CRITIQUING ETHNOHERMENEUTICS THEORIES: A CALL FOR AN AUTHOR-ORIENTED APPROACH TO CROSS-CULTURAL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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CRITIQUING ETHNOHERMENEUTICS THEORIES:

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CROSS-CULTURAL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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To Winnie,

“Many women have done excellently, but you

surpass them all.” Proverbs 31:29

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PREFACE

I could not have completed this work without the help of many people. David Sills, my supervisor, made the task an enjoyable one through his constant words of encouragement. He also challenged me to think clearly and always to ask the question, "What is it that is not being done that could be done that would result in greater glory to God and the advance of Christ's kingdom?" Chuck Lawless has helped me tremendously by devoting countless hours to my writing and by challenging me with his own Christ-like humility and godly example. Robert Vogel provided valuable insight into the contemporary hermeneutical task.

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My parents and in-laws provided support and encouragement during my Ph.D. studies. Although God's call on my life came somewhat unexpectedly, my parents have always done all they could to help me fulfill that call. I am eternally grateful for all they have done for me throughout my life.

For different reasons, I am equally grateful to our two sons, Hudson and Henry. They helped me maintain balance by providing much-needed writing breaks. I am also thankful for their constant prayer, "God, please help Dad finish his paper." I

look forward to the many ways God will use them for the spread of the gospel.

My colleagues in the Ph.D. program have also contributed to this work. Their helpful critique sharpened me and enabled me to think and write with greater clarity. I am especially thankful for the friendship of Phil Barnes and Jeff Walters. I have benefited more from the two of them than they will ever benefit from me. I appreciate their willingness to put up with my often repeated question, "But what does that have to do with ethnohermeneutics?"

I am most grateful to my wife, Winnie, whose unfailing belief in me and commitment to me have given me much strength throughout this process. During the early days of our marriage I was seriously ill, but she never complained about our difficult circumstances. Her love during those painful days was Christ-like and heartfelt. Since then, she has made countless sacrifices to support me through both the M.Div. and the Ph.D. programs. I look forward to what God has in store for us in the next chapter of our lives.

And, finally, who would I be without Christ? As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive?" It is only by God's grace that I am able to do anything worthwhile, and my prayer is that this work might give believers greater clarity in the task of making Christ known among all the world's peoples.

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Louisville, Kentucky

December 2011

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century saw several seismic shifts take place in the realm of biblical interpretation.[1] In fact, the traditional understanding of interpretation was under attack throughout. In the 1930s and 40s, a hermeneutic perspective referred to as the New Criticism arose that recognized the text as independent from its author and its historical setting. This approach, popularized by W. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy,"[2] became the dominant approach of literature interpretation until the 1970s. During this time, Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and Paul Ricoeur's *Interpretation Theory* shifted the focus of interpretation away from the text and onto the reader.[3] The resultant Reader-Response method of interpretation rejected the existence of objective meaning, establishing the reader as the final determiner of meaning.

While these developments were taking place in biblical hermeneutics circles, one of the major shifts in missiological studies during the twentieth century was an

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[1]Robert H. Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (September 2001): 451-54; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 29-46; Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 127-33. For a philosophical treatment of these developments, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 25-35.

[2]William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" [on-line]; accessed 19 July 2011; available from http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwart/seminar/fallacy.htm; Internet. Also available in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

[3]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method: Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics*, English trans. (New York: Seabury, 1975). Gadamer's work was first published in German in 1960; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, English trans. (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976). Ricoeur's work was first published in French in 1965.

emphasis on indigeneity. Although the indigenous approach to missions was first proposed by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the nineteenth century, delegates to the 1910 World Missions Conference in Edinburgh recognized that missionary practice was still too often characterized by paternalistic attitudes.[4] As a result, in the first half of the twentieth century, missiologists placed more emphasis on raising up indigenous leadership. In the post-World War II era of missions, this emphasis was aided by new research in cultural anthropology and linguistic studies.[5] Contextualization then became a major area of discussion and debate as missionaries sought to communicate and transmit the gospel message through culturally appropriate means.

These two areas, the shifting hermeneutical perspectives and the developing missiological paradigms, coalesced in the development of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation. Proposed in light of the alleged ineffectiveness of the grammatical-historical approach to exegesis in non-Western contexts, some ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation hold that each culture ought to utilize its own culturally appropriate methods of interpretation when interacting with the biblical text.[6]

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[4]Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910*, ed. R. K. Frykenberg and Brian Stanley, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 132-66; A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*, Encountering Missions, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 133, 136-37.

[5]Everett M. Rogers and Thomas M. Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1999), 59-69. Rogers and Steinfatt explain that the study of intercultural communication, an area of cultural anthropology, which is especially important for missiological purposes, did not develop until after World War II.

[6]For a critique of the effectiveness of the grammatical-historical method in cross-cultural contexts and an argument for the use of culturally-appropriate hermeneutical methods, see Larry W. Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Methods for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today," *Asian Journal of Theology* 1 (1987): 314-33, and idem, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context," *Journal of Asian Mission* 1 (1999): 21-43.

Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine various theories of ethnohermeneutics and to provide an alternative cross-cultural model for biblical interpretation that upholds authorial intent. In this study, I answer four primary research questions. First, what are the strengths and weaknesses of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation? Second, is it paternalistic and ethnocentric for missionaries to teach converts to utilize the grammatical-historical method of exegesis? Third, is there any place for the use of indigenous hermeneutical methods in biblical interpretation, and if so, in what way? Fourth, is it possible for missionaries to train converts to interpret the Bible in a way that is faithful to the author's original intent and sensitive to culture?

When Venn (1796-1880) and Anderson (1796-1873) first wrote concerning missiological principles related to raising up an indigenous church, they envisioned that such a church should be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.[7] They developed these principles by studying the Scriptures, with particular attention to the missionary work of the apostle Paul. Anderson wrote, "When [Paul] had formed local churches, he did not hesitate to ordain presbyters over them, the best he could find; and then to throw upon the churches, thus officered, the responsibilities of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation."[8]

The three principles that Venn and Anderson established were intended to guide the missionary in planting contextualized churches. They used the word

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[7]Henry Venn, *The Letters of Henry Venn* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993); Rufus Anderson, *To Advance the Gospel: Basic Writings in the Theory and Practice of Missions*, ed. R. Pierce Beaver (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 98-99, 103, 139. Though their theories are similar, there were some differences between Venn and Anderson. For example, Venn used "self-extending," while Anderson preferred "self-propagating." Venn envisioned and wrote of the end goal as the euthanasia of the missionary, while Anderson saw the goal as self-extension. For a brief explanation of the history of this movement, see Hans Kasdorf, "Indigenous Church Principles: A Survey of Origin and Development," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), 71-86.

[8]Ibid., 97.

"indigenous" both to confront the practice of reproducing Western churches in foreign lands and to convey the concept of a church that would grow naturally in its own environment. They envisioned that these principles would lead to the establishment of a church in which native leaders made decisions, financed the ministries, and shared the gospel.

In the first half of the twentieth century, other missionaries such as Roland Allen and Melvin Hodges became advocates of the indigenization movement. Like Venn and Anderson, Allen focused on the work of the apostle Paul. Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours* explained of Paul, "In a very few years, he built the Church on so firm a basis that it could live and grow in faith and in practice, that it could work out its own problems, and overcome all dangers and hindrances both from within and without."[9] After an examination of what methods Paul utilized in accomplishing his work, Allen appealed to the missionaries of his day to place greater emphasis on raising up indigenous leaders by teaching them about issues like the management of funds, the administration of baptism, the selection of ministers, and the exercise of discipline.[10]

In his work *The Indigenous Church*, Hodges explained that the goal of missions is the planting of a New Testament church.[11] The New Testament church model was one in which churches were planted that were not dependent on the missionary. These churches were characterized by a self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing nature. Like others before him, Hodges argued that the use of indigenous methods is not a new approach to the missionary task. In reality, the indigenous

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[9]Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 7.

[10]Ibid., 154-58.

[11]Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church: A Complete Handbook on How to Grow Young Churches* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 10-14.

approach to missions is a return to the methods that Paul modeled in his work.[12]

Other authors made additions to the three-self model. Alan Tippett revised Venn and Anderson's model by giving six marks of a truly indigenous church: self-image, self-functioning, self-determining, self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-giving.[13] Charles Brock added self-teaching and self-expressing to the traditional three.[14]

Another author who considered the three-self model too limiting and not a valid indicator of indigeneity was Paul G. Hiebert. Hiebert argued for what he termed "The Fourth Self," self-theologizing.[15] He explained, "Every church must make theology its own concern, for it must face the challenges of faith raised by its culture."[16] In other words, a legitimate function of an indigenous church is to develop theologies that speak to the relevant issues in their specific cultural context.

Hiebert displayed balance on this issue by noting, "Although they have a right to interpret the Bible for their particular contexts, they have a responsibility to listen to the greater church of which they are a part."[17] He referred to this dynamic as a

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[12]Melvin L. Hodges, "Why Indigenous Church Principles," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), 8.

[13]Alan R. Tippett, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (Lincoln, IL: Lincoln Christian College Press, 1969), 133-37. Tippett defines self-image as whether or not the church sees itself as "the church of Jesus Christ in its own local situation." Self-functioning is whether or not nationals fulfill all the necessary roles and functions of the body. Self-determining is whether or not the church makes its own decisions. Self-giving is whether or not the church has devised its own system of service of social ministry.

[14]Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994), 92-94. Brock explains self-teaching as taking place when the membership of a church is active in teaching itself. He describes self-expressing as the church having its own personality as it expresses itself through worship.

[15]Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 193-224.

[16]Ibid., 214.

[17]Ibid., 217.

"transcultural theology."[18] A transcultural theology is formed when each individual culture understands how Scripture speaks to the issues of its day, and then the various cultural perspectives are compared and explored to determine the biblical universals. As this global level hermeneutical community forms, cultural biases and areas of syncretism are uncovered, and ultimately, the church grows to understand God more clearly.

Although his position is distinct from Hiebert's,[19] Charles Kraft also encouraged the development of indigenous theologies through a process he refers to as "dynamic-equivalence theologizing."[20] He explained this process in stating, "Dynamic-equivalence theologizing is the reproduction in contemporary cultural contexts of the theologizing process that Paul and the other scriptural authors exemplify."[21] Essentially, Kraft is saying that Paul and the other authors of Scripture conveyed truths about God by communicating them through culturally-bound theological statements. The indigenous church must utilize its cultural norms and practices to convey the same truths about God in culturally appropriate ways.

Kraft explained that in order to convey the theological truths in culturally appropriate ways, they must be presented using receptor-oriented methods:

> [T]heological truth must be re-created like a dynamic-equivalence translation or transculturation within the language and accompanying conceptual framework of the hearers if its true relevance is to be properly perceived by them. Theologizing, like all Christian communication, must be directed *to* someone if it is to serve its

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[18]Ibid., 216-19.

[19]Yoshiyuki Billy Nishioka, "Worldview Methodology in Mission Theology: A Comparison Between Kraft's and Hiebert's Approaches," *Missiology* 26 (October 1998): 468-69.

[20]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005). For a discussion of "dynamic-equivalence theologizing," see Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 228-44. For his discussion of "ethnotheologies," which is similar to Hiebert's "transcultural theology," see idem, *Christianity in Culture*, 10, 94, 230-33, 305-06, 314, and idem, "Toward a Christian Ethnotheology," in *God, Man, and Church Growth*, ed. Alan Tippett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973). For a discussion of how this issue relates to the three-self principles, see Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 247-56, or idem, "Dynamic Equivalence Churches," *Missiology* 1 (1973): 39-57.

[21]Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 228.

purpose.[22]

Kraft explained that for theological truth to be accepted and embraced, it must be presented in relevant terms. Kraft went on to argue that the indigenous church should not simply embrace theology in Western terms, but it must use its emic cultural perspective to explain its own ethnic understanding of God's unchanging truth, which he referred to as "ethnic theologies."

In order for the indigenous church to develop an ethnic theology, Kraft encouraged the adoption of an ethnotheological or supracultural hermeneutical perspective.[23] He explained that Bible interpreters utilize culturally conditioned methods of interpretation when interacting with Scripture. While the knowledge of God that is uncovered by these culturally determined methods is adequate, it is not absolute. Kraft explained, then, that to uncover supracultural truth about God that lies beneath the surface of Scripture's culturally-specific commands, the interpreter must go beyond his culturally-conditioned interpretational reflexes (for Westerners, the grammatical-historical method of exegesis) to an ethnolinguistic or ethnohermeneutic approach.

Kraft argued that the ethnohermeneutic approach enables the interpreter to decode the meanings encoded in the original author's cultural context and then to apply that meaning in forms that are appropriate for the contemporary culture. He went on to argue that re-encoding the meaning in the correct cultural forms should bring about the same response in the contemporary context as it did in the original recipient's context.[24]

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[22]Ibid., 233.

[23]Ibid., 100-08.

[24]Kraft himself acknowledged the massive implications that *Christianity and Culture* has on biblical hermeneutics and the cross-cultural transmission of the gospel when he states on page 102, "There is a sense in which a new or deepened approach to hermeneutics is the major subject of this whole book." Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 102. More than any other person, it is Kraft's student, Larry W. Caldwell, who has fleshed out many of those implications.

One of Kraft's students, Larry Caldwell, has become one of the primary advocates for this ethnohermeneutical perspective.[25] Caldwell has focused on the recipient's end of the process Kraft described, and has ultimately asked the question, "What type of hermeneutical methods can be employed by the indigenous church or as part of the cross-cultural transmission of the gospel in order to bring about the greatest response among the target culture?" Caldwell has proposed that what will bring about the greatest response to the communication of the gospel message is the use of the hermeneutical processes inherent in each cultural context.

Caldwell explains what his position means for those who communicate the gospel cross-culturally,

> What is really needed by cross-cultural Bible interpreters, then, is a knowledge of the hermeneutical methodology *the people in that society are comfortable with* – discovering the hermeneutical tools that are in line with *their* particular methodology – *and then* communicating the message of the Bible in appropriate cultural forms using a dynamically equivalent hermeneutical methodology. . . .What I am arguing for here is an acknowledgement that God not only works through the culture of each particular society – hence the need to communicate the truths of Scripture in culturally relevant forms that the society will understand – but, correspondingly, that God also works through the hermeneutical processes inherent in each society.[26]

If a missionary desires to plant an indigenous church, according to Caldwell, he should not only communicate the message of the gospel in culturally-appropriate forms, but he should also utilize culturally appropriate hermeneutical methods. In most cases, these culturally-appropriate hermeneutical methods are the culture's pre-existing methodologies used in interpreting their sacred texts.

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[25]Caldwell has written his dissertation and several journal articles on this topic. His dissertation is the primary work on the topic: Larry W. Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics: Reclaiming the Hermeneutical Methodologies of the New Testament for Bible Interpreters in the Twenty-First Century," (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990). Although Caldwell's dissertation was written in 1990, he continues to teach and to publish on this topic. His most recent article is "Towards an Ethnohermeneutical Model for a Lowland Filipino Context," *Journal of Asian Mission* 7 (2005): 169-93.

[26]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 278-79.

Moreover, Caldwell argues that once an indigenous church is founded, its leaders should be trained to employ their culture's hermeneutical methods when they interpret Scripture.[27] He rejects the notion that the grammatical-historical method of exegesis is the only appropriate method of interpretation, calling it a Western hermeneutical model based on a Western philosophical foundation.[28] For him, then, to train indigenous leaders only in the grammatical-historical method is paternalistic and arrogant.

To support his position, Caldwell looks to the New Testament authors' use of the Old Testament. He argues that the use of *midrash*[29] is an employment of a receptor-oriented, culturally appropriate method of interpretation: "It was natural . . . for Jesus and the writers of the New Testament to use *midrash* in their own interpretation of various Old Testament texts when they communicated the Good News of Jesus Christ to their audiences. In their use of *midrash* they interpreted and applied the text of the Old Testament using a hermeneutical methodology their audiences were familiar with."[30] Since Paul and the other New Testament authors used *midrash* when they interpreted the Old Testament, Caldwell argues, contemporary indigenous leaders can use the traditional

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[27]Caldwell, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics," 28-31. In this article, Caldwell explains his own journey in learning to appreciate indigenous hermeneutical methodologies, and how his adoption of this perspective has affected his training of indigenous pastors.

[28]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 315-16. In his writings, Caldwell refers to the two-step method as the historical-critical method. Although many scholars recognize a significant difference between the historical-critical method and the grammatical-historical method, Caldwell equates the two. For a critique of Caldwell on this aspect of his writing, see James R. Whelchel, "Ethnohermeneutics: A Response," *Journal of Asian Mission* 2 (2000): 127.

[29]*Midrash* is a first-century Jewish interpretive technique that is application-driven exposition. It seeks to provide practical instruction of God's Word. Klyne Snodgrass explains, "Even where the midrashic interpretation is fairly straightforward, the focus with *midrash* is on the application of the text rather than with understanding the text itself." Klyne Snodgrass, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 42.

[30]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 243-44.

hermeneutical methods of their cultural context when interpreting Scripture.[31]

Ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation, then, deal with the utilization of indigenous hermeneutical methods to interpret Scripture. While a culture may employ certain hermeneutic techniques in interpreting its sacred texts, the issue this dissertation addresses is whether or not it is appropriate for them to use these techniques in interpreting Scripture, and if so, to what extent.

Although Caldwell is one of the main proponents for this position, others like R. S. Sugirtharajah are also writing on these issues.[32] Where Caldwell focuses on cross-cultural interpretation, Sugirtharajah focuses on explaining the hermeneutical processes that indigenous leaders are employing. Sugirtharajah explains that through the use of ethnohermeneutics, the distant biblical text is brought nearer; "Vernacular interpretation seeks to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of these biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides, by employing the reader's own cultural resources and social experiences to illuminate the biblical narratives."[33] In his opinion, then, the native interpreter uses that which is familiar to him (his own culture) to explain that

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[31]Some have critiqued Caldwell's arguments. For their critique, see: Whelchel, "A Response"; Daniel A. Tappeiner, "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call to Ethnohermeneutics," *Journal of Asian Mission* 1 (1999): 223-32; Daniel Espiritu, "Ethnohermeneutics or Oikohermeneutics? Questioning the Necessity of Caldwell's Hermeneutics," *Journal of Asian Mission* 3 (2001): 267-81; Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 227-30.

[32]Sugirtharajah prefers the terms "postcolonial hermeneutics" and "vernacular hermeneutics." His major works include R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); idem, *The Bible and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); idem, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); idem, *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); idem, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture*, The Bible in the Modern World, 17, ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Jorunn Økland, and Stephen D. Moore (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008); idem, "Introduction, and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (1994): 251-63. He has also edited several works on this topic. While Caldwell considers himself evangelical, Sugirtharajah is more pluralistic and could not be considered evangelical. His writings, though, are helpful in that they convey the hermeneutical practices of many Majority World believers.

[33]Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 182.

which is distant (the biblical text).

In contrast to Caldwell and Sugirtharajah, who tend to embrace a plurality of indigenous interpretational methods, Enoch Wan is more conservative in his evaluation of these approaches.[34] Wan understands ethnohermeneutics to be the principles that guide interpreters from multiple contexts as they seek to work together to understand God's revelation to humanity. He writes that although this process is more complex than interpretation done by an individual in a single context, it prevents heresy and produces more biblically based and scripturally sound interpretations.[35] Wan explains that the grammatical-historical method, which he refers to as the historical-critical method, is not without its weaknesses, but most evangelicals agree that it is the best approach, even in cross-cultural situations.[36]

In this dissertation, I examine not only the various philosophical arguments of scholars like Caldwell and Sugirtharajah, but I also examine the writings that display the practical implementation of these techniques.[37] After critiquing these theories and examples, I propose and apply a system for cross-cultural biblical interpretation that maintains and emphasizes authorial intent.

While numerous models exist that aid in the determination of the original author's meaning, many of those models do not deal adequately with the challenges of

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[34]Enoch Wan, "Ethnohermeneutics: Its Necessity and Difficulty for All Christians of All Times," ETS Microform, ETS-4772 (1995), 1, 10.

[35]Ibid., 10.

[36]Ibid., 8-9. Similar to Wan, others have argued more forthrightly that the grammatical-historical method of exegesis is the only proper method for evangelicals to use, regardless of the cultural setting. For an explanation of this position, see Espiritu, "Ethnohermeneutics or Oikohermeneutcs," 278; Tappeiner, "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call," 229-30; M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 53.

[37]An important work that gives a number of examples of indigenous hermeneutical processes is R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (London: SPCK, 1991).

studying one's culture.[38] Those challenges are multiplied when one is seeking to complete that task in a foreign culture. Along the same lines, there are a number of resources that are helpful in terms of studying a new culture and learning about the culture's hermeneutical process.[39] Most of those resources, though, neglect authorial intent. This dissertation seeks to provide what both of these types of resources lack – insight into how one studies and applies the Scriptures in a way that is faithful to the original author's intent and sensitive to culture.

There are several reasons why this issue demands consideration. First, the biblical model of church planting displayed by the apostle Paul includes a commitment to teach and to train native leaders.[40] Although missionaries often neglect the discipleship aspect of the Great Commission,[41] it is imperative that they continue to consider not only the best ways to communicate the gospel but also the best ways to train indigenous

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[38]Some books on hermeneutics that fall in this category include Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); and Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*. Books on preaching that fall into this category include Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition*, Bold Assurance Series, no. 2 (Nashville: B&H, 2003); Stephen F. Olford with David L. Oldford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 1998); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

[39]Several books that are helpful in terms of studying and ministering in one's target culture include Carol V. McKinney, *Globe-Trotting in Sandals: A Field Guide to Cultural Research* (Dallas: SIL International, 2000); Bryan K. Galloway, *Traveling Down Their Road: A Workbook for Discovering a People's Worldview* (Thailand: 2006); Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009); Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003). These books, while helpful, do not deal extensively with how to study Scripture in a foreign context. Those theories that do deal with interpretational issues, namely those referenced earlier by Kraft, Caldwell, Sugirtharajah, etc. are not concerned with being faithful to authorial intent.

[40]Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 236-41.

[41]Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 11-13, 38-40.

leaders. Questions related to the appropriateness of the extent and use of culturally-sensitive and receptor-oriented hermeneutical methods fall within this discussion. Considering this issue will aid missionaries as they seek to be faithful in discipling those whom they lead to Christ.

Second, Caldwell is correct that "interpreting God's Word for others, as well as training others to correctly interpret God's Word, is the heart of theological education."[42] As Paul commands in 2 Timothy 2:15, "rightly handling the Word" is the task of the faithful minister. One of the primary tasks of theological education, then, is to prepare ministers to handle the Word in such a way.

The difficulty in this task increases when the trainer and the trainee have different cultural backgrounds. The trainer must take into consideration the biblical context, the trainee's context, and his own context. He must consider the trainee's cultural background and his worldview, and he must examine the traditional hermeneutical methods of the trainee's culture. Missionaries often have difficulty understanding the meaning behind the forms of a culture, which makes the application of God's Word, and the training of others in how to apply God's Word, difficult in cross-cultural contexts.

Third, Caldwell is again correct in recognizing that although numerous resources exist to aid in the process of biblical interpretation, "few directly address the complexities of interpreting the Bible in multi-cultural contexts."[43] Along the same lines, Timothy Tennent, in his work, *Christianity in the Context of World Christianity*, explains that despite the growth of the church in the Majority World, the pressing theological issues of the Majority World are largely absent from theological discourse and

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[42]Caldwell, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics," 22.

[43]Ibid., 23.

publications in the West.[44] Although the task of training indigenous leaders is a painstaking process, it has not been given enough attention. More needs to be written about this issue if indigenous leaders are to interpret Scripture in a way that they are able to state what the Bible teaches about the pressing practical and theological issues of their own contexts.

Fourth, this issue is important because there is a strong connection between the authority of Scripture and the methods used in interpreting it. No one has made this clearer than J. I. Packer, who in the midst of the battle for inerrancy wrote, "Biblical authority is an empty notion unless we know how to determine what the Bible means."[45] In other words, if the methods one uses to interpret the Bible undercut the truth intention of the original author, the nerve of evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture is severed.

Definitions

Before describing the background and methodology of this dissertation, it is necessary to define several important terms. Since this dissertation deals with issues related to missiology, cultural anthropology, and hermeneutics, I first define the terms *hermeneutics*, *meaning*, *significance*, *ethnohermeneutics*, *ethnotheology*, *missiology*, and *culture*.

The term *hermeneutics* is difficult to define. As a result of the scholastic

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[44]Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 11-12. I am aware of the differences between ethnohermeneutics and ethnotheologizing. The two are related, in that one utilizes certain hermeneutical processes in developing one's theological positions. The point I am making here is that indigenous leaders will be unable to faithfully address the pressing theological and practical needs of their day (ethnotheologizing) if they are not trained to faithfully interpret Scripture (ethnohermeneutics).

[45]Cited in Earl D. Radmacher, "Introduction," *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), xi.

contributions of Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida,[46] in many circles the term has come to signify the application of a text to the contemporary context.[47] In other writings the term means the process of interpretation.[48] In this dissertation, though, I will follow the traditional understanding of the term, which is "that science which delineates principles or methods for interpreting an individual author's meaning."[49] Exegesis, then, is the implementation of those principles, and interpretation is an understanding of authorial intent.[50]

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is also important to note that *meaning* is defined as the truth intention of the original author.[51] As E. D. Hirsch commented, "To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning [is] to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to interpretation."[52] I follow Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance, in that *meaning* is "what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence."[53] *Significance*, on the other hand, "names a

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[46]Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugene Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970), 247-65; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).

[47]For a discussion of these developments, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 465-99; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*?, 15-35.

[48]Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 102.

[49]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21; Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 17; Robert L. Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation? *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (June 1996): 247-48; Caldwell also follows this definition as explained in Caldwell, "Toward the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics," 23.

[50]Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends," 247-48.

[51] Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 38-39; Stein, "Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach," 453; Thomas, "Current Hermeneutical Trends," 248.

[52]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 5.

[53]Ibid., 8.

relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable."[54] Significance explains how the text applies to the contemporary context.

If hermeneutics is the set of principles that guide interpretation, then *ethnohermeneutics* is the culturally-sensitive set of principles that guide interpretation in any specific cultural context. They are those principles that are indigenous to the culture and are used to interpret that culture's sacred texts and narratives. These indigenous principles guide interpretation done in three distinct settings. These settings include interpretation done in the initial transmission of the gospel to the people by the missionary, the cross-cultural or multi-cultural interpretation done by the missionary and the people, and the interpretation that is done solely by the people once the indigenous church is planted.

To do so, the model proposed in this dissertation envisions a three culture or three horizon view of the process.[55] These three cultures are the biblical culture, the missionary's culture, and the receptor's culture. Ethnohermeneutics focuses on the indigenous methods of interpretation in the third culture or third horizon involved in the process, the receptor culture.

As ethnohermeneutics is the culturally-sensitive set of principles that guide interpretation in any cultural context, *ethnotheology* is the theological position(s) that is/are developed when those principles are implemented. Ethnotheology is the result of the utilization of ethnohermeneutics.

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[54]Ibid.

[55]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 314-33; Randolf W. Tate, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 125-26. The original source of the three culture model of communication is Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 46-47.

In defining the term *missiology*, I follow Scott Moreau's distinction between "missions" and "mission." Missions is "the specific work of the church and agencies in the task of reaching people for Christ by crossing cultural boundaries."[56] On the other hand, mission "is broader, referring to everything the church is doing that points toward the kingdom of God."[57] *Missiology*, then, is the study of missions. In this dissertation, I am considering what types of hermeneutical models are appropriate methods or philosophies for use in missions.

In defining *culture*, I follow Paul Hiebert, who defined culture as "the more or less integrated systems of ideas, beliefs, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do."[58] At its deepest level, then, culture has cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions that affect the way a person sees the world and interacts with it.

A related issue is the distinction between "cross-cultural" and "intercultural." The use of "cross-cultural" envisions those aspects of cultural that are similar or can be reproduced from culture to culture. "Intercultural," though, has in view the interaction that takes place when people from two separate and distinct cultures communicate. This dissertation deals with concepts related to both terms. It deals with cross-cultural in considering an author-oriented model of interpretation that could be implemented in any cultural setting. It deals with intercultural in considering how a missionary might interact with a target culture in studying their hermeneutical methods and training them for proper biblical interpretation.

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[56]Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 17.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 30.

Background

My interest in ethnohermeneutics began when I served with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in East Asia from 2002 to 2004. During that time, I experienced firsthand the complexities involved in communicating the gospel to a people with a vastly different worldview. Because I did not have a background in cultural anthropology, I often utilized Western terms and illustrations when I sought to communicate the gospel. I rejoiced when people responded to the gospel I shared, but then I struggled to understand the best ways to disciple those whose values and decisions were often so different from mine.

In October 2003, I met a young lady who would eventually become my wife. Liyun is Han Chinese, and our cross-cultural marriage has taught me more about culture and proper cross-cultural interaction than any other experience in my life. Although Liyun and I have sought to embrace aspects of both cultures, the difficulty for us has been communicating our decisions, beliefs, or values to her parents or my parents. We have learned the importance of considering the worldview of those with whom we communicate.

In December 2005, I began work on my Master of Divinity degree at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In my second semester of taking courses at Southern, I took both Robert Plummer's Biblical Hermeneutics course and David Sills' Introduction to Missiology course. While both courses had a lasting impact on me, taking the courses simultaneously caused me to begin thinking, "How should sound biblical hermeneutics affect what one does missiologically?" Moreover, I started considering how I would incorporate teaching and training on biblical hermeneutics into future missiological strategy.

After my third semester at Southern, I had the opportunity to return to East Asia and conduct training for church leaders. I was asked to model solid hermeneutical skills as I taught through 1 Peter. As I interacted with the church leaders, I realized that

most of them had not been discipled, and as a result, had no idea how to read and interpret Scripture properly. Their method of exegesis was to find a word or a phrase they understood and apply it to the contemporary context as quickly as possible. My burden for these leaders grew as I learned that many of the churches in this area were saturated with aberrant doctrine, no doubt due in part to their lack of proper interpretational methods.

Robert Vogel's Hermeneutics for Preaching seminar influenced me during my first semester in the doctoral program. This course enabled me to reflect on many of the ways that traditional hermeneutical processes were challenged in the twentieth century. It also gave me an opportunity to further study issues related to contextualization. In the course of writing my seminar paper, I conducted substantial research on the ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation, especially as they related to preaching in East Asia.

As I have continued to study various hermeneutic theories, I have made two observations. First, a number of books exist that do a good job establishing the processes for determining the original author's meaning.[59] Unfortunately, none of these books does an adequate job of explaining how to study one's culture, let alone how one might go about studying a culture that is totally foreign to the interpreter. On the other hand, a number of missiological resources are helpful in studying the culture and its hermeneutical processes.[60] Unfortunately, though, the major proponents of ethnohermeneutics tend to neglect authorial intent. My purpose in this dissertation is to propose an alternative model for cross-cultural biblical interpretation that maintains authorial intent and is sensitive to culture.

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[59]See p. 11 of this dissertation.

[60]See p. 12 of this dissertation.

Limitations and Delimitations

This dissertation is limited by several factors. Some authors have presented arguments for the importance of ethnohermeneutics. Others could be considered practitioners and have displayed how ethnohermeneutical models are utilized. No single author, though, presents both arguments for why the models should be used and examples for how they should be used.[61] As a result, I examine both the philosophical arguments presented by some and the ethnotheologies that have been developed by others from the utilization of ethnohermeneutical methods.

There are also several delimitations. First, I do not attempt to examine all of the world's cultures and their associated hermeneutical methods. Such an examination would be well beyond the scope of this study. Those cultures and their associated methods that I examine are limited to the Asian context and even more narrowly to literate cultures in the East Asian context. I focus on this context because of my experience ministering there.

Second, since my primary aim is the evaluation of the use of ethnohermeneutics and the provision of a proposed alternative method, I do not investigate the sacred texts of any culture to determine their primary hermeneutical methods. Any conclusion about a culture's traditional hermeneutical methods are drawn from sources that describe how a culture interacts with its sacred texts.

Research Methodology

A critique of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation must begin with those books, articles, essays, and other published works that explain the use of indigenous interpretational systems. I have compiled many of these sources in my personal library, but other sources may be found at the James P. Boyce Library at The Southern Baptist

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[61]Caldwell's latest publication comes closest, but he simply discusses the necessary issues to consider when seeking to implement an ethnohermeneutical approach. Caldwell, "Towards an Ethnohermeneutical Model for a Lowland Filipino Context," 169-93.

Theological Seminary. Many of these sources are journal articles, and the Boyce Library holds many of the journals that contain these articles. For those sources that cannot be found at the Boyce Library, I made use of the other libraries participating in the inter-library loan system. As a result, I was able to do a thorough analysis of the relevant literature on this subject.

My analysis of these materials is as follows. First, I examine articles and books that have been written by those who have argued for the use of ethnohermeneutical methods. Second, I examine sources in which the authors explain an ethnotheology of a specific people or culture, and I diagnose the underlying hermeneutical system that produced such an ethnotheology. Third, I consider articles and books on hermeneutical procedures as I propose an alternative hermeneutical system for use in cross-cultural settings. Finally, I examine the East Asian context and the potential problems that arise in applying my proposed model in that context.[62] To do so, I examine relevant secondary sources that explain the traditional hermeneutical methods of East Asian religions.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by examining the topic of ethnohermeneutics and its development out of the indigenization movement. For the sake of clarity, key terms are defined. The project background, methodology, and the limitations and delimitations are also stated in this chapter.

Chapter 2 gives a history of the ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation. This chapter gives a brief history of interpretation, focusing on the major twentieth century attacks on traditional hermeneutical models. I provide an examination of the indigenization movement and its main proponents. I then give an explanation of various theories of contextualization. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how these

[62]Again, I have chosen to focus the application section on the East Asian context because of my experience ministering within that context.

various themes coalesced in the formation of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation.

Chapter 3 is an evaluation of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation. I provide an overview of these theories by examining the writings of the major proponents. In examining the major writings, I present the major theories by analyzing the works of their proponents. I then state both the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.

Chapter 4 provides an alternative model for cross-cultural hermeneutics. This chapter discusses the importance of authorial intent to biblical interpretation. I examine why the meaning of a text is fixed by the author, but multiple applications of that text exist. I also discuss the fact that the grammatical historical method of exegesis is the best model for author-oriented interpretation. The second half of this chapter provides the steps for determining the author's meaning and applying it to a given context. I also discuss how an interpreter can undertake these steps in contexts where there are limited resources or the people are primary oral learners.

Chapter 5 applies the alternative model to the East Asian context. This chapter examines the East Asian context and the difficulties that arise when conducting biblical interpretation in this region of the world. I explain some of the traditional hermeneutical methods employed when interpreting sacred texts in this context. I then display how my model for cross-cultural interpretation can be implemented by examining three texts of Scripture and the ways they apply in this context.

Chapter 6 serves as the conclusion that will summarize the study. I discuss why training in hermeneutics is important to missiological discussions, and I also explain the implications of this study to other areas of hermeneutics.

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNOHERMENEUTICS THEORIES

To understand ethnohermeneutics theories and their major proponents, it is necessary to consider the historical developments that laid the groundwork for these theories. In this chapter, I examine the history of modern interpretation, the history of the indigenization movement, and the history of contextualization. In the conclusion, I state how these theories affected the development of ethnohermeneutics theories.

History of Modern Interpretation

Historically, interpreters of the Bible have sought to determine what the original author of a text meant by what he wrote. This view is the common-sense approach to interpretation.[1] Robert Stein explains, "All normal conversation assumes that the goal of interpretation is to understand what the speaker or writer means by the words he or she is using."[2]

In the last two hundred years, though, many scholars have challenged this historic understanding of interpretation. New hermeneutical models display an increasing subjectivity in interpretation. This section examines the approaches of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Structuralist hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Reader-Response hermeneutics to display this increasing hermeneutical openness.

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[1]Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 130; Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 21.

[2]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 21.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834) is considered the father of modern hermeneutics. He was educated by the Moravians and began teaching at the University of Halle in 1804.[3] During his time at the University of Halle, he was heavily influenced by the thinking of the Enlightenment, especially the writings of Kant, Lessing, and Hume. These factors were especially influential in the development of his hermeneutical system where he wed the pietism of the Moravians with the philosophical theology of the Enlightenment.[4]

Schleiermacher defines hermeneutics as the "art of understanding."[5] He explains that there are two aspects of understanding that are in view during the hermeneutical process. The first is objective-historical. To perform this aspect of study is "to consider the statement in [its] relation to the language as a whole, and to consider the knowledge it contains as a product of the language."[6] Schleiermacher explains that the interpreter must know the language as the original author knew it, which happens through the study of the author's vocabulary, sentence structure, and language characteristics unique to his genre of writing.[7]

The second aspect of interpretation is what Schleiermacher calls the subjective-historical aspect. The aim here is "to know how the statement, as a fact in the

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[3]Unless otherwise noted, the biographical information in this paragraph is from Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 148.

[4]Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 468.

[5]Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977), 44, 96-97, 112-13; See also Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 149; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 25.

[6]Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, 112.

[7]Ibid., 113-14.

person's mind, has emerged."[8] To do so, the interpreter must know the inner and outer components of the author's life, which he comes to understand through the study of the situation of the text, the unity of the text, and the theme of the text.[9]

Combining both the objective-historical and the subjective-historical aspects of interpretation, Schleiermacher concludes that the goal of interpretation is "to understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author."[10] He goes on to explain, "Since we have no direct knowledge of what was in the author's mind, we must try to become aware of many things of which he himself may have been unconscious, except insofar as he reflects on his own work and becomes his own reader."[11] To accomplish this goal, the interpreter must balance the objective and subjective aspects of interpretation.[12]

One of the important contributions of Schleiermacher's system is his explanation of the hermeneutical circle. He explains, "Also within each given text, its parts can only be understood in terms of the whole, and so the interpreter must gain an overview of the work by a cursory reading before undertaking a more careful interpretation."[13] One can only understand the parts of a text once he understands the whole of a text. At the same time, though, one can only understand the whole of a text once he understands the parts. Schleiermacher explains, "Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to

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[8]Ibid., 112.

[9]Ibid.,113, 147-51.

[10]Ibid., 112.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., 116.

[13]Ibid., 115; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 155-56.

which it belongs, and vice versa."[14]

Along the same lines, Schleiermacher introduced the concept of preunderstanding. He explains that one's understanding of a given text is always conditioned by the understanding he has before coming to the text: "The understanding of a given statement is always based on something prior, of two sorts – a preliminary knowledge of human beings, a preliminary knowledge of the subject matter."[15] This concept has been important to modern hermeneutics, helping interpreters understand their own individual textual biases.

While Schleiermacher's description of preunderstanding and the hermeneutical circle were helpful contributions, his introduction of the subjective aspect of interpretation moved the hermeneutical process away from the determination of authorial intent. This emphasis focused interpretation more on the experience or feeling of the interpreter than on the truth intention of the author. Larkin explains the problems with this approach: "It transformed Scripture's revelatory content into reports of religious experience and removed from interpreters any confidence in their ability to hear God speak in and by his Word."[16]

Moreover, Schleiermacher's so-called "psychologizing of the author" is equally problematic.[17] On top of the impossibility of reconstructing the author's psyche at the time of writing, this approach is a problem because it disconnects the author from

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[14]Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, 113. It is helpful to contrast Schleiermacher's explanation with Osborne's description of what he calls "hermeneutical spiral" in Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 22-23. Osborne's description is more helpful in explaining that as the interpreter moves back and forth in considering the parts and the whole, he spirals upward in a cone shape, "moving ever narrower to the meaning of the text and its significance for today."

[15]Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, 59; William J. Larkin, *Cultural and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 37; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 155.

[16]Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 38.

[17]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 468; Larkin, *Culture and Hermeneutics*, 38; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*?, 25, 222, 231; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 161.

the text. Vanhoozer agrees when he explains that hermeneutics should be a quest for communicative action, not an affair of consciousness.[18] Focusing on the psychological analysis of the author, then, Schleiermacher began the process of moving interpretation away from the determination of the original author's meaning.

Structuralist Hermeneutics

Also known as Formalism or the New Criticism, structuralism was formed in response to existentialist interpretation, focusing attention on the text as the determiner of meaning.[19] Structuralism views the text as a system which can be analyzed scientifically or objectively.[20] This set of theories moved the locus of authority away from the author to such an extent that it saw the text as an entity that exists independently from its author.

Defining structural analysis, Corina Galland explains what structuralism is not:

> It does not attempt to go back to the author of the text, what he wanted to write, the era from which the text has received its cultural stamp, or the event to which it refers. The goal of structural analysis is not historical knowledge, and it is suspicious of any light of clarification which is projected from *outside* the text onto the text at the risk of sketching from it a very incomplete outline and leaving its contents in the dark. However, structural analysis does not extend its naiveté so far as to ignore information that history can supply, but it is concerned about submitting historical information to the control of the information contained in the text itself and to the control of the organization of the meaning effects which are first observed *inside* the text.[21]

When applying structural analysis techniques, interpreters are not concerned with the author or his historical setting, but they focus on the text itself.

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[18]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*?, 222.

[19]Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 486; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 471.

[20]Thiselton, *New Horizons in* Hermeneutics, 486.

[21]Corina Galland, "A Structural Reading Defined," in *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Collection of Essays*, ed. and trans. Alfred M. Johnson, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, no. 22 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1979), 181. Emphasis Galland's.

After explaining what structural analysis is not, Galland goes on to explain what it is: "Structural analysis seeks the code which must be known to decipher the message or the collection of rules which permits a text to produce meaning and to be communicable."[22] Structuralists are not interested in the surface meaning of a text, but they look for the hidden meaning contained in a text's deep structures.[23]

Analyzing the "code" which Galland speaks of is a critical aspect of structuralism. As one of the major proponents of Structuralism, Roland Barthes models the search for the codes of a text in his article on Acts 10:1-3.[24] In these three verses of Scripture, Barthes finds twelve different codes, including the narrative code, the topographical code, the actional code, the chronological code, the anagogical code, and the metalinguistic code. Thiselton explains that Barthes' search for codes in a text "makes possible the discovery of underlying and sometimes disguised meaning."[25]

This focus on the codes of a text led Structuralists to postulate that multiple meanings exist in any given text. A section of his essay entitled, "The Principle of Plurality," explains Barthes' perspective: "Narrative structural analysis . . . does not seek to establish '*the*' meaning of a text. It does not even seek to establish '*one*' meaning of the text."[26] He continues, "The meaning for me is not a *possibility*; it is not *one possible*; it is *the very being of the possible*."[27]

To determine these codes or structures of a text, Structuralists focus on

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[22]Ibid., 184.

[23]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 472.

[24]Roland Barthes, "A Structural Analysis of a Narrative from Acts X-XI," in *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Collection of Essays*, ed. and trans. Alfred M. Johnson, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, no. 22 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1979), 109-43.

[25]Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 200.

[26]Barthes, "A Structural Analysis of a Narrative from Acts X-XI," 118. Emphasis Barthes'.

[27]Ibid.

analyzing the underlying symbols that organize the whole of a text.[28] The elements of a text do not have meaning in and of themselves, but as Galland explains, "The analyst should attempt to put each element into relationship with other elements in order to see how they differ, correspond, complete, and oppose one another."[29]

Grant Osborne gives an example of this analytical process when he considers Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus in John 3.[30] He explains that a Structuralist would deny that any surface statement, such as the one given in John 3:16, can impart the meaning of the text:

> Rather one must consult the entire dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1-15, in particular the binary codes of the above (Jesus) and the below (Nicodemus), then further apply these to the editorial addition of John 3:16-21, with its own codes of sending-receiving, judgment-salvation, believe-reject, light-darkness and truth-evil. These symbols are then deciphered to discover the deep structures or underlying message and then transformed on the basis of codes of our own day. The background or the surface grammar does not speak, but rather the oppositions within the text itself communicate meaning.[31]

Analyzing these broad themes enables an interpreter to more clearly determine the message of a text.

While Structuralism is helpful in terms of analyzing the grammatical structure and broad themes of a text, it ultimately fails as a hermeneutical approach for two reasons. First, its scientific analysis of the text disconnects the text from its historical setting and the basic communicative relationship between author and reader. Thiselton explains that "without any adequate action-oriented anchorage of the text in the communicative inter-active life-world of speaker and hearer, we slide from one level of

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[28]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 473.

[29]Corina Galland, "A Short Structural Reading of Isaiah 52:13-53:12," in *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Collection of Essays*, ed. and trans. Alfred M. Johnson, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, no. 22 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1979), 197.

[30]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 473.

[31]Ibid.

code to another, without any stable grounding in patterns of extra-linguistic behavior."[32] Its overemphasis on codes and structures as opposed to the interaction between author and reader makes this approach highly reductionistic.

Second, and along the same lines, its view of the text as disconnected and independent from its original author is equally problematic. At their most basic level, texts are only groupings of shareable symbols, but those symbols are grouped together in a certain way in order to fulfill the purpose of the original author.[33] Only an author can decide which set of words and grammar best communicate his message, and only an author can determine meaning.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002) was a German philosopher who studied with Martin Heidegger and Rudolph Bultmann.[34] His *magnum opus*, *Truth and Method*,[35] is considered to be one of the foremost works on hermeneutics in the twentieth century.[36] His hermeneutical system can be classified as "radical metacriticism."[37]

There are several components that make up Gadamer's system of

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[32]Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 490.

[33]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible Rules*, 19.

[34]Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 207-08.

[35]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1996), 276.

[36]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 245. Hirsch, though critical of Gadamer's hermeneutical system, gives this evaluation of Gadamer's work: "Hans-Georg Gadamer has published the most substantial treatise on hermeneutical theory that has come from Germany this century."

