stability of canonical order (as opposed to the canon itself) is always achieved from *beyond* the Work. It arises from the usage and expectations of the many reading communities, which engage the relative shaping of the Work and thus render it as one of many Texts with a *local* stability of canonical order.

In addition to this, it should be mentioned that *within* the books of Scripture themselves (and across these various communities of use) we could observe high levels of stability of order. What have come to be commonly referred to as the chapters and verses within the book of Genesis, for example, do not shift or rearrange (at least, not in such a dramatic fashion as noted above) across versions of the text, and the same can be said for much of the New Testament books (some of the numberings of the Psalms and the alternate endings of Mark are, of course, notable exceptions). This is but one of many indications that the overall question of “stability”—for any of these axes and sub-areas—

is extremely complex. It is analogous to an idling automobile engine: the whole of the car might be sitting still (relatively stable), while various parts, systems, and subsystems may each be exhibiting relative amounts of activity or instability. It is 'still' only in a very peculiar sense. Even in its stillness there remain evident vibrations, and discernibly there are movements and mechanisms constantly in flux. While the bulk of it stays in place (for now, at least), the dynamics and forces are always at work, in motion, beneath the surface. Depending upon which level one considers, the same idling engine may appear stable or dynamic, predictable or highly erratic. The same can be said of a Text—particularly a Text as complex and interleaved as that of Scripture. Thus each Text is a complex literary artifact *even in its own "host" language*. An order of magnitude is added to the complexity of literary stability as soon as one introduces the matter of *translation*.

Translation: The matter of translation is so intricate as to demand a dissertation all its own.⁵³ Even a cursory examination of this sub-area of literary structure is sufficient, however, to provide the reader with a taste of what is at stake in the matter. As any seminary student struggling through her first exegetical class can attest, the translation of a Text (i.e., of a Work which now is received in a certain context with a

⁵³ A reader wishing to wade into the depths of the varied studies of translation could begin with samples from Umberto Eco's *Experiences in Translation* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2001), and *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003); Andre Lefevre's *Translating Literature: the German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977); Reuben A. Brower, ed. *On Translation: Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 23* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959); and Susan Bassnett-McGuire's *Translation Studies: Revised Edition* (New York: Routledge, 1991). For overviews of specifically Biblical translation, see as well Stanley E. Porter and Richard S. Hess, eds., *Translating the Bible: Problems and Prospects*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 173 (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1999); Hilton C. Oswald and George S. Robert, eds., *Luther as Interpreter of Scripture: A Source Collection of Illustrative Samples from the Expository Works of the Reformer in Luther's Works: An American Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977); Jack P. Lewis's *The English Bible From KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation with Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982); and of course the works by Buber and Rosenzweig mentioned above.

definitive canonical ordering *as a Text*) is neither formulaic nor algebraic. Far from an “interlinear” style of one-to-one correspondence of words or phrases, each translation of a Text (whether we are referring to Scripture, or an eight-line poem, or even oftentimes a single sentence, phrase or word) becomes in many respects its own, independent literary entity.⁵⁴

This point deserves some elaboration. Despite a greater-or-lesser “family resemblance” to the “originary” Text (or perhaps we should merely say, “predecessory” Text, though even *this* adjective threatens to mislead our analysis), the translation must (by expectation and definition) stand alone *as another Text*. A translation that demands constant reference and comparison to the “original” would be considered a failure, and yet there is an expectation of dependence and connection to this original—although this dependence should not imply a necessary *degradation* from “original” Text to the “new” Text.⁵⁵

Note that I am *not* here asserting that the *Work* is translated into a new Text. This is a key point, but one that is often misunderstood in characterizations of the translation process. It is understandable to assume that the Work itself is what is translated, but this is never the case. It must be emphasized that *the Work does not exist without an accompanying Text—and often is accompanied by a range of accompanying Texts*. That is to say, when a Work is constructed, inherited, or used by a community, it has already become a Text. Thus it already has a field of interpretation (and this is true, as we have

⁵⁴ See again Rosenzweig, “Scripture and Word,” on the matter of the *Schriftsprache*.

⁵⁵ Two examples here should suffice to illustrate this possibility. First, Gabriel Garcia Marquez has been often and famously quoted that the English translation of his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* surpasses the Spanish original in beauty. Second, Slavoj Zizek’s commentary on *Billy Bathgate*, that the film “creates” the novel that should-have-been.

seen above, because the very construction of a Work from assembled fragments involves an interpretive process, as does the acceptance of an inherited Work). Hence the translation involves a negotiation of this one Text (a field of accepted and stabilized interpretations in one language) with another Text (the field of meanings possible and to be stabilized in the new, receptor language).

There are many possible approaches to this sort of translation between Texts. For example, in many Jewish and Muslim traditions, emphasis is placed on the use of a translated Text *in concert with* the “original language” Text (Hebrew or Arabic, respectively). Proper study, then, involves the incorporation of the cadences and idioms of the “original” language into the life and study of the speaker of the “new” language. In contrast, many Christian translation projects revolve around the desire for the new Text to *stand alone*—to convey, in a variety of possible manners, the *meaning* of the “original” Text in the marked *absence* of that Text. Hence the English versions of the Bible are designed for use without the Septuagint or the Vulgate, or the Novum Testamentum Graece.

Thus, when a translator makes a choice to step away from the need for “constant reference” to another Text, each translation itself acts as a negotiation between the demands of the “original” language and the desires of the target language. As was mentioned briefly above, in matters of Christian translations of Scripture, this tension often is differentiated between “literal” renderings and more vernacular “dynamic equivalence” modalities.⁵⁶ Hence multiple and distinct translations of the same core

⁵⁶ For discussions of these tensions, see the overview given by Leonard Greenspoon in “Ten Common Misconceptions About Bible Translations,” *Creighton University Magazine*, Summer 2004, pp. 12 – 17, as well as the more detailed examinations in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and*

stabilization of a congruent Work/Text matrix may render vastly different literary products, each a distinct Text stabilization in themselves.⁵⁷ At the level of language “use,” matters of idiom and irony then come into play, as well as the expectations of the translator about the imagined “original” and/or “target” audience for the new Text. All of these variables affect the process of translation and hence the translated congruence of Work/Text as a stabilized *literary* artifact.

Let us consider an example. Translational choices are predicated on rules of grammar and matters of style, but these rules do not, even in the best of cases, completely restrict the ambiguities, which can result in a widely divergent set of translations of a text.⁵⁸ For the theologian, such ambiguities, at work on the literary level, can have marked (or certainly perceived) doctrinal consequences. One of the most famous (or infamous) cases of this in English versions of the Bible is, of course, the controversial

English Versions (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) and, for another critical perspective, see Robert L. Thomas, “Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics,” in *How to Choose a Bible Version: Making Sense of the Proliferation of Bible Translations* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000) 161 – 191. It is also worth consulting Everett Fox’s *The Five Books of Moses: A New English Translation with Commentary and Notes* (New York: Schocken, 1995), which draws heavily upon the translational methodologies introduced by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.

⁵⁷ This is certainly readily apparent in certain “types” of translation, such as the Targums (which translated the Hebrew Work into Aramaic with heavy glosses, changes, and emendations arising out of proto-theological and community reading tradition). However, it is the contention of this analysis that, even when this process is not immediately observable, the trace effects of the act of translation (and the theological imprint of the translators) will be in effect. “It is essential to realize that translating a text always involves problems of selectivity and of ‘underdetermination.’ A single translation can never show all aspects of a source text. Translations have to choose and in that process inevitably some aspects of the source are lost (selectivity). The problem is, how do translators decide which aspects of the source are retained and which not, when they are forced to choose?... Translators solve problems of selectivity and ‘underdetermination’ intrinsic to translation by invoking criteria *outside* the source text. It is their only option, whether they are aware of it or not.” Lourens de Vries, “Paratext and *Skopos* of Bible Translations,” *Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and Christian Traditions: The Textual Markers of Contextualization* (Boston: Brill, 2003) 176.

⁵⁸ These sorts of translational ambiguities have received a great deal of attention in recent literary-critical circles, with one of the best examples being Jacques Derrida’s “rereading” of Plato’s *Phaedrus* around the dual meanings of the term “*Pharmakon*” (remedy/poison). See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson, trans. (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1986) 61-156.

rendering of Isaiah 7:14. The Hebrew “*almah*” is translated in the Revised Version as “young woman,” in contrast to the more familiar King James (and, it is well to note, Septuagint) assertion that “a *virgin* shall conceive, and bear a son.”⁵⁹ The translator’s choice of rendering produces two *distinct* literary fields (and thus multiple Texts), each with distinct traditions of reading and interpretation.⁶⁰

This well-known case is by no means the only example of these effects that we might find. To take another instance, let us consider J. Louis Martyn’s analysis of a key Greek phrase from Galatians, which he examines at length (and which forms a key trope of his reading) in his *Anchor Bible Commentary* on the letter:

Paul writes *pistis Christou Iesou*, an expression which can mean either the faith that Christ had and enacted or the faith that human beings have in Christ, both readings being grammatically possible. Recent decades have seen extensive discussion of the matter, sometimes even heated debate; and the debate has demonstrated that the two readings do in fact lead to two very different pictures of the theology of the entire letter. Is the faith that God has chosen as the means of setting things right that of Christ himself or that of human beings? Attention to a number of factors, especially to the nature of Paul’s antinomies that to the similarities between 2:16 and 2:21, leads to the conclusion that Paul speaks of the faith of Christ, meaning his faithful death in our behalf.⁶¹

⁵⁹ For a comprehensive treatment of the Isaiah 7:14 controversy, see Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999). For those wishing for more discussion on the controversy, research can begin as far back as St. Jerome’s *Adversus Helvidium* (in which Jerome makes the textual case for interpreting the biblical accounts of Mary as attestations of her virginity) and St. Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter LXIII. IN the twentieth century, readers can find, for example, J. Gresham Machen’s *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930) and Cornelius van Til’s *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1946).

⁶⁰ And here we can see implications extending from literary stability *back* into questions of structural stability—i.e., how do the two Testaments function as a *unified* canon—as well as forward into questions of hermeneutic and doctrinal stability.

⁶¹ J. Louis Martyn, *Anchor Bible Galatians* commentary, 251.

As can be seen, the choice of the exegete with regard to the translation of this short Greek phrase can carry significant *doctrinal* import for the theologian in such matters as soteriology, atonement theory, and the doctrine of providence, as well as render a pronounced literary influence on the whole of the Text. Depending on how the phrase is translated, two entirely different mechanisms of *Heilsgeschichte* could thus be articulated as operative throughout the two Testaments.

In sum: it can thus be readily demonstrated that what we call “the Bible,” *as a Text*, has a marked *translational instability* in exactly those key passages where doctrinal questions arise and find their support. As above, this instability is not expressed as a pejorative complaint but a fact that *must be explicitly accounted for* when an appeal is made to a Text, which a given community is calling “the Bible,” in support of a position taken on a matter of doctrine or praxis.

There have, of course, been attempts in theological and Biblical studies to make just such an accounting. During the battles over English Bible translation from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, it was asserted that ever more rigorous scholarship and attention to ancient grammar might eliminate such ambiguities. For Protestants especially, this trust in grammar was an inheritance of the confidence in the power of the “pure text” that has been handed down from Martin Luther and the other Reformers. Martin Luther “fully expected that his clear exposition of Scripture would correct error and yield a purified and still unified faith”⁶²—an expectation shared, certainly, by those 19th and 20th century scholars who undertook such projects as the Revised, Revised Standard, New Revised Standard, and New International Versions of the Bible.

⁶² Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emmanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 18.

However, as any reader of Peter J. Thuesen's *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, a history of these often bitterly divided factions of scholars,⁶³ will readily note, "[s]omehow God's will and message to man does not result in such uniformity."⁶⁴ Indeed, the thrust of literary criticism since the mid-1960's has put the lie to the taming of ambiguity even in the most seemingly "clear" of texts.⁶⁵ This pushes us forward to our final consideration under this focus: the stability of *core narrative*.

Core narrative: It is a truism that individual readers of all stripes emerge from their engagements with the Bible having formed a "canon within the canon"—a subset of Scriptures that, for them, particularly articulates their understanding (or their desires) of the "true meaning" of the text.⁶⁶ Theologians, as readers, are as susceptible to this practice as laypersons. Prior to turning to the focus on the final axis of stability, then, it is important to define the ways in which theologians stabilize the Biblical text as a literary artifact through the creation of core narratives—subsets of Scripture which norm their readings of all other aspects of the text—*prior* to what is often regarded as the entry point of the hermeneutic process.

An example of the outplay of an "ambiguous" text into theology through the isolation of a core narrative can be found in Gerhard von Rad's groundbreaking work on

⁶³ Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999).

⁶⁴ Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler* 18.

⁶⁵ For a variety of perspectives on this assertion, see Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), and Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

⁶⁶ As theologians we often account for this process within our methodological considerations of "sources" and "norms".

the “Form Critical Problem of the *Hexateuch*” (the first six books of the Old Testament). Von Rad builds the entire edifice of his two-volume *Old Testament Theology* upon his readings of Deuteronomy 26 (and parallel verses in Deuteronomy 6 and Joshua 24) as a *credo* utilized by the Israelites in shaping the form and content of the Hebrew Scriptures, reflecting God’s mighty acts in history:

4 When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, 5 you shall make this response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6 When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7 we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8 The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9 and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. [NRSV]

Von Rad’s claim is that the whole of the theological development of the Old Testament—from oral tradition to writing to redaction to final canonical form⁶⁷—is based around the telling and re-telling of this claim.⁶⁸ It is the central axis of his analysis upon which nearly 900 pages hangs (this is the case if one considers only the two-volume work; there are more if one includes various other articles and monographs). For purposes of analysis here it is important only to note that the distillation of this core narrative gives rise to a particular reading of this passage.

In other words, as a core narrative, it frames certain readings of other parts of the text. In particular, it gives a particular answer to the question “who is the Aramean?” In this reading, Jacob is the Aramean. Thus the core narrative, as read by von Rad (and a

⁶⁷ It is important to note that, as mentioned above, von Rad’s attestation of “canonical form” can be seen as collapsing the concepts of “canon” and “canonical ordering” which are kept distinct in this analysis.

⁶⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Volume I* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 122-123.

great many other interpreters, it should be noted) can be paraphrased: *Jacob and his progeny wandered into Egypt, there to be heavily burdened until they cried out to God and were delivered into the Promised Land.*

This is a grammatically reasonable reading, but the words are demonstrably ambiguous, thus supporting multiple Texts. That is to say, there may be *multiple* possible attestations of core narrative by which a reader, in a given reading community, could come to know what the text “means.”

Thus we should explore the effect of asserting that the rendering of the Hebrew into “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor” is not the *sole* possible reading for this text. As a counterexample, let us briefly consider the reading given this passage by Rashi, the 13th century French rabbi and Talmudic scholar.

For Rashi, von Rad’s reading of this “core narrative,” arising out of the Deuteronomy text, would be wholly nonsensical. For Rashi, Jacob is not the Aramean, but rather one who is hunted by the Aramean. Thus, in Rashi’s reading, the “Aramean” mentioned is not an ancestor at all, but a dire *threat*. Rashi reads the passage as, “An Aramean would have *destroyed* my father.” Here the Aramean is not Jacob, but rather *Laban*:

[Rashi, commenting on the Chumash, interprets:] “An Aramean would have destroyed my father” means, Laban, the Aramean, sought to eradicate everything when he chased after Jacob. Because he thought (planned) to do this...and he descended into Egypt. And still others came against us to annihilate us, for after this encounter with Laban Jacob went down to Egypt.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Rabbi Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg, et al., *Rashi: The Torah: with Rashi’s Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated* volume 5, *Devarim/Deuteronomy* (Brooklyn: Mesorah / ArtScroll, 2000) 270.

To read the core narrative of the text in *this* way renders the whole of von Rad's theological project problematic at best. Here the core narrative is not focused on God's mighty acts in history, but rather on the very real and ever-present threat of annihilation and the need for self-preservation. Rather than an example of God-dependent *Heilsgeschichte*, Rashi is seen reading this passage as a narrative of escape and *self-reliance*.

This demonstration of conflicting core narratives is not to discount the work and claims made by von Rad, but rather to highlight again the manner in which a simple choice about reading an ambiguous phrase as one or another "meaning" can grow and solidify into a formidable (and very influential) theological edifice through the stabilization of ambiguities into competing narratives.

Of course one might, following the assertions of certain strands of textual criticism, make the bald assertion that Rashi has simply read the passage *inaccurately*—that he has, in effect, gotten his grammar wrong and confused to whom the term "Aramean" refers here (conversely, a skeptic might also make such a claim against von Rad). It is not far-fetched to imagine such an assertion about Rashi being made by some types of modern Christian commentators (and indeed, we can find prototypical chiding references in John Calvin's commentaries, for example, to Jewish misreading and obscurantism⁷⁰). I wish to caution Christian readers against such quick dismissals of core narratives that seem to disagree with their own—both on general principles, and especially in the context of the present analysis.

⁷⁰ e.g. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, volume 1, William Pringle, trans., volume 7 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 244 – 248.

Thus, while such appeals to grammar certainly have their proper place, they are not the key focus here, in this particular sub-area of analysis. Rather, what is being pointed to here is one of the mechanisms by which differing Texts are stabilized from the same basic Work, a process that may involve a host of rhetorical and grammatical strategies, depending upon the particular context in which the certain Text reading arises. Thus it is important to note that Von Rad and Rashi's differing accounts of this core narrative are indicative of contexts that transcend the interests of a "solitary reader with a text" and point to larger schemas of community identity and interests.

The distillations of core narratives (as part of the stabilization of the Bible *as a Text*) point to our community commitments, and thus bring us to the final focus of stability in our examination. It is in this axis that McClymond's questions can be most fruitfully examined, and the enthymematic effects of covert magisteria most readily demonstrated and observed. Thus we turn to the final axis we will consider, the axis of the *Book*.

3a. The "Book" as a general case

The Book is simultaneously the nearest and most remote of the axes that will be considered here. It is the nearest because it is the interface through which we—each of us—will encounter and interact with the various other levels of artifactuality examined above. In other words, one does not, properly speaking, ever actually hold the Work (except in certain rare instances, if one is able to visit a rare book library) and one can never physically "hold" the Text (as it is a field of community interpretations, not an object); but one holds a *Book*.

This ubiquity, however, is what renders the Book as the most remote artifact to our (hermeneutic) consciousness: we *act*, in the process of holding of a Book, *as if* we believe we are holding the Work or possessing the Text. We are in fact, however, doing neither. We are *holding a book* (one of many possible and iterated Books), an actual, concrete, *physical* and *material* interface that, in its normal function, is often *invisible*. To put this another way, the Book, in its proper function, is meant to be *transparent*. Thus we might understand it as an extension of our analogy of the enthymeme begun in Chapter 1. The Book acts in some respects a physical manifestation of hidden major premises.

As an interface, the Book functions to convey information. It is a platform (and, for much of the history we are concerned with here, *the* platform), which *supports* the widespread transmission of a stabilized Work and *opens* the space whereby we can begin to negotiate the stabilization of a series of Texts. The Book is a conveyance, and hence is designed to function *as if* it was transparent and left no trace. But this is in fact not the case.

The creation of the moveable-type, printing press version of the Bible by Gutenberg and Schoeffer forged the trade of publishing. The Bible has been deeply wedded to this trade ever since. This certainly was not the beginning of the Bible's relationship to the market—we can find evidence of the commodification of Bibles during the days of hand copying as well—but the advent of the movable type press opened new avenues for the transmission of the Bible as an object for an ever-increasing mass market.⁷¹ It follows quite naturally from this that the existence of the Bible as a

⁷¹ Another boost to this commodification, especially for English-language Bibles, is attributable to the work of various “Bible societies” in the 1900's.

marketable object has brought with it the unavoidable fact that marketing is often predicated on *innovation*. The proffering of a Bible that has new or enticingly different features—or indeed a Bible that is *itself* somehow new and different—has been, and remains, a powerful factor in the economic sphere known as Scriptural publishing.

This urge for the ever-new product can be observed as a cause of consternation—increasingly so as we enter the context of the North American market that arose in the past two centuries. To cite an early example, Philip Schaff, who was involved in the American committee of the Revised Version of the Bible, commented in the 1840’s that “[e]very theological vagabond may drive here [in the American market] his bungling trade, without passport or license, and sell his false ware at pleasure.”⁷² But even where such iterative instability has passed without negative commentary such as Schaff’s, the fact of this instability still is demonstrably (and increasingly) evident in the American context. When we theologians speak of the Bible, we are most definitely speaking of *a Book*. We are speaking, that is, of a particular object or set of objects that has been shaped and produced by religious, scholarly and market forces. We never hold in our hands “Scripture,” per se, and we do not hold “*the Bible*.” Rather, we hold *a Bible*—one of many possible options on the shelf of our local book retailer or online vendor.

Thus we must examine the axis of the Book with special care, particularly because holding and reading a Book always entails certain *extremities* to the Work and the Text, which influence our experience of these axes and interfere with any claims to the *purity* of the Work (or the *endless* play of the Text) we might be tempted to make.

⁷² Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism* (1844), quoted in the epigraph to Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) vii.

“The Book,” used here as a technical term, indicates a physical object (one of many such physical objects) that exists specifically as a *marketed* and *marketable* artifact. As such, the Book has aspects of what Marshall McLuhan and others term a *medium*,⁷³ as well as what Martin Heidegger refers to in *Being and Time* as *equipment* (*das Zeug*).⁷⁴

The Book is equipment for the distribution—and more importantly, *consumption*—of a given set of stabilizations of a Text and a Work. Moreover, because the Book is consumed as a *marketed artifact*, the ability or inability of a given set of stabilizations to “perform” (in the economic sense, but also in the sense of “being given ears” by an audience) can itself influence the re-arrangement and re-stabilization of *future* iterations of the Work and the Text being distributed through the medium of the Book.

This is the important, and often missed, point that necessitates the recompassing of the “hermeneutic circle” described above. As post-Twentieth Century readers, any hermeneutic that purports to deal with only *abstract* instances of Work or Text will be insufficiently robust. The stabilized Work, and even the stabilized Text, is not revealed to us as an abstract. They are themselves *particulars* that can yield a multiplicity of different stabilizations *as a Book*. Simply to consider, for example, the plethora of

⁷³ For McLuhan’s development of the notion of the printed word as a medium, see his analysis of typography, which runs across his works. In particular, see Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding the Media: the Extensions of Man* [sic] (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) 155-162 and *passim*, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man* [sic] (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) and McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: an Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967). One can see the influences of McLuhan’s ideas in more recent works, such as Doron Mendels’s *The Media Revolution in Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), as well. Mendels analyzes “Eusebius’s work as an historian by employing the criteria that modern researchers use to evaluate the standards of modern media performance” [43]—a most McLuhan-esque endeavor! However, both McLuhan’s and Mendels’s notion of “medium” (which Mendels defines as “*any means, agency, or instrument that stands between information and the public*” [2]) will be attenuated in the present analysis by explicit reference to the effects of *market forces* on the production and consumption of the Book as a medium.

⁷⁴ See Heidegger’s analysis of *das Zeug*, in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 96-123.

iterations and varieties of New Revised Standard Version Bibles, or New International Version Bibles, or New Century Version Bibles, demands that one begin to grapple with the enormity of this issue. We can find this enormity at any level we might choose to examine. At the level of “Bible version” (those trademarked three and four lettered abbreviations that claim various levels of “newness,” “revision,” or standard-bearing), each *version* is discrete from the others (the NIV having observable differences from the NRSV, for example). But it is also the case that differing published editions of the *same* version have demonstrable (and arguably theological) differences one from another (that is, the various NIV Bibles, for example, will have observable theological, racial, and class emphases, such that each physical NIV Women’s Bible you hold will differ from each NIV Student Bible).

In other words, one will find the *Revolve* New Century Bible for Teens to be a markedly different reading experience from the *Real* New Century Bible for African Americans. Though both are supposedly the “same” Work and Text (the “New Century Version,” or NCV, which has a certain traceable genealogy of stabilizations of ancient source texts to render its particular Work, as well as a particular set of community interpretations giving rise to its Text), one finds a whole layer of additional information-bearing aspects as part of the physical artifact, which coexist with the Work and the Text, framing them and guiding the readers to differentiated experiences of reading. These are the aspects that arise not only when a reproduction of a Work leaves the scriptorium or when a Text is disseminated from the pulpit or the academy, but also and especially when one begins to account for the life (and livelihood) of Bibles as objects *for and in the*

marketplace. Indeed, one finds, the market has itself been reaching back into both the academy and the scriptorium, and influencing them both, for a long, long time.

Thus the equipmentality of the Book—its presence as a seeming-transparent but demonstrably influential medium via physical artifact—is arguably the most neglected aspect of theological discourse concerning the authority of Scripture in the present context. It is to this aspect we now turn, through an analysis of three sub-areas: paratext, imprimatur, and audience.

3b. The ‘Book’ as the marketed artifact

The difficulty of *seeing* the Book when we are looking for “Scripture” is largely due to the manner by which the Book is embedded into the very fabric of our communication and language. *As a Book*, what we call “Scripture” or “the Bible” comes to us bearing certain markers which have no direct cognate in the Work, and yet seamlessly inhere themselves within the structure of the words on the page.

As mentioned above, Michael McClymond has drawn our attention to the need to account for some of these markings, namely footnotes in English Bibles, but these form but one example of these sorts of elements that are both within and outside the *corpus* of a Book. These small but significant markings and additions have of late been codified in the work of French literary theorist Gerard Genette (as well as others) under the umbrella term *paratext*.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ It should be noted that, as with Barthes’s terms above, the use of *paratext* in this discussion will not adhere strictly to Genette’s delineations. In particular, Genette classifies paratextual effects as those aspects of the written artifact, which are not properly part of the text, yet reflect “authorial intention.” Thus Genette would point to prefaces and chapter headings as paratext, but would not necessarily include under the term such items as editorial insertions, critical apparatus, etc. However, this scrupulous appeal to the *intentions* of the author is arguably problematic: as Barthes’s work (as well as that of Derrida, Stanley Fish,

Paratext: Paratextual effects arise from the consideration of these marginalia that frame the text and shape the consumption (a term used in the present analysis specifically to refer to reading and understanding within a market environment) of the text. They take the form of “additions to the bare text, such as title, name of author, blurbs, prefaces, chapter headings, notes by the translator, brief comments and exclamation marks scribbled in its margins by previous readers.”⁷⁶ Moreover, these “additions to the bare text,” *particularly* when one considers the matter of Scripture, are embedded even more deeply and fundamentally.

The earliest artifacts of Scripture as a Work do not proffer certain paratextual effects we take for granted in English, such as punctuation, differentiation between capital and miniscule letters, and (in the case of the Hebrew language manuscripts) even vowels. Properly speaking, such English conventions, overlaid onto the translated text of the Work of Scripture, are additions that can be demonstrated to freight and encode theological meanings and to shape the reader’s experience dramatically.⁷⁷ These distinctions are thus not merely academic, and the “definitions of text and paratext are not

and others) has demonstrated, such appeals are themselves subject to the flux of interpretation (i.e., such claims always already implicate the claimant in a subjective web of interpretation that belies context and interest). Hence, within the present discussion, “paratext” will refer more broadly to *all* types of marginalia added to a Work in the process of preparing it as an artifact for the market. For further discussion of this debate, see A.A. den Hollander, et al, “Introduction,” *Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Boston: Brill, 2003) vii – xiv. For Genette’s work on the paratext itself, see Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Jane E. Lewin, trans. (Cambridge: U of Cambridge, 1997).

⁷⁶ Den Hollander, *Paratext and Megatext*, vii.

⁷⁷ To take but one example, consider the difference in theological meaning that arises when one English version of the Bible renders the Hebrew *ruach* as “Spirit” and another renders it as “spirit”. It has been my experience in the classroom that such differences in capitalization create marked differentiations in interpretation of the theological import of certain words within passages of Scripture. We could also take the example of the Contemporary English Version (CEV), which has been marketed as the first English version to expurgate explicitly anti-Jewish language. It is interesting to note that the CEV, despite this claim, still uses the Christianized, capital-S “Spirit” for *ruach* in the Hebrew translations.

so much interesting for taxonomic reasons, but for exploring the influence of paratext on reading a certain text.”⁷⁸

Part of the distinction that can be made between versions of the Bible *as iterated instantiations of a Book* is found precisely in these different stabilizations of paratextual elements. As mentioned above, it is these paratextual elements that account for much of the differences observed when one considers different Books of the same version side by side. The New International Version, for example, is differentiated across iterations by such elements as cover art, whether the version is intended for a “scholarly,” “student” or other manner of “audience” (with attendant images, footnotes, reading guides, and highlights of aspects of the text). Though this becomes abundantly visible in Bibles published for the North American marketplace in the last two decades, this is not a new phenomenon.

In recent examinations of the *early* history of Bible transmission, much has been made of the influence of (para)textual and interpretational additions that arise during the creation of the Targums on both the Old and New Testaments.⁷⁹ These Aramaic interpolations are woven into the flow and body of the text, and work in this case as paratextual influences that directed and governed the reading of the Bible for ancient interpreting communities. The Targums are a case where these effects are quite visible.

⁷⁸ Den Hollander, *Paratext and Megatext*, vii-viii.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Willem Smelik, “Orality, Manuscript Reproduction, and the Targums,” in den Hollander, *Paratext and Megatext*, 49-81, as well as Martin McNamara’s landmark *Targum and Testament: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972). For a broader history of manuscript transmission leading to the creation of various English Bibles, see also Ira Maurice Price, *The Ancestry of Our English Bible: An Account of Manuscripts, Texts, and Versions of the Bible* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), Luther A. Weigle, *The English New Testament: From Tyndale to the Revised Standard Version* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1950) and William Holloway Main, *Our Bible* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, no date given).

However, one might also consider other examples, such as the Contents page of the *Lutherbibel*,⁸⁰ to see other very apparent examples of paratextual influence upon the experience of the reader.⁸¹

It is in the last half-century, however, that these paratextual effects can be seen exploding in variety and influence upon the readers of the English texts of Scripture. Examples abound not only of footnotes and chapter headings, which direct and influence the reader, but increasingly one can find whole-cloth additions of items that interrupt the flow of text and explicitly invite or cajole the reader to entertain certain interpretations of the text. In particular, the ends of chapters or grouped sections of chapters will have text boxes which ask framing questions about what has just been read, and in certain “teen Bibles” there are text boxes—and even full pages—set aside under such headings as “What does *that* mean?”⁸²

In particular, these last examples of paratext are the most obviously reflective of the assembly of certain stabilized readings into Scripture *as a Book*. They are of course not accidental, nor do they arise in “Scripture” understood *as an abstract entity*. Rather, they are reflective of the preparation and careful construction of Scripture as an *item for the market*. These paratextual emendations are one very obvious way the “common text”

⁸⁰ Wherein Luther set apart several books of the Bible from the whole, including them but relegating them to “second-class” status for the reader.

⁸¹ And let us not forget that, in his day, Luther was what we might consider a “best-selling author.” His version of the Bible was most certainly a *marketed* object.

⁸² For example, in the *Quest NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), a Bible specifically marketed to teenagers, the pages are equally divided between text and paratext, with each page boasting extensive marginalia to direct and shape the reader’s hermeneutic and theological experience. One notes, indeed, that the marginalia of the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah 53 remove all doubt for the reader that this passage might ultimately refer to anything but the Messiah (and that the Messiah might be anyone but Jesus) [1059].

of the Bible (or even a specifically prepared version such as the NIV or NRSV) is modified and molded to reflect the character of a certain publishing house, with an eye to satisfying the desires of a certain set of demographics among a subset of readers. This brings us to the second subset of stabilization to be considered here: *imprimatur*.

Imprimatur: While often used in a specifically Roman Catholic context, *imprimatur* here refers to any official sanction or approval of a version of Scripture by some type of authorizing body. Certainly the Magisterium of the Catholic church has historically functioned in such a capacity, but it can be readily demonstrated that, in America particularly, the power to pronounce a version of the Bible as soundly orthodox has not been limited to the Roman Catholic church, but has extended to a variety of denominational and ecumenical organizations and, increasingly, to publishing firms themselves.

There are a variety of studies of “the history of the English Bible,” but few of these have considered that the generation of a new English version of the Bible involves not only the work of scholars and exegetes but also the machinations of (in varying cases) national committees of evangelical or ecumenical church leaders as well as the sustained interest and influence of publishers such as Zondervan, William B. Eerdmans, Tyndale House and many others. This is one of the most evident moments where the operation of a *covert* Magisterium can be observed. That is, regardless of whether the “body” involved is one denomination, a para-denominational organization, or a publishing house,

however, the demonstrable effect of their influence is the same: they provide the “authorization” of a given version of the text, a *de facto* imprimatur.⁸³

What started at the outset of the Reformation as differentiations between Bible versions to reflect Catholic or Protestant theological sentiments became more complex as more versions of the Bible appeared. By the middle of the twentieth century there was a marked schism as well between what were perceived as more “evangelical” versus more “liberal” English versions. Bibles were being adjusted to meet the perceived needs of a given *audience*. But this adjustment itself, by being encoded in a physical, printed object—the Bible *as a Book*—in turn increasingly helped to *solidify* the identity of the very audience to which it was being marketed. It took time for this effect to be observable, but one can trace backwards from the very evident “identity” Bibles now available in bookstores to the less-obvious roots. For example, one might not immediately think, upon entering a motel room and finding there the Gideon Bible, that one is looking at an artifact marketed specifically to a certain audience (the lonely, potentially unevangelized travelers).

Audience: In fact, as an intentionally evangelical tool, the Gideon version of the Bible, *as a Book*, is constructed to be as unassuming and generic as possible, and we can observe therefore that it is specifically *designed* to not raise these suspicions. Yet, by this very generalness, it can also be observed as an artifact with a specific and targeted audience in mind. Moreover, someone paid money to produce it and have it placed there, in the motel rooms of America (and the world), to meet the traveler. The Gideon Bible,

⁸³ The New International Version Bibles published by Zondervan, for example, bear a service mark under the trademarked NIV logo, which reads “Most read. Most trusted.” Stickers on the covers assure the reader that over 2 million copies of the NIV have been sold. The explicit claim is that this its the version that you—and your friends—ought to read.

as a Book, has been produced through a market process, designed and refined to meet the needs of a certain pre-screened (though admittedly very broad) demographic, and therefore produced to be consumed by that audience.

