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Deconstructing general hermeneutics / (re)constructing a Biblical hermeneutic

Khushf, George Peter, Ph.D.

Rice University, 1993

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DECONSTRUCTING GENERAL HERMENEUTICS/
(RE)CONSTRUCTING A BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Deconstructing General Hermeneutics/
(Re)constructing a Biblical Hermeneutic

by

George Khushf

The post-modern predicament can be seen in the conflict between general hermeneutics and deconstruction. General hermeneutics seeks to develop the "modern" project of understanding understanding. It is concerned with universality and meaning, sublimating otherness and difference in the "merging of horizons". Deconstruction subverts such a drive to universality, seeking to open up differences where there is a presumed unity. It tears horizons apart.

Protestant interpretation of Scripture has been closely associated with general hermeneutics. However, an evaluation of Rudolf Bultmann's thought shows how any so-called general hermeneutic involves implicit commitments to natural theology which conflict with doctrines of special revelation that are implied by the principles of sola fide and sola gratia. In this way the generality of general hermeneutics is deconstructed.

Instead of beginning with an independently derived hermeneutic, which directs the interpretation of Biblical
texts, one should begin with the kerygmatic content, and develop its hermeneutical implications. Through a careful examination of the implications of Luther's account of justification, it can be seen that the point of departure for interpretation is not a generally determinable "plain sense" of the text, but rather a particularly determined ambiguity, opacity and polyvalence. Through the text's content, which is the Word of God, there is a metaphorical transfer from a grammatical metaphoricity to a divine metaphoricity, in which an initial linguistic displacement in the text is reduplicated existentially as a shift from the indeterminate absence to the hidden presence of God. This metaphorical metaphoricity provides an alternative to Babel, which is the Derridian "metaphor of metaphors".

The metaphorical metaphoricity that grounds justification can be seen in the incarnation, which is thematized by John's Gospel. Through an account of the logic and rhetoric of revelation in John's text, a hermeneutic of revelation can be derived, which does justice to the unique dynamics of Scripture and its function in the Christian community. The singular juxtaposition of universality and particularity that takes place in the incarnation provides a third alternative to the competing movements that constitute the post-modern predicament.
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As a graduate student, I have had the opportunity to serve as an assistant to three professors of great stature. Each of them has left an indelible mark upon my life and thought, and I owe them an intellectual debt that cannot be paid. Thank you to Professors Hans Küng, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., and the Chair of my dissertation committee, Werner Kelber, who has been more than generous with his time and his support. Professor Kelber's careful reading and guidance enabled me to move from vague, indeterminate notions to understanding and expression. Could one ask more from a
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Finally, I wish to thank my parents and my wife for their patience and support over the many years of graduate study. I dedicate this work to my daughter, Abigail Christine Khushf, who taught me why Jesus exhorted us to be as little children.
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INTRODUCTION

I. The "Post-modern" Predicament

In attempting to account for our present, "post-modern" condition we are tempted to elaborate upon the complexities of the computer age, developing the way in which the "information explosion" and new technology transform the older bureaucratic and societal structures of a previous industrial age. All this rests on the assumption that our predicament is determined by factors that are new, thus not available to a previous age. We understand the present by comparing the present and the past, subtracting all that is found in the past, and setting forth the specific difference as that which qualifies our age. It is much like the way Aristotle defined species in terms of genus and a specific difference.

It is not clear, however, that our age is qualified by factors that are wholly unique, and not by deeper structures that are perennial. Nor is it clear that we are in the best position to grasp the deep, perennial structures, if there are such structures. Perhaps our subtlety and complexity serve to cloud rather than enlighten the dynamics of our age.

In order to account for the present condition, I would like to begin with a model drawn from a simpler, more distant society. Consider a tribal leader who attempts to initiate his son into a game whose rules symbolize the laws of
that society. By teaching the child how to play the game, the leader simultaneously teaches him how to effectively work within the laws of society; by living in society and experiencing its conditions, the child also learns to better play the game. (Here the game relates to society as ideology.) But in this case, let us imagine that the child is not interested in the game; even further, he does not like some of the rules. Instead, he gathers with other youth and they form a new game, which is different from the one played by the parents. Likewise, their game reflects and is reflected in the dynamics of their societal interaction.

There are now two games: the dominant one of the elders, which we will call the ancient game, and the subgame of the youth (functioning like a counterculture), which we will call game 2. These games reflect two forms of societal interaction, with different expectations, rewards and penalties. Let the subgame increasingly vie with the dominant one for preeminence, so that a conflict situation is created. This conflict will constitute the "predicament" of the tribal society, which we will call the ancient predicament.

Next, let us assume that the youth come to appreciate that there is wisdom in some of the rules in the ancient game, and the elders come to realize that the rules of the subgame are often better adapted to new conditions that have arisen in society. Both sides unite and form a new game, which will be reflected in and reflect new societal structures. This game
results from a "merging of horizons", and it can be called *game 1/2*. It gives an answer to the ancient predicament.

Now let the same process be repeated again. A new subgame, which we will call *game 3* comes into conflict with game 1/2. This sets up a variant on the ancient predicament, which we will call *predicament 2*. But in this case let the society abstract from the particular predicament and ask: how can we generally solve a conflict situation that is posed by the introduction of a new subculture? Let us call this general question the problem of general hermeneutics, and define it as the modern predicament. In this case society seeks an answer not just to its present, particular predicament but to present and future predicaments. One asks in a general way about the way in which one "comes to understanding with" the alien. Predicament 2 is then regarded as a particular instance of the universal, "modern" predicament.

One way to answer this general question arises from reflection on the previous history of society; namely, by reflection on the way in which that society answered the ancient predicament. After a new game has been worked out, retrospectively, the individuals in the newly formed society can reflect upon the process by which the two competing sides merged into one. That which was implicit in the process can be made explicit and set forth as the rules of yet another game; namely, the *metagame* that was played out in response to
the tribal predicament. We can call the system of rules that characterizes this metagame *general hermeneutics*, and this provides the answer to the modern predicament. Let us call the historical period governed by these metarules *modernism*. It is characterized by a continually developing society in which each new game arises from the synthesis of a previously dominant game and its subgame. Each synthesis expresses an outcome of playing the metagame. The synthesis then becomes a new dominant game that breeds its own subgame, etc.\(^3\) In each case one moves to a greater universality, which encompasses a previous universal and its specific difference.

We are now in a position to raise our model to yet a third level of reflection. In the previous cases, the subgames were not radically alterior to the dominant games against which they contended. The seeds of reconciliation were thus already present in the nature of the conflict, and there was a *continuity* in the development of society which can be accounted for in terms of the metarules of the general hermeneutic. Now, however, let us posit a subculture which regards itself as radically alterior to modernism. Further, let this culture be constituted in such a way that it regards itself as suppressed and dominated by the very rules that make modernism what it is. It thus contests not only the regular rules of a specific stage in modernism, but the metarules which constitute the general hermeneutic. It characterizes its conflict with modernism as a conflict which cannot be
regarded as a case of the "conflict in general" to which modernism was an answer. It thereby denies to modernism the universality that was constitutive of modernism's own self-characterization. We can call this conflict between modernism and the radically alterior subculture the post-modern predicament.

I would suggest that this post-modern predicament is indeed our predicament, that of present-day society. But this suggestion contains a contradiction: the predicament developed in the model is uniquely our predicament today, but it is also a perennial predicament, thus I was able to characterize it in terms that were abstractable from our present context. Both perennial and uniquely ours - that is the contradiction.

There is a sense in which every predicament has been a post-modern one. In an ancient predicament the two sides approach their particular conflict without any cognisance of its deeper, universal import. They do not see that their solution will provide a precedent for future solutions, since a metagame will be derived from the retrospective appraisal of the procedure that led to the resolution. the ancients thus err by focusing only on the particular, without an eye on the universal. In doing this they abdicate responsibility for the deeper consequences of their act: a responsibility that extends beyond the horizon of the two sides that are engaged in the conflict. In a modern predicament, on the other hand,
people lose sight of the particular conflicts and focus only on the universal dimensions. Every predicament is viewed as an instance of a universal predicament to which a metagame provides a procedural answer. While modernists recognize full well the broader import of their resolutions, reflecting on the precedent-setting character of judgments, they fail to do justice to the uniqueness and particularity of concrete conflicts. By regarding a past predicament as an instance of the modern predicament, one maintains the suppression of the radically alterior which was veiled rather than unveiled by the metarules that directed the resolution of conflicting claims.\(^4\) Every predicament is simultaneously particular (and thus pre-modern or ancient) as well as universal (and thus an instance of the modern). It is in this sense that every predicament is a "post-modern" one.

What uniquely distinguishes our predicament from others is that it is successfully resisting the metagame of modernism while at the same time avoiding the flight from responsibility that takes place when one focuses only on the particular. The singularity of our predicament can thus be disclosed as what it is: a cacophony of competing voices.\(^5\) This singularity is seen in/as the conflict between general hermeneutics and deconstruction.

General hermeneutics is concerned with the movement toward greater universality, and it develops understanding as a merging of horizons. It responds to the post-modern
predicament by regarding the subculture's criticism as an expression of modernity's own self-criticism. As with Hegel, "the power of division is supposed to be at work only so that the absolute can demonstrate itself as the power of unification." The same content that comes to expression in the dominant game also further expresses itself in/as the subgame. In this case, alterity or otherness is not valued in itself, but only in so far as it opens one to a more universal point of view. The otherness of the "other" is like Hegel's "negativity" - it is negated as horizons merge and the opposition that characterizes the predicament is sublimated in the actualization of the metagame that increasingly comes to expression in historical becoming. There is continuity in the immanent development of the metagame and the subculture becomes the condition for the metagame's further development rather than a fundamental, foundational challenge to its legitimacy.

Deconstruction, on the other hand, gives priority to opening difference rather than unification. To this extent it seeks to intensify the predicament and accentuate opposition, making the answer into the question. Most significantly, deconstruction challenges modernism by showing that every metagame, no matter how it is developed, is not neutral with respect to the particular games that conflict. Jacques Derrida has profoundly disclosed the subject implicit in the modern metagame, thus deconstructing the claim to universality
and objectivity that is made by the metagame, when it is set forth as the way to reconcile opposition between diverse subjects. To this extent the subject is itself deconstructed; not the concrete, alterior subject, but the "subject" that is implicit in the language and rules of modern culture - the universal subject. By deconstructing the claims to universality implicit in modernism, Derrida transforms all so-called "general" hermeneutics into the special hermeneutics of particular cultures and perspectives, and he shows that the metagames veil as much as unveil alterity. Then, as the second movement of a double gesture referred to as "différance", Derrida seeks to reverse the hierarchy of the dominant-subgroup relation, thereby allowing the suppressed alterity to come into view. In this way Derrida designates "the crevice through which the unnameable glimmer beyond the closure of our epoch can be glimpsed". By tearing apart horizons and liberating the alterity that was suppressed in the overarching metagame, this "glimpse" becomes apparent, and it serves to break the continuity of history's immanent development, thus confronting modernism with a "crisis" that cannot be resolved in modern terms. It is this crisis that marks the post-modern predicament.

For general hermeneutics, the key crisis was expressed in the gap between the dominant game and its subgame. This crisis constituted a question that was answered by means of the metagame, which provided an anticipation of a peace in
which the opposition between two competing groups was overcome and horizons merged. In this way the gap was bridged. The metagame, in turn, was derived retrospectively from the resolution of previous crises. One assumed that there was a continuity in historical development and that all crises were an instance of a general problematic that could be answered by abstracting general rules from previous resolutions.

When deconstruction challenges the continuity of historical development, it opens a new gap, which is now between the predicament (the old gap) and the metagame that provided the resolution. Positively, deconstruction makes clear that the answer is absent. Negatively, it shows that that which was set forth as the answer (the metagame) was not really an answer. Presumed presence is transformed into false self-assertion (an idol). Further, the "crevice" makes clear that the peace (answer) cannot be made present my means of recollection, which presumes a certain kind of hidden presence and immanence that one can access by an inward turn. Now the uniqueness of the present predicament and the absence of an immanent answer become manifest in full force. However, when deconstruction shows that there is no immanent answer, this does not mean that it has shown that there is no answer at all.
II. The Predicament of the Church in the Post-Modern World

The Christian Church claims that God is the ultimate answer to the question contained in all questions, and as such God is the answer to the human predicament. In the deepest sense, the crisis of humanity is its separation from God, in other words, its sin. This is the word that Christianity gives to the absence of the answer that becomes manifest in and as the post-modern predicament. Christianity agrees with deconstruction when it challenges the presumed presence and immanence affirmed by modernity. Derrida is thus wrong when he identifies western history (associated with modernism) and the Christian faith, calling them both "logocentric". While some Christian theologians have appropriated the "metaphysics of presence" that is seen in general hermeneutics, this optimism and immanentism does not coincide with the doctrine of sin that is central in orthodox belief systems.

Christianity does speak of a type of presence, although it is far removed from the "full presence" associated with doctrines of recollection. It claims that God - the answer - has made himself present in the person of Jesus Christ, and that through this person sin has been overcome. By "belief" in Jesus Christ, one can obtain the life of God's Kingdom, which is the peace (Shalom) that humanity gropes toward in its endeavors. In this peace, the opposition between diverse
groups is overcome and all live in harmony and perfect freedom. This life is not, however, fully manifest. One only "sees through a glass dimly", and one is directed toward a future end, when one "sees face to face". Under present conditions there is thus a paradoxical simultaneity of presence and absence. The End (Shalom) bears in upon the present so that it is relevant in addressing the human predicament, but it is also future and thus "not yet" (noch nicht).

Through the Church's preaching, the paradoxical presence given in Jesus Christ is brought to bear upon the present predicament(s) of humanity. This assumes that the preacher is simultaneously related to the previous paradoxical presence, which is now absent (the 2000 year historical gulf; if the paradoxical presence were not absent, then it would not need to be mediated by the preacher), and the present predicament, with its unique conditions. In order to be faithful to his/her task, the preacher is thus confronted with a twofold predicament which encompasses the post-modern predicament and also goes beyond it. First, (s)he must relate to the predicament, grasping the question in its full import. Second, (s)he must relate to the paradoxical presence, grasping the answer in terms appropriate to the way in which it addresses present conditions (the question).

The gulf between the preacher and the paradoxical presence (e.g. the 2000 years that Lessing so well
characterized as the "abyss") is a singular expression of the gulf between question and answer. It is thus a form of the post-modern predicament that uniquely confronts the Church. When the preacher rightly grasps the full import of the Christian form of the predicament, then (s)he succeeds in grasping the post-modern predicament (the first part of the twofold task). The answer to this Christian form of the post-modern predicament will then provide the needed access the preacher needs to the paradoxical presence, and by articulating the nature of this access, the preacher simultaneously articulates his or her message to the world.

III. Toward a Special, Christian Hermeneutic

In this dissertation, we will take a stance that is squarely within the theological circle. It will be assumed that the Christian kerygma is indeed relevant in addressing the concerns of the post-modern world. Thus the predicament of the Church, outlined in the previous section, will be appropriated as the challenge to which this dissertation responds. We will characterize in post-modern form the problem of accessing the paradoxical presence, and then show how that problem is answered in a way that enables the Church to answer the world for the hope that lies within it.

The dissertation is divided into two main parts. The first looks at the role that general hermeneutics has had
historically in addressing the Church’s problem of accessing its own content (the paradoxical presence). We will deconstruct those theologies that depend on general hermeneutics. Then, in the second part of the dissertation, we will attempt to reconstruct a special hermeneutic that takes seriously the concerns of deconstruction while at the same time does justice to the more general orientation of the deconstructed general hermeneutic. In this singular way we will address the singular question which is the post-modern predicament, and develop the Church’s response to the present world.

The first part of the dissertation is on the genesis and subsequent deconstruction of general hermeneutics, and it has two chapters. Chapter 1 begins with the assumptions regarding "full presence" that one found in the Roman Catholic Church at the end of the Middle Ages. Presence took several forms: It was seen in the "divine universals", which, in a realist context, constituted the thoughts of God, available to the human person who was created in the image of God.\textsuperscript{16} Presence was also seen in the inspired magisterium, which authoritatively interpreted and directed the affairs of people in such a way that earthly matters were fully infused with sacred import. But most significantly, God’s presence was seen in an incarnationally understood visible Church that constituted the literal body of Christ, just as the transubstantiated elements of the Eucharist likewise gave
concrete embodiment to the effective agency of God.

In the late Medieval Period these assumptions were challenged on several fronts: William of Ockham and the nominalistic school that followed him problematized access to universals; secular authorities and growing nationalisms confronted the authority of magisterium and Church, and the authority of the sacred text came into new prominence, especially as seen in the theologies of John Wycliff and John Hus. Although the nominalistic turn and secular nationalistic movements where quite successful in deconstructing claims to presence, they were not able to provide an alternative means of accessing the paradoxical presence that was foundational to Christian belief. ¹⁷ In their wake the gulf between question and answer became apparent with powerful existential force, preparing the way for a new expression of faith that would do justice to the altered circumstances.

Martin Luther deeply experienced the predicament of his day. Although he diligently sought to appropriate the Medieval answer, his "Anfechtungen" made all too apparent the abyss that remained between humanity and God. Presumed presence was existentially apprehended as absence, until, in his "tower experience", the paradoxical presence of grace became manifest in and by Scripture. Now the biblical text became the link between question and answer.

For Luther it was not a general hermeneutic, but rather a particular text that provided the needed answer to the human
predicament (his Anfechtungen). But this textual turn gave the impetus that would eventually lead to a new problem and the modernist solution. Luther assumed an immediacy with the text and its content that enabled him to put forward the doctrine of the "clarity and certainty" of the Bible. But when developments in the natural and historical sciences problematized the ancient biblical worldview, the harmony between the two books - of nature (the empirical world) and grace (the Bible) - broke down, and with it the immediacy to the text.

Science deconstructed the Reformation paradigm, replacing the particularity of the biblical text with a gulf between interpreter and text; immediate unity gave place to difference. Although this gap was a particular one - i.e. it was the gap between a particular interpreter (the person who accepted the Bible as her authority) and a particular text (the Bible) - it soon was regarded as an instance of a general gap; namely, the gap between any interpreter and any text. In this way the predicament of the Church took on a modern form: the problem of general hermeneutics.\textsuperscript{18} It was assumed that one could answer in a general way how one comes to understand a text, and then one could use this knowledge to appropriately interpret the particular, biblical text from which one could subsequently derive the content that answers the gulf between question and answer that was acutely felt at the end of the Middle Ages. It was not recognized that the particular gulf
between interpreter and biblical text was itself an expression of the gulf between question and answer (sin), which the Protestant churches sought to address by means of proclamation. Thus the answer to the textual problematic (the immanentism of general hermeneutics) came into conflict with the Church's particular answer (the kerygma), which presupposed a gulf (sin) that could not be bridged in immanent terms.

In chapter 2 of this dissertation's first part, we consider in detail the theology and hermeneutical reflection of one of the most important "modern" theologians. Rudolf Bultmann sought to give an account of the process of understanding - a general hermeneutic - that was completely independent of a consideration of the character of the content set forth by a text. He argued that all have a preunderstanding, which is rooted in a life-relation to a text's content. If there was no such preunderstanding, then one could not understand a text. In the process of interpretation, the preunderstanding is developed and understanding is thereby expanded. This assumes that there is a continuity in interpretation.19

These reflections on the relation between preunderstanding, life-relation and text provide Bultmann's general hermeneutic; his metagame, which is abstracted from all particular contents and valid for all texts. When he turns to the Biblical texts, he considers the particular
content that is mediated through these texts and attempts to thematize the nature of the preunderstanding and life-relation that makes understanding possible. Bultmann suggests that the Biblical texts serve a two-fold function, which needs to be separated in today's world. The texts were formulated in a mythical worldview which combined scientific knowledge of the world and human self-understanding. In a modern worldview, world-understanding (science) needs to be separated from self-understanding (philosophy and theology). Thus the texts should be interpreted in two ways: according to the preunderstanding one has of the world (scientific possibilities) and according to the preunderstanding one has of one's self (human possibilities). These two preunderstandings are reflected in two methodological strategies: historical criticism and existential interpretation.