[37]Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 313-43; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 469-71. Vanhoozer gives this definition of metacriticism: "Metacriticism examines principles of criticism and proposed criteria for successful readings. It asks less about the how than the why, specifically, why should readers adopt one set of interpretive aims and interests rather than another? Or simply: why should we read at all?" Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*?, 186.

hermeneutics. First, Gadamer argued that preunderstanding is an important part of the hermeneutical task. Although the Enlightenment tradition held that one must overcome his individual prejudices, Gadamer disagreed. He wrote, "The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness."[38] Gadamer argued that being aware of one's prejudices was the foundation for effective study of the text: "That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being."[39]

A second component of Gadamer's system was the position that meaning is not determined by the original author. He explains,

> Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It is certainly not identical with them, for it is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history . . . . Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author.[40]

Once a text is written down, then, what the text is about is no longer solely related to the author or the original historical context. The focus is on the text and the contemporary reader's interaction with it.

An implication of Gadamer's position on the intention of the author is that understanding is a creative process and not merely a reproduction of what the author meant. He wrote that "understanding is always more than merely recreating someone

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[38]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276.

[39]Ibid., 276-77, italics his.

[40]Ibid., 296.

else's meaning."[41] Elsewhere he explained that the understanding a reader gains is not necessarily better, as Schleiermacher proposed, but it is wholly different: "Understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all*."[42]

A third component of Gadamer's system was that past meanings cannot be reproduced, because the past itself cannot be reproduced. The first section of *Truth and Method* considered the aesthetics of art and concluded that what makes the music, drama, or artwork significant is not the recovery of the setting in which it was written but the appreciation and celebration of it.[43] Instead of its meaning being totally an object of the past or totally an object of the present, it is a merging of the two.

He explained the implications of this position on hermeneutics when he argued that interpretation that attempts to reproduce the original author's intention "is as nonsensical as all restitution and restoration of past life."[44] Instead, interpreters ought to see that "the essential nature of the historical spirit consists not in the restoration of the past but in thoughtful mediation with contemporary life."[45]

Perhaps the most significant component of Gadamer's hermeneutical system was his "fusion of horizons." Genuine understanding, he argued, does not come from a study of the past (viz. the text) or the present (viz. self) in isolation: "Rather,

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[41]Ibid., 375.

[42]Ibid., 296-97.

[43]Ibid., 121-29, 166; Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 298.

[44]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 167.

[45]Ibid., 169.

understanding is always a fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves."[46] He continued,

> Projecting a historical horizon, then, is only one phase in the process of understanding; it does not become solidified into the self-alienation of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs – which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded. To bring about this fusion in a regulated way is the task of what we called historically affected consciousness. Although this task was obscured by aesthetic-historical positivism following on the heels of romantic hermeneutics, it is, in fact, the central problem of hermeneutics. It is the problem of *application*, which is to be found in all understanding.[47]

Understanding and application, then, take place as the horizon of the past is fused with the horizon of the present and a new horizon of meaning is created.

Gadamer's hermeneutical theories began the paradigm shift away from the deep textual study of structuralism. His system contained a greater awareness of the influence of the reader in his interaction with the text, and his "fusion of horizons" was a dynamic simile for what proper textual interaction looks like. His writings gave evidence to a growing disdain with the historic aim of interpretation, namely to understand the original author's intention.

Paul Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur (1913 – 2005) was a phenomenologist who was heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger and Gabriel Marcel.[48] His writings cover a wide range of topics, including everything from symbol and metaphor, Freudian thought, love and justice, to religion and ethics.[49]

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[46]Ibid., 306.

[47]Ibid., 306-07.

[48]Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 59; Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 344-345.

[49]Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 248.

The first aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutic theories is that they moved beyond structuralism and laid the foundation for what is known as "poststructuralism." A growing frustration with structuralism led to a paradigm shift toward poststructuralism, which sought to wed the analysis of a text's deep structural codes with the analysis of a reader's conscious interaction with the text.[50] Ricoeur displayed this combination in his writings when at times he explained the importance of structural analysis,[51] and at other times he argued for what he refers to as "appropriation." He explained, "By 'appropriation,' I understand this: that the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself."[52] He continued, "In short, in hermeneutical reflection – or in reflective hermeneutics – the constitution of the self is contemporaneous with the constitution of meaning."[53]

For Ricoeur, the objective study of the text led to a deeper study and revelation of one's self. His work *Freud and Philosophy* pointed to Freud's psychoanalysis in examining the deeper truths behind a patient's dreams to display how interpreters must approach the text. He explained that this process takes places as one moves from the themes, rituals, myths, and beliefs of a given text toward a phenomenological study of the sacred truths that lie beneath them.[54] Explaining a perspective that became known as the "hermeneutic of suspicion," he wrote, "This hermeneutics is not an explication of the

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[50]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 474-75.

[51]Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 155-57.

[52]Ibid., 158.

[53]Ibid., 159.

[54]Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 29.

object, but a tearing off of masks, an interpretation that reduces disguises."[55]

A second aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutical system was his emphasis on both explanation and understanding. Anthony Thiselton explains this dynamic of Ricoeur's system when he writes: "A hermeneutic of suspicion demands that we must retain explanation alongside understanding as the two key axes of hermeneutical enquiry."[56] Ricoeur's position on this issue was different than Gadamer's, who argued that one must decide between truth (understanding) and method (explanation). Ricoeur explained that understanding and explanation have a dialectic relationship that enables the interpreter to more readily appropriate the text to his own life.[57]

A third dynamic of Ricoeur's system was the challenge he presented to the traditional understanding of a text as a type of discourse. He argued that the writing down of a text affects communication in four ways.[58] First, it changes the relationship between the message and the speaker by limiting the speaker's (or writer's once it is written down) ability to interact with his hearers. It also disconnects the message from the intention of the author, because once the message is written down, it no longer belongs to the author. Second, it changes the relationship between the message and the hearer by opening up the discourse to more than just the immediate audience. As such, writing down the message disconnects the meaning of that message from its original audience.

A third way that a written text affects the communicative process is by making the relationship between the message and code more complex. With this point Ricoeur

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[55]Ibid., 30.

[56]Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 348; For Ricoeur's discussion of this issue, see Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 71-88; Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 146-64.

[57]Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1967), 91.

[58]Ibid., 29-37.

argued that when messages are written down with certain textual codes, how the message is written down affects how readers are able to interpret it. The fourth way writing changes communication is by altering the relationship between the message and the reference. When speaking, the discourse is limited by the setting and the points of common interest between the speaker and hearer. When writing, though, the text is freed from those constraints, and the meaning is no longer related to its referent, which opens up a whole new world of possible meanings.

The implications of Ricoeur's statements on communication are far reaching. Vanhoozer summarizes Ricoeur's arguments when he writes, "The text enjoys a threefold semantic autonomy: it is independent of its author, of its original audience, and of its original referent."[59] For Ricoeur, though, these developments were not negative. Unlike communicative discourse, the text's autonomy enables it to surpass its original setting and outlive its original author. As a result, even ancient texts, like the Scriptures, have something to say to contemporary audiences.

The result of Ricoeur's hermeneutical system is a decisive shift away from the author and toward the reader as the determiner of meaning. With multiple readers, then, come multiple meanings of any given text. Osborne explains, "Since the perspective of the reader is crucial for the interpretation, polyvalence naturally results when various contemporary worldviews are employed to examine the grid of the text."[60] This growing influence that the reader exerts over the text is extended to its logical conclusion in the next paradigm, the reader-response theories of interpretation.

Reader-Response Hermeneutics

Thiselton defines this set of theories when he writes, "Reader-response theories

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[59]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*?, 107.

[60]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 475.

call attention to the active role of communities of readers in constructing what counts for them as 'what the text means.'"[61] These theories shift the focus away from the author and the text, placing the emphasis on the active role of the reader. Some have even gone so far as to refer to these theories as "the Reader's Liberation Movement, the Reader's Revolt, and the Revenge of the Reader."[62]

There are two types of reader response theories. The first is the more conservative school, displayed in the writings of Wolfgang Iser. Iser sought to apply a phenomenological perspective to the reading of a text, which he referred to as an "aesthetic response" theory of interpretation. He explained, "It is called aesthetic response because, although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus."[63] As a result, the reading of a text today is a process in which the reader brings something new into existence.[64]

Iser looked to behavioral analysis theories of social interaction that state there are certain aspects of interaction that humans are unable to experience. These theories state that one must fill in these "gaps" for effective social interaction. Iser applied behavioral science findings to the process of interpretation:

> Similarly, it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process; the lack of a common situation and a common frame of reference corresponds to the contingency and the "no-thing" which bring about the interaction between persons. Asymmetry, contingency, the "no-thing" – these are all different forms of an indeterminate,

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[61]Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 515.

[62]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*?, 27.

[63]Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), x.

[64]Ibid.

constitutive blank which underlies all processes of interaction.[65]

The reader, then, must complete the text by filling in these gaps that occur between text and reader. The reader utilizes his imagination to develop images to supply the missing links.[66] Iser was careful to caution, though, that this process does not give the reader the right to arbitrarily import his projections into the text.[67] While the reader's imagination is seeking to fill the gap, the text is shaping and changing the reader. Thus, for the reader and his projections to be unchanged by the text is a failure of the reader-text interaction.

Since the text is unchanging, it guides and corrects the reader and his projections. He explained,

> If these possibilities are to be fulfilled, and if communication between text and reader is to be successful, clearly the reader's activity must be controlled in some way by the text. The control cannot be as specific as in a *face-to-face situation*, equally it cannot be as determinate as a social code, which regulates social interaction. However, the guiding devices operative in the reading process have to initiate communication, the success of which is indicated by the constitution of a meaning, which cannot be equated with existing frames of reference, as its own specific quality manifests itself in question existing meanings and in altering existing experiences . . . . What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light.[68]

Thus, there should be balance in the reader's interaction with the text. The reader is active in supplying meaning to the holes in the text, but the text is also shaping the ways in which the reader interacts with the text.

Iser also contrasted the contemporary reader with the ideal reader.[69] The

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[65]Ibid., 166-67; See also Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 479; Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 517.

[66]Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 186.

[67]Ibid., 167.

[68]Ibid., 167-69, italics his.

[69]Ibid., 27-30.

contemporary or real reader is drawn from the history of responses to a certain text. Their responses, including those from the contemporary period, display their cultural codes and their time period's typical understanding of that given text. The ideal reader, on the other hand, would need to have an identical code and the identical set of intentions as the original author. As a result, this reader is a "structural impossibility,"[70] but the construct of this type of reader helps critics in evaluating the various responses of the contemporary reader.

One application of Iser's model is seen in James L. Ressiguie's article on Mark 10:22 entitled, "Reader-Response Criticisms and the Synoptic Gospels."[71] Ressiguie argued that the reader has the ability to supply an infinite number of meanings, while also arguing that the text exerts control over the range of possible meanings. Examining the Markan version of the rich young ruler, he applied his perspective, arguing that the Markan context guides the general direction of the text, but the reader supplies the more specific meaning based on his own perspective on wealth.

While Iser and Ressiguie are at the more conservative end of reader response theories with their understanding of the text and the ideal reader exerting some control over the reader's interaction with the text, Stanley Fish is at the radical end of the spectrum. Fish stated that once one leaves the text-centered approach of structuralism or formalism behind, there can be no middle ground approach like the one Iser has adopted.[72]

In Fish's view, reading is a creative act. He argued that texts "do not lie

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[70]Ibid., 28.

[71]James L. Ressiguie, "Reader-Response Criticisms and the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of the Academy of Religion* 52 (1984): 307-24; See also Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 519.

[72]Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 2; See also Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 537-38.

innocently in the world; rather, they are themselves constituted by an interpretive act. The facts one points to are still there (in a sense that would not be consoling to an objectivist) but only as a consequence of the interpretive act (man-made) model that has called them into being."[73] It is the interpretive act of the reader that creates meaning.

Fish ultimately defined meaning according to what the reader does. He explained,

> The reader was now given joint responsibility for the production of a meaning that was itself redefined as an event rather than an entity. That is, one could not point to this meaning as one could if it were the property of the text; rather, one could observe or follow its gradual emergence in the interaction between the text, conceived of a succession of words, and the developing response of the reader.[74]

He then stated quite decisively, "In this formulation, the reader's response is not *to* the meaning; it *is* the meaning."[75]

He went on to explain that the text only supplies potential meanings, which readers actualize. He explained that "there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only 'ways of reading' that are extensions of community perspectives."[76] Multiple interpretations of a single text exist because interpretation (and by extension, meaning itself) is simply the product of the cultural and historical biases of a given people coming to light as they read that text.

Fish also argued for the importance of the role of interpretive communities:

> Thus the act of recognizing literature is not constrained by something in the text, nor does it issue from an independent and arbitrary will; rather, it proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count as literature, a decision that will be in force

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[73]Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 13; See also Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 479; Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 538-39.

[74] Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 3

[75]Ibid.

[76]Ibid., 16.

only so long as a community of readers or believers continue to abide by it.[77] These interpretive communities provide the parameters around which appropriate reader responses are defined. He continued in stating that "it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features."[78]

Fish's position displays a significant paradigm shift away from both the author and the text. Fish recognized this shift and stated that one of the benefits of his approach is that "the reader was freed from the tyranny of the text and given the central role in the production of meaning."[79] For Fish, the shift ought to be celebrated, because it grants the reader a greater sense of autonomy and centrality in the process of determining the meaning of any given text.

Moreover, his explanation of the autonomy and centrality of interpretive communities is a relevant point in relation to this study's examination of ethnohermeneutics. If, as Fish argued, interpretive communities have the right to determine for themselves the correct processes of interpretation, then Caldwell, Sugirtharajah and others are correct in their assertions that each culture ought to interpret Scripture according to its own indigenous methods of interpretation. If, on the other hand, Fish's assertions are simply the product of a growing subjectivity in interpretation that has occurred in recent hermeneutical theory, then radical ethnohermeneutical theorists have a problem.

Summarizing this survey of modern hermeneutical theories, it is exactly this second statement that this section has shown to be true. Interpretation, once defined according to the author's intention, experienced a paradigm shift when Schleiermacher

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[77]Ibid., 11.

[78]Ibid., 14.

[79]Ibid., 7.

introduced his approach that was overly focused on psychologizing the thought processes of the author. Post-Schleiermacherian theorists focused their attention on the text as entity separated from its author. The resultant formalist or structuralist approaches over-emphasized the codes and structures of a text and missed the simple understanding of a text as the communication between an author and a reader.

With Gadamer and Ricoeur, interpretation experienced a shift away from deep textual study toward an emphasis on the "fusion of horizons" and multiplicity of possible meanings. These theories came to their logical conclusion in the formation of the reader-response theories of hermeneutics. According to these theorists, the reader is now the sole determiner of meaning as his cultural and historical perspective is brought to light in his interpretation of the text. With each successive turn in this historical study, a greater level of subjectivity has resulted.

History of the Indigenization Movement

Throughout much of what is known as "The Great Century" (1792-1910), the two major aims of the mission enterprise were evangelization and civilization.[80] In the midst of several revivals in Europe and America, significant missionary fervor was released into the world, and that fervor helped characterize missions in this century by its "rapid geographical expansion of the work."[81] At the same time, though, missions was also characterized by its spread of Western civilization to the rest of the world. David Bosch explains that in America "it was increasingly thought that the overseas mission of the American churches consisted in sharing the benefits of the American civilization and

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[80]R. Pierce Beaver, "Introduction," in *To Advance the Gospel: Basic Writings in the Theory and Practice of Missions*, ed. R. Pierce Beaver (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 13. The term "The Great Century" was first coined by Kenneth Scott Latourette in his seven-volume classic on the history of Christian missions; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937).

[81]Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed., The Penguin History of the Church, vol. 6 (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 215.

way of life with the deprived peoples of the world."[82]

The relationship between the competing aims of evangelization and civilization was a complex one. In some cases, the expansion of the colonial powers opened new fields of service for missionaries.[83] In other cases, the presence of the British Empire closed doors to missionaries.[84] In still other cases, it was the missionary expansion of the church that aided the global expansion of the state.[85] To summarize this difficult relationship, many have pointed to the statement made by one who was a victim of colonial rule, "First they had the Bible and we had the land; now we have the Bible and they have the land."[86]

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the indigenization movement developed in reaction to many of the excesses of this period. To better understand this paradigm shift in missions strategy, this section examines the writings of its major proponents, Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. This section also considers the writings of

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[82]David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 283.

[83]In 1842 the treaty following the Opium War ceded Hong Kong and five other ports to the British for trading and residence. Several years later in 1854, then, when Hudson Taylor first sailed for missionary service in China, he was able to freely enter Shanghai, which was one of the ports opened to foreigners. For information on Taylor's story, see Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, new ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989); Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor*, 2 vols. (Littleton, CO: OMF, 1998).

[84]William Carey, considered by many to be the father of the modern missionary movement, is one of the missionaries who experienced this impact of colonial expansion. At the time of his service, the British East India Company was afraid that the evangelization of the native population would hinder their economic interests. He was forced out of Calcutta and ultimately found an opening for ministry in the Danish colony of Serampore, where he spent the rest of his life. For a brief overview of Carey's life see Justice Anderson, "The Great Century and Beyond (1792-1910)," in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions,* ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: B&H, 1998); for a more extensive treatment, see Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Worchester, PA: Church History Institute, 1998).

[85]Andrew Porter, "An Overview, 1700-1914," in *Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington, Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47.

[86]Cited in Norman Etherington, "Introduction," in *Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington, Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

those who followed after Venn and Anderson, namely John Nevius, Roland Allen, Melvin Hodges, and other various voices.

Henry Venn

Henry Venn (1796-1873) was the general secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in London from 1841 until 1872.[87] His life was guided by a passion to see the gospel extend into new harvest fields. During his leadership of the CMS, he placed an emphasis on planting native churches and raising up native leaders. To this end, he developed the three-self formula for indigenous churches – that they should be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-extending.

Venn argued that an essential step in the founding of an indigenous church was for that church to be self-supporting. He wrote that "a second step in the organization of the Native Church will be taken when one or more congregations are formed into a Native Pastorate, under an ordained native, paid by the Native Church Fund."[88] For a church to be indigenous, it must be led to support its own ministries.

Venn also argued for an indigenous church to be self-governing. Responding to critics who claimed his approach to government was too European, Venn explained the need for a cautious transition of the leadership responsibilities:

> Though, in the first instance, and while the tentative and transition stage lasts, it may be advisable to give a preponderating influence to European Missionaries, yet as the Native Councilors become efficient, and as the native contributions enlarge, and the Society's grant in aid is diminished, the European element will be gradually

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[87]This biographical information is from Max Warren, "Introduction: Henry Venn, The Man, His Thought and His Practice – An Interpretation," in *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 18-25; See also Justice Anderson, "The Great Century and Beyond (1792-1910)," 208-09.

[88]Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 70; See also idem, "On Steps Towards Helping a Native Church to Become Self-Supporting, Self-Governing, and Self-Extending," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 243-49; idem, "Three-Self Principles," in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity: A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission*, ed. Norman E. Thomas, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 207-09.

withdrawn, until the Native Church becomes wholly free and independent.[89]

In addition to the need for indigenous churches to be self-supporting and self-governing, Venn added self-extending to his formula. He wrote of exciting a missionary spirit among the native church:

> The case needs to be stated to exhibit the warning and the duty that every convert should be instructed from his conversion in the duty of laboring for his self-support, and for the support of Missions to his Countrymen, and to lay himself out as a Missionary among his relations and friends to bring them to the truth.[90]

He went on to write that passing on a missionary spirit to the native church would open the door to a new day of missionary effectiveness in which the native converts led their fellow countrymen to Christ. He wrote that a missionary spirit "will often give a reality, a vigor, an independence to native Christianity which it now wants . . . . and above all the work would spread as we may say of itself, and such an extension would soon appear, as we have hitherto almost ceased to expect."[91]

Arguing for his three-self formula, Venn explained the limitations of missionary-led churches.[92] He wrote that when missionary-led or missionary-supported churches are planted, the missionary's hands become full, and he focuses less and less of his attention on the unsaved. The converts, then, become dependent on the missionary, and the missionary society invests its resources in ground already gained instead of focusing on "the regions beyond."

To support his formula, Venn explained the importance of training leaders. He wrote,

> Missionaries should remember that it is upon the training up and location of such Native Pastors as we have described that their own labors and the resources of

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[89]Venn, *To Apply the Gospel*, 76-77.

[90]Ibid., 64.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Ibid., 67.

> the Society will be best economized; and that a preparation will be made for the transfer of Missionary labors to the surrounding heathen.[93]

Missionaries become good stewards of their organization's resources by focusing on training leaders. Focusing their time and energy in this way enables them to raise up more laborers capable of shepherding the flock and of reaching the harvest fields.

Venn also wrote of the "euthanasia of mission,"[94] where the missionary cautiously removes himself from the leading of the mission and begins to focus on new fields. He taught missionaries to keep in view the time when

> the missionary is surrounded by well-trained Native congregations under Native Pastors, when he gradually and wisely abridges his own labors, and relaxes his superintendence over the Pastors till they are able to sustain their own Christian ordinances, and the District ceases to be a Missionary field, and passes into Christian parishes under the constituted ecclesiastical authorities.[95]

Working to that end, Venn argued, would lead to a time of great growth and expansion of the indigenous church, similar to the time when "the flowers of a fertile field multiply under the showers and warmth of summer."[96]

Rufus Anderson

Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) was a contemporary of Henry Venn's who served as the senior secretary for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) from 1832 to 1866.[97] Under his leadership, the ABCFM grew to support twelve hundred missionaries and focused more attention on evangelism and the training of native pastors.

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[93]Ibid., 63.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Ibid.

[96]Ibid., 71.

[97]Biographical information is from R. Pierce Beaver, "Introduction: Rufus Anderson, Grand Strategist of American Missions," in *To Advance the Gospel: Basic Writings in the Theory and Practice of Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 10-12; See also Justice Anderson, "The Great Century and Beyond (1792-1910)," 208-09.

Anderson developed his philosophy of missions in reaction to the dual emphasis on evangelization and civilization. He believed that the primary work of missions was the evangelizing of the lost in places where churches did not exist. To that end, he wrote, "Education, schools, the press, and whatever else goes to make up the working system, are held in strict subordination to the planting and building up of effective working churches."[98] He continued, "The governing object to be always aimed at is self-reliant, effective churches – churches that are purely native."[99]

Anderson looked to Paul as the missionary *par excellence*. He explained the mission work of the apostle through five qualities: the aim was to save men; the means employed was the gospel; the power relied upon was the Holy Spirit; the success was in the middle and poorer classes; and the result was the planting of churches and the ordaining of leaders.[100] He then argued that if these were the attributes of Paul's missionary work, they ought to be the attributes of contemporary missionaries. In a separate article, he wrote of Paul, "His manner of treating the native pastors and churches is a model for missionaries and their supporters in our day."[101]

Anderson sought to clarify the distinction between the roles of the pastor and the missionary. He argued that when a missionary begins to take his focus off of the lost and place more emphasis on issues of church government and social order, his (and similarly, the church's) missionary spirit fades in strength. He explains,

> In a word, the missionary prepares new fields for pastors; and when they are thus prepared, and competent pastors are upon the ground, he ought himself to move onward – the pioneer in effect of a Christian civilization – but in office, work and

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[98]Anderson, *To Advance the Gospel*, 99.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Rufus Anderson, "Principles and Methods of Modern Missions," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 251; Anderson, *To Apply the Gospel*, 97-98; Beaver, "Introduction," 14-16.

[101]Anderson, *To Apply the Gospel*, 94-95.

> spirit, an ambassador for Christ, to preach the gospel where it has not been preached. And whatever may be said with respect to pastors, it is true of the missionary, that he is to keep himself as free as possible from entanglements with literature, science, and commerce, and with questions of church government, polities and social order.[102]

Missionaries, then, must focus on evangelizing the lost, planting churches, and training indigenous leaders. Once that work is complete, the missionary should move on and seek to engage another field.

As a result, in Anderson's view, missionaries should under no circumstances seek to become the pastor of a church they plant. He wrote,

> A foreign missionary should not be the pastor of a native church. His business is to plant churches, in well-chosen parts of his field, committing them as soon as possible to the care of native pastors; himself sustaining a common relation to all, as their ecclesiastical father and adviser; having in some sense, like the apostle, the daily care of the churches.[103]

Anderson argued for the importance of investing resources in training native pastors. He wrote, "Without education, it is not possible for mission churches to be in any proper sense self-governed; nor, without it, will they be self-supported, and much less self-propagating."[104] He argued that focusing on training leaders saves time and resources by raising up more leaders:

> The cost of a ten-year course of education for five natives of India, would not be more than the outfit and passage of one married missionary to that country. And when a company of missionaries is upon the ground, it costs at least five times as much to support them, as it would to support the same number of native preachers. . . . The cost of educating a thousand youth in India, from whom preachers might be obtained, and afterwards of supporting two hundred native preachers and their families, would be only about $25,000; which is but little more than the average expense in that country of twenty-five missionaries and families.[105]

Missionary organizations, Anderson argued, are better stewards if they train pastors and

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[102]Ibid., 77.

[103]Ibid., 99.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid., 105.

church leaders rather than allowing Europeans to fill those positions.

Anderson wrestled with the question, "Will the converts stay committed after the missionaries leave?" Answering the question, he gave examples from several places where indigenous believers stayed faithful amidst severe persecution. Ultimately, Anderson encouraged missionaries to trust in the Holy Spirit when transferring the work into the hands of the native believers.[106]

Overall, like Venn, Anderson's philosophy of mission was focused on the planting of indigenous churches that displayed the three-selfs. He wrote,

> As soon as the mission church has a native pastor, the responsibilities of self-government should be devolved upon it. Mistakes, perplexities, and sometimes scandals, there will be; but it is often thus that useful experience is gained, even in churches here at home. The salary of the native pastor should be based on the Christianized ideas of living acquired by his people; and the church should become self-supporting at the earliest possible day. It should also be self-propagating from the very first. Such churches, and only such, are the life, strength, and glory of missions.[107]

Though Venn and Anderson developed the three-self principles independently, they eventually influenced each other. Their writings laid the foundation for all those who would later focus on and write about the planting of indigenous churches.

John Nevius

John Nevius (1829-1893) was a missionary to China with the American Presbyterian Board.[108] Nevius built off the foundation laid by Venn and Anderson, focusing particularly on the concept of self-support. He opposed the missionary society

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[106]Justice Anderson, "The Great Century and Beyond (1792-1910)," 208-09; Beaver, "Introduction," 21-22.

[107]Anderson, *To Apply the Gospel*, 98-99.

[108]The biographical information in this paragraph is from Francis M. DuBose, "John L. Nevius: Introduction," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 256-57. For a fuller treatment of his life, see Helen S. Coan Nevius, *The Life of John Livingston Nevius: For Forty Years a Missionary in China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1895).

paying indigenous preachers and evangelists, with much of his writing explaining his rationale and responding to criticisms.

While his philosophy aided the work in China's Shandong province, his greatest contribution was to the work of Presbyterian missions in Korea. In 1890, he taught his methods to a group of missionaries who subsequently adopted his plan. Some scholars argue that "this has been the most significant contributing factor to the singular success of the Presbyterian work in Korea, which has developed the most effective urban-based Christian witness in Asia in modern times."[109]

Nevius despised the missiological practices of what he termed the "old system." He explained this philosophy as one that "strives by the use of foreign funds to foster and stimulate the growth of the native churches in the first stage of their development, and then gradually to discontinue the use of such funds."[110] What Nevius proposed in contrast to this old system was that the native church should be self-supporting and free from any foreign funding even from the earliest stages of the church. Nevius further explained the differences between the two systems:

> The Old uses freely, and as far as practicable, the more advanced and intelligent of the native church members in the capacity of paid colporteurs, Bible agents, evangelists, or heads of stations; while the New proceeds on the assumption that the persons employed in these various capacities would be more useful in the end by being left in their original homes and employments.[111]

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[109]Francis M. DuBose, "John L. Nevius: Introduction," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 257; Bruce F. Hunt, "Preface to the Fourth Edition," in *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1958); Charles Allen Clark, *The Korean Church and the Nevius Method* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1930); Stephen Neill, "Nevius Plan," in *Concise Dictionary of Christian World Missions*, ed. Stephen Neill, Gerald H. Anderson, and John Goodwin (London: Lutterworth Press, 1970), 437-38.

[110]John L. Nevius, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1958), 8; idem, "'The Old System Criticized' from Planting and Development of Missionary Churches," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 258.

[111]Ibid.

Nevius went on to state six objections to the old system of missions.[112] He explained that paying indigenous believers with outside funds "affects injuriously the stations with which they are connected."[113] When missionaries pay some native believers, other believers can become jealous of those believers and hateful toward the missionaries. The paid believer often loses his ability to influence others on behalf of the mission because others see him as an employee.

A second objection Nevius made was that paying native believers is often harmful to those believers on a personal level. While these believers are employed in some field and have developed a positive reputation in that area, their influence changes when they begin to work for the missionaries. They often quit those forms of employment, losing the opportunity to share the gospel with people in those arenas. Nevius explained from personal experience that often these paid agents become arrogant. If these paid agents must be let go for any reason, it is shameful for them and damaging to the cause of Christ.

Nevius' third objection was that this old system makes it difficult to judge between the true and the false. He suggested that once the new believers become paid agents, it is difficult to judge their motives of continued service. Nevius pondered whether these converts continue to be motivated by their love for Christ, or if they now are motivated by the income they received. His fourth objection was similar in that when this practice is used, some become believers because they are motivated by the desire to become paid agents. He called this false motivation a "mercenary spirit," and gave specific examples of regions in China that had experienced this type of issue.

The final two objections that Nevius made were that the paying of native

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[112]Ibid., 12-18.

[113]Ibid., 12.

believers stops the voluntary work of unpaid Christians, and overall lessens the influence of the entire missionary enterprise. Nevius lamented that the sad result of this system is that it negatively influences the unbelieving population's perspective of the gospel. He explained,

> The injurious effects of the paid-agent system on the mass of the Chinese population outside of the Church are perhaps still greater. The general opinion of the Chinaman as to the motive of one of his countrymen in propagating a foreign religion is that it is a mercenary one. When he learns that the native preacher is in fact paid by foreigners, he is confirmed in his judgment. What the motive is which actuates the foreign missionary, a motive so strong that he is will to waste life and money in what seems a fruitless enterprise, he is left to imagine. The most common explanation is that it is a covert scheme for buying adherents with a view to political movements inimical to the state. Of course it is supposed that no loyal native will have anything to do with such a movement.[114]

Like those before him, Nevius looked to Paul to support his conclusions. He explained, "I can find no authority in the Scriptures, either in specific teaching or Apostolic example, for the practice so common nowadays, of seeking out and employing paid agents as preachers."[115] He encouraged missionaries to follow the Pauline model in planting self-supporting churches[116] and exercising patience as they waited for qualified elders to be recognized in the churches they planted.[117]

Roland Allen

Roland Allen (1868-1947) was an Anglican missionary to China from 1895 to 1904. He followed Venn, Anderson, and Nevius by focusing on the apostle Paul as the exemplary missionary. His books *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*[118] and *The*

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[114]Ibid., 17.

[115]Ibid., 59.

[116]Ibid., 64.

[117]Ibid., 60.

[118]Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

Spontaneous Expansion of the Church[119] addressed the need of missionaries to return to the apostolic church planting pattern by planting self-sufficient churches and relying on the Holy Spirit. His works were ignored in his own day, but scholars now recognize these two books as classics on the Christian missionary task.[120]

Allen was amazed when he compared Paul's work of starting churches with the work being done by missionaries in his day. He wrote, "That churches should be founded so rapidly, so securely, it seems to us today, [being] accustomed to the difficulties, the uncertainties, the failures, the disastrous relapses of our missionary work, almost incredible."[121] Allen explained that many in his day considered Paul's missionary endeavors to be the work of an exceptional man in an exceptional time, and as a result, his work should not be followed as an example.[122] He responded to this argument by pointing to the universal qualities of Paul's work. He concluded, "That however highly we may estimate St. Paul's personal advantages or the assistance which the conditions of his age afforded, they cannot be so great as to rob his example of all value for us."[123]

Allen then examined some of the specific goals of Paul's missionary work and concluded that Paul was led by the Spirit in his travels.[124] He did not focus on one

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[119]Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes that Hinder It* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997).

[120]Norman E. Thomas, "Establishing Apostolic Plan Churches," in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity: A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission*, ed. Norman E. Thomas, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 82-83; Francis M. DuBose, "Roland Allen: Introduction," in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 268-69.

[121]Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 3.

[122]Ibid., 4-5.

[123]Ibid., 4.

[124]Ibid., 16-17, 152.

particular class, though many of his converts were from the lower classes.[125] Allen disagreed with those who explained that Paul's success was due to his focusing on strategic cities. He responded, "It is not enough for the church to be established in a place where many are coming and going unless the people who come and go not only learn the gospel, but learn it in such a way that they can propagate it."[126] Thus, missionaries must start churches and train leaders so that they have the ability to share their faith.

Allen argued that Paul's success did not lie with his ability to perform miracles or with his funding of the churches he planted, but the key to his success was his ability to teach and train the first converts.[127] Like Venn and Anderson, Allen explained that the converts of his day were too dependent upon the missionaries, and this spirit of dependency left missionaries unable to move on to new areas in need of the gospel.

He encouraged missionaries to teach in simple ways that converts could easily understand, to allow new believers to participate in all that they do, to give native believers the responsibility of handling the finances, and to trust in the Holy Spirit.[128] He explained that a missionary "should remember that he is the least permanent element in the church."[129] Following this general principle will aid a missionary as he seeks to plant an indigenous church.

Melvin Hodges

Melvin Hodges (1909-1986) was an Assemblies of God missionary in Central

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[125]Ibid., 24.

[126]Ibid., 13.

[127]Ibid. 42, 51-61, 81-82.

[128]Ibid., 151-63.

[129]Ibid., 153.

America for eighteen years. Hodges was especially influenced by the works of Roland Allen, and he sought to blend the three-self principles with his own Pentecostal theology.[130] His work, *The Indigenous Church*, dealt with all three of the indigenization principles, but it focused especially on the issue of self-governing.

Hodges explained that the goal of missions is the planting of a church, and the type of church that should be planted is a New Testament church – a responsible church.[131] He argued that missionaries had failed to plant this type of church because, "As missionaries, we have too often trained the converts in dependence upon us, rather than in *responsibility*."[132] He went on to state that transferring a sense of responsibility to one's converts is the "pearl of great price" for the missionary. A missionary must minister in such a way as to help his converts gain a sense of responsibility for their church and for the continued work in their area. Focusing on the indigenization principles, Hodges wrote, would aid in that process.

Hodges further explained that of all three of the indigenization principles, self-government is the most difficult to accomplish.[133] He wrote, "Yet the principle of self-government is so important and the result in the spiritual life of the church so vital, that if we fail here, it could well mean that we shall fail in the entire program of establishing the indigenous church."[134] It is for this reason that Hodges devoted a significant portion of his book to the practical questions related to how to lead a church to become self-governing.

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[130]Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church: A Complete Handbook on How to Grow Young Churches* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 131-34.

[131]Ibid., 14, 17, 18-21; idem, "Why Indigenous Church Principles," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), 8.

[132]Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, 17.

[133]Ibid., 22.

[134]Ibid.

He explained that even in the early stages of the church planting process, the methods of decision-making can have a significant impact on the ability of the church to develop a self-governing perspective. He wrote, "If the missionary makes all the decisions at the beginning, the converts will become accustomed to his leadership, and later when they should take the responsibility for the management of their own affairs, he will find that they are unable; even unwilling, to do so."[135]

For this reason, Hodges devoted an entire chapter to issues related to developing leaders. This chapter argues for a decentralized approach to training that includes training for the entire church. Hodges explained, "I believe that the church has the obligation to provide training for everyone that God is calling. It does not have to be the same degree of training for all; rather, teaching should be tailored to fit the need of each class."[136] By providing this type of training, each person is able to fulfill the level of ministry to which God calls him.

Another aspect of self-governing that Hodges dealt with is the development of an association and national organization of churches. He explained that for the sake of fellowship, stability, and the advancement of the gospel, the indigenous church should seek to establish such organizations. He warned, though, this organization should be developed for the sake of serving the indigenous churches, not the missionaries.

One final issue that Hodges explained in his discussions on self-government is the issue that would later become known as "self-theologizing." Hodges wrote that "there must be a standard of doctrine and conduct accepted in common by the believers."[137] He went on to state, "One point here deserves special emphasis. The

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[135]Ibid., 25.

[136]Ibid., 62.

[137]Ibid., 26.

standard of doctrine and conduct must be an expression of the converts' own concept of the Christian life as they find it in the Scriptures."[138] Hodges argued that the missionary can help with this process, but ultimately, the native believers must make these decisions for themselves. These new believers must learn to do theology on their own, apart from the missionary's leading.

Others

Chapter 1 mentioned that other missiologists have made additions to the three-self model.[139] Allen Tippett adopted self-propagating and self-supporting, modified self-governing to self-determining, and then added three other marks – self-image, self-functioning, and self-giving.[140] He explained that a local body must see themselves as a church that is independent from the missionary; it must function in normal ways without the missionary; and it must find ways, on its own initiative, to meet the needs of hurting church members.

Charles Brock is another author who added to the marks of an indigenous church by listing self-teaching and self-expressing alongside the traditional three.[141] For self-teaching, Brock looked to Paul's letters in Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 31; and 1 Timothy 4:13, where Paul commanded these churches to be faithful in teaching its members the Word. An indigenous church must do the same. For self-expressing, Brock explained that an indigenous church must be free to express itself in culturally appropriate ways during worship.

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[138]Ibid., 27.

[139]See pp. 5-7 in this dissertation.

[140]Alan R. Tippett, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (Lincoln, IL: Lincoln Christian College Press, 1969), 133-37.

[141]Charles Brock, *Indigenous Church Planting: A Practical Journey* (Neosho, MO: Church Growth International, 1994), 92-94.

One of the most significant additions to the original three principles is the addition of the "fourth-self," or self-theologizing. As noted earlier, Hodges explained the importance of this concept, but it was Paul Hiebert who coined the term.[142] When Hiebert wrote *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* in 1985, he stated that the most pressing missiological issues of the day were related to questions about how indigenous a church should be planted. Two of the crucial questions with which missionaries were wrestling and which Hiebert sought to answer were, "Should [the native believers] be encouraged to develop their own theologies?," and "What should the missionaries do when these theologies seem to be going astray?"[143]

Answering those questions, he explained that everyone's cultural background influences his theology: "We think that our studies of the Bible are unbiased, that our own interpretations of the Scriptures are the only true ones. It disturbs us, therefore, when we begin to discover that theologies are also influenced by culture."[144] He continued, "The fact is, all theologies developed by human beings are shaped by their particular historical and cultural contexts – by the languages they use and the questions they ask."[145]

Hiebert then challenged missionaries to teach new Christians to not just teach the people the Scriptures, but also to teach the people *how to study* the Scriptures.[146] He wrote, "It is essential that we train leaders who can wrestle with the theological issues

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[142]Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 193-224; Darrell L. Whiteman, "Anthropological Reflections on Contextualizing Theology in a Global World," in *Globalizaing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 60-61.

[143]Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 193.

[144]Ibid., 198.

[145]Ibid.

[146]Ibid, 215-16.

that emerge within their cultural context."[147] As new believers grow in their faith, they learn how to apply the Scriptures to the pressing religious and social issues of their day. For Hiebert, the ability to accomplish this task is the fourth mark of an indigenous church.

Another author who wrote concerning the importance of self-theologizing is Charles Kraft. Kraft described this process as "dynamic equivalence theologizing," and he wrote, "Dynamic-equivalence theologizing is the reproduction in contemporary cultural contexts of the theologizing process that Paul and the other scriptural authors exemplify."[148] For Kraft, then, all theology, including Paul's in the New Testament, is culturally conditioned, and the supracultural truth of God can only be determined from an in-depth study of the text. He argued that this process that Paul used to contextualize God's ultimate truth to his hearers is a process that must be reproduced in each cultural setting where the gospel is communicated.[149]

History of Contextualization

In the 1970s, the discussion of contextualization replaced the discussion concerning indigenization principles. The term was formally introduced in a 1972 report by the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches.[150] Norman

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[147]Ibid., 215.

[148]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 228.

[149]At this point it is sufficient to note that while Hiebert's and Kraft's positions are distinct, they both affirm the need for an indigenous church to develop its own theologies that address the specific issues of its cultural setting.

[150]A portion of this report is included in "From Indigenization to Contextualization," in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity: A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission*, ed. Norman E. Thomas, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 175-76; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 420-21; David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1989), 28-29; David J. Hesselgrave, "Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12 (1995): 115; Simon Shui-man Kwan, "From Indigenization to Contextualization: A Change in Discursive Practice

Thomas noted that the term was introduced in response to an ecumenical frustration with the indigenization movement. He explained, "Whereas indigenization referred often to relating the gospel to traditional cultures, contextualization was used in relation to cultures undergoing rapid social change. It implied taking into account the processes of secularity, technology, and the struggles for human justice being expressed by peoples of the Third World."[151]

Despite the term's ecumenical roots, evangelicals adopted "contextualization" and sought to redefine it. In one of the early attempts to redefine contextualization, Byang Kato explained that contextualization deals with the relevance of the unchanging gospel message:

> We understand the term to mean making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation. In reference to Christian practices, it is an effort to express the never changing Word of God in ever changing modes for relevance. Since the gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary.[152]

Kato went on to state that this type of process "can take place in the area of liturgy, dress, language, church service, and any other form of expression of the gospel truth."[153]

Another author who has dealt extensively with contextualization is David Hesselgrave. Early on in this discussion, Hesselgrave gave a broad, inclusive definition of contextualization when he wrote, "Contextualization is the process whereby representatives of a religious faith adapt the forms and content of that faith in such a way

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Rather than a Shift in Paradigm," *Studies in World Christianity* 11 (2005): 237-38.

[151]Norman Thomas, "From Indigenization to Contextualization," in *Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity: A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission*, ed. Norman E. Thomas, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 20 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 175.

[152]Byang H. Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context, and Religious Syncretism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 1217.

[153]Ibid.

as to communication and (usually) comment it to the minds and hearts of a new generation within their own changing culture or to people with other cultural backgrounds."[154] For Hesselgrave, the mission of the church and the desire to take the gospel from one cultural context and implant it in another makes the contextualization process a necessary one.

In a book that Hesselgrave later co-wrote with Edward Rommen, Hesselgrave defined contextualization narrowly as "the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts."[155] This definition helps to envision a marriage between faithfulness to Scripture and sensitivity to culture.

Enoch Wan presented a similar view when he defined contextualization as "the efforts of formulating, presenting and practicing the Christian faith in such a way that is relevant to the cultural context of the target group in terms of conceptualization, expression and application; yet maintaining theological coherence, biblical integrity and theoretical consistency."[156] Again, inherent in the contextualization process is a commitment to both faithfulness to Scripture and sensitivity to culture.

While these statements are helpful in terms of defining what contextualization should be, in practice evangelicals have noted the difficulty of maintaining such a balance. D. A. Carson explained,

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[154]David J. Hesselgrave, "Contextualization and Revelational Epistemology," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984), 694.

[155]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 200; Hesselgrave, "Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant," 115.

[156]Enoch Wan, "Critiquing the Method of Traditional Western Theology and Calling for Sino-Theology" *Global Missiology* 1 (October 2003) [journal on-line]; accessed 2 May 2011; available from http:// globalmissiology.org/missionchina/wan1-1.htm; Internet.

> Broadly speaking there are two brands of contextualization. The first assigns control to the context; the operative term is praxis, which serves as a controlling grid to determine the meaning of Scripture. The second assigns the control to Scripture, but cherishes the 'contextualization' rubric because it reminds us the Bible must be thought about, translated into, and preached in categories relevant to the particular cultural context.[157]

Missionaries and missiologists have tended to emphasize either Scripture or culture and have struggled to find proper balance between the two.

Paul Hiebert examined historical approaches to contextualization and considered the various types of responses to the question, "How did – and how should – missionaries who bring a new gospel respond to the old one?"[158] There have been three periods of missionary activity in which the church has answered this question differently. These periods include the era of non-contextualization, the era of emerging contextualization, and the era of over-contextualization.[159]

The Era of Non-Contextualization

Although earlier periods of missionary activity contained an emphasis on cultural study and gospel contextualization, the modern missions era that began with William Carey in 1792 was initially an era of non-contextualization. Mission efforts

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[157]D. A. Carson, "Church and Mission: Reflections on Contextualization and the Third Horizon," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 220.

[158]Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987): 104; See also Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75. For an excellent treatment of the life and legacy of Paul Hiebert, see Philip Wayne Barnes, "Missiology Meets Cultural Anthropology: The Life and Legacy of Paul G. Hiebert" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

[159]Hiebert gives two areas: The Era of Noncontextualization and The Case for Contextualization. He then proposes Critical Contextualization as a means of finding the proper balance between Scripture and culture. In a later article, Hiebert used Minimal Contextualization, Uncritical Contextualization, and Critical Contextualization. I have modified his breakdown to give some attention to the over-contextualization that has been influential in the period since he first wrote. For Hiebert's later article, see Paul G. Hiebert, "The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization," in *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millenium*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 84-94.

during this period were guided by the desire for the evangelization *and* civilization of the target peoples.