Since the “Gideon Bible” is designed to look plain, generic and unthreatening, it is more likely to appeal to the broadest spectrum of those who might fit the criteria of *lonely* and/or *traveler*. Thus we might say that the stability of audience for the Gideon Bible is comparatively low. That is, you could not say with assurance much else about the characteristics of the people reading the “Gideon Bible” *as an audience*. However, if we take this very early version of a niche-marketed Scripture as but one end of a spectrum, we see that further along that spectrum there are increasing numbers of examples of Bibles that have highly stabilized and clearly anticipatable demographics to their audiences. In fact, in the current context, you can often tell, simply from the cover, who the reader of that particular Bible Book is intended to be.⁸⁴

But these “audiences,” however conceived, should not be thought of simply as static entities. Rather, the creation *and* the consumption of these sorts of market-objects are part of a circular process. In general terms, we can assert that the existence of the given marketed artifact as an object for consumption helps to solidify an aggregate base of consumers into a pronounced audience, and the existence of this audience’s buying power helps to solidify the aggregate profit accrued to this given artifact such that it—and objects like it—continues to be produced for consumption. While no particular market process is guaranteed success, we can be assured that through demographic and market

⁸⁴ To cite one very clear example: consider “large print” Bibles. What picture forms when one considers the intended audience of this Book?

research on the part of the publishers and distributors of such artifacts, these objects are designed to have the most appeal to the largest aggregate of a given target audience.

We could posit many hypothetical scenarios to illustrate this process. A publisher's research into the target demographic of "Evangelical Christians," to take one example, might find that the aggregate is no longer content simply to read broadly generic *Protestant* Bibles. In response, the publisher begins to market a *brand* of Protestant Bibles that *bear the imprimatur* of their publishing house, whose Evangelical reputation is established and well known. Thus the potential buyer might choose this Bible over another simply because they have come to "trust" that particular publisher.

This is also true at the level of distribution. During 2008 I made an informal survey of several Christian bookstores in the Nashville area.⁸⁵ In speaking to purchasing managers and representatives, it quickly became clear that—in terms of the Bible varieties each store would stock on their shelves—the decision to carry or not carry a particular version was driven by market considerations as often as by theological ones. As a clerk at 21st Century Christian (a store explicitly affiliated with the Church of Christ) put it, "our customers don't want Catholic books or Bibles."⁸⁶ In many cases, a pastor may endorse a given version informally or from the pulpit, leading congregants to purchase this "authorized version." There are numerous factors that can be named in the complex interface of Bible commerce and consumption.

⁸⁵ I have spoken to representatives from LifeWay and Cokesbury, two large corporate chains with a market presence across the southeast, as well as representatives from Logos and 21st Century Christian, and St. Mary's, three relatively independent stores. The denominational affiliations of these businesses could be loosely described as Baptist, Methodist, Reformed and Church of Christ, and Roman Catholic, respectively.

⁸⁶ Conversation with clerk at 21st Century Christian Bookstore in Nashville, TN, August 2008.

What are some of the visible markings that *make* a “Catholic” or an “Evangelical” (or some other specific demographic) version of the Bible readily apparent to the consumer? Our answer to this question might well begin at the level of distribution, but it by no means is limited to that indicator. We can be assured that the publishing house in turn has made sure to include within their particular version(s) of the Bible *as a Book* a clear set of paratextual elements that comfort the reader (who is likely, but perhaps not already, a self-identifying Evangelical or Catholic) through explicit and encoded reading guides that shape, generate, influence and conform the interpretations of any ambiguously polysemic verses and phrases to conform to more traditionally accepted Evangelical or Catholic (or other) interpretations. This may be as blatant as putting the words “Catholic” or “Evangelical” on the cover,⁸⁷ or through less direct means of footnotes and other paratextual markers. Thus the reader is reinforced by and reinforces the continued shaping of such tailored artifacts through her participation in the profit aggregate, while at the same time the artifact *as a Book* (and hence filled with many paratextual signifiers) is reinforcing her (nascent or already well-formed) Evangelical (or Catholic, or other) identity more fully in the process of reading.

This becomes a cyclical effect—and certainly one not limited to Evangelicals and Catholics. The anticipated interests and concerns of a projected set of readers become part of the marketing strategy⁸⁸—with effects felt from the artwork on the cover of the

⁸⁷ See e.g., *The Catholic Study Bible, 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), and *The Essential Evangelical Parallel Bible* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007). It is not always the case that the same publisher will approach such a breadth of audience. Oxford is an interesting exception, though it could be argued that in many theological regards the differences between American Evangelicals and many Catholics have lessened in the past decade.

⁸⁸ The cover is appealingly colored and bears images (flowers on some women’s Bibles; urban “edged” youth in bandanas and baggy clothes on some African American Bibles; large glossy teen-magazine glamour shots on Bibles for young girls, etc.). The body of the Book—its cover and visual presentation

Bible straight through to the scholarly construction of the Work to the paratextual effects influencing the interpretive moves made by readers as it becomes Text—and these market forces are *fully* a part of the theological hermeneutic of reading and *must* be acknowledged and accounted for if we are truly to speak of a fully realized “hermeneutic circle.”

It must be accounted for because what began as minor modifications to expand the generic appeal to a broad audience of “the unchurched” (with regard to versions such as the Gideon Bible and other missional versions) has become a demonstrably undeniable reshaping of various versions of the Bible through paratextual additions and conformist interpretations, in effect *narrowing* the audience of each successive iteration as more and more versions of the Bible are brought to the marketplace.

Hence, as the twentieth century drew to a close and a new century has begun, we have been confronted with the proliferation of increasingly fractured aggregate audiences, relating more and more narrowly to “their” versions of the Bible. This trend is apparent not only in the academy (with the increased proliferation from feminist to

throughout—bears clear paratextual encodings that are age-, race- and gender-normed. It is likely that more recent publications of Bibles have also had some sort of promotional or public relations campaign (the RSV found considerable support in the editorial pages of prominent American newspapers, other versions have been supported by advertising in magazines) that is itself a targeted, anticipatory process. At every level, a Bible functions in the market not by virtue of its being *a Bible*, but by the fact that it is somehow *different* from any other Bible one might purchase. “This is the Bible that speaks to *me*,” the buyer seems to be saying. The consumer identifies and is identified with it. However, it should be noted that such identifications are not (as the Christian tradition might hope) *cruciform*. Rather, these identifications are at the level of one’s personal *style*. The Bible, *as a Book* in the current market environment, might well be viewed simply as one among many accessories to be chosen. Nike or Reebok? Levi’s or Gloria Vanderbilt? NIV or NRSV? It becomes one of many markers of identification of one who is already wholly seen in demographic terms. For detailed explorations of this phenomenon, see *inter alia* James Burton Fulmer, *Identities Bought and Sold, Identity Received as Grace: A Theological Criticism of and Alternative to Consumerist Understandings of the Self* (Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2006), Tyler Wigg Stevenson, *Brand Jesus: Christianity in a Consumerist Age* (New York: Seabury, 2008), and David J. Dunn, “Sacred Hunger: Fasting as Economic Resistance” and “The High, the Holy, and the Huckstered” (both unpublished manuscripts).

womanist and mujerista readings, and the rising interest in “postcolonial” questions⁸⁹ which we will examine in greater detail in the following chapter), but also on the shelf of the local bookstore (with Bibles marketed to ever-narrowing sub-populations organized around a proliferation of identities: African Americans, Athletes, People in Recovery, Teen Girls, “Emergent” Twentysomethings, etc.).

But one might ask (particularly if one approaches these matters with Nominalist suspicions) whether these various identities necessarily “existed” prior to their delineation and solidification through these market forces, or if, like the concept of “Scripture” explored in the previous chapter, these identities have themselves become reified. Of course, one may read the Bible *as* an athletic Christian, or a Christian struggling with substance abuse. But something occurs when one holds a printed *object* that marks and identifies them specifically by these markings: this is a Bible for a Christian *Athlete*,⁹⁰ this is a Bible for a *Recovering Alcoholic* Christian⁹¹—and then perhaps it is not enough to identify simply as a Christian among Christians.

Add, to this spectrum, the dimension (for example) of a “Study Bible” produced under the imprimatur of a “liberal” publisher (an internet search of the term “liberal Bible” will often return discussion board and blog results pointing to the *New Oxford Annotated NRSV Study Bible* as the most likely candidate for this position) over against a

⁸⁹ See for examples of 1) Womanist theology, Emilie M. Townes, *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation* (New York: Orbis, 1997); 2) Mujerista theology, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Orbis, 1996) and 3) Postcolonial theology, Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *Interpreting Beyond Borders* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); R.S. Surgitharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). This is the most cursory of samplings of the many books in these fields.

⁹⁰ E.g., *God’s Game Plan: The Athlete’s Bible* (Nashville: Serendipity House, 2007).

⁹¹ E.g., *NIV Recovery Devotional Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), and *The Life Recovery Bible NLT* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2006).

“Study Bible” produced under the imprimatur of an “evangelical” publishing house (which might include such candidates as the *NASB MacArthur Study Bible* or the *Daily Walk Bible NLT*). Each of these, of course, next year could differentiate again by producing volumes marketed explicitly to *men* and *women*, and the next year again to *African American* men or women,⁹² *Latinos* and *Latinas*,⁹³ etc. Each successive narrowing of audience further refines the field of identification, until the reader has found *the* version that speaks to *their* condition—and perhaps to no one else. This is by no means intended as a hyperbolic claim. One need go no further than the bookstore around the corner or log on to the internet to see this phenomenon in its effects.

Conclusion

Up to this point, the metric presented here has had a twofold effect: First, it has served to logically deflate the Protestant notion of *sola Scriptura*. As I briefly outlined in the first two chapters, this doctrine has long functioned in too many theological discourses as if the reified concept “Scripture” could be a veritable “view from nowhere,” above and untouched by prior commitment, or (when hermeneutic questions of context and interest *were* raised) the doctrine collapsed into radical subjectivity where every reader became her own authority.⁹⁴ Concerned with circumventing this pair of

⁹² E.g., *NIV Aspire: The New Women of Color Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁹³ E.g., *Biblia Devocional para la Mujer NVI, Enc. Rustica (NIV Women’s Devotional Bible, Softcover)*, (Miami: Zondervan/Vida, 2005).

⁹⁴ For more examples of this, see recent works such as A.K.M. Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* Guides to Biblical Scholarship New Testament Series (New York: Augsburg Fortress, 1995) and The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997).

eventualities, the methodology proposed in this chapter has intended to clearly demonstrate how different printed volumes of the Bible can begin to be *concretely* compared, and their sources and audiences understood, so that we can clearly see that *Scriptura* is not now, and never has been, “*sola*,” in any sense of the term.⁹⁵

Second, the metric has offered a means to examine and critique the temptation we as theologians face, content as we often are to allow “Scripture” to remain an empty variable, a sort of “black box” that is indicated with an abstract gesture, but never carefully examined in its multiplicity of physical instantiations. This artifact we choose off the shelf to be *our* “Bible” is the tangible evidence we will simply ignore, so long as we insist on the illusion of “theological neutrality” and the now demonstrably incorrect assertion that theology is “second order” discourse. In other words, whatever “Scripture” we appeal to will remain both reified and enthymematic in its structuring, and therefore its magisterial effects will be covert, but those effects will remain influential nonetheless. Unless we actually attend to the choices to which Kelsey called us, as described in the previous chapter, we simply perpetuate these illusions and incorrect assertions.

The consideration of these axes and sub-areas—Work (canon, iteration, and syntaxis), Text (ordering, translation and core narrative) and Book (paratext, imprimatur, and audience)—is offered here as a suggestion for *one* means by which we can begin to recompass the “hermeneutic circle” in light of the questions raised by McClymond regarding the theological effects of paratextual elements appearing in printed Bibles in English. Moreover, it offers us a means to address Frei’s remarks regarding his

⁹⁵ Here I am drawing heavily on the vast corpus of concrete, nonfoundationalist analyses of texts and the methodology developed for such analysis by, in particular, Stanley Fish, in such works as *Is There a Text in*

epistemological concerns about the theological reading of texts. What I have presented here is one possible metric with which a theologian can begin to *articulate* her “understanding of how we understand” the Bible (*both* as a Book, and as a book *for* theology) in a way that makes accounting for the *theological* effects of the whole physical artifact as published Book (footnotes, covers, “helpful questions,” marketing demographics, etc.) a possibility.

When this metric, or another like it, is brought to bear on the present state of affairs in the North American context (this “Biblioplex”), then the theologian can no longer reasonably claim ignorance of the ever-presence of these magisterial influences—whether visible or otherwise—coming now not only from ecclesial authorities but from focus groups, marketing directors, and publishing houses.

As this metric plainly demonstrates, once we begin to pay attention to the physical object that is bought off the shelf in the section marked “Bibles,” we begin to recognize that *some* form of magisterial presence is at work, albeit often an extra-ecclesial one. The demonstrable presence of so many types of Bibles, each functioning in a *well-planned* fashion within the marketplace, is clear evidence that *someone* understands the workings—and construction—of these Books (and their concomitant Works and Texts) quite well. Ignorance can no longer be a refuge for the responsible theologian.

Once the “hermeneutic circle” is recompassed to account for the full *dynamics* and concreteness of “Scripture” as an artifact stabilized, iterated, printed, reassembled and encoded within the “Biblioplex,” we are burdened with a new set of trajectories as theologians using the “Bible.” Our context and, more importantly, our *commitments* to

this Class?, *There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech: and It’s a Good Thing, Too* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), and *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001).

our extant *traditions* within those contexts, must be foregrounded. When any printed object has the potential to carry the name “Bible,” our choosing among these many options for the object we will call “Scripture” is itself inherently *confessional*.

What has been demonstrated here, in consonance with Kelsey and Tanner as seen in the preceding chapter, is that the authorization for this confession does not—and cannot—come from the printed object itself. Moreover, we see that we must move beyond the insights of Kelsey and Tanner to the claim that this artifact, this Book, is itself caught up in the dynamics of tradition and market, of interpretation and paratextual infiltration. Where we do not find *overt* magisteria, these dynamics function discreetly, as covert magisterial entities, which might just be another way of stating the now well-known argument made in certain “postmodern” circles that we can never escape our context.

To simply make this observation, however, without beginning to address the *ethical implications* of such a state of affairs, would be tantamount to building a fine ship with no rudder. It would be an enterprise of little consequence.

Thus, though the analysis being presented thus far has been one of *description*, I will now propose that, with the full explication of this set of insights that has become our metric, a shift is occurring towards a more constructive, *prescriptive* approach. That is, having shown the multiplicity of means by which a given set of interpretations is stabilized, and how such stabilizations are *physicalized* into printed, published and marketed artifacts called Books, what remains to be demonstrated is *why* and *how* a set of readers might—and *should*—come to value one particular set of stabilizations over another. This demonstration will be the concern of the next three chapters.

We are driven to this prescriptive aspect because any continued attempt to engage in theological projects that do *not* account for these complexities of Scripture—not only *textual*, but *market-driven* complexities—is dangerous business. At best such an attempt is intellectually dangerous, ignoring clear evidence of these complexities; at worst, it might well also prove *spiritually* dangerous. If we are not able, or willing, to examine the commitments we hold in our hearts in relation to the commitments encoded physically in the artifact of Scripture we hold in our hands, we run the very real risk of falling captive to an agenda that serves a purely fiscal end, not a faithful one.

I mean simply this: If we undertake critical projects in reference to Scripture that do not, at the very least, *acknowledge* what has been demonstrated here—that when the theologian speaks of “the Bible,” she is in actuality concretely referencing *a* Bible that she has bought from a publisher who has crafted it (with the aid of scholars re/constructing the Work and readers interacting with Text) *to be consumed*—then, following Isaiah 44, we enter the range where we stand accused of completely and *idolatrously* misunderstanding the object we hold in our hands.

In his essay, “Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths,” which we have had occasion to mention in the previous chapters, Bruce D. Marshall puts forth a formal means of understanding how a given faith community comes to incorporate “alien discourse”—the voices from both without and within to which the hegemony of the “status quo” no longer meaningfully speaks—into new interpretive truths.⁹⁶ In the next two chapters that follow, we will take up the question of these “alien

⁹⁶ Bruce D. Marshall, “Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths,” in Bruce D. Marshall, *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 75-76.

truths,” and their place in the re-interpretation of Scripture by flesh-and-blood readers, in communities gathered around some, or many, ink-and-paper Bibles. This will take us first to the work of postcolonial theorist R.S. Sugirtharajah, and then to the “postmodern Jewish Philosophy” project championed by Peter Ochs, and others, in the work known as Scriptural Reasoning.

CHAPTER IV

R.S. SUGIRTHARAJAH'S *POSTCOLONIAL RECONFIGURATIONS*

In perusing these pages, some person may think that I abase the Christian while extolling the Musselman [Muslim]. To abase is wrong; but to humble the proud and to enlighten the ignorant, in high places as in low, in the self-righteous as in the sinner, is to render service; and this sometimes becomes a duty.¹

...in traditional China a critic is often simultaneously a poet. The fact is that, in addition to this dual status, the critic and [her] colleagues form the only group of competent readers of Chinese critical writings. Thus, Chinese criticism is written only for professionals rather than for those who are not trained to understand. Since the critic is at once the poet and the reader, his critical comments are intended more to delight than to instruct. He delights himself as well as his colleagues. He does so by writing as a critic the way he writes as a poet, and by reading critical writings the way he enjoys poetry.²

While theologians in the North American academy have been slow to directly address the issues of market and identity with regard to Bibles, this is not to imply that there has been *no* mention at all of the dynamics under analysis here. On the contrary, there are scattered, but notable, outbreakings of inquiry surrounding the formation of Bibles as marketed objects. We have already mentioned McClymond's essay; we should also give credit to a recently collected volume, which appeared on the scene in 2004,

¹ Hyacinthe Loyson, "Introduction, which is a Confession," *To Jerusalem through the Lands of Islam Among Jews, Christians and Moslems* (Chicago: Open Court, 1905) 5.

² Yanfang Tang, "Art or Science: Chinese and Western Perspectives on Literary Criticism," *The Comparatist*, vol. 22 (1998), 57-58.

titled *New Paradigms in Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*.³ Two essays in particular from the book are worth attention, as both take as their starting points the very explicit physical instantiations of Bibles noted in the previous chapter.

The first essay to be considered is Mark Fackler's "The Second Coming of Holy Writ: Niche Bibles and the Manufacture of Market Segments." Fackler is a professor of Communication Arts at Calvin College, and headed the editorial team overseeing the development of the *Max Lucado Inspirational Study Bible* from Livingstone Press.⁴ In the essay, Fackler celebrates the explosion of the Biblioplex, hopeful that "these niche products will save the Bible from obscurity in an era when much of its context strikes many readers as antiquated and even morally out of pace with the ethics of a new millennium."⁵ Fackler's position is quite sympathetic to the trends of Bible manufacture that utilize focus groups and "narrowcasting" in the development of Bibles as products, and his chief concerns seem to center around the threat of market over-saturation and consumer buying fatigue.⁶

Fackler's essay is quite useful, nonetheless, for its comprehensive overview of the history and rise of the North American "niche Bible" market, the most recent (and most expansive) wave of which he claims began with the 1989 publication of the *Women's Devotional Bible* by Zondervan.⁷ It is worth noting that, though clearly an evangelical

³ Robert M. Fowler, Edith Blumhofer, and Fernando F. Segovia, *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2004).

⁴ Mark Fackler, "The Second Coming of Holy Writ: Niche Bibles and the Manufacture of Market Segments," in *New Paradigms*, 77.

⁵ Fackler, "Second Coming," 86.

⁶ Fackler, "Second Coming," 82-83.

⁷ Fackler, "Second Coming," 71.

scholar, Fackler focuses on the media and not on theology, and thus his celebratory stance toward the Biblioplex is quite understandable. For him, “the niche Bible market keeps the ancient Word alive”⁸ by making the old texts attractive and plentiful. His one cautionary moment arises at the end of the essay, where Fackler comes closest in his analysis to the critical positions of this dissertation:

Surely the Bible press of the late twentieth century has pushed the multiform side of [the communications shift begun in the fifteenth century with movable-type presses] to its highest expression and the uniform side toward the science of marketing and audience demographics. At no time in Christian history have so many adaptations of the Bible been so readily available to such a studied market. Driven by the self-help phenomenon of the late twentieth century, Bible publishing has understood its audience in terms of life stages, worship preferences, gendered spirituality, and social roles of all kinds. Yet a point-of-purchase decision requires that these book-buyers put forward \$20-\$50 to add a special-interest Bible to their armory of faith. This is most likely going to occur among an affluent, largely evangelical population. Members of that group presently find themselves faced with a cornucopia of choices; minority populations are not so blessed. Perhaps the community of faith of the “lesser” will finally be the more expressive of older communal virtues such as ecclesial solidarity and confessional unity, while well-Bibled people discover that life needs and social roles have fragmented the fellowship: where two or more gather together, no two texts will match.⁹

This insight is completely correct. From our perspective, however, it is unfortunate that this is Fackler’s tentative *conclusion*, instead of a starting point for deep reflection about this state of affairs and what it entails for the “well-Bibled” populations of the North American continent. Let us take a moment and expand upon this point.

Fackler names several issues in this quotation. He highlights economic disparity, majority/minority identification, “confessional unity,” traditionalism/liberalism, and fragmentation as key points of divergence among various Christian groups in the

⁸ Fackler, “Second Coming,” 87.

⁹ Fackler, “Second Coming,” 87.

contemporary North American context. As the previous chapter has made clear, Fackler is pointing to a definite trend in North American Bible production. However, it should be noted, he does not necessarily agree that this state of affairs is in any way a problem. Hence I would claim that Fackler's essay, while tremendously helpful in laying out the scope and complexity of the current landscape of printed Bibles, fails to approach the *critical* analysis called for at the conclusion of the previous chapter, which might allow us to examine the covert idolatry that threatens to turn the reader around until "the text is the human self alone."¹⁰ It is a threat Fackler names, but fails to adequately address.

The essay that follows Fackler's in the anthology is titled "Packaging the Word, Peddling Holy Writ: Canongate and their Pocket-sized Bibles," by R. S. Sugirtharajah. Unlike Fackler's global overview, Sugirtharajah's essay hones in on one particular set of physical instantiations of English Scripture—in this case, a reprinting by Edinburgh-based Canongate of the books of the King James Version, each individually bound with an introduction written by a celebrity or other noted personage (scientists, authors, musicians, and even avowed atheists are all part of the mix).¹¹ Some religion scholars, including one Buddhist, are included in the assortment as well. The intention, from a marketer's perspective, was to take this well-worn version and to give it a new edge, making it attractive to the British reading public. By any measure, the campaign was a resounding success, with Sugirtharajah noting that, "although Christian bookstores in the

¹⁰ Fackler, "Second Coming," 87.

¹¹ A sampling of the persons invited to contribute introductions includes the musician Bono, authors Charles Frazier, E.L. Doctorow and Doris Lessing, scientist and atheist Steven Rose, and the Dalai Lama. R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Packaging the Word, Peddling Holy Writ: Canongate and their Pocket-sized Bibles," in *New Paradigms*, 89 (also reprinted in Sugirtharajah's *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*).

United Kingdom refused to stock these single volumes, they have become a publishing sensation and sold over a million volumes.”¹²

What is edifying about Sugirtharajah’s essay is twofold: 1) his analysis is tightly focused on a very specific field of physical artifacts, and 2) his methodological position—*postcolonialism*—allows him to adopt a stance toward these artifacts that is far more nuanced and critical than Fackler’s, while not devolving into complete dismissal of the artifacts out of hand. Let us look at both of these points in turn.

1. First, unlike many of the theological commentators we have examined thus far in the previous chapters, Sugirtharajah resists the invocation of a global term, “Scripture,” which would then function in his essay as a reified object. Instead, he enacts several of the careful attentions spoken of in the previous chapter; he looks at a specific version that has been *concretely stabilized* with particularities that can be, in their turn, analyzed: cover art, paratextual additions such as the introductions aforementioned, and the (understandably) profit-driven motives of the publishing house, Canongate.

Hence I applaud Sugirtharajah here for his very tightly controlled field of view. Focusing in this way allows for a more careful and detailed analysis. Thus he can more readily observe that “[t]hese introductions simultaneously free readers from the authority and mediation of critics and entrap them in the essayists’ over-simplistic and often skeptical views, capitalizing on their authors’ popularity and status as novelists, pop-icons, and serious scientists,”¹³ and note vital biases, such as the fact that “throughout these introductions, the hallmark of Protestantism is in evidence: the primacy of the

¹² Sugirtharajah, “Packaging the Word,” 90.

¹³ Sugirtharajah, “Packaging the Word,” 94.

individual reader responding to a sacred text in a manner quite unmediated by the authority of institutional readings.”¹⁴

These are much finer-grained critiques than are possible when one simply discusses “Scripture” as a reified abstract. Thus Sugirtharajah demonstrates the tacit denial of one type of reading, based upon “establishment” authority, and demonstrates its replacement with a different authority—the pop-icon, the scientist, and the “expert.” By keeping this narrow focus on the Canongate Bibles, Sugirtharajah’s essay can offer deep insight into these clashing magisteria—covert, overt, and conferred-by-celebrity. Thus his essay allows us to observe in “real time” the application of an analysis at least structurally similar to the one advocated in the previous chapter, and to see how such an approach actually functions.

2. In addition to the structural similarities in his project to the analysis of Textuality advocated by this dissertation, there is also value in exploring beyond this lone essay of Sugirtharajah’s, into the wider scope of his involvement with the postcolonial project. While I do not fully advocate the positions and insights arising from the work of the postcolonial theorists over the past forty years, there are certainly aspects of this project worth critically engaging. This is especially the case with regard to the willingness of postcolonial theory to raise serious economic, cultural, and dialogical critiques of what could be termed the complacency of North American Christian hegemonic identity.

¹⁴ Sugirtharajah, “Packaging the Word,” 94.

We should begin such an engagement by first outlining in greater detail what is meant here by both the “postcolonial project,” and Sugirtharajah’s specific involvement with it.

Overview of Postcolonialism

The 20th Century was marked throughout its course by the reconfiguration of myriad cultures that had, in previous centuries, borne the yoke of imperial rule. These events of liberation, followed by periods of great flux in terms of national and intra-national identities among groups and castes, form the global backdrop for the rise, in Western academic discourse, of the concept of “postcolonialism,” a term that, according to Ania Loomba, should not be thought of as:

just coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. Such a position would allow us to include people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African-Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as ‘postcolonial’ subjects although they live within metropolitan cultures. It also allows us to incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance with contemporary resistances to imperialism and to dominant Western culture.¹⁵

First brought to the fore by theorists like Edward Said (whose book, *Orientalism*, helped define the terms and perspectives from which the entire critical project of “non-Western discourse” springs), postcolonialism is a species of literary and cultural studies, and has given rise to disciplinary cognates across the academic spectrum.

Like many so-called “identity” theologies that precede it (in the world of academia, at least, where it is a more recent entrant, though on the global landscape it

¹⁵ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 12.

could be considered one of the earliest forms of liberation theology¹⁶), postcolonial theology has found a voice, if not always a comfortable home, in seminary and divinity school curricula. Like other positional theologies such as black theologies, feminist theologies and womanist theologies, the postcolonial project is often given lipservice, but by no means fully embraced, by the guild. This very “outsider” status is both the context and the subject of critique by the academic wing of postcolonial theologians.

The rise of the postcolonial project, specifically in the sphere of theology, opens for us another window through which to view possible ways forward with regard to questions of biblical authority and hermeneutics. Such analyses can point us to one model of theological *non*-neutrality; this non-neutrality, in turn, is vital for the enactment of the sort of analyses of Textuality called for in the present dissertation. Observation of these analyses at work, as mentioned with regard to Sugirtharajah a moment ago, will offer keen insights into our own North-American context, as well as giving us an avenue to critically engage the postcolonial model itself.

To this end, the present chapter will look at the recent work of British postcolonial theorist R.S. Sugirtharajah, in particular a series of articles collected under the title *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology*¹⁷ (an anthology that conveniently also includes a slightly altered version

¹⁶ For example, Gandhi’s “Salt March” in 1930 can be understood both as a political and a theological act of resistance. When Gandhi claims that British rule is designed to “crush the very life out of” the Indian people, I contend that this has a similar theological consonance to the sorts of repressions and resistances analyzed by Cavanaugh in the Chilean milieu. Mahatma Gandhi and Dennis Dalton, *Selected Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 76; William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

¹⁷ If one wishes to explore the corpus of the postcolonial project, the following landmarks will be invaluable: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage 1994), and *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism (The New Critical Idiom)* (New York: Routledge,

of his essay with which we began this discussion, “Packaging the Word, Peddling Holy Writ”).

The chapter will proceed by first offering an overview of the key points of Sugirtharajah’s project, highlighting the salient connections to the present investigation. Second, these connections will be analyzed for their strengths in regard to meeting the concerns of the dissertation. Finally, concerns and critiques will be raised to demonstrate that, while Sugirtharajah’s project has definite merit, it does not offer a sufficiently developed theological vision to meet the needs demonstrated by the present project.

Sugirtharajah’s Project

Sugirtharajah’s book is a collection of essays, the majority of which were previously published between 1997 and 2002. The book is divided under two thematic headings: “Relocating Biblical Studies” and “Remapping Christian Theological Discourse.” An unfortunate weak point in the volume, it should be noted, is that the second, supposedly theologically oriented part, largely involves reworkings of essays and themes that are presented in the first part. As with Fackler, it might be argued that, useful though Sugirtharajah’s project is, it ultimately does not venture far enough in its analysis.

2005); and Diana Brydon, ed., *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, Vol 1*. (New York: Routledge, 2001). The preceding are chiefly concerned with the literary-critical and cultural-studies aspects of the project, but they provide rich background and detail for a general understanding of the specific applications of the project beyond those academic confines. While there are several examples of writers working specifically in the area of biblical studies, Sugirtharajah was chosen because his book, to date, is one of the more comprehensive and developed collections available. While still a collection of essays, it is at least making the attempt at a comprehensive sphere of discourse encompassing hermeneutics and theology, whatever its ultimate shortcomings.

Regardless of this perceived initial shortcoming, from this pair of sections we can isolate three main critiques raised by Sugirtharajah that are quite germane to the interests of this dissertation, and that form the thematic backbone of Sugirtharajah's project: 1) the critique of Western imperial capitalism as masked by religious identity, 2) the critique of major Western metanarratives, which marginalize subaltern¹⁸ populations, and 3) the positing of the concept of hybridity as a viable answer to the hegemonist discourses of imperialism. We will examine each in its turn.

1. Critique of Western imperial capitalism as masked by religious identity

In his description of the overall aims of his and other postcolonial projects, Sugirtharajah makes a claim which is simultaneously familiar and jarring, to wit:

The role of postcolonialism is to ensure that the yearnings of the poor take precedence over the interests of the affluent; that the emancipation of the subjugated has primacy over the freedom of the powerful; and that the participation of the marginalized takes priority over the perpetuation of a system which systematically excludes them.¹⁹

In other words, the plight and the suffering of real human persons is a central concern of the postcolonial project. A Western reader, upon encountering this quotation, might be tempted to agree too readily with Sugirtharajah here. *Of course*, the Christian Westerner might well aver, *we know this quite well. After all, this is simply the Gospel we proclaim.*

¹⁸ The term "subaltern" is adapted from British military parlance. In that context, the term simply indicates a "subordinate." The term has been adapted into postcolonial discourse to indicate a member of the colonized (and, by logical extension, perceived-inferior) population. See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1988).

¹⁹ *Postcolonial Bible* 113.

Indeed, the similarity of such a quotation to the statements of Jesus, from the Beatitudes and beyond, might lead the Western Christian reader to feel a measure of comfort.

But such comfort will be short-lived. Our over-ready familiarity is quickly undermined by Sugirtharajah's positioning of this goal of the postcolonial project *in direct opposition* to what he and other postcolonial theorists perceive to be the aims and ends of Western Christendom, namely, the concentration of power, capital, and above all existential autonomy *away* from the marginalized. If we, as Western readers, are comfortable with the words of Christ mentioned above in the Beatitudes, Sugirtharajah would simply point out that we have most likely misunderstood them in the first place.

To more fully understand this point that Sugirtharajah is making, one need not look farther than a recent volume, which deals with the subject of biblical evangelism, *The Challenge of Bible Translation*. The book is a collection of essays. The essays deal with both the method and the mission (as understood from the Western perspective) of Bibles translated for evangelism in foreign cultures. The authors perceive their paramount task to be to "get the transforming Word of God out into the hands and hearts of the people of the world."²⁰ This is a latter-day version, one could argue, of the same missionizing impulse that Sugirtharajah observes authorizing the earlier colonial movements, and that these colonial movements themselves have been tied inextricably to the interests of global capitalism.²¹

²⁰ Glen G. Scorgie, "Introduction and Overview," *The Challenge of Bible Translation* 20.

²¹ As Loomba puts it, "we have defined colonialism as the forcible takeover of land and economy and, in the sense of European colonialism, a re-structuring of non-capitalist economies in order to fuel European capitalism. This allows us to understand modern European colonialism not as some transhistorical impulse to conquer but as an integral part of capitalist development." Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2005), 20.

It is worthwhile to note, then, what Glen G. Scorgie, a professor of theology at the Bethel Seminary in San Diego, writes in his introduction to the book:

Today there is a growing awareness of the strategic role that (usually anonymous) translators play. Most Christians do not understand the original languages, and therefore do not personally have access to the text of the Bible as it was originally written. For the most part they are dependent on translators to tell them what the Bible says. Translators are thus the first-line gatekeepers for the Word of God. *Just as stock market investors need to be able to trust corporate executives and their auditors, the church must be able to trust its translators.*²²

Scorgie's insight in the first half of the quotation is quite valuable, and might be expanded to echo some of the chief contentions of the present dissertation.²³ As helpful as these claims would be, however, it is vital to note here the absolute *ease* with which Scorgie puts forward this financial analogy, which I have highlighted in the final sentence.

Scorgie is clearly writing to an audience for whom affluence is no stranger; the intended readers of *The Challenge of Bible Translation* are unabashedly assumed by this quotation to have no difficulty imagining participation in the stock market; no difficulty

²² Scorgie, *The Challenge of Bible Translation* 23, my emphasis.