Bultmann dismisses the results of historical criticism as largely irrelevant to religious concern. This is because he develops religion as a concern with human self-understanding. Thus, when Bultmann considers the role that the Bible has within the Church, he advocates existential interpretation, which he sees as rooted in a life-relation to God. His general hermeneutic leads him to posit such a life relation that is generally available to all people. But this general revelation (which implies a hidden presence) conflicted with Bultmann's account of the content of the Biblical texts, which
required special revelation (God's self-disclosure was needed to overcome the absence that reflected the existential gulf of sin). Bultmann did not appreciate this conflict between his general hermeneutical principles and his account of the Biblical content.

The conflict between Bultmann's metagame (general hermeneutics) and his particular game (the religious content of the Bible) makes clear that one cannot simply regard the gap between a particular interpreter and the Bible as an instance of the gap between any interpreter and any text. Not only is there a hermeneutical circle between preunderstanding and text, there is also a metahermeneutical circle between a hermeneutic and the content expressed in and as the text. Or, in other words, the so-called "general" hermeneutic must itself be regarded as an expression of an interpreter's preunderstanding and not as some independent, neutral account of how interpreter and text are related. This is especially the case in the interpretation of the Bible, since, according to Bultmann, the content is self-understanding. What is a hermeneutic but an understanding of understanding? Thus, on Bultmann's premises regarding the nature of religious discourse, the Bible directly thematizes hermeneutics as its concern.

Recognition of the metahermeneutical circle in Biblical interpretation deconstructs the affirmations of universality in "general" hermeneutics, thus transforming such metagames
into the *special hermeneutic* of a particular person or culture. Further, we will find that Bultmann was not able to sustain his neat distinction between world-understanding and self-understanding, thus his separation of "scientific" research (historical criticism) and religious interpretation (existential interpretation) collapsed, and the way was prepared for a reevaluation of the modernist assumptions regarding Biblical interpretation, which have increasingly reigned for nearly two hundred years. This brings us to the second part of this dissertation, which is concerned with the reconstruction of a special hermeneutic that does justice to the special revelatory function of the Biblical texts.

In 1934, Emil Brunner wrote an open letter to Karl Barth in which he attempted to justify a certain type of natural theology. Appealing to Calvin and other reformers, Brunner argued that there is in humanity a "capacity for revelation" or "possibility of being addressed", and this implies a knowledge of God that is rooted in creation (the image of God in humanity) and is independent of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This pre-knowledge of revelation; this capacity for understanding and receiving revelation when it comes, is obviously very similar to the "life-relation", which Bultmann posited and made the condition of understanding Scripture. In response to this "natural theology", which was defined as "the doctrine of a union of humanity with God existing outside God's revelation in Jesus Christ"\(^2^0\), Barth expressed his
s tern "Nein!", eschewing every form of presupposed presence, and reasserting the gulf between humanity and God (the doctrine of sin, and thus of God's absence\(^2^1\)).

Barth rejected Brunner's appeal to the Reformers, arguing that they did "not clearly perceive the range of the decisive connection between the problem of justification and the problem of knowledge of God, between reconciliation and revelation".\(^2^2\) The task of theology today must be to extend the doctrine of salvation by grace to its full epistemological import. This Barth did in his rejection of both Brunner's apologetic and Bultmann's hermeneutical reflection, with its espousal of a "life-relation" to God, rooted in a doctrine of creation. But, unfortunately, Barth did not appreciate the full hermeneutical import of the doctrine of sin. This made him unsensitive to the "problem of hermeneutics" that Bultmann attempted to address by way of his general hermeneutical reflections.\(^2^3\) Further, this insensitivity made Barth unable to carry out his attempt to extend the reformers' doctrine of salvation to its full epistemological import, since such import clearly has a hermeneutical dimension. In the second part of this dissertation, we shall attempt to carry out Barth's project, developing the hermeneutical form of the doctrine of sin, so that the full epistemological force of the doctrine of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ can be appreciated.

Chapter 3 begins with a reflection on the metaphor of
"Babel". The attempt to set forth a particular structure - the tower at Babel - as if it were the universal endeavor of humankind (to be like God) leads to oppression and exclusion. Thus God descends, "deconstructs" the unitary project, and scatters the resulting diverse groups across the earth. General hermeneutics is like the babelian project, since it attempts to provide a universal structure that encompasses all groups. This metagame is then deconstructed, and in its place one finds many special hermeneutics. In the context of the resulting pluralism, there is a confusion of tongues; the many, diverse groups can no longer understand one another, since they no longer share the common metagame. Instead of a "merging of horizons", worlds fly apart. In this way, by recounting the collision between general hermeneutics and deconstruction, "Babel" provides a powerful metaphor of our post-modern predicament.

Jacques Derrida claims that Babel is the metaphor of metaphors. He makes deconstruction the final word, arguing that any attempt to move beyond Babel can only lead to a repetition of the babelian pretension, and thus to a regression rather than progress. In response to Derrida and to the post-modern predicament, the Church claims that the confusion of tongues is not the final word. It is possible, it claims, to set forth a message of Shalom, of God's kingdom, which avoids the Scylla (appropriately a many headed monster) of general hermeneutics and the Charybdis (appropriately a
monster dwelling in a whirlpool) of deconstruction. The Church can only justify this possibility by providing its alternative, and it does this, in turn, by concretely proclaiming its good news to the world. This good news will entail a special hermeneutic that escapes the dilemma of post-modernism; it will involve neither the "presence" of general hermeneutics nor the "absence" of deconstruction.

By means of a discussion of the theology of Luther, we will move toward a theological justification of a special, Christian hermeneutic. In the previous chapter on Bultmann, we began with general hermeneutics and showed how this metagame implied a whole anthropology and christology, which collided with the content of Scripture. Now we take the reverse direction: we begin with the kerygma, and show that this implies a special hermeneutic, which, in turn, enables us to access the paradoxical presence that provides the condition of the Christian Church's alternative to the post-modern dilemma. If, in part I of the dissertation, our opponent was general hermeneutics; now, in part II, our opponent is deconstruction.

A special, Christian hermeneutic provides an epistemological thematization of the life-giving-relation (Spirit) of special revelation (justification by grace). It thus shows a way from the opacity and polyvalence that results from deconstructing the general hermeneutic to clarity. The clarity of meaning, however, is never a univocal clarity (full
presence). It is always a metaphorical, deferring meaning (a paradoxical presence, eschatologically oriented). In chapter 3, by way of a discussion of Luther’s theology, we show how the displacement that takes place in justification is authentically expressed in a metaphorical displacement, that begins with an initially grasped absurdity (the opacity that results from deconstruction) and then, by means of re-reading, leads to a new meaning, in which God’s kingdom is grasped, but as through a glass, dimly. There is a linkage between the redoubled meaning of an interpreter and the text, and this linkage is rooted in the content which is proclaimed by the Church; namely, it is rooted in the incarnation of God’s Word. The thematization of the linkage in a way that makes it directly relevant to the gap between interpreter and text thus provides the Church’s answer to the way in which it can access the paradoxical presence that it seeks to mediate to the world. Paradoxically, it is by the paradoxical presence, developed as a displacement between text and interpreter, that an interpreter gains access to the paradoxical presence that is provided in and as the text. Or, in other words, the content that one seeks to obtain from the Biblical texts is the means by which it is obtained; it thus mediates itself to the interpreter. Humanity does not ascend through a hermeneutic to God, the answer; rather, the answer descends to humanity (grace). A Christian, special hermeneutic simply expounds upon this self-unveiling, which is called
"revelation", and it does this in a way that makes clear how it takes place in and through the Biblical text.

In chapter 4, the final chapter of the dissertation, we turn to a specific Biblical text, that of John's Gospel, and develop its content as a hermeneutic. For John, God's Word descends to humanity in the incarnation. The person of Jesus, as the incarnate Word, mediates the paradoxical presence, whereby humanity is transformed into workers of God's Word. If we can understand how Jesus manifests the presence of God, then we can extend that knowledge to show how John's text manifests the paradoxical presence of Jesus. This, in turn, will provide the answer to the Church's predicament in the post-modern world.

The development of a Johannine hermeneutic involves three steps. First, we consider the "logic of revelation", whereby the invisible, grounding relation between God and God's spoken Word is reconstituted in visible, "fleshly" terms as the relation between the person and work of Jesus. Second, we look at the "rhetoric of revelation" whereby the "objective revelation" given in the person-work of Jesus is made subjectively accessible in signs, witness and figurative language. Finally, we bring together the logic and rhetoric of revelation. By means of the logic, the person-work relation (the flesh) is extended to text. Then, by the rhetoric, this content is made subjectively accessible to the reader of that text. In this way, the dynamic between a
hearer and Jesus recounted in John's text can be reconstituted as the dynamic between the text and a reader. The result is a "hermeneutic of revelation" that answers Barth's call to provide an epistemological extension of the Church's kerygmatic content.

NOTES

1. We find this approach to post-modernism in Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

2. This model can be viewed as an analogy of proportionality; namely, it will develop an underdetermined structure of interrelation which is proportional to the structure of that which we seek to explicate. It thus functions like a modern mathematical model.

3. The classical development of this is of course found in Hegel's philosophy which, in turn, elaborated on a structure of thesis, antithesis and synthesis in the identity philosophy of Fichte.

4. A posteriori, when the metagame has been used to resolve the predicament, a past predicament has become an instance of the universal and thus modern. It was forced to be a case or instance of a universal. It is not that it was such primordially; it became such after its resolution.

5. Another way to put this is to say that our predicament successfully resists the metagame of modernism, which forcefully establishes unity by oppressive mechanisms, thus allowing the state of things to come forth as what it is: Babel. This "coming forth" of confusion can perhaps best be seen in the lands of Eastern Europe, which were forcefully unified under the metagame of Marxism. For more on this see Peter Beilharz et al., eds., Between Totalitarianism and Modernity (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992).

6. In The Persistence of Modernity (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), Albrecht Wellner well recognizes that the debate about whether to designate the present as modern or post-modern hinges upon whether the critique which is called "post-modern" can be regarded as a further articulation of a self-
critique contained in modernity. All hinges upon whether the voice of the other can be regarded as an expression, in the deepest sense, of the self.


9. One finds here a Heideggerian them: the quest after the primordial question. But in Derrida’s case the fundamental question is not metaphysical - the quest for Being and presence - but rather the singular question: the quest for the predicament in its simultaneously particular and universal import.

10. Quoted in Habermas, p. 162.

11. On this particular crisis, see Allan Megill, Prophets of Extremity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. xii-xiii.

12. This is a crisis in the confidence that promoted a previous crisis in theology, which, in turn, led to the modern transformation whereby the transcendent content of religion (God) was made into an immanent, secular content (reason). For more on this see the Hegel quote in Habermas, p. 23.

13. This is a primordial question about the status of the old question (the modern crisis, that concerned the gap between dominant game and subgame) and its relation to an answer (the metagame).

14. Walter Kasper puts it well when he says that "the word 'God' is not intended to answer one question among many others. ... He is rather the answer to the question that is contained in all questions; he is the answer to the question that is contained in the very existence of the human person and the world. God is an answer that includes and transcends all other answers." The God of Jesus Christ, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1986), p. 5.

15. The character of such a paradoxical presence has been well developed in philosophy by Ernst Bloch and in theology by Jürgen Moltmann. For a good summary of this, see Moltmann's account of Bloch in the Anhang to Theologie der Hoffnung (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985), pp. 313-334.
16. Cf. Gadamer on the image of God motif in the middle ages and the role this had in the German concept of Bildung - i.e. "raising to universals", Truth and Method, pp. 9-19.

17. In a way the humanistic schools anticipated an Enlightenment, i.e. "modern" answer. They provided an alternative means of accessing presence in their development of the humanum. But it would take several years for this alternative to be fully articulated.

18. In this case we are dealing with the epistemological form of the modern predicament, rather than the ethical form we outlined in the first section of this introduction.

19. This does not mean there are no discontinuities. Bultmann notes that preunderstanding must also be corrected. But that does not change the main issue; namely, that there is primarily continuity in interpretation.

20. This is from Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics II/1, quoted in Clifford Green, ed., Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 151.

21. It is in this context that we can well appreciate the contention that Barth is the father of post-modernism.


CHAPTER 1
THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

During the Middle Ages there was a grand synthesis of faith and reason, which was reflected in a biblical hermeneutic that harmonized culture, official church doctrine, and the "literal" sense of the biblical texts. This hermeneutic was not so much a way of deriving content from the texts, as it was a dialectical strategy for juxtaposing diverse, pre-established meanings in a non-contradictory way. At the end of the Middle Ages, several factors undermined the Roman Catholic synthesis. Growing nationalism resisted the authority of the Church hierarchy, and nominalism impugned the realist metaphysic and epistemology on which so much of the synthesis rested. The chain of being that linked heaven and earth was cut, and people searched for new bridges, which could overcome the abyss that now separated humanity and God.

Martin Luther existentially apprehended this abyss in his "Anfechtungen", which he interpreted according the Christian doctrine of sin. The answer to this human condition could be found in Scripture, he argued. But in order to rightly interpret Scripture, one must avoid the Medieval hermeneutic, which prohibited the text from saying anything that contradicted with Church tradition. Thus Luther advocated sola scriptura. This position proved problematic, however,
since a positive principle was needed to enable the interpreter to appropriate the content from the text. In the subsequent development of the Protestant position, general hermeneutics was set forth as that positive principle. In the end, the system of general hermeneutics proved to be just as dominant a synthesis as the Medieval one, and it begged the question of the text's content in just as radical a way.

In this chapter we will consider the historical development from the Medieval system to that of general hermeneutics.

I. THE CONTEXT:

ROMAN CATHOLIC AUTHORITY AND LUTHER'S TEXTUAL TURN

The Grand Synthesis: A Ladder to God

The character of the Medieval system can be well seen in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.¹

In the 13th century, although there was general agreement that universals exist and that such universals are within the reach of the human intellect, there was considerable debate over how these could be accessed.² Much of the difficulty rested upon the conflict between an Aristotelian approach to universals, whereby the intellect abstracts them from an
empirical individual, and a Platonic approach to the realm of
ideas. For the philosophers of the Middle Ages, influenced
as they were by the Augustinian heritage, the Platonic realm
was the mind of God, wherein the universals reside. On the
other hand, however, Aristotle's empiricism provided the most
advanced, "scientific" approach to reality. The genius of
Thomas Aquinas was that he worked out consistently the
Aristotelian approach but did it in such a way that it did not
undermine the truths of the Christian faith, as they were
understood in the Augustinian framework. This amounted to
a reconciliation of science and religion.

The problem of knowing universals was simultaneously the
problem of knowing God, since the universals were regarded as
the thoughts of God ("almost all of philosophy is directed
towards the knowledge of God"). For Aquinas, an object can
only be known according to the mode of being of the knower.
Humanity thus can not know God in the perfection of God's
essence but only according to the imperfection of human
being. Before one can appreciate the character of this human
knowledge, however, one must first know the place of humanity
in the universe; in other words, one must know the hierarchy
of being. Epistemology is set in the context of an ontology.

The human person stands between the purely intelligible
world and the corporeal world - the midpoint of the chain of
being, as the earth is the midpoint of the corporeal
universe. The human person is a unity of intellect (at the
lowest level) and body (at its highest level). But this intellect is such that it cannot intuit any intelligible substance of itself. Due to its weakness it must call upon an instrument, the body. Through the body the intellect abstracts the forms that are in matter.

There are two ways in which reason, by itself, can know of God. It can proceed by way of negation, specifying what God is not. E.g. God is eternal (not in time), pure act (not in potency), simple (not composite), unity of essence and existence (not composite - an implication), being itself (not derived in being), etc. But reason can also know of God by analogy. Although human intellect cannot know God in his perfection, it can find traces of God in creation. These traces enable a knowledge that is between equivocation and univocation. In this way "our intellect, by gathering up the various essences and perfections which it finds in things, forms in itself the resemblance of this inaccessible unity by means of multiple conceptions." Thus humanity can know that God is good, unique, infinite (a positive attribute), intelligence, will and life.

If humanity had to depend upon reason alone, abstracting all universals from the empirical entities it encounters, then human knowledge would be very limited. Although some things, like God's existence and some of his attributes, can be discerned by reason from God's effects in creation, one could not apprehend the deeper unity and harmony of the universe,
especially the (tri)unity of God.  

God has revealed the truths that human reason is not able to obtain of itself. The Christian philosopher thus draws from two sources of knowledge: (1) reason, and (2) "faith in the truth revealed by God, and its interpreter, the Church". God is the originator of both forms of knowledge, therefore they cannot contradict one another. Rather, they complement one another. Abstractly stated, philosophy takes reason as the point of departure and theology takes the authority of faith. But, according to Aquinas, it would be incorrect to identify philosophy with reason and exclude the latter from theology. Philosophy needs authority - unless one first accepts an argument from a teacher one can never learn to follow the argumentation (this is a principle Aquinas will attempt to prove in his theory of human knowledge - the intellect of itself is capable of nothing; it needs the deliverances of its instruments, whether the body or teaching or faith). Likewise theology needs reason - by way of the initial development from the effects, philosophy prepares the way for the theological completion. The truths of faith do not give a systematic whole, but rather complete the whole that philosophy begins. In addition, reason provides the analogies that are needed for a grasp, though inadequate, of the matters of faith. As grace completes nature, so the truths of faith, explicated in the analogies of reason, complete the truths of reason. Grace elevates the human
person beyond his or her natural virtues. By seeking to contemplate the revealed things of God, the person "approaches to a likeness of God" and to some extent shares in the true beatitude for which (s)he has been created.22

In order to appreciate the Biblical hermeneutic of Aquinas, one must place the function of Scripture within the context of the full hierarchical system, which we have outlined above.23 Without an understanding of the place of humanity in the chain of being; without an account of human intellect, and the way in which it abstracts universals from corporeal objects; without an account of the two sources of knowledge, faith and reason, and the way in which they cooperate, the explanation Aquinas gives to Scripture and its interpretation will seem arbitrary and unjustified. This is because Scripture, as it is interpreted by the Church, provides access to the truths that reason cannot obtain by itself from nature. This function within the system will provide the orientation for delineating the appropriate hermeneutic.

Thomas Aquinas' account of language and of the way in which knowledge is obtained from a biblical text depends upon a realist account of the relation between signum and res (signifier and signified).24 There is a parallel between the way in which universals are abstracted from empirical individuals (the process of analogical reasoning outlined above) and the way in which knowledge is obtained from the
linguistic signs in a text (grammatical interpretation).\textsuperscript{25} This is not surprising, since nature is regarded as a book, and material objects are regarded as a unity of matter (signifier) and a universal form (signified), i.e. as signs. In one case one reads linguistic signs (the book of faith), in the other one reads corporeal signs (the book of nature).

The \textit{grammatical interpretation}, analogous to the process by which the agent intellect abstracts universals from material objects, gives one a first level of meaning, the \textit{sensus litteralis}, which can be obtained solely on the basis of the rules of grammar. One does not need Church authority. But this meaning is incomplete by itself, just as nature is incomplete, requiring grace. Thus, in addition to the grammatical, one has a \textit{spiritual interpretation}, based on the Church's authority (both past and present). This enables one to discern a second level of meaning, the \textit{sensus propheticus} or \textit{sesus spiritualis}.\textsuperscript{26} There is thus an analogy of proportionality between the two approaches to interpreting Scripture (grammatical and spiritual) and the two approaches to knowledge (reason and faith). In both cases one begins with a process that depends on natural capacities and that provides a determined but incomplete meaning, and then one goes on to a supernatural supplement, which is rooted in authority and completes the natural.

To put things in modern terms, one could say that for Aquinas, the \textit{sensus litteralis} depended on a general, secular
hermeneutic. Its single correct meaning was established by the rules of grammar, independent of ecclesiastical authority. However, this did not mean that the grammatical sense could ever be used to criticize an interpretation that was put forth by the magisterium. Again, one finds here an important parallel with philosophy and its relation to faith. Aquinas notes that a philosophical argument can never be used to refute anything set forth in the books of the Old and New Testaments. One simply begins by believing that all revealed truth is true.