One of the reasons that this era was guided by non-contextualization was the influence of colonialism on missions.[160] Hiebert explained the attitudes of many Western missionaries during this period:

> Colonialism proved to the West its cultural superiority. Western civilization had triumphed. It was the task, therefore, of the West to bring the benefits of this civilization to the world. Old medical systems were seen as witchcraft and hocus-pocus, and had to be stamped out. Old governments were seen as feudalistic and had to be replaced by modern, national governments.[161]

Not only did the Western world consider colonialism necessary because of the superiority of Western civilization, but they also understood the spread of colonialism as an act of divine providence.[162]

Along the same lines, this era was also guided by an attitude of cultural evolution.[163] People in the West considered Western culture superior and of a higher order than non-Western cultures. This perspective is seen in many of the missiological writings of that day. One missionary whose writings display this attitude is John Philip. Philip was a missionary in South Africa in the 1820s. He argued that "permanent societies of Christians can never be maintained among an uncivilized people without imparting to them the arts and habits of a civilized life."[164] During this period missionaries practiced non-contextualization because they believed that non-Westerners were "uncivilized" and their cultural settings were so inferior that churches could not be

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[160]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 104.

[161]Ibid.

[162]Etherington, "Introduction," 6.

[163]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 105.

[164]John Philip, cited in Porter, "An Overview," 52.

maintained in them.

Hiebert explained that these attitudes had two consequences during this period of missions.[165] First, since missionaries grouped the aims of evangelization and civilization together, Christianity was typically seen as a foreign religion. Non-Westerners identified Christianity as a Western religion, and this perspective became a barrier to the gospel for many people.

A second impact of this period of non-contextualization was syncretism. Since missionaries did not contextualize the message of the gospel or the forms of Christian worship, those who became Christians adopted Christian beliefs and practices only on the surface level. This dynamic has become known as "surface accommodation."[166] Converts did not give up their native beliefs and religious practices; they simply gave their native practices Christian names or they placed Christian modes of worship on top of their existing belief system. Hiebert explained, "Amulets were hidden under shirts, and Christians did not admit to Christian doctors that they were also going to the village shaman."[167]

The Era of Emerging Contextualization

While the era of non-contextualization merged evangelization and civilization, in the twentieth century, this situation began to change. The two major developments of this period were the decline of colonial rule and the rise of anthropological theory.[168]

In missions theory, this chapter has already noted the impact of Venn and

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[165]These two consequences are found in Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 106.

[166]Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1991), 63.

[167]Ibid.

[168]Ibid.

Anderson's focus on the three-selfs of an indigenous church.[169] The indigenization movement in missions revealed a growing dissatisfaction with colonialism. The recognition that churches should be self-governed was coupled with the idea that nations as a whole should be self-governed.

The emphasis on education during the colonial period also played a part in the end of the colonial period.[170] The effectiveness of the education systems implemented by the colonial powers created a new group of potential leaders who had learned from Westerners and had the ability to govern their own people. These educational institutions turned out to be, especially in Africa, the birthplace of democracy for many British colonies.[171]

Around the same time, the world experienced two world wars, which shattered many concepts of Western cultural superiority. People considered the technological and scientific advancements Western nations made in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and believed that society was evolving and advancing to a create a better world. In the course of the evolution process, Western nations were more advanced and by extension, they needed to civilize the rest of the world. When those same advancements were used for destruction and the unimaginable horrors of the Jewish holocaust, though, it put to rest any notion of Western cultural superiority.

After World War II (1939-1945), Western nations were more focused and interested in other cultures and languages.[172] At this time the United States was involved

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[169]See pp. 42-59 in this dissertation.

[170] Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 106.

[171]David Maxwell, "Decolonization," in *Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington, Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 289.

[172]The information in this paragraph is from Everett M. Rogers and Thomas M. Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1999), 59-66; Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 108.

in rebuilding much of Europe and Japan, as well as directing projects aimed at the development of Third World nations. In spite of the fact that the technology was advanced and potentially beneficial to the people, most of these projects failed due to the way the technology was implemented. The U.S. representatives failed to learn the language or study the cultural setting, and as a result, when they implemented the technology, they overlooked key cultural considerations. In light of these failures, more attention was given to scholarly research in areas like linguistics and cultural anthropology.

The consequences of these developments on missions were far reaching. The death of Western attitudes of cultural superiority meant that Christianity would no longer be seen as a foreign religion.[173] In most cases, missionaries no longer lived in isolated compounds but among the people, and they likewise embraced the lifestyles of the people. As a result, the gospel was not seen as message in which one had to become westernized in order to believe it, but the gospel was clothed in cultural terms that the people could understand and appreciate.

The developments of this period led to attitudes of cultural relativity, in which all cultures were valued and considered worthy of study.[174] As a result, missionaries placed more emphasis on cultural acquisition and language learning. This renewed emphasis on cultural anthropology created more interest in presenting the gospel in culturally appropriate terms. These studies also helped missionaries to prevent and avoid syncretistic practices.

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[173]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 108.

[174]Cultural relativity is the belief that all cultures are true and no one culture can judge another. I am aware that extreme cultural relativity leads to pluralistic attitudes in which all aspects of culture are acceptable and beyond critique. If the extreme position is avoided, cultural relativity helps missionaries recognize that some aspects of culture like language, food, communication methods, or any aspect that Scripture does not address are amoral and can be different from culture to culture. The challenge for evangelicals is to combine cultural relativity with biblical authority.

Another result of this period was the development of the people group approach to missions. It was amidst this period of emerging contextualization with its renewed emphasis on linguistic and cultural anthropology that Donald McGavran and Cameron Townsend developed the missiological concepts that led to the understanding of people groups.[175] Ralph Winter then took those concepts and presented them at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, challenging missionary leaders to focus on reaching these unreached people groups.[176] This emphasis on people groups with their unique cultural and linguistic settings opened the door for the contextualization discussion.

The Era of Over-Contextualization

With the emergence of the contextualization discussion in the 1970s and 80s, scholars focused much attention on defining contextualization and measuring its appropriate limits. Some considered certain missiological practices to be "over-contextualization." It is helpful to remember Carson's explanation of the two strands of contextualization – one puts the emphasis on Scripture as authoritative, and the other puts the emphasis on culture as normative.[177] Those who over-contextualized sided with culture. There were several developments that led to this over-contextualization.

One of the trends of this era was the postmodern turn. Myron Penner explains, "I want to suggest that the postmodern turn is best understood when one resists the temptation to define it categorically, as either a field of beliefs or a set of philosophical

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[175]Ralph D. Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Missions," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 3rd ed. (Pasadena: William Carey, 1999), 260.

[176]Ralph D. Winter, "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 213-41.

[177]Carson, "Church and Mission: Reflections on Contextualization and the Third Horizon," 220.

theses – except in the most general way."[178] Penner's resistance to defining postmodernism reveals something about postmodernism itself – its rejection of absolutes. Postmodernism calls into question the validity of all ideologies by examining the subjective nature of human knowledge.[179]

Postmodern thought is an attempt to think when absolute certainty or absolute truth no longer exists.[180] The problem with this mentality, from an evangelical perspective, is that absolute truth is the foundation of the Christian faith, and the exclusivity of Christ is the core of the gospel.[181] Hiebert echoed this concern when he wrote that "the denial of absolutes and of 'truth' itself runs counter to the core Christian claims about the truth of the gospel and the uniqueness of Christ. Moreover, if the gospel is contextualized, what are the checks against biblical and theological distortion?"[182]

Hiebert's fears over how the rejection of absolute truth would affect the contextualization process were realized with the onset of over-contextualization. The subjectivity of postmodernism combined with the growing cultural relativity displayed in the era of emerging contextualization to create an environment in which culture, not Scripture, drove the contextualization process.

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[178]Myron B. Penner, "Introduction," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 16.

[179]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Pilgrim's Digress: Christian Thinking on and about the Post/Modern Way," in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*, ed. Myron B. Penner (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 80-81; Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 108.

[180]Penner, "Introduction," 25.

[181]Todd Miles explains exclusivism as the position that "conscious faith in the gospel, defined as the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as anticipated, developed, and presented in the Holy Scripture, is necessary for salvation." Some evangelicals, referred to as inclusivists, hold that some inherit salvation without conscious knowledge in this life of the saving work of Christ. The clear teaching of Scripture, contrary to the inclusivist position, is that conscious faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. For the Miles quote, see: Todd L. Miles, *A God of Many Understandings? The Gospel and a Theology of Religions* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 3.

[182]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 108.

The greatest example of over-contextualization is the dynamic known as insider movements.[183] In its simplest form, an insider movement is a movement of people coming to faith in Christ that is designed to keep people inside their networks of relationships after they become believers.[184] At face value, keeping believers "inside" their networks of relationships is a helpful missiological principle. The problem, and overall critique of insider movements, is that keeping believers inside those networks, and not scriptural considerations, becomes the driving issue in evangelism. In terms of contextualization, it is cultural considerations, namely what is culturally appropriate or not appropriate to keep people relationally connected, that controls the contextualization process.

One example of an insider movement is the proposed C5 level of contextualization among Muslims.[185] At C5 on the contextualization spectrum, Muslims who accept Jesus continue to refer to themselves as Muslims. They seek to share their faith with unsaved Muslims, but they also seek to "remain legally and socially within the community of Islam."[186] Some Christian missionaries are even willing to *begin* referring to themselves as Muslims for the sake of reaching potential C5 believers.[187]

In one specific example of C5 evangelism in South Asia, the missionaries, for

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[183]For an excellent treatment of insider movements, see J. Henry Wolfe, "Insider Movements: An Assessment of the Viability of Retaining Socio-Religious Insider Identity in High-Religious Contexts" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

[184]Rebecca Lewis, "Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Connections: A Proposed Definition of Insider Movements," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2007):75; Kevin Higgins, "The Key to Insider Movements: The 'Devoted's' of Acts: How Insider Movements Relate to the Nature of the Gospel Itself," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 21 (2004): 156.

[185]For an explanation of the C1 to C6 Contextualization Spectrum, see John Travis, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (1998): 209-10.

[186]Ibid., 210.

[187]John Travis, "Must all Muslims Leave 'Islam' to Follow Jesus?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (1998): 412.

the sake of creating an insider movement, would not baptize an individual until the head of his family became a believer.[188] Following the pattern of ethnic Jews who come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah, these Muslims refer to themselves as "completed Muslims."[189]

In 1998, Phil Parshall led a group of researchers to study a C5 movement.[190] The encouraging signs of the study included the participants' beliefs in Jesus as the only Savior, in God's forgiveness through Jesus' death for them, and in the importance of regular Christian worship. At the same time, though, these same participants also believed that "there are four holy books, of which the Qur'an is the greatest. Nearly half continue to go to the traditional mosque on Friday where they participate in the standard Islamic prayers which affirm Muhammed as a prophet of God. And nearly half do not affirm the trinity."[191]

In a similar study among Hindus and Muslims in Southern India, Herbert Hoefer examined a group of 200,000 "non-baptized believers."[192] Since public baptism would signify a departure from their religious and cultural setting and in fear of being cut off from family and other relationships, these believers had never been baptized.[193] Hoefer commended this practice as a successful contextualization of Christianity in India,

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[188]Shah Ali with J. Dudley Woodberry, "South Asia: Vegetables, Fish, and Messianic Mosques," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, 3rd ed. (Pasadena: William Carey, 1999), 681.

[189]Ibid., 682.

[190]Phil Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (1998): 405; idem, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*, rev. ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publishing, 2003), 68.

[191]Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization," 405.

[192]Herbert E. Hoefer, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001).

[193]Ibid., xv, 8.

despite the fact that many of these non-baptized believers "tended to carry on with their worship of Christ in the same manner as they had previously worshipped their other gods."[194]

These practices do not pose a problem for Hoefer, who wrote, "We do not want to change the culture or the religious genius of India. We simply want to bring Christ and his gospel into the center of it."[195] As a result, baptism should not be seen as a movement away from one's cultural and religious background, but it should be understood as a "sacrament of fulfillment."[196] It is fulfillment of one's indigenous religious system through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Numerous attempts have been made to give a biblical foundation for insider movements,[197] but others have pointed out the hermeneutical weaknesses of those arguments.[198] The bottom line for adherents of insider movements is that the question they are asking is not "How can a convert be faithful to the Scriptures?," but "How can one become a Christian and not leave his culture?" While scriptural considerations are important, culture is ultimately driving the practices of C5 insider movements.

The era of over-contextualization is an important consideration for this study,

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[194]Ibid., 199.

[195]Ibid., 201.

[196]Ibid., 199.

[197]Higgins, "The Key to Insider Movements,"155-66; J. Dudley Woodbery, "To the Muslim I Became a Muslim? A Veteran Missionary and Scholar Weighs in on Muslim 'Insider Movements,'" *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2007): 23-28; Kevin Higgins, "Acts 15 and Insider Movements among Muslims: Questions, Process, and Conclusions," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2007): 29-40; John Ridgway, "Insider Movements in the Gospels and Acts: The Biblical Roots of 'Insider Movements,'" *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2007): 77-86. See the responses to Gary Corwin's questions, especially nos. 3, 4, and 8 in Gary Corwin et al., "A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2007): 5-20.

[198]L. D. Waterman, "Do the Roots Affect the Fruits? Six Points to Consider," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2007): 57-64; Gary Corwin, "A Response to My Respondents: The Dialog Continues," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2007): 53-56.

because it is the era in which many ethnohermeneutics theories were developed. For those that first proposed the study of ethnohermeneutics, Charles Kraft and Larry Caldwell, it was the desire to be receptor-oriented in communication and contextualization of the gospel that fueled this study. The next chapter considers these theories in more depth.

Summary

Throughout the history of modern interpretation, an increasing subjectivity developed. Although interpretation once was focused on the determination of the author's meaning, with the influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher, it changed into a psychologizing of the author. With Structuralist theories, interpretation became a scientific analyzation of a text's deeper themes.

From there, Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer focused more attention on the reader's influence over the text and the so-called "fusion of horizons" that takes place between text and reader. The Reader-response theories of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish followed these progressions to their logical conclusions, allowing the reader to take control over the determination of meaning.

A consideration of the history of the indigenization movement and the history of contextualization reveals that missiological theory moved from a period of non-contextualization to a period of over-contextualization. The indigenization movement, initiated by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, played a critical role in heightening awareness of the need to be sensitive in culture when transmitting the gospel from one culture to the next.

The contextualization discussion took this focus to a deeper level through a more serious commitment to linguistic and cultural anthropological studies. The goal of the contextualization of the gospel is faithfulness to Scripture and sensitivity to culture. Unfortunately, though, the cultural relativity that influenced these developments

combined with postmodernism's denial of absolute truth to create an environment where cultural concerns, not scriptural ones, drive the contextualization process.

These various developments coalesced into the formation of ethnohermeneutics theories. The next chapter considers and critiques some of these theories.

CHAPTER 3

AN EVALUATION OF ETHNOHERMENEUTICS THEORIES

Ethnohermeneutics theories are concerned with indigenous methods of interpretation. The last chapter showed that interest in these methods developed as a result of increasing subjectivity in hermeneutics and of growing over-contextualization in missiology. Proposed in light of the perceived failure of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis in cross-cultural contexts, ethnohermeneutics theories attempt to provide a more culturally sensitive approach to interpretation.

Survey of Various Authors[1]

A broad range of perspectives exists concerning ethnohermeneutics. Views on one end of the spectrum have a pluralistic outlook and make a radical departure from evangelicalism.[2] Views on the other end of the spectrum emphasize the need for believers in a culture to develop theologies that speak to the pressing issues of their day. These views also cautiously state the need to arrive at those theologies through the

[1]These authors have been selected not only because they display a broad range of views, but also because they are the predominant authors in the contemporary discussion of cross-cultural hermeneutics.

[2]The term "evangelical" is debated, but for the sake of clarity, it is helpful to understand the commitments of evangelicals. Todd Miles explains those commitments: "(1) worship of the one God who fully exists simultaneously and without division or confusion in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; (2) the authority of Scripture that is grounded in its inspiration by the Holy Spirit; (3) the supremacy and centrality of Jesus Christ, demonstrated in his life, substitutionary death, resurrection, and ascension, as the hinge upon which all redemptive and human history turns; (4) the necessity of personal conversion and regeneration to enter the Kingdom of God; (5) the lordship and guidance of the Holy Spirit; (6) the fellowship of the local church for worship, witness, and service; (7) the exercise of personal piety through spiritual disciplines; and (8) the priority of evangelism and mission manifest in the Spirit-empowered proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Todd L. Miles, *A God of Many Understandings? The Gospel and a Theology of Religions* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 10.

grammatical-historical method of interpretation. To better understand these various proposals, this survey begins with the radical end of the spectrum and proceeds to the conservative end.

R. S. Sugirtharajah

Sugirtharajah is a Sri Lankan theologian and a professor of biblical hermeneutics at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. He has written extensively on issues related to indigenous hermeneutic systems. His works focus on Third World contextual theologies, hermeneutic methods during the colonial and postcolonial period, and Asian understandings of Scripture. The distinguishing marks of his works include a denial of biblical absolutism, a denial of the exclusivity of Christ, an approval of vernacular readings of Scripture, and an approval of postcolonial rereading of Scripture.

Denial of biblical absolutism. One of the features of Sugirtharajah's system is a denial of biblical absolutism. He argues that the Bible is not the sole provider of information concerning God's revelation of himself. He explains, "What postcolonialism attempts to do is to demonstrate that the Bible itself is part of the conundrum rather than a panacea for all ills of the postmodern/postcolonial world."[3] He goes on to refer to the position that the Bible provides the answers to life's questions as an "illusion."[4]

As a result, Sugirtharajah proposes that indigenous hermeneutical systems must include the use of indigenous sacred texts. He writes, "The Christian Bible's place amidst the other sacred writings depends on the acknowledgement that no scripture conveys the full divine experience, and that any scripture can help us to see the traces of

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[3]R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford Press, 2002), 100.

[4]Ibid., 102.

that experience, if one approaches the sacred writings with openness and sensitivity."[5] For effective ethnohermeneutics, Sugirtharajah argues, the Bible should be seen as one text among many.

He states that the faith experience one has through the Scriptures is analogous to the encounters of others. The Bible is not unparalleled in its nature or unique in its place of provider of information about God's character.[6] The claims of the Bible, in his view, are not competing claims against the sacred texts of a people but are complementary.

Inherent in Sugirtharajah's understanding of Scripture and his hermeneutical system as a whole is a rejection of the original author as the determiner of meaning. He argues that "the author as a readily recognizable figure who approves and supervises the exact and intended meaning of a text is no longer tenable."[7] To point to the author as the determiner of meaning is colonial, and in his mind, hegemonic and outdated.[8]

Modern biblical interpreters, he argues, must move beyond the fascination with the author to embrace interpretation as "reading encounters."[9] Doing so means interpreters must also recognize that texts have multiple meanings, and they must be open to alternative meanings to biblical texts.[10] Understanding texts as only having one

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[5]R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Bible: Introduction," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 14-15.

[6]Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 205.

[7]R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture*, The Bible in the Modern World, no. 17, ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Jorunn Økland, and Stephen D. Moore (Sheffield, U. K.: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 32.

[8]R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61-73, 110, 116; idem, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 202-203; idem, *Troublesome Texts*, 32.

[9]Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts*, 32.

[10]Ibid., 32-33; idem, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 202-03.

meaning, he argues, is a feature of historical criticism and is a mode of interpretation for a bygone era.[11]

To display his own system, Sugirtharajah examines the Johannine letters. He rejects the aspects of the letters which confront heretical, divisive theological positions and those aspects that project an imperial Christ because at those points, the intention of the author is colonialistic.[12] Postcolonial interpreters, he argues, should focus on the aspects of the letter that focus on truth, justice, and love as they seek to be ethically involved in their own communities.[13] At the same time, he contends that the epistles were influenced more by Buddhist thought than by Judaic or Hellenistic categories, and thus, it is clear from the letters that "sacred texts are textual coalitions."[14] He argues that postcolonial interpreters should not be ashamed, then, to utilize indigenous sacred texts as they develop new meanings for biblical texts.

Denial of exclusivity of Christ. For Sugirtharajah, just like the Bible is not the absolute and final word from God, Jesus Christ is not the sole means of salvation for men. He explains,

> In a multireligious context like ours, the real contest is not between Jesus and other savior figures like Buddha or Krishna, or religious leaders like Mohammed, as advocates of the 'Decade of Evangelism' want us to believe, it is between mammon and Satan on the one side, and Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, and Mohammed on the other. . . . The question then is whether these religious figures offer us any clue to challenge these forces, or simply help to perpetuate them, and how the continuities rather than contrasts among these savior figures may be experienced and

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[11]Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts*, 129.

[12]Ibid., 33-35.

[13]Ibid., 40-41.

[14]Ibid., 39, 42. Sugirtharajah claims that in John's writings, "God does not do anything but is called light (1 John 1:5), love (1 John 4:8, 16) and, in the gospel, spirit (John 4:24) as a result of the actions of human beings." He goes on to state that "It is the act of love which makes the presence of God real." For him, the presence of this theme is a result of Buddhistic influence on John.

expressed.[15]

In today's globalized world, he argues, what benefits society most is not competing claims between different religions and their salvific figures, but mutual harmony and a conscientious effort to confront the social evils of society.

As a result, Sugirtharajah encourages Majority World theologians to utilize hermeneutic techniques that "integrate, synthesize, and interconnect" their indigenous religious systems with the gospel in order to refashion it in Asian terms.[16] He explains that Asian theologians are going beyond contextualization in their reformulation of the gospel: "The task is seen not as adapting the Christian gospel in Asian idioms, but as reconceptualizing the basic tenets of the Christian faith in the light of Asian realities. The new mood is not to assume the superiority of Christian revelation but to seek life-enhancing potentialities also in the divine manifestations of Asia."[17]

Christ, in Sugirtharajah's view, is not the sole mediator of salvation for all cultures for all time. He is simply one option among many. In his treatment of the supposed missionary claims of John 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1 Tim 2:5, and similar passages, he argues that the unbiased stance of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics enables interpreters to see that early Christian literature is confessional rather than missionary in nature. He explains that these passages,

> Should be seen in the light of the constituency of intended readers, the narrative setting of these sayings, and, more importantly, as supportive of internal theological positions within the early Christian communities. In other words, they are not to be seen as statements made with Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and countless indigenous people in mind. These assertions, if we read them with the

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[15]R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 119.

[16]R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 5.

[17]Ibid.

above-mentioned perspectives, look much less triumphalistic.[18]

Recognizing that these claims were made to people who were already Christians, he argues, helps interpreters to understand that Jesus did not make these statements to exclude from salvation people of other faith traditions.

In a work that Sugirtharajah edited, *Asian Faces of Jesus*, various Asian theologians present their indigenous perspectives of Jesus. Sugirtharajah introduced the project by explaining these views of Jesus "counteract this imperial, supremacist, and absolutist understanding of Jesus."[19] He then explains two of the common themes of these articles, and of Asian understandings of Jesus in general, "They fiercely resist any attempts to apply well-established and timeless truth about Jesus . . . . They demonstrate that perceptions of Jesus are not validated by their timeless claims or by their dogmatic soundness, but by the appropriateness of the image to a specific context."[20]

A second theme is similar, "Their Christological constructions demonstrate that one need not necessarily appeal to precedents or paradigms enshrined in the gospel or other early Christian works, nor have these constructions necessarily been based on or legitimized by canonical writings."[21] For Sugirtharajah, then, contemporary Christians need not utilize traditional Christian hermeneutical methods; nor do they need to conceive of Christ in traditional Christian terms or even consult the Bible to gain an understanding of Christ. The issue for him is not whether a conception of Christ conforms to the Christ of the Scriptures, but whether it conforms to the Asian context.

Approval of vernacular readings. Sugirtharajah explains that one helpful

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[18]Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 98.

[19]R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Prologue and Perspective," in *Asian Faces of Jesus*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), ix.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid.

hermeneutical model for Majority World Christians is what he refers to as vernacular hermeneutics. He states that vernacular biblical hermeneutics "is an attempt to go 'home.' It is a call to self-awareness, aimed at creating an awakening among people to their indigenous literary, cultural, and religious heritage."[22] This method attempts to recover the indigenous aspects of the culture that were oppressed during the colonial period of missions.

Sugirtharajah states that since the biblical text is culturally far from these indigenous peoples, the stories of Scripture are often difficult for them to understand and grasp. It is at this point that he views vernacular hermeneutics as helpful. He explains,

> Vernacular interpretation seeks to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of these biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides, by employing the reader's own cultural resources and social experiences to illuminate the biblical narratives. It is about making hermeneutical sense of texts and concepts imported across time and space by means of one's own indigenous texts and concepts.[23]

In this process, indigenous beliefs are used to help make the biblical text more understandable.

Sugirtharajah states three methods, or modes, for implementing vernacular hermeneutics. He calls the first mode conceptual correspondences. Utilizing this mode, the interpreter seeks parallels between the indigenous sacred texts and the biblical text,[24] and he looks for textual analogies that can elucidate the foreignness of biblical concepts and terms. Sugirtharajah gives numerous examples of this process: Indian believers using Vedic texts to explain creation and the fall, Tamil converts using Tamil poems explaining one's love for his beloved to explain the death of Christ, Chinese believers using Confucian concepts to explain the Holy Spirit, and South Africans using the

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[22]Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 177.

[23]Ibid., 182.

[24]Ibid.

concept of *ubuntu*[25] to explain the Joseph narrative.[26]

The second mode of vernacular hermeneutics is narratival enrichments. This mode seeks to "re-employ some of the popular folk tales, legends, riddles, plays, proverbs, and poems that are part of the common heritage of the people and place them vividly alongside biblical materials, in order to draw out their hermeneutical implications."[27] Sugirtharajah explains that an example of this mode is Peter Lee's juxtaposition of the drama "The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo" with the book of Ruth.[28] Although the two stories are quite different, they are both set within paternalistic societies and both portray a daughter-in-law's devotion to her mother-in-law.[29]

Sugirtharajah's final mode of vernacular reading is performantial parallels. This mode uses indigenous rituals and behavorial practices to help explain biblical concepts. One example he gives of this mode is A. C. Musopole's use of Malawi witchcraft techniques to explain Jesus' teaching in John 6:53-55 that his followers must eat his flesh and drink his blood.[30] Sugirtharajah explains that the use of these witchcraft

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[25]Allistair Bobby-Evans explains the concept of Ubuntu, "Ubuntu is an Nguni word which has no direct translation into English, but is used to describe a particular African worldview in which people can only find fulfilment through interacting with other people. Thus is represents a spirit of kinship across both race and creed which united mankind to a common purpose." Allistair Bobby-Evans, "Ubuntu" [on-line]; accessed 17 May 2011; available from http://africanhistory.about.com/od/glossaryu/g/ubuntu.htm; Internet.

[26]Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 184-85.

[27]Ibid., 186.

[28]Peter K. H. Lee, "Two Stories of Loyalty," *Ching Feng* 32, no. 1 (1989): 24-40.

[29]"The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo" is a drama set during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). In the story, a father and son try to force two widows to marry them. The older widow is amenable, but her daughter-in-law is not. The son then attempts to murder the older widow but accidentally kills his father. He blames the younger widow, Tou Ngo, for the murder, and she is condemned to death. For more information, see Haiping Yan, "Theatricality in Classical Chinese Drama," *Theatricality: Theater and Performance Theory*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68.

[30]A. C. Musopole, "Witchcraft Terminology, The Bible, and African Christian Theology: An Exercise in Hermeneutics," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23 (1993): 352.

rituals could be understood metaphorically or literally.[31]

The problem with vernacular hermeneutics, as Sugirtharajah sees it, is that with globalization and the intermixing of many diasporic communities, pure indigenous systems of thought are difficult to find.[32] Moreover, many vernacular interpretations are so particularistic and isolated that they have little to offer the global community.[33] Nonetheless, such hermeneutical methods still have much to offer as a reaction against the forces of globalization in today's world.[34]

Approval of postcolonial rereadings. Given some of the weaknesses of vernacular hermeneutics, Sugirtharajah proposes postcolonial interpretation as an alternative. Postcolonial biblical interpretation is in the same stream of interpretation as liberation hermeneutics in that both focus on voicing the concerns of minority groups and confronting dominant ideologies.[35] Sugirtharajah critiques liberation hermeneutics, though, as being too concerned with textual issues and with the homogenization of the poor.[36]

Postcolonial hermeneutics is a reaction against the dominant interpretational techniques of the colonial period. Sugirtharajah explains, "Postcolonialism is about a set of measures worked out by diasporan Third World intellectuals in order to undo, reconfigure, and redraw contingent boundaries of hegemonic knowledge."[37] This type of

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[31]Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 189.

[32]Ibid., 198; idem, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 14; idem, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 190.

[33]Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 14.

[34]Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts*, 127-28.

[35]Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 244.

[36]Ibid.; idem, *Troublesome Texts*, 123.

[37]Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 246.

interpretation is concerned with giving a voice and a new identity to those once colonized.[38]

The first concern of postcolonial hermeneutics is to scrutinize biblical texts for their colonial entanglements.[39] Sugirtharajah explains that numerous biblical texts were written in colonial contexts. In light of these contexts, "Postcolonial reading practice will reconsider the biblical narratives, not as a series of divinely guided incidents or reports about divine-human encounters, but as emanating from colonial contacts."[40] As an example, Sugirtharajah considers the liberating purposes of the book of Esther to see how the contents of the book might relate to those in areas formerly colonized.[41]

The second concern of postcolonial hermeneutics is to reread biblical texts in light of postcolonial concerns.[42] To accomplish this task, Sugirtharajah explains that biblical texts will be read "from the perspective of postcolonial concerns such as liberation struggles of the past and present; it will be sensitive to subaltern and feminine elements embedded in the texts; it will interact with and reflect on postcolonial circumstances such as hybridity, fragmentation, deterritorialization, and hyphenated, double or multiple, identities."[43] Such a reading will utilize texts in a way in which they speak to these issues.

As one example of this type of reading, Sugirtharajah considers Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal at Mount Carmel. He explains how this reading

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[38]Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 16.

[39]Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 251-52.

[40]Ibid., 251.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., 252-55.

[43]Ibid.

would affect the interpretation of this passage:

> Postcolonial reading will, for instance, see the confrontation of Elijah and the priests of Mount Carmel, not as a straight theological conflict between two deities, Yahweh and Baal, nor as one religious community and its gods pitched against another and its gods, but as a complex issue where communities intermingle and the gods are significantly beyond their theological propensities.[44]

A third task of postcolonial hermeneutics is the interrogation of colonial interpretation.[45] The task here, as Sugirtharajah sees it, is to overcome the oppressive interpretations of the colonial period. Such an interpretation will be a reaction against or an interrogation of the dominant Western-influenced interpretations of the colonial era.[46]

Critique. Sugirtharajah's hermeneutic proposals are helpful in emphasizing the need to study the cultural concerns of various people groups in both native and diasporic settings. To communicate the gospel effectively with those peoples, one needs to study the people's indigenous methods of interpretation.

Unfortunately, though, it is at this point that the benefits of Sugirtharajah's approach end. His pluralistic denial of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God and of Jesus Christ as the sole mediator of salvation is a rejection of historic Christianity. His argument that understanding Jesus as the authoritative, sole provider of faith for all mankind is oppressive and outdated is an affront to evangelical Christianity. The attempt to "refashion" Jesus in a way that is more receptive to Asian audiences is misguided and is a failure to understand the very nature of the gospels.

Moreover, his argument that John's Gospel and the other New Testament documents were written to Christians, thus nullifying any sense of mission in verses like John 14:6 or Acts 4:12, is erroneous. Andreas Köstenberger argues cogently against this

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[44]Ibid., 253

[45]Ibid., 255-57.

[46]Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 17.

understanding of John's purpose, showing that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose.[47] This view was the dominant one until the onslaught of historical criticism in the twentieth century.[48] These passages display the fact that the missionary nature of the church is a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith.

From a missiological perspective, another weakness is that in reacting against the non-contextualization of the colonial period, Sugirtharajah has moved directly to over-contextualization. One wonders if contextualization is even appropriate to describe his proposals when Sugirtharajah himself explains that he desires to go beyond contextualization altogether in refashioning the very nature of the gospel.[49]

In terms of hermeneutics, Sugirtharajah's proposals are in line with the radical reader-response hermeneutics of Stanley Fish. His desire to read postcolonial and vernacular concerns into the text strips the locus of authority away from the author and places it in the hands of the reader. In his view, readers, in their own cultural settings, are able to utilize texts in any way they see fit. This lack of authorial control over the written word leads quite naturally into syncretism, which is evident in many of the examples Sugirtharajah gives.

His treatment of 1 Kings 18:20-40 and Elijah's defeat of the prophets of Baal is an attempt to eisegetically read his concerns for globalization, diversity, and pluralism into the text. His rejection of this passage as a narrative that displays God's superiority over the false religions of this world fails to deal with the fundamental aspects of the

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[47]Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Mission of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); idem, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 8.

[48]D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 91.

[49]See pp. 77-78 in this dissertation.

narrative. His pluralistic perspective simply will not allow him to admit that the clear teaching of this passage is that the worship of the God of Israel is true and the worship in all other religious systems is false.

In the end, Sugirtharajah's system is nothing more than repackaged postmodernism for cross-cultural situations. Sugirtharajah speaks positively of postmodernism, but concludes that it is too Western a concept to be useful in the Majority World.[50] Nonetheless, his rejection of absolute truth, his pluralistic outlook, and his desire to question and confront historic interpretation are postmodern. As a result, his hermeneutic system is not helpful to evangelicals.

Archie C. C. Lee

Archie Lee is a professor of Old Testament and hermeneutics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His writings display an interest in traditional Chinese religious practices, biblical interpretation in multi-cultural and pluralistic contexts, and cross-textual hermeneutics.

Summary. Lee's hermeneutic proposal is what he terms "cross-textual hermeneutics."[51] It is similar in approach to Sugirtharajah's vernacular hermeneutics in that it seeks to take the traditions, customs, and sacred texts of a people and relate them to the narratives and teachings of the Bible. He explains that in light of the diverse, multiscriptural context of Asia that "Asian Christians should venture to read their own classical texts and the biblical text together, and let one text shed light on or challenge the

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[50]Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 15.

[51]Archie C. C. Lee, "Cross-Textual Hermeneutics," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 60-62; idem, "Cross-Textual Hermeneutics on Gospel and Culture," *Asia Journal of Theology* 10 (1996); idem, "Cross-Textual Reading Strategy: A Study of Late Ming and Early Qing Chinese Christian Writings," *Ching Feng* 4, no. 1 (2004): 1-27.

other, so that creative dialogue and integration can take place."[52]

Lee criticizes those theologians and missionaries who have denounced Chinese sacred texts and other classical works.[53] He argues that those who hold that the Christian faith is the universal and absolute truth and those who hold to historic interpretation practices do not take the Asian religious and cultural setting seriously. He states that both the Bible and the religious context should be equal contributors, and no one text should hold sway over the others. He writes that at times the cultural context even critiques the biblical text.[54]

Lee argues that historic methods of interpretation are outdated. He explains,

> More recently, however, biblical scholars have acknowledged the limitations of [the historical-critical] approach, especially with regard to the fact that it presupposed an alleged objectivity on the part of the reader with regard to the text, established by means of a supposed scientific method, and thus fails to take into account the vital interaction between the received text, the contemporary reader, and the act of reading in the process of interpretation. As a result, the enormous impact of the social location, cultural background, economic context, and political situation of the reader on the process of interpretation has been completely ignored.[55]

With these concerns in mind, Lee states that if biblical interpretation is to be relevant in the Asian context, interpreters must relate the story of Scripture to the story of indigenous religious culture.[56]

In several articles, Lee displays how his model of cross-textual interpretation

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[52]Lee, "Cross-Textual Hermeneutics," 61.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., 62.

[55]Archie C. C. Lee, "Cross-Textual Interpretation and Its Implications for Biblical Studies," in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 247. It is important to note that when Lee critiques the historical-critical method, his critique applies to the grammatical-historical method as well. He is not critiquing the critical stance of those who have a historical-critical perspective, but he is critiquing the viability of analyzing the historical and grammatical setting of the text. He is also challenging the grammatical-historical approach's objectivity of meaning.

[56]Ibid., 248-49.

should be used. In one article, he examines how Chinese culture views the symbol of the dragon, and he contrasts that perspective with how the dragon is conveyed in Scripture.[57] In Chinese culture, the dragon represented the imperial authority and was thought to convey blessing, but in the Bible, the dragon is a symbol of chaos and evil.[58] After explaining this difference, though, Lee does little to alleviate these divergent understandings of this symbol.

In a second article, Lee examines the Chinese creation myth which states that the world was created through a female creator, *Nu Kua*.[59] He then relates the myth to the biblical account of creation. Once again, though, after examining some of the discrepancies between the biblical text and cultural myth, Lee does little to offer a way forward in light of the differences.

In a similar article that relates the Chinese flood narratives to the biblical ones, Lee explains that among the fifty-six ethnic minority groups in China, some 568 versions of a flood narrative exist.[60] He examines some of the common themes of these Chinese myths, one of which is the intermarriage between the divine and the humans that remain after the flood. Lee explains,

> This insight about a divine-human continuum in Chinese religious belief and mythological representation will present a challenge to the Chinese reading of the Bible. Humanity's aspiration for immortality or divinity will help to detect the same human yearnings recorded in the tradition of the Genesis story. When the biblical

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[57]Archie Chi Chung Lee, "The Dragon, the Deluge, and Creation Theology," in *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology: Emerging Trends*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994); idem, "The Dragon, the Deluge, and Creation Theology," in *Doing Theology with People's Symbols and Images*, ATESEA Occasional Papers no. 8, ed. Yeow Choo Lak and John England (Singapore: ATESEA, 1989).

[58]Lee, "The Dragon, the Deluge, and Creation Theology," 99-102.

[59]Archie C. C. Lee, "The Chinese Creation Myth of Nu Kua and the Biblical Narrative in Genesis 1-11," *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994): 312-24.

[60]Archie Chi Chung Lee, "When the Flood Narrative of Genesis Meets Its Counterpart in China: Reception and Challenge in Cross-Textual Reading," in *Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Archie Chi Chung Lee, and Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2010), 87.

> materials are read cross-textually with Chinese resources, it is hoped that new light can be shed on the different layers of the biblical text, and that often-neglected features will be seen clearly against the contours created by the nonbiblical text being brought into the reading process.[61]

Once again, though, after explaining the differences between the Chinese flood narratives and the biblical ones, Lee never proposes a solution to this challenge.

Lee examines, in a fourth article, the abuse of power in the story of David and Bathsheba and then applies it to the contemporary situation in Hong Kong.[62] The article was written in 1985 when people in Hong Kong were anxiously anticipating the return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1996. Lee considers David's abuse of power and Nathan's role of rebuking David's sinful action. Lee then calls the church to fulfill Nathan's role in rebuking the abuses of power from contemporary governmental regimes.

In a final article, Lee considers Isaiah 56-66 in light of the handover of Hong Kong to China.[63] In this article, he reads the situation in Hong Kong back into the biblical text. Picking up on Gadamer's wording, he explains that the study is a fusion of the two horizons.[64] His study of Isaiah displays a commitment to historical critical methods.

Critique. Like Sugirtharajah, Lee's hermeneutic proposals are concerning. His desire to implement a strategy that allows the contemporary culture to critique the biblical text is a departure from evangelical Christianity. Likewise, his proposal that indigenous texts should be integrated with biblical texts and that neither should have a

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[61]Ibid., 96-97.

[62]Archie C. C. Lee, "The David-Bathsheba Story and the Parable of Nathan," in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: SPCK, 1991); idem, "Doing Theology in the Chinese Context: The David-Bathsheba Story and the Parable of Nathan," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 3 (1985): 243-57.

[63]Archie Lee, "Returning to China: Biblical Interpretation in Postcolonial Hong Kong," *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999): 156-73.

[64]Ibid., 161.

position of authority is an encouragement toward syncretism. Both issues display a rejection of the Bible as the inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God.

At the same time, though, his handling of some biblical texts in the articles examined displays a commitment to study and apply the details of the text. As a result, his analysis of the various texts, although dependent on historical critical methods, is more in line with the original author's intent than Sugirtharajah's handling of various texts. In several of the other articles, he raises discrepancies between Chinese culture and the biblical text, but fails to propose a way forward. In the end, his model fails due to its rejection of historic Christianity, its tendency toward syncretism, and its failure to alleviate the differences between the biblical text and the cultural context.

K. K. Yeo

K. K. Yeo brings a unique perspective to the issue of cross-cultural hermeneutics. He is ethnically Chinese, was reared in the multi-cultural context of Malaysia, received his theological education in the U. S., and has taught in both Hong Kong and the U. S. His outlook on this issue has three characteristics: a historical-critical perspective, a rhetorical-interactive hermeneutic, and a cross-cultural intention.

Historical-critical perspective. Yeo utilizes historical-critical tools to analyze the text of Scripture. In addition to his direct statements about the use of historical-critical methods,[65] his use of these methods is displayed in his study of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. His basic method of exegesis is rhetorical criticism, which he states explores the persuasive nature of discourse as it relates to the original author and his audience.[66] This

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[65]K. K. Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10: A Formal Analysis with Preliminary Suggestions for a Chinese, Cross-Cultural Hermeneutic*, Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 9, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Rolf Rendtorff (New York: Brill, 1995), 53; idem, *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 65.

[66]Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, 53. Rhetorical criticism is one form of

method, though, utilizes other critical tools such as literary criticism, redaction criticism, and textual criticism in analyzing the text.[67]

He applies redaction criticism to 1 Corinthians and determines that the text contains a total of six different letters (Letters A through F) that were edited together by a later Pauline school.[68] While he does believe that Paul wrote the original letters, he agrees with Robert Jewett that the letter in its current form was redacted together by a conservative Pauline school for their purpose of fighting heresy.[69]

In a later work in which he examines the letters of Paul and the writings of the Chairman Mao,[70] he relates the process of canonization of Paul's writings to that of Mao's:

As charismatic leaders of social and religious movements, Paul and Mao were

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literary criticism that has developed in New Testament scholarship that seeks to ascertain the specific type of rhetorical devices that were utilized in the formation of the letter. Most of these discussions focus on Paul's letters. For a brief introduction and critique of rhetorical criticism from an evangelical perspective, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 59.

[67]Redaction criticism is one aspect of historical criticism that developed out of source, form, and tradition criticism. Source criticism focused on the sources that were utilized in the forming of the Gospels and Epistles. Carson and Moo explain that "each source, real or imagined, was thought to reflect the theology and outlook of different communities, or different writers, or of the same community at a different time." This focus gave rise to form criticism, which focused on the form of the documents. Out of form criticism, tradition criticism developed as a response. It focused on the traditions of the communities that stood behind the formation of the various New Testament documents. As a reaction to the weaknesses of tradition criticism, redaction criticism developed. It argues that the communities behind the New Testament documents edited them to produce gospels and letters that voiced the concerns of the evangelist and fulfilled the purposes of the community. Literary criticism picks up on many of these historical critical tools by analyzing the specific literary devices employed in the New Testament documents. For a brief historical survey of these developments and for a critique of this perspective, see Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 54-59.

[68]Ibid., 81-82.

[69]Ibid., 79.

[70]Mao Tse-tung, or Chairman Mao, was the leader of China from 1949, when the Communist army first came to power, until his death in 1976. Although history has had a positive outlook on his leadership of China, recent research has shown that his leadership was responsible for the deaths of 70 million Chinese and that during a time of peace. For more information, see Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005).

> not ordinary persons. Both had extraordinary ideas that had worldwide impact. If they had not been great persons, their ideals would not have been canonized. But neither Paul nor Mao thought of writing "scriptures." Both were practical theorists writing out of the necessity of situations and addressing problems in their communities. The canonization process of both Mao's and Paul's thought reached a point of becoming divine (the divine word itself or the agent of divine word) when devotees began to memorize and imitate the rhetoric. Any canonized text contains codes that believers assume to be the lenses through which reality should be viewed. Christians believe that sacred Scripture views reality as God sees it; Maoist followers believe that the Little Red Book views reality as Mao sees it.[71]

He goes on to explain that it was after Paul's death that the Pauline school collected, redacted, and circulated his writings. It was at this point that Paul gained prestige and power, and "his legacy gained its mystified and divinized qualities."[72]

The result of this historical-critical perspective is that at times Yeo views the Pauline letters on equal ground as Chinese sacred texts and other writings.[73] In his study he writes of how a reading of Confucian ethics "helps to correct or supplement Paul's theology."[74] He reads the writings side by side and seeks to create a dialogue between the two.

Rhetorical-interactive hermeneutic. Yeo describes his hermeneutical approach as one of rhetorical-interaction. He explains that this approach is concerned with "the interactive and communicative process of utterance between the rhetor and

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[71]K. K. Yeo, *Chairman Mao Meets the Apostle Paul: Christianity, Communism, and the Hope of China* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 192.

[72]Ibid., 193.

[73]K. K. Yeo, "Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and Classical Confucianism," in *Navigating Romans Through Culture: Challenging Readings by Charting a New Course*, ed. K. K. Yeo, Romans through History and Cultures Series (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 273; idem, *Chairman Mao Meets the Apostle Paul*, 192; idem, *Musing with Confucius and Paul: Toward a Chinese Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008), 430; idem, "Paul's Theological Ethic and the Chinese Morality of *Ren Ren*," in *Cross-Cultural Paul: Journeys to Others, Journeys to Ourselves* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 120.