²³ While the insight expressed by Scorgie here is fundamentally correct, two things should be noted. First, while correct, the scope of the inquiry is *limited*. There is an assumption of the existence of an "original text" available to a reader in an "original language" (an assumption that the present analysis, as shown in the previous chapter, seeks to draw into question). Second, the reader should note the ease with which this financial analogy is made. This, in light of the analysis put forth in the previous chapter, can easily be named as a covertly encoded theological position. It assumes the reader will have a tacit comfort with a type of "branded" Christian identity (shaped, supposedly, by the version they are reading) that agrees with some level of participation in global market capitalism. Scorgie, in other words, assumes the reader will understand this analogy because the reader is herself an investor. But to make this tacit assumption is already to have suppressed the overwhelming weight of (a perhaps differently branded) Biblical witness, which speaks precisely against such a dual-identity, and against such participation in usury-based markets. Moreover, in making such an assumption, Scorgie has clearly indicated the demographic range of economic class and resources he expects his readers to possess.

either from the point of view of material resources *or* morality.²⁴ The “anticipated audience” of this quotation is a reader for whom disposable income is the norm, and upon whom the harsher realities, namely those of subsisting and surviving that pertain in many third-world milieus, do not impinge. This imagined reader, moreover, is the one beckoned to underwrite the project of Scorgie’s book itself, namely carrying the Gospel, in the form of Bibles-in-translation, to “the world.” At each of these levels, the reader can see, Scorgie’s project (both from a literary and missionary point of view) is underwritten by the assumptions and comforts of a well-networked flow of global capital: he and his readers assume a great deal in both the analogies they deploy to describe their mission, and in their understanding of the structure of the Great Commission itself.

Sugirtharajah’s first point of critique, then, is to raise the consciousness of his Western readers with regard to these basic issues regarding the reading of the Bible:

The singular aim of postcolonial biblical studies is to put colonialism at the centre of biblical scholarship. Both the historical and the hermeneutical literature of biblical interpretation over the last four hundred years has been defined by the needs of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and later by the Enlightenment and such attendant features as rationalism, or its offshoot historical criticism. *There is a remarkable reluctance among biblical scholars to speak of*

²⁴ This moral question of finance is often overlooked in the North American context, where the moral focus is so often exclusively on *sexual* morality that money (and its use) is regarded as a “neutral” or private matter. It can be reasonably (and biblically) argued, however, that a Christian *should* find any situation in which she has disposable affluence - while there are still those homeless and starving in the world - to be a state of *sin* and therefore morally reprehensible. It would follow from such a premise that Scorgie’s implicit assumption that a given congregant’s participation in stock-market capitalism can include a dimension of “trust” is questionable, and is itself quite telling of the naïveté with which he applies this financial analogy to notions of biblically-formed identity. To illustrate the difficulty of using financial analogies in matters of “trust,” consider this example: A December 22, 2007 “WallStreet Confidential” video feature on TheStreet.com contains the following statement by James J. Cramer, host of CNBC’s show *Mad Money*. In his part of a conversation he boasts, *repeatedly*, about leaking false and unlawful information to the press for the express purpose of influencing markets in his favor: “[W]hat’s important when you’re in hedge-fund mode is not to do anything remotely truthful, because the truth is so against your view that it’s important to create a new truth, to develop a fiction.” Quoted in “The Invisible Hand,” *Harper’s Magazine* June 2007, 23-24. As reifications go, stock-market capitalism is among the most pernicious and spiritually treacherous, at least from the perspective by which I read the words of Christ, and the Prophets Amos and Jeremiah.

imperialism as shaping the contours of biblical texts and their interpretation. What postcolonialism makes clear is that biblical studies can no longer be confined to the history of textual traditions, or to the doctrinal richness embedded in texts, but needs to extend its scope to include issues of domination, Western expansion, and its ideological manifestations, as central forces in defining biblical scholarship.²⁵

The portion of the quotation I have highlighted is, I believe, a paramount insight. We are not simply discussing the interpretation of a neutral and static text, but rather a text that has itself been thoroughly *shaped* by ideological forces. This is a criticism that can be made more easily, it seems, from the standpoint of postcolonial discourse than from within more mainline Western theologies. These more mainline theologies, moreover, actively resist such bold critiques of the Bible that dare to name it as a crafted, marketed and *interest-laden* artifact. This quotation underscores the importance of including critical discourses, like postcolonialism and others, in the wider dialogue surrounding Scripture and the questions of authority (*what is allowed? what is required? and who is qualified [and upon what grounds] to make such judgments?*) with which this dissertation is preoccupied.

Taking his criticism to heart, then, we might imagine Sugirtharajah arguing against the likes of Scorgie, pressing the point that in writings where such facile claims to economic mobility are made, “the concerns of the poor and the disadvantaged *go unnoticed* and their plight does not occupy a central place...”²⁶ In short, Sugirtharajah is reminding Western readers that these invocations of “trust” by writers like Scorgie, alongside such assumptions of disposable wealth, might too easily make us blind and

²⁵ R.S. Sugirtharajah, “Coding and Decoding: Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation,” *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 74, my emphasis.

²⁶ *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 59, my emphasis.

deaf to the very real *human suffering* that “the Gospel” (in its variety of construals - even the very Western construals that are participating in these naive financial comparisons) is so often invoked to address and assuage.

This speaks to the point raised in the previous chapter about the tight connection between biblical interpretation and strategies of social identity. We must remain attentive to the feedback loop that comes into play when one creates (and, in the case of a printed Bible version, *recreates*) a physical and marketed artifact that encodes identity, class, race and other expectations into its matrix. Following the *specific* case here of Scorgie, this manifests as a translated Bible for consumption by a foreign population. The case is applicable to *all* such artifacts manifesting in both foreign and local contexts, however, though the particulars of any given instance may not resemble the others (i.e., not all cases will resemble Scorgie’s particular set of artifacts).

While Sugirtharajah does not specifically target Scorgie, and Scorgie’s co-authors, in his essays, the postcolonial project presented in *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* and Sugirtharajah’s other works is tremendously helpful in shaking Western readers out of habitual blindness to these sorts of encodings that are occurring in both more “academic” writings (*viz. The Challenge of Bible Translation*) and contemporary church missions (the very efforts that *Challenge of Bible Translation* in part documents). On this front, there is a strong affinity between a practice Sugirtharajah refers to as “decoding texts”²⁷ and the criticisms I am attempting to raise about North American theologians’ various hermeneutical “blind spots.”

²⁷ Sugirtharajah, “Coding and Decoding,” 79.

When a text is decoded, as Sugirtharajah puts it, then “[a]nyone who engages with [the] texts knows that they are not innocent and that they reflect the cultural, religious, political and ideological interests and contexts out of which they emerge.”²⁸ This act of decoding demands that the reader be attentive to several factors, among them the means by which hegemonic power reshapes both texts and readings of texts (and thus, to use the terminology of the previous chapter, publishes Books designed to serve the interests of global and corporate powers, but not necessarily the interests of God). On the other side of this decoding, according to Sugirtharajah, “a postcolonial reading will also be alert to the *covert* ways the marginalized protest.”²⁹

These encodings—both of the powerful and the powerless—are tied to the realities inherent in the structured global economy. But while these *realities* are inherent so long as the market exists, the market itself is *not* inherent, or natural. For the subaltern and the recently decolonized, the market is a force that must be reckoned with, bargained with, and lived with, but Sugirtharajah’s point is that, despite this, the reader and the text both can imagine and enact narratives that subvert and dethrone entrenched powers: “Postcolonial criticism not only celebrates the presence of oppositional voices within the text but also marks out silenced voices and spaces in texts which fly in the face of hierarchical and hegemonic modes of thought.”³⁰

²⁸ Sugirtharajah, “Coding and Decoding,” 79.

²⁹ Sugirtharajah, “Coding and Decoding,” 84, my emphasis.

2. The Critique of major Western metanarratives³¹

Thus Sugirtharajah's project also seeks to draw into question the narrative (and metanarrative) assumptions that have authorized and continue to underwrite both the imperial colonialism of the past and the present academic patronization of subaltern identities. While his methodology is applicable to a variety of such narratives, we will here briefly consider three of his examinations to illustrate this point: 1) the Christian "mission narratives," 2) the narrative of Eurocentrism, and finally 3) Sugirtharajah's criticism of postmodernism-as-metanarrative. Each area reinforces Sugirtharajah's overarching point that Western religious and academic discourse seeks through power dynamics to perpetuate a myopia with regard to the value and legitimacy of subaltern populations.

1. First, the matter of the "mission narratives." Sugirtharajah challenges the notion that there has been a constant construal in the Christian tradition of texts from Matthew and Acts as authorizing missionary travels. "The Bible, especially the New Testament, has been projected as a document with a missional thrust facilitating missionary endeavours and promoting Christian values," Sugirtharajah claims, going on to state that, "In such a context the Bible provided the evaluative critical language to

³⁰ Sugirtharajah, "Coding and Decoding," 85.

³¹ This term, *metanarrative*, is often interchangeable with the idea of the "grand narrative." In Jean-Francois Lyotard, the metanarrative is named as the key foundation for the legitimacy of authority within modernism. Grand narratives of progress, liberty, and knowledge, according to Lyotard, can be found to be encoded through the works of philosophy and political theory that define the modernist project in the West. What drives Lyotard's brief but seminal work, *The Postmodern Condition*, then, is the question, which I paraphrase here as, "After metanarrative, where do we locate legitimacy now?" Sugirtharajah's point, and Lyotard agrees, is that the break between the modern project and the "postmodern" is never a clean one, and thus the lingering power of grand narratives remains to be interrogated and subverted. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 31-38 and *passim*.

judge other peoples' cultures and contexts."³² Thus, Sugirtharajah argues, these passages from the New Testament were not of perennial importance, but were brought to the interpretational fore only at the dawn of the colonial project. In Sugirtharajah's reading, "Before the eighteenth century, Matthew's command 'Go ye and preach' was an unfashionable, under-exegeted, often even absent, text" in the European churches.³³

Acknowledging that a majority of European (as well as North American) Christians take for granted that what are currently understood as mission-narratives have *always* been read in this fashion, he subjects this assumption to a hermeneutic of suspicion, demonstrating that this is not in fact the case. As he says,

I am particularly interested in looking again at the Matthean missionary commission (Mt 28.19) and the missionary journeys of Paul (Acts 13-14; 15.40-18.22; 18.22-21.16). These were profitably used in the missionary efforts of the church in the colonial period. Commentaries for Indian students written during both the colonial and the post-independent periods, mobilized Matthew's text as a biblical warrant to missionize the natives, and utilized the mission-journey narratives, as a model for their Christianizing work. *These texts had been dormant and were largely disregarded by the reformers*, yet were reinvoked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the evangelical revival which significantly coincided with the rise of Western imperialism. At this time, the Matthean text came to be used as a template to institutionalize the missionary obligation, and Luke's alleged recording of Paul's missionary undertaking was *fabricated* as a way of perpetuating the myth that it was from the West that the superstitious and ignorant natives received the essential verities of God's message.³⁴

³² Sugirtharajah, "Coding and Decoding," 97.

³³ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 17.

³⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 17, my emphasis.

Significantly for our analysis here, Sugirtharajah likens the revitalization of such texts in service of imperialism to a *marketing strategy* that worked in consonance with the expansion of the mercantile trading companies into the colonies.³⁵

2. This notion of marketing strategy dovetails with Sugirtharajah's demonstration of a wholesale re-description of biblical origins by Western scholarship towards a Eurocentric bias. This re-description denies the influence upon the development of the text of any sources that are not explicitly Hellenic or Hebrew :

The imposition of a missionary-tour pattern on Acts has other hermeneutical implications in addition to bolstering a westward expansion of the church. It reinforces the view that the churches in Asia and Africa have been recipients of the gospel as a gift from a benevolent West to enlighten the heathen. It largely ignores the Christian presence in these parts of the world before the arrival of the modern missionary movement.³⁶

Sugirtharajah argues, moreover, that the exclusivity of this re-described narrative of Christian origins *intentionally* negates any mention of Hindu or Buddhist influence on the development of the text, despite his claim that extensive historical evidence that Indian traders were well-established throughout the Mediterranean region during the biblical period. Any attempts at scholarly comparisons between Buddhist texts and early Christian sources are, according to Sugirtharajah, suppressed or dismissed outright in a deliberate attempt to narrow the story of Christian influences to the Greek and Israelite cultures.³⁷

³⁵ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 20-22.

³⁶ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 26.

³⁷ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 28-29.

This narrowing, in Sugirtharajah's view, serves chiefly to set the stage for a complete re-casting of the Christian story in a light that is exclusively Eurocentric and palatable to the imperial and missionizing elites:

The Bible, essentially an 'Eastern Book'... migrated from its Mediterranean context, settled on English soil, and is now claimed as belonging to the Western civilization and literary tradition. The Bible is now being freed from Hebraic and Hellenistic discourse practices and seen as the bearer and marker of English literary tradition...³⁸

Sugirtharajah's analysis here parallels claims made by Thuesen's *In Discordance with the Scriptures*. The shift of narrative-origin sets the stage for a Eurocentrism that culminates in various levels of English-Bible chauvinism, through the tacit or explicit claim that English versions are the epitome of biblical expression, perhaps even eclipsing the original-language versions themselves.³⁹

This Eurocentric bias plays out in a variety of subtle ways. For example, Sugirtharajah points out "the tendency of Western biblical scholarship to read [Mark's] gospel as a "passion narrative with a long introduction," thus effectively erasing all traces of its opposition to foreign rule, and its atrocities, and the role of the local aristocratic collaborators whose support helped to prop up the system"⁴⁰—each of these being tendencies that map easily onto the political identities of more modern, European

³⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 60. It should be pointed out that these sorts of scholarly re-configurations of the Bible as an "English" book have their vulgar counterparts in the avowedly anti-Semitic and hyper-fundamentalist "British Israel" movement. One recent example of this sort of supercessionist rhetoric can be found in the "Overcomer Ministries" radio broadcast of 30 July 2007, wherein the claim is made that the "Anglo-Saxon people" are actually the "lost tribe of Israel," who have been divinely appointed to maintain the "true" documents of inspired holy Scripture, the King James Version of the Bible. See the broadcast archives at <http://www.overcomerministry.org> for further examples of this rhetorical position.

³⁹ See again Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, particularly chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Sugirtharajah, "Coding and Decoding," 91.

colonialisms. Thus, Sugirtharajah points out, the “standard reading” by biblical scholars of Mark, and other gospels, works to reinforce a status quo, supporting the position that European colonization was relatively benign.⁴¹

3. Finally, Sugirtharajah tracks such chauvinisms into the present-day Western academy itself, seeing even in the “suspicion of metanarratives” (a la Lyotard) an attempt to rob subaltern populations of both story and voice, just at the moment when their voices and stories can, for the first time, be truly heard:

Why is it that, at the time when previously silenced people have begun to script their own stories and speak for themselves, the West celebrates the death of the author and proclaims that the megastories are over. The West is currently experiencing the loss of grand discourse and is frowning at the idea of the power of agency, at a time when the subalterns are trying to make their stories heard...At a time when postcolonial theorists are trying to recover subaltern histories and stories, we are informed that there is no history to be narrated or stories to be told.⁴²

Such an insight is quite valuable, as it demonstrates that no position (even a position that seeks to be as inclusive as many iterations of “postmodernism” claim to be) is immune to the corrosive effects of hegemony and power. Thus even positions that are *prima facie* advocating for subaltern voices and experiences within the academy should be critiqued and closely read.

In making this move, Sugirtharajah casts postmodernism itself as a grand narrative—one deployed in the interests of “Eurocentralized” power and finance

⁴¹ Sugirtharajah’s critical stance of such “status quo” readings is neatly summed by his statement that “the old scholarly quest for the original meaning is now replaced [in postcolonial and other critical approaches] by the search for a ‘good misreading’.” Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 48.

⁴² Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 94.

capital.⁴³ However, Sugirtharajah also cautions those critical of Eurocentric power to be wary of flying from the shelter of one grand narrative to another:

What postcolonialism attempts to do is to demonstrate that the Bible itself is part of the conundrum rather than a panacea for all the ills of the postmodern/postcolonial world. However much Dalits, feminists, and other crusaders against oppression may tantalizingly recuperate the emancipatory potential in the text, the Bible continues to be an unsafe and problematic text. For every redeeming aspect of the narrative, there is an unredeeming feature linked to it. . . . All along we have assumed liberation and human rights—high points of the Enlightenment—to be part of the biblical ethos. Before the advent of the Enlightenment’s radical critique of religion, however, the medieval natural law advocated by Thomas Aquinas upheld the view that people had no rights, only duties. It may be possible for the advocates of liberation, applying Enlightenment values, to mine the Bible for its liberative strands. However, it is important to be mindful that this same Bible contains elements of bondage and disenfranchisement. What postcolonial biblical criticism does is to make this ambivalence and paradox clear and visible.⁴⁴

Making the ambivalences and paradoxes clear and visible is, in one phrase, to sum up the deep value that methodologies like postcolonial criticism offer to present North American theology. While I do not share the depth of Sugirtharajah’s antipathy to postmodern approaches, I find his call to engage the Bible in its cultural and literary complexities to be right on the mark. As the above quotation asserts, and as other sections of this dissertation would agree, the use and exegesis of the Bible demands an engagement from readers that will always be risky and tenuous.

As was the case in the previous section on the connection of finance capital to religious identity, we can easily find affinities between Sugirtharajah’s critiques of these various narrative foci and the claims about narrative made in chapters two and three of

⁴³ To more fully grasp the implications of Sugirtharajah’s gestures here, the reader is highly encouraged to explore Frederic Jameson’s *Postmodernism: or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, where complementary assertions about the connections of the postmodern project to trenchant ideologies are developed.

⁴⁴ Sugirtharajah, “Coding and Decoding,” 100-101.

this project. As Sugirtharajah demonstrates repeatedly in his essays, biblical texts are re-read and re-construed to give rise to narrative authorizations for colonialism and global inequity, and these re-construals can be clearly demonstrated through examination of historical and artifactual evidence.

One example, offered by Sugirtharajah to elaborate upon his detection of these colonialized readings, occurs in his essay “Relocating Biblical Studies,” in *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*. In the essay, he highlights three spheres in which “the historical and cultural reality of colonialism” is made plain—and challenged—by postcolonial analyses.⁴⁵ In this essay, Sugirtharajah claims that contemporary Western biblical scholarship is rife with, and hampered by, “Europeanization” (“The history of the missionary activities in Acts is of course predominantly the history of the gospel leaving its original Jewish environment and reaching Europe. My criticism is that the commentators make too much of this.”⁴⁶), “racialization” (As he puts it, “racialization [the affirmation of white supremacy] has entered into Western biblical scholarship by means of intellectual resources employed by those scholars who helped shape the discipline.”⁴⁷), and “negation of ‘the other’” (“There is a tendency among biblical scholars to either discard or diminish the African and Asian presence in the biblical texts.”⁴⁸).

⁴⁵ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 103.

⁴⁶ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 103.

⁴⁷ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonila Reconfigurations*, 105.

⁴⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 106.

While space here does not lend itself to the full accounting of Sugirtharajah's critique of these points, the reader is encouraged to explore this essay for herself, as it offers a succinct overview of the "re-readings and re-construals" to which I alluded in the previous two paragraphs. Again, with this initial reading, there are, as before, strong affinities between Sugirtharajah's critiques and the methodological claims of the present project regarding the connection between marketing forces (acting as covertly *magisterial* forces) and the identities that surround reading communities of the various published versions of the artifacts we call "Bibles."

3. Hybridity

Sugirtharajah's constructive proposal, drawing on the above critiques, involves advocating for the radical enactment of an observed pattern of indigenous responses to imperial and colonizing attempts to impose a hegemonic religious identity upon subaltern populations: the practice of *hybridity*. Simply put, "hybridity" is Sugirtharajah's term for the syncretistic blending of elements of Christianity and biblical identity with local religious practices (in his examples, chiefly from Hinduism and Buddhism) already extant in colonized or post-colonized regions.

Hybridity is predicated on the notion of *bricolage*⁴⁹ and pastiche. It takes for its premise the claim that there is no pure religious practice—no matter how hegemonic—and no purity of culture (either on the part of the colonizer *or* the colonized) that should "naturally" obtain, or be rigidly maintained, after disparate cultures have come into

⁴⁹ A Derridian term, adapted from Claude Levi-Strauss, indicating the assemblage of incongruous parts into a mediated and temporary whole. See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1973), 278-293.

contact.⁵⁰ Sugirtharajah's intent is to encourage this hybridizing process of open reading of religious traditions as "a sign of resistance and survival, and an act of validation in the face of colonial hegemony."⁵¹

Thus there is not, for Sugirtharajah, *a Truth* that can or should be maintained, but rather a set of recombining and mutable "truths" that the subaltern navigates in equal strokes of openness and resistance.⁵² This recombination of truths leads to new possibilities for identity formation and preservation, depending on the given set of forces at work in the direct experience of clash between hegemony and subaltern.

In Sugirtharajah's project the practice of hybridity is championed precisely because it undercuts the oppressive particularity of the colonizer that leads to hegemony. It allows religious practitioners amongst the subaltern to take what they like, and leave the rest, in the process of recovering their religious and cultural autonomy in the wake of colonialism's hold. The models to follow, in Sugirtharajah's view, are the likes of Rammohun Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen, two pre-twentieth century Indian biblical commentators who "mapped out their understanding of Jesus in response to the missionaries' essentialist, and biased view of Hindus, [while never losing] their admiration and affection for Jesus and his teachings."⁵³ These two thinkers, in repeated

⁵⁰ "What postcolonialism implies is that there is no recourse to a time when tradition was pristine, identity was pure and immaculate, or cultures were uncontaminated. What postcolonialism signifies is that the future is open and the past unstable and constantly changing." Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 8.

⁵¹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 139.

⁵² "What postcolonialism does is to force us to choose between truth and truth." Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 124.

⁵³ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 130.

examples given in *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, “were able to incorporate Jesus into the Hindu framework without feeling any need to give up their own religious tradition”⁵⁴ They are, for Sugirtharajah, practitioners of hybridity *par excellence*.

For Sugirtharajah, this sort of hybridity, embodied by thinkers such as Roy and Sen, serves to dismantle the power dynamics that inhere in the meeting of any set of dogmatically held identities. Specifically, hybridization “deflates particularisms”⁵⁵—and such deflation, in Sugirtharajah’s model, leads ineluctably to a more just and nurturing expression of *local* culture (over/against imported, colonizing, and hegemonic culture). Subaltern populations are empowered and encouraged by hybridity to “poach” religious texts and gather pieces to be recombined into new and empowering narratives. “Their way of de-Europeanizing Christ,” Sugirtharajah asserts, “is to retrieve the Jesus of the Gospels, and to place him within his own continent and situate him along with the long line of Asia’s illustrious religious figures.”⁵⁶

While this end is understandably enticing, there are several difficulties I see with the concept of hybridity that must be addressed. First, there is an unacknowledged danger in the deflation of particularities, especially among colonized populations. While I have much agreement with Sugirtharajah’s notion that there is no “natural” or “pure” expression of a cultural or religious identity that must be maintained, there are points where it seems that Sugirtharajah is asserting that *all* such markers or tenets are negotiable in a cultural exchange. Where he can be read to make this claim, his position

⁵⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 139.

⁵⁵ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 125.

⁵⁶ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 136.

can appear overly romanticized. Yet this hyperbolized negotiability is a logical implication of Sugirtharajah's arguments, and should be critically explored before it is dismissed.

In many of the essays comprising *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, Sugirtharajah puts forth the claim that any interest in the maintenance of religious particularity (*viz.*, a tradition or an institution) is a root cause of oppression.⁵⁷ Thus a more just and equitable cultural moment arises, so goes his argument, when the subaltern is free to hybridize aspects of the colonizing religion into the indigenous faith practice, *without* regard for the rigidities of either tradition.⁵⁸

But is this truly the desirable solution? There seems to be no clear description in this model for the liberative effects promised to the subaltern if hybridity is practiced. At several points in his essays, Sugirtharajah's position fails to differentiate between the fluidity of particularity regarding the hegemon and that of the subaltern. If this duality is what Sugirtharajah is suggesting, then it seems that there is no formal distinction between the two in his model, and hence hybridity might be used as easily to *erase* the particularities of the colonized and absorb the subaltern into the hegemony.

⁵⁷ "Sadly, the gap between theology and church doctrine is too wide to be bridged. Obviously, the churches prefer fundamentalism to theological scholarship, since fundamentalism allows them to keep their doctrines intact, their institutions safe. Theological scrutiny would require them to revise their beliefs and reconfigure their identity." Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 121.

⁵⁸ In making this claim, I have in mind the interplay of the following two quotations: 1) "What these new readings in foreign contexts do is to relativize the Christian text and invite and force Christian interpreters to keep their eyes open to disruptive, even uncomfortable, readings. This means constantly rethinking Christian hermeneutical conclusions, accepting them as only provisional, and acknowledging their methods as tentative. Anything other than this will be a return to the exegetical imperialism that has often marked and marred Christian scholarship." Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 48, and 2) "Rather than striving to redeem India, Indian Christian theology's future would lie in its ability to evolve a hybridized style of identity. Its relevance will be measured not by its ability to invoke lost authenticities of ancient India or to superintend the purity of the gospel, but by its ability to create an allegory of theological hybridity." Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 125. It seems clear, from these, that Sugirtharajah intends that *every* aspect of the two cultures is open for hybridization without reserve.

In contrast to this, there could be an equally strong case to be made that the *maintenance* of an indigenous particularity under hegemonizing conditions is equitable, if not preferable, to sublimation. In other words, hybridity should *not* be considered a two-way mechanism, but rather a methodology for opening the hegemon to negotiation while maintaining certain *non-negotiables* on behalf of the subaltern. Indeed, at other points in his essays this seems to be Sugirtharajah's *actual* desire: that the subaltern will be *autonomous*, that they will tell their *own* (i.e., their own *particular*) stories. When Sugirtharajah presents this more nuanced alternative, this is the position I find preferable and supportable by the demonstrable facts: the perseverance, not erasure, of particularities lead to the continuation of identities, subaltern or otherwise.⁵⁹ It is not clear, unfortunately, across the range of Sugirtharajah's writings, which of these two alternative readings of hybridity is the one for which he is actually advocating. At the points where it seems to be the dual-sided fluidity, where all (both subaltern and hegemonic identities) are negotiable, we must continually press the question: how does the call for hybridization of cultural and religious tropes will not simply serve the ends of hegemony? Will not the particularity of indigenous practice be erased through hybridity?

To put this another way, one may laud Roy and Sen when they incorporate Jesus into a Hindu framework, but without *some* non-negotiable marker of identity in the exchange, there seems to be nothing that would prevent just as easily the hybridization of Hindu cultures with the most malevolent aspects of the imposed Western culture. In

⁵⁹ For an articulate argument against my position on the value of particularity—though, interestingly, it is one with which I could hardly imagine Sugirtharajah would agree, thus demonstrating the complexity of these sorts of positions—the reader is encouraged to consult Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2004).

other words, without such a non-negotiable marker, what would be the difference between the statement “they were able to incorporate Jesus into the Hindu framework without feeling any need to give up their own religious tradition,” and, “they were able to incorporate transnational sweat-shop capitalism into the Hindu framework without feeling any need to give up their own religious tradition”?

Clearly Sugirtharajah will approve the former and disdain the latter, but, so long as we are reading him in this ultra-fluid, overly romanticized idiom, it remains to be shown *how* his overture to hybridity will necessarily defend against and avoid this sort of compromise. There is no guarantee, if one extrapolates *solely* from the claims, which Sugirtharajah has put forth, that hybridity will in every case flow in the direction of increased justice, rather than increased commercialization and injustice. To claim that it *will*, without highlighting the mechanisms by which this protection will be accomplished, seems naive.

This is a vital concern. The mechanism of hybridity put forth in Sugirtharajah’s essays seems either insufficiently consistent, or insufficiently developed, to quell the concerns that arise from its invocation. To wit: in his zeal to free the subaltern from the constraints of dogma and tradition, it is unclear how the resulting hybridizations will *necessarily* develop into structures that increase equity and justice. Sugirtharajah must more fully explicate *how* hybridity will necessarily lead to liberation, in light of the difficulties enumerated here.

Furthermore, this lack of development regarding the mechanics of hybridity is indicative of a more general lack of theological development in Sugirtharajah’s project. In fact, when the reader moves from the first part of the book (the portion dealing with

biblical studies) to the second (the portion which purports to “remap” theological discourse), she becomes uncomfortably aware that not only concepts, but *entire paragraphs*, have been lifted word-for-word from the first set of essays and dropped into the second.⁶⁰ In other words, Sugirtharajah recycles his own arguments, wholesale, from his work in biblical studies. Then, without adding any technical or theoretical backing to these recyclings, without even editing or altering them, he proffers them as “theology.”

After several essays in which this practice occurs, I was left to wonder about these invocations of ends-without-adequate-means (be they technically or theoretically theological). It appears almost as if Sugirtharajah expects that these messy and sometimes lethal clashes of identity and culture will simply sort themselves out naturally. Thus, with hybridity exerting an absolute value of positive influence across the theological landscape, no great effort of explanation on the theological front is mandated.⁶¹ This is an unfortunate aspect of *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* as a whole. The merits of the project are hampered by 1) the lack of rigorous editing (as evinced by the repetition of material, verbatim, in multiple essays throughout the book) and 2) these points, noted above, where a more fully developed methodology is demanded. These

⁶⁰ Compare, for example, “A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation” with “Postcolonialism and Indian Christian Theology.” They share, between them, one *whole section* that in fact reads verbatim in both essays.

⁶¹ In fact, one wonders whether Sugirtharajah is speaking as a critical *insider* or as a critical *outsider*. Is he an *Indian* Christian or a *Christian* who happens to be Indian? What do such distinctions actually mean in this matter? Is it “culture,” or “Christian theological identity,” that is foremost here? Can these be easily kept separate, or is such an assumption of easy separation already a mark of colonialism, of being “marked” with the colonial mindset? These, indeed, are the very questions a postcolonial ethos intends to raise. This ambiguity may be the appropriate stance for a cultural critic. However, it is the contention of this project that any stance that attempts to *remain* in a state of indecision (which is the stance, at least at certain key points, to which Sugirtharajah’s project seems to aspire) would be improper for the theologian. For a theologian to operate *as a theologian*, instead of as a pure theorist or philosopher, she must enter the fray of context and particularity.

negative aspects are unfortunate, as they can give the reader leave too-readily to dismiss Sugirtharajah's work.

Acknowledging these potential difficulties with his project, at least as it is presented to the reader of *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, we can now explore a more charitable reading of Sugirtharajah, giving him the benefit of the doubt on these points. This alternative reading yields a more constructive point of interface for the interests of the present dissertation.

Convergence and divergence

The origin of “suspicion” and the suspicion of “origins”

Central to Sugirtharajah's championing of hybridity is the cognate premise that any regimented or “traditioned” reading of biblical texts (or even the desire to interpret the Bible according to a dogmatic tradition itself) is likely indicative of hegemony and suppression. As he puts it:

Reading practices are ultimately an ongoing struggle for control over texts and the monitoring of meanings. Biblical reading has been largely controlled by the producers of texts, and latterly by various Christian church authorities or professional interpreters whose readings are not only compromised by their denominational and institutional agendas but also by their authority to regulate the production and distribution of meanings...like poachers who move across the hermeneutical territory belonging to someone else, and abduct the texts and meanings and then deliver them to ordinary readers.⁶²

I am largely in agreement with Sugirtharajah's suspicions, though not with his notion of the ultimate culprits.

⁶² Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 69.

His position, on first reading, seems to be that meaning is imposed through a “top-down” structure that can, and should be, resisted. The notion that a confessionally-integrated understanding of the Bible is necessarily a “compromised” one implies that an “outsider” reading is untainted and, therefore, preferable. While such a position has an appealing “us-versus-them” cleanliness to it, the reality of the situation, by my analysis, is far more complex. There are no “clean” or uncompromised readings of a Bible—*every* reading, by the account of the previous chapter of this dissertation, is beholden to *some* influence (i.e., is part of some Magisterium). *Contra* Sugirtharajah’s position in the above quotation, the point is not to *escape* from all influences (an impossible undertaking) but rather to acknowledge and interrogate the influences to which one is beholden, with an eye to measuring them against a given ethical standard (which will itself be a factor of influence, always under a certain sort of negotiation⁶³).

This criticism is not meant to dismiss Sugirtharajah. At other moments in his writing, he seems aware of the points I am raising critically here, and pulls back from the bare “us-versus-them” simplicity of the above quotation. The urge to oversimplify these power relations, however, remains a temptation for Sugirtharajah. This is particularly true when the power in question is clearly associated with institutional ecclesiologies.⁶⁴ When Sugirtharajah implies, as above, that *all* traditioned and church-based readings are compromised, his critique is too facile. The critical theologian can certainly agree that *some* readings are compromised. However, to assert that *all* such readings are compromised by the very fact of their association with a tradition is for the theologian (I

⁶³ Again, for more on this methodological assertion, the reader is directed to Section II, “Reasons for the Devout,” in Stanley Fish, *There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech*.

⁶⁴ See Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 110-113 and *passim*.

would claim) to undermine her own ultimate project. Thankfully, his overall body of work is inconsistent on this point, and thus allows the reader to access a more nuanced set of critiques that take better account of the full complexity of power relations involved in meaning-production and identity formation—both within the institutional churches and among the subaltern.

Even granting the misgivings noted in the previous section, what can be learned from his quotation is the value of paying careful attention to the power of those who *produce* the texts. Here as well I think Sugirtharajah’s position would be enhanced by increasing the field of these “producers” to include not only the *ecclesial* authorities, but also the publishing houses and the corporations that own them and, to an ever increasing degree, dictate editorial policy. By turning his analysis to these matters of *production* of physical Bibles, here tied to the control and creation of meaning, Sugirtharajah is outlining for us an example of the very *magisterial* influences and effects with which we dealt in the previous chapter. In other words, there is a convergence between Sugirtharajah’s postcolonial critique and the concerns of the present dissertation. Though we are working from different points of origin (Sugirtharajah from cultural studies and the present project from the concerns of systematic theology), we are here both traveling on the same path.