"From this we evidently gather the following conclusion: whatever arguments are brought forward against the doctrines of faith are conclusions incorrectly derived from the first and self-evident principles imbedded in nature. Such conclusions do not have the force of demonstration ... And so, there exists the possibility to answer them." 27

In the same way, one begins by believing the interpretations set forth by the Church. If a grammatical interpretation contradicts this, it must be because that interpretation has been incorrectly prosecuted. 28

Aquinas' contention regarding the grammatical determinability of a single literal sense obviously did not accord with the reality of his day, since there were many competing meanings, each set forth by its interpreter as the authentic sensus litteralis. Aquinas addressed this pluralism in the same way that he addressed the philosophical pluralism of his day: the right account was determined by its capacity to account for and be accounted for by the theological
doctrines that supplemented natural knowledge. All other accounts could then be shown to violate some rule of grammatical interpretation, since they were necessarily incorrect by virtue of contradicting ecclesiastical authority. The result was a perfect harmony between all sources of knowledge. It was simply presupposed that there would be an accord between the doctrines set forth in Church history (exhibited by those who were an authority), those set forth by the present magisterium (the people in authority), and those given in the grammatical interpretation of Scripture. In this way the grand synthesis of the whole system was reflected in the Church, which was itself incarnationally understood, providing upon earth the heavenly truths that Aquinas sought to contemplate. Further, this Church harmony was in full accord with the science and culture of his day, so that all of reality "constituted in its hierarchic and analogical structure, a sort of ladder leading us up to God" (my emphasis).  

Disintegration of the Medieval Synthesis

Despite the harmonious account given in the system of Aquinas there was always a tension - even a conflict - between faith and reason, Church and state, magisterial interpretation and grammatical interpretation; in sum, between grace and nature. In the high Middle Ages these tensions were
intensified to a point of disruption.\textsuperscript{31} The ladder was taken away and a chasm opened up between earth and heaven.

Philosophically, the greatest blow to the Grand Synthesis came from nominalism, which was the new scientific avant-garde.\textsuperscript{32} Radically developing an orientation toward the individual that one found in the modified realism of Duns Scotus (1265-1308), William of Ockham (1280-1349) rejected the objective existence of universals, arguing that they were simply tools of thought; pictures formed by the mind to represent concrete reality.\textsuperscript{33} This conclusion reduced the chain of being in realism to subjective status, thus opening a gap between humanity and God. One could no longer arrive at knowledge of God by reason (natural theology).\textsuperscript{34} Revelation (positive theology) was needed, and faith took on a more occasional status (fideism).\textsuperscript{35}

In this context Scripture, as the mediation of revelation, took center stage. But the elimination of the realist \textit{signum-res} relation undermined one's ability to obtain knowledge directly from the linguistic sign.\textsuperscript{36} Recall the parallel between the book of nature and the book of faith: The same development that made it impossible to move from natural knowledge (reason) to supernatural knowledge (revelation) also made it impossible to move from a grammatically determined \textit{sensus litteralis} to an inspirationally determined \textit{sensus propheticus}. The gulf that separated earth and heaven also separated the linguistic signifier from its spiritual meaning.
Nominalism by itself thus increased the need for the active agency of the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process, and this could have been used to further enforce the need of papal interpretation. Ockham did not come to this conclusion, siding with the Spiritual Franciscans against the Pope. (He thus made personal experience central, rather than the Pope's experience.) But papal sympathizers could have used nominalism to buttress a magisterial hermeneutic. This did not happen, however, because other factors undermined papal authority, even as nominalism made it more necessary.

There was a long history of opposition between Church and state, revolving especially around investiture, taxation and property rights. Well before the late Middle Ages, the states were given considerable freedom in the exercise of secular matters. Both Church and state had their own domains in which they could exercise legitimate power (the two swords), and, in the Thomistic framework, the functions of state (politics) could be undertaken according to natural virtues, thus the Church was not needed to carry out the secular matters effectively. Generally, secular powers recognized the Pope's authority in spiritual matters.

In 1302, when Boniface VIII (1294-1303 C.E.) issued the bull *Unum sanctum ecclesiam*, the Pope attempted to abrogate for himself temporal as well as spiritual power. Although the bull spoke about the two swords in the usual fashion, the temporal sword was put under the authority of, and at the
disposal of the spiritual sword. According to Boniface VIII, no explanation was needed to justify the use of spiritual power against temporal power. In this way, the autonomy of the secular realm was for all practical purposes taken away from the secular authorities. These claims evoked a confrontation between Church and state that, when coupled with other developments, eventually led to the so-called "Babylonian Captivity", when the Pope had to move to Avignon and came increasingly under the influence of French kings. Then the Great Schism took place, when there were two and finally three popes, each spewing anathemas at one another. The result was a reductio ad absurdum of absolute papal authority. This enabled secular powers to take back all their temporal authority and even some spiritual authority.

When the Pope's authority in spiritual matters was undermined (due to his secular pretensions), there was a spiritual vacuum. It is in this context that one can best understand the success of John Wycliff in England and John Hus in Czechoslovakia. Both Wycliff and Hus posed radical challenges to the visible Church's authority, basing their reforms on the centrality of Scripture. Growing nationalism aligned with a certain type of pietism, which held closely to Scripture, and these were set against the sacramental Church/Empire of the Middle Ages. It is interesting to note, for example, that Wycliff initially began with a very secular, national concern, representing the king in his dispute with
the Pope over whether England could be regarded as a fief that had to pay tribute. But later, as ecclesiastical measures against him mounted, Wycliff went beyond the secular demands to specifically religious ones. Instead of the Church exercising both temporal and spiritual authority, secular forces came to exercise this dual function. 46 This shift was reflected in Scripture as well. As Kurt Aland notes, "Wycliffe conceived of Scripture as the law of God which is applicable to all, not only as the basis for faith and the church but also for the world and the daily life of all people." 47 In this case Scripture was to be interpreted by theologians, who had significance for both the spiritual and temporal spheres. Further, the reorientations taking place had a hermeneutical consequence. Recall that the grammatical interpretation related to magisterial interpretation in a way parallel to the relation between state and Church (nature and grace). When the Pope was undermined, one turned to state. Similarly, one turned to grammatical, secular interpretation. Now Scripture became a text that served a dual function, and it would be interpreted by scholars who would serve dual functions.

In the disruptive period of the High Middle Ages we thus see two conflicting strands. By breaking the link between signum and res, nominalism established the need for a positive, spiritual principle in the interpretation of Scripture. The text could not stand alone. On the other
hand, the waning of papal authority coupled with an increasing nationalism, led to a renewed confidence in Scripture, which could be used by scholars as a source of worldly and supernatural knowledge, and which could be interpreted according to general, hermeneutical principles. The two approaches to Scripture that co-operated in the Thomistic system now broke apart, and they were developed independently of one another in response to the broader disintegration of the Medieval synthesis.

Jean Gerson's Ecclesial Hermeneutic

The Council of Constance (1414-1418 C.E.) reasserted the authority of the magisterium, but rooted this authority in a Church council rather than the Pope. At Constance the approach to Scripture found in Wycliff and Hus was condemned. Wycliff's bones were to be exhumed and scattered, and Hus, who was brought to the council and was demanding to be instructed by "better and more relevant scripture than those I have written or taught", was sentenced to death. The council reiterated the traditional contention that the divining of Scripture was not a matter of private interpretation, thus Hus had no right to set his individual views against the Church. In order to guard against the capriciousness of "fleshly" interpretation, the magisterium was given a central role in arbitrating among competing interpretations.
Not all of the participants at Constance took this authoritarian approach. Jean Gerson, who was a leading figure at the council, recognized that if the *magisterium* was given the office of determining the canonical interpretation of Scripture, then this would undermine any basis for criticizing the *magisterium*, if it became corrupt. In order to steer a middle road between the capriciousness of "private interpretation" and the equally capricious magisterial interpretation, Gerson advocated an approach that Mark Burrows refers to as an "ecclesial hermeneutic".⁴⁸

For Gerson, as for many exegetes from the 12th century onward, the main focus of biblical interpretation was the *sensus literalis*.⁴⁹ The problem was that there were many competing interpretations, each put forth as the authentic *sensus literalis*. How could one identify which of the competing versions was correct?⁵⁰

Following Aquinas, Gerson identified the literal sense with God's intention.⁵¹ In a realist framework, this intention could be obtained by grammatical analysis, because there was an essential relation between *signum* and *res*. But when nominalism broke the chord between the two, grammar was separated from meaning. If one could not move from *signum* to *res* by means of grammatical analysis, how could God's intention be recovered? This was one of the key questions, which Gerson and late medieval exegetes faced.⁵²

It seems obvious that the biblical texts *by themselves*,
sola scriptura, were not enough. With the texts one has only the written word, the signum (also referred to as verbum). One does not have the meaning, the sensus. Gerson attempted to solve this problem by arguing that the initial revelation, given directly by Christ to the early Church, was simultaneously of text (verbum) and its meaning (sensus). The locus of verbum was the canon, and its sensus was given in patristic exegesis. The Church's historical tradition thus provided the basis for recovering the authentic sensus litteralis.\(^{53}\)

By locating revelation in Scripture and tradition and not in Scripture alone, Gerson could challenge the "private interpretation" of Hus, without simply advocating an equally private one of his own. By identifying tradition with the ecclesia primitiva rather than the present magisterium he could also challenge the interpretations of Pope or council. His hermeneutic thus provided what seemed to be a basis for reform, without falling into the capriciousness of every interpreter who claimed to exposit the sensus litteralis.\(^{54}\) However, there were some problems with Gerson's solution. These would become apparent in the theology of Martin Luther.

**Martin Luther's "Sola Scriptura"**

Luther's doctrine of "Scripture alone" is usually connected with "faith alone", and the two are jointly set
forth as key insights of the Reformation. However, such an approach does not do justice to the historical record. Indeed, Luther's understanding of "justification by faith" came about through a study of Scripture. On the basis of this insight, he would eventually criticize both magisterium and ecclesiastical tradition. But Luther did not initially advocate sola scriptura in the Protestant sense. He was forced to it when other alternatives were eliminated. While sola fide was set forth positively, as the gospel, sola scriptura was set forth instrumentally, as the epistemological condition by which Luther could justify the role he took in relation to Church tradition and the magisterium. It was thus not a corollary of salvation by grace. This gives sola scriptura a tenuous position.

In Luther's initial attempts at reform, most notably in his posting of the Ninety-Five Theses (October 31, 1517), he did not intend to directly confront the Church's authority structure. Although Luther does imply that a legitimate doctrine must be based on "grounds of reason or scripture" (thesis 18), this could be interpreted in a way that was harmonious with traditional Catholic teaching. Gerson, for example, could have made the same statement, since he argued for basis in Scripture as the criterion by which legitimate patristic tradition could be distinguished from that which is illegitimate. Further, at this time Luther did not attack the Pope or present magisterium, although he did seek to
qualify the Pope's authority and reassert the Lordship of Christ. Christ and the Pope are still clearly on the same side (thesis 53), and Luther is primarily concerned "lest these men [the commissaries of the papal indulgences] preach their own fancies instead of what the Pope commissioned" (thesis 70). He thus sees himself as defending the magisterium against the corruption of emissaries. Throughout the Ninety-Five Theses there is an implicit assumption that in the deepest sense there is a harmony between canon and the present magisterium. It was thus never a question of the Scripture by itself vis a vis the visible Church.

The same situation still pertained at the beginning of the Heidelberg disputation (April 26, 1518), where the conflict was viewed more as one between Augustinians and Dominicans than between a heretic and the Church.\(^5^9\) This, of course, does not undermine the significance of the conflict, since Augustine was called on as the basis for an attack on the whole medieval synthesis of faith and reason that depended on the scholastic appropriation of Aristotle. The Dominicans, holding to the via antiqua and viewing as a threat the via moderna of Ockham and his followers, would have seen the disputation as touching on the heart of faith.\(^6^0\) But viewed in a larger context, this exchange can still be seen as one between two parties within the Church.

In the course of further debate, as Luther began to develop the implications of his attack on indulgences and his
reflections on Augustine and human depravity, he arrived at a more radical critique - a critique that could no longer be developed from within the Medieval Catholic Church.⁶¹

After the Heidelberg disputation, while Luther was working on his Resolution Concerning the Ninety-Five Theses, he made a "glorious discovery".⁶² He found that Matthew 4:17, which had been translated in Latin as "do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand", originally read "repent" in the Greek. For Luther, this had two important consequences. First it showed that one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church was not justified by Scripture. This meant that the sacrament of penance had the same status as indulgences. In the Ninety-Five Theses, Luther strongly distinguished between the penalties imposed by the Pope and the penalties which accrue to persons for their sins before God (thesis 20). The Pope only had the power to remit those penalties which he imposed. In this way, Luther established a gap between the Pope's sphere of authority and Christ's, drastically limiting the former. It was not difficult to take the next step and argue that not only is the Pope's authority in indulgences and penance limited, but further, the Pope erred, and the doctrines in question are illegitimate, because they are not founded on Scripture. This was the step Luther took in his response to the Dominican, Sylvester Prierias.⁶³

The second important consequence of Luther's discovery regarding Matthew 4:17 rests on what this reveals about
Luther's understanding of Scripture. By knowing Greek and reading the original Greek text, Luther could obtain the literal sense. In this way, despite Luther's nominalism, the obstacles to understanding the Bible were greatly reduced and made, in some instances, simply a question of knowing the original tongue. "Thus if the gospel is dear to us, we must pay attention to the languages in which it comes." This will be his concession to the opaqueness of the text. But this is an obstacle that can be overcome in a purely secular way. It is a matter of right learning.

At this stage, we still do not see in Luther a doctrine of sola scriptura, at least not in terms of the later Protestant doctrine. Luther has clearly moved away from a magisterial interpretation, where the Pope has the final word on a text's meaning. But his approach still has strong affinities to the "ecclesial hermeneutic" of Gerson, where Church tradition is used as the norm of scriptural interpretation. As with Gerson, Luther could well have said that a doctrine must be grounded in Scripture, but the meaning of Scripture is manifest in historical tradition. Here the Church (viewed historically) functions in a "normative" rather than "constitutive" role in mediating true doctrine.

This approach can be seen in Luther's initial response to Cajetan, in an interview held in October, 1518. The cardinal called on Luther to acknowledge that the Church has a treasury of merit that it can access in indulgences. This
is a doctrine clearly enunciated in the bull *Unigenitus* of Pope Clement VI (1343). Initially, Luther tried to answer the cardinal by interpreting the bull in a way that coincided with Luther's criticism of indulgences. He argued that the bull said "Christ *acquired* a treasure of indulgences" not "the merits of Christ *are* a treasure of indulgences."\(^6\) Luther's strategy is telling, because it shows how reluctant he was to abandon the Church's tradition as the norm of scriptural interpretation. Thus he could say "I am not conscious of going against scripture, the fathers, the decretals, or right reason."\(^6\)

When Cajetan pushed Luther, showing that his quibble over the difference between "acquired" and "is" was not relevant in determining whether the church presently had such a treasure of indulgences, Luther shifted ground, openly rejecting the bull and the authority of the Pope who issued it. "In a matter of faith not only is a council above a pope but any one of the faithful, if armed with better authority and reason."\(^7\) When Cajetan retorted with the traditional answer, that the Pope is interpreter of Scripture, Luther responded by denying the Pope's prerogative.

This exchange does not have its main significance in Luther's rejection of papal privilege in interpreting the Bible. In his response to Sylvester Prierias, Luther had already stated that Popes and Councils may err and only Scripture is the final authority. His rejection of a
"magisterial hermeneutic" is thus nothing new. What is more significant about this exchange is Luther's initial attempt to work with an "ecclesial hermeneutic" like that of Gerson's. He came out arguing for the continuity of "scripture, the fathers, the decretals and right reason." But in his interview with Cajetan, he saw the difficulty of this position. There was an even greater difficulty in interpreting the fathers than there was in interpreting Scripture. The norm of the Church's historical tradition, taken as the Church fathers and regarded as the Bible's meaning (sensus), was itself a "text" whose meaning needed to be unveiled. If Luther allowed for the hermeneutical ambiguity that required tradition as interpreter - and it was on just such an ambiguity that he played in his quibble with Cajetan over the bull Unigenitus - then he would in the end have to concede the need of a magisterial interpretation to decide among competing interpretations. One could not have as a basis of the Church's teaching a text that did not have a clear and unitary meaning - this was Luther's assumption. Thus, feeling uncomfortable with his attempt to quibble, Luther moved away from the ecclesial hermeneutic, and boldly put forth the Scripture alone as the basis. Although the terminology of Luther is not really different from what he has been saying all along, now, for the first time, we see what may be regarded as the Protestant doctrine of sola scriptura.

After his interview with Cajetan, Luther no longer
attempted to justify his position by aligning it with the development of Church tradition. There were both good traditions and bad traditions. The only way to determine which was which, truth from error, was to evaluate whether a given tradition was rooted in Scripture. The same held true for evaluating the pronouncements of the *magisterium*. Thus Scripture alone, *sola scriptura*, could serve as the foundation and source of the Church's proclamation and teaching.

Again and again Luther heard the same response from the Catholic church: Scripture had to be interpreted. *How does one decide which, among the many competing interpretations, is the legitimate one?* This same challenge to the Protestant *sola scriptura* would be reiterated by Catholics, Anglicans and Orthodox representatives up to the present. The "Catholic" answer to this "how" has also remained the same: *tradition* (whether in the form of the Church's historical writings or its present *magisterium*).

It is important to note that Luther did not answer this question when it was put to him. Although he would later formulate the principles of his "evangelical hermeneutic," and these principles can be seen as operative in his early reflection on Scripture, he did not debate them with Tetzel, Cajetan, Eck or anyone else in the years before the Pope issued his *Exsurge Domine*, and the final break with the *magisterium* was made. This fact shows that Luther did not perceive as central the problematic of the text's polyvalence
and the need for some principle by which one could distinguish the authentic from inauthentic meanings. This is curious, since he stood within the nominalist tradition that called into question the essential relation between *signum* and *res*. Luther's responses show that for him the *sensus litteralis* of the text was apparent as long as one got rid of the obstacles to understanding - obstacles such as the false Latin translation of Matthew 4:17, or the Isidorian decretales, which spuriously presented papal primacy as an apostolic doctrine. Humanistic scholarship, whether in the form of language or historical criticism, became the key to eliminating the hindrances to biblical interpretation. And once the false tradition was set aside, then the text would speak for itself. Its "plain sense" would be heard.

For Luther there was thus an *immediacy to the text* which made the hermeneutical challenge posed by the Church meaningless. Now, instead of being the norm of interpretation, tradition became an obstacle to interpretation. Tradition was seen as breaking the immediacy to the text and it functioned like a veil which hindered the hearing of God's word. It was the "old man" (in large part, the *via antiqua* of Aquinas) that one put to death, before the regenerating word of Christ could actualize life. To understand correctly, one simply needed to set aside the veil, kill the "old man", and then be open to the Truth that is unveiled.
For Luther it was clear that God's word was mediated in and through Scripture. Further, it was clear what that word was: Salvation by faith alone, *sola fide*. But Luther was not able to thematize how the content was manifest through the text in such a way that it brought about its transforming result. Initially, he attempted to answer this "how" by calling on traditional Catholic models. But when he was barred from this, he arrived at the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

Unlike *sola fide*, which was developed positively and which was aligned with a special principle of revelation (the unveiling of grace), *sola scriptura* was developed negatively, as an independence from tradition. When obstacles were eliminated, then the meaning of the text would be apparent. This immediacy to the text could have been developed positively, as the epistemological form of salvation by grace. But Luther did not do this. Instead, he emphasized the secular, grammatical dimensions of interpretation, and spoke as if these were sufficient for discerning the external meaning of the text. Later, this secular approach would be developed as a positive principle, and *sola scriptura* would come to mean that one must exclude all dogmatic concerns, interpreting the text by the same hermeneutic as one uses on all other texts. Then *sola scriptura* will be aligned with general hermeneutics, while *sola fide* is aligned with a special revelation. Instead of providing different
expressions of a single Reformation insight, sola fide and sola scriptura would come to designate the two competing strands that broke apart in the disruptive period of the High Middle Ages.