[74]Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul*, 430.

audience in the rhetorical situation."[75] He continues in stating that this approach "accepts the subjectivity of an interpreter and the role of interpreter in interaction with the text."[76] By using this approach, he seeks "to work out the triangular interactive relationships among the utterance/text, the rhetor/audience, and the hearer/interpreter."[77]

Yeo picks up on the hermeneutical ideas of Gadamer and Ricoeur. With Gadamer, Yeo agrees that the interpreter's understanding of the text comes through a dialogical process.[78] In other words, meaning and understanding are fused together in interpretation as the interpreter interacts with the text. This process is a communicative dialogue, and meaning is derived partially from the situation of the text and partially from the situation of the interpreter.

As a result of these insights from Gadamer's hermeneutic, Yeo understands reading as both reproductive and productive.[79] He explains:

> The processes of reading and meaning-production are always dialogues between the writers and the readers. The authority of interpretation does not reside in the frozen text or in the first writer but is to be found in the interactive process of the text, involving both the writer and the reader, which I have previously called "rhetorical interaction."[80]

He continues by explaining how this understanding of authority affects the determination of meaning:

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[75]Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, 16.

[76]Ibid., 17.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid., 18.

[79]K. K. Yeo, "Culture and Intersubjectivity as Criteria for Negotiating Meanings in Cross-Cultural Interpretations," in *The Meanings We Choose: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Charles H. Cosgrove (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 86; idem, *Musing with Paul and Confucius*, 34; idem, "Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and Classical Confucianism," 20, 260.

[80]Yeo, "Culture and Intersubjectivity as Criteria for Negotiating Meanings in Cross-Cultural Interpretations," 86.

> This reproductive and productive process of reading allows and requires text/writer and reader/interpretation to be intersubjective. A text not only carries meaning but allows readers to create meanings. Similarly, readers not only interpret texts, they are being "read" by texts, that is, their stories are made meaningful by the texts. Because understanding and reading processes are reproductive and productive, a writer cannot control the meaning of a text and limit that meaning to *just* his or her own "original" intention.[81]

For Yeo, then, the intersubjective nature of interpretation results in the fact that meaning of a text is both reproduced and produced. In light of this dynamic, Yeo explains that the original author is not the sole determiner of meaning.

Yeo also adopts some aspects of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. He agrees with Ricoeur that it is not the text of Scripture which is sacred, but it is the one to which Scripture points, namely God, that is sacred. Yeo continues,

> In other words, the biblical text is sacred not in its ontological nature but in its interpretive and communicative process. That hermeneutical process is exercised by the biblical writers who claim that the Holy Rhetor of the texts wills the utterance to speak over time and space. Once the power or effectiveness of that speaking is evident and beneficial, we say that the text has its enduring quality. The enduring quality of the text is manifested not in the "pure" or "objective" or "arbitrary" exegesis of the historical meaning of the text but in the interaction of the text with the exegete and the audience.[82]

While Yeo draws from Ricoeur's hermeneutical system, he also critiques some aspects of it.[83] Even though Yeo argues that meaning does not reside only with the original author, he disagrees with Ricoeur's understanding of texts as "autonomous" or independent from the author's intent. Instead of suspending the original context of the text, Yeo picks up on Gadamer's language of fusing the horizons of the original

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[81]Ibid., 87; idem, *Musing with Confucius and Paul*, 34; idem, "Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and Classical Confucianism," 260; idem, "Introduction," in *Navigating Romans Through Culture: Challenging Readings by Charting a New Course*, ed. K. K. Yeo, Romans Through History and Cultures Series (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 20. In "Introduction," Yeo states, "Thus, it is not just the scriptural text that determines the meaning."

[82]Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, 19.

[83]Ibid., 20.

author/original context and the contemporary interpreter/contemporary context.

Yeo likewise accepts the possibility of multiple interpretations for any given text of Scripture. He argues that "interpreters cannot recover completely the cultural meaning of Paul."[84] Since interpreters cannot know what Paul meant, Yeo, states, there is a "plausibility of divergent interpretations."[85] For him, then, more than one interpretation to any given text is reasonable.

Cross-cultural intention. Yeo describes his cross-cultural hermeneutic as one of intertextual intentions.[86] He points to Julia Kristeva's definition of intertextuality[87] to explain that texts do not exist in isolation, but they interrelate with other texts that preceded them or currently co-exist with them. The aim of an intertextual study, then, is to uncover these areas of similarity and difference between two texts that have influence on some specific group of people.

These intertextual studies, Yeo explains, have their foundation in the intersubjective nature of interpretation.[88] Since interpretation is a dialogue between text and reader in which readers both reproduce and produce meaning, Yeo argues that this intertextual type of study creates an environment in which a dialogue between two textual influences takes place. It is a method of analyzing the specific ways in which the biblical text and a cultural text interact with and influence one another.

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[84]Yeo, "Introduction," 19.

[85]Ibid., 20.

[86]Yeo's interterxual study is different from the type of intertextual study that compares motifs from two different biblical authors. For Yeo, intertextual studies compare the stories and teachings of the biblical texts with the texts of other religious traditions.

[87]Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Tori Moi and Julia Kristeva (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[88]Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul*, 33-34; idem, "Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and Classical Confucianism," 260, 273.

In his study of Confucius and Paul, Yeo explains the benefits of the intertextual approach to cross-cultural interpretation: "The intertextual perspective will help us see the commonality and commensurability between Confucius and Paul. It is their profound differences that distinguish the cultural-specific of Confucian China from the cultural context of the Protestant West."[89] He goes on to state that the areas of difference can be either obstacles or resources, depending on how readers respond to them.

Yeo then explains the importance of dialogue between these two sources that shape the worldview of Chinese Christians,

> Confucius and Paul are very close at certain points while differing radically from each other in terms of the larger frames of reference or their thought. On the one hand, these basic differences of the origin or cause of determinative concepts of Confucius and Paul shape in a complementary way the contours of my identity as a Chinese Christian, just as they make up the principles of my hermeneutical investigation. On the other hand, there are basic differences that are simply irreconcilable, and holding on to them in radical tension is an ever-present challenge. The incommensurability between Confucius and Paul does not mean that one is right and the other wrong. Rather it means that on different issues both are incomplete and that one is needed for the fulfillment of the other.[90]

Elsewhere, Yeo fleshes out the results of this dialogue in more practical terms when he explains that through this intertextual study, "Paul's christological lens is colored with the social and moral aspects of ethics and politics, and Confucius' humanistic lens is colored with theological necessity."[91]

Yeo explains that there are three aspects to his conception of the possibility of knowing truth that guide his cross-cultural hermeneutic. These aspects include, "(1) that complete knowledge of the truth cannot be attained, (2) that all truth is God's truth,

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[89]Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul*, 35.

[90]Ibid., 36.

[91]Yeo, "Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and Classical Confucianism," 274.

wherever it is found, and (3) that provisional knowledge of the truth can be known by all peoples (not just Christians)."[92] He then explains that his reservation about the possibility of knowing truth "invites us into a dialogical process between cultures, a dialogue in which we can both accept but also transcend the limits of our specific cultural locations."[93]

Yeo encourages performing these intertextual studies by beginning with an exegetical study of the biblical text.[94] In actuality, though, he states that his study of the biblical texts is guided by the teachings and concerns of certain cultural documents or cultural presuppositions. In one study, immediately after stating that he will begin his study by examining the biblical text, he states that he will be "imposing a certain principle (the yin-yang understanding) on the text."[95] Another study analyzes "Paul's messianic (Christological) predestination language using the lens of the Confucian millennial understanding of *Datong* (Great Togetherness)."[96]

Despite the concerns raised by Yeo's imposing certain principles upon the biblical text, his study of the text focuses on ascertaining the message that the original author intended to convey to the original audience. In one study, he examines the uses of "weak" and "strong" in 1 Cor 8 and 10. He seeks to identify which heretical groups these terms might apply to, and he considers what Paul hopes to communicate to these groups through the use of these terms.[97] In another example, he considers four interpretations of

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[92]Yeo, "Culture and Intersubjectivity as Criteria for Negotiating Meanings in Cross-Cultural Interpretations," 99.

[93]Ibid.

[94]Yeo, *What Has Jerusalem to do with Beijing?*, 51, 65.

[95]Ibid., 51.

[96]Yeo, "Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and Classical Confucianism," 259.

[97]Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, 142-55.

Romans 7, and then proposes an alternative view.[98] His alternative view arises from concerns like the context of Romans 7 and the usage of specific words. After explaining his view, he proceeds to relate his interpretation to Confucian ethical traditions.

After examining the biblical text and the cultural text, Yeo simply juxtaposes the similarities and differences without providing solutions for the reader. After explaining the eschatological views of Paul and Mao Tse-tung, Yeo states in conclusion,

> In contrast to the secular faith of Mao's view of history, Paul's eschatology is Christ-centered: it has an openness to the future. It acknowledges the limitation of the human and urges one to place one's trust in the Divine, who determines the future. For Mao, death for the people was the highest virtue as well as the ultimate end of the utopian hope. In other words, Mao's utopian vision was a "fully realized eschatology" in the now because of his rejection of the eternal future.[99]

Not making a clear statement about which perspective is correct and which one is not, he avoids making a harsh critique of Chinese culture and is able to simply have the dialogue between two competing influences on the Chinese Christian worldview.

There are a few times in his writings that Yeo does critique certain aspects of Chinese culture. He examines the Confucian ideals of *li* (holy ritual) and *ren ren* (being a loving person) and compares them with Paul's teachings on the cruciform life. He concludes,

> Chinese Christians can learn from Paul that *li*, including its expression in acts of filial piety, does not have the power to break sin's grip over humanity. Moral formation through *li* animated by *ren ren* needs something more than the right social context and good intentions. It requires death to self and the world through the cross of Christ.[100]

Since the Confucian ideals of *li* and *ren ren* serve as the foundation for ancestor worship,

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[98]Yeo, "Culture and Intersubjectivity as Criteria for Negotiating Meanings in Cross-Cultural Interpretations," 94-95. While I do not agree with his interpretation of Romans 7, my point here is simply to show that his interpretation arises from his study of the text. He then relates his conclusions about Paul's concerns in Romans 7 to Confucian cultural considerations.

[99]Yeo, *Chairman Mao Meets the Apostle Paul*, 224-25.

[100]Yeo, "Paul's Theological Ethic and the Chinese Morality of *Ren Ren*," 140.

Yeo then addresses that subject:

> This suggests that Paul's theology calls for Chinese Christians to abandon the assumptions and practice of ancestor veneration or to reshape them in the light of the Pauline gospel so that they express, rather than conflict with, that gospel of the crucified and exalted Christ, who is lord of the powers and who creates a new spiritual family in which old relationships are brought to an end and love reaches out not just to ones' biological family and one's friends but to all, even to outsiders and enemies.[101]

Yeo advocates that when examining many of these Confucian teachings, one must distinguish between the religious practices and the ethical ones. After explaining that Confucianism is a dominant cultural force even for Chinese Christians, he states that "this definition of Chineseness should not be taken as a subscription to Confucian forms of worship (e.g., offering food to the dead and burning incense to the ancestors) but to the practice of Confucian ideals (e.g., reverence for elders)."[102] He states that only those aspects of culture that reject the cruciform life need to be changed.

Yeo, though, tends to see Paul's teachings as "fulfilling" Confucian ideals, or he utilizes Confucian ideals to reread Paul's letters.[103] He explains his perspective on these issues when he writes, "In my case, the Christian reading of Confucian texts and the Confucian reappropriation of Christian theologies are my way of being faithful to being Chinese."[104]

Critique. There are a number of aspects of Yeo's hermeneutical system that are worth commending. First, his argument that culture needs to be corrected on those points where its norms depart from the expectations of the crucified life is a helpful one. Although this point is a minor one in his overall hermeneutic system, and though he

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[101]Ibid.

[102]Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul*, 425.

[103]Ibid., 406, 429.

[104]Ibid., 425.

rarely critiques Chinese culture in his discussions, his statement does reflect how the authoritative biblical text does confront and reshape cultural standards.

A second helpful area in Yeo's system is the distinction he draws between religious and ethical aspects in Confucian teaching. Again, this position is a minor one in his overall system of interpretation as he tends to see biblical truth fulfilling Confucian ideals, but it does not lessen the usefulness of his statement. One might argue, though, that making such a separation is easier with Confucianism than it would be in other contexts where culture and religion are so closely intermingled. Since Confucianism is an ethical system in which religious rituals were later added to help people fulfill those ethical guidelines, it is often easy to draw the distinction between religion and culture in that tradition.

Third, Yeo's general commitment to study Chinese culture is helpful. He displays a wealth of knowledge concerning Chinese ethical, philosophical, and religious practices in his writings. While the writings focus on Confucian and Taoist teachings, he also recognizes that contemporary Chinese are more likely to be affected by materialism and consumerism.[105] His knowledge of these issues enables him to better understand the complexities involved in developing a Chinese Christian worldview. It also enables him to understand the barriers that keep non-Christians from responding to the gospel.[106]

A fourth strength of Yeo's approach is his commitment to begin each study with an examination of the biblical text. While concerns exist about Yeo's understanding of Scripture, this principle is helpful for those who are committed to Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. For such interpreters, ethnohermeneutics should always begin with a study of the biblical text, allowing Scripture to address those areas of culture

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[105]Yeo, "Paul's Theological Ethic and the Chinese Morality of *Ren Ren*," 119.

[106]Yeo, *What Has Jerusalem to do with Beijing?*, 196-97.

that contradict its teaching.

While there are some positive aspects to Yeo's approach, several negative ones also exist. First, Yeo's use of historical critical methods is a problem. His critical stance toward Pauline authorship through his statements about the Pauline school is an attack on the traditional understanding of the nature of Scripture. Such a position questions the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, and it challenges the unique place of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God.

Moreover, Yeo's understanding of the canonization process of the Scriptures is equally troubling. To argue, as Yeo does, that Paul did not envision his writings as scripture misrepresents the response of other New Testament authors to Paul's writings (2 Pet 3:15-16). More troubling, in fact, is the view he espouses that the canonization process of Paul's writings was the same as that of Mao Tse-tung's.

Similar to the first concern, a second problem is Yeo's commitment to rhetorical criticism. Numerous scholars have pointed out the weaknesses of rhetorical analysis of the biblical texts.[107] While rhetorical criticism was a popular approach from 1970 to 1990, contemporary New Testament scholars recognize that little has been gained from the overly technical labeling of certain sections of the text.[108] This view fails to recognize that the Greco-Roman system of rhetoric was designed for orators, not letter writers.[109] Moreover, one questions the validity of these insights when even the church fathers, who were still living in the Greco-Roman period, failed to comment on such rhetorical categories.[110]

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[107]Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 59; Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 302, 309.

[108]Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 309.

[109]Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 59.

[110]Ibid.

Third, the subjective nature of Yeo's hermeneutical perspective is a drawback. Although he critiques Ricoeur for completely abandoning the original author, Yeo goes almost as far by allowing the reader to dialogue with the text and create his own meaning. Yeo strips authority away from the original author and places it in the hands of readers by arguing that readers both recreate and create meanings to texts with which they interact.

Moreover, Yeo's explanation of the interpretation process blurs the distinction between meaning and application. Yeo states that the meaning of a text is found partly in the situation of the text and partly in the situation of the reader. This intersubjective approach blends together what the text means and how it applies.

A fourth negative aspect of Yeo's system is his commitment to intertextual readings. Yeo's intertextual, cross-cultural hermeneutic fails in not recognizing the authoritative place of the biblical text. It has already been shown that this attack on the Bible's authority is due to Yeo's historical critical perspective, but it is necessary to note that the result of such a perspective is that Yeo places the Bible on equal grounds as other sacred texts.

Similarly, his practice of reading Scripture through the lens of Confucian teaching or other cultural principles is eisegetical. While Yeo is correct to note that no interpreter is presupposition-less,[111] wise interpreters seek to overcome the presuppositions they bring to the text by allowing Scripture to confront and critique their own worldview. Reading Scripture to confirm or fulfill one's own concerns is misguided.

As a result, Yeo's system for cross-cultural biblical interpretation is not an appropriate model for evangelical interpreters. The problems with his view include his commitment to historical and rhetorical critical methods, his arguments that the reader

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[111]Yeo, "Introduction," 3-4.

creates the meaning of a text, and his eisegetical tendencies.

Larry Caldwell

Larry Caldwell studied at Fuller Seminary and is currently a professor of hermeneutics and missions in the Philippines. Caldwell is an evangelical who believes that "the Bible is God's authoritative, inerrant word, and that it is the final authority for all matters of faith and practice."[112] His interest in ethnohermeneutics grows out of his commitment to missions and his desire to reach all the cultures of the world with the gospel.

Caldwell defines ethnohermeneutics as "Bible interpretation done in cross-cultural, multi-cultural, and multi-generational contexts that, as far as possible, uses dynamic hermeneutical methods already in place in these contexts."[113] He argues that faithful Bible interpreters in intercultural situations ought to study and utilize indigenous hermeneutic methods because doing so will ensure greater receptivity to the proclamation of the gospel message.[114]

Cultural outlook. Caldwell's perspective on culture is a basic premise that predisposes him to accept indigenous hermeneutic systems. Caldwell adopts Charles

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[112]Larry Caldwell, "A Response to the Responses of Tappeiner and Whelchel to Ethnohermeneutics," *Journal of Asian Missions* 2 (2000): 136. Although Caldwell claims to believe in an inerrant Word, his argument that the horizon of the interpreter determines meaning contradicts such a position. In Article IX of the Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics, the authors write, "WE DENY that the message of Scripture derives from, or is dictated by, the interpreter's understanding. Thus we deny that the 'horizons' of the biblical writer and the interpreter may rightly 'fuse' in such a way that what the text communicates to the interpreter is not ultimately controlled by the expressed meaning of the Scripture." "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 883.

[113]Larry Caldwell, "Towards an Ethnohermeneutical Model for a Lowland Filipino Context," *Journal of Asian Mission* 7 (2005): 169-70.

[114]Caldwell, "Towards an Ethnohermeneutical Model for a Lowland Filipino Context," 170; idem, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context," *Journal of Asian Mission* 1 (1999): 31-32; idem, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Models for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today," *Asian Journal of Theology* 1 (1987): 324.

Kraft's position of God-above-but-through culture. Kraft writes, "This model holds that the Christian God should not be perceived either as against, merely in, or simply above culture. It sees God as outside culture but working in terms of or through culture to accomplish his purposes."[115] Kraft goes on to explain that "though God exists totally outside of culture while humans exist totally within culture, God chooses the cultural milieu in which humans are immersed as the arena of his interaction with people."[116]

Since Caldwell agrees with Kraft that God should not be perceived of as against culture, his overall view of culture is positive. Caldwell explains his perspective on this issue when he writes, "God is at work in each culture drawing individuals from within each culture to himself."[117] His point is that God is at work, using the unique aspects of each culture to help the people in that culture come to a more complete knowledge of who he is. This understanding of God working through culture, he believes, is the foundation for why missionaries utilize culturally-sensitive methods to communicate the truths of the gospel.[118]

Caldwell then argues that if missionaries are willing to use culturally-sensitive methods to communicate the gospel, they should also be willing to use indigenous hermeneutic methods to help determine the most culturally-sensitive way to communicate that gospel. He explains,

> What I am arguing for here is an acknowledgement that God not only works through the culture of each particular society – hence the need to communicate the truths of Scripture in culturally relevant forms that the society will understand – but,

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[115]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 88.

[116]Ibid., 89.

[117]Caldwell, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics," 31.

[118]Larry Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics: Reclaiming the Hermeneutical Methodologies of the New Testament for Bible Interpreters in the Twenty-First Century" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990), 278; idem, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics," 31.

> correspondingly, that God also works through the hermeneutical processes inherent in each society.[119]

He encourages Bible interpreters to ask two questions: "What are the hermeneutical method, or methods, found within the culture of the people whom I am ministering; and, how can I possibly use this method(s) when I attempt to communicate the truths of the Bible to individuals in or from this culture?"[120]

Caldwell distinguishes between surface level ethnohermeneutics and deep level hermeneutics.[121] Surface level ethnohermeneutics involves using culturally appropriate methods to communicate the truths of the Bible. Interpreters operating at this level will take a specific teaching of Scripture and seek to communicate that truth in a culturally-sensitive manner. These interpreters will look for culturally appropriate methods of communication or specific illustrations or analogies that arise from that culture to help better convey the truth of Scripture to people within this culture.

Deep level ehtnohermeneutics, on the other hand, uses culturally appropriate methods of interpretation to discover the truths of Scripture.[122] Instead of simply communicating the truths of Scripture in a culturally appropriate manner, at this level interpreters will use indigenous hermeneutical systems to determine the truths of Scripture for the people in that culture. Doing so will enable the interpreter to communicate the uncovered truths in the most culturally sensitive way possible.

Caldwell is careful to note that while he advocates the use of indigenous hermeneutical methods, he does not support using the content of those indigenous

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[119]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 279.

[120]Caldwell, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics," 31-32.

[121]Caldwell, "Towards an Ethnohermeneutical Model for a Lowland Filipino Context," 170-71.

[122]Ibid.

religious systems.[123] He recognizes that some may question how this approach avoids incorporating the theological content associated with those methods of interpretation. He responds,

> However, an answer is not very difficult when we understand that we are not necessarily taking the *content* in which the hermeneutical methodology of the society is used – for example, in a Hindu society some of the *Upanishads* – but rather developing a *dynamically equivalent hermeneutical methodology* that incorporates as many acceptable elements as possible of the hermeneutical methodology that a particular Hindu society uses when it interprets the *Upanishads*. The theologically unacceptable content of the *Upanishads* will be disregarded in the same way that the New Testament writers disregarded the spurious elements of the hermeneutical methodology of *midrash* of their day – those elements that were both disallowed by God's Word as well as not receptor-oriented, like the interpretations that were popular at Qumran – nevertheless using many of the same elements of the common midrashic methodology, now in dynamic ways.[124]

Caldwell encourages using the methods of interpretation but not the theological content associated with those methods.

Jewish hermeneutic foundation. One of the primary aspects of Caldwell's argument for the use of ethnohermeneutics is his understanding of the New Testament authors' use of the Old Testament. He explains that the New Testament writers utilized Jewish cultural methods of interpretation when they interpreted the Old Testament. He states that these methods, which were culturally appropriate to Jewish audiences, are quite different from the grammatical-historical methods utilized by contemporary interpreters. Since the authors of Scripture used culturally appropriate methods of interpretation that were different from the grammatical-historical method, he argues that

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[123]It is important to note that Caldwell's position here is what differentiates him from some of the other authors already considered. It has already been shown that Sugirtharajah, Lee, and Yeo support using the theological content of indigenous systems to interpret and sometimes even critique the biblical content.

[124]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 282-83. As is evident from this quotation, Caldwell's understanding of how the New Testament authors interpreted the Old Testament is vital to his argument for the use of ethnohermeneutics. His position on this issue will be explained under the next subheading.

contemporary interpreters in other cultures ought to have the freedom to use their indigenous hermeneutical methods when they interpret Scripture.

Caldwell explains the significance of this argument,

> The New Testament writers, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, used their own culturally-relevant hermeneutical methods in communicating Old Testament truths to their particular audiences. As a result, the discipline of ethnohermeneutics places a renewed emphasis upon the New Testament's use of the Old Testament for the purpose of discovering some of the hermeneutical methods employed during the first century AD. By discovering these methods it can be shown that the hermeneutical milieu of that time period directly influenced the hermeneutical methods of the New Testament writers as they interpreted the Old Testament text for their various audiences. This implies that what the New Testament writers wrote is inspired, but not their specific hermeneutical methods. And this fact is terribly significant for all Bible interpreters today. Why? Because it means that no one hermeneutical method is inspired; each and every method simply emerges from its own unique hermeneutical milieu.[125]

Since the New Testament authors used hermeneutical methods that were influenced by their cultural situation, Caldwell argues interpreters today can use the indigenous methods that are appropriate to their context.

Caldwell also explains that the New Testament interpreters utilized three types of Jewish hermeneutical practices.[126] The first method they utilized was rabbinical *midrash*. *Midrash* is a set of exegetical principles developed by Jewish rabbis that sought to contemporize or adapt the text to the current situation.[127] Caldwell gives examples in his dissertation of *midrash* in the Old Testament, the intertestamental literature, and the New Testament. The New Testament examples include Jesus' teaching, Matthew's writing, Paul's preaching in Acts, Paul's writing in Romans, and John's writing in John

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[125]Caldwell, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics," 32.

[126]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 322-23.

[127]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 115-18; idem, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 322. Caldwell references New Testament scholar Richard Longenecker to define midrash, whose comments can be found in Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 37.

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One example that Caldwell gives of *midrash* in the New Testament is Romans 10:6-8. He states that throughout church history, interpreters like John Calvin have been confused by the way Paul references Deuteronomy 30:12-14 in this passage. Caldwell explains that what Paul is doing is utilizing Jewish hermeneutical techniques to apply the passage to his readers' contemporary context. He writes,

> Thus exegetes, like Calvin, need fret no longer concerning the supposed irregularities of Paul's use of the Deuteronomy passage here. The point in all this discussion of Romans 10:6-8 is not so much to accurately define the specific hermeneutical technique used by Paul in this instance – *pesher* vs. targum – but rather to show that in either case Paul in using the hermeneutical methodology of his day. Paul simply quotes the "that" of Deuteronomy (based upon both his and his audience's understanding of the common targumic interpretation of the "that") and interprets it in light of the "this" of Jesus Christ. The quotation of the Deuteronomy passage, in other words, is actualized and reinterpreted in light of the new context of Paul and those to whom he is writing the epistle. The present situation of his audience compels Paul to adapt this Old Testament quote for purposes of New Testament faith.[128]

Caldwell argues that Paul, in Romans 10:6-8, is referencing a targumic explanation of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 and then using midrashic methods to apply the text to the contemporary hearers.

Caldwell argues that the New Testament authors used a second Jewish hermeneutic method called the *pesher* technique.[129] *Pesher* interpretation was common in the Qumran community. This method used a "this is that" approach to interpretation, where the "this" is the present aspect that fulfills the "that" of the Old Testament. Caldwell explains that Jesus often used this method. One example he gives of this approach is found in Luke 4:16-21 where Jesus announces that he is the fulfillment of

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[128]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 225; idem, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 322-23.

[129]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 323.

Isaiah 61:1-2.

A third approach that Caldwell argues the New Testament authors used is allegory.[130] He notes that this approach had varying levels of influence among rabbis and is used less often in the New Testament. Two examples of allegory, however, in the New Testament are 1 Corinthians 9:9-12 and Galatians 4:21-31.

Caldwell summarizes the ways Jesus and the New Testament authors used the Old Testament:

> Consequently, in their "actualization" of the Old Testament Scripture, Jesus and the writers of the New Testament had little interest in attempting to discover the original context of the particular Old Testament text that they quoted. They, likewise, cared little if their interpretation of a particular Old Testament text varied from the use of that same text by another New Testament writer, or even with their own previous usage of that same text (as we saw in the case of Luke). Instead, the New Testament writers were more concerned with *the application of these texts to their present audiences* in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In other words, the needs of their audiences were the primary concern of the New Testament writers and the hermeneutical methodology of *midrash* allowed them to communicate their message accordingly.[131]

For Caldwell, then, it is not a problem that Jesus and the New Testament authors take Old Testament verses out of context, because they are simply using Jewish interpretive techniques to better communicate with their audiences. In fact, Caldwell argues that the primary interpretive technique of Jesus and the New Testament authors is that meaning is determined by the interpreter's context.[132]

To support his view of the New Testament use of the Old, Caldwell quotes

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[130]Ibid.

[131]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 249. Caldwell only references *midrash* as the technique that enabled Jesus and the other NT authors used to be receptor-oriented because in his dissertation he focused primarily on how they used *midrash* techniques. His later writings explain that the *pesher* and allegorical techniques also helped Jesus and the NT authors helped them to focus on their audiences.

[132]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 32.

New Testament scholar Richard Longenecker who explains,

> It is hardly surprising to find that the exegesis of the NT is heavily dependent upon Jewish procedural precedents, for, theoretically, one would expect a divine redemption that is worked out in the categories of a particular history – which is exactly what the Christian gospel claims to be – to express itself in all its various manifestations in terms of the concepts and models of that particular people and day.[133]

The problem with Longenecker's position, as Caldwell sees it, is that although Longenecker argues that the New Testament authors used Jewish hermeneutical practices, he also argues that those methods should not be duplicated by contemporary interpreters.[134]

Caldwell disagrees with Longenecker and argues, "Just as God used the cultural forms of the first century A.D. to communicate the message of the NT to a new generation of believers in Jesus Christ, so today we also need to recognize that God can use culturally relevant hermeneutical models to carry the gospel message within cultures and across cultures."[135] Since the New Testament authors used culturally relevant hermeneutical methods when they interpreted the Old Testament, Caldwell explains, contemporary interpreters should also use indigenous hermeneutical methods to communicate better with their audiences.

Receptor orientation. The goal of Caldwell's system is a more receptor-oriented message. He explains the missiological thrust of ethnohermeneutics:

> We must always keep in mind that the primary motivation behind ethnohermeneutics is missiological: to help a new generation of missionaries, pastors, and church planters make the gospel message as relevant as possible to other audiences so that more unreached people groups will be reached and more

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[133]Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 207; quoted in Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 323.

[134]Ibid., 218-20; quoted in Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 324.

[135]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 324.

individuals will acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.[136]

He argues that the use of ethnohermeneutics results in a more receptor-oriented presentation of the gospel. His hope is that as the gospel is presented in understandable ways, more and more people will put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

To this end, Caldwell adapts anthropological theories of communication to biblical interpretation. He explains what it means to be receptor-oriented: "To be receptor-oriented means to deliver a message that is *understandable within the frame of reference of the target audience*; it does not guarantee that the message will be *accepted* by that audience."[137] Caldwell's receptor-oriented hermeneutics, then, seeks to use the target audience's hermeneutic methods to determine and present a more understandable gospel message.

Returning to Jesus and the New Testament authors, Caldwell states there is no doubt that their communication style was receptor-oriented.[138] He explains,

> Since *midrash* was a part of the hermeneutical milieu of Jesus and the New Testament writers, it is not surprising that their receptor-oriented communication often employed this culturally appropriate hermeneutical methodology. This methodology helped their messages to be better understood, and accepted, by their first century A.D. audiences.[139]

The New Testament authors, as Caldwell understands them, practiced deep-level contextualization or deep-level ethnohermeneutics, using Jewish hermeneutical practices to better communicate with Jewish audiences.

With the goal of being receptor-oriented, Caldwell critiques the usefulness of the traditional two-step method, which he refers to as the historical-critical method,[140] in

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[136]Caldwell, "A Response to the Responses," 139-40.

[137]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 252.

[138]Ibid., 249.

[139]Ibid., 252.

[140]See Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 315 n2. Caldwell incorrectly equates the

cross-cultural contexts. After explaining that historical criticism is one of many helpful models for interpretation, he writes,

> At the same time, however, this two-step method based on historical criticism has often times proven itself woefully inadequate for interpreting Scripture in cross-cultural situations. While the two-step method of interpretation may indeed be a good model for interpreting Scripture in the Western world, it must be seen that this particular model has arisen out of Western philosophy after the Reformation and such has little relevance in cultures which do not have a similar Western philosophical background.[141]

Caldwell goes on to state that Western missionaries have exported their hermeneutical models along with the gospel. He explains,

> However, with the dominance of the Western church in worldwide missionary endeavors over the past two centuries came the dominance of this western hermeneutical method. So it was that Bible schools established by western missionaries had curriculums that resembled curriculums in the West, complete with an emphasis on Greek and Hebrew, etc., in a nutshell, historical criticism. It was just *assumed* that it was the proper approach. And the nationals who were trained by westerners, or who were trained in the West, simply learned this same western system. It was seldom, if ever, questioned.[142]

Forcing believers in other cultures to learn hermeneutic models influenced by Western philosophy, he argues, is another form of Western paternalism.[143] In Caldwell's view, if missionaries desire to adequately contextualize the gospel and present an understandable message, they must abandon their own Western hermeneutical assumptions and utilize

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historical-critical method with the grammatical historical method. James R. Whelchel critiques Caldwell at this point and notes, "A significant difference can be found, however, between the attitude of enlightenment rationalism which assumes the *cogito* is the judge of all, and that of evangelical grammatical historical hermeneutics which actively seeks the illumination of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate determiner of scriptural meaning. Historically evangelicals have been skeptical (and rightly so) of the rationalistic attitude of the enlightenment which elevated human reason above the authority of the scripture as interpreted to us through the mediation of the Holy Spirit." James R. Whelchel, "Ethnohermeneutics: A Response," *Journal of Asian Mission* 2 (2000): 127. The major difference between the historical-critical method and the grammatical historical approach is the former's skepticism over the supernatural events recorded in Scripture.

[141]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 315.

[142]Caldwell, "A Response to the Responses," 139-140.

[143]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 345.

indigenous hermeneutical methods.

Caldwell laments how seldom this deep level contextualization is done:

> Unfortunately, most contextualizers have not taken the time and effort necessary to really understand the prevalent hermeneutical methods at use in their target cultures, despite the fact that many of these cultures contain vast oral or written scriptures. Instead, for whatever reasons, most contextualizers have been content with using the hermeneutical methods (predominantly western historical criticism) that they were already familiar with when interpreting the Bible and making it relevant for their various cultures. Consequently, this surface level contextualization has been an incomplete contextualization.[144]

Good contextualizers, he argues, are receptor-oriented, and being receptor-oriented means being aware of and utilizing the target group's traditional methods of interpretation.

Doing such contextualization, Caldwell explains, requires revising the two horizon view of interpretation to include a third horizon.[145] The two horizon view, proposed by Anthony Thiselton, involves fusing the original Bible culture and the interpreter's culture. Caldwell proposes adding a third horizon, the receptor culture, to this process. He explains,

> In a cross-cultural situation, the attempt to fuse the various horizons is extremely complicated. For communication to happen, there should be the fusion of *three* horizons, a *tri-fusion* as it were. Once again, the burden for this tri-fusion rests upon the interpreter. Aside from fusing with the Original Bible Culture, the interpreter must also try to fuse with the *Receptor's Culture*.[146]

Interpretation, Caldwell states, involves familiarity with the culture of the biblical text, his own culture, and the culture of the recipients. He argues that good interpreters will

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[144]Caldwell, "A Response to the Responses," 138.

[145]Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics," 271; Larry Caldwell, "Cross-Cultural Bible Interpretation: A View From the Field," *Phronesis* 3 (1996): 21-24. Caldwell's proposal here builds off the insights of Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 33-58; Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 188-90; D. A. Carson, "Church and Mission: Reflections on Contextualization and the Third Horizon," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker), 17-20.

[146]Caldwell, "Cross-Cultural Bible Interpretation," 21-22.

fuse these three horizons to ensure effective communication from the interpreter to the receptors.

Critique. There are several positive aspects of Caldwell's proposal. First, his commitment to Scripture as the authoritative Word of God is a clear positive. The fact that he sees Scripture as authoritative and the final word on faith and practice of the church is helpful, and those with an evangelical perspective will agree with Caldwell on this issue. In fact, Caldwell's stance on this issue sets him apart from some of the other authors considered in this study who have placed Scripture on common ground with other sacred texts.

A second positive of Caldwell's proposal is his commitment to missions. Again, unlike some of the other authors already considered, Caldwell's aim is missiological – he desires more of the world's people groups to come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. His proposal is not solely an academic exercise but is born out of the efforts to reach people with the gospel. Although his proposal has its weaknesses, his missiological aim is commendable.

Third, his commitment to being culturally sensitive is another positive. Caldwell displays a strong desire to study the target culture of the people he is trying to reach and to use his knowledge of the culture to communicate the gospel message in more understandable ways. His desire to study the thought processes and the worldview of a people strengthens the contextualization process.[147]

Caldwell's commitment to learn the indigenous hermeneutic systems of a specific culture is equally positive. His critique is accurate that Western missionaries often fail to consider the hermeneutical assumptions of their target group. He is correct

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[147]Caldwell, "A Response to the Responses," 139; idem, "Towards an Ethnohermeneutical Model for a Lowland Filipino Context," 178-80.

that when missionaries "do their homework"[148] and learn a culture's indigenous hermeneutical methods, it aids the communication process.

Finally, Caldwell's critique of the two-horizon model of interpretation is well stated. Caldwell is correct to note that in cross-cultural and intercultural situations interpreters must handle three cultures, including the culture of the target group. His discussion on this issue is helpful to those who seek to communicate God's Word with people of a different culture.

While there are some positive aspects of Caldwell's proposal, there are also some troubling aspects. First, his perspective on culture is too positive. His God-above-but-through culture position leaves out the critical God-against culture perspective. Every culture has some qualities that are sinful and contradict the clear commands of God's Word. Missionaries and pastors need to recognize that while God can use some aspects of culture, he is against those aspects that are sinful and in violation of his Word. Cultural relativity may be applied in amoral areas of culture, but in those areas that Scripture addresses, biblical authority must take precedence over culture.

Caldwell's positive view of culture leads him to propose that God works through the hermeneutical processes of a culture. In a response to one of Caldwell's articles, Daniel Tappeiner comments, "If by 'works through' Caldwell means only that contextualizing is useful in the missiological task, he is on solid ground. If he means to say that God uses ethnohermeneutics to discover 'what it meant,' he has established hermeneutical pluralism."[149] Since Tappeiner's critique, Caldwell has clarified that he is arguing the second, that proper contextualization requires the utilization of indigenous

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[148]Caldwell, "A Response to the Responses," 139.

[149]Daniel Tappeiner, "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call to Ethnohermeneutics," *Journal of Asian Mission* 1 (1999): 227.

hermeneutical methods. Such an approach allows the standards of a culture to determine the teaching of Scripture, elevating cultural relativity above biblical authority.

Caldwell is quick to respond that he is not open to hermeneutical relativity and does not believe that every hermeneutical method or every interpretation is valid.[150] He does believe that there is more than one valid way of interpreting Scripture and more than one meaning for any given text of Scripture. Each proposed meaning, he argues, must be evaluated based on the overall thrust of Scripture.[151] Nonetheless, Tappeiner's critique remains a valid one. Allowing each culture to determine its own rules of biblical interpretation is hermeneutical relativity.

A second critique of Caldwell's proposal is that it blurs the distinction between meaning and significance. Caldwell, like Ricoeur, argues that the contemporary context, the interpreter's context, determines meaning. He states that evangelicals should move away from the one meaning/many applications approach to a many meanings/many applications approach to interpretation. Some evangelicals have adopted this approach, and like Caldwell, they see the boundary of possible meanings as determined by theology or by the rest of Scripture.[152]

The problem with this view is that it takes right interpretation to arrive at right theology, and a multiplicity of meanings leads to a multiplicity of theologies.[153] Meaning

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[150]Caldwell, "A Response to the Responses," 144.

[151]Ibid.

[152]The approach known as Theological Interpretation of Scripture encourages this view of interpretation. For a brief description and critique of this position, see Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 313-20 or Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation," in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14 (2010): 28-37.

[153]Several others have stated this same critique of Caldwell's proposal. For their critiques, see Tappeiner, "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call," 226; Daniel L. Espiritu, "Ethnohermeneutics or Oikohermeneutics? Questioning the Necessity of Caldwell's Hermeneutics," *Journal of Asian Mission* 3 (2001): 278; James R. Whelchel, "Ethnohermeneutics," 131-32; Henry Holloman, "Response by Henry Holloman to Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics: Re-Evaluating New Testament Hermeneutical Methods for Intercultural Bible Interpreters Today by Larry W. Caldwell" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the

is not determined by the contemporary context but by the original author. The contemporary context determines what significance the author's meaning has in the interpreter's life, but it does not determine meaning itself. It is for this reason that evangelicals have long held, and should continue to hold, to the one meaning/many applications theory of interpretation. Allowing the interpreter's context to determine meaning, as Caldwell proposes, blurs the distinction between meaning and significance and subverts the original author's intent.

Third, Caldwell's understanding of the New Testament use of the Old Testament is inaccurate. Stating that Jesus and the New Testament authors paid little attention to the original context, as Caldwell does, is inaccurate. Numerous scholars have rejected this view.[154] One extensive reference work that seeks to explain how each Old Testament quotation and allusion is referenced in accordance with the original context in mind is the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.[155] A careful analysis of each Old Testament citation will reveal that Jesus and the New Testament authors respected the Old Testament contexts.

In one article, Caldwell references a Darrell Bock article in which Bock lists

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Evangelical Missiological Society, Wheaton, IL, 1988), 1.

[154]One of the primary opponents of such a view is Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. For his arguments against this view, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001); idem, "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. K. S. Kantzer (Nashville: Nelson, 1978), 123-41. Other scholars who have critiqued such a view include G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?" *Themelios* 14 (1989): 89-96; C. H. Dodd, "The Old Testament in the New," in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 167-81; I. Howard Marshall, "An Assessment of Recent Developments," in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-21.

[155]G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

four schools of understanding the New Testament use of the Old Testament.[156] Responding to Caldwell, Henry Holloman notes that three of these four schools argue that the New Testament authors used the Old Testament in accordance with the original context.[157] His point is that the evidence favors this view, and evangelicals have correctly recognized that evidence. To support his statement that this view is the standard among evangelicals, Holloman references Article XVIII from *The Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics*: "We affirm that the Bible's own interpretation of itself is always correct, never deviating from, but rather elucidating, the single meaning of the inspired text."[158]

Consider Romans 10:6-8, which Caldwell argues is evidence of Paul's use of *midrash*. Mark Seifrid provides a cogent critique of those who claim these verses display Jewish interpretive techniques:

> However, certain factors caution against assigning too great a significance to similarities in form between Paul and *midrashic* interpretation or Qumran *pesher*. First, it is Paul's confession of Christ that determines his use of Scripture, not an interpretive technique. Second, material differences set him apart from the *pesher* texts that the form of his citation here approximates. The Habakkuk *pesher* and other similar writings actualize the text by interpreting it in terms of contemporary persons and events. Paul differs in that he interprets scriptural texts as having reference to persons and events in the past. That is already clear from the broad sweep of his use of Scripture. Even in this context this perspective is apparent. Paul already has spoken of the "goal" of the law, introducing the category of time. He likewise introduces the message of "the righteousness of faith" with a telling adverb: it speaks "in this manner" – that is, in the same manner as Deuteronomy. The prior text retains a certain independence. In a related way, furthermore, unlike Qumran, Paul's interpretation is not so much a contemporizing as it is eschatological. His purpose is to explain what Scripture is *finally* about, in the decisive context of God's saving work in Christ. Third, the explanatory expression "that is" was commonly used in Hellenistic rhetoric and in itself cannot be regarded

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[156]Caldwell, "Third Horizon Ethnohermeneutics," 321-22.

[157]Holloman, "Response," 2.

[158]"The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," 881.

> as distinctively Jewish. Paul is writing primarily for Gentile readers, who would have had little problem recognizing his interpretation of the text.[159]

Many factors in Paul's use of Deuteronomy argue against his use of *midrash* or *pesher* methods. Paul respected the Old Testament context of the verses he referenced, and a thorough study of other Old Testament citations will reveal the same.

A fourth critique against Caldwell is his position that the grammatical historical method of interpretation is an outgrowth of Western philosophy.[160] More than this two-step method being born out of Western philosophy, it has been born out of the church thinking critically about the correct and incorrect ways to understand the message of the original authors. Although the allegorical method was popular in the early church, some interpreters continued to argue for a literal reading, respecting the intent of the original authors.[161] During the Reformation, it was not Western culture that caused the Reformers to question the allegorical method, but it was a desire for more faithful interpretation of the Scripture. In fact, allegory *was* their cultural mode of interpretation, but the Reformers rejected those practices because of the heretical practices that developed as a result of those interpretational techniques.

Tappeiner critiques Caldwell on this point. He writes,

> In any proper hermeneutic the text is "king," i.e., "what it meant" is fundamental, foundational, and indispensable to a proper understanding of "what it means" now . . . . *There really is only one valid way in which "what it meant" can*

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[159]Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 654.

[160]Technically, Caldwell argues that the historical-critical approach is a development of Western philosophy. In one sense, he is correct since the historical-critical perspective is skeptical of the supernatural events recorded in Scripture. Caldwell, though, equates the grammatical historical method with the historical-critical method, and I am critiquing the argument that the grammatical historical is a Western method.

[161]The Antiochean fathers were among those who held to a literal interpretation of Scripture. These included Lucian (A.D. 240-312), Diodore of Tarsus (d. ca. A.D. 394), John Crysostom (A.D. 347-407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (A.D. 350-428), and Theodoret (A.D. 393-457). For more information, see Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 89. Tappeiner has also made this point in his critique of Caldwell. For his comments, see Tappeiner, "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call," 228.

> *be discovered*. The grammatical historical method is simply the developmental result of a process of discovering explicitly, the laws which govern the proper and valid recovery of "what it meant." . . . *Therefore the grammatical historical method is not "western," but "human" and "universal."* It is true that God sovereignly used western culture and its preferred thought processes to develop explicitly the laws of valid interpretation of "what it meant." That does not, however, make it "western" or "ethnohermeneutical" any more than the conclusions of Nicea of Chalcedon are "western" simply because they use the most accurate and precise language available to them – Greek.[162]

Tappeiner is correct that the grammatical historical method, though developed in the West, is not a western approach. It is the method the church has developed that best determines the intent of the original authors. It is a universal, objective method through which believers can understand "what it meant," and subsequently, "what it means."

A final negative aspect of Caldwell's proposal is his desire to utilize indigenous hermeneutical methods. As has already been noted, Caldwell's emphasis on studying a culture's hermeneutical methods is helpful to the missionary task. Utilizing those methods to arrive at the message the missionary communicates is another matter entirely. Caldwell's deep level contextualization or deep level ethnohermeneutics where the indigenous hermeneutical methods are utilized is over-contextualization.