To make this convergence more fully clear, let us consider the following quotation, which deserves to be cited at length:

The Bible we possess today is the result of relatively *recent* cultural and ecclesiastical factors—Protestantism, the Enlightenment, modernity and print culture. Today we not only have a *different* Bible, but we mint meanings which were not anticipated by the original writers/tellers/hearers/readers of the narratives. Illuminated by centuries of human experience, intellectual enquiry

and cultural fluidity, we question its retrogressive elements—such as the support of slavery, patriarchal control, corporal punishment of children, and homophobic and xenophobic attitudes—which the dominant thinking of the time would have been comfortable with. At the same time, *we embrace and transpose* the ancient texts, and *propel them to yield new meanings* unenvisaged by the authors of the narratives, in order to meet our contemporary needs. We use the Jubilee Laws in Leviticus 25 to write off Third World debt, we cite the Nazareth Manifesto to critique global capitalism, and we employ the Exodus motif whenever we find ourselves in an oppressive context. We continue to examine, expose, explain and transcribe meanings.⁶⁵

This quotation is to be commended for naming that which, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, so many contemporary theologians seem willing to ignore; namely, the manner in which history, identity, and interest play into our reading of the “Bible”—helping to (re)create a “recent” and a “different” Bible, by Sugirtharajah’s account.

This insight is consonant with our analysis of the effects of “print culture,” the acknowledgement of *particularity* among various physical Bible versions (*e.g.*, the reference to Protestant influence in the quotation above), and the reconstruction from passages of narratives that fit aspects of contemporary culture and context rather than some “originary meaning.” Sugirtharajah is exactly correct to raise these issues often and loudly, and to do so in forums where theologians might have the opportunity to be confronted with them.

However, we can also see in the quotation the need for a more robust development of these ideas. For example, as insightful as Sugirtharajah’s position is in pointing out the influences of *context* upon the “meaning” of “Scripture,” he still *implies* the existence of a purified, static, originary meaning (*e.g.*, “but we mint meanings which were not anticipated by the original writers/tellers/hearers/readers”) as if these “originary

⁶⁵ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 2, my emphasis.

meanings” could exist independently from our context, as a standard for comparison for contemporary readings.

To the extent that this is his claim, Sugirtharajah participates in the mistaken conception of the “hermeneutic circle” that was discussed in the previous chapter. That is, as the “original texts” exist for us only as Works (i.e., *reconstructions* from fragments which are *assembled* and thus reflect the stabilization of dynamic factors by latter-day historical-critical and theological biases, not some “originary” or trans-historical “meaning”), we *do not have* objective access to what these “original meanings” might or could be.

Of course, to claim we have no “objective access” is not the same as claiming there is *no* access whatsoever. That is, we may have access to something we *call* the “original meaning,” but this itself is a result of *contemporary* interpretation, negotiation, and subjective positions with regard to “historical fact.” Thus, when anyone (Sugirtharajah included) makes reference to the “original writers/tellers/hearers/readers of the narratives” in such a way, they are conflating yet another (perhaps very rigorously and historically informed, or perhaps not so informed) stabilization and *reconstruction* of this “origin” with that “actual” phenomenon, located in the past, that we might reasonably term the “intent” of the “original” author at the point when the artifacts now assembled into the Work were “first” written.⁶⁶ If Sugirtharajah, or anyone, makes such a move, there is reification at work. That is, a matter of negotiation has been presented as natural, and has been mistaken for an objective datum that might actually obtain to the

⁶⁶ See, for example, Sugirtharajah’s reading of the parable of the Prodigal Son in “Son(s) Behaving Badly: The Prodigal in Foreign Hands,” in Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 37 – 50.

intentions and theologies of the authors. This reification is a potential hindrance to Sugirtharajah's larger project.

Openness to the other

Returning to "Packaging the Word, Peddling Holy Writ" (which is included in *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, retitled as "Marketing the Testaments: Canongate and their Pocket Sized Bibles."⁶⁷), we can reiterate that points he makes are remarkably consonant with the methodological observations made in previous chapters of this dissertation. It is refreshing to encounter an essay that is willing to speak of, and deal explicitly with, *specific printed versions* of the Bible, and to discuss the implications of this particularity.⁶⁸ As was mentioned before, Sugirtharajah examines the series from Canongate publishing, which reprinted each book of the King James New Testament with an introduction from a contemporary figure from academia or popular culture—poets and musicians alongside religious scholars.

Sadly, however, even as these helpful points are being made, Sugirtharajah feels compelled to retreat again into an "us-versus-them" paradigm that seems an unfortunate

⁶⁷ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 50-71.

⁶⁸ The following quotation is indicative of the sort of analysis at work in the essay: "The King James Bible is often portrayed as a definitive version, without any rivals since the date of its publication. English translations were undertaken at a time when English had no literary status. It was only much later that the Authorized Version came to be praised for its literary quality. In seventeenth-century England it was the Geneva Bible which was seen as the people's Bible. It had the advantage of being printed attractively and produced in a convenient size for private use...David Norton, in charting the triumph of the King James Version, points out that it was the commercial considerations and political influences which played a crucial role in its elevation rather than its literary merits. His contention was that the ascendancy of the King James Version owed nothing to its scholarly or literary rendering of the original texts. The king's printer and the Cambridge University Press, who held the monopoly of the Authorized Version, secured the suppression of the Geneva Bible in spite of the latter's superior printing and rendition." Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 61.

and prevalent by-product of the subaltern/ “outsider” self-construal of present postcolonial theory:

The explosion of methods for investigation of the Bible has made it imperative that biblical study be a cooperative enterprise between professionally trained scholars and those who read the Bible as dictated by experience and culture...What these introductions indicate is the need for what Edward Said advocated in another kindred discipline—literary studies—namely, secular criticism. For Said, it is an activity which frees criticism from the ‘priestly caste of acolytes and dogmatic metaphysicians.’⁶⁹

In this quotation, the dichotomy is presented between the “expert” (she who is “professionally trained” and, by implication, beholden to some static and hegemonic tradition) and the “experience” of the outsider (the non-traditioned or other-traditioned, the hybridist, the subaltern). The implication is that the former is necessarily the limited and restricted/restrictive reading, with the latter presenting the “freeing” corrective, wild and untouched by dogma and metaphysics.

My criticism, again, is that such a position is naïve. It ignores the case, as I am attempting to demonstrate in this project, that there are *no* bare “social and political realities,” which exist or can be appealed to outside our own interests and attachments to whichever “dogmatic metaphysics” (here read: Wolterstorff’s notion of “control beliefs”) to which we (and the critic) happen to be bound. To be part of the “priestly caste” or the “secular critics” makes little difference in this regard, as neither is safe from their commitments; even “those who read the Bible as dictated by experience and culture” are still beholden to a dogmatic metaphysics: their own perception of their “experience and culture.” In other words, the “expert/priest/critic” is not *against* experience and culture, but is merely reflecting a position based in the critic’s *own* “experience and culture”

⁶⁹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 68.

(even if that can be termed scholarly experience and academic culture, or dogmatic experience and dogmatic culture, etc.).

Hence there is, on the surface reading, a false dichotomy at work in Sugirtharajah's imperative. It is thus especially important to interrogate more fully his quick call (following Edward Said) for a supposedly non-dogmatic and "secular" (Said's term) criticism. One wonders, given how cautious Sugirtharajah is at other points of invoking any sort of "expert" position, over-against an indigenous reader,⁷⁰ how Sugirtharajah can be comfortable making this appeal to the professional critic. The answer seems to come in the fact that this critic is herself *secular*—posited *against* ecclesial and dogmatic authority.

This move (the preference of the non-ecclesial reader to the professional/confessional ecclesial reader) needs to be criticized because I see in it a species of the same epistemological moves, made by Protestant critics against the notion of a Magisterium that we highlighted and brought into question in the first chapters of this present project. One does not obtain the more "true" reading of Scripture by virtue of one's distance from clerical authorization; one merely substitutes one magisterial authority for another.

It is a shortcoming, again, of Sugirtharajah's project that he makes available to his readers these heavily polarized and simplistic dichotomies. If we seek a more charitable reading of Sugirtharajah on this point, however, we can gain a valuable insight, and such a reading, while requiring some effort, is well worth our time. Hence we can view

⁷⁰ See in particular, "Complacencies and Cul-de-sacs: Christian Theologies and Colonialism." Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 143 – 161.

Sugirtharajah’s call for “those who read the Bible as dictated by experience and culture” as a call for a greater *openness* to listen to the voice of the “other,” the voice of those who are currently “outside” the given meaning or the magisterial interpretation, and not simply as an “us-against-them” division. This openness to the other is also, as was mentioned earlier in the chapter, particularly an openness to the *suffering* of the other—for Sugirtharajah, this suffering is the plight of the subaltern, the colonized, and those recovering from colonization, but we can generalize the case beyond these identities to a more full embrace of the suffering generally.

Such a voice of otherness is not *necessarily* opposed to the voice of the professional/confessional ecclesial reader, nor does it have to be viewed as such. Thus, if this greater openness can be obtained and maintained *without* automatically condemning the traditioned reading, greater subtlety can be obtained in our analysis. Indeed, as will be argued in the following chapter, such an openness is absolutely *essential* to the ethical comparison of the power structures—magisteria—of which Sugirtharajah’s project, at its best points, makes us so aware.

Conclusion

What is so valuable in the postcolonial project, from the standpoint of this dissertation, is that it brings forth the *political* (or what might be more properly called the “theo-political”) aspects of what has been, heretofore, a primarily structural and theoretical analysis. In other words, it is in the example of postcolonial biblical critique (and similar liberationist readings) that the interplay of power, authority, and Bible

construction / dissemination become instructively visible to contemporary North American theology—a milieu that has otherwise remained comfortably ignorant of such issues. Hence I regard the postcolonial critique, in large measure, as a powerful ally to the present analysis offered in this dissertation.

More specifically, as shown in this chapter, the essays that form *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, and other key writings of R.S. Sugirtharajah, provoke and interrogate North American theology at exactly those places where it has not been sufficiently attentive: namely issues of context, identity, and market forces and their undeniable influence on the hermeneutic practices of Bible readers. However, as has been suggested, Sugirtharajah's project also suffers from an unevenness on its theological front, at points evincing a blasé inattention to the technical aspects of systematic doctrine and tradition. His tendency to dismiss the importance of such matters (either by accusing them of serving an oppressor discourse⁷¹ or by simply not mentioning them at all) must be noted and called to account if the merits of his project are to be properly weighed. In other words, it is a shortcoming that must be addressed that Sugirtharajah's analytic project has much to offer towards the political questions of Scripture as a human document, but little to say of what it might mean to regard Scripture as also a *divine* document.

Sugirtharajah's claim, whereby hybridity offers a viable option for Christian *or* Hindu cultures, should also be closely monitored. As has been stated above, the concept of hybridity does not automatically guarantee that any resulting mix of cultures will necessarily mix only the most desirable elements, and thus an inattentive application threatens, in my analysis, to function as an *erasure* of the particularity of subaltern

⁷¹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 88-89.

identity, rather than as its protector (and one would reasonably assume that this is in fact the *least* desirable outcome for the subaltern identity in the wake of colonial rule).

Finally, if the analysis presented in the previous chapters is correct, we certainly should call into question Sugirtharajah's repeated use of static terms like "origin," "original meaning," "original writers," along with his implied attendant claim that subaltern reading strategies can be dynamically contrasted against these terms. Instead, as we seek to incorporate the insights of Sugirtharajah's project, we should do so with the contention that *all* "meanings"—original or contemporary—and *all* artifacts of Scripture, have demonstrable genealogies and particularities that can (and must) be examined theologically.

Even with these criticisms, however, Sugirtharajah's value to the present dissertation is vast and not to be dismissed. He has given us the first arena of practical application for the analyses developed in the first three chapters, the *theo-political* application. Using what has been learned from his project, we now turn to the second set of practical applications we will consider, using insights gained from a recently developed methodology of theological biblical interpretation, the Scriptural Reasoning project.

CHAPTER V

PETER OCHS AND THE “SCRIPTURAL REASONING” PROJECT

“For the Biblical text is identical in the Orient and the Occident—with the sole exception of that which is argued by their grammarians concerning individual words...That sort of thing, however, is nothing more than the stuff of disputation and scholarly exercise.”¹

- Johannes Reuchlin

“And furthermore each new name must come to terms with the old ones.”²

- Franz Rosenzweig

The previous chapter observed that Sugirtharajah’s postcolonial project makes the theo-political issue of the *suffering of real human subjects* a central concern, as we saw in Sugirtharajah’s claim that “the concerns of the poor and the disadvantaged *go unnoticed* and their plight does not occupy a central place”³ in typical North American theological and biblical studies discourses. However, while postcolonial criticism has awakened us to this voice of otherness, it has not, as we observed in the previous chapter, always offered the most adept methodology for incorporating this othered, suffering voice. Thus I have

¹ Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation whether to Confiscate, Destroy and Burn All Jewish Books: A Classical Treatise Against Anti-Semitism*, edited and translated by Peter Wortsman (New York: Stimulus, 2000) 75.

² Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 72.

³ *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* 59, my emphasis.

claimed that Sugirtharajah's hybridity model may not be the best, or most effective, means of redressing instances of such suffering. That being said, I do not want to lose sight of the concern itself. It will be claimed in this and the following chapter that it is this very openness to the voice of the suffering other that provides the means to speak critically and comparatively with regard to the various magisterial forces we have observed to be at work in the present North American context.

On the way to elaborating this rather global claim, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the critical points of the projects known as *Scriptural* and *Textual Reasoning* with regard to their applicability to the present dissertation. In particular, we will consider the essays and programmatic overviews written by one of the founders of these projects, Peter Ochs. This chapter will look first at Scriptural Reasoning in its development and context, examining Ochs's turn to a model of confessionally interpretive *communal particularities*, in contrast to Sugirtharajah's hybridity model seen in the last chapter. From there, we will explore Ochs's pragmatic understanding of *derash* (reinterpretation of settled meaning), viewing it as a model for magisterial self-critique in the face of human suffering.⁴

I do not want to go too far in elaborating this claim before the stage is set, however. So let us take a moment and explore the *raison d'être* of Scriptural Reasoning itself.

⁴ I am indebted to Nicholas Adams, particularly a presentation he gave in the Scriptural Reasoning Group session of the 2007 American Academy of Religion Conference, for drawing my attention to this powerful aspect of Ochs's project. His presentation helped to clarify my reading of *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), which will form a vital part of the latter half of this chapter. His analysis rendered transparent some passages that I had previously found opaque, and I am deeply thankful. This dissertation is greatly improved as a result of his fine work.

The Milieu of Scriptural Reasoning

Choose You This Day Whom You Will Serve⁵

A major theme running throughout Chaim Potok's novels, *The Chosen* and *The Promise*, is the clash of two conflicting traditions, both vying for the minds of American Jewish youth in the early twentieth century. What these traditions present are two methods for reading and understanding the Jewish holy writings. We might here term this pair of approaches the "confessional" method and the "modern-critical" method. The young protagonist of the two novels, Reuven Malter, is caught between these two methodological worlds, between the Chasidic *yiddishkeit* taught by his teachers in the traditional yeshiva (rabbinic academy) he attends, and the methods of the modern-influenced, more secular and liberal, textual criticism utilized by Reuven's father. Reuven feels penned-in, pained and frustrated by the seemingly unavoidable reality that he cannot adhere to both methods simultaneously. Indeed, in his view, each tradition demands that he choose one or the other.⁶

These books by Potok are works of fiction, it is true, but they dramatize the real-life clashes that have often occurred when the inherited, communally focused, yeshiva-based styles of reading Bible and Talmud are confronted by "renegade," individually focused, modern, historical-critical approaches. This clash, while heartbreaking in the imaginary landscape of the novels, is no less dramatic in the real world. The clash itself,

⁵ From Joshua 24:15, KJV

⁶ See Chaim Potok, *The Chosen* (New York: Ballantine, 1967) and *The Promise* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1969).

indeed, is anything but fiction, and certainly is not limited to Jewish interpretive communities. Indeed, such clashes are a factor in the history of all major religious faiths.

A latter-day example of what we might term here “Reuven’s dilemma” can be found, most recently, in the conflict between two of the most noted Talmud scholars of the present generation, Adin Steinsaltz and Jacob Neusner. These religious thinkers embody, to a great extent, the two poles—yeshiva and modern-critical—that lie at the heart of the drama of these stories by Potok.

Neusner, a professor at Bard College in New York and a Senior Fellow of Bard’s Institute for Advanced Theology, has written and/or edited over 900 books, the majority of them on the subjects of Talmud and the “academic study of Judaism,” a field that he purports to have founded himself.⁷ He is perhaps the most visible contemporary proponent of text-critical and historico-critical analyses of Talmudic writings, claiming as he does to have unlocked the means to “properly decode” the Talmud and completely understand its (linguistic *and* logical) intricacies.⁸ Neusner’s pronouncements are deeply controversial, both among more traditional readers and among academics. He has no reticence in making them, however, even to the point of public affront to other scholars, as shall be readily seen.

⁷ Mark Primoff, “Bard College Announces Endowed Professorship in Honor of Renowned Scholar and Teacher Jacob Neusner,” online at <http://www.jacobneusner.com/add/chair.doc>, accessed 26 July 2007. See also, Dinitia Smith, “Jacob Neusner: Scholar of Judaism, Professional Provocateur,” *The New York Times*, April 13, 2005.

⁸ See Jacob Neusner, “Prologue,” *How Adin Steinsaltz Misrepresents the Talmud: Four False Propositions from His “Reference Guide”* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

Adin Steinsaltz is similarly notable, lauded as a “once-in-a-millennium scholar” of the Talmud,⁹ whose work of translation and explication has opened the intricacies of the tractates to unprecedented numbers of new readers. He is one of the premier translators of the Talmud, rendering it from its source languages of rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic into modern Hebrew, French, Russian, English and Spanish. In contrast to Neusner, his methods and interpretations are deeply shaped by the norms and traditions of classical rabbinic thought, Kabbalah, and Orthodox Judaism.¹⁰ Notably, Steinsaltz pays absolutely no public attention to the claims or concerns of university-based historical-critical scholars such as Neusner. He refuses to enter into their conversations and debates, in person or in print, and does not engage their commentaries on the Talmud or their criticisms of his own work.

These are all facts about Steinsaltz that Neusner decries loudly, most particularly in his very pointed work, *How Adin Steinsaltz Misrepresents the Talmud*. For Neusner, Steinsaltz’s refusal to address the critical concerns of the secular academy shows a lack of “intellectual integrity.”¹¹ If Steinsaltz were to respond, however, he would likely counter this charge by stating that his refusals are in fact the very *demonstration* of his integrity. Thus the two thinkers embody in this impasse the very clash of these two worlds: for Neusner, integrity necessitates the willingness to consider moving against

⁹ Richard N. Ostling, “Giving the Talmud to the Jews,” *Time Magazine*, 18 January 1988.

¹⁰ Rabbi Steinsaltz has been named the Nasi, or leader, of the New Sanhedrin movement in Israel, which certainly speaks to his pedigree as a traditional scholar.

¹¹ “But when various colleagues took issue with statements [made by Steinsaltz in his *Reference Guide* accompanying his Talmud translations], to my knowledge, Steinsaltz has not taken notice of their criticism, nor has he yet addressed the contrary proportions and the evidence adduced in behalf of those views...It is not a mark of intellectual integrity to ignore one’s critics and pretend they do not exist.” Neusner, *Steinsaltz Misrepresents*, v.

one's tradition; contrastingly, for Steinsaltz, it is only by remaining firmly in one's tradition (and thus refusing to participate in the undermining of its foundations through the skepticism inherent in the historical-critical approach) that intellectual integrity is possible.

Such clashes – whether depicted in Potok's fiction or in the halls of the academy and yeshiva – point to the current state of polarization that exists, not only in Judaism, but in the majority of approaches to the study of religious works, regardless of whether those approaches are considered to be traditional or non-traditional. The scholars of the secular academy use tools and methods that are unconscionable to traditionalists. Conversely, the traditionalists' methods of reading are dismissed outright, or admitted to discussion only after having been “improved” by the latest historico-critical insights.

This impasse has led to a clash that has been highlighted by several writers, and articulated perhaps most succinctly by John Webster at the conclusion of his *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*. These writers maintain that what has been lost in theological speech (for Webster, *Christian* theological speech, but in the present discussion generalized to other Abrahamic discourses) is precisely the ability of theology to humbly and simply *read with* the texts of Scripture. As Webster puts it:

A good deal of classical Christian theology was written as commentary, paraphrase, or reflection upon major texts in the tradition—primarily biblical texts, but also by derivation creedal or other writings of sufficient stature and durability to constitute permanently enriching statements of the gospel. Modern theology has largely lost touch with this genre... One of the primary reasons for the decline of the genre of running paraphrase of or expansion upon the classics (biblical or otherwise) is that the genre does not sit easily with the anti-statutory tendency of modernity which has deeply shaped scholarly rhetoric, and which makes these older genres scarcely recognizable as intellectual discourse. They are deliberately unoriginal; they take us immediately *in medias res* and do not feel excessively anxious to start *de novo*; they do not accept that ‘recital’ and ‘creativity’ are necessarily antithetical... Their relationship to the language of the

Bible and its derivative dialects is prior to their relation to the language of high culture or philosophy. And they are unsystematic, in that they eschew reorganizing the material, preferring to let its own logic stand without submitting it to pressure to conform to external schemes.¹²

For Webster, the call for a return to a style of “reading-with” that conforms theological reflection to the cadence and language of Scripture is “frankly utopian.”¹³ Insofar as we agree that the divide, outlined above, between the positions of “Neusner” and “Steinsaltz” is entrenched in the academy and intractable in orthodoxy, Webster’s assessment is likely correct.

There is, however, a growing group of scholars who advocate just such a return to this approach of “reading-with” Scripture and biblically-based classical texts, for whom such reading is not a utopian ideal but increasingly a lived reality. This would suggest that there is a third approach, allowing for one to navigate between the horns of the “Neusner/Steinsaltz” dilemma.

A third possibility

The project that came to be known as “Scriptural Reasoning” arose in the friction of these clashes outlined above, as an attempt to preserve what is best in both approaches. It is reminiscent of Reuven Malter, Potok’s character mentioned above. In other words, scriptural reasoning attempts to honor modern criticism *and* the traditions of the ancestors, and does this with its own claim to intellectual integrity.

As we stand at the cusp of the twenty-first century, looking back on the last hundred years and their myriad of advances and obliterations—all the promises of

¹² John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 132-133.

¹³ Webster, 133.

science and all the horrors of the Shoah—we are struck simultaneously by the poverty and hope of the academy. To face the scars and traumas of the “real world” has been an often voiced, but seldom realized, goal of recent theorists. This is especially evident in the field of religious scholarship, where desperate questions of theodicy and providence insistently confront any patient or aloof articulation of the Abrahamic traditions. Thus the question arises and persists: without retreating into the myopia of an over-simplified faith, is it possible for the scholar to navigate the geography of trauma, which works against and undermines faith, from within the academic establishment, and still make a claim to *believe*?

As has been observed in earlier sections of this dissertation, such clashes are not restricted only to discussions of the biblical and religious texts themselves, and the scholars who exegete them, but extend into the purview of the theologians, who draw from such works in their pronouncements and doctrines. In fact, because theologians of the present generation are often, at best, “one step removed” or more from these texts (by virtue of their own self-distancing and claim that theirs is primarily “second-order” discourse), the cumulative effects of such clashes, biases, and divisions can be even more pronounced.

It can be argued, from this, that what is needed most at such a point of impasse is a revised method for maneuvering. We observed one such attempt in the previous chapter, in the form of Sugirtharajah’s concept of hybridity. However, while promising, hybridity failed to maintain the *particularities* that would allow rival voices of academy and tradition to speak together (while remaining in, and maintaining, their distinct integrities). That is, it preferences the “voice of the subaltern” over the “commanding

voice" of hegemony. The result of this is that—whether you agree more with the colonizer of the colonized—in such a model there is only one voice worth listening to. What is needed, instead, is a way forward that does not predicate this collapse of particularities into monologue; in other words, what is needed is an approach that is structurally *dialogical*, allowing for the critical activities of reason to operate *in conjunction* with the schemas of doctrinal hermeneutics and cultural practice.

We find one such approach in the project begun in 1991 by a collection of (initially mostly Jewish) scholars including Steven Kepnes, Edith Wyschogrod, Robert Gibbs, and the subject of the present chapter, Peter Ochs. The project is the attempt to articulate a post-critical, postmodern Jewish philosophy that traces its genealogy to classic rabbinic practices.¹⁴ Various instantiations of this method have come to be known as *Textual* (and, in extra-Judaic contexts, *Scriptural*) *Reasoning*.

As with postcolonial theologies, discussed in the previous chapter through a focus on the work of Sugirtharajah, we will chiefly examine one representative writer, Peter Ochs. His work is considered here, not as the sole or definitive voice of Scriptural Reasoning, but as one who speaks clearly in the idiom of the project, and thus one about whom certain observations might be made. Ochs is a particularly appropriate choice in

¹⁴ “In classical rabbinic paideia, rabbinic literature is the means of entry into the biblical text, rather than the other way around. In this setting, the living Torah is the biblical word as it is received and debated and performed in each generation’s lived sociality, in the context of a complex and ever-growing tradition of received histories, legal codes, commentaries and literary compositions. In this setting, furthermore, the plain sense of the Bible, when isolated from its lived meaning, becomes the subject of specialized scholarly study, not everyday ‘Bible lessons’: one of several criteria for adjudicating disputes about lived meaning, rather than the blueprint *per se* for covenantal life. Judging that modern studies of the Bible—both religious and academic alike—have tended to neglect the art and wisdom of non-literal reading, textual reasoners have sought to resituate biblical studies within, rather than ‘before’ or even outside of, rabbinic text studies.” Peter Ochs, “Introduction,” in Peter Ochs and Nancy Levine, eds., *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 10.

this regard, as his theoretical work on Scripture will allow us to explore the question of suffering raised in the previous chapter, and frame this issue in light of the larger questions of magisterial authority we have been considering here.

Overview of Scriptural Reasoning

“One way to practice Jewish philosophy after the demise of the modern western paradigms of philosophy is to adopt *the elemental patterns of Jewish reading and social action* as first principles of a Jewish philosophy—refashioning philosophy, one might say, as Judaism writ large.”¹⁵ So begins the introduction to the short work, *Reasoning After Revelation*, one of several books that treat the growing body of conversations collected under the project(s) that will be here referred to as *Scriptural Reasoning*. This project, which identifies itself with “postmodernism” and “Jewish philosophy,” is one of the growing edges of a desire in scholarship for a “postcritical” tradition. (In the following sections, *Scriptural Reasoning*, *Textual Reasoning*, and *Abrahamic Reasoning* will be used interchangeably. The distinctions between them, while important, are not germane to the present discussion. ¹⁶⁾

¹⁵ Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs and Robert Gibbs, eds., *Reasoning After Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998) 2, my emphasis.

¹⁶ Scriptural Reasoning is the umbrella of discussion over of a series of interlocking, overlapping, differentiated and expanding projects including “Abrahamic reasoning,” “Qur’anic reasoning,” “Textual reasoning” and others. Each of these projects within SR maintain the particularities of their traditions of reading sacred scriptures as a starting point, they all share in the development of common methodologies that will be explored in this chapter. These common methodologies allow us to make certain limited general statements about these projects, while affirming their claims to particularity. Thus, especially for the purposes of this chapter, the term “Scriptural Reasoning” will indicate this broad field of projects insofar as these limited generalities of method obtain. For a brief overview of these varied particularities at work on their common task, see Jeffrey W. Bailey, “Sacred Book Club: Reading Scripture Across Interfaith Lines,” *The Christian Century Magazine*, 5 September 2006.

Many of these scholars deploy the term “postcritical,” to indicate this aforementioned maneuvering between the poles of the yeshiva and the academy (or, if you will, between an inherited, traditioned way of reading and the historical-critical methods), seeking a nuanced and delicate balance between both “hard scholarship” and “robust belief.” As Ochs puts it, with regard to Textual Reasoning’s relationship to traditional Judaism:

Textual Reasoning therefore tends both to affirm and to reform the practices of both traditional Judaism and modern rationality...On this level, textual reasoners explore the Western sciences and logics in their terms, and they explore Jewish textual, theological, liturgical and behavioural practices in their own terms. They also explore ways of examining Judaism in the terms of Western science and logic (in the fashion of liberal Judaism), and ways of examining Western science and logic in the terms of classical Judaism (in the fashion of certain modern orthodox thinkers).¹⁷

The postcritical project thus intends to form a “third way” of thinking, which can be likened in many respects to the intellectual presuppositions of Anselm and Augustine: *faith seeking understanding*.¹⁸ Any such formation of this “third way,” however, must begin with the caveat that the project undertakes its task in the wake of some of the worst horrors either faith or understanding could have imagined. Thus, as Scriptural Reasoning is an avowedly rational enterprise, it employs a *chastened* rationality; as a faithful enterprise, the postcritical project of Scriptural Reasoning employs a *(self-)critical* faith. Most importantly, this postcritical project of Scriptural Reasoning understands itself to always deploy these two poles *in concert* together, conversationally; again, the task is fundamentally *dialogical* in its methods.

¹⁷ Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 5.

¹⁸ Indeed, this phrase (in its Latin form) was to be the original title of Anselm’s *Proslogion*. See, e.g., Anselm, *Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, Thomas Williams, tr. (New York: Hackett, 2001).

This is not meant to be an exhaustive definition of the postcritical project, but rather an orientation to some of its major points as understood through its deployment in the Scriptural Reasoning project(s). Thus, in any case, this is the way the term “postcritical” will be used throughout this chapter—to indicate the attempts of scholarship to *discipline* itself with regard to belief, and vice-versa, in the hope of creating a space that acknowledges and employs the strengths of the modern project while not (at least hopefully not) succumbing to its radical secularity.¹⁹

The uses of Scripture in Scriptural Reasoning

While there are many manifestations of the postcritical project at the present time, one common feature among them, at least as they are deployed in the Scriptural Reasoning project(s), is the practice of regarding holy Books as *simultaneously* human and divine artifacts that exist meaningfully *within* communities and traditions of reading—not *apart* from them.²⁰ At the outset, this is a notable difference in approach from that of the postcolonial analysis we examined in the previous chapter. For the postcolonial project, the question of Scripture centers on the human and political use of human artifacts; in Scriptural Reasoning, a similar attention to the human createdness of

¹⁹ “In sum, textual reasoners are text scholars and philosophers trained in and strongly committed to working within both the text traditions of Judaism and the humanistic disciplines of the Western academy. While maintaining the intellectual standards and the ethical ideals of modern humanism, as well as its complaints about the inadequacies of medieval religion, they have come to reject its foundationalist practices. Among these practices are efforts to denude prophetic ethics of its setting within communal practices of reading and acting.” Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 8.

²⁰ “Summarized in a sentence, the argument of both Jewish and Christian postcritical interpreters is that modern scholars have reduced biblical interpretation to the terms of a dyadic semiotic that lacks warrant in the biblical texts. The postcritical scholars claim that, as read in the primordial communities of rabbinic or of Christian interpreters, these texts recommend a triadic semiotic, according to which the text displays its

Scripture is present, but is combined with a sense of divine participation as well. In other words, in Scriptural Reasoning, God is understood as a participant in the negotiations surrounding the Bible and its interpretation.²¹

This dual-identity and dual-possibility of encounter (the human and the divine together, both with regard to the *origin* and *reading* of a holy Book) maintains the stem of *authority* for a text while nourishing the blossom of *interpretation*. The hope, in such cases, is that neither authority nor hermeneutic is compromised (though each is tempered or, one might again say, *disciplined*²²) and that the dual-encounter one finds in the printed artifact breaks the bonds of both restrictive-academic and literal-fideistic closures. As Michael Fishbane, another scholar who has been active in the formation of Scriptural Reasoning, as well as scholarship on the history of rabbinic interpretation and theology, has put it, “[m]y concern is rather to reframe modern text study through the schemata of sacred learning—wherein each level of interpretation requires a different orientation to the text and discloses different dimensions of truth. The integrity of the text is thus the

performative meanings *with respect to* its community of biblical interpreters.” Ochs, “Introduction,” *Return to Scripture*, 38.

²¹ For a classic rabbinic example of this, see the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Baba Metziah*, 59b (the “Oven of Akhnai” debate between Rabbi Eliezer and the sages).

²² The term ‘discipline’ has made its second appearance in as many paragraphs, and will be used throughout this chapter in a technical fashion, to indicate the submission of the scholar to certain traditions and limitations in the course of the pursuit of knowledge. I take this term (with some liberty) from the following quotation by David Weiss Halivni, regarding the Shoah: “No aspect of history should be declared off limits to research. Perhaps because I am so insistent on absolute freedom of inquiry in all areas of intellectual endeavor, I plead for an exception in the case of the Holocaust. The Shoah is unique in human history. It ought to remain so in scholarship as well. The tragedy, the enormity, the systematization, the ideology, and above all the helplessness that accompanied the Holocaust make the Shoah unprecedented: there was nothing a Jew could do in the face of the Shoah, unlike other persecutions, to mitigate the death sentence. To be born a Jew meant to be born to be killed. *Scholars ought to discipline themselves* by refraining from asking a question that, by its very nature, tends to diminish the uniqueness of the event, the culpability of the perpetrators, and to increase the despair of the survivors.” (from David Weiss Halivni, *The Book and the Sword: A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996], 157, my emphasis).

fullness of all these possibilities, even as it is the integrity of the reader to mediate this fulfillment.”²³

Thus, in addition to being a “third way” between modernism and traditionalism, Scriptural Reasoning also has been described as an emergent, “fourth-paradigm” approach to Biblical scholarship and interpretation, succeeding a predecessor triad of approaches, which Ochs taxonomizes as 1) the Neoplatonic paradigm (typified by Saadya Gaon), 2) the Scholastic paradigm (typified by Moses Maimonides) and 3) the Kantian/modern paradigms (typified by Hermann Cohen and the various enquiries of modern academia).²⁴ The fourth paradigm takes as its model the dialogical philosophical enquiries centered in the works of Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, and especially Franz Rosenzweig.

Therefore the approach to Scripture, employed in this fourth paradigm model, assumes at the outset that there is not one voice in the text, or one “proper” interpretive key by which to unlock the text. Instead, the intention has been to deploy the conversational/confrontational style of study prevalent in traditional *yeshivot*—where two students verbally explore and argue a text together—into both academic philosophy and scriptural hermeneutics. Thus, from the beginning, Scriptural Reasoning has been a movement without a center or central figure, relying instead on a coalition of like-minded scholars in semi-constant communication.