Protestant Options

As hermeneutical immediacy to the Biblical texts broke down, the text by itself became problematical. Protestants were forced to address the question: how does one decide among competing interpretations of the Bible? It was not enough to put away assumed extra-biblical hindrances to understanding. One also needed a positive principle that enabled access to the text's meaning.81

Later Protestants gave three answers regarding the nature of this positive principle:

1. Creedal hermeneutic - The gospel itself was to be the norm of scriptural interpretation. This gospel was succinctly expressed in the creeds, especially the Augsburg confession, which could then function as the "analogy of faith." This is the approach to hermeneutics that was taken by "Protestant Orthodoxy," and it is often characterized as entailing a "dogmatic" method. There are important similarities between such a creedal hermeneutic and the ecclesial hermeneutic of Catholicism, only now the creed takes the place of the patristic
tradition. 62

(2) Enthusiastic hermeneutic - The Holy Spirit brings the true meaning, and thus serves as the principle of scriptural interpretation. This is the approach taken by some of the "radical reformers", and it is later seen in Romanticism and German Pietism. There are important similarities between an enthusiastic hermeneutic and the magisterial hermeneutic of Catholicism. In both cases the present operation of God's Spirit is appealed to as the authority which justifies the interpretation and understanding of a particular individual, whether that individual be a radical "prophet" or a conservative Pope.

(3) General Hermeneutic - Reason and the "natural" faculties of a person provide the principle of understanding. One should interpret a biblical text in the same way one interprets any other text. This approach is often characterized as the "scientific" one, and it is contrasted with the "dogmatic method" found in a creedal hermeneutic. 63 Since the method is secular and not religious, it does not matter whether one is a Protestant, Catholic or atheist.

One finds aspects of each of these three approaches in Luther's own hermeneutic. For him the gospel is indeed the norm and principle of interpretation, but not the gospel embodied in a creed. It was rather the proclaimed and heard Word of God, which was quickened by the Spirit of God. And,
as we have already seen above, Luther gave an important role to humanistic concerns such as ancient language and historical criticism.

Later Protestants could not maintain a synthesis of these elements. Although there were several attempts at integrating the dogmatic, enthusiastic and scientific strands, none of them succeeded and the task of integration—especially the integration of the dogmatic and scientific—is still set forth as one of the primary tasks confronting the present-day Church.84

However, before we consider how this task can be addressed, we will look at the way in which Luther's hermeneutical immediacy broke down and the "science" of general hermeneutics was introduced as a positive principle.

II. THE DISINTEGRATION OF HERMENEUTICAL IMMEDIACY

AND THE RISE OF SCIENCE

For Luther, when one removed obstacles to interpretation, the word of God unveiled itself in the verbum, which is Scripture. This confidence in the "Word of God" was unproblematic as long as there was no contradiction between the two senses in which "Word of God" was used: (1) Scripture, (2) the active agency of the Living God, which Luther identified with the good news of "justification by grace." Faith in Scripture was not separate from faith in
God. In both cases faith involved a confidence that God would perform that which man, of himself, could not. The same God who justified the ungodly made himself manifest in and as the Word of God, which is Scripture. Scripture related to the event of God's salvific act, namely the incarnate Christ, as the incarnate Christ related to God. This transparency of the text upon the historical event which it recounted was the condition of its immediate relevance to the Church. The relevance of Scripture was none other than the relevance of the incarnate Christ, who was made contemporaneous in the body of the text. 85

When developments in science - in cosmology, geography, and history - called into question the transparency of the text upon the world it recounted, then Protestants could no longer avoid the gap between verbum and sensus that nominalism introduced. Science - reading the book of nature - forced a reappraisal of the interpreter's relation to Scripture. But "science", in the form of a general hermeneutic, would also be set forth as the solution. In sum, it would come to pose both the question and the answer.

As science rose in prominence, Scripture was increasingly deprecated. In this section we shall consider four steps in the rise of science and the fall of Scripture: First, in Kepler, science is a critical principle of Scripture, but Scripture is also a critical principle of science. There is a complementarity between the two. Second, in Galileo,
science is a critical principle of Scripture, but religion is no longer relevant to science. There is still a legitimate domain for theology, but this is delineated negatively as that which is left over when science has demarcated its domain. In the third step, with Deism, the domain of science becomes exhaustive. Scripture simply gives the moral and cosmological truths set forth by science, but it gives them in a more primitive form. Finally, in the fourth step, Reimarus will develop revealed religion negatively. It deals with falsehood, used rhetorically to manipulate the public. Science (natural religion) discloses its illegitimacy.

In these four steps we see the development of the secular strand that broke away from the supernatural in the disruptive period of the high Middle Ages. Through the process of secularization, whereby the Scripture is stripped of its authority, we come to recognize the richness and complexity of the relation between interpreter and text. This leads to the modern formulation of the problem of hermeneutics.

A. Johannes Kepler

Reflecting on the discrepancy between the geocentric cosmology apparent in a literal reading of the Bible and the heliocentric cosmology implied by observations of the book of nature, Johannes Kepler introduced a distinction between the "said" and the "meant" of the biblical texts. He argued
that the Bible communicated its content in a way that was accommodated to the knowledge of its original reader. Thus, for example, when we read in Psalm 19:

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge...In them he has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end.

Kepler argues that we should not conclude from this that the earth is the center around which the sun rotates, because that is not the content that the text seeks to communicate. Instead the Psalmist expresses the majesty of God, and he uses the experience and knowledge of the hearer to convey a sense of that majesty.⁸⁷

Note that Kepler calls on the distinction between said and meant, verbum and sensus, to solve a problem introduced by science. The distinction enabled one simultaneously to affirm both the book of nature and the book of revelation.⁸⁸ But this solution was none other than the problem that Catholics addressed by means of tradition, and that Protestants avoided as long as there was an immediacy between interpreter and text. In solving the gap that opened between the book of nature and the book of revelation, Kepler reintroduced the gap between signum and res. Later, this solution would be a much greater problem than the problem it solved.

For Kepler, a scriptural interpreter must focus on the way in which the intended content is conveyed; i.e. (s)he must
focus on the problem of language and rhetoric. In the case of Scripture, where one is concerned with matters pertaining to God, the "intended" or "meant" cannot be fully embodied in human language and concepts, because the greatness of God transcends all such artifacts. Biblical revelation is thus given metaphorically, by analogies derived from human experience. It is not a limitation of Scripture that it communicates in such a way. This is rather its strength. God makes himself known in a way that leads the hearer from the known (experience) to the unknown. Metaphorical and analogous language is necessitated by the content that is conveyed. But Kepler did not specify how one gets from the known to the unknown. The gap between the two is none other than the gap between humanity and God, and this was the gap that Scripture was supposed to bridge.

Kepler regarded the "book of nature" (science) and the "book of faith" (theology) as complementary. The nature of the complementarity is well illustrated in his work on a heliocentric theory. For him, the sun, earth and force of rotation were an analogy for understanding the relation between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Knowledge of the Trinity helped him in the development of his scientific cosmology (especially his view of force), and knowledge of science (the heliocentric theory) helped him to better understand the Trinity. There was thus a correlation of domains - a hermeneutical circle - which enabled the development of
systematic knowledge.\textsuperscript{89}

In Kepler's thought, both science and theology were concerned with the same domain (reality), but they approached knowledge in a different way. The \textit{scientist} begins with the \textit{book of nature} and develops knowledge from there, while the \textit{theologian} begins with the \textit{book of faith}. The harmony between the two approaches - the interrelation between heaven and earth - is presupposed, and the task of the interpreter is to iteratively work out a knowledge of that harmony.\textsuperscript{90}

We thus see that for Kepler, the contention that biblical language is accommodated to the hearer did not imply that the worldview of the scientific interpreter is superior to the worldview seen in biblical language, or that one could somehow translate the accommodated language of Scripture into a nonaccommodated, scientific form. The incommensurability between said and meant is necessitated by the content of theology.

It is not surprising that many of Kepler's concerns were theological, since he was a Tübingen trained theologian. But in subsequent developments, the complementarity of the two books would give way to a more exclusive, antagonistic relation.
B. Galileo Galilei

In contrast to Kepler, Galileo was directly concerned with desacralizing the cosmos. His work on sun-spots, for example, involved the attempt to show that the heavenly bodies (the sun, in particular) were no different than earthly ones. In this way, he took content that was previously considered religious (people identified the heavenly bodies with angels) and made it secular.\(^9\)

Galileo sharply distinguished between the domain of science and that of religion. Note again the contrast with Kepler, who saw the two fields as dealing with the same domain but in different ways. For Galileo, the domain of religion was delineated in a more or less negative way: It was concerned with that which could not be derived from nature. It was thus what was left over, after science had specified its domain. This approach to religion was to promote an increasing secularization as the historical development of science continued. The realm of science grew and that of religion shrank.\(^9\)

For Galileo, many biblical passages, when interpreted literally, were simply wrong.

"Hence in expounding the Bible if one were always to confine oneself to the unadorned grammatical meaning, one might fall into error. Not only contradictions and propositions far from true might thus be made to appear in the Bible, but even grave heresies and follies.\(^9\)"

This is especially the case regarding things like the earth
and sun, since "these things in no way concern the primary purpose of the sacred writings, which is the service of God and the salvation of souls." In the same way that the domain of religion decreased as science increased, so the truth of the Bible was narrowed to pertain only to that content that coincided with the religious domain.

Like Kepler, Galileo called on the ambiguity and accommodated nature of biblical language to reconcile the books of nature and revelation. But this ambiguity did not introduce the hermeneutical difficulty that it did for Kepler, because Galileo made the knowledge derived from nature the basis for biblical exposition:

"Having arrived at any certainties in physics, we ought to utilize these as the most appropriate aids in the true exposition of the Bible and in investigation of those meanings which are necessarily contained therein, for these must be concordant with demonstrated truths."

He thus eliminated the critical role that religion had in relation to science. The book of nature is read independently from the book of faith. But now the book of faith is dependent upon science (reading the book of nature); one needs science "in the true exposition of the Bible", since it enables one to obtain the truly religious sensus.

C. Deism

As confidence in the power of reason and science increased, the scientific world view became increasingly
identified with the correct, true world view and the biblical accommodation was regarded as only necessary for a more primitive, unscientific society. In English Deism this trajectory led to a rejection of all doctrines associated with special revelation. Buttressed by Newton's tremendous success in mechanics and the Copernican revolution in cosmology (a revolution that is better attributed to Galileo's desacralization of the cosmos), Deists concluded that all significant knowledge of God could be derived by reason directly from nature. Following Paley's notorious characterization of God as a watchmaker, the universe was regarded as a masterfully designed machine. To assume that God intervenes in the world would be the same as assuming that God created the world improperly. Would a watchmaker need to intervene in the operation of the watch if it was made properly? Thus supernatural events, i.e. wonders or miracles, should be regarded as natural works for which the observer does not know the cause. Likewise, the accounts in the Bible should be regarded as the attempt to communicate natural revelation to those who are not able to derive the knowledge from nature itself. There are thus two books of revelation, the book of nature and the Scriptures, and both communicate the same content. Once one learns the content from nature then one no longer needs the Scripture. This content also gives one the criteria by which one can discern what was intended in the accommodated language of Scripture.
In Deism one presupposed a religious content, largely consisting of a certain cosmology and moral teachings, and then found a way to interpret the Scriptures in a way that enabled them to yield the presupposed content. It was still assumed that the intent of biblical texts was fully in accord with the moral teachings derived from nature, only the Bible gave these teachings in a primitive way. But when the premises of Deism made it to a more critical, German soil the presupposed harmony gave way to a more antagonistic relation between the Bible and the book of nature. This is nowhere more apparent than in the Wolfenbüttel Fragments, edited by Lessing.

D. Reimarus

Reimarus, the author of the Wolfenbüttel Fragments, was the first writer explicitly to develop a difference between the intention of God and that of a biblical author. The meaning or significance of a text can be regarded as the divine intentionality. It is the objective meaning and as such the meaning for me, the present reader of the text. Before Reimarus, if there were a distinction between the author's meaning and the text's meaning for me, the distinction rested on degree not difference; i.e. the author may not have fully appreciated the import of what was being said, but at least his intent was in harmony with God. Thus,
in interpreting a text, one could go beyond an author's intention (as in the allegorical method of Catholic exegesis) but never against the author's intention. Reimarus, however, developed an antagonistic relation between the two, thus opening up a gulf between authorial intention and meaning for the reader. He argued that Jesus expected the inauguration of God's kingdom, but instead got crucified. This devastated the disciples, who had grown accustomed to living on handouts, and balked at the prospect of going back to work. In order to avoid this unpleasant option, they stole the body of Jesus and came up with the story about the resurrection.

The details of Reimarus' account are not important for our purposes. His significance lies in the fact that he now raised the question of the author's intention as distinct from the question of the text's significance for me, the present reader. Further, Reimarus introduced a distinction between the historical events and the author's account of those events. These distinctions enable an interpreter to isolate the "literal sense" (i.e. the author's intended sense) from broader questions. In sum: now "literal sense" can be separated from historical referentiality on one side, and ultimate significance on the other. One could pursue the intended meaning without asking about the two senses of truth.
Overview

Wolfhart Pannenberg well summarizes the difference between Luther's hermeneutical immediacy and the present-day context of biblical interpretation:

"For Luther, and in early Protestantism generally, the literal sense of the biblical writings passed at the same time for the historical sense; and, on the other hand, his own evangelical doctrine (doctrina evangeli) coincided for Luther with the content of the scriptures understood literally (ad litteram). Since that time, however, a gulf has opened up between the literal meaning of the texts and the events to which they refer, on the one side; and, on the other, the distance separating our period and any conceivable contemporary theology, from the time of primitive Christianity and the various theological concepts of the New Testament witness, has become immense."¹⁰²

In this section we looked at the process that opened up the gulf between the sensus litteralis and the historical events, on one side, and between the sensus litteralis and the meaning for us (contemporary theology), on the other. The text can have a twofold referentiality - historical and existential - and neither is transparent.

It should be noted that this problem of interpretation, which is recounted by Pannenberg is not uniquely the problem of interpreting the New Testament. It is the problem of interpreting any ancient text. Although Pannenberg wants to do justice to the uniqueness of the Scripture, he frames the problem of Scriptural interpretation in a way that is influenced by the historical development in which science displaced Scripture as an authority. When Scripture was
desacralized, and viewed as just one ancient text among others, then one could view the relation between interpreter and text as an instance of the relation between any interpreter and any text. It is in this way that the problem of interpreting Scripture became an instance of the general problem of hermeneutics. After this one could call on general hermeneutics as the answer to the Church's task of Scriptural interpretation.

From Reimarus onward, with increasing regularity, theologians and exegetes within the Church would take for granted the assumption that Scripture should be interpreted by general hermeneutical principles. It was not recognized that if Scripture is given a special revelatory function, then the gap between interpreter and Scripture is unique; it is an expression of the separation between humanity and God. Nor was it recognized that the assumptions implicit in general hermeneutics collided with Luther's sola fide, which entailed an occasional understanding of special revelation. The two strands that broke apart in the disruptive period of the high Middle Ages are simultaneously operative in Protestant theology, but their opposition is not sufficiently appreciated. Our task must be to uncover the hidden collision, thereby deconstructing the theological systems that are based on these contradictory assumptions. Only then can we formulate the problem of Scriptural interpretation in a genuinely theological manner.
NOTES


2. In a more detailed account, this statement would need to be greatly qualified. The "general agreement" to which I refer largely concerns (1) the espousal of realism (either the "ultra-realism" of Plato, or an Aristotelian, "moderate" realism) against an antirealist position (either conceptualism or nominalism), and (2) the connection of the realist position with a theological exemplerism (universals are related to God's thought of a thing). The two points of agreement entail the possibility of natural theology. The key issue of debate then concerns how natural knowledge of God is obtained. Is it by means of an inward turn (Plato, Augustine) or an empirical, "scientific" philosophy (Aristotle, Aquinas). For a good overview of the problem of universals, see Copleston, pp. 136-135.


5. Copleston, p. 423: Aristotle's system was "the most powerful and comprehensive intellectual system known to the medieval world."

6. Copleston puts it well when he says that Aquinas expressed Augustineanism in terms of Aristotelian philosophy (p. 318). For the specifics of the solution, see p. 323.


8. Gilson, p. 41.


10. Gilson, p. 204.


15. Gilson, p. 111.
16. Copleston, pp. 312-323; Gilson, p. 41.
17. Gilson, p. 37; Copleston, pp. 316-317.
18. Gilson, p. 47.
20. Gilson, p. 56.
21. Gilson, p. 44.
22. Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Book 1, Ch. 2; Copleston, pp. 316-317.
23. Gerhard Ebeling notes that the "basic feature of scholasticism", which was based upon the coordination of authority and reason, "was valid on principle for all branches of scholarship in the same way, whether for mathematics or for medicine" (Luther, R.A. Wilson, trans. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964], p. 83). As Gilson noted (Gilson, pp. 56-57), the coordination of faith and reason was only understood within the broader systematic framework of Thomistic philosophy. Thus, extending Ebeling's observation, we can say that the "basic feature of scholasticism" is only understood in the broad systematic framework. This will include the Thomistic hermeneutic, with its coordination of the sensus spiritualis (authority) and the sensus litteralis (reason).
24. Medieval philosophers and theologians worked with an account of the signum-res dichotomy, which was derived from Augustine's On Christian Doctrine. But that account was developed in the context of a Platonic metaphysic and it involved an approach to universals that was not immediately amenable to the Aristotelianism of Aquinas. In a more extensive discussion we would need to consider the problems that Augustine's signum-res distinction created for Aquinas and the way in which Aquinas did and did not address these problems. Such an account would bring together the discussion of universals and the book of nature with the discussion of signs and the book of faith.
25. Aquinas did not directly reflect on this parallel, but it can clearly be seen in the way negation and analogy work together in the reading of both the book of nature and the
book of faith. We already considered the former (ref. Gilson, pp. 98-131). In reading scripture, one begins with the literal sense (= historical sense), and then negates it to move to a higher meaning. Analogy is used to move from the literal to the spiritual senses.

26. For a good overview of the two senses, see Wilhelm Pauck's "general introduction" to Luther: Lectures on Romans (London: S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1961), pp. xxvii-xxviii. In Summa Theologica I, q.1 9.10 Aquinas, following Augustine, notes that "God is the author of Holy Scripture. He has given a meaning not only to the words but also the things they signify, so that the things signified in turn signify something else." The literal reading is tied to that which is signified by the things signified. If one turns to the broader system of Aquinas, then one finds that the things signified by things are simply more encompassing universals (that which is higher in the chain of being). The account of literal and spiritual meaning is thus connected with Aquinas' account of universals.

27. Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, 1.7 [7].

28. Gilson, p. 47. Just as "St. Thomas' philosophy should thus be regarded in the light of its relation to theology" (Copleston, p. 307), so his literal interpretation should be regarded in the light of his spiritual interpretation. Errors in philosophy (and literal interpretation) are introduced because of the intellectual and moral weakness of the philosopher (and interpreter), and they can be checked by faith (and the authority of the magisterium in matters of interpretation). Cf. Copleston, p. 314; Gilson, p. 42. Ebeling puts it well when he notes that "where a conflict arose a decision could be made on the basis of the authority of revelation" (Ebeling, Luther, p. 83).

29. "In this form of scholarship, based upon authority, the task of reason was to reconcile contradictions, refute objections and develop consequences by the use of the syllogistic method, that is, by means of dialectic. Strict limits were imposed by authority on these activities, but within these limits there was ample room for an intellectual activity which....led to extraordinary high achievement in the form of comprehensive systems of thought which possessed great acuteness and power" (Ebeling, Luther, pp. 83-84).