In the end, Caldwell's system must be rejected by evangelical interpreters. Caldwell's system is reader-centered and over-contextualized. While his commitment to study the indigenous hermeneutical practices of the target audience is a positive, his commitment to utilize those methods in the communication of the gospel is dangerous. Such a position opens the door to hermeneutical relativity. Moreover, his understanding of the New Testament use of the Old does not reflect the biblical data. For these reasons, his system must be rejected.

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[162]Tappeiner, "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call," 229-30. Emphasis Tappeiner's.

Others

There are several other authors who have written in brief concerning cross-cultural hermeneutics. These authors will be examined individually and then critiqued as a whole.

Enoch Wan. Enoch Wan is a Professor of Intercultural Studies at Western Seminary. He is ethnically Chinese and has written several articles on issues related to ethnohermeneutics and contextualization.

Wan defines ethnohermeneutics as

> the principles and procedures by which the interpreter determines the meaning of the Holy Scripture, inspired by the Primary Author (triune God within theoculture) and inscripturated through the secondary authors (human agents of varied historio-culturo-linguistic contexts of homoculture) for the recipients (of various historio-culturo-linguistic contexts).[163]

Important to Wan is the understanding of God communicating to humans through the words of the human authors of Scripture. Since the world contains a variety of human cultures, ethnohermeneutics involves interpreters of Scripture wrestling with how to understand the message of Scripture within these various cultural contexts.

Wan explains that this ethnohermeneutic process is a difficult one. He writes, "There remains the distance and difference between the Author, writers and interpreters/recipients of the Scriptures due to the different multiple-contexts involved; there is the inevitable difficulty of ethnohermeneutics for all Christians of all times."[164] Since the process of interpretation involves individuals from multiple cultural contexts, it is a process that is best done in community with others.

Wan states that in general evangelicals agree that the historical-critical method

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[163]Enoch Wan, "Ethnohermeneutics: Its Necessity and Difficulty for All Christians of All Times," ETS Microform, ETS-4772 (1995), 1.

[164]Ibid.

is the best model for interpretation.[165] He then explains that this method is not without its weaknesses. As Wan sees it, the weaknesses of the historical-critical method arise from the unchecked presuppositions of interpreters that use this approach. One of these presuppositions that Wan critiques is the understanding of a plain meaning or only one meaning to any given text. Wan describes such a perspective as "questionable."[166]

The benefit of ethnohermeneutics, Wan writes, is that interpretation done in the context of multiple cultures prevents individualistic heresy.[167] The presence of interpreters from multiple cultural contexts forces each interpreter to look beyond his own cultural biases. Wan explains that such an approach produces an interpretation of Scripture that is biblically based and scripturally sound.[168]

Paul Hiebert. The last chapter examined Hiebert's explanation concerning the history of contextualization.[169] Here his views on the role of hermeneutics in the contextualization process are explained.

Hiebert critiques the views of Kraft and Caldwell and calls their proposals "uncritical contextualization."[170] He writes that

> in applying ethnoscience to missions there is the danger of letting the context determine the meaning of biblical texts. The meanings of scriptural passages become what people believe them to be, not a communication from the outside. Ultimately this leads us to an uncritical contextualization that is willing to bend the

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[165]Ibid., 8-9. Like Caldwell, Wan groups the historical-critical method together with the grammatical historical method.

[166]Ibid., 9.

[167]Ibid., 10.

[168]Ibid.

[169]See pp. 63-71 in this dissertation.

[170]Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 97-98. What Hiebert refers to as "uncritical contextualization," I have called over-contextualization.

> gospel to fit each culture and to neglect the prophetic call for all cultures, societies, and peoples to be transformed by the power of God.[171]

While ethnoscience has made many positive contributions to the missionary task, the uncritical contextualization that is characteristic of its approach is ultimately problematic.

In light of these weaknesses, Hiebert proposes a critical contextualization process.[172] This process begins with exegesis of the culture. Local leaders and the missionary uncritically gather information about traditional beliefs and customs. Hiebert explains that the goal of this part of the process is simply to understand the former beliefs and practices.

The second step in Hiebert's process is the exegesis of Scripture and the hermeneutical bridge.[173] During this step, the pastor or missionary leads the people in a study of certain passages of Scripture that relate to the cultural practices in question. This step is also a chance for the pastor or missionary to train the people in the correct ways to read and interpret Scripture. Hiebert explains,

> New believers have little knowledge of the Scriptures and often cannot read. They are dependent upon the missionary for an understanding of what the Scriptures mean, and for guidance in dealing with the questions they face. It is the responsibility of the missionary not only to teach the people the Scriptures, but also how to study the Scriptures for themselves, and to apply them to their own lives. As they mature, he or she must make it clear that they must be obedient to the voice of God as it comes to them through the Word of God, not as it comes to the missionary nor even to the church that sent the missionary.[174]

While Hiebert does not advocate a specific method of interpretation, he does

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[171]Ibid., 98.

[172]Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987): 109; See also Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 88. Less than being a hermeneutical process for the interpretation of any and every passage of Scripture, Hiebert's process is more focused on contextualization and the redemption of specific cultural practices in light of the community's recent commitment to Christ. It is for this reason that his proposal begins with a study of culture – one must first study the culture in order to find out those areas of the culture that are inconsistent with the Christian gospel.

[173]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 109-10.

[174]Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 215.

emphasize the church as the hermeneutical community.[175] He explains that this community guards against errant hermeneutical practices:

> Exegesis and hermeneutics are not the rights of individuals but of the church as an exegetical and hermeneutical community. And that community includes not only the saints within our cultural context, and even the saints outside our culture, but also the saints down through history. To become a Christian is to become a part of a new history, and that history must be learned.[176]

Hiebert stresses the role of each group of believers in joining the larger church community. He also emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding each community's interpretations. He writes, "We must never forget that the same Holy Spirit who helps us to understand the Scriptures, is also interpreting it to believers in other cultures."[177]

The final two steps in Hiebert's critical contextualization process involve the critical response of the believers and the adoption of the new contextualized practice.[178] As the believers examine their cultural practices in light of the teaching of Scripture, they may change, reject, or modify those practices. He states, "Here cultures are viewed as both good and evil, not simply as neutral vehicles for understanding the world."[179] Many aspects of culture, Hiebert explains, must be changed by the objective truth of God's Word.[180]

Daniel Tappeiner. Daniel Tappeiner was a Pentecostal theologian who served as a missionary in the Philippines. His article on cross-cultural hermeneutics was written

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[175]Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 183; idem, "Critical Contextualization," 110.

[176]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 108.

[177]Paul G. Hiebert, "An Introduction to Mission Anthropology," in *Crucial Dimensions in World Evangelization*, ed. Arthur Glasser et al. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976), 59-60.

[178]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 110.

[179]Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 29.

[180]Paul G. Hiebert, "The Missionary as Mediator of Global Theologizing," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 306.

in response to an article written by Larry Caldwell.[181]

Tappeiner rejects the possibility of multiple hermeneutical methods.[182] He explains that interpreters can distinguish between the meaning and application of a text by determining "what it meant" and "what it means."[183] He writes, "There really is only one valid way in which 'what it meant' can be discovered. The grammatical historical method is simply the developmental result of a process of discovering explicitly the laws which govern the proper and valid recovery of 'what it meant.'"[184] The grammatical historical method, Tappeiner argues, is the only proper way, in any culture, for determining the meaning of any text.

Tappeiner states that when applying the meaning of a text to a specific context, a number of different approaches may be utilized.[185] He argues that even local indigenous hermeneutic or communication methods can be used to convey the contemporary application of that historical meaning. He writes that "there is only one theology (one supra-cultural truth), but many ways, culturally sensitive, in which to expound and communicate that one theology."[186] Contextualization, he explains, is the application of the timeless truth of Scripture to the contemporary context.

Daniel Espiritu. Daniel Espiritu is a Filipino Pentecostal minister who teaches Philosophy in the Philippines. Like Tappeiner, Espiritu wrote his article on

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[181]Tappeiner, "A Response to Caldwell's Trumpet Call," 223-32.

[182]Ibid., 226.

[183]Ibid.

[184]Ibid., 229-30.

[185]Ibid., 226, 229.

[186]Ibid., 226-27.

cross-cultural hermeneutics in response to Caldwell.[187]

Espiritu's proposal is for what he terms "oikohermeneutics." He explains that the work of missions will require the entire household of God praying, talking, and working together to reach the world.[188] His proposal is similar to Hiebert's as he sees hermeneutics not as the role of an isolated believer or community but as belonging to the church. Likewise, he argues that the theology of the local church needs to be worked out in communion with the universal church.

Espiritu argues that Caldwell's proposals and many of the hermeneutic methods of believers in Asia are characterized by postmodernism and cultural relativism.[189] He laments the current situation in the Philippines, where preachers use sermons full of allegories and folk illustrations, and he wonders if Caldwell's call for the use of indigenous hermeneutic systems might actually delay the work of missions in Asia.[190]

Espiritu states that given the basic evangelical worldview, interpreters with this perspective must use caution in how they handle the text. He writes that "we cannot engage in an 'endless play' with the biblical texts."[191] He also states that the grammatical historical approach is not so much a Western approach as it is an outgrowth of the evangelical worldview:

> The evangelical insistence on doing rigorous exegesis to get at the probably intended meaning of biblical texts, replacing allegorizing, spiritualizing, and moralizing, is not so much the out-growth of western worldview as it is the

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[187]Espiritu, "Ethnohermeneutics or Oikohermeneutics?"

[188]Ibid., 281.

[189]Ibid., 272.

[190]Ibid., 270, 279.

[191]Ibid., 278.

inevitable offshoot of evangelical presuppositions and worldview.[192]

Grammatical historical, then, is the natural method of interpretation given the evangelical understanding of truth.

Critique. There are a number of positives in these approaches. The insistence of Tappeiner and Espiritu on the grammatical historical approach is helpful to reinforce the common sense way of interpreting Scripture. Wan's and Hiebert's arguments for believers to be involved in interpretation with believers from other cultures and with believers from the history of the church guard against syncretism and idiosyncratic interpretations and theologies. Hiebert's critical contextualization is a helpful process for evaluating cultural practices in light of the teaching of Scripture.

The weakness of these proposals is that they fall short of proposing a full hermeneutical system. Although the authors provide many insights into how cross-cultural interpretation should be done, they do not fully develop the specifics of how to determine the author's meaning and apply it to the contemporary context in intercultural and cross-cultural contexts. It is because of this lack of specificity that chapter 4 proposes such an approach.

Summary

A broad spectrum of ethnohermeneutic approaches exist. Some approaches, like those of Sugirtharajah, Lee, and Yeo, are pluralistic in approach and seek to place Scripture on level-ground with sacred texts of other religious traditions. Other approaches, like that of Caldwell, argue that missionaries and indigenous leaders respect the authority of Scripture while also utilizing indigenous hermeneutic approaches. Ultimately, evangelicals must reject each of these approaches because of their subversion of authorial intent.

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[192]Ibid.

Still other proposals by Wan, Hiebert, Tappeiner, and Espiritu seek to uphold authorial intent while encouraging indigenous interpreters to dialogue and learn from biblical interpreters in other cultural contexts. While these views have much to offer evangelicals, it remains for someone to take their views and present a fully developed cross-cultural hermeneutic model that blends biblical authority with cultural sensitivity.

CHAPTER 4

A CORRECTIVE APPROACH TO CROSS-CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS THAT MAINTAINS AUTHORIAL INTENT

Chapter 3 examined several views on cross-cultural hermeneutics that included postcolonial and vernacular hermeneutics, cross-textual hermeneutics, intertextual hermeneutics, and ethnohermeneutics.[1] While each of these views offered some positive contributions in terms of valuing the target culture and communicating in culturally appropriate ways, these views also contained many negative aspects that make them unsuitable for evangelicals.

Chapter 3 also examined several other views, in which the authors are more cautious in their approach to cross-cultural hermeneutics.[2] These authors encourage native believers to be in dialogue with believers in other cultures and to learn from the lessons of church history. Several of these authors argue that the grammatical historical method is the most natural method of interpretation in any cultural context. The weakness of these views was that none of the authors develops a complete model for cross-cultural hermeneutics.

This chapter addresses this need by proposing a model for cross-cultural hermeneutics that maintains authorial intent and is sensitive to culture. To accomplish this task, I first examine some basic hermeneutical guidelines. I then show how the grammatical historical process can be applied cross-culturally.

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[1]See pp. 74-120 in this dissertation.

[2]See pp. 120-27 in this dissertation.

Hermeneutical Guidelines

Before stating principles that make the grammatical historical method of exegesis applicable cross-culturally, it is helpful to make some statements about the principles that guide this model of interpretation. Chapter 2 showed that throughout the twentieth century hermeneutics has been in a state of crisis, with a growing amount of subjectivity guiding the interpretation process.[3] The traditional understanding of interpretation as the pursuit of the original author's intention was under attack by those who wish to give the reader greater authority over the determination of the written Word's meaning.

This section argues that in cross-cultural interpretation, interpreters must return to the traditional view of interpretation, namely an author-oriented approach through the use of the grammatical historical method. To do so, I present arguments for an author-oriented approach, the basis for the meaning/significance distinction, responses to some of the criticisms of this approach, and the relationship between this approach and the grammatical historical method.

Explanation of an Author-Oriented Approach

Every written act of communication contains three elements: the author, the text, and the reader. Robert Stein explains that of these three elements, the traditional understanding of interpretation viewed the author as the determiner of meaning:

> Who or what determines the meaning of a text, code, message, writing? At the beginning of the twentieth century the general assumption was that the author was the determiner of a text's meaning. The text meant what the author of the text consciously willed to convey by the words he or she had written. Texts were understood as a form of communication, and in communication we seek to understand what the author of that communication seeks to convey. Thus, if in a Bible study we were engaged in a study of Paul's letter to the Romans, and by some miracle the apostle Paul entered the room and explained what he meant by the

[3]See pp. 23-42 in this dissertation.

> passage under consideration, this would settle the issue. Our goal was to understand what the author, that is, Paul, meant by this passage, and we now know what he meant.[4]

Chapter 2 explained that this understanding of the author as the determiner of a text's meaning was under attack in the twentieth century by those who wished to shift the locus of authority to the text or to the reader.[5]

The traditional view, though, has not been without contemporary proponents. One of those proponents is E. D. Hirsch, whose *Validity in Interpretation* has become for evangelicals the standard defense of an author-oriented approach to interpretation.[6] Hirsch argues that the meaning of a text should be defined according to the author's intention. He refers to this traditional view of interpretation as a "sensible belief,"[7] and states that when this view was rejected, "no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of interpretation."[8]

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[4]Robert H. Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 451.

[5]Again, see pp. 23-42 in this dissertation.

[6]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Numerous evangelical authors have noted the importance of Hirsch's work to their understanding of hermeneutics. Among those are Stein, "The Benefits of An Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 453; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 74; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 32; Elliott E. Johnson, "Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 411; Scott A. Blue, "The Hermeneutic of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Its Impact on Expository Preaching: Friend or Foe?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 253. It should also be noted that Hirsch revised his views on this issue in his later publications by stating that his meaning/significance distinction is reserved for original meaning, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976); idem, "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 202-25. For a discussion of the impact of this change, see Blue, "The Hermeneutic of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Its Impact on Expository Preaching"; Dale Leschert, "A Change of Meaning, Not a Change of Mind: The Clarification of a Suspected Defection in the Hermeneutical Theory of E. D. Hirsch Jr.," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 35 (1992). Nonetheless, Hirsch's initial work remains a helpful defense of the author as determiner of meaning.

[7]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 1.

[8]Ibid., 3.

Hirsch explains that the author's intention is the objective aspect of meaning because of its determinacy and reproducibility.[9] An author's meaning is determinate because in the process of writing the author submits himself to the norms of language. Hirsch explains that "the norms of language exert a powerful influence and impose an unavoidable limitation on the wills of both the author and interpreter."[10] Words cannot mean anything that an author or interpreter desires them to mean.

Hirsch likewise explains that the determinacy of verbal meaning requires authorial intent. Words do not mean anything in and of themselves, but it takes some intelligent will, what Hirsch calls a "discriminating force," to make it mean one thing and not mean something else. He writes, "That discriminating force must involve an act of will, since unless one particular complex of meaning is willed (no matter how 'rich' and 'various' it might be), there would be no distinction between what an author does mean by a word sequence and what he could mean. Determinacy of verbal meaning requires an act of will."[11]

In the same way, an important concept for biblical interpretation is that specific genres of literature contain certain rules of interpretation. When authors write a piece of literature in a certain style, they expect readers to interpret their words according to the norms of that type of literature. Hirsch explains, "The norms of language are neither uniform nor stable, but vary with the particular sort of utterance that is to be interpreted."[12]

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[9]Ibid., 26. For further explanation of this aspect of Hirsch's argument, See also Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 74-75; Blue, "The Hermeneutic of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Its Impact on Expository Preaching, 255.

[10]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 27.

[11]Ibid., 47.

[12]Ibid., 31.

Stein explains this concept with the phrase "playing by the rules."[13] He states that a soccer fan attending his first football or basketball game would be confused unless someone explained to him the rules of the game. He then states how this analogy applies to biblical interpretation:

> In a similar way there are different "game" rules involved in the interpretation of the different kinds of biblical literature. The author has played his "game," has sought to convey his meaning, under the rules covering the particular literary form he used. Unless we know those rules, we will almost certainly misinterpret his meaning. If we interpret a parable as if it were a narrative, or if we interpret poetry as if it were narrative, we will err. Similarly, if we interpret a narrative such as the resurrection of Jesus as a parable, we will also err.[14]

These genre specific "rules" confine both an author and interpreter.

Hirsch writes that the important point here is the sharability of these norms of language.[15] He explains, "Determinacy is a necessary attribute of any sharable meaning, since an indeterminacy cannot be shared: if a meaning were indeterminate, it would have no boundaries, no self-identity, and therefore could have no identity with a meaning entertained by someone else."[16] It is the sharability of these norms of language, given their determinate nature that provides any sort of validity and objectivity in the process of interpretation. Due to its sharability, then, authorial intent is the ground of interpretation.[17]

The concept of reproducibility is another important aspect of Hirsch's argument that authorial intent is the objective aspect of meaning. Hirsch writes,

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[13]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75-76.

[14]Ibid., 76.

[15]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 31.

[16]Ibid., 44.

[17]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 74-75. Vanhoozer here is explaining Hirsch's arguments for authorial intent as the guiding principle for how one should define meaning.

"Reproducibility is a quality of verbal meaning that makes interpretation possible: if meaning were not reproducible, it could not be actualized by someone else and therefore could not be understood or interpreted."[18] Although he recognizes that reproducing the author's meaning is not always easy, he argues that it is possible, and thus, it provides objectivity to interpretation.[19]

Kevin Vanhoozer explains the concept of reproducibility by describing it as the goal of interpretation. He writes, "An interpreter grasps the meaning of a text when he or she experiences sameness of content (or object) despite differences of context."[20] Hirsch states in a similar way, "All valid interpretation of every sort is founded on the re-cognition of what an author meant."[21] The reproduction of the author's meaning is the goal of the interpretive process.

There are several benefits to an author-oriented approach to interpretation. First, this approach gives validity to interpretation. Hirsch explains, "To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to interpretation."[22] If the author does not determine the meaning of some writing, then no interpretation of that writing can be more correct than any other. Vanhoozer explains Hirsch on this point, "He is saying that unless you make the author's intended meaning the norm for interpretation, you will have no reliable means for discriminating between valid and invalid interpretations – between exegesis (what one gets out of the text) and eisegesis (what one puts into texts.)"[23]

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[18]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 44.

[19]Ibid., 235-36.

[20]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 76.

[21]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 126.

[22]Ibid., 5.

[23]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 76.

A second benefit of this approach is that it is the common sense approach to interpretation. After stating that this issue of meaning is the major issue in biblical scholarship today, Robert Stein explains that communication between two people cannot take place unless the reader assumes that the meaning of a text is what the author intended it to mean:

> One cannot have a meaningful conversation or even a serious debate about this issue without assuming [that an author determines the meaning of a text]. During the present reading of this article, you, the reader, have been seeking to understand what I, the author, meant by the words I have written. Probably it has not even entered into your mind that the words I have written should be treated independently of my intention or that you should give your own meaning to these words. Communication between two people can only take place if both parties seek to understand what the other person means by their words.[24]

For meaningful communication to take place between two parties, the author must be the determiner of meaning.

Robert Plummer gives an example of what would happen if an author no longer determined the meaning of what he has written or said:

> If your friend says, "I would like a hamburger for lunch," and you respond, "Why is it that you hate Caucasians?" the person would rightly respond, "Are you crazy? Did you not hear what I said?" Any act of communication can progress only on the assumption that someone is trying to convey meaning to us and we then respond to that meaning intended by the speaker or writer.[25]

When this principle is rejected, the process of communication between the author and the reader breaks down.

Chapter 2 revealed that some modern theorists like Paul Ricoeur challenge the notion that the same rules apply to both the spoken and written word.[26] In light of this critique, Vanhoozer develops his understanding of authorial intent with reference to

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[24]Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 455.

[25]Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 130.

[26]See pp. 35-36 in this dissertation.

communication. He explains that a text is "a communicative act of a communicative agent fixed by writing."[27] He argues that it is an author whose communicative action determines the nature and meaning of that text.[28]

A third benefit of the author-oriented approach to interpretation is that it is the hermeneutical methodology that best fits the evangelical worldview. Robert Stein argues that an author-oriented approach to interpretation is the only approach that corresponds with the evangelical commitment to the inspiration of Scripture.[29] He states that it is not the ink and paper but the meaning of the Bible that is inspired, and that meaning is what the author consciously willed to convey by the words he chose.

Daniel Espiritu argues similarly in his article, "Ethnohermeneutics or Oikohermeneutics." He states that contemporary, reader-driven, or culturally-driven methods of interpretation are "a manifestation of the spirit of the age" – the spirit of postmodernism.[30] He goes on to state that the evangelical presupposition concerning the nature of truth, namely that it is objective, requires evangelical interpreters not to "engage in an 'endless play' with the biblical texts."[31] Instead, they must utilize methods that enable them to determine God's message that he communicated through the human

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[27]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 225. Vanhoozer departs from Hirsch at this point. Where Hirsch defines meaning as "an affair of consciousness," Vanhoozer defines it according to communicative action. Vanhoozer states that this model has two advantages over Hirsch's. First, that communicative action, unlike consciousness, is publicly accessible. Second, that communicative action is fixed in writing and history, and thus, it has determinate meaning. It is also important to note that when Hirsch speaks of "an affair of consciousness," he means something different than Schleiermacher's attempt to analyze the psyche of the author. While Hirsch and Vanhoozer depart here in terms of their understanding of the nature of the text, for this discussion it is salient that both ground their theories in authorial intent. For more on this difference, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 225; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 23, 48-49.

[28]Ibid., 228-30.

[29]Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 456.

[30]Daniel L. Espiritu, "Ethnohermeneutics or Oikohermeneutics: Questioning the Necessity of Caldwell's Hermeneutics," *Journal of Asian Mission* 3 (2001): 272.

[31]Ibid., 278.

authors in the words they chose.

Likewise, an author-oriented approach best fits the evangelical commitment to the authority of Scripture. Wayne Grudem explains the evangelical understanding of the authority of Scripture: "The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God."[32] Earl Radmacher explains that if the author's meaning is lost so is the authority of Scripture: "With the evaporation of the meaning of the author goes the authority of that author. Thus, it is of little profit to hold to the inerrancy of the original writings while at the same time banishing the author as the sole determiner of meanings."[33]

Vanhoozer makes a similar argument when he writes,

> How does such authorial laryngitis affect biblical authority? The answer is brief but massive in its implications: *biblical authority is undone*. The Undoers[34] effectively strip the Bible of any stable meaning so that it cannot state a fact, issue a command, or make a promise . . . . Finally, biblical authority is undermined by the instability of meaning because, if nothing specific is said, the text cannot call for any specific response.[35]

If the meaning of the biblical text is not defined by the author, then there is no biblical

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[32]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 73. Grudem is quick to note this definition does not imply a dictation theory, nor does it imply a sharp distinction between the divine and human authorship of Scripture. He writes, "In cases where the ordinary human personality and writing style of the author were prominently involved, as seems the case with the major parts of Scripture, all that we are able to say is that God's providential oversight and direction of the life of each author was such that their personalities, their backgrounds and training, their abilities to evaluate events in the world around them, their access to historical data, their judgment with regard to the accuracy of information, and their individual circumstances when they wrote, were all exactly what God wanted them to be, so that when they actually came to the point of putting pen to paper, the words were fully their own words but also fully the words that God wanted them to write, words that God would also claim as his own." Ibid., 81.

[33]Earl D. Radmacher, "A Response to Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 435.

[34]Vanhoozer uses this term to refer to those who desire to undo the authority and intention of the original author.

[35]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 86.

authority. Thus, an author-oriented approach to hermeneutics is necessary to uphold the evangelical view of biblical authority.

Basis of the Meaning/Significance Distinction

One of the important aspects of Hirsch's author-oriented system is his distinction between meaning and significance. He explains that the meaning of a text "is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent."[36] He continues,

> Significance, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable. Authors, who like everyone else change their attitudes, feelings, opinions, and value criteria in the course of time, will obviously in the course of time tend to view their own work in different contexts. Clearly what changes for them is not the meaning of the work, but rather their relationship to that meaning. Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means.[37]

With this distinction, meaning becomes the objective, unchanging aspect of interpretation, while significance is the subjective aspect. Defining meaning according to the original author's intention makes the meaning of a text objective since the author's meaning was willed in the past and cannot change.[38] Significance, though, is subjective in that it defines the interpreter's response to the author's meaning. Although what the author intended through the writing is recorded in history and unchanging, the response that a reader has to that meaning may change many times, and Hirsch's distinction makes this concept clear.

Vanhoozer states that Hirsch's distinction is a fundamental component of

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[36]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 52; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8-10.

hermeneutic realism. He explains,

> The underlying issue concerns the objectivity of meaning and interpretation. Is meaning "fixed" by the author of the text, or is it free-floating, varying from reader to reader (or does it arise from some combination of the above)? Those who invoke authorial intentions usually do so in order to provide a base for a stable, determinate, and decidable textual meaning. The "hermeneutic realist" holds that there is something prior to interpretation, something "there" in the text, which can be known and to which the interpreter is accountable. By contrast, the hermeneutic non-realist (e.g., Derrida, Fish) denies that meaning precedes interpretive activity; the truth of interpretation depends on the response of the reader.[39]

Hirsch's hermeneutic realism, as seen in his distinction between meaning and significance, helps to provide stable textual meaning.

Stein modifies Hirsch's distinction to make it more specific. He defines implications as "the meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern of meaning he willed."[40] An example that Stein gives is Ephesians 5:18 where Paul prohibits drunkenness from wine. Stein explains that even though Paul only mentions wine, an implication of the text is that drunkenness from any alcoholic beverage or intravenous drugs is prohibited.

Stein also gives a contemporary example of implications:

> Johnny received a Christmas gift from grandma and grandpa of fifty dollars. He knows exactly what he wants to do with the fifty dollars. He wants to go down to Target and purchase two toys that together, with tax, cost $49.95. As his father, you, however, tell Johnny, "Now I don't want you to go down to Target and buy those two toys with the money grandma and grandpa gave you. They don't want you to spend it on toys at Target." Later, when you come home, you find Johnny playing with the two toys. In frustration you respond, "Didn't I tell you not to buy those toys at Target?" How would you respond if Johnny replied, "Well, dad, I didn't buy them at Target. I went to Wal-Mart and bought them for only $44.50." Would you say, "Oh, that's OK. As long as it wasn't Target?" Wouldn't you say, "Johnny, you knew I meant you shouldn't buy those toys at Target, Wal-Mart, or any other place?" What you meant by, "Now I don't want you to go down to Target and buy those two toys with the money grandma and grandpa gave you. They don't want you to spend it on toys at Target" involves a paradigm which, even though

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[39]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 26.

[40]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 39.

> unstated, goes beyond Target. Meaning involves numerous implications that we may not be aware of at the time but that are nevertheless present and logically flow out of the paradigm given.[41]

Stein's explanation of implications is helpful for those involved in biblical interpretation, because there are often issues in the contemporary culture which the biblical author was unaware at the time of writing but to which his teaching applies.

Stein goes on to state the often-used term "application" is confusing because it is a combination of significance and implication:

> To be more precise, [application] is a compound of a specific implication that concerns the individual, which is cognitive in nature, and the value response given to that implication, which is volitional in nature. Thus the term "application" can be confusing, because it refers to two different components in the communicative process. Implications, even those that apply uniquely to an individual, are controlled by the author and flow out of the paradigm determined by his or her willed meaning. The reader, on the other hand, controls significance.[42]

Since the implications of a text are controlled by the author and the significance is controlled by the interpreter, application can be a confusing concept. Stein clarifies the role of the interpreter by explaining these two concepts.

Responses to the Criticisms of an Author-Oriented Approach

Opponents of the author-oriented approach to interpretation have made several criticisms of this approach. First, opponents claim that it is impossible to climb back into the mind of the author to determine his thoughts. This criticism was popularized in William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's 1946 article "The Intentional Fallacy."[43] Wimsatt and Beardsley distinguish between internal evidence, that which was in the text,

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[41]Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 459.

[42]Ibid., 461.

[43]William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," sec. 2 [on-line]; accessed 19 July 2011; available from http://faculty.smu.edu/nschwart/seminar/fallacy.htm; Internet. Also available in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

and external evidence, that which relates to why, how, or to whom the author wrote.[44] They state that focusing on the original author's intention places emphasis on the external as opposed to the internal; it is a biographical or psychological study instead of a textual one.

Stein responds to this criticism by stating that it is true that no one can climb back into the mind of the author, but a psychological analysis of the author is not the goal of an author-oriented hermeneutic.[45] As a result, Stein differentiates between the "mental acts" of the author, which he defines as the "experiences the author went through when he wrote,"[46] with the "meaning" of the author, which he consciously willed through his words in the text.[47]

Stein also differentiates between the fact that a text can *convey* meaning, but it cannot *produce* meaning.[48] Texts are simply word groups of symbols organized together on a page, but the organization of the symbols into a specific message requires an intelligent being. The production of meaning, then, requires the intelligent thought of an

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[44]Ibid., sec. 4.

[45]Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 456. Chapter 2 demonstrated that the psychological analysis of the author was an important component to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic system. For explanation of his approach, see chapter 2, n. 17. Grant Osborne distinguishes Schleiermacher's approach from the one currently being argued for by referring to Schleiermacher's as an "Author-Centered Approach." Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2006), 468.

[46]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 52.

[47]Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 456. Stein goes on to explain why it is important to speak of the author's "conscious" determination of meaning. He explains, "It should be noted that the term 'consciously' is used to describe the meaning that the author wished to convey. This is to distinguish our definition from those views that seek to demythologize the myth that the author has written and to find out the subconscious meaning of the author that lies behind the myth. It also distinguishes our definition from such views that reject the surface-level meaning and seek to discover the substructural meaning of a text." Idem, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 457-58.

[48]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 19.

author. Thus, an author-oriented hermeneutic is a study of the internal evidence of the text; more specifically, it is a study of what message the author sought to convey through his organization of the words in that text.

Along the same lines, Hirsch argues against the idea of semantic autonomy or the idea that a text is independent of its author once it is written down. He states that a fundamental assumption of semantic autonomy is the concept of public consensus, in which the meaning of a text is not what the author intended but what the public understands. Hirsch responds,

> The idea of a public meaning sponsored not by the author's intention but by a public consensus is based upon a fundamental error of observation and logic. It is an empirical fact that the consensus does not exist, and it is a logical error to erect a stable normative concept (i.e. *the* public meaning) out of an unstable descriptive one. The public meaning of a text is nothing more or less than those meanings which the public happens to construe from the text. Any meaning which two or more members of the public construe is *ipso facto* within the public norms that govern language and its interpretation.[49]

A text is not independent from an author's thought but is a product of the author's intelligent thought. It is the study of that text that enables interpreters to understand the meaning of the original author.

A second criticism of the author-oriented approach to hermeneutics is that an author's worldview is too distant from contemporary interpreters, and as a result his meaning is inaccessible.[50] Stein explains the perspective of those who make this objection,

> How can the modern-day reader, familiar with computers and megabytes, jet airplanes and international travel, television, heart transplants, lunar landings, and nuclear power understand an ancient author writing thousands of years ago in a time of sandals, togas, and animal sacrifices? According to this view, the culture of the

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[49]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 13.

[50]Gadamer is one of the critics who made this claim. For a discussion on his criticisms, see pp. 32-33 in this dissertation. This criticism is also part of Wimsatt and Beardsley's criticism in "The Intentional Fallacy." For their comments, see Monroe and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," sec. 4 [on-line].

> author and the culture of the reader are so radically different that it is impossible for a present-day reader to understand what an ancient author meant. The author and reader live too many centuries, even millennia, apart.[51]

Some objectors go so far as to argue that since the past cannot be reproduced, past meanings can likewise not be reproduced.[52] As a result, Monroe and Beardsley describe the pursuit of the author's meaning as a "romantic" notion.[53] Gadamer, more to the point, refers to this pursuit as "nonsensical."[54]

For those interested in biblical interpretation, this objection should not be taken lightly, given the considerable distance between the biblical context and the contemporary context. Nonetheless, Stein is correct to note that there is a tendency to overemphasize these differences.[55] He explains that the differences make the interpretation of an ancient author's meaning difficult, not impossible.

Hirsch responds at length to those who claim that the author's meaning is inaccessible. He writes,

> Most authors believe in the accessibility of their verbal meaning, for otherwise most of them would not write. However, no one could unanswerably defend this universal faith. Neither the author nor the interpreter can ever be certain that communication has occurred or that it can occur. But again, certainty is not the point at issue. It is far more likely that an author and an interpreter can entertain identical meanings than they cannot. The faith that speakers have in the possibility of communication has been built up in the very process of learning a language, particularly in those instances when the actions of the interpreter have confirmed to the author that he has been understood. These primitive confirmations are the foundation for our faith in far less primitive modes of communication. The inaccessibility of verbal meaning is a doctrine that experience suggests to be falsity. But since the skeptical doctrine of inaccessibility is highly improbable, it should be

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[51]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 25.

[52]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed (New York: Continuum, 1996), 121-29, 166.

[53]Monroe and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," sec. 2 [on-line].

[54]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 167.

[55]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 25.

rejectd as a working assumption of interpretation.[56]

The basic nature of communication confirms that an author's meaning is accessible to an interpreter, no matter the cultural or chronological distance that exists between them.

A third objection to this approach is that the author's meaning is irrelevant today. Monroe and Beardsley argue this point when they discuss T. S. Elliot's poem "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which contains a line that is similar to a line used in a song by John Donne. They argue that whether Elliot had Donne in mind when he wrote has no bearing on the study of the poem:

> The way of biographical or genetic inquiry, in which, taking advantage of the fact that Eliot is still alive, and in the spirit of a man who would settle a bet, the critic writes to Eliot and asks what he meant, or if he had Donne in mind. We shall not here weigh the probabilities – whether Eliot would answer that he meant nothing at all, had nothing at all in mind – a sufficiently good answer to such a question – or in an unguarded moment might furnish a clear and, within its limit, irrefutable answer. Our point is that such an answer to such an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem "Prufrock;" it would not be a critical inquiry. Critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled in this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.[57]

Monroe and Beardsley state that even if an interpreter is able to consult the author about his meaning, and in the case of biblical studies the interpreter is not able, the author's response is irrelevant because an author does not determine the meaning of a text.

A similar objection is that the meaning of a text changes, and therefore objectivity in interpretation is impossible.[58] Vanhoozer explains that this is the position of the hermeneutic non-realist, who argues that interpretation is "a slippery slope on which meaning slides uncontrollably into significance, so that the meaning of the text is

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[56]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 18.

[57]Monroe and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," sec. 5 [on-line].

[58]Again, Gadamer argues this point in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 121-29. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 13; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1967), 29-37.

in no way separable from its meaning for us."[59] The non-realist sees the work of the interpreter as inextricably connected with meaning so that interpretation is both a reproduction and production of meaning. These theorists propose that the meaning of a text changes each time it is read.

Both of these final criticisms fail to understand the fundamental distinction between meaning and significance. Hirsch responds to this critique by examining cases where the author himself changed his mind about his work:

> Probably the most extreme examples of this phenomenon are cases of authorial self-repudiation, such as Arnold's public attack on his masterpiece, *Empedocles on Etna*, or Schelling's rejection of all the philosophy he had written before 1809. In these cases there cannot be the slightest doubt that the author's later response to his work was quite different from his original response. Instead of seeming beautiful, profound, or brilliant, the work seemed misguided, trivial, and false, and its meaning was no longer one that the author wished to convey. However, these examples do not show that the meaning of the work had changed, but precisely the opposite. If the work's meaning had changed (instead of the author himself and his attitudes), then the author would not have needed to repudiate his meaning and could have spared himself the discomfort of a public recantation. No doubt the *significance* of the work to the author had changed a great deal, but its meaning had not changed at all.[60]

Even in those extreme examples where the author changes his perspective about what he has written, what has changed is not his meaning but his significance toward that meaning. Once a text is written down, the meaning is unchangeable, even by the author who penned those words.

Hirsch continues by explaining what happens to interpretation when the non-realist position is embraced,

> If a meaning can change its identity and in fact does, then we have no norm for judging whether we are encountering the real meaning in a changed form or some spurious meaning that is pretending to be the one we seek. Once it is admitted that a meaning can change its characteristics, then there is no way of finding the true Cinderella among all the contenders. There is no dependable glass slipper we can

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[59]Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 84.

[60]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 7-8.

> use as a test, since the old slipper will no longer fit the new Cinderella. To the interpreter this lack of a stable normative principle is equivalent to the indeterminacy of meaning. As far as his interests go, the meaning could have been defined as indeterminate from the start and his predicament would have been precisely the same.[61]

If the meaning of a text can change, then no principle exists by which critics can judge which interpretations are correct and which ones are incorrect. For biblical interpretation, this point is important, because once meaning is viewed as indeterminate, the church has no way to differentiate between orthodox and heretical interpretations of Scripture.[62]

Stein's definition of implications is also helpful here. Since the author willed a certain pattern of meaning, there are many aspects of the contemporary culture that fall within that pattern. Even though, in the case of biblical interpretation, the author is separated from the contemporary culture by two millennia, his willed pattern of meaning has many implications today. As a result, the message of the biblical authors is still relevant today.

Relationship between the Author-Oriented Approach and the Grammatical Historical Method

If the author determines the meaning of a text, and if the goal of interpretation is to discover the author's meaning, what is the best method for accomplishing this goal? Stein answers this question when he writes that "the only way that we can understand

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[61]Ibid., 46.

[62]Some who hold the view known as Theological Interpretation of Scripture would not argue for the indeterminacy of meaning, but they would argue against the objectification of meaning. They state that though a number of different hermeneutic approaches are allowable, even allegory, the boundary for orthodox interpretations is the church's confessional statements. These statements serve as theological parameters. For a description and critique of this view, see Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 313-20. For an argument for this view, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

what an author means is by his or her use of language."[63] He continues by explaining that the only access we have to God's message to humanity is through the words of the human authors: "We have no way of understanding what God means except through what his apostles and prophets wrote in Scripture, and in seeking to understand God's apostles and prophets, we want to know what these human, inspired authors meant by their words."[64] If one wants to know the author's meaning, he must study the writing of the original author.

The fundamental method for studying the words of the authors of Scripture is the grammatical historical method of exegesis. The goal of this method is the determination of the original author's meaning through the study of grammar and the facts of history.[65] The analysis of the author's grammar enables the interpreter to understand what the author meant through his choice and organization of words, and the analysis of the historical setting enables the interpreter to understand what prompted the author to write this specific passage.

In explaining this method of exegesis, Walter Kaiser adds a word of caution. He explains that the grammatical historical method goes beyond the study of grammar and history to include syntax and theology as well: "If the term were not so awkward and clumsy, the truth of the matter is that the method should be called grammatical-contextual-historical-syntactical-theological-cultural exegesis, for each of these concerns, and more, must participate in the exegetical venture."[66]

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[63]Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 463.

[64]Ibid., 464. That is not say, though, that Stein views this task as accomplishable through simple word study. When he writes about what the "authors meant by their words," he has in view the grammar, syntax, genre, and context of those words as well.

[65]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 87.

[66]Ibid., 90.

Chapter 3 explained that several of those who have proposed a method for cross-cultural hermeneutics have confused the grammatical historical method with the historical critical method.[67] The primary difference between these two methods is the skepticism toward the biblical documents of those who employ the historical critical method. A fundamental presupposition of those who hold a historical critical perspective is their anti-supernatural bias toward the miraculous events recorded in Scripture. Scholars who utilize this approach reject the inerrancy and historical reliability of the Bible.[68]

The grammatical historical method, on the other hand, does not propose a critical or skeptical stance toward the historical reliability of the Scriptures. Those who practice this method are committed to the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible, and the method is utilized in order to understand the original author's intent.

Chapter 3 also showed that some scholars criticize the grammatical historical method for being unsuitable and inadequate as a cross-cultural hermeneutic.[69] Specifically, Larry Caldwell claims that the historical-critical and grammatical historical approaches are Western approaches to hermeneutics that developed out of Western philosophical presuppositions. Caldwell is correct in that the historical critical perspective, with its anti-supernatural bias, is an outgrowth of the Enlightenment and Western philosophical presuppositions.

The grammatical historical method, though, is not a method that is unique to any culture, but it is an attempt to determine the original author's meaning through the

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[67]See the discussions of Lee, Caldwell, and Wan on pp. 86-90, 102-20, and 120-21 respectively in this dissertation.

[68]For a basic description of the skeptical approach of the historical critical method, see Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 92-93.

[69]See especially the discussion of Caldwell's theories on pp. 102-20 in this dissertation.

study of his use of syntax, grammar, language and his cultural and historical setting. Through the study of these various issues, the interpreter is able to understand the message that the original author desired to communicate with those who would read what he wrote. Such an approach is not unique to one single cultural setting but should be utilized in every culture as believers are equipped to "rightly handle the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). Missiologist M. David Sills makes this point when he writes, "In order to avoid the errors of imaginative minds, believers with the Bible in their language must be taught how to interpret God's Word. The historical-grammatical method for understanding the original intent of the author is the most faithful method of interpretation, even when there is no knowledge of biblical languages."[70]

Kaiser agrees and critiques those who argue that each culture should use its own indigenous hermeneutic methodologies when studying Scripture. He states, "It is simply not true that there are as many approaches to the text of Scripture as there are cultures and societies."[71] The grammatical historical method is the method that the church has developed over the course of its history that enables the interpreter to determine in the most effective way possible the truth intention of the original author.

In fact, the pursuit of the author's meaning through the study of his word usage has been an approach exemplified throughout church history. Although the church fathers emphasized allegorical interpretation, in the fourth century some church leaders developed the Antioch School to emphasize a literal approach to interpretation. Interpreters such as Theodore of Mopsuestia and Chrysostom used a grammatical historical approach to determine the original author's meaning.[72] Chrysostom and others

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[70]M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 53.

[71]Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 121.

[72]Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary*

in the Antioch School argued that those who allegorized the text were no longer servants of the Word but were manipulating the words and images of Scripture for their own theological purposes.[73]

As the boundaries of the church expanded to Western Europe through missionary efforts, the Antioch School's focus on literal exegesis was forgotten. Hughes Oliphant Old explains the dynamic of this period,

> The speed with which the missionary work was being done and the political and cultural motives for which many accepted baptism meant that great masses of only partially converted people had been received into the Church. Basic Christian doctrines were poorly understood, the Christian life was poorly practiced, and the ways of paganism were not entirely left behind.[74]

Believers in these areas found it increasingly difficult to read and interpret Scripture, and as a result interpreters utilized their own imaginations in explaining the details in biblical texts.[75] These indigenous interpretive approaches led believers further and further away from the original author's meaning.

During the Reformation there was a renewed emphasis on understanding the literal meaning of Scripture. Dennis Johnson explains the Reformers' emphasis on hermeneutics,

> Protestant Reformers had a keen interest not only in doctrinal reformulation but also in questions of hermeneutics. They recognized that distortions in the church's piety and practice (indulgences, veneration of saints and images, etc.) typically arose from errors in doctrine, that errors in doctrine arose from errors of biblical interpretation, and that specific errors of biblical interpretation were attributable to a hermeneutic method that gave too large a place to ecclesiastical

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Hermeneutical Method (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 91-96; Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 105-06; Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 89.

[73]Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 106.

[74]Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 3:189.

[75]Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 109-10.

tradition (with its political dimension) in determining what God's Word teaches.[76] For the Reformers, their emphasis on the literal meaning of Scripture was not a result of their cultural perspective, but they developed this emphasis in response to the cultural misinterpretation that was rampant during their day. The Reformers' call to return to the study of the grammar and historical setting of the original author in order to determine his literal meaning set the standard for modern biblical interpretation.

Moreover, as is shown in the next section, this method of exegesis does not end once the interpreter has determined the original author's meaning, but a necessary step is the connection of that meaning to the contemporary context. This second step, application or contextualization, provides the interpreter the opportunity to relate the author's meaning to any cultural context. The grammatical historical method, then, is well suited to communicate God's message in culturally appropriate ways in any context.

Author-Oriented Cross-Cultural Model

Since the arguments for an author-oriented approach to interpretation have been considered, it is now appropriate to present an author-oriented model for cross-cultural hermeneutics. The particular author-oriented approach that will be utilized, the grammatical historical method, is a two-part process: determining the meaning and applying the meaning to the contemporary context.