Formed in 1991 as a loose coalition of interlocutors with similar affinities and approaches to the study of Judaic traditions, postmodernity, and philosophy, the scholars

²³ Michael Fishbane, *Garments of Torah* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 114.

²⁴ Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 4.

began the project in an online forum known then as the “Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Bitnetwork.” They were clear in their desire to avoid both *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the “science of Judaism”: a nineteenth century, post-Hegelian movement in Germany, which attempted to render the concept of “Jewish culture” palatable to European Christians, as well as elevate its study as a subject within the University system), along with its concomitant historical-critical modes of text study, and the presuppositions inherent in modern liberal philosophy.²⁵

From the beginning, they were intentional in modeling their dialogic method (in contradistinction to what is perceived as the authority-based univocity of academia, which they claim to be a type of “monologism”) on a traditional form of rabbinic study that eschewed focus on the individual in favor of dialogue-partners and group learning-debate.²⁶ Interest in their project grew in the wider community of religious academics. There was a hunger for such an approach, it seems, and by the end of the ‘90’s

...the group ... expanded from a circle of ten Jewish scholars to a society of about three hundred scholars—Jewish and non-Jewish scholars of Hebrew Bible, of rabbinic literature, of Kabbalah, who [found] in these literatures resources for responding to some of the greatest challenges of Jewish life today. Among these are challenges posed by the Shoah and by the demise of the hegemonic principles of secular thought that came to guide the lives of so many European and American Jews up to the epic of the Shoah.²⁷

From this brief history we can begin to trace the outline of shared concerns among the scholars involved in Scriptural Reasoning, in spite of their varied religious backgrounds and particular interests.

²⁵ The history recounted here is taken from Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 3-4.

²⁶ Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 4.

²⁷ Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 3.

In light of this variety, one of Ochs's principal contributions to the Scriptural Reasoning project has been the production and dissemination of a series of programmatic statements that attempt to capture the ethos of the various incarnations and forms of the endeavor (while Ochs reiterates in such statements that he is not speaking "for" the movement, but rather is speaking from his experience as a participant *in* the movement. As such, his programmatic pronouncements are best regarded as but one part of a chorus of such attempts²⁸).

Scriptural Reasoning and Magisterial Effects

The "House" of Reading as an Organizing Metaphor

Let us look at one such overview, from an address Ochs made at Princeton: "Faith in the Third Millennium." It is worth quoting at some length here. In this overview, Ochs articulates—in personal language that, as will be seen, is inextricably linked to the intentional particularity of the Scriptural Reasoning project—what he regards as the key features of Scriptural Reasoning.²⁹ I'll look at the overview in sections, adding commentary after each:

(1) I turn to Scripture for guidance on how to understand and act in the world. (2) Scriptural Reasoning thus presumes that God's instruction revealed in Scripture and that what is revealed cannot be readily seen in the plain sense of the words of

²⁸ Another key figure who has written and disseminated such programmatic overviews is Steven Kepnes. See, for example, his draft of "A Handbook of Scriptural Reasoning," online at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/writings/KepHand.html>, accessed 31 August 2007.

²⁹ This is one of several versions Ochs offers to sum the Scriptural Reasoning project. Another (considerably shorter) attempt is as follows: Five basic tenets: 1) Love of God, 2) a hermeneutics of retrieval, 3) interpretive or midrashic study of the divine word, 4) dialogic study of biblical texts and of rabbinic and subsequent commentaries, 5) reasoned reflections on this process of study as a means of responding to contemporary crises in the Jewish and academic communities. Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 10.

Scripture. (3) The plain sense (of Scripture, *p'shat*) speaks for all eternity, but the deeper meaning (*derash*) is disclosed only for the time and place of the seeker. (4) Derashah, seeking into the depths of Scripture, is a form of prayer: it is asking God, "how shall I understand this day? And what shall I therefore do?"³⁰

Some aspects that can be highlighted from this first section are *engagement*, *revelation*, and *prayer*—not always the first concepts one associates with an avowedly academic study of religious texts. Thus the assumptions of what is being studied, and what is at stake in that study, are quite high. Such study is predicated on a non-ironic, believing commitment. Also introduced here are the rabbinic hermeneutical concepts of *p'shat* and *derash*, which here introduce the *dialogical* interaction between the eternal and the contextual meanings that subtend for the engaged reader.

Ochs's overview also makes the point that this "what shall I therefore do?" is not a Kantian appeal to pure formal duty, but the first step in a process of *prayerful engagement with revelation*:

(5) The seeker believes that God answers back, as it were, and then the seeker asks a more refined question, then God answers back, and that the back and forth dialogue between prayerful seeker and the God of Scripture is what we mean by *studying into the depths of Scripture as Scripture*, provided we remember that this kind of study speaks only to the time and place of study. (6) Scriptural Reasoning marks out special times for bringing a part of the eschatological future into the present.³¹

This phrase I have highlighted, "*studying into the depths of Scripture as Scripture*," brings forth resonances with Brevard Childs's *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Childs, in turn, draws us to a key inquiry of this dissertation when he states

³⁰ Paraphrased from Peter Ochs, "Faith in the Third Millennium: Reading Scriptures Together." Address at the Inauguration of Dr. Iain Torrence as President of Princeton Theological Seminary and Professor of Patristics, Thursday, March 10, 2005, accessible at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/ochs-princeton.pdf>, accessed 18 July 2007.

³¹ Paraphrase of Ochs, "Faith in the Third Millennium: Reading Scriptures Together."

that “[t]o speak of scripture is to raise the question regarding the religious community for whom this literature performs this function.”³² This is precisely the issue to which Ochs now directs our attention, through the intriguing presentation of the concept of “House(s)” of reading:

(7) We read each word of Scripture as generative of broad fields of meaning, from which we are led to encounter certain deeper meanings appropriate to this given day. (8) To search for Scripture’s deeper meaning for this day is to pray for illumination and to search for signs of that illumination in our text traditions and in our study fellowship. (9) Each member of a study fellowship is a member, first, of a House (*bayit*) shaped by *kairos* and reshaped over time by practices of remembering that *kairos* and of being educated through its memory and its renewal.³³

The House (based on the *beit midrash*, the “house of study,” where rabbinic learning takes place) here locates our reader in *space*, in *time*, and in *a tradition*. This is an overture to the *particularity* of Scripture’s meaning(s) and the particularity of the readers who wrestle with them. Houses of reading are *physical* (as well as conceptual) sites of reading, inhabited by real human bodies encountering physical, extant Books.

The universal and transcendent meanings of “Scripture” are not denied in this model, but (following Rosenzweig’s model of the *Schriftsprache*) these meanings find purchase only as *contextual* artifacts—objects with a concreteness and a history within a House. This history is itself described as *kairotic*—qualitatively set apart from “objective,” common history. The Scripture that occurs within a House is therefore never “Scripture” (i.e., a House’s Scripture is never reified as the empty placeholder, the

³² Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 661.

³³ Paraphrase of Ochs, “Faith in the Third Millennium: Reading Scriptures Together.”

traditionless cipher): it is the *particular* artifact of this prayerful engagement with revelation for a certain people, at a given point in time.

Thus the House's reading is certainly *not* an approach one would claim to be "theology position neutral" (à la the misappropriation of Kelsey we noted in Chapter 2); it also is notably dissimilar from Sugirtharajah's position noted in Chapter 4 in that, though this model of the Houses allows for and encourages dialogue, the result (and hope) is decidedly *not* hybridity (the collapse of competing political voices into the single-voiced *bricolage* of the subaltern). The House's reading is invested, traditioned, and listening. When members of a House read together, there is an inbreaking of the divine. Furthermore, when *different* Houses are able to read together, this is seen as an inbreaking of the divine as well. It is seen as an *eschatological transcendence*: "a millennial day when Judaism will feel loved by—and will love!—the Church and the Mosque in a way that it has not loved or been loved before."³⁴

Ochs, as it can be seen, is generalizing the Judaic concept of the *beit midrash* (the house of study) beyond the population of Jewish readers. This openness understands the Church and the Mosque as valid Houses of reading (again, this follows a theme from Rosenzweig³⁵—at least with regard to the Church) that can be in conversation together while remaining in the integrity of their own reading traditions. In other words, this is community *without* hybridity in this model, and this non-hybridity is *necessary* for the

³⁴ Ochs, "Faith in the Third Millennium: Reading Scriptures Together," page 9.

³⁵ See, for example, Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, W. Hallo, tr. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1985), 396-401, 414; also quotations from Rosenzweig in Ronald H. Miller, *Dialogue and Disagreement: Franz Rosenzweig's Relevance to Contemporary Jewish-Christian Understanding* (Latham: UP of America, 1989), 91 and 109.

advent of this new and heretofore unknown “love” mentioned above to become manifest.

To love in this manner is to embrace a loving that exists in *difference*:

The textual reasoners’ community of dialogue is therefore itself a prototype of the dialogical relation its members seek to nurture between traditional and academic modes of study and between study and the ends of socio-political, religious and ethical practice. In this community, ‘dialogue’ does not imply identity or simple agreement. It refers, instead, *to a relationship that persists despite difference*: one that honours difference, argument and even verbal struggle as instruments of *tikkun olam*, rather than as obstacles.³⁶

This is why dialogue is preferred in this model over hybridity: If the Synagogue, the Church and the Mosque were to meld into each other, losing their particularity and integrity, such eschatological love would not be necessary, nor could it be hoped for in the manner Ochs describes.

This point of integrity and particularity is driven home in the final portion of Ochs’s overview:

(10) The English term “Scripture” may be used to refer to the record of kairotic moments that is sanctified and preserved by such a House. (11) Scriptural Reasoning refrains from otherwise generalizing about the way a scripture will be named and maintained within a House. The way a House names its Scripture belongs to the way it is received into intimate relation with God, and no name offered outside the House can be adequate to this intimate naming. A House therefore houses a scriptural tradition; to read Scripture *as Scripture* is to read it first in a House.³⁷

Here we see similar themes to the ones that Kelsey highlighted in his *Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, with the addition of the irreducible tie of *any* actual functioning of the term “Scripture” to its use *within* a House. In other words, the danger I mentioned in Chapter Two of Kelsey being *misread* on this point is actively combated in Ochs’s model.

³⁶ Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 6, my emphasis.

³⁷ Paraphrase of Ochs, “Faith in the Third Millennium: Reading Scriptures Together.”

To speak of “Scripture” is always already to speak of a concrete artifact, a physical Scripture, used in a specifically traditioned manner by a group of living human beings.³⁸

Houses and Magisterium

In the concluding chapter of his very thorough study of the doctrines and practice of the Roman Catholic Magisterium, *Teaching with Authority*, Richard Gaillardetz makes the following observation:

It is difficult to imagine a formalized unity among the Churches that does not include some shared understanding of doctrinal teaching authority. Even so, Roman Catholics cannot afford the hubris of thinking that their structures and understandings of authority *in toto* and as presently constituted provide the only viable possibility. If there lies in the future of Christianity a formalized unity among some of the various Christian traditions, no one can know at this point what precise form the structures and manner of exercise of ecclesial authority will take.³⁹

What is available in such an observation is not dissimilar to the possibilities put forth by Ochs and the Scriptural Reasoners in this model of Houses. That is, what has heretofore been the exclusivist understanding of authority for Roman Catholics can perhaps be expanded beyond reference to Roman Catholics solely, and even beyond (as the above quotation imagines) the broader Christian community, to embrace the present condition of religious communities in North America generally. In fact, when Ochs and Gaillardetz are read together, the points of convergence sound consonant with the ecumenical overtures found in the Second Vatican Council. What is alive in both Ochs’s claims

³⁸ E.g., “Nonetheless, however generalizable they may prove to be, practices of Jewish philosophy and theology belong, in their points of origin, *to specific times and places.*” Peter Ochs, “Introduction,” in Peter Ochs and Nancy Levine, eds., *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 2, my emphasis.

³⁹ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church*, Theology and Life Series 41 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 275-276.

above, and in Gaillardetz's understanding of the future of magisterial authority, seems to be this openness and an un-knowing-ness: the future that is to come cannot yet be named in its "precise form"; it is the eschatological transcendence.

If, as this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, *all* congregations (at least when speaking of Christians, but here in Ochs we see beyond even those borders) are tied to magisteria, the question is still open as to what *shape* these magisteria will take. There are multiple viable magisteria at work (both in ecclesial and extra-ecclesial forms) and, as the above quotation attests, multiple viable *possibilities* that might be considered—even for those traditions, like Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, that have heretofore identified themselves by the exclusivity of their visible magisteria.

The Houses of reading suggested here by Ochs would comfortably fit high on the list of viable possibilities for a model of a trans-traditional magisterial understanding. Thus, in this open future suggested by Gaillardetz, the unity he speaks of might be better construed as a unity of *authorities*, rather than authority. That is, the recognition begun by Vatican II of the legitimacy of other Christian traditions (and continued by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI toward reconciliation with other Abrahamic traditions) is itself of a species with the model of Houses put forth by Ochs: different traditions remaining differentiated, but reading together in charity.

For my claim of this convergence to have a proper context, however, let us consider for a moment the second half of Gaillardetz's quotation, where he goes on to state:

there are two things that are incumbent upon Roman Catholicism if it is to contribute to that future unity... First, it must come to the table of ecumenical dialogue with a coherent understanding of its own view of doctrinal authority, one

that flows from the best of its ecclesiological tradition...Second, it must address the tangible gap many perceive between Catholicism's *vision* of ecclesial authority and its concrete structures and practice.⁴⁰

What I find compelling in Och's House model is that both of Gaillardetz's criteria (the need for coherent self-articulation, and the requirement for self-critical reflection on that articulation) are met. Any given House is constituted *precisely* "by practices of remembering kairos and of being educated through its memory and its renewal."⁴¹ In other words, a House is constituted by its self-understanding, from its sources in its Scriptures and Traditions, from the coherence of its doctrines and authority, and the best of its ecclesiological tradition. A House is a House *because* it knows its integrity, and furthermore it knows (and it *must* know) how this integrity differs from the integrity of other Houses.⁴²

It is *from* such integrities that the members of a House engage in ecumenical dialogue. In Ochs's model, this is illustrated by the image of "leaving the House"—standing outside its doorway, and thus now being available for conversation with other representatives of other Houses, each just outside of their respective doorways. Thus, in the Scriptural Reasoning construal of ecumenism, participants never meet in a strictly "neutral" space, but rather in an absolutely *shared* space. The experience of this shared space is always informed and contextualized by the Houses the dialogical partners have

⁴⁰ Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority*, 276.

⁴¹ Paraphrase of Ochs, "Faith in the Third Millennium: Reading Scriptures Together."

⁴² It is also notable that, for Scriptural Reasoning, this integrity is indelibly tied to the written word: "Rather than reduce Jewish literatures to the categories of strictly secular, academic disciplines, textual reasoners seek to reason, *again from out of practices of reading*, rather than from out of the modern practice of thinking before reading, sharing ideas before sharing texts, and, one might say, breaking new conceptual ground before breaking bread." Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 7, my emphasis.

left, temporarily, to share it. Within Judaism, of course, these doorways historically would have been the literal doors of the *beit midrashim*, though we can now generalize this model among the Abrahamic traditions (Synagogue, Church, and Mosque) and the sub-traditions of each (e.g., Catholic and Protestant Christians, evangelicals and liberals), where the Houses, and doorways, are more conceptual and figurative.⁴³

But there remains the question of *why* a member of a given House would desire to leave the conversations within to venture out into this shared space between Houses. To address this point, we will now turn in detail to an examination of Ochs's *midrashic pragmatism*.

Reasoning Together: Reading as Ethical Embodiment

P'shat and Derash as Pragmatic Readings

Because a House is constituted as *dialogical*—in conversation not only with other Houses, but within itself—we find here the possibility of a model in which magisteria can be rigorously traditional without necessarily falling into hegemony. In other words, a Magisterium constituted in the House model could be understood as internally self-reforming. Ochs makes the claim that the Scriptural Reasoning project “introduces one set of guidelines for reconceiving the new and the old, guidelines that are at once post-

⁴³ This generalization is authorized by such statements as the following, made in regard to SR: “There are times, however, when a family of thinkers comes to believe that its shared project may speak to more than its own individual members and may, therefore, display at least some generalizable responses to the conditions of Jewish life as lived in a certain period in history.” Peter Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 2.

secular and post-orthodox.”⁴⁴ The mechanism of this reconceiving self-reformation, however, remains to be explicated.

To undertake this explication will require a preliminary introduction of some terms that are quite familiar in the circles of rabbinic interpretation, but are not necessarily well known in the vocabulary of Christian theology. In particular, the terms *p’shat* and *derash* need to be defined in our discussion.

Often times the term *p’shat* is translated into English as the “plain sense” of a Scripture or text, and the *derash* is its “interpreted sense.” We have encountered this term “plain sense” before, in the work of Kathryn Tanner and Bruce Marshall that we discussed in the first two chapters. Even so, some careful distinctions need to be made here, for oftentimes when Christian ears hear these definitions of “plain” and “interpreted,” they tend to overdraw the distinction implied by the terms, imagining the *p’shat* to be some species of the *literal* sense and *derash* thus a species of the *figurative* (i.e., the *p’shat* as what the passage “really says,” and *derash* as interpretive supplement). Hence the Christian ear might misunderstand these terms, classing them in binary hierarchies and exclusionary oppositions.

However, these terms are *not* seen in the rabbinic tradition as binary opposites, or hierarchical, in the way that the “literal” and “figurative” are in the Christian hermeneutic traditions. Nor does the rabbinic tradition prefer the former to the latter as the “real” meaning. Rather, these two aspects are seen together as *interdependent* manifestations of an emergent truth arising when one reads at a given time *in a given context*. Ochs himself gives a helpful clarification when he says:

⁴⁴ Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 7.

I take the term “plain sense” from the exegetical practice of medieval Jewish scholars, for whom the “plain sense” (*peshat*⁴⁵) of a text is its meaning within the *rhetorical* context of some body of received literature. Here, “plain sense” is contrasted with “interpreted sense” (*derash*), much in the way we might contrast textual exposition with hermeneutical or performative *use* of a text—provided that we do not grant epistemological authority to one sense over the other. This epistemological model comes from the pre-medieval scholars or “rabbis” of the Talmud, for whom, as I read them, the lived meaning of a scriptural text will be found in its *derash*, but only when the *derash* is itself performed within the grammatical, philological and semantic rules of the *peshat*: as the Talmud says “the scriptural text must not be deprived of its plain sense.”⁴⁶

Hence, in Ochs’s appropriation of these terms, a given House (as a community of reading) will develop, over time, a *body of interpretations* that, since they help to form the context of reading itself, become “commonsensical” or “plain sense” readings of holy Books. This is quite similar to Tanner’s understanding of this process, where she describes the “plain sense”

[a]s the immediately apparent sense, produced by a habit of reading in which the members of a community engage without thinking about it, the plain sense is the standard sense of a text. It provides a normative reading, that is, in at least some minimal degree: all other senses, as both new and nonobvious senses, require some additional warrant. In sum, the plain sense is the “familiar, the traditional and hence authoritative meaning” of a text within a community whose conventions for the reading of it have therefore already become relatively sedimented.⁴⁷

For Ochs, this set of interpretations will be reconceived and reformed as these core contextual meanings are brought to bear on the trials of actually living. Thus *p’shat* and *derash* achieve, in the majority of cases, a stability that can be demonstrated, with the understanding that other contexts and times might call for a reconfiguration of stabilities.

⁴⁵ Some writers will render the Hebrew as “peshat,” rather than “p’shat.”

⁴⁶ Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism*, 5 - 7, underlined emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ Tanner, 63.

The local occurrence of stability, however, might lead an observer unfamiliar with the fluidity of *p'shat* and *derash* over time to mistake the “House model” as rigid and sedimented. As Ochs develops this point across his writings, however, we can see that this is not the case. The *p'shat's* “commonsensical” reading *can* become central and assumed, of course, and thus can fit with the analogue drawn in Chapter 1 to a style of *enthymematic* influence on reading. A given community *can* turn its “commonsense” reading into a hegemonic reading, and thus can engender the sort of monolithic (and not always overt) presence for its magisteria that makes the notion of “Magisterium” itself so troubling for many. Ochs’s House model of Scriptural Reasoning, however, combats this hegemony.

The explicit identification of a reader with one House contains the implicit admission that there are *other* Houses. Thus a given House seeks not to establish a neutral, “global” field of interpretations for sacred Books, but rather to honestly inhabit *its* traditions of reading and understanding faithfully, and then work outward from there. Ochs admonishes would-be scriptural reasoners: “Don’t start by making generalizations. Start with actual practices of reading, texting and thinking and then ask, ‘what is this?’”⁴⁸

Thus the concrete practices in one’s own House enter into dialogue with the concrete practices of another House. This occurs because, in the real world, such dialogues cannot be avoided. Readers of differing Books will disagree, but so will readers of the *same* Book. Particularity and difference, therefore, remain paramount, and Ochs describes the readings generated as “pragmatic.” That is, they are considered

⁴⁸ Ochs, *Textual Reasonings* 8.

valuable, not for their transcendental positive content, but rather for how they function in the *lived* readings of a House.⁴⁹

Reading with Those that Suffer: Defining 'Derash' Pragmatically

When we start with the “actual practices of reading,” as was just mentioned, we can easily recognize that not every community will read in the same manner. Moreover, a given community may come to question *its own* readings over time or with shifting circumstances. Ochs anticipates such eventualities (with extraordinary analytic finesse, particularly in *Pierce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*), demonstrating that these stabilized reading practices and interpretations will, at given points, break down for readers—no matter how faithful.

⁴⁹ The technical development of this point forms the theoretical crux of Ochs’s project, as described in the following selection, which, though lengthy, bears quoting in its entirety: “...I will, in closing, restate the postcritical paradigm once more, this time in terms of Peirce’s theory of pragmatism, which is a theory about how abstract inquiries like this one are connected to our everyday practices in the world. According to Peirce’s theory of pragmatism, our everyday reasonings about the world and about what we are supposed to do in it are informed by deep-seated rules of knowledge that we do not ordinarily have reason to question. Instead, these rules set the largely unperceived context in terms of which we question and correct our understanding of particular facts and behavioral norms. At times, however, our incapacities to correct problems in everyday understanding stimulate a deeper level of questioning: what Peirce calls “pragmatic” inquiry, designed to adjust our deep-seated rules of knowledge to changing conditions of life. Postcritical inquiry is a pragmatic inquiry of this kind, stimulated by the doubts certain text scholars have about the fundamental rules of scholarship they inherited from modern academia. More specifically, these are doubts about modern scholarship’s capacity to sponsor pragmatic inquiry when it is called for and to recognize pragmatic inquiry when it is already in place. The postcritical claim is that modern scholarship tends to define rational inquiry on the model of everyday inquiry: as if reason operates only when a community’s deep-seated rules of knowledge are in place and when the task of inquiry is strictly referential, that is, to identify facts and norms with respect to these rules. Modern scholarship therefore tends to reduce the pursuit of knowledge to the terms of binary opposition between referential, rational inquiry (when the deep rules are in place) and non-referential irrational inquiry (when they are not). In the case of scriptural studies, the effect is to assume either that scriptural texts are simply referential (in which case they display their meaning by pointing ostensibly to certain facts or norms) or that they are non-referential (in which case they are either silent or display their meaning only expressively or metaphorically). The postcritical complaint is that this binary opposition excludes the possibility that scriptural texts may have pragmatic reference: that is, that they may represent claims about the inadequacy of certain inherited rules of meaning and about ways of transforming those rules or adjusting them to new conditions of life. To the degree that they refer pragmatically, scriptural texts will not disclose their meaning to modern methods of study.” Ochs, “Introduction,” *Return to Scripture*, 38-39.

In other words, what was once a familiar text will suddenly become, for a handful of readers or for many at once, “burdensome,” and require a new (re)reading, beyond the (re)reading that has become “commonsense” for a House. As Ochs describes this process:

In the Talmudic literature, the rabbis tend to move from plain sense to interpretive reading only when something burdensome in the plain sense stimulates them to do so: some apparent contradiction (*sitra*) or textual difficulty (*kashia*). Because the plain sense in question is the plain sense of Scripture (*torah*) as God’s revealed word, the rabbis assume that the textual burden is merely apparent and that the non-burdensome meaning of a given passage will be disclosed through further “searching out” (*derasha*: “interpreted meaning,” or the result of “searching out”). Unlike ancient allegorical or esoteric readers—such as the Essenes or Christian Gnostics or Jewish Platonists—the rabbis do not believe that any single activity of searching out could disclose a meaning that was not apparent in Scripture’s plain sense. The non-evident meaning of a burdensome passage would be disclosed only through the indefinite give-and-take of past, present and future readings. Otherwise put, a particular interpretive meaning for a particular passage could be identified only for a particular reader in a particular context. New contexts of interpretation would disclose new aspects of meaning. ... This reading would not preclude other readings for other contexts, although it could also contribute to them. The success of the reading would be judged by how well it resolves the given problem...*for a given community of interpreters.*⁵⁰

These textual difficulties could certainly arise from shifts in grammar, language, and community identities with respect to a given set of Books. Ochs, however, does not see the “burdensome” reading as arising only out of *technical* difficulties, and instead will press the point; “burdensome” readings arise not only when a given community begins to doubt its grammar, but also when a portion of that community *begins to doubt the God about whom these readings speak*. Burdensome readings arise from trauma; that is, they

⁵⁰ Ochs,, *Peirce, Pragmatism*, 5 - 7. Although Ochs is speaking in these quotations about how he is applying rabbinic interpretive techniques to his reading of Peirce, it is my contention that these positions can be used to describe Ochs’s understanding of these techniques more generally.

arise, in the most *engaged* readings, from the encounter with human suffering.⁵¹ The following example will help to illustrate what this means.

In his essay, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: a Suggested Typology of Function,” Walter Brueggemann offers a trifold analysis for reading the psalms that opens for us the milieu of the burdensome reading, and its potential for resolution in *derash*. Brueggemann’s analysis demonstrates how such burdensome readings have been incorporated into the stabilized canon of the Old Testament.⁵² In the piece, Brueggemann follows the arc of analysis of the psalmic voices from assurance to doubt to re-establishment of faith—a movement that ebbs and flows through the life of ancient Israel as reflected specifically in the Psalms. His terminology for this movement is *orientation-disorientation-reorientation*.

1. Psalms of *orientation* offer a straightforward and linear flow from expectation to satisfaction: Follow God’s edicts and be rewarded, disobey and be punished; in such psalms, the universe fundamentally makes sense.⁵³ The orientation songs can be understood fundamentally as *descriptive*, “for they anticipate and remember no change.”⁵⁴ Their modality is one of order and status quo, and within the present

⁵¹ For some examples of this notion of “burdensome” reading that are not specific to Scriptural Reasoning, see Miguel A. de la Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), John R. Levinson and Priscilla Pope-Levinson, eds., *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), and Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁵² Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function,” in his *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, Patrick D. Miller, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 3-32.

⁵³ Examples of Psalms of orientation include 1, 104, 119, 127, 128, 131, and 133. See Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 10-11.

⁵⁴ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 11.

discussion we can see in this a parallel to what we have termed the settled or stabilized interpretation of a text within a community (the enthymematic, assumed reading).

2. Such songs are in stark contrast to the psalms of *disorientation*, in which, for Brueggemann, such linear expectations and assurances are reversed, undermined, and rendered impotent. In the place of God's recognizable ordering of the world, such Psalms are observed instead to cry out, "We followed the rules, but we have been exiled to Babylon, and the Temple has been destroyed. Is God still there? Have we been forgotten?"⁵⁵ The disorientation songs can be understood fundamentally as *lament*. In these Psalms, the universe is nonsensical, and the *status quo* has given way to uncertainty and displacement.⁵⁶

Of particular note to our discussion is Brueggemann's observation that such psalms, reflecting the reality that the world is *not* working, become "necessary" in the life of Israel in sudden and unexpected ways, arising "in a situation in which the old worldview, old faith presuppositions, and old language are no longer adequate."⁵⁷ Reading Brueggemann alongside Ochs, we can see that for both, this is the point at which a community (or sub-community) testifies that the descriptive, assumed, enthymematic reading has become suddenly and unexpectedly *burdensome*, demanding *new* worldviews and faith presuppositions, and a *new* language. Demanding, in other words, precisely the manner of pragmatic *derash* described by Ochs—a new interpretation of the text that *responds* to the undeniable and now-present suffering caused by sudden and unexpected

⁵⁵ Examples of Psalms of disorientation include 60, 88, 89, and the book of Lamentations. See Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 18-19.

⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 11-12.

⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 19.

brokenness; a new interpretation that will not supplant, but rather *coexist* with the former, *p'shatic* reading.

3. Brueggemann's typology concludes with the psalms of *reorientation*. As he puts it, "[t]hese psalms reflect a quite new circumstance that speaks of newness (it is not the old revived); surprise (there was no ground in the disorientation to anticipate it); and gift ([the new circumstance] is not done by the lamenter)."⁵⁸ This new circumstance is a species of the *postcritical*, not bound by the limitation and naivete of orientation, nor lost to the lament and despair of disorientation, though mindful of the existence of both predecessors. Such psalms, then, represent a "movement out"⁵⁹ of the impasse of the former, now-burdensome reading, and thus are marked by renewed testimony of divine favor and outpourings of thanksgiving.

Thus the reorientation songs can be understood fundamentally as *doxology*, but the contrast of these reoriented songs to the naive orientation psalms is, according to Brueggemann, "their ability to touch on the *extremities* of human life."⁶⁰ The reorientation song bears the *burden* of the failure of former readings, and has become the means for the (sub)community to *derash* a new meaning, and a new relationship, with divine authority. Hence, Brueggemann claims, "[t]he extremity of reorientation is as shattering as that of disorientation."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 14.

⁵⁹ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 22.

⁶⁰ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 15.

⁶¹ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 15.

Responsive to Suffering: *Tikkun Olam*

This shattering reorientation is another point of convergence with Ochs's project. For Ochs, and others committed to Scriptural Reasoning, the ultimate goal of reading is not individual edification or even the advancement of knowledge. The ultimate goal of reading is *repair*, the healing of the world. "Textual reasoners reaffirm the goals of classical Jewish teaching: to 'repair the world' (*tikkun olam*), to redeem human suffering and to nurture lives of holiness (*kedushah*) and service to the One God. They also reaffirm the indispensable role of critical rationality as an instrument of this teaching."⁶²

"Critical rationality" is, in such a model, not the disinterested or objective poise of the neutral "modern subject" in its various construals. This is precisely because *truth* is not understood by this model to be objective; truth is a matter of being-engaged.⁶³ Engagement, in turn, indicates that when accepted meanings break, rationality should first be critical of those accepted meanings, not critical of the ones for whom the

⁶² Ochs, *Textual Reasonings*, 5. This is not, however, a thoroughgoing fideism: "At the same time, textual reasoners also reject the presumption that traditional Jewish practices of reading and interpretation lie somehow beyond the pale and the reach of contemporary practices of reasoning." *ibid.*

⁶³ That is, "truth" is not a matter of objective fact, but instead arises from a concrete subject's state of engagement with a concrete historical community. This is what I mean here by the term "being-engaged"--both the act of "being engaged" and to have oneself engaged "at the level of one's being" (i.e., ontologically and as a matter of deepest concern). As Ochs describes such engagements: "Unlike strictly modernist interpreters, they [postcritical Christian interpreters] thereby practice what the semiotic philosopher Charles Peirce would call a three-part hermeneutic: claiming that the *text* (the first part) has its *meaning* (the second) *for a normative community* (the third), rather than identifying the meaning of the text with some historical or cognitive "sense" that is available to any educated reader. Following this approach, these postcritical Christian scholars tend to argue that questions of truth may be raised only within the context of a normative community's exegetical practices. These scholars refrain from adopting a prioristic methods of resolving competing claims among various normative communities...To locate a common language of discourse, they examine shared textual sources and layers of shared practice and, therefore, of shared meaning." Ochs, "Introduction," *Return to Scripture*, 4, underlined portion is my emphasis.

meanings have broken.⁶⁴ Rationality must be willing to listen to (sub)communities of a House in the *extremity* of their despair, and assist in the extreme reorientation of meaning needed to bring repair, to enact *tikkun*.

This ability to “hear” suffering results in the breaking of hegemonic and monological meanings, transmuting those readings which had been accepted previously as definitive into readings which are more tentative and vague,⁶⁵ at least for the period of time that the suffering is being addressed. This willingness to reconsider the stable and established meanings is driven by *tikkun olam*—the active participation in the healing of the world by going to the points of suffering and being-responsive in the face of trauma.⁶⁶ For Ochs, this is not a capacity divorced from practices of reading.

Ochs’s position grows out of the particularity of Jewish reading *post*-Shoah. The implication of what Ochs and other Scriptural Reasoners argue is that readings that comfortably ignore the genocide that faces actual human communities in our recent shared histories are not really worthy of being called *readings*; they are not interpretations, they are dissemblance. For Ochs, we might well say that to *read* with attentiveness to the burden and extremity of suffering is to expand our capacity to read, just as

⁶⁴ For Ochs, the engaged scholar should be about the business of “addressing the singularity of suffering, rather than denying it, and redeeming it on terms that suffering itself delivers.” Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism*, 297.

⁶⁵ “To illustrate: a community whose language is constituted only by definite symbols would recognize cases of suffering only if they displayed pre-defined qualities; one whose language included vague symbols could interpret as-yet unidentified sufferings as invitations to engage the sufferer in dialogues that might reveal what is wrong.” Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism*, 295.

⁶⁶ Here I would argue that there is a deep affinity between this concept of *tikkun olam* and Wolterstorff’s use of *Shalom* as a regulative principle, which figures so importantly in the latter half of *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*.

to hear suffering is first to expand the capacity to hear, and that is to “loosen the bonds” of determinate, and thus unresponsive, and thus unhearing discourses; this is to transform definite symbols into indefinite ones, by asking with respect to what conditions they had been defined and with respect to what *other* conditions they might therefore be defined differently.⁶⁷

Once the listener has become willing to hear, and be guided by, the extremity of the trauma, by the burden of the suffering, the next step for the reader(s) is to actually redefine the symbols and meanings in play within a House, to allow the stabilized meanings to become loosened.