30. Gilson, p. 351.

31. Clyde Manschreck thus discusses the period between Aquinas and Luther in a chapter titled "Disruption" (A History of Christianity in the World: From Persecution to Uncertainty [Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974],
32. Although there is general agreement that nominalism posed a major challenge to the medieval synthesis, there is considerable debate about the nature of that challenge. Matthew Menges gives a good list of some of the ways nominalism transformed medieval philosophy and theology (The Concept of Univocity: Regarding the Predication of God and Creature According to William Ockham [St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1952], pp. 179-180). In this chapter I follow Ebeling, when he notes that Ockham challenged the relation between faith and reason (Luther, p. 85), but I disagree with him when he says that the medieval harmony was made possible by Aristotle (ibid). Rather, Aristotelianism was the "science" (reason) which Aquinas integrated with Augustine by means of theological exemplerism. As Menges notes, Ockham's philosophy can be regarded as a radical development of Aristotelian empiricism (The Concept of Univocity, p. 2).

33. It should be noted that there is some debate over whether Ockham was a conceptualist or a nominalist. (Menges, for example, argues that he is a conceptualist.) But in either case, anti-realism does problematize the justification which was given to natural theology in a realist context.

34. Menges, The Concept of Univocity, Ch. V, argues that Ockham still has a natural theology. In a detailed discussion of his work, however, I think the more traditional account of Ockham's philosophy can be sustained; namely, that it undermines natural theology.

One area that deserves further exploration concerns Ockham's appropriation of Augustine's teaching on the intellect's independence from sense knowledge (Menges, pp. 5-6). If, in a theological context, this can be related to an intuitive knowledge of God, which would allow for a simple concept such as "being" to be proper to God (ibid, p. 165), then one could develop a mystical strand in Ockham, which allows for a certain kind of neoplatonic "natural theology", while at the same time holding to an antirealist position regarding universals. One would have a knowledge of God that is not knowledge in the general, scientific sense.


36. In conventional interpretations of nominalism, the antirealist position reinforces literal interpretation of texts; it does not undermine such interpretation. However, when we consider the theological function of Scripture in the context of our earlier discussion regarding the analogy
between faith-reason and sensus lático - sensus spiritualis, then we can see that antirealism problematizes the theological role of the Bible. Consider the following analogy with law: Nominalism brought about a transformation of jurisprudence by making the literal sense of the law normative, rather than traditions and learned interpretations. Thus one severs the "literal" from traditional authorities; or rather, one makes the literal interpretation into the authority. (Cf. Heiko Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, trans. [New York: Image Books, 1989], pp. 221-222). But in the case of Scripture one does not have a content that is immediately amenable to human conceptualization, as one does in the case of positive law. The gulf between human conceptuality and reality problematizes the nature of the authority of the biblical texts, theology becomes more occasional, and the literal sense becomes "secular" and historical in a way that it was not previously. Now the key issue will be how the literal sense can be spiritual. This is a problem that will be acute in Luther's theology.

The important point in this overview is that nominalism problematizes the authority of scripture in a unique way. The analogy with the interpretation of law thus does not hold.

37. There is an important parallel between magisterial interpretation and the spiritual interpretation of mystics or private individuals claiming inspiration. In each case one is concerned with the direct agency of God, and the results cannot be verified because they depend on information that only the interpreter has.


40. It should be noted, however, that the Pope had a certain trump card over secular powers, because he could use the same hermeneutical strategy we outlined above, when there was conflict between Church and state: One was required to accept the word of Church on faith. If this word contradicted with that which is deduced from reason (i.e. state affirmations), then the state was wrong. One could then turn to state arguments and find a fallacy.

41. Aland, p. 337; Manschreck, p. 164.

42. Aland, p. 338.
43. Note the parallel between this approach to Church-state relations, and our earlier discussion of the relation between grammatical and magisterial interpretation in Aquinas. Although, in theory, he allows for the independence of grammatical interpretation, in practice, when there is any conflict, magisterial interpretation takes full priority over the grammatical. The same type of relation can be seen in *Unum sanctum ecclesiam*. But in this case, one is no longer required to give a reason that can be understood by the secular authorities. It is the contention that "no explanation was needed", which makes *Unum sanctum ecclesiam* unique. Note the contrast with Aquinas (Gilson, p. 47).

44. Manschreck, p. 165. Aland notes that, as a result of *Unum sanctum ecclesiam*, "the papacy lost its position not only as the temporal, but also as the supreme spiritual authority, and the council gradually replaced it as the highest tribunal of the church" (p. 339). But conciliarism was only one option. The other was a transfer of spiritual authority to the laity and to secular rulers. Ockham prepares the way for this by arguing that princes and Christian laity have the right and duty to exercise influence over the church if it is threatened with destruction (Aland, p. 336). It is interesting to note that Gustav Schnurer sees conciliarism as a result of Ockham's nominalism (Menges, p. 180, note 35). One could extend the argument to say that secularization (esp. seen in the transfer of power to the state) is a result of Ockham's political writing. One can see the kernel of Luther's "two kingdoms" and his "caeseropapism" in Ockham as well.

Ebeling discusses the nature of the papacy before the Reformation in *Luther*, pp. 59f.

45. Aland, pp. 359-373.

46. For Wycliff this was not the ideal, only taking place when the Church would not perform the functions it was supposed to. Ref. (Manschreck, p. 165).


52. Burrows, p. 153 with 155, 158.

53. Burrows, pp. 159-163.


55. E.g. Oberman, pp. 221, 225.

56. Oberman is correct when he notes that "[t]he exclusive authority of the Holy Scriptures was not part of his Reformation discovery - a fact that gave rise to tensions in the sixteenth century and has caused misunderstanding to the present day" (Oberman, p. 223). But Oberman is incorrect when he states that *sola scriptura* as it came to be understood by Protestants was already present in Luther's "papist" phase (ibid). While a Roman Catholic could say that Scripture was the "sole source of faith" - Luther learned this from Jodokus Tutfetter - this had a different meaning than *sola scriptura*, because it was assumed that Scripture and Church authority were in accord in the deepest sense.

57. As Manschreck puts it, "[a]ttempts to silence Luther forced him step by step to realize the revolutionary character of his challenge" (p. 197). See also Ebeling, *Luther*, p. 74.

58. Burrows, p. 159.

59. As Ebeling notes, the legacy of Augustine could be used to challenge the harmony of faith and reason found in the system of Aquinas (*Luther*, p. 85). Further, in Luther's account, *Bible and St. Augustine* are set against *Aristotle and the Scholastics* (ibid, p. 19).

60. Ebeling, *Luther*, p. 36. It is interesting to note that in an earlier stage of debate, at the time of Aquinas, the followers of Aristotle were the "moderni" and the exponents of an exaggerated realism (associated with Plato and the Augustinian tradition) were regarded as advocates of the "antiqua doctrina" (Copleston, Book I, p. 140).

61. Ebeling argues that "[t]he remarkable step in this whole process [by which Luther developed from questioning doctrinal authority to challenging the church] was his attack on the Roman sacramental doctrine in the work De captivitate babylonica ecclesiae praeludium of 1520, which from the point of view of the teaching of the Roman Church about its own nature, attacked its very foundations, and was completely heretical" (*Luther*, p. 74). But, as Luther himself observes, the key insight regarding the sacraments came in 1518, with his "glowing discovery" regarding Matthew 4:17. I shall argue that the key break takes place in Luther's interview with Cajetan, when Luther moves to the Protestant *sola scriptura*.
62. For a good overview of this see Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: A Mentor Book by arrangement with Abingdon Press, 1977), p. 67. Luther refers to this discovery in the dedication of the *Resolutions Concerning the Ninety-Five Theses*.

63. Bainton, p. 68.


65. Bainton, p. 262.


67. For a good overview of this interview, see Bainton, pp. 69-76.

68. Bainton, p. 72.

69. Bainton, p. 78.

70. Bainton, p. 73.

71. Bainton, p. 73.


73. To give just three examples, it can be seen in Trent, John Henry Newman's *Via Media of the Anglican Church*, and in the 1992 publication of the Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*.

74. This phrase, "evangelical hermeneutic", is taken from Gerhard Ebeling's book on Luther's hermeneutic, titled *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luthers Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt, 1962).

75. This does not mean that Luther did not have such a principle. In practice, Christology and a pre-understanding of the gospel directed interpretation (Bainton, pp. 259-261; Pauck, pp. xxx's-xxxiv). In chapter 3 we shall take Luther's implicit, theological hermeneutic and make it explicit.

76. As we have noted above, nominalism created unique problems for biblical interpretation. It is not curious that nominalism led to literal interpretation. As Menges notes in *The Concept of Univocity*, there was no concept of analogy in Ockham's thought, which allowed for a middle way between equivocation and univocity. But when Luther maintains the distinction between "letter" and "spirit" that was associated with realism's twofold approach to the signified thing (it is both a signifier and a signified), and when one couples this
with the nominalist approach to the sign, then the problem of a text's polyvalence becomes the problem of equivocal predication, and the spiritual meaning of the text becomes inaccessible.

77. Bainton, p. 88.


79. "Thus Luther's real concern in his dispute with the dominant philosophy of his time is that a genuine understanding of holy scripture should be made accessible to theology, from which it was concealed by the terminology and method of inquiry of Aristotelian thought. Consequently, from the very first the main principle of his exegetical work was to understand the distinctive nature of biblical modes of speech and thought, by contrast to the traditional philosophical language of scholastic theology" (Ebeling, Luther, p. 87).

80. Pauck, pp. xxiv-xxiv.


85. Bainton, pp. 258-259 outlines the incarnational approach to Scripture. Oberman, pp. 220-221 challenges this approach, emphasizing instead that "God and the Scriptures are two different things, as different as Creator and creature" (p. 221, quoted from Luther's correspondence). In either case,
however, Pannenberg is correct when he notes that Scripture was transparent to history and the doctrines of faith, and thus the incarnate Christ was directly accessible through the Bible (Pannenberg, p. 111).


87. "The sacred writings...employ those terms which are in common usage for the purpose of introducing others more sublime and divine" (*Astronomia Nova*, p. 21). Here the Protestant scholar, Kepler, sides with Erasmus in his debate with Luther, (Erasmus-Luther, *Discourse on Free Will*, Ernst Winter, trans. [New York: Continuum, 1989], p. 12.) Erasmus says that "Holy Scripture knows how to adjust its language to our human condition...[it uses] modes of expression, benefitting our weakmindedness and dullness." This approach obviously goes beyond Luther's "literal sense."


89. For a good summary, see A. Koestler, "Kepler, Johannes", in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 4, pp. 329-333.

90. Consider, for example, the way he seeks to bring an a priori, theological argument together with Copernicus' a posteriori, empirical account. Then, after developing the argument, he concludes: "For what could be more astonishing, what a more striking proof than the fact that what Copernicus concluded and interpreted, a posteriori from the phenomena, and from effects... could all, I aver, have been best determined and understood with reasons which, a priori, stem from the causes, from the very idea of creation" (*Mysterium Cosmographicum*, p. 17). Here the "more striking proof" rests on the perfect coordination of theology and science, of the a priori and the a posteriori, rather than on one approach alone.


92. Giorgio de Santillana's *The Crime of Galileo* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955) showed no appreciation of this radical implication of Galileo's approach, nor did he see the difficulty — even from a scientific point of view. Consider, for example, his discussion of Bellarmine; esp. his
response to Pierre Duhem on pp. 113-114. Santillana does not appreciate the legitimate interest which theology has in maintaining a critical role for religion in relation to the attempt of science to extend its own domain in an inappropriate way. Religion cannot simply be defined negatively, as that which is left over after science has specified its scope. On the other hand, of course, Bellarmine was wrong when he attempted to define the domain of science negatively, as that which is left over after theology specifies its scope. In both cases one loses the critical dynamic between the two. Galileo was correct on the particulars of the debate, but that does not vindicate his approach.


95. Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina, p. 182.


98. Paley himself allowed for miracles in a limited context (to bear witness to revelatory truths). But, later rationalists would ask, why are miracles needed to bear witness to a truth if that same truth could be verified by reason in nature? Those that followed Paley thus took the next step and eliminated the supernatural altogether. For Paley's account of the watchmaker (i.e. his form of the teleological argument for God's existence) see his Natural Theology. For his discussion of miracles, see A View of the Evidences for Christianity.

The next step in the argument, which regards a miracle as an event for which the natural cause is unknown, was provided by Spinoza in Tractatus theologico-politicus, ch. 6.


100. For a good example of this approach see 1 Peter 1:10-12.
101. Schweitzer provides a good overview of Reimarus in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ch. 2.

102. Pannenberg, p. 111.
CHAPTER 2

RUDOLF BULTMANN'S "GENERAL" HERMENEUTIC

In the nineteenth century a grand historical system of "scientific" interpretation arose, in which the biblical texts were regarded as an expression of a particular phase in the development of human consciousness. This system, exemplified in the writings of G.W.F. Hegel, was as comprehensive and influential as the Thomistic one that reigned in the Middle Ages. However, it reversed the relation between faith and reason. For Aquinas, one begins with reason, which is completed in and by faith; grace completes nature. But for Hegel we have the opposite: one begins with faith, regarded as an inferior mode of knowledge, and then one transforms this faith-knowledge into a rational form.\(^1\) To put it in a Hegelian idiom, one begins with representational knowledge (Vorstellungen) and then reconstructs this in conceptual terms (Begriffe).\(^2\) This process of reconstruction is regarded as scientific, and it liberates one from the more primitive faith-knowledge.

As we saw in the case of Aquinas, an account of faith and reason is reflected in the method of biblical interpretation. Hermeneutics is not separable from the broader theological and philosophical system. Thus in the nineteenth century the grand philosophical account of history was manifest in a
method of historical, critical interpretation, which involved the translation of the "mythological" biblical accounts into ideological terms or into terms of historical events which did not violate the natural possibilities set forth by science. Although the historical, critical method was regarded as a general hermeneutic, which was "neutral" and "objective", it actually begged the question of the text's content, by assuming that results of interpretation would only be legitimate if they were consistent with the moral and natural knowledge found within the "modern" scientific worldview. Like its medieval counterpart, the nineteenth century hermeneutic involved the harmonization of the text with pre-established meanings. Scripture provided the "faith-knowledge" that had to be transformed into conceptual or historical form, and the historical, critical method provided the strategy of this transformation. The results of the interpretive process would then coincide with the content derived independently from nature and history. One thus did not obtain from the text anything that was new or significant relative to other sources of knowledge.

Hegel's encyclopedic system codified and systematized a view of historical progress that was widely accepted during the nineteenth century. It was believed that humanity continued to develop intellectually and morally. As consciousness matured, it became less dependent on mythological expressions of reality and more dependent on
scientific accounts. Concomitantly, one had a movement away from the supernatural and transcendent and toward the secular and immanent. Retrospectively, in the process of historical becoming, one could discern the Absolute which increasingly comes to expression in and through developing humanity and its consciousness. Thus one became less dependent on religious texts, such as Scripture. Instead one could look to the past, to universal history, and discern therein the shape of the infinite.

In Liberal Protestantism, this philosophical account of reality was expressed in Christian terms. Progress was thematized as the increasing realization of God's Kingdom on earth, and the process of its realization was closely related to the process of secularization. History itself was now viewed as the ladder from earth to heaven, and the present time was the closest yet to heaven. In place of the Medieval chain of being, where one could traverse the ascending universals, which constituted the thoughts of God, one now had a historical, scientific account, which set forth God's thoughts in and as the interconnections of historical becoming. As Rudolf Bultmann puts it, there was a belief that "the revelation of God in history could be perceived precisely within the nexus of [historical] relations." One thus had a "pantheism of history".⁵

This was obviously an optimistic period. Even more than at the time of the Grand Synthesis in the Middle Ages, there
was a feeling of confidence and an excitement about the prospects of human achievement. The forces at work in the world were generally perceived as good, and they would soon vanquish the last vestiges of oppression and ignorance. It thus came as a shock, when some of the most "advanced" societies - England, France, and Germany - entered into mortal conflict with one another at the beginning of the twentieth century. World War I disrupted the continuity of historical progress, thus problematizing the link between human achievement and the Kingdom of God. Then, when some of the foremost leaders of liberal Protestantism aligned themselves with the aggressive policies of Kaiser Wilhelm II, some young theologians and pastors began to question the assumptions that lay behind liberal theology.⁶

There is a significant parallel between the disintegration of the Grand Synthesis during the high Middle Ages and the disintegration of nineteenth century philosophies of progress. In both cases the worldview of a whole historical period became fragmented, and an existential crisis confronted those that sought for new moorings in a seemingly chaotic world. It is thus not surprising that the "crisis theologians" of the early twentieth century turned back to Luther, when they searched for new direction. As with Luther, they perceived that they were "between the times", zwischen den Zeiten⁷, and this "betweenness" was existentially grasped as a gulf between humanity and God. Thus the doctrine of sin
- that "Christian pessimism" - came into prominence again, and this prepared the way for a new appreciation of the doctrines of grace and special revelation, which were undermined when people thought that all significant knowledge and content could be obtained from nature and history. In this new, post-modern context, the role of Scripture could be reappraised.

Rudolf Bultmann was one of the most important representatives of the new, crisis theology. However, he did not reject the legitimacy or the appropriateness of the historical, critical method. Instead, he relativized the results that could be obtained by that method, arguing that historical research could never provide any content that can serve as a basis for faith. Instead, it teaches us "the truth that history has come to a dead end, that its meaningless has become plain." Bultmann quotes Karl Barth favorably, when Barth says:

"Anyone who does not yet know ... that we cannot any longer know Christ after the flesh should let himself be taught by critico-biblical research ... This may well be the service which 'historical science' can perform in the real task of theology."³

Thus historical research "ends with a large question mark - and here it ought to end."⁹ It performs a function like that of the Law (under a certain Lutheran understanding of Paul's understanding of the Law); namely, it makes clear the impotence of works - here, the work of historical scholarship - to obtain salvation. One cannot access the foundation of faith by way of historical scholarship.¹⁰
Bultmann's rejection of the Hegelian solution, with its concomitant view of progress, had an important implication for the way the present age related to the past. A key assumption of progress (at least in its Hegelian form) is that a given age understands both itself and all previous ages; i.e., that the past is sublimated (aufgehoben) in the present. Bultmann argued, however, that liberal theology missed the central content of the biblical texts. This content needed to be recovered by theology and proclaimed anew by the Church.\textsuperscript{11} It was the "stumbling block for every kind of pantheism of history".\textsuperscript{12} There was thus a content (the kerygma) that was not sublimated in the present. The task of the Church is to recover and proclaim this stumbling block.

Bultmann will set forth a strategy of existential interpretation, which he claims enables the Church to recover and proclaim the kerygma. Both the historical-critical method and existential interpretation are set within the context of a broad, general hermeneutic, which considers the conditions of the possibility of understanding a text. We will find, however, that Bultmann's general hermeneutic has implications for a doctrine of God, humanity, history and language, which collide with the content of the Christian kerygma. Bultmann did not appreciate this collision, because he thought that his general hermeneutic had the status of a metagame, abstractable from particular theological commitments. By showing his error on this point, we shall undermine the generality of the
general hermeneutic; we shall show that Bultmann's hermeneutic is actually a special, Platonic, uniquely Western strategy for understanding. Our deconstruction of the claim to universality in Bultmann's hermeneutic thus prepares the way for a reappraisal of a uniquely Christian, special hermeneutic.

Myth and Science

Although Bultmann wanted to account for a content (the kerygma) that has not been sublimated in the present, he also accepted several of the conclusions that were current in the nineteenth century view of progress. This is nowhere more apparent than in his account of myth and science. The problem of retrieving the "stumbling block" will be set in the context of the development of human consciousness and its mode of understanding. We will find that these two concerns - the "scientific" account of progress and the special revelatory role of Scripture - are not easily reconciled.