Determining the Meaning

The first step in this process is the determination of the original author's meaning. An interpreter is able to discern the original author's meaning through a study of what the author wrote. Integral to this process is the determination of the type of literature under consideration. Each genre of Scripture has its own specific rules that

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[76]Ibid., 110.

govern the writing and reading of that type of literature.[77]

Stein explains the importance of genre-specific interpretation:

> It is clear that there are various kinds of literary forms in the Bible. Each of them possesses its own rules of interpretation. The authors in using these literary forms consciously submitted themselves to the rules governing these forms in order to share their meanings with their readers. Each author assumed that his readers would interpret his words according to the rules governing that literary form. If we are not aware of the rules under which the biblical author wrote, misinterpretation almost certainly will take place.[78]

Identifying the genre helps the interpreter to understand the rules that guided the author as he wrote this specific passage of Scripture.[79] Once the interpreter identifies the genre and the specific rules governing that type of literature, his study should focus on three separate areas: grammar and syntax, culture and history, and theology and missiology.

Grammar and syntax. The first component of determining the author's meaning is a study of the author's grammar and syntax. Grammar is the study of the laws that govern how words in a language interact with one another.[80] This type of study includes things like how verbs function, how adjectives modify nouns, and how participles interact with the rest of the sentence. The interpreter should be able to read a sentence and identify how the various words in that sentence are functioning.

One component of grammatical study is word study. A single word can have a range of meanings, often referred to as "semantic range,"[81] and it is the interpreter's job to determine for a specific text the meaning intended by the original author. Stephen

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[77]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 75.

[78]Ibid.

[79]A number of helpful resources exist to aid the interpreter with genre-specific rules for interpretation. Among these are Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*; Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*; Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*; and Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*.

[80]Obsorne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 57.

[81]Ibid., 101.

Olford encourages interpreters, as they study a specific text, to study unknown words, significant words, and difficult words.[82] Every word studied, though, should be studied within the context of the whole passage. Silva explains why when he states that "the context does not merely help us understand meaning; it virtually *makes* meaning!"[83]

In addition to grammar, syntax is another important aspect of textual study.[84] Syntax refers to the basic construction of a sentence or paragraph and how all the various parts interrelate to make up the whole. Context is similar as it refers to the ways in which individual components of a text fit together to make a completed whole.[85] Syntactical or contextual analysis is important because in biblical literature the paragraph serves as the foundational unit of thought.[86]

Studying a passage of Scripture within its own context is important. Hershael York explains,

> To truly comprehend the sense of words, you must have sufficient context to insure that you have the intended meaning of those words in their context. When it comes to understanding literature, especially the Scriptures, context is everything. Divorced from context, the words of the Bible can be – and unfortunately often are – twisted and perverted to justify all kinds of evil. Ripping verses out of their context and assigning them a meaning that the author did not intend is doing violence to the Scripture and is an affront to the Word of God.[87]

Kaiser agrees and explains that interpreters must consider the sectional, book, canonical,

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[82]Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 120-23.

[83]Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 139.

[84]Ibid., 113.

[85]Context can be broader than syntax. It can refer to the context of an entire book of the Bible or even the whole Bible. When speaking about the context of a single passage, though, it is similar to syntax.

[86]Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 96; Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 67.

[87]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 53.

and immediate context of any passage.[88]

Many helpful works exist that explain how to conduct grammatical and syntactical analysis.[89] At this point, though, that which is most helpful is not to reproduce the insights of those works, but to consider how this process should be conducted in cross-cultural situations.

In an ideal world, every interpreter would have the access to and training in the original languages so that his study of the text can be conducted at that level. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, there is no access to the original languages, and even in those places where there is access, the documents are far too expensive for most believers to obtain.[90] In fact, in more than 2000 of the world's 6800 spoken languages, some 340 million people, the Bible itself is not even available.[91] How can a national pastor be faithful in studying the grammar and syntax of the original authors if he lacks the resources available in the West? Perhaps the greatest challenge, though, is the application of this model among the 70 percent of the world's peoples who are oral learners.[92] Is it possible for a missionary to utilize this method in such contexts?

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[88]Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 70-71. Again, it is worth noting that Kaiser's use of context here is a bit broader than the syntax of a single passage.

[89]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 130-39; Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 87-104, 165-81; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, ed. Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 77-126; York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 74, 83-89.

[90]This discovery was an important point in the development of Caldwell's position. He explains that when he first started teaching in the Philippines, he taught his students the original languages and made copies for them to use. One of his brightest students, though, later commented that she was unable to use her copies because rats had eaten them. As a result, Caldwell now encourages students to utilize their indigenous hermeneutic systems. For Caldwell's explanation, see Larry W. Caldwell, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context," *Journal of Asian Mission* 1 (1999): 25-29.

[91]"Translation Statistics" [on-line]; accessed 27 July 2011; available from http:// www.wycliffe.org/about/Statistics.aspx; Internet.

[92]Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 173; International Orality Network, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, ed. Grant Lovejoy et al. (Bangalore, India: International Orality Network, 2005), 3.

While it is preferential to study the text in the original languages, it is acceptable to study it only in the local language translation. Grant Osborne, while writing for a Western audience, recognizes that many interpreters will not have the ability to study in the original languages:

> Naturally, the person who does not know the original languages will have a perceptibly greater difficulty in dealing with grammar and syntax. . . . However, the task is not completely hopeless for those who have never studied the languages. The problem is that they must then depend on secondary sources, mainly translations and the better commentaries.[93]

Interpreters in these contexts should recognize they are depending on a translation, consult any commentaries or reference works they can find, and study the grammar and syntax in their language translation.

Thomas Schreiner's method of "Tracing the Argument" will be helpful to those in contexts where the original documents are not available.[94] Primarily designed for the study of the Pauline Epistles, tracing the argument is a syntactical method that analyzes the flow of Paul's arguments by examining the coordinate and subordinate statements in his letters. Schreiner explains this process:

> The key to tracing the argument in the Pauline letters is by understanding the relationships between different propositions in the text. Paul did not usually write proverbially, offering random bits of advice to his congregations. He usually engaged in a sustained argument in his letters. We cannot understand his arguments unless we can set forth and trace the building blocks of his reasoning. The building blocks of his reasoning are found in his propositions. Thus, if the thread of Paul's line of reasoning is to be discerned, we must understand the relationship between different propositions.[95]

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[93]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 58.

[94]Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 97-126. Schreiner states that diagramming the passage in the original languages is a necessary prerequisite to tracing, but his comments are not made in reference to exegesis done in places where the originals are not available. Again, in an ideal world, everyone should be conduct exegesis in the original languages, but the reality is that many cultures do not have access to them. In those places, Schreiner's model is a helpful tool for understanding the overall flow of the passage.

[95]Ibid., 99.

At its most basic level, this type of analysis examines two statements (or two paragraphs) and asks, "What is the relationship between these two propositions?" Such analysis, while difficult at first, can become a useful tool for examining the basic structure and organization of the text in any type of literature, even if the analysis is only conducted in the language translation (i.e., not the original languages).[96]

In the second and third cases where the Bible itself is not available or the people are primary oral learners, the first step is to communicate the stories of the Bible by using a Chronological Bible Storying approach.[97] Translators can also produce audio recordings of parts of the Bible as they finish translating it. Once the translation is complete, these recordings will be an oral Bible, through which these non-literate, oral learners can have access to the complete Word of God. Although those who are oral learners will not be able to conduct any sort of written grammatical or syntactical analysis, they can learn to identify the main points of the stories and letters as more and more of the Bible in translated into their language.

A helpful approach in these situations is to train the believers to ask certain questions, often in group settings,[98] that help them to better understand the author's

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[96]It could be said that such a tool might not be helpful when analyzing wisdom literature, such as proverbs. In many cases, though, the author grouped several proverbial statements and intended for them to be read together to communicate a larger truth. Two examples of such situations are Prov 9:13-18 and 24:17-18. In other cases, the seemingly random proverbial statements would be connected with series-type coordinate relationships.

[97]For a description of the Chronological Bible Storying approach, see International Orality Network, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 12-16, 74-75; Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 183-87. It is worth noting that Chronological Bible Storying and oral copies of the Scriptures, while helpful starting points in many cultures, should never be considered an ending point. These processes fill the gap while the missionaries work to reduce the languages to writing, train the leaders in literacy techniques, and translate the Scriptures. Long term goals for these situations ought to include the people translating biblical studies resources and developing their own theological writings. It is also helpful to note that simply because narrative passages are better suited for oral learners, missionaries should not focus only on narrative passages of Scripture. As the people become acquainted with the message of Scripture, missionaries should seek to teach and communicate from other genres of Scripture.

[98]Many oral societies are also group-based cultures, which means that they prefer to make decisions as a group. In those cases, since they already discuss and make decisions as a group, it may be

meaning. By using such questions like, "Who are the main characters in the story?," "What images or symbols are meaningful in this story?," "Is there a specific sin described in this story?," and "What does this story teach us about God's character?" the believers zero in on the meaning of the story.

Culture and history. A second component in determining the author's meaning is the study of the cultural and historical setting of the text. Osborne explains how this type of study aids an interpreter's understanding of the author's meaning,

> Background knowledge will turn a sermon from a two-dimensional study to a three-dimensional cinematic event. The stories and discourses of the Bible were never meant to be merely two-dimensional treatises divorced from real life. Every one was written within a concrete cultural milieu and written to a concrete situation. It is socioscientific background studies that unlock the original situation that otherwise would be lost to the modern reader. . . . Since Christianity is a historical religion, the interpreter must recognize that an understanding of the history and culture within which the passage was produced is an indispensable tool for uncovering the meaning of that passage.[99]

Since God's Word was given at a specific time in history to a specific people in a specific place, the interpreter must learn as much as possible about the original cultural and historical setting. Kaiser explains, "God's revelation in Scripture made a discriminating use of those cultural materials that were available to the writers in their day."[100] Some of the truths of God's Word are intimately connected with certain cultural symbols, like John's use of "lamb of God" in John 1:29, 36, which cannot be understood without the background of Jewish culture and the sacrificial system. Another series of examples is found in Song of Solomon, where the bridegroom uses cultural images to communicate his love to his future bride. Such phrases as "Your hair is like a flock of

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helpful for them to, at times, study Scripture as a group. This proposal, though, certainly does not mean that they will never study Scripture in an individual setting. I am simply stating that based on their learning style this approach may be beneficial to them.

[99]Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 158.

[100]Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 115.

goats" (Song of Sol 4:1) cannot be understood without first studying certain aspects of Jewish culture.

In the same way, an interpreter cannot understand some passages without studying the historical situation at the time of writing. This connection between the history and the writing is especially true for narrative passages. One example of such a historical situation is the fact that the events in the book of Nehemiah took place after the Jewish exile. An interpreter needs to understand this setting to be able to ascertain the meaning of certain parts of the book, like Nehemiah's prayer (Neh 1:4-11) or Sanballat's conspiracy (Neh 6:1-14).

While a number of tools exist to aid interpreters in the West with such cultural and historical analysis,[101] many of those tools are not available in other parts of the world. Such a lack of resources certainly makes the interpreter's job more difficult, but this difficulty does not give the interpreter the freedom to read his own cultural setting into the text. He should still seek to determine the original author's meaning.

In settings where there is a lack of resources, an interpreter can take several steps to overcome this difficulty. First, he can become a student of Scripture. A younger interpreter can learn about the cultural settings in Scripture by reading large portions of Scripture on a daily basis. As he reads, he can compile a notebook of cultural and historical insights. Sometimes a historical detail listed in Isaiah may be helpful in understanding a text in Nehemiah, or a cultural detail in Exodus may be helpful when interpreting a passage from John. Interpreters can create their own resource by compiling

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[101]For a general introduction to the New Testament, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). For information about the New Testament from a historical and cultural perspective, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, Library of Early Christianity, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); Gary M. Burge, Lynn H. Cohick, and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

a notebook of insights.

A second step that interpreters in such situations can take is to seek out and learn from those who have more knowledge about the biblical culture than they do. In some cases this may be a pastor in another city or village, or it may even be someone of a different ethnic group. In pioneer areas, the missionary needs to take the lead in this respect and train those he leads to Christ to understand unique aspects of the biblical culture.

With orally-based cultures, the process of learning about the cultural and historical settings of the biblical texts happens before, during, and after the Chronological Bible Storying process. Before starting the story, the story-teller can set up the story by explaining information about the culture and setting of the story he is telling. After the story, the story-teller should lead a discussion time, during which some of the group discussion questions can relate the differences between the local culture and the cultural setting of the story.

Moreover, inherent in the nature of the storying process is the fact that it is chronological. The recipients of the stories learn the biblical culture as they learn the stories, because the story-teller begins the storying process where the Bible begins. Since the stories are chronological, they can reflect on the events and truths of older stories in order to understand newer ones.

For example, before hearing the story of John the Baptist's interaction with Jesus (John 1:29, 36), they would have already heard the stories of Abraham and the lamb that became a substitute for Isaac (Gen 22) and the exodus from Egypt when the Israelites placed the blood of the lamb over their doorposts (Exod 12). Thus when they hear John the Baptist refer to Jesus as "the lamb of God," they would be able to reflect on the previous stories and understand what John meant.

Theology and missiology. A third component of determining the author's

meaning is the study of a text's theology and missiology. York explains how the study of a text's theological emphases affects the determination of the author's meaning:

> Every passage of the Bible has something to say about God, his attributes, his character, his will, or his acts in history. To find the theological pattern we simply ask the question: what does this passage say about God? . . . Sometimes the theological truths are overt, sometimes they are more subtle. The Book of Romans, for example, is clearly theological in most of its content. The Book of Esther, on the other hand, does not even mention the name of God, yet it reveals God's hand even when his face is hidden. In either case, we must go to the text looking for theological patterns and themes in order to understand the author's meaning.[102]

Each text has something to say about God, and to determine the author's meaning, the interpreter must study the theological emphases of that text.

Along the same lines, Bryan Chapell explains that each passage of Scripture confronts some specific sin.[103] Chapell states that some fallen condition necessitated the writing of each text, and to understand the author's meaning, the interpreter must ask the question, "What sin is the author confronting?" Such theological study helps to elucidate the author's purpose in writing the text in view.

Kaiser writes that in order to do such theological study of any text, the interpreter can look for six clues.[104] First, he should notice any parts of the text that relate to the unifying story of the Bible. A second area of study is to identify any terms that have taken on special significance because of their frequent usage. Such terms include things like seed, son, branch, and messenger. Third, he should watch for quotations to earlier texts. Similarly, a fourth area of study is any allusion to earlier biblical events, persons, expressions, or terms. Fifth, he should relate the theological emphases of the text to the book and to the whole of Scripture. Finally, he should notice

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[102]York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 75.

[103]Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 48-51.

[104]Kaiser, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 81.

how this text relates to later biblical revelation.

This theological analysis begins with the interpreter asking questions of the text and analyzing how that text relates to other texts. The interpreter grows in his understanding of the text as he asks the difficult questions about what a text teaches about God, man, salvation, etc., and how those teachings relate to the rest of biblical revelation. Seeking unity in the diversity of biblical revelation can be a challenging process, but it is one that is worthy of the interpreter's attention. Such theological analysis is the "capstone" of the exegetical process.[105]

In addition to studying the theological emphases of the text, the interpreter should also study the text's missiological emphases. Christopher Wright explains that each passage of Scripture has something to say about God's work in redeeming humanity.[106] Wright states, "It is God's mission in relation to the nations, arguably more than any other single theme, that provides the key that unlocks the biblical grand narrative."[107] After studying the other details of the passage, the interpreter should ask the question, "What does this passage teach about God's desire for all people to be saved?"

Kaiser brings the theological and missiological emphases of a text together in the study of how a text relates to the canonical center of Old and New Testament theology. He explains that center as "God's word of blessing (to use the word especially prominent in the pre-Abrahamic materials) or promise (to use the New Testament word which summarizes the contents of the Old Testament) to be Israel's God and to do

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[105]Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 135.

[106]Christopher J. H. Wright, *Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 31-32.

[107]Ibid., 255.

something for Israel and through them something for all the nations on the face of the earth."[108] Contextually, every passage has something to say about who God is for his people and what he is doing to redeem humanity.

People in any culture or in any setting can conduct this kind of theological and missiological analysis by learning to ask questions related to God's character, man's sinfulness, and God's mission. Even with oral learners, these questions can be modeled in a reproducible way when the storyteller leads the group in a discussion time after the story in which he asks these questions.[109] While systematic theology textbooks might not be available in many locations to help guide interpreters with specific theological categories, oral learners and others without adequate resources can memorize catechisms that provide those categories.[110]

After studying these three areas of grammar and syntax, culture and history, and theology and missiology, the interpreter should attempt to state the unchanging meaning of the original author with a simple sentence. Since the determination of the original author's meaning is the objective aspect of study, this meaning will not change from culture to culture. The interpreter should seek to state the insights of his study in a simple sentence before beginning the process of determining how that meaning applies to the contemporary situation.

Applying the Meaning to the Contemporary Context

Whereas determination of the author's meaning is the objective aspect of interpretation, the application of that meaning to the contemporary context is the

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[108]Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 139.

[109]Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 185-86; Lovejoy, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, 52.

[110]Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 185.

subjective aspect. It is subjective because the way that meaning applies to the contemporary situation will vary from context to context. Once the interpreter has determined the author's meaning, he needs to research the target culture's context, scrutinize his own cultural perspective, know the implications of the biblical text, observe the importance of critical contextualization, and communicate the biblical truth in a relevant way.[111]

Research the target culture's context. The first step in applying the author's meaning to the contemporary context is researching the target culture's context. Once the interpreter can state the unchanging meaning of the original author in a simple sentence, he can begin the process of identifying how that meaning connects with the target culture.

While traditional Western hermeneutical models have envisioned a two-horizon process which includes the biblical culture and the target culture, Larry Caldwell is helpful in stating that this model is only helpful in mono-cultural interpretation.[112] When interpreters are communicating the truth of God's Word with people of different culture, theorists must include a third horizon in their model of interpretation. These three horizons include the biblical culture, the interpreter's culture, and the target culture.[113]

The interpreter's task increases in difficulty when engaged in such intercultural situations because of the additional third horizon of the target culture. Caldwell explains

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[111]Since the application process is more complicated when a missionary applies the truth of a passage to his target culture (three cultures involved in the process) than when a native interprets it for his own people (typically only two cultures involved), I focus on the missionary's perspective in this section.

[112]Larry Caldwell, "Receptor-Oriented Hermeneutics: Reclaiming the Hermeneutical Methodologies of the New Testament for Bible Interpreters in the Twenty-First Century" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990), 270. For an explanation and critique of Caldwell's position on this issue, see pp. 102-20 in this dissertation.

[113]As chapter three stated, the first to propose this three culture model of interpretation was Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 33-58.

that the burden rests upon the interpreter to understand the biblical culture, appreciate the text in his own cultural perspective, and communicate the text in receptor-oriented ways.[114] To be able to accomplish such a task, the interpreter must be committed to studying the target culture.

Studying the target culture is a complicated process that involves years of study and language learning. The first step for the missionary is the identification of the people's worldview. Hiebert defines worldview as the "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives."[115] Worldview identification is a time-consuming process that involves the study of the history of a people and the contemporary situation through ethnosemantic analysis, sentence completion, sign, ritual, and myth analysis, value identification, aesthetics evaluation, participant observation, and informant interviews.[116]

This type of worldview identification provides a number of benefits to the missionary task. Grunlan and Mayers explain, "Cultural anthropology can enable a missionary to understand his prospective new culture, to enter the culture with minimum culture shock and maximum adjustment, to insure that his message is being understood, and to implant a biblical indigenous church and not transplant the church of his own

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[114]Ibid., 271-72.

[115]Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 15.

[116]Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 91-103; Carol V. McKinney, *Globe-Trotting in Sandals: A Field Guide in Cultural Research* (Dallas: SIL International: 2000); James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1979); James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1980); John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

culture."[117] Through cultural anthropological research and worldview identification, the missionary is able to understand the people, communicate with them, and plant an indigenous church more effectively.

Worldview identification is a helpful tool when the missionary is applying the meaning of the biblical text to the contemporary context. Once the missionary identifies and is able to describe the worldview of his target audience, he can pinpoint the broad categories of thought and presuppositions about the nature of reality that relate to truth of the specific biblical text. The missionary can then narrow his study to the cultural norms and practices that the text addresses.

During this cultural analysis, the missionary should not vocalize his judgment of the sinful cultural practices.[118] If the people detect that the missionary has a critical attitude toward the norms and practices of the culture, the people will no longer talk about the practices with him. Instead, he should ask questions of cultural informants that help to elucidate the distinction between the cultural form and the meaning behind that form.

Another element of the culture that the missionary needs to study at this point is the hermeneutical methodologies of the target culture.[119] Knowing the traditional hermeneutical methodologies enables the missionary to understand how the people will

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[117]Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 32.

[118]Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987): 109; idem, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 88-89.

[119]As stated in chap. 3, I agree with Caldwell concerning the need to study the indigenous hermeneutical methodologies, but disagree as to the reasons why that study is necessary. Caldwell argues that missionaries should study those methodologies in order to use them, but I argue that the missionary should study them for the purpose of awareness. He missionary may also need to correct some of those tendencies where the hermeneutical practices subvert authorial intent. For Caldwell's argument, see Larry Caldwell, "Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context," *Journal of Asian Mission* 1 (1999): 31-32.

interpret and apply the specific passage of Scripture. The missionary with this type of awareness can better prepare to confront and correct those tendencies that subvert the intent of the original author.

Along the same lines, the missionary should recognize that people of different cultural settings often approach the biblical text with different questions. Believers with different cultural backgrounds focus on different aspects of the subject matter of the text.[120] The missionary who has studied the worldview of the target culture will be able to recognize why people in that culture are concerned about certain details of the text as opposed to others.

Scrutinize his own cultural perspective. The second aspect of applying the meaning of the biblical text to the contemporary situation is that the missionary should scrutinize his own cultural perspective. Returning to the three-culture model of the biblical culture, the interpreter's culture, and the target culture, the danger is that the interpreter will view the text from his own cultural biases and then impose those biases upon the target culture.

Caldwell helpfully notes this danger. As has already been stated, he explains that the burden rests on the interpreter to overcome these cultural differences so that effective communication of the biblical content can happen. He then laments, "In most cases, however, it is the receptor who receives the burden of modifying his or her worldview in order to understand the interpreter's message. Thus, what often happens is that the receptor has to enter into the culture of the interpreter and think more like the

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[120]Kevin Higgins, "Diverse Voices: Hearing Scripture Speak in a Multicultural Environment," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society, Charlotte, NC, September 2010), 7-10. Higgins explains the results of a study with believers from insider movements in five different cultures. When these men of different cultures gathered to study Scripture together, they tended to focus on different details of the text in spite of their unified pursuit of the author's meaning. While I disagree with Higgins' commitment to insider movements, his comments are helpful that different aspects of subject matter are more interesting or more appealing depending on one's cultural background.

interpreter instead of the other way around."[121]

When the interpreter (in this case, the missionary) fails to think critically about his own worldview and cultural presuppositions, he places the burden on his hearers to become like him in order to understand the message. Since application is the subjective aspect of interpretation, a range of allowable applications for the biblical text exists. Instead of developing culturally appropriate applications, the interpreter who is unaware of his cultural biases will develop applications that are better suited to his own cultural setting.

The example of ancestor worship in East Asian cultures helps to display the danger of cultural bias.[122] Westerners tend to be individualistic in outlook, and a Western missionary might reject practices related to ancestor worship on the basis of Romans 10:9 and his understanding that eternal destiny is related to the decision of an individual. East Asians, on the other hand, tend to be group-oriented and place emphasis on filial piety. They might participate in these practices and argue they are obeying the command "Honor your father and your mother" (Exod 20:12). The point here is not to alleviate the difficulty but simply to show how each cultural perspective leads the interpreter to place emphasis on a different passage of Scripture in order to reject or accept the practice.[123]

To avoid this danger, the missionary must be a student not only of the target culture, but he must also be a student of his own culture. A missionary, while rarely

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[121]Larry W. Caldwell, "Cross-Cultural Bible Interpretation: A View from the Field," *Phronesis* 3 (1996): 21-24.

[122]Ancestor veneration grows out of Confucian ideals and is focused on providing for the welfare and happiness of the dead. Not all of the practices, though, are related to impacting the eternal state of the deceased. Some practices are intended to help people honor and remember their ancestors' positive attributes.

[123]What I am not saying is that Westerners are wrong to appeal to Rom 10:9 or that the East Asian is wrong to appeal to Exod 20:12. The point is that they make a premature decision based on their cultural perception of which text is more relevant to the situation. With careful study of the rituals involved and a recognition of their own cultural biases, these believers can reconcile the two competing perspectives.

challenged to examine his own cultural perspective when at home, is forced to examine his own worldview when entering and learning another culture.[124] As an interpreter of Scripture, the missionary's reflection on his own cultural perspective is a good thing because it enables him to overcome those areas where he interprets Scripture according to his culture rather than according to the subject matter of the text.

Know the implications of the biblical text. A third step in the application process is the study of the implications of the original author's meaning. Implications are "those meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern of meaning he willed."[125] These implications are the unconscious meaning of the biblical author because, though he was unaware of them at the time of writing, they nonetheless fall within the pattern of meaning he established when he wrote. An implication of a text is the author's meaning fleshed out in contemporary terms.

The interpreter can begin to identify a text's implications by determining what the author meant by what he wrote to his original audience. The interpreter should consider what the author hoped his hearers would learn from the story or instruction and what change in belief, value, or practice he hoped would result. Sometimes this information is communicated in the text through a stated command, and other times the change is implied.

Being a student of both the biblical culture and the contemporary culture, the interpreter should be able to determine how those stated and implied changes from the biblical text relate to the contemporary culture. Some of the ways that the text impacts the contemporary culture are clear because the command in the biblical text is binding on

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[124]Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2001), 111-14.

[125]Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 39.

the contemporary culture in the same way it was on the biblical culture. For those unstated changes, the interpreter must consider the relationship between those practices of the biblical culture and similar ones in the contemporary culture.

Daniel Doriani explains that such biblical instruction is given in seven ways: rules, ideals, doctrines, redemptive acts in narratives, exemplary acts in narratives, biblical images, and songs and prayers.[126] All the instruction that is found in these types of writings is focused on one of four aspects.[127] The first aspect is duty, what one should do. The second is character, where one considers how he can become the person who does what is right. The third is goals, which explains the causes to which one should devote himself. A final aspect is discernment, where one considers how to distinguish truth from error. The interpreter should consider how each text applies to these four areas.

To develop such application, Haddon Robinson proposes an "Abstraction Ladder."[128] With implications of a text or commands that are culturally conditioned, the interpreter cannot bring them across to the contemporary culture directly. He needs to climb the ladder of abstraction and consider what the command teaches about God and humanity's relationship with him in order to communicate that command with the contemporary audience.

Robinson gives as an example the Old Testament law that says, "Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Exod 23:19, 34:26; Deut 14:21). Boiling a young goat in this way, Robinson explains, was a pagan idolatrous worship practice, and so the command is

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[126]Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 82.

[127]Ibid., 98.

[128]Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," *Leadership* (1997) [online]; accessed 3 August 2011; available from http;//www.christianitytoday.com/le/1997/fall; Internet.

a prohibition against participating in such customs. To bring the command directly across into the contemporary culture is not helpful, but the interpreter must abstract the command in terms of what it teaches about God's character. Robinson states that the principle of this passage is "You should not associate yourself with idolatrous worship, even in ways that do not seem to have direct association with physically going to the idol."[129]

Another helpful example is Romans 10:9 where Paul writes that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Paul's command is clear that to be saved one must believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and must confess that Jesus is Lord. Paul says nothing in this passage, though, about the fact that belief in Jesus is mutually exclusive with commitment to other religions systems or objects of worship.[130]

Certainly, such a point was an implication of Paul's teaching in this text, even though it was unstated. For the first-century believer, this exclusivity meant turning away from the imperial cult and the Greco-Roman system of deities. For believers today, the unstated implication of this passage to abandon and turn away from all competing religious claims will look different in different contexts. For the Hindu in India, it will mean forsaking all other gods. For the atheist in China, it will mean turning away from money and self. For the animist in Zimbabwe, it will mean turning away from sorcery, witchcraft, and the desire for power. For the Muslim in Iran, it will mean forsaking the Quran as God's Word and Mohammed as God's prophet.

Determining the implications of the biblical text allows the text to speak to

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[129]Ibid., sec. 3.

[130]Paul does argue that other religious systems are false in other parts of the letter, like 1:18-3:31, where Paul's major argument is that all are sinful and no system of religion can make us righteous before God. It is only by faith in Jesus Christ alone that people are saved.

contemporary situations. Although the author was unaware of these situations when he wrote, these concerns fall within the thought pattern he recorded through the words he chose. Since this is a difficult process and is the subjective aspect of interpretation, younger interpreters will benefit from sharing their observations and insights with older believers.

Observe the importance of critical contextualization. Chapter 3 examined Paul Hiebert's critical contextualization process and found it to have numerous benefits.[131] Hiebert's proposal is less a specific hermeneutical method than it is a system for evaluating cultural traditions and practices in light of biblical revelation. Nonetheless, Hiebert's second and third steps in the critical contextualization process are important at this point in the contextualization of the biblical message.

After an uncritical examination of the culture, the missionary studies the relevant Scripture passages with the other believers in the community.[132] At this point, the missionary takes the lead in explaining how the relevant texts relate to the cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of the people's worldview. The next step involves developing a critical response, and it involves all of the people together studying the cultural practice(s) and the biblical text.[133] The people evaluate their customs and determine how the gospel impacts those beliefs and customs.

When the people evaluate their practices, they respond in several ways.[134] One response is to leave the cultural practice in place. Some cultural practices are amoral, and believers can continue to participate in those practices after choosing to follow Christ.

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[131]For an explanation of this process, see pp. 122-24 in this dissertation.

[132]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization,"109-10; idem, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, 88-89.

[133]Ibid., 110

[134]Ibid.

Things like whether people in a specific culture prefer lamb or chicken, whether they wear suits or shorts, or whether they drive cars or ride bikes are all examples of amoral cultural categories. None of the options is sinful, and in these cases, Christians will continue to function according to those pre-existing cultural categories.

When evaluating their cultural practices, the believers may choose to reject the cultural practice or belief.[135] The believers might conclude that the biblical teaching is in direct contradiction with their custom, and in that case, they should reject the cultural practice. An example in missions history of this situation was when William Carey went to India and encountered the practice of *sati*, in which a widow was burned on her deceased husband's funeral pyre.[136] Carey confronted this practice as unbiblical and encouraged everyone, believers and unbelievers, to abandon the practice. Eventually, the government outlawed the practice.

The believers may also decide to modify the custom.[137] M. David Sills gives an example of how this modification may take place:

> For instance, in some regions of the Andes, when a new couple marries, they will spend the first year in the home of the groom's parents. During this year, the groom gathers all the building materials they will need for a new home. When he has amassed all that is necessary, the entire community is called together to build the mud-walled, thatch-roofed house. In addition to providing the building materials, the community workers look to him to provide all the alcohol they can consume as part of this culture complex. These days of building and celebration often result in drunkenness, fights, and worse. A missionary encountering such a practice might immediately forbid the entire practice in an attempt to put an end to the debauchery. The problem is that the people will see a foreign religion that does not understand their people and is forcing its rules upon them. The natural response is to reject the foreigner's religion; after all, how can a person obtain a house if they accept the foreign religion?

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[135]Ibid.

[136]Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Birmingham: Christian History Institute, 1998), 151-52.

[137]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization,"110.

> An alternative approach would be for the missionary who recognizes the sinful practices associated with the house-raising to study the Bible in the hermeneutical community and point out to them the biblical teaching on drunkenness and fighting. When the culture sees the problem, the Bible forces them to make a critical response. Their response results in a new substitute practice for the traditional one, thus fulfilling the function of the home building but without the drinking and fighting. The hermeneutical community suggests that the practice continue in exactly the same way except that the groom should supply food, soft drinks, and music groups instead of alcohol. In this way, they will build the house and the culture will embrace the new "nonalcoholic" version as a functional substitute.[138]

Hiebert's proposal begins with the cultural analysis and the identification of certain cultural practices to examine. The principles of his plan, however, still work well when the text comes first, like in the case of a specific preaching or teaching setting. In that case, the meaning of the original author narrows the range of possible cultural practices that are in view. The concepts, though, of involving the believers in both the discussion of the meanings behind the cultural forms and the development of the new contextualized practice are still helpful.

The benefit of this approach is that it avoids syncretism by confronting the aspects of culture that violate the biblical commands.[139] When believers modify sinful practices by creating functional substitutes, they avoid the possibility of surface accommodation. Surface accommodation takes place when converts apply Christian terms and practices to their existing belief system.[140] Their outward actions and phrases have changed, but their worldview remains unaffected. Likewise, involving the entire believing community in the process creates a hermeneutical community in which the believers work together to reshape their worldview in light of their newfound faith in Christ.

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[138]Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*, 208.

[139]Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization,"110-11.

[140]Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1991), 63.

Paul Hiebert and Enoch Wan both note the importance of the hermeneutical community. Though believers work through critical contextualization to apply the gospel to their specific context, they also have a responsibility to learn from and dialogue with other Christians in other cultures and in other time periods. An interpreter is better equipped to apply Scripture to his own context when he learns how believers in various locations throughout church history have correctly and incorrectly interpreted Scripture.

Hiebert explains how this hermeneutical community functions: "Just as believers in a local church must test their interpretation of Scriptures with their community of believers, so the churches in different cultural and historical contexts must test their theologies with the international community of churches and the church down through the ages."[141] This international community helps one another to determine those places where their interpretations are more influenced by culture than by the Scriptures. Such dialogue and interaction, which Wan describes as true ethnohermeneutics, is an ongoing process as the universal church seeks to apply the eternal Word in a changing world.

Communicate the biblical truth in a relevant way. The final part of the application process is the communication of the biblical truth in a culturally appropriate way. Each culture has its own unique communication patterns and learning styles. The missionary, as part of his cultural analysis, should seek to identify these cultural norms so he can use them as he communicates the biblical message.

In his theory of communication, Charles Kraft explains that communication must be receptor-oriented.[142] For effective communication of a message, a communicator must take into account how the recipient will understand the words and

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[141]Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, 103.

[142]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 115-18.

symbols used in the message. Kraft explains, "Communicators present messages via cultural forms (symbols) that stimulate within the receptors' heads meanings that each receptor shapes into the message that he or she ultimately hears."[143] This receptor-orientation does not mean that the missionary changes the biblical content but that he presents the biblical content in a way that is understandable.

The missionary should ask the question, "How is truth communicated in this culture?" Western cultures communicate truth with lists, outlines, and reasoned arguments. In other cultures, though, the relationship between the messenger and the recipient plays a role in how the message is heard.[144] In these cultures, the missionary must consider the impact of non-verbal communication and whether his actions are building or undermining the trust of the people.[145]

Bryan Chappell explains that illustrations are a key component in helping recipients to process the biblical truths. He writes, "For a person to process information it is not enough that the information simply be presented. The information must be integrated into the matrix of preexisting stimuli, memory features, and operative procedures that characterize the 'receiver.'"[146] Illustrating the key truths of the passage in cultural terms brings the gospel to life and makes it understandable.[147]

The Bible presents several models for using illustrations to communicate in culturally relevant terms. The Old Testament prophets often acted out their messages (Isa

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[143]Ibid., 116.

[144]M. David Sills, "The Great Commission and Intercultural Communication," in *The Challenge of the Great Commission: Essays on God's Mandate for the Local Church*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Thom S. Rainer (Crestwood, KY: Pinnacle Publishers, 2005), 89.

[145]Grunlan and Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology*, 59; Sills, "The Great Commission and Intercultural Communication," 86.

[146]Bryan Chappell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 52.

[147]Ibid., 59.

20:3-4, Ezek 4:1-4; Zech 11:4-17). Jesus used parables to illustrate the truths he was teaching. Likewise, Paul used cultural statements and beliefs to connect with his audiences (Acts 17:23; Titus 1:12).

The missionary needs to exert caution at this point in making sure that he understands the meaning behind the cultural forms he uses to illustrate biblical truth. Again, it is imperative that the missionary avoid laying the foundation for syncretistic tendencies, like those found in the vernacular, cross-textual, and intertextual approaches where the interpreter seeks to merge the cultural story with the biblical one. The missionary needs to solicit the help of cultural informants who can help him to understand the insider's perspective of myths, stories, and practices before he uses them in communicating the truths of the gospel. The missionary also needs to be clear in distinguishing between cultural belief and biblical truth when they are in contradiction with one another.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the author-oriented approach is the approach that is best suited to the evangelical worldview and that the grammatical historical method is the best method for determining the original author's meaning. This method includes both the determination of the author's meaning and the application of the meaning to the contemporary context. Although this process can be difficult in places where there are few resources or there are only oral learners, it is not impossible. This process enables believers in any culture to apply the authoritative teaching of the biblical author in ways that are suitable to their specific context.

CHAPTER 5

AN APPLICATION OF THE CORRECTIVE APPROACH TO THE EAST ASIAN CONTEXT

Chapter 4 argued that the author-oriented approach to hermeneutics is the method that best suits evangelicals, and it showed the steps involved in determining the author's meaning and applying that meaning to the contemporary contexts. The last chapter revealed that interpreters can implement those steps even in places where there is a lack of resources or literacy.

This chapter applies that model to the East Asian context, specifically to the Han Chinese, in order to show that the grammatical historical method can be utilized in any cultural context. To do so, this chapter first examines the Han cultural context and then shows how three biblical texts can be applied in that context.

Examination of the Han Cultural Context

The Han are the world's largest people group, totaling more than one billion people. Twenty subsets of the Han exist,[1] the largest of these being Mandarin-speaking Han, who comprise some 780 million people.[2] The official position of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is that the Han are a culturally homogeneous majority.[3] While

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[1]Paul Hattaway, *Operation China: Introducing All the Peoples of China* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), 168-91.

[2]Ibid., 175.

[3]William Jankowiak, "Ethnicity and Chinese Identity: Ethnographic Insight and Political Positioning," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, ed. Kam Louie, Cambridge Companions to Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 95.

numerous scholars debate this position,[4] the reality is that remarkable linguistic and cultural uniformity exists among the Mandarin-speaking Han.[5]

There are several reasons for the uniformity that exists among a people as populous and as diverse geographically as the Mandarin-speaking Han. The first reason is that throughout its history China has had a centripetal outlook on the rest of the world, seeing itself as a centralizing force in the universe.[6] That this is their outlook is confirmed by the Mandarin word for China, 中国 (*Zhongguo*), or Middle Kingdom. This ethnocentric perspective has served to prioritize the unity of China and its people.

Missiologist Ralph Covell gives several historical reasons for the unity of the Han people.[7] Confucian tradition established common cultural practices and made them available to all classes of people through drama, proverbs, and story. The ability of this Confucian tradition to coexist with Daoism and Buddhism helped to stabilize and ingrain the tradition. Also, the tradition of polygyny, which allowed women of lower classes to marry as the second or third wife of a man of greater wealth and influence, enabled the distribution of this common tradition through socio-economic intermingling.

Another reason for the cultural uniformity of the Mandarin-speaking Han is the centralized, autocratic style of leadership that has always been at China's helm.[8] While

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[4]Jankowiak, "Ethnicity and Chinese Identity," 95; Shin Lin Shu, *The People of China*, The History and Culture of China, ed. Jianwei Wang (Philadelphia: Mason Crest, 2006), 31-32; James L. Watson, "Past, Present, and Future," in *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Land*, ed. Robert E. Murowchick, Cradles of Civilization (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 177; Ralph R. Covell, *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith Among China's Minority Peoples* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 17.

[5]Hattaway, *Operation China*, 175.

[6]Watson, "Past, Present, and Future," 179-80; Richard D. Lewis, *The Cultural Imperative: Global Trends in the 21st Century* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2003), 121.

[7]Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, The Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 6-7.

[8]Watson, "Past, Present, and Future," 179-80.

China was governed by an imperial monarch for several millennia, in the modern period, the Communist Party has been the state's centralized authority. The unifying force that the Party has promoted is nationalism.[9] These unifying attempts have been successful through the simplification of the Chinese script, the standardization of Mandarin and its use in education,[10] the publication of historical narratives which promote allegiance to the state,[11] and the promotion of the PRC as the heir of China's great cultural tradition.[12]

A people so populous and so diverse geographically, and yet, still substantially unified in culture and language is worthy of further consideration. To better understand the Mandarin-speaking Han, this section examines their cultural characteristics by analyzing their history, religion, festivals, worldview, and hermeneutic tradition.

History of the Han

The history of the Chinese people is unparalleled.[13] The Chinese boast the world's oldest continuous civilization, dating back to 1600 B.C.[14] In China, though, the past is not simply the past. In fact, Chinese scholar Richard Gunde is correct when he notes that "in no other society does history loom so large."[15] The modern period begins

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[9]Shu, *The People of China*, 31-32.

[10]Jankowiak, "Ethnicity and Chinese Identity," 106.

[11]Ibid., 108. Two of the more notable narratives of recent Chinese history that promote allegiance to the state are The Long March and the story of Lei Feng. The origins of both narratives have recently come into question. For a discussion of these issues, see Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 127-65, 478.

[12]W. Scott Morton and Charlton Lewis, *China: Its History and Culture*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 244-45.

[13]Jonathan Fenby, *Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power, 1850 to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 1.

[14]Ibid., xlvii.

[15]Richard Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, Culture and Customs of Asia, ed. Hanchao Lu (Westport, CO: Greenwood Press, 2002), 37.

in 1900 and is the start of a century of constant change.[16]

Pre-Mao rumblings (1900-1949). This period began in the summer of 1900 with the grassroots anti-foreign movement known as the Boxer Rebellion.[17] The Boxers were an unorganized militia who used ritualistic martial arts to subdue their enemies. This grassroots movement attacked every vestige of foreign power in their country including dignitaries, missionaries, and Chinese Christians. Historian Jonathan Fenby explains, "The Boxers combined extremism and loyalty, drawing on old folk traditions and seeing themselves as a divine army marching to eradicate the demons threatening their country."[18] Empowered by Imperial Chinese troops, the Boxers attacked the foreign settlements in Tianjin and Beijing until an international relief force eventually overthrew their siege.

The inability of the Boxers to overthrow the foreign powers and the excessive reparations imposed by the beleaguered foreign powers left an indelible mark on the Chinese psyche. For one, it shattered the notion that the Chinese people had a mandate from heaven to rule the world. In the coming years, the foreign powers would exert an increasing influence in China. The Boxer Rebellion weakened the people's ever-dwindling trust in the imperial leadership. Only a few short years later, in 1911, the young emperor, Pu Yi, was overthrown, and a republic was established.

The Kuomintang Nationalist government set out to establish a democratic republic, but their rule never met the expectations of the people.[19] Plagued by corruption

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[16]Kam Louie, "Defining Modern Chinese Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, ed. Kam Louie, Cambridge Companions to Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

[17]Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900* (New York: Berkley Books, 2000), x-xiv.

[18]Fenby, *Modern China*, 83.

[19]Ibid., 117.

and beset with constant civil wars between the officials and the warlords, the government never garnered the support of the people. Amidst these difficulties, and empowered with a new sense of nationalism, student protests of the Versailles peace treaty on May 4, 1919, developed into what would be called the May Fourth Movement.[20] This student movement would eventually become the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1920 and threaten the existence of the new democratic system of government.

The rise of the CCP started a bitter civil war that would last sixteen years. The divided nation was, during this time, also invaded by Japan. Fenby comments, "The Communist 'disease of the heart' and the Japanese 'disease of the skin' were intimately entwined in determining the future of hundreds of millions of people. As Mao Zedong subsequently told Japanese who apologized for their country's behavior, he would not have ended up in power had it not been for their country's invasion."[21] The Nationalists were simply ill-equipped to handle the dual threat of the Communists and the Japanese, and in 1949 fled to Taiwan with the establishment of the PRC.

Mao-led revolutions (1949-1976). On October 1, 1949, Mao ascended the Gate of Heavenly Peace or Tiananmen at the Forbidden City to announce the establishment of the PRC. The crowd responded with shouts of "Long live Chairman Mao."[22] The CCP restored to China a centralized, authoritative type of government.[23] With the state secure and peace restored to the country, Mao would exert an increasing influence over the people through the implementation of his ruthless schemes.[24] Fenby

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[20]Ibid., 142.

[21]Ibid., 215.

[22]Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, 316.

[23]Ibid., 317.

[24]Ibid., 317-18.

describes the situation,

> Victorious revolutionaries have a problem. After winning power as outsiders, they become the new establishment. They have to construct and manage society, building bridges rather than blowing them up. Few handle the transformation well, and things usually end up badly for the people on whose behalf they claim to have acted. Never was this more true than for Mao Zedong, who remained rooted in conflict and violence after the victory of 1949.[25]

Mao's reign re-instituted China's isolation from the rest of the world, and his rule was characterized by constant revolutions.

Mao attacked the traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices of the people as he sought to establish a new China fully committed to him and to the Party. Utilizing the famous Marxist line that religion is the "opiate of the people," Mao's hope was that religion would slowly die out once the atheist regime was fully established. Chang notes, "In general, religious and quasi-religious organizations were either branded reactionary and suppressed, or brought under tight-control."[26]

Two especially destructive periods of Mao's leadership were the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), Mao implemented policies designed to increase production of agriculture and steel, which were aimed at making China competitive with other world superpowers. The result, however, was one of the largest famines in human history with at least 38 million people dying nationwide.[27] Fenby gives a horrific account of the situation:

> People ate tree bark and ground stones, and, in places, resorted to cannibalism, gnawing on flesh from corpses, and killing children to boil them for food. Men sold their wives to raise cash. Gangs of starving peasants attacked grain reserves and trains.[28]

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[25]Fenby, *Modern China*, 351.