The voice of the traumatized is an alien language to the comfortable, but the imperative of *tikkun olam* demands that this voice be heard and responded to. The humane response to traumatic dislocation of meaning allows for the members of a House to become open to *new* truths, and to incorporate these truths into these loosened meanings. For this to occur, the hearer must not simply listen, but listen with *charity*. It is this charity we find at work, not only in Ochs’s description of these mechanisms, but in Bruce Marshall’s as well:

Confronted by human beings making sounds which we take to be sentences in a language, but which we do not understand, we come to understand sentences in that language by being “charitable” about their truth. That is, we come to give right interpretations of sentences in an unfamiliar language by taking as many sentences as we can to be true, in the specific circumstances in which they are uttered.⁶⁸

Though Marshall here is chiefly referring to the encounter of different cultures and languages, it is hoped that the present discussion has shown that this alien world of suffering is equally deserving of this charitable ear. This charity, moreover, is not limited to the level of the individual; it becomes the task of the whole community.

⁶⁷ Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism*, 295.

⁶⁸ Marshall, 75.

Ochs explicates this next step, this step where charitable listening becomes the reinterpetive response, and does so with a model that is indebted overtly to Peirce, but seems equally indebted to Franz Rosenzweig, Karl Barth (whose divine “No!” itself seems to echo the opening moves of the *Star of Redemption*) and Martin Buber as well:

The Rule of Pragmatism guides compassionate responses to suffering. In it, the attribute of justice is diagrammed as a divine “No!” that deconstructs heteronomous vocabularies; the attribute of mercy appears as a divine “Yes!” that replaces the determinate words of such vocabularies with vague words whose meanings are shaped only in response to the sufferer...that discloses, by way of pragmatic rereadings of rabbinic readings of Scripture, the Rules of Pragmatism that should correct these practices.⁶⁹

The model for such pragmatic rereadings grows out of these rabbinic reading traditions, but the compelling power of Ochs’s model, and the wider Scriptural Reasoning project which incorporates it, is shown by its continuing and demonstrable ability to be widely practiced (as evinced by the variety and ecumenism of the iterated Scriptural Reasoning projects) *among* faith traditions, while maintaining the particularity and integrity of each. Each House can read in this same manner, though each House reads differently. Thus, in this added dimension of the call to be *responsive* to suffering, each House is called to maintain *both* the integrity of its particularity *and* its charitable compassion for the broken. Through reinterpretations of the burdensome readings, moving toward the loosened readings, the community reassembled old, accepted truths about their holy writings into the new truths.

⁶⁹ Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism*, 304.

Scriptural Reasoning enacted

Where such burdened re-readings are most evident in their unfolding and re-imagining is in the online *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* itself.⁷⁰ Each issue of the *Journal* collects a series of conversations and responses, which are centered on a biblical passage being read across the Abrahamic traditions. Hence, a given issue may present readings by an Islamic historian, a Jewish philosopher, and a Christian ethicist, or some other combination of these faiths and disciplines.

To take a recent example, a 2005 edition of the *Journal* takes up the subject of "Poverty and Debt Release."⁷¹ Using Leviticus 25:35-43 as a key text, the commentators and respondents enact an extended written (and, as much of this exchange happened in the context of meetings and conferences, verbal) conversation in which fresh readings emerge. Thus we find Jewish philosopher Robert Gibbs offering an abstracted reading in which he makes the claim that God's prior redemption of humanity precludes any human being bought or sold as a slave—with the caveat that (following Levinas), "everyone is someone's servant" from an ethical standpoint, with the unmitigated responsibility to aid each other.⁷²

Alternately, we find Jewish ethicist Laurie Zoloth reading the passage in the concrete context of her classes full of medical students, confronting the literal question, "Like, when I see a beggar on Michigan avenue... why do I have to give him my

⁷⁰ <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/>

⁷¹ *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, vol. 5, no. 2 - August 2005, online at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume5/number2/>

⁷² Robert Gibbs, "Property in Persons: Re-reading Scriptural Economics," http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume5/number2/ssr05_02_e02.html

money?” Which, she goes on to say, is a way of saying, “I’ve worked hard—he [the beggar] hasn’t—what’s justice got to do with it?” Zoloth presents her reading as an argument that a doctor (or a doctor-in-training) is a moral agent, claiming finally that, “the doctor has an obligation to be transformed—to transform solidarity into living by mercy.”⁷³

In this same issue we find Islamic scholar Basit Koshul reading the passage from Leviticus in light of both the Qur’an *and* sociologist Max Weber, drawing the discussion to the matter of disciplinary boundaries in the human sciences with the question, “What hath religion to do with economics?” Koshul’s reading goes on to claim that, “the Qur’an sees an irreducible and inevitable presence of the economic in religion,” with the result being that “the Qur’an posits that economic interests have had [a] direct role in the ‘production’ of religious ideas” (a position with which this present dissertation certainly agrees). From this, Koshul proceeds to the observation that, in his reading, “a key principle within an interest-based economy makes the Qur’anic principle of social justice unattainable,” allowing him to mount a critique of exploitative economic systems from within his religious compartment, based upon his articulation of the Qur’anic “narrative of charity.”⁷⁴

What is most notable about this sampling of readings is not the clear ethical dimension of their renderings (although that *is* to be noted), but rather the extraordinary *conversationalism* among the representatives of these three antagonistic (and, at times,

⁷³ All the quotations in this paragraph come from Laure Zoloth, “Why Be Good?: Response to the Reasons of the Scriptures,” http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume5/number2/ssr05_02_r01.html

⁷⁴ All quotations from this paragraph come from Basit Koshul, “The Economic in Religion and the Religious in Economics: A Qur’anic-Weberian Perspective,” http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume5/number2/ssr05_02_e01.html

warring) faiths. The willingness of the participants to listen to each other is matched by their equal willingness to dialogically criticize the positions of their interlocutors.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Having argued in Chapters 2 and 3 that there is an irreducible relation between particular magisterial instantiations and the physical objects of printed Scripture, I have turned, both in this and the previous chapter, to explorations of two current theological projects. These projects function here as interlocking examples and partial models for applying the methodologies and insights being developed in this dissertation. While neither model is a “perfect fit,” I find the Scriptural Reasoning project, and particularly Peter Ochs’s articulations of it, to be quite promising. It has a host of aspects that, in complement to Sugirtharajah’s theo-political imperatives, can be brought into effective conversation with key points of my project.⁷⁶ I will take a moment to reiterate the key points of value I find in Ochs here.

⁷⁵ My favorite example of this occurred at the late night Scriptural Reasoning session at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2001, when the Islamic commentator looked up from his paper in response to a question and asked, “Are you asking me to say where the Christian reading is wrong?” and proceeded to state his contrary position. It is this ability of its participants to disagree unabashedly, *while remaining in conversation*, that marks for me the radical promise of Scriptural Reasoning for theology.

⁷⁶ Indeed, there is an observed similarity of interests within both the Postcolonial project and Scriptural Reasoning, as was noted at the outset of this chapter. Consider the following quotation: “[Practitioners of Scriptural Reasoning] criticize efforts to adopt certain academic disciplines as universal standards or rationality, as if rabbinic (or Christian, or Muslim, or Sanskrit) texts were to be deemed ‘rational’ only in so far as their claims were reducible to the terms of the latest academic science. *They classify these efforts as persistent, if at times invidious, expressions of Western colonialism.* They presume, instead, that indigenous practices of text-reading represent indigenous practices of reasoning, and that the task of contemporary Jewish thought is to find terms, categories and logics through which such indigenous modes of rationality can be identified and discussed across the borders of different text traditions.” Peter Ochs, “Introduction,” in Peter Ochs and Nancy Levine, eds., *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 5, my emphasis.

Ochs's Scriptural Reasoning project attempts to *concretize* its discourse about reading communities and reading practices, rather than *theorize* them. The House model is necessarily a particularist model. That is, one cannot be an effective participant in a House if one does not know *explicitly* the conventions and traditions of that House. In the context of this dissertation, this aspect of Ochs's work is useful because it is a mechanism for undermining the enthymematic tendencies of covert magisteria. Ochs's model is predicated upon the *overt*ness of these magisterial influences.

This is coupled with the *dialogical* nature of the House model, both in the inter- and intra-House sense. A House is understood to be constituted among other Houses, and this reality encourages the identity of a member of a given House to be both non-hegemonic and non-ironic. In other words, while a member of a given House knows she does not possess *the* "truth" (as something that might exist beyond or transcendent-of a particular context), she is nonetheless committed to the truth she knows from within her House. This non-hegemonic / non-ironic tension is useful to our rehabilitation of the concept of Magisterium away from the inherited polarities of monologism (wherein a Magisterium speaks unchangingly for all time and everyone) and subjectivism ("Every man his own Pope!").

Finally, there is the clear position that the truth of one's House must be attentive and responsive to the voices of the suffering (both within one's House and outside). An understanding of the Magisterium that follows this model posits a teaching authority humble enough to *listen*, and thus conceives of a magisterial presence that could be

explicitly *self-reforming* (a possibility that could exist comfortably within the imaginations of Protestants and post-Vatican II Catholics alike).⁷⁷

The one criticism that we might level is that Ochs does not sufficiently account for the material considerations, such as market forces and paratextual factors, which I am trying to keep firmly in view here. Sugirtharajah's project remains the better means to engage those sorts of critiques. However, as we move to the final chapter, which will conclude this project, I will assert that this is an impasse that can be readily overcome. By drawing together some of the implications of the Scriptural Reasoning model and aspects of the postcolonial project with the analyses I have presented in the first three chapters, we will discover not only that there is a strong fit between these disparate methodologies, but that Ochs and Sugirtharajah have indeed provided us the "missing pieces" to move our exploration of these conditions of the "Biblioplex" from the level of analysis to sustained critique.

⁷⁷ Though there is not space to adequately develop the concept here, I see this as consonant with the Protestant motto of "Reformed and always reforming according to the Word of God," where "Word" is here understood less as written "Scripture," and more in the Barthian sense of the One Elected to be with and for the suffering, Jesus Christ. There is a great deal more development that would be needed, however, to make this sort of shift acceptable and coherent across the theological spectrum. I mention it here because the possibilities are intriguing.

CHAPTER VI

A BROKEN BOOK

Something like this “principle of charity” about truth in the process of interpretation is operative in the theological project of absorbing the world into the scriptural text. Charity about truth shapes the interpretation of whatever discourse the Christian community encounters; the goal of interpretation is to find a way of understanding that discourse which allows it to be held true, that is, to find a place for it within the world or “domain of meaning” opened up by the scriptural text.¹

A traditional scholar can—and must—distinguish between the living and the dead, the real and the simulacrum, the true and the false, the material and the ideal.²

The project to this point

We began this inquiry with a pair of books on a table, and it is in the sight of this same pair of books that our discussion draws to a close. We noted at the outset of this project that the physical existence of these two books—clearly different from each other, but both bearing the title of *The Golfer’s Bible*—set the stage for an interlocked and cascading array of questions and presuppositions about authority, reading, identity, and indeed the very notion of “Scripture” itself. We will take a moment to rehearse these questions and presuppositions briefly here.

¹ Bruce D. Marshall, “Absorbing the World: Christianity and the Universe of Truths,” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, Bruce D. Marshall, ed. (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 1990), 75.

² Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 252.

Though we have encountered variants of these questions in a succession of several different projects and voices, they have been expressed consistently and concisely throughout this dissertation as, *what is allowed? what is required? and who is qualified (and upon what grounds) to make such judgments?* These questions, in turn, have pointed to a set of presuppositions that have been shown to operate in the North American theological project. Though these presuppositions, like the questions, have come in various forms and voices, they can also be expressed with relative concision, by means of the phrase that states, *we theologians presuppose to know what Scripture is, and furthermore, we presuppose we can access this knowledge in a “theologically neutral” manner.*

Returning to these questions and presuppositions begins now the process of showing forth the various pieces of what has been argued here in the present project. As these various pieces are revisited, again now in brief, we can begin to draw together their wider import and the connections between them. Furthermore, this process will also allow a turning outward from the project itself, to make connections with the wider theoretical landscape in which it coheres. Such a turning outward will allow, more importantly, for an articulation of the ethical implications of the dissertation, which have to this point consisted mainly in various unconnected pieces.

As was stated in Chapter 1, the argument of this present dissertation can be seen as fitting into a set of lacunae, left intentionally open by Nicholas Wolterstorff in the theoretical landscape of his book *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*. We began in Chapter One with the lacunae themselves, holding off from examining Wolterstorff’s project as a whole until the methodological pieces and theoretical assertions of this

present project were fully presented. Now that all these elements are in place, we can turn from the lacunae themselves to the wider project Wolterstorff presents. In doing so, we can then observe the points where the present project connects to both Wolterstorff's methodological and ethical concerns.

To undertake a proper examination of Wolterstorff's project, however, will require a somewhat lengthy excursus. I therefore ask the reader's indulgence as I summarize the bulk of *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* over the next few pages. This summary will assist the reader by clarifying precisely the points at which Wolterstorff understands his project to be "nonfoundational," and what he means by this term. Further, it will demonstrate to the reader that Wolterstorff's project is by no means intended to be a mere formal reflection upon methods. Rather, Wolterstorff undertakes his project with a clear ethical vision. Hence, a final goal of this brief excursus will be the introduction and clarification of Wolterstorff's guiding principle, which he terms "justice in *Shalom*." Through the explication of Wolterstorff's ethical position *vis a vis* his formal project, a connection will emerge. This will be a connection to the present project's insistence that the ethical and the methodological are, for the theologian, properly inseparable.

Wolterstorff's Non-Foundationalist Epistemology³

Control Beliefs

Nicholas Wolterstorff begins his argument in *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* with the “well-known” anecdote of Galileo’s infamous clash with the Congregation of the Inquisition within the Roman Catholic Church, an historical event considered by many to be a “classic case of the refusal to allow science its free, untrammelled, autonomous, rational progress.”⁴

However, in his analysis of the event, Wolterstorff sees this clash, not as an isolated instant, but as rather one of many possible examples of the influence of a phenomenon he terms a “control belief.” Control beliefs, for Wolterstorff, function in a similar manner to what theologians often mean when they refer to the terms *sources* and *norms*: control beliefs frame and delimit the course of discussion, allowing some possibilities into play and rendering others beyond the pale.

We could say, then, that these beliefs, for Wolterstorff, set the limits of what William James would call “live options” within a given sphere of “reasonable” beliefs.⁵ They are called “control beliefs” because they quite literally control what theories and notions can be accepted in a given context. They are *not*, in Wolterstorff’s analysis, in

³ I am deeply indebted to my colleague J. Aaron Simmons, both for re-acquainting me with Wolterstorff’s work, and for his thoughtful suggestions that have aided greatly the analysis and distillation of Wolterstorff’s major arguments that I present in this section. He has been an invaluable interlocutor during my research.

⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999) 17.

⁵ William James, *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) 14.

any way limited to specifically religious thinking. Instead, they function (as he demonstrates in the first chapters of his book) across the spectrum of the sciences as well, affecting and shaping *all* academic disciplines. In fact, Wolterstorff asserts, “the faith, which the positivists displayed in natural science was not arrived at scientifically. On the contrary, [this faith in science] resembles in striking ways the confidence of the Congregation of the Inquisition in the veracity of Holy Scripture.”⁶

Having argued against the notion that “religious thought” is the sole locus of closed-mindedness, and having disabused the reader of the notion that “scientific thought” is necessarily any more open or less dogmatic in its approaches to new knowledge than “religious thought” is, Wolterstorff then re-poses the classic question, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”

The goal of Wolterstorff’s project: a “theory of theorizing”

In answering this question, Wolterstorff proposes the project for his book to be a sketch of some elements of a “theory of theorizing.” Wolterstorff proposes a theory that would avoid the temptation to “misconstrue the nature of theoretical inquiry or Christian commitment or (most commonly) at crucial junctures to substitute rhetoric and metaphor for the close analysis required.”⁷ In other words, citizenship in Athens and citizenship in Jerusalem each carries with it a set of commitments and presuppositions. The point has once again been reached, Wolterstorff avers, that the relationship of these commitments must be closely considered if any analysis is to proceed profitably.

⁶ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 20.

⁷ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 22.

Wolterstorff recognizes that, through much of the history of the twentieth century, the disciplines of religion gave ground nearly completely in deference to science and scientific method. “In that way,” Wolterstorff claims, “these contemporary Christian thinkers are brothers beneath the skin with the logical positivists.”⁸ The grand project of much Christian thought in the wake of the enlightenment has been to *reduce* the potential conflicts that might arise between Athens and Jerusalem.

While this may have once appeared an admirable goal of religious thought, it is, according to Wolterstorff, a goal that has increasingly been admitted to be unreachable. In the real world of our daily affairs, he states, “[a] person’s Christian commitment constantly runs the risk of coming into conflict with his science, and his science constantly runs the risk of coming into conflict with his Christian commitment.” Moreover, the “claim that no such revisions ever occur because no such conflict ever emerges is utterly false.”⁹ To argue otherwise, as some have, “amounts to a radical conformism with respect to science in its relation to Christian commitment,”¹⁰ a conformism that can only operate to the detriment of the actual lived practices of Christianity, according to Wolterstorff.

The major force driving this urge to conformity on the part of Christian thinkers, says Wolterstorff, has been the commitment, observable in many epistemologies in the Western world, to some form of *foundationalism*. As Wolterstorff sees it, “the goal of scientific endeavor, according to the foundationalist, is to form a body of theories from

⁸ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 24.

⁹ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 26-27.

¹⁰ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 27.

which all prejudice, bias, and unjustified conjecture has been eliminated. To attain this, we must begin with a firm foundation of certitude and build the house of theory on it by methods of whose reliability we are equally certain.¹¹” In analyzing how the foundationalist determines the circumstances under which one is warranted in accepting a theory, Wolterstorff proposes the following three rules:

1. A person is warranted in accepting a theory at a certain time if and only if he is then warranted in believing that that theory belongs to genuine science.
2. A theory is *belongs to genuine science* if and only if it is justified by some foundational proposition and some human being could know with certitude that it is thus justified.
3. A proposition is *foundational* if and only if it is true and some human being could know noninferentially and with certitude that it is true.¹²

According to Wolterstorff, the combined force of these three rules, forming the backbone of foundationalism, has, in the Western mindset, “been the dominant tradition among Christians as well as among non-Christians. It has been presupposed in attacks on Christianity [and] in defenses of Christianity and the possibility of Christian scholarship.”¹³

¹¹ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 28.

¹² Wolterstorff, *Reason* 28-29.

¹³ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 30.

Complementarist, Preconditionalist, and Incorporationist foundationalism

Granting that the believer and positivist alike share this commitment to foundationalism, Wolterstorff then offers three foundationalist positions, which each in their way attempt to describe the relationship of faith and reason.

The first, for Wolterstorff, is the *Complementarist* view, which he associates chiefly with Thomas Aquinas. This view divides the set of possible knowable propositions into (1) those that might become “self-evident to us in or present earthly state [through observation]”, (2) those propositions arrived at by way of reliable inference and demonstration from the set of observations, and (3) those propositions that come purely through divine revelation.¹⁴ In terms of *scientific* propositions (so goes the Complementarist view), this third method, the means of divine revelation, ultimately has no relevance because it adds only to our *believing*, not to our *knowing*. The unbeliever can also, according to Aquinas, know what the believer can know. Hence faith *complements* reason, but does not supplant or enact it. A lack of faith does not prevent one from knowing truth in this life (though Aquinas does aver that lack of faith can be a hindrance to knowing).¹⁵

The second foundationalist position, Wolterstorff suggests, is the *Preconditionalist* view. Wolterstorff associates this view chiefly with Augustine of Hippo. For Wolterstorff, “Faith is seen as a condition for arriving at a fully comprehensive, consistent and true body of theories in the sciences” in such a view.¹⁶ In

¹⁴ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 30.

¹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 31.

¹⁶ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 31.

the Preconditionalist model, faith is much more closely associated with a person's very ability to apprehend certain facts and observations than it was in the Complementarist view. Such a claim makes this view a bit of a rougher fit with strict foundationalism, but Preconditionalist foundationalism navigates this difficulty by maintaining that any absolute certitude other than God is a false certitude, and the orientation to a false absolute leads to skewed perceptions.¹⁷

The final foundationalist position suggested by Wolterstorff is the one that asserts that any faith claim or doctrine is itself propositional and thus to be "found among the body of foundational certitudes... [in other words] the content of the faith is incorporated *within* the foundation."¹⁸ In such a view, the Bible could be considered an infallible provider of simple propositional truth. Wolterstorff makes the observation that this type of foundationalism is seen especially in some Protestant circles. This position he terms the *Incorporationist* view.¹⁹

These three positions, and others like them, have rich intellectual histories within the foundationalist project. Despite this, Wolterstorff maintains that, "within the community of those working in philosophy of knowledge and philosophy of science" in the latter half of the 20th century, "foundationalism has suffered a series of deadly blows." These "deadly blows" are such that, as Wolterstorff claims, "we must henceforth construct nonfoundationalist theories of theorizing."²⁰

¹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 32.

¹⁸ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 33, my emphasis.

¹⁹ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 33.

²⁰ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 33.

Wolterstorff makes his claim—the claim that foundationalist “theories of theorizing” are inadequate—from within the very logic of foundationalism itself. If (as mentioned above) we are warranted in accepting a theory only when it belongs to “genuine science,” the means by which this “belonging” occurs should stand up to careful scrutiny. It is precisely this sort of scrutiny that Wolterstorff seeks to bring to bear on the question. In each of the cases he examines, the results lead to the same conclusion: foundational models are formally shown to be inadequate to the theoretical task.

Wolterstorff proceeds in subsequent sections to articulate his skeptical stance toward three classic positions within the philosophy of science, those of deduction, probabilism, and falsificationism. In each case, Wolterstorff asserts, the hoped-for justificatory model has been demonstrated to be inadequate.

Thus, having looked at the three most likely accounts of the relation of foundationalism to a “theory of theorizing,” he has found each wanting. In other words, for Wolterstorff, “even if there is a set of foundational propositions, no one has yet succeeded in stating what relation the theories that we are warranted in accepting or rejecting bear to the members of that set.”²¹ He goes on to claim that we are without “a general rule for warranted theory acceptance and rejection.”²²

²¹ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 45.

²² Wolterstorff, *Reason* 45.

Wolterstorff's critique of formal foundationalism

Wolterstorff then questions the very possibility of foundational propositions themselves. According to him, any viable foundationalism must assume the existence of an adequate body of foundational propositions, "propositions which are not only true but can be known noninferentially and with certitude to be true."²³ But, Wolterstorff wonders, are such propositions ever actually found? Are there, he continues, "singular propositions about physical objects which we can know noninferentially and with certitude to be true?"²⁴ For a number of reasons, Wolterstorff's answer to this question is a thoroughgoing *no*.

The first objection Wolterstorff raises is the problem of sense perceptions. "Discrepancy between [the perception of] appearing and being...is one of the fundamental features of human existence," he notes, and even when our perceiving faculties seem to be in perfect working order, we are not beyond some measure of doubt over what we perceive, says Wolterstorff.²⁵ Moreover, our perceptions are not just influenced by sensory distortion, but by the very beliefs and attitudes we hold as well. "To an alarming degree," Wolterstorff continues, "things appear to us as we believe they are rather than as they are, and fail to appear to us as they are when we do not expect them thus to appear."²⁶ There is not, for Wolterstorff, a rigid distinction between our theories and our perceptions; the two mutually interpenetrate and influence each other.

²³ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 46.

²⁴ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 47.

²⁵ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 51-52.

²⁶ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 52.

Moreover, Wolterstorff claims, there is no guarantee that sense perceptions—no matter how accurate—would ever correspond in any manner whatsoever to actual objects-in-the-world. While this may not be an insurmountable problem to philosophy generally, or to an individual going about the affairs of her day-to-day life, it is, from the rigorous expectations of correspondence and veracity laid down by foundationalism, a devastating difficulty. Thus, according to Wolterstorff, even “[t]he mathematician and the logician today begin with axioms that are far from self-evident.”²⁷ Thus the mathematician and logician, like the rest of those committed to scientific inquiry, are best served by looking for new, nonfoundational methods of justification for knowledge, according to Wolterstorff.

Wolterstorff is careful to point out that he is *not* denying the existence of “an objective reality with a nature independent of what we all conceive and believe.”²⁸ Wolterstorff is likewise not advocating any form of *relativism*, in the sense of an inability to form true beliefs or attain knowledge concerning that objective reality. Rather, he is rejecting the *foundationalist* method for warranting belief and knowledge, claiming that it is formally untenable.

While many have seen such a rejection of foundations to lead necessarily to an embrace of an “anything goes” position characterized by a sort of “cosmic agnosticism,” this is by no means Wolterstorff’s claim. All that follows from Wolterstorff’s argument,

²⁷ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 55.

²⁸ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 56.

he maintains, “is that theorizing is without a foundation of indubitables. Our future theories of theorizing will have to be *nonfoundationalist* ones.”²⁹

Wolterstorff’s Nonfoundationalism in Light of Christian Commitments

Wolterstorff asserts that, in the same way that we cannot look to our senses, nor the objects of the world, for certifiable and universal foundations for our theories of theorizing, the attempt from the Christian side to anchor such certitudes in the words of Scripture is equally problematic.

Thus Wolterstorff critiques the “Christian foundationalist” claim from several sides. He begins by examining (1) the notion that the Bible itself, being the Word of God, is replete with propositional truth in and of itself such that it is wholly sufficient to be a foundation for knowledge, as well as (2) the notion that the Bible is *a* source for propositional knowledge that functions adequately as a foundation when supplemented with empirical observations of a more traditional scientific variety. In both cases, the position that the Bible functions as an adequate source of foundational knowledge is claimed by Wolterstorff to be untenable.

In the first case, the claim that Scripture is indubitable would always be dependent upon some referent *external* to Scripture to secure the claim. Moreover, variables such as translation and interpretation (not to mention the marked lack of autographs of scripture) would raise doubts as well. In each case, even to the point of claiming that veracity is guaranteed by the machinations of the Holy Spirit, Wolterstorff reminds us that, while this may make a claim to a *form* of knowledge and certainty, it cannot, on logical

²⁹ Wolterstorff, *Reason 57*, my emphasis.

grounds, guarantee the sort of universal availability and indubitability necessary for a properly *foundational* claim.³⁰

Again, Wolterstorff is careful to delimit the claim he is making by this argument. The Bible does not, for Wolterstorff, warrant or support a foundationalist enterprise, but this in no way means that a Christian cannot have confidence in her beliefs, nor does it mean that some of those beliefs might not count as knowledge. In limiting his claims, Wolterstorff notes that, “All that follows is that our reading and interpreting of Scripture does not provide us with a body of indubitably known propositions by reference to which we can govern all our acceptance and nonacceptance of theories.”³¹

Wolterstorff’s “theory of theorizing”

Having exhausted these various foundational options for the justification of theories, the question remains to be answered: *what, then, is the nature of theorizing* as Wolterstorff conceives it?

In its broadest sense, for Wolterstorff, theories are not simply matters for the scientist or logician, but rather encompass the whole range of human lived practice. “In other words”, he contends, “scientific activity is not to be differentiated from other human activities on the ground that it deals with theories, nor even on the ground that it

³⁰ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 60-61. This caveat regarding the Holy Spirit is in consonance with my footnote in Chapter I regarding the temporary “bracketing” of the discussion of the Holy Spirit from the definition of the Magisterium offered in this dissertation.

³¹ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 62.

deals with theories of a specific kind—*scientific* theories.”³² Both the scientist and the layperson engage in the practice of *devising* and *weighing* various theories.

Thus Wolterstorff begins his explanation of theorizing by considering the manner in which the weighing of a theory functions under a *nonfoundational* methodology. Without foundations, Wolterstorff admits, there is but one recourse that remains open to the theorist: “to thine own self be true.”³³ However, Wolterstorff does not see this as necessitating a collapse into sheer relativism. This balance is maintained because, for Wolterstorff, the theorist must make choices that are delimited always by her experiences and beliefs. Thus Wolterstorff’s earlier claims regarding his concept of *control beliefs* comes back into play. In other words:

In weighing a theory one always brings along the whole complex of one’s beliefs. One does not strip away all but those beliefs functioning as data relative to the theory being weighed. On the contrary, one remains cloaked in belief—aware of some strands, unaware of most...Everyone who weighs a theory has certain beliefs as to what constitutes an acceptable *sort* of theory on the matter under consideration. We can call these *control* beliefs...Control beliefs function in two ways. Because we hold them we are led to *reject* certain sorts of theories...On the other hand control beliefs also lead us to *devise* theories. We want theories that are consistent with our control beliefs.³⁴

In addition to control beliefs, Wolterstorff also distinguishes two additional types, *data beliefs* (those that have consistency with the theory being weighed at the given time) and *data-background beliefs* (the larger set of beliefs that form the context in which data have their meaning and theories are structured). These three categories are used by

³² Wolterstorff, *Reason* 64.

³³ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 66.

³⁴ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 66-68.

Wolterstorff to distinguish beliefs as regards their function, not their essence.³⁵ Hence, it is Wolterstorff's contention, "the religious beliefs of the Christian scholar ought to function as *control* beliefs within [the] devising and weighing of theories."³⁶

Wolterstorff's call to "Authentic Christian commitment"

The control beliefs that guide the Christian scholar come forth from a background of what Wolterstorff has termed "authentic Christian commitment." In Wolterstorff's analysis, when one is a "believer" of Christianity, one is "authentically committed" to a community and its traditions. This entails a commitment, as well, to the content of those traditions—sacred writings, specific beliefs, and (perhaps most vitally) "being a Christ-follower."³⁷

According to Wolterstorff, this commitment will not, first and foremost, be a matter of subscribing to dogmatic pronouncements (though there is a place for dogma, within such authentic commitment, in Wolterstorff's view). It will, rather, manifest as a constant "working out" of the whole of one's life in the context of one's assent to be a Christ-follower. "Authentic Christian commitment," he says, "is relative to persons and to times...What I ought to be doing today by way of following Christ differs from what you ought to be doing, and from what I ought to have been doing when I was younger."³⁸ Again, Wolterstorff makes this claim while maintaining a position that is both

³⁵ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 69.

³⁶ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 70.

³⁷ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 71-72.

³⁸ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 74.

nonfoundational and nonrelativistic. The content of authentic Christian commitment is, for Wolterstorff, neither comported of universal transcendent truths, nor is it a relativism that asserts “anything goes.”³⁹

According to Wolterstorff, the belief content of these authentic Christian commitments should serve as control beliefs (as understood above) in the creation and weighing of theories.⁴⁰ The commitments of the specifically *Christian* scholar, in other words, should preclude the acceptance of certain theoretical positions whose basic assumptions are contrary to the tenets of an authentic Christian commitment.⁴¹ As Wolterstorff puts it, “Only when the belief-content of the Christian’s authentic Christian commitment enters into his or her devising and weighing of... theories in this way can it be said that he or she is fully serious both as scholar and as Christian.”⁴²

Note that, in Wolterstorff’s view, one does not look to the authentic Christian beliefs *for* the theories in question; rather, one’s method for theorizing is always already *shaped* by these control beliefs.⁴³ The data present may in fact support multiple theories, each of which would satisfy the restrictions brought by authentic commitment, and this is

³⁹ In this sense, Wolterstorff’s position seems most reminiscent of a certain Barthian strand within the Reformed tradition that holds to the continual dependence of the believer upon the revelation of God over against any sort of propositional belief content (what Barth characterizes as the fundamental difference between ‘faith’ and ‘religion’).

⁴⁰ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 76.

⁴¹ It should be reiterated that, for Wolterstorff, *all* scholars, Christian or otherwise, operate from this type of *non-value-neutral* methodology. Wolterstorff is not contrasting the committed Christian scholar with the ‘disinterested’ scientific scholar. Rather, because Wolterstorff’s work here is chiefly concerned with *Christian* articulations of knowledge and authority, he is merely making this his focus in the discussion.

⁴² Wolterstorff, *Reason* 77.

⁴³ This, I assert, is a species of what was noted in the previous chapter as “disciplined scholarship.”

for Wolterstorff completely congruous.⁴⁴ The authentic commitment functions for Wolterstorff as something *internal* to scholarship, not superadded after the facts are in place.⁴⁵

Wolterstorff's theological lacuna

At this point in Wolterstorff's analysis, he goes on to ask a series of pertinent and vital questions, which he chooses to leave unanswered. These questions formed the "lacuna" with which this dissertation began its investigations in Chapter One. Having now taken some time to situate this lacuna within Wolterstorff's wider methodological project, we can now return to them and begin to examine them more fully and integrate them with the dissertation as a whole.

Again, the questions are: (1) how is a non-foundational approach to theorizing applicable to the practice of Christian theology? Moreover, (2) how does such an approach affect the interpretation of Holy Scripture? And finally, (3) how does the non-foundationalist approach affect the matter of scriptural authority for the work of the theologian?

In dealing with these questions, Wolterstorff contends that theology, while it may be classed as an idiosyncratic example, is no different from other sets of theories that he has considered in his analysis. A theorist with Christian commitments will still need to approach the practice of theology with an eye toward the relation of theological systems to the outworking of authentic Christian commitment. For while these two may be much

⁴⁴ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 78-79.

⁴⁵ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 81.

closer in practice than they would be for a theorist of some other branch of the sciences, the two are not, according to Wolterstorff, one and the same.⁴⁶

There is, of course, every possibility that both the dogmatic and the biblical theologian might make contributions and offer works that *overlap* the territory of authentic Christian commitment. For Wolterstorff, then, there develops a triadic relation between the *Christian community*, the *dogmatic theologian*, and the *biblical theologian*. Each influences the other two with regard to the articulation of authentic commitment. Each helps to clarify for the others what are the contents of the traditions in question.

The (dogmatic or biblical) theologian, in such a view, can assist in the working-out of doctrines and hermeneutic practices, which are themselves deeply influenced by the traditions and commitments of a given community. Furthermore, because the environment in which this takes place is, as Wolterstorff contends, non-foundational, this triadic relation is simultaneously *necessary* and *tacit*. The theories (theologies and strategies of interpretation) developed within a community are binding and true, but do not possess, Wolterstorff maintains, anything that might be considered universality, ubiquity, or *transcendent* status.