For Bultmann, every interpreter brings presuppositions to the text. But there are legitimate and illegitimate presuppositions in the interpretive process. The fact that the exegete is determined by his or her own individuality, including biases, strengths, etc., does not justify incorporating these presuppositions into the exegetical process. These are factors that "the exegete ought to
eliminate by self-education." The presuppositions that are legitimate thus do not have to do with qualities of particular individuals that distinguish some individuals from others. Instead Bultmann is concerned with those presuppositions which will be characteristic of any interpreter qua interpreter, delineating the way in which the human knower can and will come to an understanding of a particular text.

To this extent Bultmann's approach can be regarded as Kantian. He seeks to develop the a priori conditions of the possibility of understanding a text. And his concern is with "objectivity" in Kant's sense. This notion of objectivity is between a subjectivism, on one side, and a hard notion of objectivity on the other. In a subjectivism one makes no distinction between the particular factors that color a particular individual's understanding and those general factors which color all individual's understanding. One simply speaks of "understanding" as wholly relative to a particular individual. The hard notion of objectivity, by contrast, is concerned only with the essence of the thing in itself, independent of the qualities that qualify the knowing of that thing. This involves a denial of any relativity. Kant's middle way, however, involves a notion of objectivity that recognizes the relativity of knowledge, while at the same time developing the knowledge as independent of those qualities that distinguish one human knower from another. The knowledge is tied to the general conditions of human knowing,
not to the particular conditions of an individual knower.\textsuperscript{15}

Unlike Kant, however, Bultmann claimed that the conditions of understanding are history-dependent, at least in terms of the categories of understanding's systematic conceptualization. The texts of the Bible, written 2000 years ago, are framed within a mythological worldview, while we today think in terms of a scientific worldview.\textsuperscript{16} One of the central tasks of interpretation must thus involve the translation of the biblical content into modern categories.\textsuperscript{17}

For Bultmann there are two basic ways of regarding the world: In \textit{Myth} certain worldly phenomena are given an otherworldly or supernatural cause.\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Science}, on the other hand, reckons with a \textit{closed continuum} of cause and effect. Every cause of a worldly phenomenon is itself a worldly phenomenon. There can thus be no otherworldly powers that break in upon the unity of the world. "The world and its occurrences are 'closed'...against the intervention of nonworldly powers."\textsuperscript{19}

Bultmann argues that the modern person could not accept a mythological conception of the world. He asks:

"Is it possible to expect that we shall make a sacrifice of understanding, \textit{sacrificium intellectus}, in order to accept what we cannot sincerely consider true - merely because such conceptions are suggested by the Bible?"\textsuperscript{20}

His answer is clearly "no." Science is simply the development of the "work thinking" that enables us to live our everyday lives within "the lawfully regulated order of things and
occurrences in the world."²¹ If we give up the basic presupposition of science, namely the closed continuum of the world, we alienate ourself from the condition needed to live out our everyday life; we sacrifice our everyday understanding.

Bultmann was aware of those who argue that "science" is modern man's myth. He did not counter such argument by advocating the truth of science. Instead, he pointed out that calling science a myth confused the main distinction between the two, namely, whether the world was open to supernatural forces. To avoid the confusion, Bultmann stated that it would be better to refer to science's understanding of the world as an "ideology" or a "fiction" rather than myth.²² In this way Bultmann seemed to show an awareness that the scientific worldview is not "objective" in the hard sense. It simply specifies the perspective of the modern person, giving that person's rootedness in time and space.

Although Bultmann never argues the point, he does assume that science is truer than the mythological. But science does not have the true understanding.²³ It rather gives a closer approximation, a clearer expression of the world in which the human person exists. Here Bultmann moves beyond Kant's weak notion of objectivity. Following Heidegger, who in turn developed certain concerns in Husserl and, before him, Hegel, Bultmann was interested in that understanding which is a disclosure (unveiling, aletheia) of Being. The understanding
given with science is for him already an interpretation of the understanding that was given with myth.

Like Heidegger, Bultmann regards interpretation as the development of understanding.\textsuperscript{24} Myth was, in part, primitive science.\textsuperscript{25} It sought to explain phenomena (in the sense of erklären) by attributing them to supernatural phenomena. This gave a first approximation at understanding. Science then interpreted myth by closing the world to supernatural forces. It found a worldly phenomenon to replace the supernatural force, explaining the world in terms of the world.\textsuperscript{26} This development from myth to science involved not only a clearer understanding of the worldly phenomena being explained. It also involved a clearer understanding of what it means to understand the world. To understand the world (in distinction from self-understanding) involves explaining unknown phenomena in terms of known phenomena. And only worldly phenomena are known. Thus one understands by grasping the unknown in terms of the known; i.e. in terms of worldly causes and processes.\textsuperscript{27}

For Bultmann, however, myth was not just primitive science. Myth also expressed the knowledge that

"man is not master of the world and of his life, that the world within which he lives is full of riddles and mysteries and that human life also is full of riddles and mysteries."\textsuperscript{28}

The problem with myth is that it expressed this knowledge in an inappropriate way, developing the transcendent reality as an immanent, this-worldly object. It was thus important for Bultmann to distinguish between the form and content of the
myth. The need of modern man is to translate the content into a form that is more appropriate to it; namely, science. One must also divide myth-as-science (erklären) from myth-as-selfunderstanding (verstehen). Myth seeks to give both at the same time, and it thereby does both inadequately. Modern man, in interpreting myth, must divide scientific explanation from human self-understanding. Corresponding to the two contents Bultmann will develop two methods: historical criticism and existential interpretation.

Outer and Inner Content

The biblical accounts express their content in a mythological worldview. The task of the modern interpreter is to translate this content into the modern, scientific worldview. The results of interpretation are the translated content; i.e. the content expressed in the language of science. But, as we have seen, this content is not a unity, although it was presented as if it were in the myth. Bultmann's attempt to account for the special revelatory function of Scripture in the context of a nineteenth century approach to the development of human consciousness thus led him to posit two different contents. One of them will be accessible to science; the other to theology. When the biblical content is translated into modern categories it must be divided; the mythic science must be separated from the
mythic self-understanding; knowledge of world separated from self-knowledge.\textsuperscript{32}

On one hand, the content of the biblical texts consists in the historical events that took place, including not only the events directly referred to by the texts but also the Sitz im Leben of Urtexte and the circumstances that led to the incorporation of such texts into the redacted work. These "outer events" must be reconstructed so that one knows the true, i.e. "scientific" events. The historical method enables one to reconstruct the events. It begins with a knowledge of what is possible, derived from our present knowledge of the world and of historical processes, and then, with this knowledge, seeks to describe the events that were explained mythologically in biblical times.\textsuperscript{33} Some of Bultmann's most famous work looks at the development of the "synoptic tradition," showing how the biblical texts came to be generated not by supernatural forces but by worldly ones.\textsuperscript{34}

Bultmann will argue that the interpreter must not presuppose the results of the interpretive process.\textsuperscript{35} But he will also insist that one cannot obtain any results without questioning a text in a particular way.\textsuperscript{36} Presuppositions thus cannot be avoided. One must therefore steer a course between presupposing the results (which is illegitimate) and presuppositionless interpretation (which is impossible). This middle way is found when the presupposition enters in as a way of questioning; i.e. as a method. In the case of the outer
events, we are concerned with the method of historical criticism. This method depends upon a given view of history and of the relation between the worldview of myth and that of science. It begins with a particular view of what is possible, and then sets this up as a criterion by which one judges the truth of a given event. The outer events, which are set forth as a result of the interpretive process, are simply a redescription of the mythologically described events, given in such a way that the events no longer violate the canons of modern science.

The question we must now ask is: Does not such an approach presuppose the nineteenth century view of progress that Bultmann challenged; namely, does it not presuppose that an age grasps both itself and the past age? How could any new possibility be discovered in the biblical texts if present possibility, as grasped within the scientific worldview, is set up as the criterion by which the possibility of any new possibility is judged? At best, any new possibility will simply be an extension of present understanding, never violating already established epistemological canons. Such an approach precludes a radical challenge to the modern worldview. In this case can one sustain Bultmann's distinction between results and method, or does not the method determine the results?

Bultmann was well aware of this criticism. He notes that:
"An objection often heard against the attempt to
demythologize is that it takes the modern world-
view as the criterion of the interpretation of the
scripture and the Christian message and that
scripture and Christian message are not allowed to
say anything that is in contradiction with the
modern world-view." \(^{39}\)

And he answers candidly:

"It is, of course, true that de-mythologization
takes the modern world-view as a criterion. To de-
mythologize is to reject not scripture or the
Christian message as a whole, but the world-view of
scripture, which is the worldview of a past
epoch." \(^{39}\)

It is important to note that Bultmann's answer here depends on
the assumption that there are two separable contents; it does
not just depend on the distinction between the form and
content of myth. The outer content, which is accessed by the
historical method, has no positive value for the believing
community. It thus does not matter that one will never obtain
any results that transcend the possibilities implicit in the
presupposed method. The external, contingent historical (i.e.
historisch) events are poorly expressed in the mythical form
but well expressed in scientific form. \(^{40}\) When we use the
historical critical method, we are concerned with knowledge of
the world. A world-view will then give the framework within
which that knowledge is expressed. But the inner content,
i.e. the self-understanding that lies behind the perception of
the external events and their meaning, \(^{41}\) is inappropriately
expressed in both the mythical and scientific worldview. In
that case we are concerned with the knowledge of the self, the
subject. And any world-view will be inappropriate, because
the subject cannot be grasped in the same terms used to grasp the world, which is an object.

In sum: for Bultmann, science is clearly more appropriate than myth when it comes to grasping and expressing the outer, external events. One could even say that it is "truer" in its account of the world. If one views the external events as the intended content (the meant), i.e. as the spirit of the words, and the account of those events as the expression (the said), i.e. the letter, then with science the spirit is appropriately given in the letter; the intended is said; the form is appropriate to the content. If one gives the outer events in the language of science, there is thus no "plentitude" that escapes the expression, no intended content beyond the "said". But both myth and science are equally inappropriate when it comes to expressing the inner event; i.e. self-knowledge and revelation. In this case one does not translate the content into the language of science because science is a more appropriate language in itself. One simply recognizes that science, which is more appropriate than myth for grasping the world, is the language of today, of modern man. Since myth is no more appropriate to the inner content than science, there is no reason not to translate the content into science. And since myth is no longer the language of today, many people may mistakenly conclude that the Christian message (the kerygma), if left in mythical terms, is actually the worldview of the past epoch. This would set up a false
stumbling block. Thus in order to avoid this misunderstanding the Christian message must be translated into modern categories. This task is carried out by existential interpretation.

In the case of the outer content one translates to promote understanding; in the case of the inner content to avoid misunderstanding. But, for Bultmann, the outer content is irrelevant for the believing community. The understanding that is promoted by the historical-critical interpretation will only be understanding of the world. And it will be of interest primarily to the scholarly community. Thus, for the believing community, the function of demythologization is the avoidance of misunderstanding. We have not yet seen what believing self-understanding will entail.

The "historisch" Jesus, the "geschichtliches" Christ, and the Incarnation

In this section we shall take an important step in deconstructing the generality of Bultmann's general hermeneutic, by showing that his account of the twofold content of myth is directly related to his understanding of the incarnation. Thus his hermeneutical deliberations are connected with a special theological doctrine.

Bultmann has been strongly criticized for his strict
separation of the inner and outer content. This separation is manifest in his writings as a separation between fact and meaning, between protological and eschatological orientation, between historical method and existential interpretation, and, perhaps most significantly, as a separation between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. In each case one has a gulf between two poles and, in the deepest sense, this gulf is an expression of the divide between humanity and God. The gulf is thus a form of the human predicament; of the question to which an Answer is needed.

Developing a motif in Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments, Bultmann attempts to bring together the two sides of the gulf by way of the doctrine of the incarnation. He will attempt to show that the gospel of John understands the relation between flesh and glory as a paradox in which the eternal is made present in time.\(^46\) The historical Jesus will be aligned with humanity, and the Christ of faith will be aligned with divinity. Then the Jesus of history will relate to the Christ of faith as the humanity relates to the divinity in the incarnation. Bultmann will then develop Paul's statement that we no longer seek to know Jesus after the flesh, interpreting this to mean that we do not have an interest in the historical Jesus when we are concerned with matters of salvation.\(^47\) This "historical Jesus" is the outer event, which can be accessed by historical-critical method, but it is the inner event that is significant existentially.
For Bultmann, a passage in Scripture can be given a historical reference (i.e. to past fact) or an existential reference (i.e. to a present and future meaning). For example, when one says that Jesus rose from the dead, this can be taken in two ways: 1. as referring to an event that happened about 30 CE, or 2. as a message to me, manifesting a possibility for my own existence. The first of these refers to "Jesus as the object of methodical, critical, historical research." For Bultmann no results of such research have any relevance for faith. Thus it would seem that Bultmann separates completely the historical and existential reference. But at the same time he will insist that the kerygma proclaims Jesus as God's salvific event, and that this event is not just a human possibility but grace, i.e. an act of God. This would seem to require a connection between the historical and existential reference. If there were no connection one would need to view God's act in Christ as accidentally related to the Jesus who lived about 2000 years ago, and this would imply a "gnostic" position.

Several of Bultmann's critics have argued that this so-called paradox is simply inconsistency. Paul Althaus, for example, quotes Bultmann as saying: "I do not deny the close relationship of the Easter kerygma to the earthly and crucified Jesus." Althaus then goes on, however, to argue that Bultmann never concretely develops this close relationship, so that, as Eduard Ellwein notes, "the bridge
between the historical Jesus and the preached Christ has, so to speak, collapsed."\textsuperscript{53} And, as Günther Bornkamm observes, "Jesus has become a mere fact of salvation and is no longer a person."\textsuperscript{54} Karl Prümm will extensively develop the accusation that Bultmann's program involves a gnosticism.\textsuperscript{55} In all cases one conclusion seems clear: "Christian faith is here understood as faith in the exalted Lord, for which the historical Jesus has no longer constitutive significance."\textsuperscript{56} And this runs directly counter to Bultmann's claim that there is a "close relationship" between the two.

I think Bultmann's critics are wrong to accuse him of inconsistency at this point, although we can readily agree with Macquarrie when he criticizes Bultmann's failure to express himself clearly.\textsuperscript{57} Much of the problem rests on an ambiguity in the meaning of the term "historical Jesus". In one case it means the content which is accessed by the historical method and the results of the historical project of reconstruction.\textsuperscript{58} But it can also refer to the event that happened 2000 years ago. Then it includes both the "historisch", accessed by the historical method, and the "geschichtlich", which escapes the historical method. When Bultmann affirms the close relation between Jesus and Christ he means the "geschichtlich" dimension of the second sense of "historical Jesus". But when Bultmann denies the relevance of the historical Jesus, he uses it in the first sense, which is concerned with the "historisch" dimension of the second sense.
Thus one can take Bultmann's meaning to be: There is a close relation between the "geschichtlich" dimension of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, but the "historisch" dimension of the historical Jesus is irrelevant for faith.

Gerhard Ebeling provides considerable clarification when he notes that the "geschichtlich" dimension is the "that" of the historical Jesus and the "historisch" dimension his "what". Bultmann's position thus involves the assumption that the "what" of Jesus is irrelevant. Ebeling, in discussing Bultmann's "anhypostasis", will then show that the divinity of Jesus is the "That", and the humanity the "what". In the address of the kerygma, which is its "that", the "That" of the historical Jesus is made present as God's act. Thus we can see how Bultmann attempts to bring together the historical and existential reference. The kerygma makes existentially relevant the "what" of the biblical message about Jesus, and is not concerned with its historical reference. To this extent the concern is wholly with human possibility. But in the fact of address, i.e. in the "that" of the kerygma, the message refers not to human possibility but to God's act in Jesus. If one breaks the spoken word into its two components - and here it is important to emphasize that the kerygma must be preached, not written - then one could say that the historical reference is in the fact of the address, not in what is said. In sum: the continuity between Jesus and Christ can only be found in the "That" of Jesus' person.
This "That" is made present in the "that" of the kerygma, i.e. in its address. The facticity of the historical Jesus gives the limit of de mythologizing, delineating the historical reference of the kerygma. But all "what" must be interpreted existentially, when the focus is on preaching, and this must be given not as an objective event but rather as human possibility.

Bultmann's solution rests upon a gulf between the divine and human. All that is human is "not God" and all that is divine is "not human". Without this interpretation, Bultmann could not sustain his separation between historical and existential interpretation. Thus the reflection on method depends upon a theological doctrine. Hermeneutics is not prior to and independent of theology, as Bultmann would have us believe.

It is important to relate Bultmann's understanding of the incarnation (and its implication for the relation between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith) with his understanding of the inner and outer content of Scripture. In the last section we noted that the outer content is translated into the language of science to promote understanding while the inner content is translated to avoid misunderstanding. We can now see that the "what" of the historical reference is the outer content, and the "what" of existential reference is the inner content. But how do these two relate to the "that" which connects the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith?
There is an important difference between the **preached word** (the kerygma) and the **written word** of Scripture. In the former one has a unity of the "that" and the "what" of self-understanding. But the historical "what" is absent. In the Scripture, on the other hand, one has a unity of the historical "what" and the "what" of self-understanding. This unity is given in and as myth. But one does not have the "that". One remembers that the divinity of Jesus and of the kerygma is directly connected with the "that", and "to be spoken is essential for this word [the Word of God]."  

How then could the Scripture be viewed as Word of God?

The answer to this question becomes clearer when we focus on how Bultmann concretely develops the "What" of self-understanding. We find that the "what" is simply a word about the "that". But Bultmann will regard "talking about" as objective language. And the "that", as the act of God, is only subjectively accessible in the divine-human encounter. It cannot be regarded as an object that is knowable as an object in the world. Thus when one speaks about the "that", all one can say is that one cannot speak about it. One can simply announce its coming; announce its future happening. For Bultmann the **inner content** is then the **paradoxical word about the "that"**. The inner content, as self-understanding, announces the possibility of human existence in which God's act makes possible that which is impossible. This possibility is grace.
Bultmann's approach to the "what" of Scripture is equivalent to his development of the incarnation in John, where he argues that all that the revealer reveals is revelation. Ebeling puts it well when he states that "the That is the What in which Jesus and the primitive christian kerygma converge." But unlike others who seek to strongly develop an incarnational model of Scripture, Bultmann cannot do justice to the divinity of the written word. This is in contrast to the spoken word of preaching, in which the "that" of the kerygma is directly connected with the "That" of Jesus as the incarnate word. As Bultmann states, the kerygma (spoken word) "put itself in the place of the historical Jesus". One can account for both the divinity and the humanity of the kerygma. In the case of Scripture, however, the outer and inner content cannot be related to the humanity and divinity of the words. Instead they relate respectively to the humanity of Jesus and the humanity of the kerygma.

Bultmann's inability to account for the divinity of the written word of Scriptures will have important implications for the nature of Scriptural interpretation. We will see that for Bultmann, one never comes to a knowledge of the Word of God by way of the reading of Scripture. Bultmann's hermeneutic always assumes that one knows that Word independently of Scripture. The task of interpretation is then to see in the Scripture the content one knows
independently and then translate this knowledge into a modern
idiom. The translation, however, amounts to showing how one
sees the independently known content in the written words.
The result of translation is simply the word to be
preached.72

Since myth holds together the historical and existential
reference (the two "what's"), it has a function analogous to
the "that" which holds together the "what" of the historical
Jesus and the "what" of the kerygma. The myth thus takes the
place of the divinity of the Word of God. In this way, myth
objectifies that which cannot be objectified. It re-presents
the divine (the "That") as a particular unity of world-
knowledge (the "what" of the historical Jesus) and self-
knowledge (the "what" of self-understanding). Bultmann
regarded such a re-presentation as an idol, which the kerygma
itself confronts and shatters. Thus it is not only our
worldview which calls for demythologization; the kerygma
itself demands the elimination of myth.73 When the idol is
shattered, the outer and inner contents, which were falsely
united, are divided from one another. After
demythologization, humanity is confronted with an unreconciled
difference; two separate contents and two separate methods.