[26]Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, 321.

[27]Ibid., 430.

[28]Fenby, *Modern China*, 415.

As painful as the Great Leap Forward was, the Cultural Revolution was by far the most excruciating period of Mao's leadership (1966-1976). During this period, which Mao sometimes referred to as the "Great Purge,"[29] he sought to rid the country of all ideological influences except Mao-ist thought. Mao's *Little Red Book* was to be carried at all times and to be read from daily. The revolution started when Mao energized the country's young to attack their teachers for "poisoning their heads with 'bourgeois ideas'—and for persecuting them with exams, which henceforth were abolished."[30] Slowly, riots erupted in cities all across China. Eventually, known as "Red Guards," these idealistic youth were given license by Mao to purge the country of anything that contradicted Mao-ist doctrine.[31] Chang provides a picture of the first riot that ensued in Beijing:

> On 18 June [1966], scores of teachers and cadres at Peking University were dragged in front of crowds and manhandled, their faces blackened, and dunces' hats put on their heads. They were forced to kneel, some were beaten up, and women were sexually molested. Similar episodes happened all over China, producing a cascade of suicides.[32]

During the Cultural Revolution, the CCP outlawed all religious practices and attacked priceless cultural relics. Mao's government even branded Confucius, whose name is synonymous with Chinese culture, a counter-revolutionary out of Mao's hatred for his teachings.[33] Fenby gives a description of the destruction of cultural items:

> In Beijing, 4,922 out of 6,843 designated places of historical interest were trashed—the Forbidden City was protected because, hearing of a planned attack, Zhou [Enlai] sent in troops and ordered the gates closed. At the birthplace of Confucius in Shandong, Red Guards, acting with the tacit approval of Chen Boda,

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[29]Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, 430.

[30]Ibid., 503.

[31]John Gugel, "China Today," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 33 (October 2006): 389.

[32]Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, 503.

[33]Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, 511; Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 36.

destroyed 6,618 registered cultural artifacts, including 2,700 books and 2,000 graves. Some reports say local inhabitants intervened to limit the damage.[34]

With Mao's death in 1976, his terrifying reign ended. Despite the havoc his leadership caused for the Chinese people, some benefits existed. The economy increased annually by 6 percent, many diseases were eradicated, and life expectancy increased from 39 to 64.[35] With the next phase of leadership, the government would implement even more changes, but those changes would be predominantly beneficial to the Chinese people.

Post-Mao reform (1977-present). With Mao dead, a power struggle ensued to see who would become the next leader.[36] Eventually, Deng Xiaoping emerged and slowly began to reverse many of Mao's policies. This new leadership brought increasing economic reforms and increasing openness to the outside world in the 1980s. While the economy became more capitalistic, political control was exercised as evidenced by the repression of the 1989 student protests in Tiananmen Square.[37] Though China has not become democratic, since 1980 the people have enjoyed more social freedom than at any other time under Communist rule.

Pragmatic concerns motivated the reforms brought about under Deng and his successor Jiang Zemin.[38] Some of the changes that have taken place include decollectivization of farms, privatization of state-owned industries, and encouragement of individual initiative and private enterprise. Perhaps the most significant change has been

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[34]Fenby, *Modern China*, 451.

[35]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 29-32.

[36]Fenby, *Modern China*, 529.

[37]For an inside account of the events surrounding the 1989 student protests, see Zhang Liang, *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership's Decision to use Force against Their Own People – In Their Own Words*, ed. Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

[38]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 33.

the increase in foreign investment, which was virtually zero in 1978, but was $105.7 billion in 2010.[39] These changes have been implemented to bring about what Deng once said, "To get rich is glorious."[40]

The reforms, though, have not been without problems. China's population, already the world's largest, doubled between 1949 and 1990.[41] To help control the population, in 1980 the government instituted the one-child policy, which, though exceptions exist, limits families to only one child.[42] Corruption, especially in the government, continued to expand with reports in 1998 of $7 billion in funds being misappropriated.[43] Social tensions have also increased as the gap between the haves and have-nots, the very issue Mao's policies sought to eradicate, widens.[44]

The increased economic and social freedoms made clear that Mao's attacks on China's rich history, culture, traditions, and religions had not worked. Recent years have seen a revival of many religions, including Buddhism, Daoism, and other folk religious practices.[45] Traditional festivals have been reinstated as public holidays, including the

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[39]"Foreign Direct Investment in China in 2010 Rises to Record $105.7 Billion" (News Article from Bloomberg News 18 January 2011) [online]; accessed 12 August 2011; available from http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-01-18; Internet.

[40]Ibid., 23.

[41]Rhoads Murphey, "The People," in *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Land*, Cradles of Civilization, ed. Robert E. Murowchick (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 31.

[42]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 179. In 2009 the government tweaked the one-child policy so that when a husband and a wife are both the only children in their respective families, they can legally have two children. For information on this changed, see "Shanghai Urges 'Two-Child Policy'" (News article from BBC News 24 July 2009) [online]; accessed 17 November 2010; available from http://news.bbc.co.uk; Internet.

[43]Morton and Lewis, *China*, 268.

[44]Ibid., 265; Fenby, *Modern China*, 529.

[45]Daniel L. Overmeyer, "Religion in China Today: Introduction," in *Religion in China Today*, ed. Daniel L. Overmeyer, The China Quarterly Special Issues New Series, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1; Fenby, *Modern China*, xlv-xlvi; Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, World Religions Series, ed. Damien Keown and Charles S. Prebish (New York: Routledge, 2009), 253.

animistic Grave-Sweeping Festival.[46] Interest has never been higher in China's history. Political science professor Lucian Pye is clear in his assessment:

> Thus after a half century of heroic efforts and massive human sacrifices, China is today, in a fundamental sense, back to where it was in 1949, or even earlier in 1911, in the sense that the country is still in search of a modern national identity which can combine elements of its great traditional civilization with features of modernity.[47]

Religion

Mao's Communist regime sought to eliminate all effects of religion on society, and as a result, today many Chinese would describe themselves as non-religious.[48] A closer examination, though, reveals that their self-description is not an accurate measurement of their religious perspective. The results of the rush for wealth that has come with the Post-Mao reforms include both a moral collapse and a spiritual vacuum in the hearts of the people.[49] The religious revival currently taking place is a direct consequence of the inability of Communist doctrine or Capitalist wealth to fill spiritual longings. To better understand the religious beliefs of the people, this section examines Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Folk religion, and Christianity.

Confucianism. Confucianism was named for its founder, Confucius (552-479 B.C.) and was accepted as an imperial ideology in the early Han dynasty (206-220 B.C.).[50] Confucianism is primarily an ethical system, and its principles stand as the

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[46]Fenby, *Modern China*, xlv.

[47]Lucian W. Pye, "An Overview of 50 Years of the People's Republic of China: Some Progress, but Big Problems Remain," in *The People's Republic of China After 50 Years*, ed. Richard Louis Edmonds, Studies on Contemporary China (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16-17.

[48]Hattaway, *Operation China*, 175.

[49]David Burnett, *The Spirit of China: Roots of Faith in 21st Century China* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2008), 316, 331.

[50]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 34.

foundation of Chinese culture.[51]

The core of Confucianism is a guide to harmonious and stable human relationships.[52] Confucius was conservative in his thinking, and he espoused traditional ways of interacting with others.[53] He explained human relationships as hierarchical and reciprocal.[54] The two principle virtues of Confucianism that enable humans to interact in these ways are 礼 (*li*) ritual or formal behavior and 仁 (*ren*) benevolence.[55] To understand the proper ways of interacting with others within these hierarchical and reciprocal structures, education was a priority in Confucian thinking.[56]

Confucius was concerned with developing a just and harmonious society as set out in his teachings on suitable human interaction.[57] His teachings explain how society should be structured and how human life should be organized.[58] Poceski notes, "While early Confucianism was concerned with the whole spectrum of social relationships, the basic pattern of interpersonal interaction was formulated in terms of the parent-child relationship, which became the principle relationship in Chinese society."[59] As a result, Confucian teaching focused on the practice of ancestor worship.[60]

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[51]Jingyi Ji, *Encounters between Chinese Culture and Christianity: A Hermeneutical Perspective*, ed. Voker Kuster, Contact Zone: Explorations in Intercultural Theology, vol. 3 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 18.

[52]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 38.

[53]Ibid.; Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 57.

[54]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 38.

[55]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 43.

[56]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 38.

[57]Ibid., 57.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid., 46.

[60]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 8-9; Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 43.

Ancestor worship is part of *li*. Covell explains, "The common person viewed sacrifice as a means to solicit the protection and blessing of the unseen spirit world."[61] Covell goes on to state that the common person "believed [ancestor worship] provided for the continued welfare of the deceased, and sought by all means to be protected from any of the dead person's evil intentions toward the living."[62] Xinzhong Yao agrees and states that the performance of these rituals was believed "to be necessary to ensure harmony, happiness, and prosperity for the state, the land and the people."[63]

Daoism. Similar to Confucianism, Daoism developed in China around 500 B.C.[64] Laozi is the oldest and most venerated Daoist teacher, and his teachings serve as the foundation for Daoist beliefs and practices.[65] With Daoism, though, a fundamental distinction exists between Daoist philosophy and Daoist religion.[66] Philosophically, Daoism is concerned with the unnamable 道 (*Dao*), which literally means 'way,' but can mean "the impersonal creative force of the universe that is perpetual and engenders *yin* and *yang*, from which emerge the myriad things."[67] Daoist philosophy conveys acceptance of nature and nearness to the creative force.[68]

As a religion, Daoism is concerned with animistic practices. Gunde explains

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[61]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 8-9.

[62]Ibid., 9.

[63]XinZhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 194.

[64]Livia Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press, 2001), 11.

[65]Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*, 11.

[66]For a scholar who disagrees with this dichotomy, see Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

[67]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 61.

[68]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 50.

the difference:

> Daoism as a religion is quite unlike Daoism as a philosophy. The latter, as we have seen, advocates acceptance of nature. As a religion, however, Daoism came to involve a search for ways to overcome nature, especially a search for superhuman (and thus supernatural) powers through following complex rituals. Many Daoists sought immortality through the use of magic, herbs and minerals, breath control, and special diets. While this sort of alchemy has often caused Daoism to be dismissed as superstition, the search for magical elixirs and formulas led believers to explore various sciences and to make important contributions to medicine, chemistry, and astronomy.[69]

Daoist practices are mystical and include sacrifices made to gods and ancestors, burning of money to benefit the afterlife of ancestors, and alchemist techniques designed to increase longevity.[70]

Buddhism. Unlike Confucianism and Daoism, Buddhism originated in India and entered China in the first century A.D.[71] The Buddhism that ultimately survived in China was far from a pure form of Buddhist thought, but amalgamated with existing belief structures. What made Buddhism attractive to the Chinese was not the Buddhist worldview or four-fold path in and of itself, but it was that it added another layer to their religious ritual system that provided guidance for everyday life.[72]

In gaining acceptance in China, Buddhism both added to and built upon Confucianism and Daoism. It built upon the ethical system of Confucianism, the philosophical worldview of Daoism, the religious supernaturalism of Taoism, and the

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[69]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 50. The type of "magic" referenced here is animistic in nature and is concerned with the use of certain spells and rituals to gain the favor and power over the unseen spirit world. "Alchemy" as it is used here is an inorganic chemistry that is concerned with the development of certain concoctions and elixirs that produce longevity or immortality.

[70]Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*, 124, 137, 146-47.

[71]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 114.

[72]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 9.

meditative practices of both.[73] As a result, the monks of the Mahāyāna tradition who transmitted Buddhism to China contextualized its teachings and helped it to become uniquely Chinese.[74]

The main emphasis of Chinese Buddhism lies in its process of merit making. Poceski explains this worldview in that "the performance of pious acts and the cultivation of Buddhist virtues were above all ways for the accumulation of merit, which brought blessings in this life and secured favorable rebirth in the next."[75] Worshippers believe that the Buddhist practices and rituals procured blessings for both this life and the afterlife.

In his article, Buddhism expert Raoul Birnbaum states that although Buddhist laity are quite devoted, they are often difficult to distinguish from followers of other Chinese religions. He writes,

> "Laypeople" within the Buddhist community are not so easily recognized. A Buddhist temple filled with worshippers who offer incense and bow before deity images is not necessarily filled with Buddhists. Such visitors may well respond to the atmosphere and the many images just as they would in any type of Chinese temple, with prayers and offerings made to powerful spirits in order to seek good fortune for themselves and others. Some may feel a special devotion to one of the figures of the Buddhist pantheon, especially the compassionate figure of *Guanyin*, whose popularity is widespread, but these worshippers are not necessarily "Buddhist."[76]

Since Chinese Buddhism is so syncretistic, it is often difficult to determine if the religious rituals have their roots in Buddhism, Confucianism, or Daoism. Moreover,

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[73]Tawa Anderson, "Paving the Way for Buddha: The Philosophical and Religious Foundations of Taoism and Confucianism in China," A research paper presented to Dr. James Chancellor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, September 15, 2008. The distinction he makes between Daoism and Taoism is the difference I have explained as philosophical and religious Daoism.

[74]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 116.

[75]Ibid., 141.

[76]Raoul Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at the Century's Turn," in *Religion in China Today*, ed. Daniel L. Overmeyer, The China Quarterly Special Issues New Series, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 123.

many of these practices are not carried out in public settings, but in the home before a family altar.[77]

Folk Religion. Chinese folk religion is a blending of practices derived from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The folk religion of the average Chinese person displays the pragmatic side of the culture in that over the years it has weaved together this system not by asking the question, "What do I believe?," but by asking, "Does it work?"

Chinese folk religion varies somewhat from place to place, but the common themes include worship of ancestors and local deities. Poceski explains,

> At their core, the practices of popular religion center on the family (here understood in a broader sense than the nuclear family) and the local community. The veneration of ancestors, sometimes dubbed the "cult of the dead," reflects the pervasive influence of the kinship system on Chinese social and religious life. It has a very long history, going back all the way to the dawn of Chinese civilization. Ancestor worship is simply a ritualized extension of the virtue of filial piety that goes beyond one's immediate parents. By such ritual means, the living are able to convey their feelings of respect, as well as establish links and channels of communication with deceased members of the ancestral lineage, as they solicit their blessings or approval, and try to avoid their wrath or censure.[78]

He goes on to explain the worship of local deities:

> Much of popular religious practice in China revolves around the supplication and worship of various divine or supernatural beings. From early on, the Chinese have lived in a complex world populated by all sort of invisible and mysterious beings, some of them perceived as being kind and helpful, but others coming across as demonic and dangerous. Scholars often classify the numerous divinities and uncanny creatures that populate the spiritual realm of popular religion into three broad categories: gods (shen), ancestors (zu), and ghosts (gui).[79]

The ancestor worship of folk religion blends several religious traditions by combining the filial piety and *li* of Confucianism with the ritual burnings and offerings of Daoism. These practices combined with the worship of local deities from the Buddhist tradition

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[77]Ibid., 143-44.

[78]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 170.

[79]Ibid., 169.

display the depth of syncretism that exists in Chinese folk religion.

Covell explains how this blending of traditions was governed by practical concerns:

> Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and the many diffused religions of China interpenetrated both on the religious and ethical level in such an intimate way that most Chinese were at a loss to analyze their own precise belief system. They could worship a Daoist deity one day and a Buddhist god the next day, along with other gods and spirits. Priests in temples could not explain to visitors whether the temple was Daoist, Buddhist, or Confucianist. It really made no difference. The Chinese, like human beings everywhere, were reaching out for any handle that would enable them to deal with suffering, quirks of fate, meaninglessness, evil, ignorance, death, and the possibility of life beyond death.[80]

The Communists, for their part, suppressed folk religious practices, and they attempted, to no avail, to replace this belief structure with Communist ideology. With the increased social freedom that has come with the post-Mao reforms, these traditions have been revived as the Chinese continue to seek answers to the deeper questions of life.[81]

Christianity. Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, arrived in 1807.[82] In the first 150 years of Protestant work in China, the church struggled to contextualize the message and forms of Christianity. The Chinese saw Christianity as a tool of Western imperialism and, by and large, rejected it.

In the early twentieth century, with missionaries still in control of churches and church structures, several indigenous leaders broke away from the missionary-led churches and established their own movements. These leaders, such as Watchman Nee and Wang Mingdao, were the first recognizable leaders of an indigenous Chinese

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[80]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 9-10.

[81]Overmeyer, "Religion in China Today," 1.

[82]David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2003), 35-36.

Christianity.[83] The leadership of these groups had little or no theological training, but they were thought to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.[84] The work of these groups and the increased focus of missionaries on developing indigenous churches in the first half of the twentieth century led to the first substantial growth of the Church in China.

With the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the situation changed drastically. In the first few years of Communist rule, the new government deported missionaries and forced Chinese believers to sign a confession stating that their utmost allegiance was to the Communist Party. When many rejected to sign such a confession, the new government sentenced them as counter-revolutionaries and imprisoned them.

Despite the hardships faced under Communist rule, Christianity has flourished. From a total Christian community of one million believers in 1949, the church has exploded with a current population estimated anywhere from 40 to 80 million believers.[85] What once was an anemic missionary-led church has now become a strong, indigenous movement that plans to impact the rest of the world with their vibrant faith in the risen Lord.[86]

The heartbeat of Chinese Christianity is the house church movement, where groups of believers gather in homes for times of worship. These groups are characterized by a deep hunger for God's Word and a willingness to suffer to see it proclaimed. In

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[83]Daniel H. Bays, "The Growth of Independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937," in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 313.

[84]Jong Keol Yoo, "Training Chinese House Church Leaders: Factors Influencing Leadership Development Strategies" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 63.

[85]Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 7-8; Fenby, *Modern China*, xlv; Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions: The Costly Revival* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 1999), 179; Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, 7th ed. (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 215-16.

[86]Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* (Carlisle, CA: Piquant, 2003).

China's Christian Millions, Tony Lambert explains that house churches are evangelical in doctrine, and yet, they are uniquely Chinese in their ability to combine seemingly contrasting doctrinal positions in their understandings of Scripture. He states that they are highly Reformed in their understanding of the sovereignty of God and the perseverance of the saints, but also highly charismatic in their understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.[87]

At the same time, though, one must recognize that even with the phenomenal growth of Christianity during the last fifty years, China still has over 1.2 billion lost souls. Numerous people groups and cities lie untouched by the gospel, with millions upon millions who have never heard the gospel. The words of Hudson Taylor are apt, "China is not to be won by quiet, ease-loving men and women. The stamp of men and women we need is such as will put Jesus, China [and] souls first and at foremost in everything and at every time—even life itself must be secondary."[88]

Festivals

Festivals are an important part of Chinese culture for several reasons. First, they provide a sense of national unity.[89] These celebrations serve to confirm that the nation's people, though diverse geographically, have many beliefs and values in common. Second, they give families an opportunity to reunite and celebrate life together. The most important Chinese festivals include 春节(*Chun Jie*) Spring Festival, 元宵节 (*Yuan-xiao Jie*) the Lantern Festival, 清明节(*Qing-ming Jie*) the Grave-Sweeping Festival, and 中秋节(*Zhong-qiu Jie*) the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Spring festival. Spring festival, or Chinese New Year as it is often referred to,

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[87]Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, 64.

[88]Cited in Aikman, Jesus in Beijing, 40.

[89]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 191.

is the most important Chinese festival of the year. The entire country has a week-long vacation, which enables people to travel back to their hometowns. For some, it is the only time during the year that they are able to see family, and as a result, people look forward to this festival throughout the year.

The main event of Spring festival is a large meal with one's family that is celebrated on New Year's Eve.[90] Though specific practices vary from location to location, many families share a special food together called 饺子 (*jiaozi*) or dumplings. During this meal, the family is able to celebrate the successes of the past year and to discuss their dreams and hopes for the upcoming year.

Since the holiday is the celebration of a new year according to the lunar calendar, it is very much about renewal.[91] One's house must be cleaned, debts must be paid, new clothes must be purchased, and old relationships must be renewed, all with the hopes of staring the New Year out with a clean slate. Certainly the animistic belief in procuring good luck plays a part in many of these practices.

The animistic tendencies of Chinese folk religion can also be seen in several other Spring festival traditions.[92] On New Year's Eve, before preparing the meal, the family will burn a picture of the kitchen god. It is believed that burning this picture sends the kitchen god to heaven, where he will report the family's deeds from the past year. The family bribes him with food offerings, and then welcomes him back by pasting his picture in the kitchen. The family also pastes a picture of the gate god over the door of their house in the hopes that he will protect the house from the devil.

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[90]Betty O. S. Tan, "The Contextualization of the Chinese New Year," *Asia Journal of Theology* 15 (2001): 120.

[91]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 195.

[92]Shaorong Huang, "Chinese Traditional Festivals," *Journal of Popular Culture* 25 (1991): 165-67; Tan, "The Contextualization of the Chinese New Year," 121.

The lantern festival. The Lantern festival always takes place after Spring festival on the 15th day of the first lunar month.[93] On this day, people hang lanterns of all shapes and sizes from homes, outside businesses, and on the streets. The lanterns are highly decorative and often inscribed with riddles. Large outdoor gatherings are also held with various types of performances featuring singing and dancing.

As with any Chinese festival, food is an important part of the Lantern festival. The special food of this festival is 汤圆 (*tangyuan*), which are balls made of glutinous rice flour and sesame seed sauce, served in soup and often covered with an orange sauce. In the year 2000, 200 tons of pre-packaged *tangyuan* were purchased in Beijing alone.[94]

The grave-sweeping festival. The grave-sweeping festival is a time where people travel out to the graves of ancestors, clean the graves, and make offerings to ancestors. In ancient times this was the most important event of the year.[95] In contemporary times, though, this festival's significance has diminished.

One of the main practices of the grave-sweeping festival, which has its roots in Daoist tradition, reveals the pragmatic and materialistic nature of the Chinese view of the afterlife. Participants burn paper money and other items considered essential to life for their ancestors to use in the afterlife. One contemporary author stated that in his experience of this festival, the paper money carried the inscription, "The Bank of Heaven Co., Ltd."[96]

As in other festivals, the family will enjoy a large meal together once the grave-sweeping festivities are finished. After the family returns home from the ancestral

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[93]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 200-01.

[94]Ibid., 201.

[95]Huang, "Chinese Traditional Festivals," 171.

[96]Peter Hessler, "Restless Spirits," *National Geographic* 217, no. 1 (2010): 109.

burial site, they gather at a local restaurant or at a family member's home and eat. Some of the food is prepared beforehand and placed at the grave as an offering to ancestors.[97]

The mid-autumn festival. The mid-autumn festival is also celebrated according to the lunar calendar and falls in late September or early October. Similar to Thanksgiving in the U. S., mid-autumn festival is considered a harvest festival. The festival is often known as the moon festival, since one of the traditions is to enjoy the light radiated by the full moon.[98] Like the other festivals, the family celebrates by preparing and enjoying a large meal together.

The characteristic food of mid-autumn festival is the moon cake. Traditional moon cakes

> measuring about three inches in diameter and one and a half inches in thickness, resembled Western fruitcakes in taste and consistency. These cakes were made with melon seeds, lotus seeds, almonds, minced meats, bean paste, orange peels and lard. A golden yolk from a salted duck egg was placed at the center of each cake, and the golden brown crust was decorated with symbols of the festival.[99]

Today, moon cakes come in all shapes, sizes, and flavors.

In sum, Chinese festivals are a time for three things: food, family, and ancestors. Many festivals have a special food, like the dumpling of spring festival, the *tangyuan* of the lantern festival, or the moon cake of mid-autumn festival. Every festival also includes a large, celebratory meal, enjoyed with family. Deceased family members are even a part of the celebrations as ancestor worship is an integral part of every festival.[100]

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[97]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 202.

[98]Ibid., 206.

[99]"Mid-Autumn Festival" [on-line]; accessed 29 May 2010; available from http://www.chinavoc.com; Internet.

[100]Zhiyuan Zhang, "A Brief Account of Traditional Chinese Festival Customs," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27 (1993): 21.

Worldview

To understand the Han people, one must seek to gain an *emic* perspective of their culture, in order to look at the world and interpret its events as they do.[101] Anthropologists refer to this perspective of the world as "worldview." Since people in different cultures understand and interpret reality differently, one of the most important tasks of anthropology is that of worldview identification. Moreover, since worldview is an aspect of subjective culture,[102] it is less accessible and more challenging to identify. One must first analyze the objective aspects of culture, find the common characteristics, and then use these characteristics to uncover the hidden aspects of culture.

Now that this chapter has considered the objective aspects of history, religion, and festivals of Han culture, it is appropriate to state some general characteristics of the culture in order to better understand their worldview. The common characteristics of Han culture are its family-centered nature, relationship-driven mentality, food-loving outlook, philosophically-pragmatic perspective, and religiously-syncretistic tendency.

Family-centered nature. For Han Chinese, family is of central importance. All the events of life and other relationships are of secondary importance when compared with the family unit. The festival section revealed that family is an important aspect of every Chinese festival. These festivals are celebrated with family, and even include frequent times of ancestors worship, thereby including deceased family members in the celebrations. For Chinese, the reverence and worship of one's ancestors is considered one's greatest duty and honor.[103]

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[101]An *etic* perspective of a culture is an outsider's perspective. An *emic* perspective is that which an insider would hold.

[102]Subjective culture includes the aspects of culture that are hidden and more difficult to ascertain. Examples of subjective culture include beliefs, values, and worldview. Objective culture, then, includes the aspects of culture that are clearly observable. Examples of subjective culture are aspects like clothes, language, food, etc.

[103]Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 109.

The religion section stated that Confucian teaching, the foundation of Chinese culture, emphasizes the importance of family. Confucius taught that the fundamental human relationship was the parent-child relationship, thus establishing the importance of filial piety. An important saying of Confucius that displays the importance of family relationships is 父母在, 不远游 or "As long as your parents are alive, you should not travel." For the Han, one's commitment to family takes priority over all the pursuits of life.

Historically, the implementation of Confucius' teaching has been seen in the fact that the oldest son marries, and yet, continues to live with his parents.[104] This communal type of living displayed in the traditional 四合院 (*si he yuan*), homes set up in a quad-style with a common courtyard, allowed several generations to live together.[105] In recent years, however, this tradition has changed, as most newly married couples find their own place to live.[106]

Chinese families are structured patriarchally, and as a result, sons are more highly valued. When a Chinese couple is married, the wife leaves her family and joins her husband's family. Therefore, with the birth of a son, one will eventually have both a son and a daughter who will provide for and support in one's old age. On the other hand, when a daughter marries, her priority shifts to her husband's family, and her parents will have less support and care in their elderly years. Moreover, the birth of a son means another generation in the family lineage, which equals the continuing worship of the family's ancestors.[107] Failure to produce a son is a tragedy.

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[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 176-77.

[107]Ibid., 168.

This cultural dynamic has been amplified since the implementation of the one-child policy in 1980. The policy has created gender imbalance among the Han. Since each family can only have one child, and since male babies are more valued than females, many female babies have been discarded or abandoned, and many more female fetuses have been aborted. The government responded to this epidemic by making prenatal sex screenings illegal. Nonetheless, female infanticide persists.[108] Recent statistics have shown the devastating effect that this policy has had on the female population in that there are 32 million more males than females under the age of twenty.[109]

One change that the Chinese family system has seen in the past fifty years relates to the role of women.[110] One of the goals of the CCP was the desire for an egalitarian society. This new society would relativize not only social classes, but also gender classes. Throughout the 60s and 70s, then, women wore the same clothes as men, as the government repressed more feminine images. With the reform strategy, women were no longer forced to look or dress like men, and new images were introduced in which women were "invariably young, fashionably dressed, in good health, and sexually desirable."[111] Moreover, the new images emphasized the ideals of the reform movement, representing "wealth, social mobility and success, and urban location."[112]

Other cultural dynamics affecting the family include the growth of cities and the necessity of work. In order to find work and provide for one's family, men (and

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[108]Albert Mohler, "The Scandal of Gendercide—War on Baby Girls" [on-line]; accessed 4 June 2010; available from http://www.albertmohler.com; Internet.

[109]Laura Fitzpatrick, "China's One-Child Policy" [on-line]; accessed 4 June 2010; available from http://www.time.com; Internet.

[110]Harriet Evans, "Gender in Modern Chinese Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, ed. Kam Louie, Cambridge Companions to Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 69-78.

[111]Evans, "Gender in Modern Chinese Culture," 77-78.

[112]Ibid.

sometimes women) are forced to leave their hometowns and move to another city. This move means long-term separation from one's wife/husband, children, and parents. What is important to remember is that the motivation for such a move is meeting the family's needs. In that sense, then, the family-centered nature of Han culture still exists, since many sacrifice the comforts of home for the sake of procuring what the family lacks: money.

In the end, these various dynamics have not affected the central place of the family in Chinese life. Families serve as the foundational aspect of Chinese culture, and the importance of filial piety still undergirds much of contemporary society. Moreover, the needs of the family often trump personal desires and goals. Though many changes have come to China in recent years, the family remains the central priority.

Relationship-driven mentality. As Han Chinese interact with others, their desire is to have peaceful, stable relationships. Covell explains the mentality of the Chinese thinking process with a diagram of concentric circles that contrasts the basic priorities of psychical experience, concrete relationships, and beliefs.[113] For Westerners beliefs or values are the central priority, and they affect one's concrete relationships and psychical relationships. For Chinese, concrete relationships are the central priority with concepts as the second circle and psychical relationships the third. Covell notes, "For the Chinese, life is made beautiful by harmonious relationships among all groups of persons."[114]

Confucius developed ethical principles in his teachings to fulfill the goal of helping people have harmonious relationships. Confucianism's *li*, ritual or proper behavior, is one of its key virtues, emphasizing the proper actions of an individual that

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[113]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 12-13.

[114]Ibid., 11.

ensure harmonious interactions as he relates to others. The other key virtue of Confucianism, *ren* or benevolence, teaches people to do good deeds to others and reciprocate the good deeds done for them by others.

The importance of relationships for the Han can be seen in the importance of 关系 (*guanxi*), or interrelation.[115] *Guanxi* guides how Chinese interact with others. Greater trust exists when one interacts with a person of *guanxi*, with *guanxi* serving as an informal social network system. Chen notes that *guanxi* also serves as a "resource to resolve conflicts or to produce functions of persuasion, influence, and control in Chinese society."[116] In other words, when a Chinese person needs a job, he looks to his network of *guanxi* to help him find it, or when interpersonal conflict arises, he looks to those with whom he has *guanxi* to help find a solution.

In situations where no *guanxi* exists, Chinese will turn toward the Confucian ideal of *ren* or benevolent action to develop *guanxi* with others.[117] People will often practice the concept of *ren* through gift giving, and thus begin to establish *guanxi* with others. The concept of reciprocity guides these behaviors, though, as Chinese expect to get something in return for acts of generosity.[118]

Another important concept that enables peaceful relationships is that of saving face. One's "face" refers to one's reputation, dignity, or prestige.[119] To maintain harmonious relationships, one should not interact with others in a way that causes them to

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[115]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 9; Guo-Ming Chen, "Toward Transcultural Understanding: A Harmony Theory of Chinese Communication," in *Transcultural Realities: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cross-Cultural Realities*, ed. Virginia H. Millhouse, Molefi Kete Asante and Peter O. Nwosu (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 62.

[116]Chen, "Toward Transcultural Understanding," 62.

[117]Ibid., 63.

[118]Ibid.

[119]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 122.

lose their dignity or reputation. Chen explains the importance of face,

> It represents an individual's social position and prestige gained from the successful performance of one or more specific roles that are well recognized by other members in the society. In Chinese society, to keep a harmonious atmosphere, competent communicators must know how to show due respect for other parties' feelings, or to save their face. Any conscious act of making others lose face in Chinese society will cause not only emotional uneasiness among others but also damage to one's own image or self-humiliation.[120]

The concept of "face" might lead someone to intentionally lose a sporting event, or even allow certain tasks to go uncompleted simply because completion of a task in the superior's absence would cause the superior to lose face.[121] Relationships are more important than systems, tasks, or an individual's goals.[122]

To ensure peaceful human interaction, Chinese are informal communicators. Research has consistently shown that while Westerners communicate to impart information, Chinese communicate in order to develop and strengthen relationships.[123] To this end, Chinese will communicate information indirectly either through contextual clues or an intermediary.[124] As a result, they are non-confrontational and have a tendency to find the all-inclusive middle ground when interacting with others.[125]

Food-loving outlook. Chinese people love food. As the festival section explained, every festival has a special food, such as the Lantern-Festival's *tangyuan* or

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[120]Chen, "Toward Transcultural Understanding," 63.

[121]On one occasion in China, I urgently needed a renewal of my visa. The school where I was teaching filed all the necessary paperwork, and all that was left in the process was for the stamp to be placed on the new visa. Unfortunately, I was told, only the boss could use the stamp. Although the process of using a stamp is quite simple, to have done so would have caused the boss to lose face, so the process was not finished until the boss returned, nearly two weeks later.

[122]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 10.

[123]Chen, "Toward Transcultural Understanding," 57.

[124]Ibid., 63.

[125]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 11-12.

the Mid-Autumn Festival's moon cake. Along the same lines, every important event in Chinese life is conducted around meals. Gunde notes, "Important events of all sorts—weddings, births, deaths, graduations, business deals, forging of political alliances, visits by dignitaries, and so on—are marked by dinners or banquets."[126]

Historically, there are two reasons why food is so important to the Chinese people. First, for centuries the Chinese have believed that if one could have three meals per day, he would have a high quality of life. One's enjoyment of life is in direct proportion to one's access to enough food. Second, in its history China has experienced several devastating famines, including the one occurring as a result of the Great Leap Forward. These times of famine have had a profound effect on the consciousness of the Chinese, reminding them that food is not always easily accessible. It is for this reason that a common greeting among many Chinese is 吃饭了吗, or "Have you eaten yet?," displaying both the importance of food and the benevolent desire to help others if their food is lacking.

There are two types of food in China: *fan* and *cai*.[127] *Fan* is narrowly defined as rice, but can be broadly applied to include starches, which Chinese consider to be the basic food or *zhu shi*. In the South, *fan* is rice, but in the North, where rice is harder to grow, *fan* consists of dumplings or noodles. *Cai*, on the other hand, is a mixture (often stir-fry) of both meat and vegetables. *Fan* is the basic necessity, and is eaten first, whereas *cai* is eaten second, if it can be afforded.

The importance of food is seen in the fact that Chinese believe that if food cannot satisfy, then nothing in life can. This belief has been born out of times of difficulty when food was scarce, and people came to realize that it is difficult to enjoy life

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[126]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 121.

[127]Ibid., 116-17.

when one goes without food. Along these same lines, the Chinese have a famous saying, 民以食为天, or "Food is what is most important to the people."

Philosophically-pragmatic perspective. Chinese people are pragmatic in their thinking. This chapter has already shown that the question that guides their thinking both religiously and practically is not, "What do I believe?," but rather, "Does it work?" Covell explains this aspect of Chinese culture, "With the Chinese, truth cannot be proved logically, only grasped experientially. This type of intuition comes from common sense, not logical reasoning processes."[128] Covell goes on to explain that this pragmatic perspective flows out of philosophical Daoism, which emphasizes oneness with nature and reality.

One example of this pragmatic perspective is seen in the process of marriage. Historically, Chinese marriages were arranged, but in contemporary generations this tradition has been phased out, although it is still practiced in some rural areas. Although most are able to choose their spouse, few marry for romantic reasons. Most are more pragmatic in their consideration of a spouse, marrying for financial reasons.[129] Even once the couple is married, they will often separate for extended periods of time in order to pursue a job that will benefit the family economically.[130]

Another example of Chinese pragmatism is their perspective on education. As a result of Confucian teaching, education has always been an important part of Chinese society. In contemporary China, though, education is not valued for education's sake

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[128]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 12.

[129]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 171-72.

[130]From personal experience, I have known of low income females who, at the request of their husband, leave behind young children to earn money for the family in another province. At the other end of the spectrum, I have also known of highly educated men who left wife and child behind to pursue further education or economic opportunities in other countries.

alone. It is valued as a means to the end of procuring a better job and a better salary. If pursuing education in a certain field will not result in a higher salary, then it should not be pursued. This pragmatic, common sense perspective guides all of life's decisions and actions.

In today's China, the primary way this pragmatic perspective is evidenced is through the pursuit of money. Since Deng Xiaoping implemented the reform changes in the 1980s, China has become capitalistic. One of the most common phrases echoed in modern China is, "Money is most important."[131] The driving ideology for China's younger generations is the desire to get rich.[132]

Religiously-syncretistic tendency. Chinese religions are syncretistic. The section on religion made clear that this syncretistic tendency has led many Chinese to adopt beliefs from Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Contrary to some religious systems in other cultures, Chinese do not commit to a philosophical or belief system in and of itself, nor do they engage in a religious practice or ritual because of its religious tradition. They engage in religious practice simply because it works to provide answers and direction for life. Covell explains of China,

> Its three major religions—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—have been essential ingredients in the making of the Chinese mind. They have contributed, however, not so much because of their character as 'organized' religions, but because their various strands have been worked into an interfaith collage that has swallowed up their original roots and identity. It is less important to know that something is Daoist, Buddhist, or Confucianist than it is to know that this is indeed the way the Chinese think and feel.[133]

Covell also explains that this tendency to syncretize flows out of the Chinese

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[131]"Explore: China" [on-line]; accessed 4 June 2010; available from http://www.eastasianpeoples.imb.org; Internet.

[132]Gunde, *Culture and Customs of China*, 226.

[133]Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ*, 14.

pragmatic philosophy of life. He writes, "The Chinese mind tends strongly toward synthesis rather than analysis, seeking always to find complements and to correlate rather than to polarize. Paradoxical thinking poses no problems for the Chinese."[134] The pragmatic philosophy that guides their lives combined with their non-confrontational perspective on relationships leads them to find complementary areas as opposed to divergent areas.[135] It is for this reason that the Chinese have been able to combine the seemingly contradictory elements of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

In sum, the common elements of the Chinese worldview include its family-centered nature, relationship-driven mentality, food-loving outlook, philosophically-pragmatic perspective, and religiously-syncretistic tendency. One must understand these characteristics and their implications to gain a proper perspective on the Chinese worldview.

Hermeneutic Tradition

In the Chinese mind, to speak of culture implies education and the ability to write.[136] The word for culture, 文化 (*wenhua*), implies the process of being transformed by writing or *wen*.[137] Zhuang explains the history and importance of writing to the Chinese people: "In the legendary account of its origin, Chinese writing is never conceived as a mere recording of oral speech but as originating independently of speech;

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[134]Ibid., 12.

[135]Enoch Wan has argued that this perspective enables Chinese Christians to hold seemingly contradicting doctrines, like sovereignty and free will or the universal church and the local church. While Western believers view these doctrines as either/or, Wan argues that Chinese believers are able to hold the biblical data in tension. For his comments, see Wan, Enoch. "Critiquing the Method of Traditional Western Theology and Calling for Sino-Theology." *Global Missiology* 1 (Oct 2003) [journal on-line]. Accessed 2 May 2011. Available from http:// globalmissiology.org/missionchina/wan1-1.htm; Internet.

[136]Kam Louie, "Defining Modern Chinese Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, ed. Kam Louie, Cambridge Companions to Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14.

[137]Ibid.

writing imitates the pattern of traces left by birds and animals on the ground or by natural phenomena in general."[138] Although in many cultures the written word finds its origin in the spoken word, Chinese writing exists quite independently from speech.

Since writing is such a critical aspect of the Chinese understanding of culture, it is important to gain an understanding of how they have traditionally interpreted the written word. Moreover, since a crucial aspect of the missionary's task is the propagation of the Word of God, it is necessary to understand the traditional Chinese methods for interpreting sacred literature. Given the fact that these traditions have been developed over many centuries and given the tendency of religious syncretism in the Chinese context, it is safe to assume that once Han become followers of Christ, they will utilize these traditional methods when they begin to interpret the Bible unless they are taught otherwise. To examine these traditional hermeneutical practices, this section will consider Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, and Christian hermeneutics.

Confucian hermeneutics. The Confucian tradition is paramount in understanding Chinese culture. The same is true for the Confucian hermeneutic traditions, since the interpretive practices of Confucian scholars set the standard for the various religious traditions that would arise in later generations.[139] The Confucian tradition displays a theoretical openness to authorial intention, but in practice authorial intent was never sustainable, and as a result, a reader-centered approach has been the prevailing method of interpretation.

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[138]Longxi Zhuang, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*, Post-Contemporary Interventions, ed. Stanley Fish and Frederic Jameson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 32.

[139]Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing: A Route to Hermeneutics and Open Poetics*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture, ed. Roger T. Ames (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2005), 9.

The earliest Confucian scholar was Mencius (372-289 B.C).[140] In theory, Mencius was optimistic that an interpreter could understand the intention of the original author. He understood writing as a means of communication, and he believed that the original intention of the author, even in poetic writings, could be recovered through faithful interpretive practice.[141] In this way, Gu has argued that Mencius is in line with Hirschian hermeneutical practice.[142]

While Mencius theoretically believed that the original intention of the author could be discovered, in practice he was unable to do so.[143] Gu explains this dynamic:

> In Mencius' conception, with the text as center, the communication channel between the writer and the reader is not blocked if one adopts a right approach to the text. What the writer intends the reader can grasp through sensitive and sensible reading. . . . But Mencius was not unaware of the problematics of communication. He, therefore, supplemented his positive conviction with extratextual and supralinguistic considerations, making his idea of reading close to those of existentialist hermeneutics propounded by Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer.[144]

So, while Mencius believed it was theoretically possible to understand the original author, in actuality it was quite difficult. Other scholars have noted that in Mencius' own writings there is considerable lack of clarity on this issue, and subsequent scholars were left to interpret sacred writings according to differences in their own contexts.[145]

While Mencius' theoretical view would be the predominant view through most of Confucian history, scholars agree that the inability of interpreters to produce similar

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[140]Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing*, 18-21.

[141]Ibid., 8.

[142]Ibid., 21.

[143]Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing*, 21; Chun-chieh Huang, *Mencian Hermeneutics: A History of Interpretation in China* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 252.

[144]Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing*, 44.

[145]Huang, *Mencian Hermeneutics*, 252.

readings of a passage led to the eventual acceptance of a reader-centered hermeneutic.[146] Examining the various historical interpretations of the 诗经 (*Shijing*) or *Book of Songs*, Chen explains how the lack of focus on the author led to existential readings of the poem:

> In reviewing the history of the *Shijing* hermeneutics from the Spring and Autumn period to the present, one is struck by its utilitarian nature, whether political, moralistic, or educational. . . .With a few exceptions, one finds little discussion on authorship throughout this history. By ignoring the question of authorship, there is more room to interpret the poems and to draw conclusions as one sees fit. Thus, instead of using the poem to express the author's emotion or aspiration, the poems can be used freely by the readers as a sophisticated vehicle to utter their inner feelings.[147]

Thus, in the Confucian tradition, the primary method of interpretation is experientially-focused and reader-centered.[148]

Daoist hermeneutics. Much like Confucian hermeneutics, Daoist philosophy and hermeneutical practice display an existential, reader-centered approach. The religion section showed that Daoism as a philosophy is concerned with the unnamable Dao or "the impersonal creative force of the universe that is perpetual and engenders *yin* and *yang*, from which emerge the myriad things."[149] This understanding that all of life, with its great diversity, has emerged from a single creative force leads quite naturally into a pluralistic, open hermeneutic.

One Daoist interpreter, Zhuangzi (369-298 B.C.), rejected authorial intent as an interpretive approach.[150] Much earlier than such theories would be proposed in the

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[146]Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing*, 8; Huang, *Mencian Hermeneutics*, 258; Kwang Yu Chen, "The Book of Odes: A Case Study of the Chinese Hermeneutic Tradition," in *Interpretation and Intellectual Change: Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. Ching-I Tu (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 58.

[147]Chen, "The Book of Odes," 58.

[148]Huang, *Mencian Hermeneutics*, 258.

[149]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 61.

[150]Gu, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing*, 22.

Western world, Zhuangzi proclaimed the death of the author – since he understood the written word to be incapable of transmitting the author's thoughts.[151] Gu explains,

> To Zhuangzi, the communication channel is not always thorough because language cannot exhaustively express the writer's intention, nor can it exhaustively recover the writer's intention for the reader. As a result, what the reader understands may not always be what the writer has intended. In this sense, he may be considered a premodern deconstructionist.[152]

Likewise, the Daoist conception of the universe leads to the idea that a single text can produce a multiplicity of meanings. Daoism understands the world as a field in which heaven acts.[153] To gain a proper perspective on life, one must align himself with the natural processes of heaven.[154] This perspective, then, recognizes constant change as Poceski explains, "This vision is part of a non-theistic understanding of the universe, which is conceived of as constantly changing and evolving, naturally going through stages of growth and decay, without the presence or intervention of an anthropomorphic creator or controlling deity."[155]

The understanding of a universe in constant change combined with the emergence of competing realities from a single creative force has led Daoist interpreters to accept multiple interpretations not only in poetry but also in narrative. Gu explains this dynamic:

> Chinese fiction writers conceived of fiction as a form of writing that could be reasonably compared to the all-encompassing power of the self-generative Dao/One. A fictional work generates a multiplicity of meanings or openness precisely in the way the Dao/One generates myriad things in the universe through the interaction of

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[151]Ibid.

[152]Ibid., 44.

[153]Kirkland, *Taoism*, 80.

[154]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 61; Kirkland, *Taoism*, 80.