As stated before, Wolterstorff chooses explicitly to set these two matters—(1) hermeneutics and (2) the locus of scriptural authority for the theologian—aside as intentionally unanswered questions. He elaborates upon the lacuna in the following passage:

the Christian scholar is a member of a community which holds that the scriptures ought to guide the life and thought of everyone committed to being a Christ-

⁴⁶ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 87.

follower. Consequently the Bible ought to guide the scholar like all other members of the community in determining the belief-content of...authentic commitment. But how in detail do they do this? ... For example, no one reading these words believes that [they] ought to believe that the earth is flat and has four corners, though that is certainly what some biblical writers seem to presume. But if this is indeed said or presumed, why is it not taken as normative when other things said or presumed are so taken? *How does one decide whether something said or presumed in Scripture is or is not normative for the belief-content of one's authentic Christian commitment?*⁴⁷

This question, “How does one decide what in Scripture is normative?” is, itself, a thoroughly *magisterial* question. In other words, Wolterstorff here outlines the issues—of community, authority, and meaning—that we have taken up here with regard to the question of Magisterium.

Due to the limited scope of Wolterstorff's project, and his desire to develop a general, non-foundationalist “theory of theorizing,” it is entirely proper and understandable that he chose to merely gesture toward these matters in passing. However, as Wolterstorff himself states, the need for an examined articulation of the possibility of non-foundationalist hermeneutics and approaches to scriptural authority for the theologian remains. As was mentioned in Chapter One, it is here, with Wolterstorff's nonfoundationalist project articulated and the lacunae presented, that the argument of this present dissertation finds its place. Hence a brief rehearsal of the key points of the present project is also in order.

⁴⁷ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 101-102, my emphasis.

The argument of the present project, briefly restated

Chapter One

In the first chapter, the problem of these two Bibles was introduced. The recent background of scholarly discussion surrounding the matter of theological hermeneutics (in both its postliberal and narrative expressions) was noted through an examination of the legacies of theologians Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. We then defined the term “theologian,” limning it not as an abstract concept, but in terms of actual human beings engaged in certain activities—those activities being the production and distribution (through teaching or sales of books) of arguments and ideas that have been taxonomized, in bookstores and academic departments, as “theology.”

Then it was noted that the term “Magisterium” was often misunderstood, usually by being collapsed into the pole of “Tradition” in the dichotomy of “Scripture vs. Tradition.” A rehabilitation of the notion of Magisterium was thus proposed, with the claim that the “Magisterium” warrants an expanded field of signification. A definition of Magisterium was offered: *that which has the power, in a given place and time, to articulate both what is to be read as Scripture, and how this Scripture is to be read.* In other words, a Magisterium sets both the limits of Scripture, as well as the *range of possible meanings* for that given limit, for a given community. Thus it was suggested that—regardless of whether we are speaking in Protestant or Catholic contexts—we could refer to any demonstrable influence on the production or interpretation of a “Bible” as a *magisterial effect*.

Next, following David Kelsey's suggestion that theological arguments could be viewed as formal logical structures, the analogy of the *enthymeme* was suggested as a means for clarifying the mechanism of what I have here called the *covert* Magisterium; that is, any authority that governs reading of or construction of Bibles in a given context while exerting its influences *sub rosa*, often by publicly denying such influence altogether. This analogy underlined a key point: just because a premise is not acknowledged or visible, it does not follow that the premise is nonexistent or without influence.

Then the Protestant fundamental of *sola scriptura* was defined, and, furthermore, problematized by suggesting that within the explosion of Bible versions in contemporary North America (what I have termed the "Biblioplex") *sola scriptura* invites the *fetishization* of Bibles, wherein market forces conspire to deliver Bibles to ever narrower "identity groups," for whom and to whom a specific physical version of a Bible is tailored to "speak."

The first chapter concluded with the location of the dissertation within a wider set of projects put forth by Nicholas Wolterstorff (whose nonfoundationalist methodology conveniently left unanswered the very questions of authority and hermeneutics the present project sought to address) and Michael McClymond (whose essay raised the question of the *theological* effects of paratextual elements, such as footnotes and editorial insertions, in English Bibles).

Chapter 2

The second chapter turned to the question of “Scripture” itself, observing that when we deploy the phrase, “*Clearly* this given book is Scripture,” the mechanism of this clarity is itself unclear, and thus must be observed and interrogated. Through a series of illustrations it was suggested that this term “Scripture” is, in fact, not *clarified* in most cases, but rather *reified*. Through equivocation, the placeholder term “Scripture” is substituted for actual, physical artifacts of printed Bibles, with an attendant obfuscation of the magisterial influence on these physical artifacts.

Given this ever-present temptation of reification, David Kelsey’s project is examined and praised as an attempt to direct the attention of the theological reader to *actual* (physical, practical) holy writings functioning in *actual* faith communities. However, it was also observed that, because Kelsey has chosen to describe this functionality in purely formal terms, there is a danger of readers mistaking his careful analysis for its opposite; that is, theologians are in danger of eschewing Kelsey’s insistence on *particularity* in favor of an adoption of a reification of his formal analysis, *as if* the formal analysis were definitive. In other words, the signifier “Scripture,” which has a *formal* place in Kelsey’s analysis, might be taken up instead by readers as the signified itself—the placeholder substituted for the meaning. In the wake of this claim, we explored briefly some key quotations from post-Kelseyean theologians to illustrate both the hope and the danger immanent in his project.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 is offered as one possible means of correcting this danger of reification. The chapter suggests an analysis that keeps foremost the fact that when we as theologians deploy the term “Bible,” and refer to “Scripture,” we are indicating *actual Books*—that is, printed artifacts that have a genealogy and an ideology. This analysis advocates a reconsideration of what has classically been known as the “hermeneutic circle,” altering its structure from a di-polar interplay of (1) the object-to-be-interpreted and (2) the interpretation(s)-of-the-object, to a tri-polar dynamic involving conceptual axes of analysis explicated as (1) the Work, (2) the Text, and (3) the Book—each pole consisting of a variety of *stabilizations* that can be examined and comparatively quantified. This overall analytic model is referred to here as *Textuality*.

By focusing on the *equipmentality*⁴⁸ of the Book, these *magisterial influences*—read here as not only those exerted by ecclesial authorities, but also those of marketing firms, focus groups, and publishing houses—which heretofore have been obscured, can be overtly named and examined. A result of this focus on equipmentality is that the Protestant notion of *sola scriptura*, as it was defined in the first chapter, is logically deflated. Scripture, it was thus claimed, is never “*sola*” in the sense meant by the present use of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. That is, Scripture is shown to always be coexistent with and derivative of a Magisterium, whether this Magisterium is an arm of a church, a publishing house, or some other authorizing entity that can control both the ideological and physical form of a given set of printed artifacts of Scripture. To fix the artifact thus

⁴⁸ Again, the reader is directed to Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), tr. By John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 96-102 and *passim*, for the manner in which the terms “equipment” and “equipmentality” are to be understood here.

is to make a preclusive interpretation, hence the notion that Scripture exists “alone” in some logical manner for the reader’s interpretation is shown to be false.

At the end of Chapter 3 it is suggested that this analysis, laying bare as it does that Bibles currently available in the North American context are thoroughly *planned* and *marketed* artifacts, raises serious *ethical* questions for the theologian. Hence the dissertation, which to that point had a descriptive register, began as well to deploy a *prescriptive* register, with an eye to making formal programmatic demands on the North American theological project in light of its findings.

Chapters 4 and 5

To begin such a process of ethical reflection, Chapter 4 introduced the critical voice of R.S. Sugirtharajah, whose participation in the hermeneutic of postcolonial criticism of the Bible shows convergences with the analytic claims made in Chapter 3. While admitting the differences in our projects, it was still claimed that the postcolonial criticism is important to the present work, offering as it does one of the few present examples of a theological project attentive to actual printed Bibles, and not merely reified notions of “Scripture.”

Postcolonialism is similarly valuable in its making available an explicitly political—understood here as a *theo-political*—vocabulary for the dissertation. In particular, the postcolonial project makes a substantive *demand* upon biblical scholarship and theology. This demand, simply stated, is that claims of neutrality be abdicated, and that we acknowledge and examine the interests we serve when we theologians offer ourselves as “professional readers,” either to our classes or to the public at large. In other

words, postcolonialism seeks to remind us that, as scholars, we are responsible for the ideologies in which we traffic, and which traffic in *us*.

Chapter 5, in looking at the work of Peter Ochs and the Scriptural Reasoning project, offers a complement to the prescriptive work begun in Chapter 4. Scriptural Reasoning offers the theologian language for identifying her magisterial commitments, the language of *Houses*. A House is the authoritative arbiter of a community's Traditions and Scriptures, and hence functions analogically to how we have understood *Magisterium* to signify in the present project. Secondly, Ochs suggests the hermeneutic benchmark for all proper *derash*: the response to suffering, guided by the rabbinic principle of *tikkun olam*.

These last two chapters, read in concert, point to the following: theologians have the ethical responsibility to admit openly their ideological positions, which arise as a result of their magisterial commitments (covert or overt) within their respective Houses; furthermore, these Houses themselves are subject to critique based upon their responsiveness to the suffering they encounter—both within their House and outside its doors.

Shalom-justice, *tikkun olam*, and the theo-political

"Authentic Christian commitment" as understood by the current project

It was suggested that the argument of this dissertation finds its purchase in the lacuna created within Wolterstorff's book. This, as we have seen, is certainly the case for the starting point of the present project, formed as it is in direct response to the challenge

presented by Wolterstorff in this lacuna. Furthermore, the end of the project—with its turn to theo-political and ethical matters—*also* forms a connecting point with Wolterstorff’s project.

At the conclusion of *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, Wolterstorff introduces an ethical register into his “theory of theorizing.” He first introduces this register by asking the thoroughgoing theological question, “What is God’s goal for human existence, to which human beings are called to contribute?”⁴⁹ His answer, which Wolterstorff argues is thoroughly scriptural, involves an ethical orientation that Wolterstorff calls “justice-in-shalom.”⁵⁰ *Shalom*, of course, is the Hebrew word for “peace,” but Wolterstorff expands upon this concept with his assertion that, “A condition of shalom is justice, and a condition of justice is liberation from oppression.”⁵¹ It is, in other words, Wolterstorff’s understanding that the only proper grounds for “authentically committed” Christian scholarship and theorizing is the participation of the scholar in this biblically-inspired pursuit of shalom-centered justice.

In making such a claim, Wolterstorff demands of his readers that they examine—deeply and critically—their scholarly motivations and commitments. They must, in other words, undertake the interrogation of the interests in which they serve. “Often it is true,” Wolterstorff avers, “that the scholar who says or even believes that he is engaged in pure theory *is in fact working to shore up a society in which he occupies a position of privilege and power.*”⁵² So long as the scholar refuses to critically examine the benefits of such a

⁴⁹ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 113,

⁵⁰ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 114.

⁵¹ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 114.

⁵² Wolterstorff, *Reason* 145, my emphasis.

position, and the detrimental consequences to others, the scholar remains, in Wolterstorff's view, irresponsible.⁵³

Wolterstorff's ethical turn takes several chapters to develop in his project, but it can be summed up clearly and succinctly with the following quotation: "I suggest that if the activities of the scholar are to be justified, that justification must be found ultimately in the contribution of scholarship to the cause of justice-in-shalom. The vocation of the scholar, like the vocation of everyone else, is to serve that end."⁵⁴ Thus, in no uncertain terms, Wolterstorff states that the only justified scholarship is ethically centered scholarship.

Thus it is important that the theological and ethical meeting point for this present project be explicated. How does the prescriptive turn of the second half of this dissertation find its theological grounding? What makes this endeavor *theo*-political and not merely political? In other words, what are the "authentic Christian commitments" *I* bring to the table?

I first came to Christianity through Quakerism, and I came to Quakerism through the writings of Milton S. Mayer. In particular, a retrospective collection of his essays, *Biodegradable Man*,⁵⁵ which I encountered during my college studies, profoundly affected me. Mayer's essays blend a deeply progressive (some would argue radical) political sensibility with a hortatory (some would argue belligerent) moral voice. His writing mixes issues of culture and politics with a biblically informed lay theology. His

⁵³ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 145.

⁵⁴ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 116.

⁵⁵ Milton Mayer, *Biodegradable Man* (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1990).

affiliation, when he claimed it publicly, was "Jewish-Quaker," and his Gospel was largely the Social Gospel. Through his essays, however, I discovered the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) and their religious witness.

Though there is much to recount of my journey with Quakerism, I will simply mention the impact John Woolman's writings and legacy had upon me.⁵⁶ Woolman, who died in 1772, spent much of his life advocating for the abolition of slavery in the United States, not simply in writings but in the whole of his life. That is to say, he donned plain grey clothing so as to not enrich the dye merchants who participated in the slave trade, and restricted his own inventory as a merchant so as not to traffic in items that did not contribute to the upbuilding to the Kingdom of God. As Woolman put it, "It had been my Practice to buy and sell Things really useful: Things that served chiefly to please the vain Mind in People, I was not easy to trade in; seldom did it; and, whenever I did, I found it weaken me as a Christian."⁵⁷

What was profound for me in Woolman was his refusal to disconnect his life as a Christian with the practices of his life and the physical objects with which he had commerce. In other words, Woolman always foregrounded the irreducible connections between the religious aspects of life and the material aspects of "making a living." Thus, for Woolman, there was no distinction between an informed Christian theology and an engaged ethics and politics. In an almost Levinasian manner,⁵⁸ to bear the title of

⁵⁶ For a brief introduction to his life and thought, I recommend John Woolman, "In the Service of the Gospel," in Jessamyn West, *The Quaker Reader* (New York: Viking, 1962), 249 - 273.

⁵⁷ Woolman, "In the Service," 258.

⁵⁸ I recognize it is problematic to invoke Levinas in a passing comment, as his thought on moral responsibility is quite nuanced. However, in making this comparison to Woolman's thought, I have in mind particularly a comment Levinas makes in *Ethics and Infinity*, where he says: "Positively, we will say that since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having *taken* on responsibilities in his

"Christian," for Wollman, is to bear the responsibility for *all* the humans to whom one is connected through livelihood or commerce, no matter how remote. When such commerce is exploitative or when it adds to the suffering of another, one must refuse to participate with the practice, even if such refusal results in loss of comfort or profit for oneself.⁵⁹ As Jessamyn West comments, reading Wollman, one "feels ashamed to understand Wollman's words without imitating his life."⁶⁰

Wollman's theologically engaged ethics (or ethically-engaged theology) is, of course, a disputable interpretation of a certain tradition of biblical reading. As this dissertation has attempted to thoroughly demonstrate, there is no "one" reading of the Bible that commands all readers across all times. Disputed though it may be, however, it is important to clarify that it is *this* sort of interpretation (one that seeks to collapse the distinctions often made between the theological, the political and ethical) that will inform the comments that follow. With that said, a few more points about the theological underpinning of these moves should be made.

First, in Chapter 8 of the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul writes:

15 When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not

regard; his responsibility is *incumbent on me*. It is a responsibility that goes beyond what I do." In other words, to be responsible is not to be responsible in the abstract, but to the many *particular* Other(s) to whom one is in relationship, no matter the remoteness or informality of that relationship. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Richard A. Cohen, tr. (Philadelphia: Duquesne, 1985), 96.

⁵⁹ Wollman went so far as to entreat his friends and family not to send him letters, though he hated being out of touch with them, because he had observed during his travels the harsh conditions under which the postal carriers labored: "And though on this account I may be likely to hear more seldom from my family left behind, yet for righteousness sake, I am through Divine favor made content." Wollman, "In the Service," 267.

⁶⁰ West, *Quaker Reader*, 249.

worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved.

There are a variety of ways to interpret the phrase, "the sufferings of the present time," within this passage. In the present context of this dissertation, I find myself in disagreement, for example, with Karl Barth's interpretation: "Participation in suffering means to *suffer with Christ*, to encounter God as Job and Jeremiah encountered Him; to see Him in the tempest, to apprehend Him as Light in the darkness, to love Him when we are aware only of the roughness of His hand."⁶¹ While this view has a definite pedigree within contemporary theological studies, I am struck by the manner in which this question of *suffering* becomes abstract for Barth. By this I mean that when he makes the injunction that we, as believers, are simply called to "love despite the roughness," it seems that Barth advocates a sort of heroic or ascetic self-overcoming—a denial, rather than an engagement, with circumstances. In other words, Barth here seems preoccupied with the question of the *reader's* proper response to *her own* suffering, rather than the reader's proper response to the suffering of *another*; it is a question of *self*, not of *other*.

This being said, I find more compelling, in the present context, the interpretation offered by Charles Cousar to the same passage from Paul:

Then, as if to explain how the "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (8:17) do in fact suffer with Christ, [Paul] turns his attention *away from believers to the suffering of the world*, to the predicament of creation and humans within it, whose lives are a perpetual groaning because of the way things are in the world (8:19-

⁶¹ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford UP, 1968) 301.

22). Hungry, victimized oppressed, whether enraged or despondent, this earthly choir can only lift up its inarticulate cries of futility and anguish. What the Spirit directs God's family to do is to join its cries with the groaning of creation, *to stand in solidarity with those who suffer, to take up the cause of the oppressed*, but to do so as those who hope and who eagerly await the completion of the family circle.⁶²

What we gain in Cousar's alternate interpretation, that I argue is lacking somewhat in interpretations such as Barth's, is precisely this *other*-centeredness. Working from the Romans text, Cousar offers the more engaged interpretation. By speaking explicitly of suffering humans in the world, *outside* the group called "heirs," Cousar's interpretation of Paul's passage can undergird theological positions that, following Wolterstorff, refuse to simply defend positions of privilege. Rather, these other-centered theologies stand explicitly (and, as Paul reminds us, with hope!) in solidarity with the suffering humans outside the confined circle of "the believers."

Furthermore, if we combine Cousar's interpretation with the legacy of Wollman, then the call "take up the cause of the oppressed" becomes a fundamentally *material* question, implicating the believer's participation, not only in the social and interpersonal realm, but also in the world of commerce and physical objects, the distribution of social good and resources.

It is at this point that the somewhat abstract notion of "authentic Christian commitment" can take on substance, context, and particularity within the present project. Within this brief sketch of (admittedly always debatable) interpretations of Scripture and theology, a clear connection between one's theological position, one's ethical response toward "the other," and the material conditions analyzed in the early chapters of this dissertation can be seen.

⁶² Charles B. Cousar, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Witnesses to God's New Work* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 23, my emphasis.

The particular ethical responsibility of the theologian

Although Wolterstorff makes his demand of scholars generally, he is clear that the *theologian*—as a professional reader and theorist within the Christian tradition—is especially culpable for failing to serve the end of justice-in-shalom. Wolterstorff’s call to theologians is, to use the language of the previous chapter, a call to be attentive to suffering; it is a call to listen and to respond. It is here (following the discussion above concerning John Woolman, Cousar's reading of Paul, and the matter of "authentic Christian commitment") that Wolterstorff’s paradigm of justice-in-shalom connects solidly with the Scriptural Reasoning paradigm of *tikkun olam*—the healing of the world—that was explored in Chapter 5.

Thus it is that Wolterstorff’s final paragraph of *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* speaks with an unmistakable tenor when he says:

Accordingly, a responsible decision by the scholar...requires that he become “self-conscious.” And as to the path of self-consciousness, there is none better *that of listening attentively* to the message of the Bible, that great unmasker of deceit, *while at the same time listening attentively* to the cries of those who make the claim of deprivation and oppression—Gentiles listening to Jews, Jews to Arabs, men to women, rich to poor, South African whites to South African blacks, Dutchmen to Moluccans, North Americans to South Americans, the First World to the Third. The person who turns one of his ears to the prophetic unmasking word of the gospel and the other to the cries of those who suffer deprivation and oppression is not likely to suffer from the illusion that he is engaged in pure theory when in fact he is working to shore up his own position of privilege.⁶³

Consonant with Wolterstorff’s ethical claim, it is precisely this combination—both of listening attentively to the suffering *and* listening attentively to the Bible itself (with

⁶³ Wolterstorff, *Reason* 145-146, my emphasis. Note that Wolterstorff is here repeating his warning against the traps inherent in "positions of privilege," as we saw in his quotation above.

“listening” read here as a close textual examination of a printed artifact)—which the present project has sought to articulate.

In further accord with the above claims, it has been the position of the present work that when a given theologian fails to account for the *physical structure* of the Bible (how a given artifact came to be, and who’s interests it serves), she is in danger of ignoring the call of the suffering around her, as well. In other words, by failing to engage in a critical material examination of the printed Scriptures that serve as one of her theological sources, she may be more prone to fall prey to the “shoring up” of position and privilege cautioned against by Wolterstorff a moment ago. The physical structure of the Bible, as a Book in the theologian’s hands, is a stabilized semiotic, an encoding of magisterial positions, which has been hidden, if you will, in plain sight.

It bears offering a concrete example of such “shorings” in action. Though the following anecdote has its origins in the realm of cinema, it will not be difficult to move from this register to a more general plane, such that we can observe the theological import it holds for the task to which we are called by Wolterstorff, Ochs and others.

Falkland Road, Bombay: Ogling eye or attentive ear?

In his lyrically intellectual, semi-biographical documentary, *The Five Obstructions* (in Danish, *Die Fem benspænd*), Danish screenwriter and director, Lars von Trier, presents his mentor, filmmaker and documentarist Jørgen Leth, with a series of escalating artistic and existential limitations, what von Trier terms “obstructions.”

The structure of the film, and the process by which it was made, is quite exact. Each of the five obstructions is centered on von Trier’s demand that Leth remake,

repeatedly, Leth's highly regarded short film, *Det perfekte menneske* (*The Perfect Human*), originally released in 1967. Clinically avant-garde in style, *The Perfect Human* depicts a man and a woman, against a stark white background, dressed in evening clothes, interacting in both highly staged everyday activities, often in surreal manner. The film is narrated as if it were a documentary about zoo animals, with the caveat that the animals in question are referred to throughout as "the perfect man" and "the perfect woman."

The Perfect Human is considered by many viewers to be brilliant precisely because of its ambiguity: the model of human perfection is presented unabashedly as white, European, and upper-middle class; at the same time, and seemingly without irony, these models of "perfection" are absurd, engaged in meaningless activities, and distracted by pains they cannot name and yet hope, someday, to understand.

This short film is thus enveloped and absorbed by von Trier's larger filmic project. The re-makings of the film are intercut in the edit with sequences from the original version of *The Perfect Human*, such that the films (both Leth's and von Trier's) are constantly in dialogue with themselves, and constantly undergoing self-critique.

In terms of structure, each of the five "obstructions" consists of a list of constraints generated in conversation with von Trier and placed upon Leth. The obstructions are placed in a series of sequential vignettes, consisting of edited footage of (1) relevant portions of the original short film, (2) conversations between Leth and von Trier about the given obstruction, (3) "behind the scenes" footage of Leth on location, shooting new footage, and (4) a relevant portion of whichever of the new versions of *The Perfect Human* was being made in response to the given obstruction. In each vignette

von Trier demands of Leth that he re-shoot, and then re-re-shoot, scenes from his film—in new locations, and new circumstances, with new actors, under the limitations placed by the given obstruction. Von Trier’s stated goal is to “banalize” Leth, to shock Leth from the calculated distance he keeps from his subject matter and “take him,” in von Trier’s words, “from the ‘perfect’ to the ‘human.’”

In the second of these obstructions, Leth is given the task of remaking a very particular portion of *The Perfect Human*, specifically a banquet scene. The obstruction stipulates, however, that Leth is required to remake the scene “in the worst place he can imagine.” Moreover, the obstruction states that Leth must shoot the scenes in this degradation, *but not show the degradation to the viewer*. Finally, von Trier commands that *Leth himself* must play the role, on film, of “the perfect human” during the scene.⁶⁴

As the obstruction is given, Leth and von Trier discuss their differing views on the “limits of observation”—both agreeing, for example, that to do such a scene of a banquet in a refugee camp, saying lines as a child was dying, would be beyond the pale. Nevertheless, the obstruction is clear, and Leth is charged with confronting, in himself, how far he is willing to push the limits of his own “cool observation” and disengagement from his subject matter.

The scene shifts then to footage of Leth on the ground, preparing to shoot the scene. Leth, almost carelessly recalls the Red Light district in Bombay⁶⁵ (an area, as stated in the film, “near Falkland Road”) as the most hellish place he has ever seen or could imagine. Following von Trier’s instructions and the limitations given by the second obstruction, he brings a Bollywood (Indian) film crew there, and they cordon off a

⁶⁴ Literally, “Obstruction #2: A miserable place; Don’t show it; Jørgen Leth is the man.”

section of road and set up for filming. As the set is dressed with table, chair, and an opulent spread of fish and wine, the other cameras, filming “behind the scenes” style, show us the view from the street at the edges of the screen, filled with the sick and starving inhabitants of Falkland Road, mute and curious about what is going on in their midst.

Later, when we are shown the finished and edited scene, we see that Leth has artfully interpreted his restriction to “not show it,” by placing a semi-opaque plastic screen behind the table, such that the hungry faces of the Red Light district inhabitants are blurrily visible behind Leth (Figure 4). We, the viewers, can easily see them watching him as he jumps in the air, takes off and replaces his tuxedo coat, and then sits down and savors the sumptuous food. This adjustment of the stated obstruction (the obstruction being that Leth *not show* the degradation, but rather to *be present* in it and to it while filming) confronts us as viewers with an uncanny vision: absolute human extremity rendered as aesthetic perfection. The scene is opulent in its monstrosity, and terrifying in its beauty. Leth has made Hell palatable.

In the wake of viewing the new version with Leth, von Trier is furious. The reason for his reaction is clear: von Trier’s goal was to put Leth, as actor/director, in a position of absolute awareness of human pain and degradation, *without allowing that degradation to become available for aesthetic redemption*.

⁶⁵ I use here “Bombay,” instead of the now more accepted “Mumbai,” as this is the way to which it is referred in the film.



Figure 4: Leth at the banquet table, Falkland Road, from The Five Obstructions

Leth makes the directorial decision to incorporate the images of Falkland Road into the viewer's aesthetic palate, and thus risks a too-easy *rehabilitation* of the extremity found there. That is, Leth, as the professional observer, can affect a psychological distance from the immediacy of extremity and excrement by giving it a beautiful frame. By doing so, Leth, in turn, passes this distance on to the viewer, as well. Leth's decision to do this was, I submit, the *opposite* of von Trier's intention when he placed the obstruction on Leth.

Let us say this in a slightly more general way. By incorporating the extremity of Falkland Road *into* the visual palate available to the viewer, Leth himself did not have to act and direct *in the presence* of its extremity (by which I mean here, "present" so as to

be *vulnerable* to that extremity at an emotional or fundamental human level). Rather, by transforming the extremity into an image for the ogle of the viewer, Leth was able to act and direct as if he were *in control* of the extremity. While von Trier, it could be argued, was asking Leth to explore what it would mean to act and direct while remaining present and vulnerable to a suffering that was not available to Leth's act of redescription, Leth's answer was instead to ignore the injunction and *insist* on redescrbing the suffering for the viewer.

This hard-to-pinpoint act of redescription, this act of showing-while-controlling-what-is-seen, is, according to artist and photography critic Mark Wyse, the very *modus operandi* of Leth's aesthetic, throughout all his films. Wyse sees this feinting control at work, not only in the re-made versions of *The Perfect Human* created for *The Five Obstructions*, but in the original version, as well:

In *The Perfect Human*, Leth keeps drawing attention to what he sees—the human. He meditates on it, and what Leth sees, we see. He makes sure of it: “Look, look at him now. And now.” It is within this constant repetition of seeing, and of thinking about what we are seeing, that he prevents us from feeling the content of this repression. Leth is repressing the source of Claus Nissen's anxiety [n.b., Nissen is the actor who portrays “the perfect man” in the original], but he is doing so in the form of presenting literal facts. And it is by being precisely literal, in the term's most concrete sense, that Leth prevents us from feeling the emotion of the wound that seems to inhabit Claus Nissen. Leth makes us think but doesn't allow us to feel. In so doing, he engages a rather perverse form of negation: a repression disguised as a truth that cannot be negated, but that nevertheless hides the source of anxiety. This is what drives Von Trier crazy—so much so that he has to make a film about it, an Oedipal dance between Von Trier and Leth that pits the instincts of the body against the intellect of the mind.⁶⁶

This assertion of control, moreover, is of a very distinct variety. Such control does nothing to alleviate the actual suffering of the inhabitants of Falkland Road. At best, this

⁶⁶ Mark Wyse, “Too Drunk to Fuck (On the Anxiety of Photography).” Essay on the Words Without Pictures website, <http://www.wordswithoutpictures.org/main.html?id=154> .

form of control simply attenuates the potential discomfort of the creator and the viewer (in Wyse's words, it "hides the source of anxiety"). Hence these suffering humans, who are trapped in such extremity, come in such acts of redescription to be robbed even of the truth of the extremity. Turned into an image, the extremity is tamed and commodified. We are shown the image, but the transmogrified beauty "prevents us from feeling the emotion" that should accompany the horror.

Vulnerability and control are, it should be noted, two very different registers. Let us compare what *might* have happened, for director and viewer, both, if Leth had followed von Trier's restrictions. *What if* Leth had filmed, for example, in front of a blank white wall on Falkland Road? The first difference would be that the *viewer* would not necessarily know the conditions under which the scene was made, *but Leth would know those conditions*. Moreover, he would know it *without* the excuse of being able to say, perhaps, *It was for the sake of the art. How beautiful, don't you agree?* As it stands, Leth showed that, to a deep level, he was unable to be in the presence of suffering without *interpreting the suffering for the viewer*.⁶⁷

The particular ethical demand of the physical artifact

To film such a scene—a banquet, with its opulence and fine dress—in front of a white wall in Falkland Road (thereby *not including* the Falkland Road as an image for the gaze of the viewer) would, of course, raise its own series of ethical questions. To make such a film would be an action (by virtue of the white background) that could take place *anywhere*. Thus, precisely *because* the conditions excluded from the frame *were not* part

⁶⁷ I am deeply thankful to my friend and colleague Kurt Schreiber for pointing out this insight about Leth's need to interpret the Bombay situation.

of the aesthetic palate, the first question would be, *Why, when it could have been made anywhere, did Leth choose to film such a scene in the Falkland Road?*

Leth's choices, in other words, would suddenly jump to the foreground, and demand our examination and ethical response. Leth *chose* that locale, based upon his explicit estimation that it was “a horrorshow.” Furthermore, Leth, as writer and director, *chooses* what aspects of the banquet scene would be remade in this new version. That is, he *chose* that the “essential” aspects of the scene to be maintained would include the fine food, fine dress, and the inherent exclusion of those around him.

We could then ask why he chose to maintain *those* aspects, which were present in the first version, despite so much else from the first version having already been altered or abandoned in this remake? Indeed, as the director and writer, Leth had the power to remake the film with *any* of the aspects of the original film *and even the obstructions themselves* readjusted and reinterpreted as he wished (a power he demonstrated clearly in his reinterpretation of von Trier’s obstruction/instruction to “not show it”).

Thus, when *we* are confronted now with the physical artifact of the film Leth remade in the Falkland Road, these choices (choices that have become fixed and stabilized in the edited, physical form of the film) remind us that Leth is engaged in a task that is thoroughly and unavoidably *magisterial*. Thus, as the one “in control” of the filmic artifact, Leth’s *choices*—in the face of Falkland Road—present themselves as not merely artistic decisions, *but as ethical decisions*, available as encoded parts of his filmic artifact.

For us as observers the ethical demand of Falkland Road by no means stops there. Continuing this line of argument, one could argue that the *extremity* of Falkland Road places an irrevocable ethical obligation upon *us*. As consumers of an artifact made in the

presence of suffering, *we* are called to inquire into the decisions made that control what we see. We are called to inquire into how and why we are manipulated to feel certain things about the images we see. Leth's decision to show or not to show the extremity of Falkland Road, or even more so his decision to show the extremity of the disease and death *but only in an aesthetically appealing manner*, cannot be problematic for him alone. That is, they cannot be problematic for him alone *if we, as viewers, happen also to claim Christianity as an "authentic commitment,"* as we have seen this phrase used by Wolterstorff. To ask such questions about the physical structure of Leth's film, and the choices he made in making it, would constitute the very essence of the sort of *attentive listening* to which Wolterstorff says we are bound by God's justice-in-shalom (and, as we have seen, the requirements of *tikkun olam* as well).

Thus, following Wolterstorff, if we theologians (as professional readers and observers within the Christian idiom) claim Christianity as an authentic commitment, then a similar rubric to the one that allows us to ponder the ethical consequences of Leth's choices might render us culpable and complicit, as well—at least to the extent we remain willfully ignorant of the fact that such magisterial decisions have been, and are being, even now, made.

Indeed, the ethical problem raised by *The Five Obstructions* is by no means a limited case. Our culpability as theologians in the face of a rubric that would condemn Leth's magisterial choices, it can be argued, is quite generalizable.

The Bible, as we have observed throughout this dissertation, is a product. In a certain sense, the Bible is like *any* product in our contemporary market economy, which is to say, the Bible is not simply an object, but a *commodity*. Moreover, the "Bible," as a

concept *and* an object, has a peculiar simultaneous functionality as a material, cultural *and* ideological commodity. Kelsey was correct: as a cultural commodity, Scripture *is* a variable; it is a sign to be filled, and a sign that *will* be filled.

In the early chapters of this dissertation we observed that some (particularly Protestant) theologians have denied the ecclesial Magisterium. Such denials, it has been shown, do not actually result in the removal of magisterial *effects*, however, even in those theological constructions where the doctrine of *sola scriptura* is a functional norm. As was demonstrated in Chapter 3, a Magisterium is always with us.

Following this, we theologians in North America stand under a particular burden because our blindness to these magisterial effects has left the Bible, as a commodity, to be filled by the interests of the marketplace, and these interests are not always those that we find commanded to believers in Scripture (e.g. doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly before God, as in Micah 6:8). Unfortunately, the milieu of global capital does not have a good track record of keeping commodities free from participation in human suffering:

The theologian Karl Rahner succinctly illustrated this point by describing the seemingly innocuous act of buying a banana. How did the fruit get to your grocery store? How was it shipped? Farmed? Were the workers responsible for its journey from tree to table treated fairly and in a way honoring to God? Was the harvest of the land for the good of many? Do you have an assurance that the fruit in your shopping cart has not caused grief and human suffering at any stage? Of course not.⁶⁸

As consumers, we might simply look at the object in front of us, be it a piece of fruit or a Bible, and concentrate upon its immediate and limited goodness *for us*. In our current North American and global context, however, neither the banana nor the Bible is *simply* an object; they are also both commodities. As commodities they bear the mark of the

many economic relationships with which they were involved in prior to becoming part of our lives. *As consumers*, we may choose to ignore these extended relationships, but are we allowed such ignorance *as believers* (or, to use the language of this dissertation, are we allowed such ignorance as those with an "authentic Christian commitment")?