When the myth is eliminated, then humanity is faced with
the full import of its predicament. The gulf between world-
knowledge and self-knowledge, between fact and meaning,
between historical Jesus and the Christ of faith is simply an
expression of sin — the gulf between humanity and God. But
this is the very difference which the incarnation bridged, and
the proclamation of the kerygma simply confronts the hearer
with the "good news" of the incarnation. It is thus important
for us to consider more carefully the two contents and two
methods, evaluating whether and how Bultmann brings them
together. Further, we will need to see how this "bringing
together" relates to the doctrine of the incarnation. We will
find that Bultmann replaces myth with a philosophico-
theological account of history that is directly reflected in
Bultmann's hermeneutic. But this account of history will
actually be the "scientific", nineteenth century philosophy of
progress that Bultmann sought to overcome. In the end his
theological account of the incarnation will be sublimated in
a philosophy that is implicit in his general hermeneutic.

In the remainder of this chapter we shall proceed as
follows: (1) We shall consider in detail the method of
historical criticism, and explicate the philosophy of history
implied thereby. (2) We shall outline a metahermeneutical
circle between hermeneutics and the specific theological
content of a text, thus showing that a hermeneutic cannot be
abstracted from the particular text that an individual
interprets. (3) Finally we shall consider the process of
existential interpretation, and note how it relates to the
historical method. In the end we shall find that Bultmann's
"general hermeneutic" is actually a special hermeneutic, which
cannot be abstracted from his philosophical and theological understanding of God, humanity, history and language.

Understanding as Reconstruction: Historical Criticism

While Bultmann acknowledges that there can be no presuppositionless interpretation, he does not allow for any and all presuppositions to play a role. Specifically, he asserts that "dogmatic assumptions" should not play a role in knowledge of the "outer events". The results of the interpretive process should be left "open", and they should be determined by "scientific" methods alone. All people, whether believers or unbelievers, should be able to come to the same results, when they are concerned with the reconstructive enterprise, which is directed by the historical critical method.

Bultmann's contention regarding the illegitimacy of dogmatic assumptions is a direct correlate of his belief that (1) the "outer events" are not relevant theologically, and (2) the method of interpretation - i.e. the metagame of hermeneutics - is abstractable from the particular results of the interpretive process, which must remain "open". In our discussion of the incarnation we saw that the first point, resting on the sharp distinction between inner and outer contents, was not abstractable from Bultmann's understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ - a very dogmatic issue. In
this section we shall focus on the second point, showing its falsity. Bultmann's "results", namely his history of the synoptic tradition, are simply an overcoded expression of his presupposed method. Further, historical criticism involves assumptions regarding the nature of language, human nature, and history which are not theologically neutral.

Up until now we have been focusing on two modes of understanding: world-understanding and self-understanding. These two modes of understanding correspond to two fundamental modes of being in Bultmann's theology: world and self. But there is also a third important mode of understanding that Bultmann has not sufficiently reflected upon; namely, the understanding of language. As R.C. Roberts notes, Bultmann's "view of language and meaning ... is the mirror image of this division of reality [between self and world]. Just as there are two kinds of reality there are two kinds of language."

For Bultmann, language is an exteriorization of interiority. In the case of the world, language re-presents the understanding's grasp of exteriority. It is the exteriorization of the understanding of the world that, in turn, involved the interiorization of that externality, which is the world. This "'objectifying' language represents worldly objects such as those of nature and of history in the sense of past events. Its way of meaning is that of referring, describing, picturing."
In the case of *self*, however, language takes on meaning in a more complex way. Roberts simply contrasts language of world and of self by way of a contrast between objectifying and nonobjectifying language. But this is not careful enough. Bultmann acknowledges a dimension to selfhood that can be grasped objectively; to some extent the self grasp itself as object. But this is not fully appropriate to the self that is grasping. It approaches the self as if it is finished, actual. But the self is not yet what it is to be. To understand itself is to grasp itself as a task, articulating itself in a moment of decision. In existence the self goes forth as that which it creates itself to be. This *creative self-expression* is an appropriation of the self's past in a new way to address the questions of the present. The self as object is taken up (*aufgehoben*) into the subject that expresses itself. Here language is again the exteriorization of interiority, but the interiority is not the simple interiorization of externality that one finds in language about the world. The interiority is an appropriation of the past (which is exterior) as a possibility for addressing the present. To interpret this language involves more than reconstruction of that which was interiorized. It must entail reconstruction of the process in which the past was appropriated to address the present; i.e. the process of creative self-expression. For Bultmann understanding of language in this second sense will involve not only the
reconstruction of the past exteriorization but the reduplication of the creative possibility actualized in the initial encoding.81

In our initial presentation of Bultmann's project we aligned historical criticism with world-understanding and existential interpretation with self-understanding. But now, in the light of our discussion of the understanding of language, it is important to revise our initial discussion. Historical criticism is concerned with understanding the language that exteriorized the interiority of a historically distant individual and community. It thus deals with both the world-understanding and self-understanding that is expressed in the text, reconstructing the ancient experience of the two dimensions of reality. In existential interpretation, on the other hand, the same language is understood, but now as a possibility to be creatively appropriated for addressing the concerns of the present.

There is a basic principle operative in Bultmann's thought, which can be viewed as an extension of Bultmann's appropriation of Kant's weak notion of objectivity. Put generally, one could say: two people, when experiencing a given object, will experience that object in more or less the same way, because the categories by which they structure the manifold impression they receive from that "thing out there" will be the same categories and the experience will be constituted in the same way. This does not mean that the
experience of the object gives an essence of the object (e.g. like the form abstracted by Aristotle's "agent intellect") that is independent from the conditions under which the knower knows. But it allows for a commonality to an experience that enables an intersubjective account of the object. Your experience of a given object and my experience of that object will be the same (or similar). As a result we can develop a language in which the reference of a word for me will involve the same type of reference as that word for you. The meaning of the word is established by associating the sound/sign with the experience. Although the association is arbitrary when viewed simply in terms of the two things associated, communication will be possible by way of the sign because there will be an agreed upon convention for the arbitrary association.62

A text consists of the signs that refer to the experience of events or objects. In the case of historical criticism, one understands the text when one rightly appreciates the experience of the events that was articulated in the text. Or, put in another way, understanding a text involves reconstructing the understanding of the events out of the language that was used to express that understanding. This reconstruction, however, is simply the reverse procedure used in the initial encoding of the experience. To express in language is to encode an event or object (with the proviso that one only has access to the event in and through
understanding). To understand the language is simply to decode by reversing the process of encoding, so that one returns to the event that was intended.83

The most basic and direct example of communication occurs when there is a simple use of the sign. By "simple use of the sign" I mean the use of a signifier to convey to another the signified when there is an agreed upon convention for the sign (i.e. an agreed upon association between signifier and signified). One can speak of such a use of language as "literal".

For Bultmann, in the case of the biblical texts (here I will refer to the synoptics, but what I say can be generalized) we do not have a simple use of the sign. First of all, the texts of the Bible do not just recount an experienced event. They seek to explain the event (erklären), and they do this by attributing to it supernatural causes, which eventually get incorporated into the event as if the experience was simultaneously of the cause (presented as if it were a worldly object) and the event, which is explained by that cause. One thus finds in the Bible simultaneously an expression of the event and the event's explanation in terms of the mythological worldview. But this is not all one encounters. The event, together with its explanation, is given in the context of an exposition of the events meaning (verstehen); namely, the account is preaching.84

According to Bultmann, preaching gives an existential
interpretation of the event and its explanation, expositing it as a message (good news) about human possibility. This preaching constitutes the "Urtext", but we have still not arrived at the canonical synoptic texts. The "Urtexte" form the basic units of the synoptic gospels. These are then expanded upon and developed until one arrives at the texts we have in the canon. It is important to note, however, that the Urtexte (the basic units) are not unproblematic or basic in the sense that allows for a direct move from them to some content in the world (the "historical events" that are spoken about in the texts). They already involve explanation and existential understanding. Instead, one should view them as basic in the sense that they are products of an individual's encounter with the message of the events. These products, as preaching, then get taken up into a community, which develops and extends the Urtexte in ways that are different from the ways in which an individual alone would develop the text.\textsuperscript{65}

Thus we come to a third step away from the simple use of the sign. First there is explanation, second existential interpretation, and now, third, sociological forces together with the historical development of community bring about a complex evolution of the Urtexte until they crystallize into the gospels. As the Urtexte evolve they are further explained and interpreted. But at each successive stage the previous account is viewed by the interpreter/community as a direct account of history. The event with its explanation and
interpretation is regarded as if it were simply an event which is in need of explanation and interpretation. The result is layer upon layer of explanation and interpretation.

For Bultmann, the way to literally understand this complex text (the gospel text) is not, in principle, different from the way one understands in the case of a simple use of the sign. One must decode by reversing the process of encoding. Only now one will be concerned with the process in which layer gathered upon layer. One will interpret by unraveling the layers of tradition like one unwraps an onion. One will keep going backward until one accounts for every layer as an explanation and interpretation of the previous layer. In order to do this, however, one must of course know how everything developed in the first place. And one must be able to distinguish the different layers from each other as they are present in the text.

According to Bultmann the process of unraveling the text can be carried out by anyone who is a competent historian. One need only have a knowledge of the methods of historical criticism and of the languages and historical circumstances at the time of the texts development. "Belief" or "unbelief" are not needed. In fact, any dogmatic presupposition would hinder the historical work.

It is important to note, however, that Bultmann does not just require "historical method," in the sense of a way of knowledge used by the historian to evaluate the merit of
sources, etc. Bultmann also requires a knowledge of "historical method," in the sense of a way of being; i.e. the method or way of historical development. More specifically, one must know how the early church developed. Knowledge of the process of historical development is needed (1) to distinguish later tradition from earlier tradition, and (2) to unwrap the different layers of tradition in the appropriate order. One accounts for the text, i.e. decodes it, by reversing the process in which the text was generated. In order to obtain the "results"; i.e. in order to move from the text, which inappropriately expresses its content, backward to the content which is expressed in the text, one needs the process of development.

Now we can see some of the problems Bultmann has in distinguishing "method" and "results." When we look at the "results" of Bultmann's exegesis of the synoptics, we find that it is not primarily an account of the "events" or "content" that was inappropriately expressed in the biblical texts. Instead, one finds the process of development itself: the synoptic tradition. But this is simply the process needed to get back from the text to the content. Bultmann's synoptic tradition is simply his historical method clothed with the torn-apart remnants of the synoptic texts; the results are the clothing on the presupposition.

Although Bultmann stated that his method was in large part adopted from folklore studies on the way tradition is
passed on through time, those in folklore studies know little of the method Bultmann used. Instead, the only real "evidence" Bultmann gives for his method of development seems to be his account of how Matthew and Luke relate to Mark. This textual example gives what may be viewed as the outer layer of the onion. Mark is the tradition and Matthew and Luke give the redaction. By noting how Matthew and Luke appropriate and modify Mark, and by looking at the trajectory from Mark to Matthew/Luke, one finds what is for Bultmann the process of development of the tradition. Bultmann then views the process of the whole tradition as continuous with the process he finds in the inter-textual relations.

If the inter-textual relations among the synoptics provide the only justification Bultmann has for the process of development of the whole synoptic tradition, then his work is on shaky ground, when viewed in terms of the criteria of historical "science". As Werner Kelber has shown, at the very least one must account for the differences in oral and literary transmission. But a more careful analysis will show that Bultmann did not simply derive the historical method from inter-textual synoptic relations. Rather, his account of historical development is simply an expression of a philosophy of history that Bultmann will directly relate to the inner content of the texts. Historical criticism will thus not be separable from existential interpretation (which is concerned with inner content). Although Bultmann assumes that
inner and outer content are separable, this assumption will prove incorrect. But this assumption was directly connected with Bultmann's dogmatic account of the incarnation, regarded as a paradox. We thus see a conflict developing between Bultmann's philosophy of history and his account of the incarnation.

The Meta-Hermeneutical Circle

Bultmann's historical criticism begins with a view of what is possible, derived from one's present experience, and then sets this up as a norm for the redescription of the events that were described mythically. Thus redescription is rooted in what Bultmann calls a "preunderstanding" of the nature of history, and the preunderstanding is an expression of a "life relation" that the interpreter has to the content. Bultmann will argue that without a life-relation to the content, an individual could never understand that which is intended in an account of that content. It should thus not be so surprising for us when we discover that Bultmann's "results" of historical criticism are in large part the embodiment of a presupposed view of historical development.

A careful reading of Bultmann's critical, historical approach to Scripture shows that there are not one but two preunderstandings. First, there is the "preunderstanding of
historical possibilities". This is the norm for redescription that we referred to in the previous paragraph. It is concerned with the conditions of the possibility of the "external events" that constitute the results of historical criticism. But second, there is the preunderstanding of how one comes to understanding. This preunderstanding of understanding is explicated as Bultmann's general hermeneutic. It establishes the conditions that must be satisfied for understanding to take place. It and not the preunderstanding of the external events prescribes the need for a preunderstanding, rooted in a life-relation, if one is to understand.

The second preunderstanding provides the context in which the role of the first preunderstanding is developed. The first preunderstanding reflects the worldview of the modern person, accounting for the interpreter's rootedness in time and place. The "problem of hermeneutics" then is an expression of the gulf between the first preunderstanding (that of the outer content) and the mythical account of the events. Bultmann's second preunderstanding (the metagame, which is the general hermeneutic) is the answer to the problem raised by the first preunderstanding. It gives the conditions of the possibility of understanding and develops them in such a way that understanding the biblical texts is possible. A life-relation to the content - the same content expressed in the ancient texts - enables the understanding of the ancient
expression. Through the metagame (general hermeneutics), one overcomes the gap between the historical preunderstanding of the modern, scientific world and the mythological preunderstanding of the Biblical age. It is in this way that Bultmann bridges the gulf between signifier and signified; namely, common access to the signified enables us to understand the signification of the signifier.

It is important for us now to consider Bultmann's argument for why a preunderstanding of the content is needed for one to understand. We already mentioned that Bultmann's preunderstanding of understanding (the general hermeneutic) enables him to answer the "problem of hermeneutics". R.C. Roberts astutely notes that the problem of hermeneutics, which concerns the gulf between interpreter and text, can be viewed as a form of Meno's paradox. Consider Socrates formulation of the problem in Meno 80d-e:

"[A] man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know[.] He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for." 97

Thus in order to discover something there must be a strange combination of ignorance and knowledge.98 The hermeneutical form of this strange combination is well expressed by W. Dilthey:

"Interpretation would be impossible if the expressions of life [that one interprets] were completely foreign. It would be unnecessary if there was nothing foreign in them. Between these two extremes it thus lies."99
Plato will answer the paradox by arguing that the soul already knows the truth but it has forgotten what it knows. The paradox is overcome by a doctrine of recollection; an inward turn enables one to obtain knowledge, while the forgotten content motivates the seeking. Bultmann's solution, involving a preunderstanding rooted in a life-relation, can be viewed as a form of the platonic answer. Roberts puts it well when he says

"Bultmann's notion of pre-understanding answers a difficulty similar to the one which Socrates' theory of the pre-existence of the soul was designed to alleviate. Stated in its most general way, Bultmann's problem is this: How can we come to understand something which is unfamiliar to us? And his answer is that if it is totally unfamiliar to us, then we cannot understand it; every actual instance of understanding is founded upon a preunderstanding of the matter in question."

Like Plato, Bultmann assumes that one already has a relation to the content which motivates the seeking. In his case the seeking is developed as the questioning of the text. It is moved by the unknowing knowledge of the preunderstanding.

There is a significant problem, however, with Bultmann's Platonic solution because it contrasts with the understanding of understanding that is implicit in his approach to the incarnation. Remember that Bultmann's understanding of the incarnation is appropriated from Soren Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments. Bultmann even criticizes Barth for forgetting the "Kierkegaardian element" that once influenced Barth, and Bultmann directly connects his discussion of the relation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of
faith with Kierkegaard's account of the incarnation in the Fragments. But - and this is the important point - Kierkegaard's approach to the incarnation is explicitly developed by him as an alternative to Plato's solution of Meno's paradox. It involves a different understanding of understanding. Kierkegaard's whole "thought project" involves the attempt to develop the nature of the "coming to understanding" that will take place if one does not have a preunderstanding of the content; namely, if the truth and the conditions for understanding it come in "the moment". The understanding of the incarnation as paradox was Kierkegaard's answer to the condition needed to satisfy the "thought project".

Bultmann's understanding of understanding (his hermeneutic) conflicts with his account of the kerygma of the biblical texts (his account of the incarnation) because he did not recognize the relation between method and results. Since for Bultmann the intended content of myth is self-understanding (or rather, this is one of the contents of myth), and since a hermeneutic is concerned with understanding understanding, i.e. self-understanding, the explication of a hermeneutic should be regarded as an attempt to make explicit one's preunderstanding of the content of the biblical texts. Bultmann did not see this special relation between the general hermeneutic and the biblical content. In other cases, the general hermeneutic provides the framework within which one
understands a given content. This framework establishes the need for a preunderstanding of the content, but it is not itself the preunderstanding. In the case of the biblical content, however, the general hermeneutic both provides the framework which establishes the need of a preunderstanding and at the same time gives a preunderstanding. Recognizing this connection, one could say that the content of the Bible is a hermeneutic. Or, in other words, a "biblical hermeneutic" is not just the method of approaching the biblical texts but also the content provided by the texts.

This special relation between hermeneutics and the biblical content raises unique difficulties, which Bultmann did not reflect on. If the content of the texts is a hermeneutic then one is faced with the paradox that one needs the content to obtain the content.\textsuperscript{108} Note the resemblance between this paradox and the hermeneutical circle. For example, in the case of the relation between whole and part, one needs a knowledge of the whole to understand the parts, but one can not understand the whole without a knowledge of the parts. But now the circle is extended to what I shall call a "meta-hermeneutical circle". One needs a philosophical, general hermeneutic to obtain the content of Scripture. But this content is a hermeneutic, which should on theological premises serve as the basis of the philosophical hermeneutic. Or, in other words, one needs a hermeneutic to obtain the content, but one needs the content to obtain the
If one takes Bultmann's platonic solution to the problem of hermeneutics, then the meta-hermeneutical circle is easily resolved. Bultmann argued that the preunderstanding one brings orients the way one approaches the text. In the process of interpretation the preunderstanding may be developed and even corrected, but, on Bultmann's premises, there will not be a radical discontinuity between the preunderstanding and the understanding. In a similar vein, one could solve the meta-hermeneutical circle by arguing that the general hermeneutic relates to the inner content in the same way the preunderstanding of historical possibility related to outer events. The biblical texts are then forced to yield an account of self-understanding that conforms to the conditions of the possibility of understanding that are established in the general hermeneutic.

If, on the other hand, one takes a Kierkegaardian approach to the understanding of understanding, seen in Bultmann's discussion of the incarnation, then the meta-hermeneutical circle provides a more significant obstacle to biblical interpretation. Central to Kierkegaard's thought project is the contention that one does not have a preunderstanding of the content; even further, that one's preunderstanding is a hindrance to the task of understanding. The content one is concerned with is developed as a radical challenge to all present modes of
understanding. This is why the content is grasped by the interpreter (i.e. the learner) as a radical paradox. To the closure of the learner's worldview the content is absurd. Thus not only the content but also the condition for understanding the content must be given by the teacher.

In our hermeneutical context, the teacher is the text. In sum, on Kierkegaard's premises (and on Bultmann's, when we focus on his account of the incarnation), one needs to obtain the hermeneutic from the text one seeks to understand. And only this hermeneutic makes the text accessible. But how could one obtain the hermeneutic from the text without the hermeneutic one seeks to obtain, since this is needed to make the content accessible? Here the meta-hermeneutical circle is better regarded as a meta-hermeneutical paradox. It is like Kafka's account of the Law: A doorkeeper stands in front of the text prohibiting the interpreter from entering, but the text is intended for the interpreter so that (s)he may gain access. The "problem of hermeneutics" that Bultmann attempted to answer by his general hermeneutic is now transformed into a "problem of metahermeneutics" that cannot be answered by a metagame that is abstracted from the special content of the text. Any answer to the metahermeneutical paradox will necessarily be a special hermeneutical answer.