[155]Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions*, 66.

yin and *yang*.[156]

Both Daoist philosophy and practice encourage and accept the various contrasting and competing interpretations that arise from reader-centered hermeneutical practice.

Buddhist hermeneutics. Similar to the Confucian and Daoist traditions, the Buddhist hermeneutic tradition is also characterized by existential, reader-centered hermeneutical approaches. Buddhist scholar David Chappell has shown that no single method of Buddhist interpretation exists.[157] On the contrary, numerous interpreters in various traditions display a range of hermeneutical approaches. This multiplicity of methods displays the subjective nature of Buddhist hermeneutics.

In the Pure Land stream of Canonical Buddhism, one interpreter displays this subjectivity:

> Tao-ch'o asserted the hermeneutical principle that the Buddha's teaching should be made *relevant* to the circumstances of one's own time, and quoted a passage from the *Cheng-ta-nien ching* to this effect: "When devotees single-mindedly seek the way to enlightenment, they should always consider the expedient means of the times. If they do not grasp the times, then they do not have any expedient means, and it becomes a losing effort."[158]

Thus, Tao-ch'o argued that the reader's context, not the author's, should be the driving force in interpretation. The subjectivity of Tao-ch'o's approach is displayed in his argument that the means of salvation varies given one's context.[159]

In the later Ch'an tradition, a similar freedom in interpretation existed. Chappell notes that although early texts are related to some scriptural source, the lineage

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[156]Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture, ed. Roger T. Ames (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2006), 220.

[157]David W. Chappell, "Hermeneutical Phases in Chinese Buddhism," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Studies in East Asian Buddhism, vol. 6 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 175-76.

[158]Chappell, "Hermeneutical Phases in Chinese Buddhism," 187.

[159]Ibid.

of the Ch'an masters "did not adopt the line-by line exegetical method, but instead was more interpretive in its treatment of scripture."[160] The established tradition was not concerned with discovering the original intention of the author, but was more concerned with exercising interpretive freedom as new esoteric meanings were introduced. As a result, this tradition displayed considerable proof-texting and negligence of the original context.[161]

Along the same lines, a traditional Buddhist analogy indicates that the letter is subordinate to the spirit. Buddhist scholar Etienne Lamotte explains this analogy, "The letter indicates the spirit just as a fingertip indicates an object, but since the spirit is alien to syllables, the letter is unable to express it in full. Purely literal exegesis is therefore bound to fail."[162] While the function of the letter is to indicate meaning, this analogy argues, it is never able to do so in an adequate way. Thus, a spiritualizing or allegorical method of interpretation is common in the Buddhist tradition.

Another Buddhist scholar, Donald Lopez, confirms this perspective with an interpretive guideline given in the *Catupratisaranasutra*:

> Rely on the teaching, not the teacher.
> Rely on the meaning, not the letter.
> Rely on the definitive meaning, not the interpretive meaning.
> Rely on the wisdom, not on [ordinary] consciousness.[163]

This guideline initiates a dichotomy between the true meaning of a passage and the limited meaning that the letter is able to convey. As a result, Buddhist hermeneutics have

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[160]Ibid., 194.

[161]Ibid., 195.

[162]Etienne Lamotte, "Textual Interpretation in Buddhism," trans. Sara Boin-Webb, in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Studies in East Asian Buddhism, vol. 6 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 15.

[163]Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Introduction," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Studies in East Asian Buddhism, vol. 6 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 3.

encouraged a reader-centered, often allegorical, interpretative approach.

Christian hermeneutics. The history of Christian interpretation in China bears a striking resemblance to the other traditions already considered. The first indigenous Chinese Christian thinkers arose in the first half of the twentieth century. Two of the most recognizable of these indigenous leaders, Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee, emphasized 灵异解经 (*lingyi jiejing*), or spiritual exegesis. Yieh explains,

> They believed in textual inerrancy, but even more so in theological inerrancy, so they took a metaphysical-deductive approach, using doctrines to interpret scripture. For them, Christ was the crown of orthodoxy. As the right understanding of Christ led Saint Paul to the right interpretation of scripture (OT), Nee insisted that orthodox faith should precede correct interpretation. Their spiritual exegesis is similar to the allegorical interpretation of Origen, but . . . it may well be derived also from a hermeneutical tradition in the history of Chinese Confucianism that seeks to uncover the hidden meaning of the classical texts.[164]

Instead of focusing on the literal meaning of a passage, they focused on the spiritual meaning. Along the same lines, they emphasized right doctrine over right interpretation. The result was a high level of allegory in their teachings, which ultimately is similar to methods of interpretation utilized by those in other Chinese religious traditions.

One example of Nee's allegorical approach is his treatment of Song of Songs. Nee allegorizes the love language of the Song by explaining, "The emphasis in this book is the relationship of love between the believer and the Lord."[165] He interprets the phrase, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Song of Sol 1:2) in terms of the spiritual progress of the believer. He explains,

Her former relationship with the Lord was a mere ordinary one which she felt to be

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[164]John Yueh-Han Yieh, "Chinese Biblical Interpretation: History and Issues," in *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 26.

[165]Watchman Nee, *The Song of Songs*, trans. Elizabeth K. Mei and Daniel Smith (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1965), 19.

most unsatisfactory. Now she longs for a more intimate and personal relationship. She years, therefore, for His kisses, which would show His own ardent and personal love for her.

No one can kiss two persons at the same time, so this is a matter of personal significance. Moreover, this kind of kiss is not on the cheek like that of Judas Isacariot, nor is it a kiss upon the feet like that of Mary, but it is the "kisses of his mouth," which would express a most personal and intimate love. She is thus confessing at this stage that the ordinary or elementary relationship can no longer satisfy her heart and that she craves that direct expression of His love for herself which is not possessed by another – in other words, she wants to go much further than the ordinary believer.[166]

Another early indigenous leader was Yu Ming Jia, a Presbyterian pastor from Shandong Province.[167] The substance of Jia's teaching was similar, but he emphasized the spiritualization of the interpreter. Yieh explains, "For him, human reason is to be utilized, but it needs to be spiritualized."[168] Jia conveyed that correct interpretation was contingent upon the spiritualization of the interpreter. Though different in emphasis, Jia's teaching still resulted in a spiritualization of the text.

Contemporary house churches likewise tend toward a spiritualizing of Scripture. One recognized house church leader is Brother Yun, whose interpretations of Scripture display frequent allegorizing.[169] In a sermon on Luke 5:36-38, Yun writes, "I believe He was talking not only about our lives as being the wineskin, but also, in a

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[166]Ibid., 20.

[167]Yieh, "Chinese Biblical Interpretation: History and Issues," 26.

[168]Ibid.

[169]Some house church leaders like Samuel Lamb, Moses Xie, and Allen Yuan have claimed that Yun exaggerated some of his testimony in his autobiography, Brother Yun with Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Brother Yun* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2002). Nonetheless, his interpretations of Scripture, which he explains in Living Water, are representative of the allegory seen in house church preaching. For an explanation of Lamb's critique, see "China: Leaders Distance Themselves from "The Heavenly Man" [on-line]; accessed 15 August 2011; available from http://www.e-n.org.uk; Internet. For Paul Hattaway's defense of Brother Yun, see Paul Hattaway, "An Open Letter Regarding the Heavenly Man" [on-line]; accessed 15 August 2011; available from http://www.asiaharvest.org; Internet.

broader sense, about the church as being the wineskin."[170] He goes on to state in this parable that the wine is the Holy Spirit and the wineskin is the church.[171] Unfortunately, Yun neglects the entire context of these verses, in which Jesus is answering a question about fasting. Jesus teaches on fasting in 5:34-35 and then uses the parable in 5:36-39 to further explain his teaching on fasting, not on keeping the Holy Spirit in the church.

Yun's teaching also displays what can be termed "premature application." Premature application is attempting to apply a specific text of Scripture in a way that is not in line with the original author's intent. That is, the application is premature because the passage is applied to the contemporary context before the interpreter determines the original author's meaning. This problem is a direct result of a reader-response approach to reading the text.[172] In one sermon, Yun discusses Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine in John 2:1-12. For the first part of the sermon, he focuses on John's statement, "Now there were six stone water jars there for the purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons" (John 2:6). Interpreting and applying this passage, Yun writes,

> The first thing to notice is that these six large jars were normally used for ceremonial washing, as the Jews were required to be clean before worshipping God. No doubt, over time, these jars started to become worn and grimy. Perhaps a crust had built up around the rims.
>
> This speaks of the condition of many Christians today. Their lives are designed to bring fresh water and blessing to those around them, but due to years of overuse, they start to lose contact with the living water of the Holy Spirit.[173]

It is unclear how Yun determines that the water jars had become worn and grimy since this information is not mentioned in the passage. He then uses this subjective implication

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[170]Brother Yun, *Living Water*, ed. Paul Hattaway (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 253-54.

[171]Ibid.

[172]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 20.

[173]Yun, *Living Water*, 112-14.

to make application to the contemporary lives of Christians by stating that their lives are like worn and grimy water jars. At no point does he seek to identify why John included this story in his gospel.

In sum, Chinese Christian interpretation has been characterized by many of the same issues that characterize the hermeneutic traditions of other Chinese religions. As allegory and reader-centered approaches are the prevailing standard in Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions, these approaches have also dominated Chinese Christian interpretations of the Bible.[174] Attempting to faithfully interpret Scripture, indigenous Chinese Christian leaders have utilized traditional Chinese methods for interpreting sacred texts.

Application of the Model to the Han Cultural Context

Traditional Chinese methods of interpreting sacred texts are reader-centered and allegorical in style. Such methods subvert the original author's intention, and because the determination of the author's meaning is critical to evangelical hermeneutical methodology, it is important to show how an author-oriented model of interpretation would be implemented in a Chinese context. Since the Han worldview has been considered in some detail, this section builds on that description by explaining how four different biblical texts could be applied to this cultural context: Habakkuk 1:12-2:1; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Luke 14:25-33; and Matthew 25:1-13.[175]

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[174]Tai Ji, "Preaching in the Church in China," trans. Alan Miller, *Chinese Theological Review* 11 (1996): 26; Tai Ji, "Hermeneutics in the Chinese Church," *Chinese Theological Review* 12 (1998): 146.

[175]I chose these four texts to show how studying texts from four different genres presents distinct challenges. The four texts are from a prophecy, an epistle, a teaching section in a narrative context, and a parable.

Habakkuk 1:12-2:5:
The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

Some Old Testament sections are better suited to Chinese culture because of the similarity between the cultural situation of Old Testament Israel and the cultural situation of China. Given the influence of wisdom literature and proverbial sayings in Chinese culture, Proverbs is one book that resonates especially well with Chinese Christians.

At the same time, though, other sections of the Old Testament, like the prophetic books, pose greater challenges. The imagery and poetic nature of the literature combined with the distance from the original setting are some of the challenges that make the interpretation of this type of literature difficult. One example is Habakkuk's second complaint to God in 1:12-2:1 and God's response in 2:2-5.

In 1:1-4 Habakkuk complains to the Lord concerning the violence and iniquity among God's people. The Lord responds in the following verses by explaining that he is raising up the Chaldeans to judge the people of Israel for their unfaithfulness. Confused, Habakkuk returns to the Lord with a second question in 1:12-2:1. Ralph Smith explains that Habakkuk complains because the Lord "has appointed and destined a wicked instrument to punish one who is more righteous than the punisher."[176]

The complaint Habakkuk brings before God is similar to what contemporary theologians refer to as "the problem of evil." Smith explains, "Given a theology that assumes God's goodness, holiness, and universal sovereignty, how does one explain God's standing aside while the wicked swallow the righteous?"[177] Although separated by two and a half millennia, Habakkuk's complaint is one that resonates with contemporary audiences, because contemporary believers must still find an answer to the question,

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[176]Ralph L. Smith, *Micah – Malachi*, Word Commentary, vol. 32 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 103.

[177]Ibid.

"Where is God in the midst of my suffering?"

After posing his question, Habakkuk commits himself to wait for God's answer to his second complaint: "I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint" (Hab 2:1). Achtemeier explains how this verse displays the unique role of the prophet:

> Thus, Habakkuk, the prophet – the one who is to be the bearer of the word of God to his people – himself turns to God to wait for the interpreting word. Prophets have no independent wisdom of their own – they are dependent on the word of God (cf. Jer 42:5-7) – as we too are dependent for a true understanding of what God is doing and must ever search the word now given us in the Scriptures.[178]

Achtemeier is correct to note that while the prophet waited for a word from God, contemporary believers must search the Scriptures to find God's word to them.

One Chinese interpreter, Zhao Zhilian, explained that the lesson of Habakkuk 2:1-2 is that believers must ascend their own watchtowers for contemplation. Zhao spiritualizes the concept of the watchtower when he writes,

> The lesson this has for us is that in order to ascend the watchtower, in order to stand back and see the whole picture, we must have a broad vision and be concerned for many things . . . . To turn it around, standing high above things and where we can see greater distances will make us more broadminded. If we care only about trivial matters, totting up each little gain and loss, it will not occur to us to take up our stand on the watchtower.[179]

The concept of the watchtower is symbolic, but not as a place where one gains a big-picture view of life, as Zhao sees it. It is symbolic as a place of waiting.[180] Zhao misinterprets this term and spends his article discussing why Chinese believers need to see the larger picture of life. Ironically, Zhao argues for the need to see the big picture,

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[178]Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum – Malachi*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 42.

[179]Zhao Zhilian, "On the Watchtower," trans. Janice Wickeri, *Chinese Theological Review* (1986): 131.

[180]Achtemeir, *Nahum – Malachi*, 42.

but he misses the big picture of the text by neglecting the context of the passage and by focusing on a single word.

Moreover, believers today no longer need to ascend the watchtower and wait for God's response to questions related to justice and the existence of evil in the world, because God responds to Habakkuk in 2:2-5. God's responds to Habakkuk's complaint by explaining that although he is raising up the Chaldeans to judge the Israelites, a day will also come when God will judge the Chaldeans. Achtemeier explains, "The world is not as God intended it, and God is setting it right. His will be the final order established in human society. The hope of all good persons everywhere who have trusted in the Lord is a sure hope, firmly anchored in the providence – that is, the promises – of God."[181]

In v. 4 God explains that while living in such a world filled with injustice and evil, "the righteous shall live by faith" (2:4). For the New Testament authors, this phrase was an important description of the God-honoring life. They referenced the phrase to explain that it is only through faith in Christ that one is justified before God (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). In the context of Habakkuk's question, it is clear that what God desires for believers is to endure times of suffering and difficulty by looking to Christ in faith. Believers must be assured that a day is coming when God will bring justice to his elect, and until that day, they must live in the tension of the already/not yet.

For believers in China, especially those in house churches, they continue to live with the daily threat of persecution. It would be easy for them to question why God allows a sinful governmental system to execute such threats against God's people. Their question is similar to the question Habukkuk brought before God, and God's answer to the contemporary Chinese church is the same: the righteous shall live by faith (2:4). Believers in China must learn to live by trusting in Christ – trusting that he will return

[181]Ibid., 43.

and that he when he does he will bring vengeance to his enemies and justice for his elect.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10:
The Thorn in the Flesh

This passage teaches that Satan often attacks the livelihood of believers. Paul describes here "a messenger of Satan" that was sent to harass him (12:7). He uses the words σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί (thorn in the flesh) to describe this messenger (12:7). Σκόλοψ is used to signify something sharp and pointed, and it denotes "something which frustrates and causes trouble in the lives of those afflicted."[182] While it is impossible to know exactly what the thorn was, it was most likely a physical ailment.[183]

Whatever the thorn was, it is clear from Paul's language that it caused him a great deal of pain. Schreiner notes that presumably Satan intended the thorn "to inflict misery on [Paul] and cause him to doubt God's goodness."[184] It is likely that Satan also used the pain to hinder Paul and limit his ability to preach the gospel.[185]

This painful attack, however, was not the result of any sinful behavior on Paul's part.[186] Paul explains that the attack commenced before he became prideful in order to keep him from becoming prideful (12:7). Before his prayer, Paul was not even aware of the reason for the attack (12:7-8). The reality is that sometimes God allows

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[182]Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 205; Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 855.

[183]Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 859.

[184]Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2001), 301.

[185]Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, Interpretation, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1987), 119.

[186]Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*, 3 Crucial Questions, ed. Grant R. Osborne and Richard J. Jones, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 125.

Satan to attack believers for reasons that are unknown to them. Amazingly, this passage also teaches that God is sovereign over these attacks, and he uses them for the growth of the believer and the advancement of the gospel (12:9-10).

While Satan used the thorn to attack Paul, humiliating him through severe weakness, God used the attack for good (12:9).[187] Paul writes that God used the thorn to keep Paul from becoming too conceited (12:7), and through the weakness he experienced, he learned to depend more on God's power than his own (12:9b). In the end, the suffering that Paul experiences actually serves to spread the gospel.[188]

Paul explains in verse 9 that after pleading with the Lord to remove the thorn, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." The lesson Paul learned was that he was to be content with weakness. He was to rely more on God's grace than on his own ability. The main point, then, is that God's grace is sufficient to meet all the needs of believers, even when the circumstances of their lives are difficult or painful.

For this specific passage, Paul's teaching on resting in God's grace and not in one's circumstances contradicts the pragmatic perspective of the Han. The Han's pragmatic perspective, if applied to the Christian faith, could result in a "health and wealth" type theology where faith in Christ is understood as a means for procuring blessing. Their tendency to ask "Does it work?" could lead to a mentality where belief in God is evaluated based on whether or not it leads to an easier or better life. Moreover, their practical "money is everything"[189] attitude could lead to the same, where faith in

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[187]Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 856-57; Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan & Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 197.

[188]Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 102.

[189]See p. 205 in this dissertation.

Christ is pursued for monetary gain.

In reality, though, the underground nature of Chinese house churches and the persecution of believers have prevented this pragmatic perspective from being applied to Christian theologies.[190] Where this danger does apply is in communicating the truth of this passage to non-believers. Non-believers do tend to evaluate the benefits of conversion to Christianity with a "Does it work?" mentality. When they examine the life of Paul and the difficulties he faced, as explained in this passage, they might conclude that faith in Christ is not worthwhile.

While the Chinese worldview's pragmatic perspective creates challenges when communicating the teaching of this passage, its focus on relationships aids in the communication of this truth. The worldview section revealed that for Chinese the central priority in life is harmonious relationships.[191] This prioritization of relationships helps them to understand this passage, because what Paul is saying is that his relationship with Christ is of greater value than any temporary comfort he could experience in this life. The benefit of Paul's faith in Christ is that through that faith his relationship with God has been reconciled. It is of no consequence if persecution or difficulties befall him as a result of his faith since he is at peace in his relationship with God.

This emphasis on relationships makes sense in the context of the Chinese worldview. Since the Han are willing to endure difficulty to maintain peaceful relations

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[190]For information on the continued persecution of the church in China, see Jeremy Reynalds, "China Launches Major Crackdown on House Churches; Labels Them a 'Cult'" (News article from 9 December 2010) [on-line]; accessed 10 December 2010; available from http://www.assistnews.net/; Internet; Promise Hsu, "Why Beijing's Largest House Church Refuses to Stop Meeting Outdoors" (News article from 26 April 2011) [on-line]; accessed 15 August 2011; available from http:// www.christianitytoday.com; Internet; David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003), 227-44. For information about the doctrine of unregistered house churches, see Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions: The Costly Revival* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2000), 67-69, 187-93.

[191]See pp. 200-01 in this dissertation.

with others, they can understand Paul's perspective when he is content with weakness and hardship as long as he remains in a right relationship with God. In fact, Paul explains, the weaknesses he experiences actually serve to strengthen his relationship with Christ by teaching him to rely more on the power of Christ and less on his own strength. He places the priority in his life on his relationship with Christ, and that makes sense to the Chinese.

Chapter 4 explained that cultural outsiders must examine the influence of their own cultural perspective on their interpretation of Scripture.[192] In this situation, a Western interpreter who is ministering in a Chinese context must evaluate how his Western perspective affects his understanding and communication of this text. Since the central priority in the Western worldview is belief,[193] a Western interpreter might explain that a Christian's belief in God helps him to understand and overcome difficulties. While this explanation is true, it is not as helpful in a Chinese context since Chinese tend to think in terms of relationships and not beliefs.

Since Chinese pragmatism contradicts the truth of this passage, it is best to reinterpret that pragmatism in light of what this passage teaches. Instead of asking "Does it work?" about their experiences, Chinese believers should be taught to ask, "How does this situation strengthen my relationship with God?" When Chinese believers ask this question, they adopt the Pauline perspective of focusing on God's grace and boasting in their weaknesses, because when they are weak, they experience more of God's powerful presence.

Luke 14:25-33: The Cost of Discipleship

In this passage, Jesus teaches about the cost of discipleship. Following the

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[192]See pp. 165-66 in this dissertation.

[193]See p. 200 in this dissertation.

parable of the great banquet (14:12-24), which emphasizes the need to prepare for the kingdom of God, this passage emphasizes the conditions for membership in the kingdom of God.[194] For Luke, this teaching section serves as Jesus' answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?"[195] Jesus answers the question with two comments about discipleship, two illustrations, and a final word about discipleship.

Jesus' first two comments explain the serious nature of becoming one of his disciples. In the first comment, Jesus states that a disciple must "hate" his family (12:26). This call is not a literal hatred but a rhetorical one in that Jesus expects disciples to love their family less than they love him.[196] In the second comment, Jesus uses the illustration of "bearing" one's own cross to explain that disciples must be willing to die to themselves (12:27). Following Christ means placing commitment to him above family or self.[197]

Jesus' first illustration relates the building of a tower and how the builder needs to consider before starting whether he has the necessary funds to complete the building (12:28-30). The second illustration is similar in that it explains that a king, before going to war, must consider whether his army is powerful enough to overthrow the opposing force (12:31-32). Both illustrations are given as rhetorical questions and emphasize the need for serious consideration of one's commitment to Jesus.[198]

Jesus' final command explains the need for disciples to "renounce" everything

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[194]Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 395.

[195]Ibid.

[196]Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:1284; Stein, *Luke*, 396.

[197]I. Howard Marshall, "Luke," in *New Bible Commentary*, 21st Century ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 1005.

[198]Stein, *Luke*, 396.

in order to follow him (12:33). In contrast to Jesus' command to the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions (18:22), Jesus' command here is a command of "abandonment of things, yielding up the right of ownership, rather than outright disposal of them."[199] Bock puts the idea succinctly, "Persevering with Jesus means being attached to him, not to possessions."[200]

Each of the commands and illustrations clarifies Luke's main point that as the Messiah, Jesus demands a position in life above all others, and each disciple must consider the cost of following him.[201] For the disciple, Jesus is to be more valuable than possessions, family, or even self. Given the serious nature of this commitment, he should evaluate beforehand whether or not his commitment to Jesus is paramount.

Applying the truth of this passage to the Chinese context, the most significant obstacle is the family-centered nature of the Han. The worldview section explained that commitment to one's family is more important than all other pursuits in life. Fulfilling one's duty to family is of the highest importance, and that duty overrides all other personal ambitions and goals.

Jesus' command confronts this prioritization of family. His teaching that disciples must commit to him in such a way that all other relationships are of secondary importance is a challenging concept in such a family-centered culture. Of special interest are those disciples who are the first in their family to commit to Christ. They must take seriously the command to count the cost, because for them commitment to Christ may be understood as literal hatred and denial of their families.

One of the practical aspects of the Chinese family-centered nature is ancestor

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[199]Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 980.

[200]Bock, *Luke*, 2:1290.

[201]Stein, *Luke*, 398-99.

worship. The section covering traditional Chinese religions explained that ancestor worship practices focus on protecting and providing for deceased ancestors.[202] These practices contradict the teaching of this passage that Jesus alone commands the place of worship in the life of a believer. Jesus' command to "hate" father and mother is evidence of this fact. They also contradict the teaching of other texts that the eternal fate of the deceased cannot be altered (Luke 16:26; Rom 2:5-7; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:12-13).

Nonetheless, Scripture does command believers to honor their fathers and mothers (Exod 20:12). Chinese believers can reconcile these two concepts, commitment to Christ and the desire to honor one's ancestors, by evaluating each practice according to Hiebert's critical contextualization process.[203] Some practices, like the burning of money and items that the deceased receive in the afterlife, should be rejected because they contradict the teaching of Scripture. Some practices need functional substitutes. An example of such a practice is the daily burning of incense, which is believed to protect the deceased from evil spirits. Instead of burning incense, believers can use the time to pray for living relatives who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Other practices, such as the cleaning of graves as a way of honoring the memory of deceased relatives, could remain as long as those practices are not tied to worship.

Another obstacle in applying this passage to the Chinese context is their tendency toward religious syncretism. The religion section showed that throughout China's history, the Chinese have blended together multiple religious traditions on the basis of "what works."[204] This syncretism contradicts Luke's point in 14:25-33 where

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[202]See p. 186-87 in this dissertation.

[203]For an explanation of this process, see p. 122 in this dissertation. For an explanation of its usefulness in the hermeneutical process, see pp. 169-73 in this dissertation.

[204]See p. 190 in this dissertation.

Jesus demands absolute and unwavering commitment from his followers. To combine faith in Christ with any other religious or worldly pursuit is to misunderstand the nature of Christian discipleship.

As a result, those considering commitment to Christ should be taught to count the cost, as Jesus teaches in this passage. This serious and sober evaluation makes sense in the Chinese context, where, as a result of their pragmatic nature, they tend to be cautious in making decisions. Jesus' illustrations in this text of a builder and a king evaluating their tasks before acting relate well to this context where people are taught to avoid shame by finishing projects they start.

Moreover, since Luke was writing to believers, this passage can serve to remind Chinese believers of the serious nature of the commitment they have already made. To help them avoid syncretism, missionaries or church leaders should help them to evaluate pre-existing beliefs and practices in light of their newfound faith in Christ. Ultimately, a change in worldview and the avoidance of syncretism requires both conversion and discipleship. Hiebert explains, "We must see worldview transformation as a point, conversion, and as a process, ongoing deep discipling."[205]

Matthew 25:1-13:
The Parable of the Ten Virgins

In this passage, Jesus uses a parable to explain the delay in the coming kingdom. The parable falls within an extended teaching section that discusses the return of Christ (24:1-25:46). Jesus says that the kingdom is like ten virgins who are waiting to meet the bridegroom (25:1). Five of the virgins are prepared with enough oil for the lamps, but the other five are not prepared, expecting the bridegroom to come quickly (25:2-3). When their oil runs out, they leave to buy more, and the bridegroom comes

[205]Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 319.

while they are gone (25:8-10). When they return, the wedding feast has already begun, and they are unable to enter (25:10). As he often does, Jesus emphasizes the point of the parable with his final comment when he states, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (25:13).

Throughout church history, numerous details in the story have been allegorized.[206] Certainly, the bridegroom represents Jesus, but to press other details, like the oil, the lamps, or the virgins for spiritual significance misunderstands the point of parables.[207] Given the tendency for Chinese hermeneutical practices to focus on reader-centered, allegorical interpretations, a danger exists that untrained believers will use their imaginations to read their own concerns into parables and other narrative passages of Scripture.

Watchman Nee's interpretation of this parable is one example in the history of the Chinese church of an allegorical interpretation of this text. Nee explains that the difference between the five virgins with oil and the five without is the difference between having the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit:

> It says that the five came to the door and said: 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' What door? Certainly not the door of salvation. If you are lost, you cannot come to the door of heaven and knock. When therefore the Lord says: 'I know you not," He surely uses these words in some such limited sense . . . .[208]

The five virgins who do not have enough oil are not unbelievers, but believers who have yet to discover the secret of living a Spirit-filled life. He summarizes the parable, "In the

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[206]For a description and evaluation of some of these allegorical interpretations, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 511-12; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 619; R. T. France, *Matthew*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 349-50.

[207]Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 274-75.

[208]Watchman Nee, *Sit, Walk, Stand*, ed. by Angus I. Kinnear, 4th ed. (Eastbourne, UK: Victory Press, 1974), 36-37.

end, of course, all the ten had enough. But the difference lay in the fact that the wise had sufficient oil in time, while the foolish, when at length they did have sufficient, had missed the purpose for which it was intended."[209] The point of the parable, then, is that believers will miss God's purposes if they are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

Nee's interpretation finds spiritual significance in the distinction between the five virgins who have enough oil and the five who do not. According to Nee, the first five represent Spirit-filled Christians, while the second five represent carnal Christians, or those who have been saved but are still living according to the flesh. Such an interpretation misses the fact that the second group of virgins is not allowed to join the wedding (25:12), and it ultimately misses the main point of the parable that since the time of the bridegroom's return is unknown, alertness is necessary.[210]

This parable teaches that the return of the bridegroom is a certainty, and all must prepare for his coming or be left out of the wedding feast of the lamb. The only appropriate way to prepare for the bridegroom's coming is to come to him in faith in this lifetime. Among the Han, where so many have yet to respond to Christ in faith, and many more have yet to even hear of Jesus, this text calls all people to face the reality that a judgment is coming, and all must come to Christ or perish. Such a call runs counter-cultural in a place where Communist ideology, Confucian morality, and economic opportunity are seen as the means through which one procures a better life.

For Chinese believers, the history of interpretation in China and the errors of church history[211] reveal the need to avoid allegorical or reader-centered interpretations.

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[209]Ibid., 37.

[210]David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 597; Carson, "Matthew," 512.

[211]For a discussion of the impact of allegorical interpretation on the doctrine of the church, see pp. 146-48 in this dissertation.

To do so, missionaries and pastors must train believers to utilize the proper methods for biblical interpretation. Such proper methods are those that emphasize determining the original author's intent through the use of the grammatical historical method.

Conclusion

Although some have criticized the author-oriented grammatical historical method of interpretation as being ineffective and unsuitable for many cultural settings, this chapter shows that this method can be utilized among the Han Chinese, in spite of the fact that their traditional methods are reader-centered and allegorical in approach. As the missionary prepares to enter the pioneer field, he should seek to model and teach this author-oriented hermeneutical approach. Utilizing such an approach will ensure that the new believers learn to understand and apply the author's meaning to their cultural context.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to examine various theories of ethnohermeneutics and to provide an alternative cross-cultural model for biblical interpretation that upholds authorial intent. The primary research questions were "What are the strengths and weaknesses of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation?" and "Is it possible for missionaries to train converts in other cultures to interpret the Bible in a way that is faithful to the author's original intent and sensitive to culture?"

Chapter 1 examined some basic aspects of the indigenization movement and its focus on self-theologizing. Discussions on this key strategy eventually focused on ethnotheologizing and ethnohermeneutics. Larry Caldwell, one of the key proponents of ethnohermeneutics, argued that for the sake of contextualization missionaries should utilize culturally appropriate hermeneutic methodologies. Once people are reached with the gospel, he argued, they ought to be trained and encouraged to continue to use the hermeneutic methods of their culture.

Chapter 1 also stated that many Western textbooks on hermeneutics focus on the determination of the original author's meaning. These resources, though, neglect to consider the difficulties involved when this process is implemented in situations involving people of multiple cultures. On the other hand, many of the missiological resources that do take culture into consideration, like the theories of Caldwell, go too far in allowing culture to determine the meaning of a text. The remainder of this dissertation sought to provide what both of these types of resources lack – insight into how one studies and applies the Scriptures in a way that is faithful to the original author's intent and sensitive to culture.

Chapter 2 considered historical issues related to ethnohermeneutics theories. This chapter showed that hermeneutical theories in recent history attacked the traditional understanding of interpretation by allowing the reader a greater level of autonomy when determining the meaning of a text. The major theories of this period displayed a growing openness in allowing readers to use texts for their own purposes. Missiological studies focused the indigenization movement, which sought to give greater autonomy to the churches that missionaries planted.

The scholarly conversation on indigenization principles changed into a discussion on proper contextualization of the gospel in the 1970s. During this time, both ecumenicals and evangelicals grew frustrated with the indigenization movement's inability to make the gospel relevant in other cultures. Whereas indigenization attempted to deposit the gospel as a potted plant in the new culture, contextualization sought to plant the gospel seed in the soil of the new culture. Throughout missions history, the views on contextualization have ranged from non-contextualization, where the gospel is exported with the missionary's home culture, to over-contextualization, where cultural sensitivity trumped biblical authority. In the latter part of the twentieth century, over-contextualization and its resultant insider movement focus became increasingly influential. These two themes, hermeneutical openness and over-contextualization, coalesced in the formation of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation.

Chapter 3 evaluated several ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation. The proponents of these views argued for vernacular and postcolonial hermeneutics, cross-textual hermeneutics, intertextual hermeneutics, and ethnohermeneutics. While these views are helpful in their emphasis on studying and valuing the target culture, ultimately evangelicals must reject each view because of the high level of interpretive subjectivity of each view.

This chapter also examined several other views in which the authors are more cautious in their approach to cross-cultural hermeneutics. These authors encourage

native believers to be in dialogue with believers in other cultures and to learn from the lessons of church history. Several of these authors argue that the grammatical historical method is the most natural method of interpretation in any cultural context. The weakness of these views was that none of the authors develops a complete model for cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Chapter 4 sought to address weaknesses of the views examined in chapter 3 by providing an alternative model for cross-cultural hermeneutics. The first section of this chapter showed that the author-oriented approach is the method best suited to the evangelical worldview. This method includes both the determination of the author's meaning and the application of that meaning to the contemporary context. Determining the author's meaning includes the study of the grammar and syntax, culture and history, and theology and missiology of a text. The application of that meaning includes researching the target culture's context, scrutinizing the interpreter's cultural perspective, knowing the implications of the biblical text, observing the importance of critical contextualization, and communicating the biblical truth in a relevant way.

Chapter 5 applied this model to the East Asian context and showed that this model of cross-cultural hermeneutics can be implemented in another cultural context. The common characteristics of the Han worldview are its family-centered nature, relationship-driven mentality, food-loving outlook, philosophically-pragmatic perspective, and religiously-syncretistic tendency. The traditional hermeneutical methods employed when interpreting sacred texts in East Asia have been reader-centered and allegorical. Chinese Christian interpreters of the Bible have utilized similar methods.

Nonetheless, an author-oriented model of hermeneutics through the use of the grammatical historical method can be implemented in this context. Chapter 5 examined three passages of Scripture, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Luke 14:25-33; and Matthew 25:1-13, to show that this model could be utilized in the Chinese context. The examination of these passages showed that through the determination of the author's meaning and the

study of the contemporary context, the author's meaning can speak to the prevailing concerns of any given cultural context.

Implications

This dissertation has been concerned with the meeting point of two academic disciplines, because ethnohermeneutics theories developed at the intersection of missiology and hermeneutics. This dissertation has examined which hermeneutical methodologies are appropriate when crossing cultural boundaries with the gospel. As a result, it is necessary to state the implications of this study for future missiological and hermeneutical discussions.

Missiological Implications

The research in this dissertation has several missiological implications. First, it shows the necessity in any culture of utilizing only those hermeneutical approaches that uphold authorial intent. An author-oriented approach is the approach that best fits the evangelical understanding of the authority of Scripture. Since the authority of the biblical text is bound up with the meaning of the original author, interpreters in any cultural context must focus on determining the author's meaning and on applying that meaning to their specific contexts.

Similarly, it is not enough for evangelicals to simply affirm the inerrancy, inspiration, and authority of the Scriptures. If their hermeneutical methods subvert the authority of the Scriptures by proposing interpretations that contradict the clear meaning of the original authors, affirming biblical authority is of little use. Biblical authority is meaningless unless interpreters utilize approaches that uphold that authority. The only approaches that do so are those that see the original author as the determiner of meaning.

The best method for determining and applying the original author's meaning is the grammatical historical method of exegesis. Again, chapter 4 showed that this method is not a Western method or a method that is built on Western philosophical

presuppositions. It is, however, a method that the church has developed over time to enable interpreters to determine the original author's meaning through the study of his use of syntax, grammar, language and his cultural and historical setting. Studying these various issues enables the interpreter to understand the message that the original author desired to communicate with those who would read what he wrote. Such an approach is not unique to one single cultural setting but should be utilized in every culture as believers are equipped to "rightly handle the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

A second implication of this dissertation is the necessity of modeling sound hermeneutical methodology in missiological practice. When pioneer missionaries enter cultural contexts that have little or no knowledge of the biblical message, they must study the culture and learn the language in order to present the gospel in culturally appropriate ways. As they present the message of the gospel, they should model proper hermeneutical methods for their hearers. The interpretational methods of the missionary set the standard for how these future believers will learn to handle the biblical text.

Great danger exists if the missionary neglects to model proper hermeneutical methods in his teaching. If the missionary does not respect the intention of the original author when he interacts with the text, it is highly unlikely that those he leads to Christ will do so either. Since the missionary has had the opportunity to study biblical truth for a longer period of time, for him it is a case of right doctrine from wrong text.[1] These new believers will likely utilize those same methods as they develop their own theological convictions. If the new believers have learned erroneous hermeneutical methods from the missionary, for them it may be a case of wrong doctrine from right text.

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[1]The phrase "right doctrine but wrong text" is used of those who argue for an orthodox position from a passage of Scripture that does not speak to that issue. An example of "right doctrine but wrong text" is Nee's argument for believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit from Matthew 25:1-13 that chapter 5 examined. His doctrine is correct that believers should be filled with the Holy Spirit, but he argues for that position from a text that does not treat that doctrine. For my discussion of Nee's interpretation, see pp. 222-23 in this dissertation.

On the other hand, if the missionary models hermeneutical methods that respect the intention of the original author, the people will learn to do the same. Chapter 4 showed that even in cultural contexts where people are oral learners, the missionary can utilize and model the grammatical historical method. Even in evangelistic settings, the unbelievers are learning from the missionary the right way to interact with biblical revelation. Once they become believers, and as they continue to listen to the missionary teach God's truth from God's Word, they will grow in their understanding of the nature of biblical revelation and the proper ways of interpreting it.

A third implication of this dissertation is the necessity of hermeneutic training as part of the discipleship process in missiological contexts. Jesus' command to the church in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) was to "make disciples." This process of disciple making occurs as unbelievers are led to Christ and then taught to obey all that Christ commanded. When missionaries lead people to trust in Christ, they must invest the time in teaching and training these new believers.

A critical part of this discipleship process is training in the proper methods for interpreting Scripture. Part of fulfilling Jesus' command is equipping believers with the tools to read and interpret Scripture on their own. Once the missionary teaches these new believers how to determine and apply the original author's meaning, the believers will know how to consult Scripture to find answers to the pressing issues of their day. Training in hermeneutics does not answer all of the people's theological questions, but it equips them to find answers for themselves through the faithful study of the Scriptures.

The reality is that the foundation of healthy theology is healthy interpretation. Christians in any culture look to Scripture to develop their theological convictions. How they handle Scripture affects how they work out their positions on certain theological issues. It also affects how they utilize Scripture in addressing critical issues of their cultural context. If these new believers adopt healthy methods of interpretation, healthy theology will follow.

The danger here is that if these new believers are not trained in proper hermeneutical methods, it is likely that they will utilize the interpretive practices of their culture. Chapter 5 revealed that in the Chinese context, traditional Christian interpretation has been similar to the interpretive practices of traditional Chinese religions. This situation is problematic since those traditional hermeneutic methods are reader-centered and allegorical. Such practices go against the author-oriented, grammatical historical method that best fits the evangelical worldview.

If believers in environments that missionaries have recently reached utilize their indigenous hermeneutic approaches, the result will be a high degree of syncretism in their belief and practice. If they utilize methods similar to vernacular or postcolonial methods, they will end up reading their own concerns into Scripture. If they utilize approaches like those found in intertextual or cross-textual models, they will put Scripture on the same level as any other sacred text and will blend together the teachings of both belief systems. With other ethnohermeneutic approaches that subvert authorial intent, they will establish a system where their own ingenuity or creativity will trump the clear meaning of Scripture.

The simple response to these dangers is that new believers must be trained how to interpret the Scriptures. Missionaries must invest the time not only modeling proper hermeneutical practice but also teaching converts the correct ways to handle the text of Scripture. Where there is a lack of resources or where the people are primary oral learners, this task is difficult, but certainly not impossible. Even in those settings, missionaries can teach and train believers to determine and apply the original author's meaning.

Hermeneutical Implications

In the same way that there are missiological implications of this dissertation, there are also several hermeneutical implications. First, a need exists for more discussion

on the third horizon involved in intercultural interpretation. Thiselton's two-horizon model is helpful for recognizing the differences between the biblical culture and the interpreter's culture. Caldwell is right, though, that Thiselton's model does not go far enough. His model should be adjusted to include a third horizon, that of the target culture. It is the interpreter's responsibility when his cultural background is different from his hearers' backgrounds to recognize the differences and to communicate the truth of the passage in ways that are relevant to his hearers.

Moreover, few, if any, mono-cultural settings exist in today's world. With the effects of urbanization and globalization, and with the ease of travel and communication, people have more contact with those of other cultures than at any other time in history. As contemporary biblical interpreters seek to communicate the truths of Scripture, they need to recognize that they live in a multi-cultural world. Effective application and communication of God's Word in today's world requires attention to the worldviews of their hearers, which may be very different from their own.

Factoring this third horizon into the interpretive process, though, increases the challenges involved in interpretation. Scholars must devote more attention to addressing the challenges involved when interpreting the Bible for hearers of a different culture.

A second hermeneutic implication of this dissertation is the need for continued discussion of global theology. Much has been written about global theology in recent years,[2] and much of this discussion has been helpful. More attention is needed on the hermeneutic challenges involved in the development of global theology. Questions like how global interpretive practice should be evaluated, how indigenous leaders can be

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[2]Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

trained in hermeneutics, and how errant hermeneutical practice affects the development of theology still need to be addressed.

Along the same lines and given the multi-cultural context of the twenty-first century, interpreters must wrestle with how a text might apply in other cultural contexts. More attention should be given in commentaries and other scholarly writings concerning how a passage under consideration might relate to non-Western contexts. Interpreters can no longer simply assume that readers have the same cultural background as they do, but they need to write in such a way that they equip believers in any cultural context to apply the truths of Scripture to the pressing theological issues of any context.

A final implication of this dissertation is the need for further study on how current hermeneutical trends might impact interpretation in other cultural settings. One of these areas is redemptive historical hermeneutics.[3] Redemptive historical hermeneutics, often referred to as biblical theology, is a hermeneutical approach that recognizes that "the center and reference point for the meaning of all Scripture is the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God."[4] Although differences exist between these Christ-centered approaches, in general these views seek to utilize a salvation historical perspective as they recognize that the wider context for every text is the complete divine plan.[5]

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[3]Graeme Goldsworthy is the major proponent of this view. His works include Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); idem, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006); idem, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991). Other authors that have written on a Christ-centered or redemptive historical approach include Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). It must be noted that redemptive historical is different from redemptive trajectory. For a description and an argument for the redemptive trajectory approach, see William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: Zondervan, 2008).

[4]Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 16.

[5]Ibid., 120.

The question that remains unanswered is how these redemptive historical approaches might affect interpretation in other cultural settings. Questions such as, "Are these approaches well-suited to oral learners?," or "Are these approaches helpful in settings where traditional forms of interpretation are allegorical?" are questions that scholars still need to address.

The theological interpretation of Scripture movement is another trend that might be useful in cross-cultural hermeneutics. Theological interpretation of Scripture (TIS) is difficult to define, but Gregg Allison offers the following definition, "TIS is a family of interpretive approaches that privileges theological readings of the Bible in due recognition of the theological nature of Scripture, its ultimate theological message, and/or the theological interests of its readers."[6] Both positives and negatives exist to TIS theories, but the question that remains is what impact these theories might have on the interpretive practices and development of theology in other cultural settings.

Conclusion

The author-oriented approach to hermeneutics is the approach best suited to the evangelical worldview and best suited to cross-cultural hermeneutics. This approach, through the use of the grammatical historical method, enables believers to determine the original author's meaning and to apply that meaning to their cultural context. No matter the cultural setting, believers can learn to implement and utilize a hermeneutic approach that is faithful to the intent of the authors of Scripture and sensitive to culture.

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[6]Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation," in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14 (2010): 29. For more on TIS, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson, eds., *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). For an evaluation of these approaches, see Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series, ed. Benjamin Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 313-20.

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ABSTRACT

CRITIQUING ETHNOHERMENEUTICS THEORIES: A CALL FOR AN AUTHOR-ORIENTED APPROACH TO CROSS-CULTURAL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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This dissertation examines ethnohermeneutics theories and proposes an alternative view to cross-cultural interpretation. Chapter 1 introduces the study by examining the topic of ethnohermeneutics and its development out of the indigenous movement. For the sake of clarity, key terms are defined. The project background, methodology, and the limitations and delimitations are also stated in this chapter.

Chapter 2 gives a history of the ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation. This chapter examines the modern hermeneutics theories and the contemporary missiological discussions related to indigenization and contextualization that laid the groundwork for the development of theories related to ethnohermeneutics.

Chapter 3 is an evaluation of ethnohermeneutics theories of interpretation. It provides an overview of these theories by examining the writings of the major proponents and stating the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.

Chapter 4 provides an alternative model for cross-cultural hermeneutics. This chapter explains the importance of authorial intent to biblical interpretation. It examines

the steps involved in determining and applying the author's meaning and an interpreter undertakes those steps in places where there is a lack of resources or the people are primary oral learners.

Chapter 5 applies the alternative model to the East Asian context. It examines the East Asian context and the difficulties that arise when conducting biblical interpretation in this region of the world, and then the model for cross-cultural interpretation will be implemented by examining three texts of Scripture and the ways they apply in this context.

Chapter 6 serves as the conclusion and summarizes the study. It discusses why training in hermeneutics is important to discipleship in missiological contexts and explains the implications of this study to other areas of hermeneutics.

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