Each of these prior relationships affects the object before us. Simply think of the matter of price: we pay more for the banana at the market than we would from the wholesaler, and more at the wholesaler than we would pay to the farmer if it were possible to buy directly. Each relationship between farmer and buyer changes the way we interact with the object, in this case with regard to its price—though this mechanism is by no means limited to price, as we shall see. In the case of the bananas, we do not buy directly because we are willing to pay an added price for the convenience of buying smaller amounts at vendors closer to our homes. We could say that the additional relationship of the grocer adds *meaning* to the banana, as in, *this banana is convenient, though more costly than another banana I might buy directly from a farmer in Ecuador*.

The market, however, does not simply add the more positive meanings of "convenience" and "value" in these economic transactions. As was noted in the quotation above, human suffering can also be an added factor in the creation and/or distribution of commodities. Though it is not explicitly accounted for in our economic theories, in the same way "added value" is, this addition of human suffering affects just as much the ultimate *meaning* of the commodity for us—*especially* for those of us claiming an "authentic Christian commitment" in our lives or our scholarship.

Capitalism, in other words, can become the default Magisterium in our present context when a hermeneutic denies the existence of any magisterial presence. As we

⁶⁸ Stevenson, *Brand Jesus*, 87.

have shown, the simple denial of Magisterium within a hermeneutic does not constitute the removal of magisterial effects. Instead, what occurs is a space void of overt control, which risks being possessed as a site of covert presence. Most often in our current context these voids are not filled with a pure market interest, but are filled instead with a hybrid of capitalist consumer identity and ecclesial identity.⁶⁹

As was argued in Chapter 3, when a Magisterium is overt it can be held to account for the human suffering in which it has participated.⁷⁰ Covert magisteria, however, can remain dangerously oblivious to the human sufferings in which they participate. It follows that the close examination of physical Scripture, as the "local embassy" of a given Magisterium (whether covert or overt) is, following Wollman's example above, a plausible responsibility of anyone claiming an "authentic Christian commitment." Theologians, to the extent that they function (and are paid by institutions to be) professional "Christian readers," are thus culpable and implicated in the extended relationships of human suffering that arise from the production of Bibles. This is true for any epoch we might examine, but especially so in the present milieu, when the fact of commoditization almost guarantees that some amount of human suffering has been involved in the physical object of Scripture we hold.

⁶⁹ The most direct example at work in the American churches would be the so-called "prosperity gospel," which looks to such biblical passages as Deuteronomy 8:18, Malachi 3:10, Luke 6:38 and John 10:10 for confirmation of God's desire for believers to be blessed with material abundance. Advocates of such positions within the "Word of Faith" movement in American Evangelicalism include Joel Osteen, T.D. Jakes, and Creflo Dollar. For a critique of these sorts of theological blendings of Gospel and marketplace, see Tyler Wigg Stevenson, *Brand Jesus* (mentioned above), as well as Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁷⁰ For example, the Episcopal Church recently issued a public apology for its role in American slavery (see <http://pewforum.org/news/display.php?NewsID=16617>) and the Catholic Church has addressed similar issues in *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* (Pauline Books and Media, 1993).

The voices from the wilderness

Our culpability is even more present precisely because we theologians also *willingly* participate in and aid our share of covert material magisteria. That is to say, the impetus to interpret the suffering of others without allowing oneself to be open and vulnerable to that suffering is not in any respect limited to European filmmakers. It is a recurring and present temptation for a majority of North American theologians.

To put this point another way, for North American theologians (and others who share some of the interests of the North American theological project), the temptation has been, when confronted by suffering, to subtly *re-interpret* that suffering, both for the theologian herself and *for the sufferers*. Whether through a redescription of the narrative of the sufferer, or by altering the range of possible questions to be asked within “theology proper” such that inquiry into present material suffering is explicitly excluded, we can find ample evidence of such theological obfuscations.

I am by no means a lone voice in raising this troubling point. This propensity to re-define and re-interpret has been noted and strongly criticized by, for example, James Cone, in his Preface to the 1986 edition of his book *A Black Theology of Liberation*:

White theologians wanted me to debate with them about the question of whether “black theology” was real theology, using their criteria to decide the issue. With clever theological sophistication, white theologians defined the discipline of theology in the light of the problem of the unbeliever (i.e., the question of the relationship of faith and reason) and thus unrelated to the problem of slavery and racism. Using a white definition of theology, I knew there was no way I could win the debate. And even if I could give a “good” account of myself, what difference would that have made for the liberation of poor blacks?⁷¹

⁷¹ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), xix.

Such “white definitions”⁷² of theology, moreover, are not limited to issues of race, but are implicit in the marginalization of a host of related matters from the scope of concerns of “theology proper.” We can cite several representative examples. Douglas Meeks, for instance, chastens his fellow theologians to be mindful of issues of *economic class* when he states, “unjust economic conditions destroy the true worship of the Triune God...[and] worshipping God in distorted ways contributes to the dehumanization of economic life.”⁷³ In a claim similar to Cone's, Meeks also points out that, “This [distortion and dehumanization], however, *has been largely denied in the North Atlantic context.*”⁷⁴

These two examples are indicative of a pattern observable in North American theology, consisting of clear, undeniable calls from individual theologians to their colleagues to shift the fundamental concerns of the North American theological project toward a more engaged attentiveness to some aspect of real human suffering. It is true that issues of race, gender, class, and others have received more frequent mention, as a result. However, if we listen to Cone and Meeks, their chief complaint is of a consistent defusing of the ethical core of these concerns. Read in parallel with our examination of *The Five Obstructions* above, such mention resembles, again and again, the style of

⁷² Cones theological typologies of “white” and “black” are highly nuanced and well worth deep consideration. Unfortunately, there is not room here to give a complete reading of their interrelations and functions. Hence, one brief quotation will have to suffice, with an admission at the outset of its inadequacy for encompassing the whole of what Cone is arguing: “Unfortunately, American white theology has not been involved in the struggle for black liberation. It has been basically a theology of the white oppressor, giving religious sanction to the genocide of Amerindians and the enslavement of Africans. From the very beginning to the present day, American white theological thought has been “patriotic,” either by defining the theological task independently of black suffering (the liberal northern approach) or by defining Christianity as compatible with white racism (the conservative southern approach). In both cases theology becomes a servant of the state, and that can only mean death to blacks.” Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 4.

⁷³ Douglas M. Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 20.

⁷⁴ Meeks, *God the Economist*, 20, my emphasis.

“reference” preferred by Leth: a sanitized redescription at best, which leaves the fundamental conditions in which our acts of theology are performed unquestioned and untouched.

The call to shift from a theological practice that serves powerful but unseen interests to a theological project explicitly attentive to the suffering among us is thus neither novel nor recent. Such a project, however, will show marked differences from the North American project in its current form. Latin American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, to give one alternative, has called for a renewed vision for theology that he terms *engaged* theology—one in which “[t]heologians will be personally and vitally engaged in historical realities in specific times and places. They will be engaged where nations, social classes, and peoples struggle to free themselves from domination and oppression by other nations, classes and peoples.”⁷⁵ Such a theology, Gutierrez goes on to claim,

does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. *It is a theology which is open*—in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of humankind, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just, and comradely society—to the gift of the Kingdom of God.⁷⁶

It is this matter of *openness* that should cause us here to pause, for it is precisely this sort of openness that Leth was unable to muster to the faces of Falkland Road. It is an openness that, regrettably, the theological project in North America has been unable to muster, as James Cone reminds us:

⁷⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: 15th Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 10.

⁷⁶ Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 12, my emphasis.

The importance of this point cannot be emphasized too strongly, because there are white theologians (as well as others greatly influenced by their definitions of theology) who *still* claim an objectivity regarding their theological discourse, which they consider vastly superior to the subjective, interest-laden procedures of blacks and other liberation theologians. That there are theologians who make such claims today (even after the successful critiques made by black, feminist, and Third World liberation theologians) continues to baffle me.⁷⁷

There are, in other words, theologians who remain ideologically beholden to theological methods and interpretations (again, it must be remembered that these are, in the final analysis, *magisterial* matters) that are deeply committed to a *limited vulnerability*, in the sense we observed above with Leth. This constitutes a refusal to be open to suffering, a refusal to listen attentively to suffering, and thus constitutes a failure to meet Wolterstorff's criteria for legitimate Christian scholarship. Theological practices such as these simply cannot serve the goal of justice-in-shalom.

Ideology and material practice

Breaking the Book

Literary critic Scott Wilson, influenced by the work of neo-Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, has made the claim that "ideology must be understood as material practice."⁷⁸ It was Althusser himself who said, while reflecting upon the early writings of Karl Marx, that:

the developmental motor principle of a particular ideology cannot be found within ideology itself but outside it, in what *underlies* (*l'en deça de*) the particular ideology: its author as a concrete individual and the actual history reflected in this

⁷⁷ Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, xx.

⁷⁸ Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), xi.

individual development according to the complex ties between the individual and this history.⁷⁹

This dissertation has undertaken the task of interrogating “magisterial effects”—what we might now, in the wake of Althusser, also call “magisterial ideologies”—by drawing the reader’s attention back, again and again, to the theologian as a “concrete individual” who is marked by “complex ties” to a concrete historical event: namely, the interaction with a physical, printed artifact of Scripture.

In so doing, it is hoped that the physical artifact of Scripture, with all its concomitant constructedness, will become for us *conspicuous* (in the Heideggerian sense⁸⁰). It is hoped that the Bible will become, at least for a moment, *a broken book*: broken in the sense of a tool that has ceased to serve the purpose to which we are accustomed to putting it.

A tool so broken may be repaired, but the act of repair demands we first *look* at it, with care and scrutiny, to understand it in a fresh and new manner. Such a breaking constitutes, again following Heidegger, a form of *de-reification* of the tool. It is no longer taken for granted as an unaccounted part of a seamless symbolic whole; the broken book, once broken, becomes clear to us perhaps for the first time.

We concentrate on the physical artifact, the Book, because (as was mentioned above) it functions as the “local embassy” of a Magisterium. Looking at the Book-ness of a given Bible, we see in static form the otherwise ethereal ideological forces put forth by an often-covert magisterial entity. Following Wilson and Althusser’s claims, we seek

⁷⁹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: NLB, 1977), tr. Ben Brewster, 63.

⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 62 – 63.

such ideologies through their overt material effects; in this case, the published objects that a given Magisterium will authorize.

What has been suggested here is not the only attempt to look at the “brokenness” of the Bible (or the Bible publishing industry) and seek the ideological import at work in it. With that said, let us look briefly at some suggestions made by post-structuralist biblical scholar Timothy K. Beal, to examine critically an alternative option for moving from the concrete to the ideological.

A theologian in Falkland Road

In a presentation to the 2007 International Joint Conference of the Society of Biblical Literature and American Academy of Religion, biblical scholar Timothy K. Beal questioned the future of printed Bibles. His talk, “It’s the End of the Word as We Know It, and I Feel Fine,” gave an overview of the same explosion of Bibles we noted here (in Chapter 1) when describing the Biblioplex. As he passed around the audience a series of examples of this explosion (a representative sampling of various “designer” Bibles, marketed to adults and children), he offered the following reflection, which I will paraphrase:

When I was a child, we had an orange tree in our backyard. Over the years, the tree got sick, and began producing less and less fruit. Each year it seemed a little sicker, and each year there was a notable drop in how much fruit it bore on its branches. Then, one year, the tree simply exploded with fruit, producing more oranges than it had in the previous several years combined. The tree kept producing fruit all through the season. Then, at the end of the summer, the tree died completely. My father referred to this as a “disaster crop.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Timothy K. Beal, “The End of the Word as We Know It, and I Feel Fine: the Bible in the Twilight of Print Culture,” paper given in the Reading, Theory and the Bible program unit of the Society of Biblical Literature meeting, San Diego, CA, November 17 – 20, 2007. Abstract available at http://www.sbl-site.org/Meetings/Congresses_Abstacts.aspx?MeetingId=7; see also <http://www.theendofthewordasweknowit.com/>

Beal went on to liken this “disaster crop” to what we are now observing in North American Bible publishing. His claim is that what I have here termed the Biblioplex is itself the “disaster crop” of abundance that signals the death throes of print literature, particularly printed Bibles. Beal’s notion is that this abundance we are observing is a signal of the passing of print, and therefore the phenomenon is short-lived and explicable in these terms. This is, I submit, Beal’s similar approach to the sort of Althusserian “materialist reading” of an ideological moment that I have proposed above. Because of this similarity, a brief critical comparison between the two approaches, Beal’s and mine, may be edifying.

If Beal’s analysis is correct, and the Biblioplex is the material “disaster crop” that reflects the ideological crisis named by him and others as “the end of print culture,”⁸² then it is to a certain extent consistent with the hypothesis offered by Ochs in Chapter 5, namely that the source of new interpretations (in this case, new physical *derashot*) is to be found at moments of crisis. If print culture is dying, then the outpouring of new interpretations stabilized in a plethora of different physical versions is a logical result.

I would like to attenuate Beal’s explanation, however. I want to assert that the source of this Biblioplex is not the “disaster crop” of a dying print culture—that, at least, would be a response to something many of us would view as something approaching an *actual* crisis. It is instead a wholly *artificial* “crisis,” a *manufactured* crisis, invented by the American marketplace. That is to say, the Biblioplex (the explosion of Bibles tailored

⁸² See, for example, Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2006); Geoffrey Nunberg, *The Future of the Book* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1996); and Jeff Gomey, *Print is Dead: Books in Our Digital Age* (New York: Macmillan, 2007). Of course, the godfather of all such materialist critiques of print culture, at least in English, remains Marshall McLuhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1962).

to meet a plethora of consumer “needs”) is a manifestation of phantom groaning—the cry of suffering of *fictional* entities, not human bodies. In other words, it is the result of the suffering of *corporate* “persons,”⁸³ not actual persons.

This corporate “suffering” I have in mind here is the threat of a profitless quarter, of angry shareholders voting “no confidence,” of losing market share. A corporation “suffers” by not continuing to grow and grow, by not acquiring more and by not cutting bottom lines. A corporation suffers when *we*, the consumers of North America, do not buy its products or accept its fee-based services. Corporate “suffering,” in a critical register, is the suffering of a cancer that cannot get enough blood to feed itself and grow ever larger. Furthermore, though it must be noted that actual human persons suffer as a result of this “corporate” suffering, *the suffering of a chartered corporation is by no means comparable to actual human suffering*. The “corporate person,” precisely because it is an aggregate of resources that enjoys the protection of government and the favor of law through its charter, can *never* be and *must* never be mistaken for one of the “least of these” whom Jesus calls us to face with the demand of absolute charity (again, we see here the resonance of justice-in-shalom and *tikkun olam*).

The North American theological project has difficulty keeping distinction between such registers, between the “corporate person” and the “least of these,” as we have seen in the critiques leveled by the likes of Cone, Meeks and Gutierrez above. The result is precisely the confusion mentioned above regarding “phantom groaning” and actual suffering. Take, as but one example, Mark Fackler’s essay, “The Second Coming

⁸³ Within United States legal precedent, legal entities such as corporations have been granted many of the rights of “natural persons” (what I am here referring to as “actual humans”). See, for example, Santa Clara

of Holy Writ,” which we mentioned previously in Chapter 4, which contains the following quotation. Fackler offers it in passing, without criticism (and this lack of criticism is noteworthy in itself):

The immense popularity of niche Bible products led in 1998 to publishers’ worst fears: hints from neighborhood booksellers that the market was saturated and that their shelves could no longer contain the latest niche. Firms once bustling with production business were reducing the size of their writing teams, while publishing houses declared moratoriums on new proposals. ... [However,] as the new millennium begins, another phase of the niche marketplace may be appearing: once popular books are being revived and updated, retread with contemporary apparatuses, and reintroduced to a market still eager for spiritual insight and succor.⁸⁴

This is an example of this sort of “corporate suffering” mentioned above. The “worst fear” of a corporation publishing books for the “neighborhood” is “market saturation.” If one were to poll the *living residents* of many of these “neighborhoods” (the word is in many ways a misnomer, as the “neighborhood booksellers” are now often ensconced in areas that once were *genuine* neighborhoods, areas that have had their previous community centers bulldozed and shattered to make room for the shopping “neighborhoods” where the “big box” bookstores are now ubiquitous), it is reasonable to assume that this “fear” of the corporate publisher (the horror of “market saturation”) would be superseded by other fears—for example, the horrors of poverty, loss of family members to violence, and lack of adequate health care.

Publishing houses expanded their editorial teams and marketing departments throughout the 1990’s, riding a crest of growing interest in Bibles marketed to ever

County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company, 118 U.S. 394 (1886) and Louisville, C. & C.R. Co. v. Letson, 2 How. 497, 558, 11 L.Ed. 353 (1844).

⁸⁴ Mark Fackler, “Second Coming,” 82-83.

narrowing fields of (particularly evangelical⁸⁵) identities. This expansion was not driven, I submit, by the great *need* of such Bibles, but rather by the tremendous *desire* for them. In such an environment, where need and desire have become confused, the marketed Bible becomes an artifact with an increasingly limited shelf life. Children's Bibles are replaced by Teen Study Bibles, giving way to disposable Biblezines and then the fractured adult Bibles shaped by demographics of occupation (e.g., Fireman's Bibles, Sailor's Bibles), race, and income. Then, at the end of our days, as the eyes are failing, a large print edition—perhaps sold as a matched set with the Caregiver's Bible, which we can share with those paid to look after us in the twilight of our lives.

Now it must be noted that a strong impetus for a *portion* of such "identity Scriptures" springs from a deeply felt urge to evangelize. Creating a fancy, profitable Bible tailored to a population with disposable income here in North America might, in the eyes of a publisher, be justified by the fact that the profits made from such a product help to fund unprofitable ventures like missionary Bibles and aids to evangelism at home and abroad.⁸⁶ Such balances between profitable and the evangelical interests have been a constant factor in Christian publishing, and I do not condemn them. However, as can be readily ascertained by a cursory examination of company balance sheets or a perusal of *Fortune* magazine, the corporations that publish our Bibles in North America are increasingly becoming wholly owned subsidiaries of large media conglomerates.

⁸⁵ Fackler, "Second Coming," 74.

⁸⁶ I base this on a conversation I had with John Kutsko, managing editor of a division of Abingdon Press here in Nashville, in May 2008. The example he gave was of a Bible tailored to elderly ladies belonging to the "Red Hat Society," the sales of which would fund non-profitable Bible versions designed for various mission fields.

This shift in corporate ownership parallels a shift in the balance noted above between profit and evangelism. Where once profit was the “necessary evil” to allow the perceived good of the availability of non-profitable Bibles and resources, in the present day these have begun to shift places. Now, for many Bible publishers, the non-profit ventures are maintained for their public relations value, for the legitimacy they grant to an otherwise secular parent corporation in the eyes of Christian consumers. In other words, not-for-profit and “missionary” Bibles, once the end to which profitable ventures served, are now put to the service of giving “spiritual credibility” to the profit-driven explosion of Bible-themed products targeted solely to an over-saturated and thoroughly comfortable North American middle class.

What cannot be emphasized strongly enough is that, in the wake of this reversal, the “crises” that serve as impetus for new physical interpretations of Scripture, and the identities to which they are tailored, are both increasingly *manufactured*—made to order in a marketplace constantly craving replacement items. Thus North American theologians (again, as “professional” Christian readers) *must* begin to discuss these products introduced to alleviate this “suffering,” whether satiating the profit margin or giving “succor” to the desires brought by entry into our latest niche, as the fully *manufactured* objects that they are. In the context of North America in the 21st century, no reference to “Scripture,” no citation of a “Bible,” is casual or innocent. So long as the physical object we mean when we say the word “Bible” is engineered for our comfort and pleasure, it is an artificial response to an artificial “need.” To the extent that we might still desire to “listen attentively to the suffering” with such an artifact, we are in

danger of doing so only in the limited way Jørgen Leth listened to the inhabitants of Falkland Road.

Repairing the rupture

The propensity for North American theology to serve ideological interests that are deaf to, or seek only to redescribe the experience of the suffering, has led to a deep rift in theological praxis. It has led some to conclude that the theologian in the present context is presented with an “either/or” choice: *either* she can maintain her academic and doctrinal positions, *or* she can engage with the suffering attentively. This dilemma has been succinctly described in the following quotation from John Thatamanil, in a brief reflection he wrote on the problem of suffering, read through the lens of the book of Job.

Theologians of our day, too, can cite Scripture for their claims and mount arguments with impeccable structure, even if such argumentation should run roughshod over the experience of the suffering. Job’s friends do well to keep company with Job, but when Job speaks out of his experience of suffering and anguish, he articulates an idea unfamiliar and disturbing to his fortunate friends. Job discovers that a theology to which he once subscribed is breaking down, and he can no longer believe that those who suffer deserve to suffer. It is true that Job never allowed his theology to interfere with the work of doing justice and looking after the needs of the poor—that is all the more to Job’s credit—but now that Job finds himself on the other side of the table, he can no longer accept a theo-logic that gives him a picture of a morally tidy universe where the good prosper and the wicked perish. He knows better, and so do we. Confronted with the choice between continuing to adhere to an unworkable theology and entering into the experience of their suffering friend, Job’s friends elect to abide with their theology.⁸⁷

Note the prominence *Scripture* plays in this dilemma for Thatamanil. To “cite Scripture” and “mount impeccable arguments” is part and parcel of the decision by Job’s friends to

⁸⁷ John J. Thatamanil, “Against Explanation and for Consolation: Faith in the Wake of the Tragic,” *The Spire* (Vanderbilt Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion magazine), Vol. 26, No. 1 (Fall 2005), 31.

“abide with their theology”—a theology that serves the ideological maintenance of a “morally tidy universe” where the “fortunate” find suffering “disturbing,” and so “run roughshod” over the experience of the suffering.

This is the crisis we face as theologians in 21st century North America. It can be argued that this is by no means a new crisis; nevertheless, it is *our* crisis. A majority of us, we theologians, have profited by turning a blind eye to this crisis. We have ignored it and been rewarded, in the short term, with academic appointments and publishing contracts. Yet the long term cost has been the marginalization of our own discipline in the eyes of the students we teach and the readers to whom we write, to the extent that, here at Vanderbilt (to take but one example), recent efforts and a great deal of funding have been secured to establish a program of *Practical* Theology. The implication, though not spoken, is hard to miss: theology, *per se*, is impractical and obtuse. If we poll our students, we might indeed find that they share this view, as well. To them, theology is a hoop to jump through on the way to a degree, a sort of intellectual hazing with no value to how they actually live their human, spiritual lives.

Such a state of affairs is no accident. It is the result of the willful refusal to follow Cone, Gutierrez, Meeks, and many others in their call to *listen attentively*—to the cries of those right here and now, the least of these, the suffering, with charity (and not mere redescription). We have willfully participated in a theology that is ideologically safe, that challenges neither principalities nor powers, and thus have made ourselves complicit in hegemony and oppression. We, like Leth, have made a “Faustian pact” with the status quo, and thus are caught on the horns of this dilemma—caught between tidy theologies and genuine presence with the suffering.

It need not be so. The ideological critique of physical artifacts of Scripture *is* the material critique of a Magisterium. Furthermore, *if* such critiques are (following Wolterstorff) *authentically* based in *tikkun olam* and justice-in-shalom, then this combined action of critique *is* the beginning of the undoing of the dilemma named above by Thatamanil. Restoring this ethical center to our discipline is not separate from a sustained interrogation of our ideologies, and this (following Althusser) requires a sustained interrogation of the material conditions of those ideologies. For theologians, those material conditions are Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium.

The Shape of Our Theological Task

In Chapters Two and Three, we began the investigation of the first of these—the matter of Scripture, and in particular the matter of “the Bible,” understood as a *textual artifact*. This investigation was undertaken because, it has been argued, the close examination of the physical printed form of a given artifact we call “Scripture” can unlock for us these second and third material conditions. That is to say, what we choose to call “Scripture” highlights our *confessional* commitments (our Tradition, if you will), as well as the materially encoded assumptions and decisions that have gone into the publication of this particular artifact (the Magisterial commitments).

In the conclusion of the third chapter, it was suggested that if we, as theologians, are not able, or willing, to examine the commitments we hold in our hearts in relation to the commitments encoded physically in the artifact of Scripture we hold in our hands, we run the very real risk of falling captive to an agenda that serves a purely fiscal end, not a

faithful one. But what, in the theological milieu of post-Twentieth Century North America, will such an examination look like?

Following the suggestions of Peter Ochs and his companions in the Scriptural Reasoning project, I suggest that it will look like what he has called a House.⁸⁸ As a House of Reading, it will constitute a series of temporary communities, constituted in concrete times and places for the purposes of mutual dialogue and interchange. These temporary communities will share members and continuity between their successive constitutions, though each instantiation of this House will be unique to its context and the voices that comprise it.

This House of Reading will certainly look closely at the words we find on the pages of Scripture, and will search for their meaning-in-community. However, the House I envision will not stop there, but rather will press further, asking the question: How did *these* words come to be on *this* page? The House I envision will seek the meaning of *this* artifact—the meaning of the choices that were made in its planning, production, and purchase; the meaning of the ideologies *included* and the voices *excluded* from its particular matrix of stabilities. We would begin to ask our publishers, our book retailers,

⁸⁸ Though the guiding image associated with Scriptural Reasoning in this project has been the “House,” we might also find a profitable resonance—and perhaps a more apt description—by calling this location a “Tent.” This image has been suggested by David F. Ford, in his superlative introduction to the more recent undertakings of Scriptural Reasoning, “An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims,” in David F. Ford and C.C. Pecknold, eds., *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*. In the essay, Ford expands the House model of SR to a more nuanced, tripartite schema of House, Campus and Tent (with the third forming a space of “inbetweenness” connecting the first two [12]). Thus, Ford says, the Tent “has scriptural resonances of hospitality (cf. Genesis 18) and divine presence (cf. Exodus 40), and with the whole Middle Eastern culture of nomads and desert travel in which the Abrahamic scriptures are rooted. [The Tent] suggests the fragility of a network of Jews, Muslims and Christians who are part of the well-established structures of houses and campuses but who also gather in this lightly structured setting. It is of a different order to a house or campus, suggesting (at least in our culture) a place that is not one’s permanent home, and not in competition with the others as religious or academic institutions” [12]. I am very thankful to my colleague Sean Hayden for bringing this excellent volume to my attention, and I regret that I encountered it too late in writing to incorporate it more fully into the dissertation.

our scholars (whose names reside in the seldom-read Prefaces and Introductions to our various Bible versions): “Why have you offered us *this* Bible to buy? Why have resources been used in *this* way, to appeal to *this* audience of consumers?” Perhaps even more importantly, we might begin to ask, “*Should* we buy *this* Bible?”

One approach this House could take toward this end would be to employ the metrics I have suggested in Chapter Three. These metrics are, as it has been suggested, best understood as *comparative* axes, which imply that theologians in this House will be looking at *multiple* artifacts of Scripture, in conversation with each other. This approach, as has also been suggested, dovetails well with the methodologies employed by Ochs and the others in the Scriptural Reasoning project.

Another approach for the theologians of this House might be to follow R.S. Sugirtharajah into a sustained inquiry into the global economics of capital, resources, and labor that all have been combined in the production of this particular Bible as a product. In such an approach, the metrics suggested in Chapter Three would also prove helpful, but this time they will aide in the interrogation of the encoded ideologies of publishing houses, and the transnational media conglomerates that they represent. The metrics and axes of Textuality allow the theologian, participating in this House I am suggesting, to practice a thoroughgoing hermeneutic of what we might call “cultural material suspicion.”

Because this House is constituted of tacit meetings and shifting contexts, the practices will likely incorporate aspects of these metrics I have suggested, but certainly will also draw from a range of other possibilities adapted to given places and events. The axes and metrics I have suggested in Chapter Three are designed to be adaptable to a

wide range of practices, though I do not wish to suggest that they are the proper practice in all conditions. I would welcome an outbreak of theologians intent upon suggesting and adapting new metrics beyond those I have suggested, in a theological aggregate that we might truly call “practical.”

But a House, for Ochs, is not constituted merely by its practices, but moreso by its *commitments*. Commitments to undertake the slow task of reading *together*, with those of other denominations, and other traditions—the Abrahamic, and perhaps beyond the Abrahamic; commitments to *hospitality*—to welcoming and listening to guests when they come to dwell in “our space,” and to acting like good guests when we visit “other” hermeneutical spaces; and to our *authentic* commitment, finally and fully, to *tikkun ‘olam*, and to *justice-in-Shalom*.

These commitments should make us cautious of the manner in which we *read* the Bible as well as *write* about the Bible. We should be cautious, lest we as theologians continue to act like the filmmaker Leth in the streets of Bombay, oblivious to human suffering, or worse, willing to acknowledge it only through morally anaesthetized filters.

Close material examination of the physical objects we call Bibles, in other words, is one important and practical means by which we can keep ourselves—as “professional readers” and as participants in the human family—open and vulnerable to the voice of the suffering. Seeing the object in our hands, not as some reified, Docetic abstraction that uses the imprimatur of “God’s Word” to mask all its fault lines, but rather as a stabilization of *choices*—choices regarding identities, commodities, and the use of ever more precious resources. With the Prophet Isaiah, we must be willing to ask if the thing we hold in our hands is the truth, or a lie.

The practice I am suggesting is, however, inextricable from the sort of *authentic commitments* to which Wolterstorff has called us. The practice of reading this Book, in this House, demands that the theologian abandon her neutrality, and the safety and comfort of the reified Word. The theologian, at her best moments in this House, will be at risk, open and vulnerable and willing to listen to the voice of the suffering, and the stories they tell. Such stories will, as Thatamanil has suggested, fracture our tidy narratives and well-oiled readings.

When this openness happens, in short, we theologians might begin to acknowledge “our Bible” for the broken Book it already is, and always has been. To admit this is not to lose the Book; rather it is to gain a far greater good. That is to say, we theologians must allow the Book in our hands to be broken, so that the real human bodies of our suffering brothers and sisters will not be.

“Lord, when did we see you?”

When the theologian reaches for the *Golfer’s Bible*, without reflecting on the ethical problem of the *very existence* of a *Golfer’s Bible* in the first place (and not immediately wondering why there does not exist, say, a *Homeless Person’s Bible* or a *Person Dying of Multiple Drug Resistant Tuberculosis’s Bible*), should we not announce that, even before any act of “theology” has commenced, it is already proceeding from a deeply, and perhaps *sinfully*, flawed premise?

It should be clear why, in this latter half of the dissertaion, I have felt the need to speak of this as an *ethical* problem. Precisely because any theology that would proceed

from a flawed premise such as this (again, that there is nothing worth questioning about the existence of a *Golfer's Bible*) *is not innocent*. It is duplicitous.

Applying Wolterstorff's test for justification, we might ask: Is there a place in any "authentic Christian commitment" where the moniker "golfer" could be assumed as a viable and unproblematic identity for a Christian *while there are still those who are homeless and those dying of tuberculosis*? If such an identity fails this test of justification, then it seems to follow that a *Golfer's Bible* is (and should be named as) an abomination—*precisely to the extent* that the ongoing existence of chronic treatable disease among members of our community is an abomination. Does it not then seem that a theology (or a theologian) that would be comfortable with the continuance of such suffering, that would not demand the reallocation of resources, *away* from such affluence and "leisure" activities and *toward* the care of the sick and poor, is a theology (or a theologian) acting in flagrant disregard of Jesus claims about the "least of these" among us?⁸⁹

Golfers are not the problem here. No *single* identity or activity or practice is the problem here. Rather, each of these problematic and jarring moments of encounter, when we meet a Bible that caters to such artificial, affluence-driven niche markets, should serve to *rouse us*, we theologians, from slumbers and comforts too-long held.

The problem, however, for us as theologians, quite simply, is that we are comfortable with these artificial identities, giving them the *imprimatur* of our acquiescence. We are always already participants in *some* Magisterium, as I have argued above. For many of us, unfortunately, as theologians in North America, ours is a Magisterium of avarice, predicated upon the neglect of those among us who are *truly*

suffering. Our Magisterium offers us superficial solutions to manufactured problems (perhaps, as theologians, we are not rich, or thin, or tenured, or published enough; thus we aid and abet all those who are told they, too, are not *enough* of something), and the solution we seem to have bought into wholeheartedly is that a Bible can and should make us *feel* better, and that this feeling is preferable to actually *being* better.

Such a Magisterium is not of God.

Isaiah 44

The value of the foregoing analyses in this dissertation is minimal if they merely leave the reader thoughtful. This has not been the intention of this project. It has been written in a personal style because I intend a deeply personal effect; I intend this dissertation to change not only the way you read and regard Bibles, but how you *act* as a result of this knowledge.

There may, in fact, be only one viable hermeneutic, only one good reason to ever offer a new reading or new physical version of a Bible: that you have heard the voice of the suffering (the real suffering—not the suffering of the corporation, or the cramped lifestyle), and are responding with a new way of articulating the timeless words of comfort and hope we are called, as believers, to offer. This is the demand our Traditions make of us, Catholic or Protestant, evangelical or liberal. This is what our Scripture expects of us, New Revised Standard or New International. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Malachi, Micah, Ezra, John the Baptist, Paul, Peter (first, second and third), James—and Jesus himself—all make some version of this demand of us: that we attend to the widow, the poor, the orphan and the alien in our midst.

⁸⁹ Matthew 25:31-46.

As has been demonstrated in this dissertation, we cannot avoid being beholden to a Magisterium. The question is only ever: to which Magisterium are we beholden? When we choose, buy, read and interpret our Bibles, we are beholden. So long as our magisteria are covert, we might claim ignorance, but not innocence.

It has been shown here that those who would tailor the Bible to your desires know your heart, perhaps better than you. You now have their methods laid bare before you, and the means to make overt the magisterial influences at work around you. Not some abstract Tradition (we no longer can offer that excuse), but an actual, locatable Magisterium. Bring it to the light.

And once it is plain to you, dare to ask of it how it listens to the voice of the suffering, and how it responds. *Is* it listening? Or is it listening and responding to a more damnable voice?

Choose you today whom you will serve.

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