Karl Barth, in response to Bultmann's hermeneutical deliberations, suggested an approach to the text akin to the
Kierkegaardian one sketched above:

"As I see it, one can and should read all theology in some sense backwards from it [i.e. from the central content of the New Testament]: down to anthropology, ethics, and then methodology."\(^{116}\)

Bultmann, recognizing the difficulties such an approach would lead to, explicitly denied the possibility of doing this. He says in response to Barth:

"It is misleading to equate the NT and the Word of God when discussing the methodological problem of NT hermeneutics. The Word of God is spoken in the human word and the NT stands before us as a literary record of history. Can it be interpreted otherwise than according to general hermeneutical rules? That it is God's Word cannot be made a presupposition from which to deduce hermeneutical rules of a different kind."\(^{117}\)

This quote echoes a similar statement made by Bultmann in *Jesus Christ and Mythology*:

"Should we perhaps say that we must interpret without any presupposition; that the text itself provides the conceptions of exegesis? This is sometimes asserted, but it is impossible."\(^{118}\)

Bultmann thought that the only way in practice for the text to give the principles of exegesis would be for one to begin with certain dogmatic assumptions about the text's content.\(^{119}\)

This was in fact the approach Barth took, developing the "analogy of faith" as an exegetical norm. For Bultmann this amounted to a return to the Catholic method of interpretation. What then of Luther's "literal sense" and the need to begin with Scripture? The irony is that Bultmann's philosophical hermeneutic begs the question of the text's content in just as radical a way as Barth's dogmatic assumptions.
Bultmann did not appreciate the relation between hermeneutics and the inner content of Scripture. For that reason he did not see the artificial nature of the distinction between "Vorurteil" (which he says Barth has in his dogmatic method of interpretation) and "Vorverständnis". Despite this, we find in his work a trajectory toward integrating his philosophical, hermeneutical reflections and his theological account of the inner content and the incarnation. These two strands of Bultmann correspond to the two strands that broke apart in the high Middle Ages; namely, the general, secular approach and the special, theological approach. Now they are simply given in a hermeneutical form: (1) the kierkegaardian understanding of understanding, which does justice to special revelation, and (2) the Platonic understanding of understanding, which assumes a general access that is rooted in a life-relation to the kerygmatic content. In the remainder of this chapter we shall focus on the way in which Bultmann subordinates the special, revelatory strand to the general, Platonic one. The result is a "modern" historical system, which continues to set forth the "scientific" hermeneutic of the nineteenth century as if it were a general one.
Existential Interpretation

Paul Ricoeur has astutely observed that Bultmann's interpretive strategy of "demythologizing" can have three meanings:\(^{120}\) (1) translation of primitive science into modern categories, (2) elimination of the objectifying moment, in order to recover its intention as one explanation of human self-understanding, (3) the process set into motion by the kerygma itself. The first two can be regarded as the two-fold presentation of the preunderstanding of myth. They are explicitly developed as (1) the historical method,\(^ {121}\) and (2) existential interpretation.\(^ {122}\) Thus in these cases "demythologization" refers to the method by which one comes to understand the content. But in the third case "demythologization" refers to the movement initiated by the content itself.\(^ {123}\)

The movement initiated by the content can be understood in two ways: First, it can be understood theologically, as an act of God. One recalls that for Bultmann, "myth" is an idol; it seeks to take the place of the "That" in unifying the "what" of history (outer event) and the "what" of self-understanding (inner event). When the true content un-veils itself, it thus shatters the idol set forth in its place; it de-mythologizes. The "That" un-conceals (aletheia) itself as that which is Other from all objectifying expression, including myth.
Second, the movement initiated by the content can be understood philosophically, as an *epistemological process of the human intellect*. In this context, one has a resolution analogous to Plato's answer to the Meno paradox: There is an unknowing knowledge, rooted in the interpreter's relation to the content. This implicit knowledge is clouded by the myth. When the interpreter reflects upon the life-relation, making explicit the implicit, then the myth is set aside; one de-mythologizes. The same content that moves one to seek knowledge, also makes apparent the inappropriateness of mythical knowledge.

Bultmann will speak of the movement initiated by the content as an "act of God", but he will also develop the process of interpretation in a way that is informed by a Platonic resolution of Meno's paradox. In one case, the content itself bursts forth, initiating the movement, but in the other case, the movement is initiated by the interpreter. In order to see how Bultmann resolves this paradoxical position, we shall elaborate upon the similarities and differences between his account and that of Plato. Plato will be taken as the archetype of the western metagame that is manifest in general hermeneutics.

Plato answered the "pugnacious proposition" (Meno's paradox) by arguing that one must know the truth (this is what enables one to seek truth and recognize it when one finds it) but one has *forgotten* that one knows it. The everyday
world of becoming has clouded one's vision and distracted the
gaze. Most people wrongly focus on the material world,
thinking that this is the locus of truth. But this world
provides only an impartial and insufficient expression of
truth, a strange combination of being and nothing.\textsuperscript{125}

Since one knows the truth but has forgotten it, seeking
(the question) is developed by Plato as \textit{recollection}; namely,
as the protological, retrospective movement in which one
retrieves that which has been clouded by the everyday,
material world.\textsuperscript{126} One must discover that the world one
believes is true is actually an impartial expression of truth.
When one sees this, one will then learn to divide the truth
from untruth, being from nothing. The being of the world of
becoming can then be taken as the point of departure for the
inward turn - the turn of recollection - in which one seeks to
retrieve the prototype of the being one found in the everyday
world.\textsuperscript{127} Once the prototype is retrieved, then one can let
go of its impartial expression. One is freed to contemplate
truth in its appropriate medium.

For Plato, the impartial expression is the \textit{outer content},
and the prototype (form) accessed by recollection is the \textit{inner
content}. The process of understanding is thus a movement in
which one turns away from the outer content (the world of
becoming) and toward the inner content (the intellectual realm
of being). There are important parallels between this and
Bultmann's approach.
Bultmann will contrast "believing" and "unbelieving" existence. He will speak of an "everyday world", which is like Plato's world of becoming in that it is only an incomplete expression of Truth. Bultmann's "life-relation" to the content is like Plato's "previous knowledge". In unbelieving existence, an individual loses sight of the life-relation and focuses on the everyday world and on his own worldly existence as if they were ultimate. In believing existence, by contrast, an individual re-recognizes that the everyday world and the believer's own existence are but impartial expressions of the whole. By turning inward, one comes to the primordial Ground of human being; namely, the life-relation to the Ultimate. Here the Whole is encountered as the Other that unveils itself in and to human existence. The kerygma is simply a call for the individual to stand out of (ex-istere) his past (i.e., his worldly existence) and transcend his impartial grasp of the Whole.

In both Plato and Bultmann, we find an outer, everyday world and an inner realm, which is to some extent articulated or expressed in the outer. For both, the human predicament generally involves a mode of existence in which the focus is inappropriately placed upon the outer as if it were the truth itself, rather than simply an articulation of the truth. The outer is not false, but it is incomplete. The process of understanding thus involves the following procedure:
one must become aware of the incompleteness and relativity of the outer, everyday world, seeing that it is an expression of Truth, but not the full content. (2) One must divide the truth from the untruth within the everyday world; or, to put it in Plato's terms, one must grasp the being, dividing it off from the strange combination of being and nothing that one finds in the world of becoming. The condition of this movement is the truth, the vision of which as been clouded by the everyday world. (3) The impartial grasp of truth distilled from the everyday world (the result of step 2) together with the subconscious knowing of truth (the life relation) which conditions both the seeking and finding of truth, become the twofold point of departure for the inward turn in which one moves from the everyday world unto the inner realm. Here the gaze is turned from the outer to the inner; from the impartial expression of truth to the truth itself. (4) The vision of the truth (the conscious life relation; the result of step 3), together with the previous articulation of the truth (the result of step 2), becomes the point of departure for a new, more appropriate expression of the truth.

Another important similarity between Bultmann and Plato can be found in their approach to myth. For both, one relates to myth in the same way as one relates to the everyday world. Myth is also an impartial and, to some extent, inappropriate expression of the truth. Thus the process of interpreting myth is the exact same as the fourfold process outlined above
in the case of the everyday world. Recognizing this parallel between myth and the everyday world is important because it helps one understand the import that the interpretation of myth will have. For Plato (and Bultmann), myth, like the everyday world, does not provide a content that cannot be obtained otherwise. This is because the grasp of truth distilled in the interpretation of myth is simply one aspect of the point of departure for the inward turn in which the truth is disclosed in its fullness. The value in a myth is thus the degree to which it promotes an act of interpretation that will be like the one needed to attain to truth in the everyday world. The interpretation of myth can be regarded as practice for the process of understanding (note Plato on the role of the arts). Myth is a textual reconstruction (mimesis) of the everyday world for the purpose of precipitating a movement that will enable one to penetrate the everyday world. It is thus a tool, like Plato's "sacred lie."

These parallels between Bultmann and Plato are significant enough to warrant designating Bultmann's approach (and much of western history) as "platonic." But it is important also to see the differences in their approaches. For Bultmann the life-relation that an individual has to the subject of faith is an unconscious but constitutive dimension of human existence. It guides and directs human existence, but it guides from behind, as it were. The life-relation can
be viewed as a fact of existence; even further, as the facticity, the "that", of existence, as opposed to its "what." It is present in and to human existence as the Other (Otto's "holy"). The everyday grasp, i.e. one's preunderstanding, is conscious. It is related to the unconscious Ground as "letter" is related to "spirit"; namely, as an expression. In revelation, the primordial Ground (the life-relation) unveils itself, making manifest to consciousness the directing force of all life. For Bultmann this act of disclosure, i.e. the unveiling (aletheia), is an act of God, wholly independent of all human merit and endeavor. Since it is contingent upon factors that transcend human agency, there is nothing one can do to bring it about. It simply happens. This view of "God's act" and of "grace" has significant implications for Bultmann's hermeneutical reflections, and it requires that we qualify the contention that Bultmann's understanding of understanding is Platonic.

To appreciate the similarities and differences between Plato and Bultmann, let us now go back through the four step process outlined above, developing this process in hermeneutical terms, and noting where Bultmann's position is unique. For Bultmann the four steps can be developed as follows:

(1) The developments in science (modern worldview) make clear the incompleteness and relativity of the Biblical accounts (myths). These developments problematize the direct
transparency of the text upon reality, thus opening up a gulf between interpreter and text. It is only in this context that the problem of hermeneutics becomes apparent in full force.

The science, which problematized the Biblical accounts, is similar to the civic and "scientific" culture that made Plato aware of the relativity of the Homeric myths.\textsuperscript{134}

(2) The historical method enables one to separate out the truth from the untruth in myth. The grasp of the outer events is made possible by the life-relation (preunderstanding) to the content (historicality). The reconstructed content that results from the project of historical criticism is only the point of departure for an inward turn; one sees the emptiness of the outer events, and this motivates a movement to the inner events.

Although Plato did not have a full sense of history, Bultmann's method of retrieval (historical-criticism) is structurally similar to Plato's method of setting forth the being of the world of becoming (his dialectic). In both cases, the one-sidedness of an expression is relativized and developed by reconstructing that which endures in the expression. This reconstruction is directed by the unknowing knowledge, which is the condition of understanding. Likewise, in both cases the result of this step is not the prototype (the ultimately true content), but only the point of departure for a turn to that content. Thus, in steps 1 and 2, we do not see a significant structural difference between Bultmann and
Plato.

(3) In Plato, the *inward turn* is a protological movement which can be regarded as an act of the human intellect. Although this turn of the gaze from the everyday world to the truth requires a great amount of education as well as natural ability, it is a turn that is appropriate — supremely appropriate — to the intellect. There is thus no radical break between the activity of dividing truth from untruth (step 2) and that of turning inward to gaze upon the prototype that is inappropriately realized in externality (step 3). In fact, the former (step 2) provides exercise and helps further the capacity to do the latter (step 3).\textsuperscript{135}

Here we see an important difference between Plato and Bultmann. For Bultmann, the truth comes forth to consciousness (is unveiled, aletheia) on its own initiative. In the address of preaching, God (the "That" of the kerygma) encounters the hearer, manifesting to consciousness the Ground of human existence. In this case, step 2 can do no more than make clear one's inability to attain the truth.\textsuperscript{136} The work of the historical method (the protological, retrospective movement of step 2), like the Law (following a certain Lutheran interpretation of Paul) thus has no positive role in coming to the truth.\textsuperscript{137} In Bultmann it may not even be appropriate to call step 3 an "inward turn". Although the sub-conscious life-relation that conditions all knowledge can be regarded as the inner, primordial Ground, the gaze upon
this truth is more a "coming outward" of that which was inward; the truth comes forth to consciousness. This truth is the End of history which breaks into the present. The movement is eschatological.

In sum, for Bultmann this third step is an act of God rather than a human act. There is thus a radical break between the human work of interpretation (step 2) and the event in which truth is unveiled (step 3). It is here that Bultmann attempts to account for the special, revelatory dimension that is excluded in a purely Platonic understanding of understanding. In Plato the intellect turns inward to the prototype; in Bultmann the inner prototype, which is the Telos, comes outward to the intellect, but only as the intellect's other, in the light of which that intellect is relativized and brought to self-transcendence.

(4) Existential interpretation involves the attempt to express in modern categories the possibility that is actualized in step 3; namely, the event of God's self-disclosure (revelation). It is important to see that this "interpretation" is not primarily concerned with the process in which one comes to know the truth, but rather with the process in which the truth known in revelation (God's act; step 3) is articulated. Although Bultmann at times closely associates understanding with the expression,138 his development of existential interpretation is more concerned with rhetoric than with hermeneutics in the traditional sense.
of the terms. The word that he probably uses more than any other to designate what is done in existential interpretation is "translation": one translates something that is known into a new idiom. Bultmann is not fully clear on the conditions of this. In some contexts he seems to suggest that it can be done independent of God's act (revelation) and thus depends only on the results of historical work (step 2). In other contexts, it seems to be independent of step 2 and wholly contingent upon step 3; simply an attempt to articulate the event that has taken place (it is "interpretation" in the sense that it is concerned with explicating the event for understanding). In still other contexts, it seems to depend on both step 2 and step 3.

When we sift through Bultmann's diverse accounts, we find that there are two distinct approaches to existential interpretation:

A. Existential Interpretation as Preaching.

Preaching - or, more specifically, the fact of address in preaching - performs an important role in the event of unveiling (step 3). In the address of the spoken word the hearer is confronted with the facticity of existence (which is simultaneously the fact of his or her own existence as a task) and called to decision and action. According to Bultmann, the content of the proclaimer's proclamation is simply "exist!" Beyond this, the content is largely irrelevant,
because the significant dimension of the spoken word is the fact of address; the "that" and not the "what" of preaching.144

This approach to existential interpretation is problematic, when it is regarded as an interpretation of the Biblical texts, because one does not really have anything left from the text. For Bultmann, the reason the biblical content should be translated is to avoid confusing the content - i.e. the "what" of the texts - with the true stumbling block, which is the "that" of address. Thus one gets rid of all in the biblical accounts that contradicts the modern worldview; i.e. one gets rid of anything that refers to supernatural forces as if they were active worldly causes. All that remains is the pure fact of an inbreaking force of life, which is then called the "act of God" and associated with the "that" of the spoken word. All words in preaching then proclaim the inbreaking. The "what" speaks about the "that" by saying that one can say nothing about it. In this way the revealer - or proclaimer - reveals revelation. But one remembers from our discussion of the incarnation that the "that" of the spoken word is the one thing that is lacking in the biblical texts. As written word the texts bring together the "what" of the historical Jesus and the "what" of the kerygma. Myth replaces the "that", which is the divinity of both Jesus and the kerygma.

How then can Bultmann speak of existential interpretation (preaching) as an interpretation of the Biblical texts? For
Bultmann, preaching must be regarded as an interpretation of the "that", with the implicit assumption that the signified content of the Biblical texts is likewise the "that". When preaching is expository (and for Bultmann it need not be directly tied to the New Testament in this way) the practical result of the existential interpretation is showing that the Biblical texts are an expression of the same content that one is confronted with in the moment of address and decision that takes place in the immediacy of the preaching itself. Bultmann can take this freedom with the biblical texts because he is not at all dependent upon them for a knowledge of the content. The signified is known independently of the signifier, and preaching consists in showing the signifier as a signifier of the independently known signified.

An important point to consider in evaluating Bultmann's account of preaching rests upon how the existential interpreter knows the independently known signified. It would seem that the preacher is empowered to preach by revelation itself (step 3). Only through God's act (the unveiling, which is truth) is an individual brought to the place where (s)he can bear witness to the possibility of that act. This would make revelation and belief the condition of existential interpretation, which, in turn, would imply that a general hermeneutic was not sufficient for ascertaining the inner content.
Bultmann did not accept this conclusion. Thus he made the knowledge of the independently known signified contingent upon the life-relation (which everyone has) rather than the concrete event of un-veiling (which only some have). "Existential interpretation" thus depends upon the general conditions of human existence, not the special content of revelation in Jesus Christ. As soon as he makes this connection between the "that" of preaching and the life-relation, Bultmann transforms the Kierkegaardian understanding into a Platonic one. Thus he argues:

"[I]f it is objected that we human beings cannot know who God is and hence also cannot know what God's act means prior to God's revelation, the proper reply is that we can very well know who God is in the question about God. Unless our existence were moved (consciously or unconsciously) by the question of God in the sense of Augustine's "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it rests in thee," we would not be able to recognize God as God in any revelation. There is an existential knowledge of God present and alive in human existence in the question about "happiness" or "salvation" or about the meaning of the world and of history, insofar as this is the question about the authenticity of our own existence."  

This quote, written largely as a response to Karl Barth, justifies the approach which biblical scholarship has taken for the past century. It establishes the need and the condition for developing a general hermeneutic. But it entails an account of revelation which makes the New Testament dispensable, and it ultimately rests on an understanding of understanding that is not rooted in the Christian kerygma.
B. Existential Interpretation as Human Self-Transcendence.

In the above account of existential interpretation the "what" of the proclamation (i.e. the said of the saying) was largely irrelevant. One simply ends up with the call "exist!", and this call can be derived philosophically by an exposition of the question which the human person is. Why then do we need the biblical texts, and why does Bultmann spend so much of his own time worrying about what is said?

In order to answer this it is important to connect his "existential interpretation" with his philosophy of history. Bultmann simultaneously worked with two different notions of historical becoming: (1) a vertical notion, rooted in the philosophy of Heidegger and Kierkegaard, that developed becoming as "coming into existence." This is the move from the "that" to the "what"; the actualization of the possible. It is well developed in Kierkegaard's "interlude," where the focus is not on development through the horizontal time-line of history, but rather on the development that takes place in the moment of act. (2) A horizontal notion, rooted in Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Schelling and developed in 19th century Culture Protestantism, which looks at "universal history" as a progress in which truth is increasingly realized.

Much writing on Bultmann has focused upon the first, vertical notion. The second, horizontal one was associated with liberal notions of progress and thus disassociated from
Bultmann's "neo-orthodoxy." A more careful reading of Bultmann's work, however, indicates a clear tendency to develop earlier, horizontal understandings of history. In fact, Bultmann's approach can be seen as a clear precursor to the "universal history" approaches developed in the writings of theologians like Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann.

To put it succinctly, for Bultmann creation is a process that can be seen in history. Interpretation is also a process. Both creation and interpretation involve progressive approximations to the truth. In each case, one freely appropriates a previous articulation (the past) and uses it in a new way to answer the questions/needs of the present. The question is the pre-understanding of the End, when truth is fully manifest. It can be regarded as the drive that moves history and interpretation onward, motivated by the unarticulatable awareness that previous expressions of the truth are incomplete.

The key question now regards how the processes of creation and interpretation should or could be related to each other. We have already seen that there is a parallel between myth and the everyday world; between interpretation (as expressing the truth) and creation (as reconstituting the truth in externality). But we have not yet developed how the two may work together. To develop this involves working out the implications of the integration of human agency (step 2) and divine agency (step 3). For Bultmann, this will entail
an integration of the Platonic and Kierkegaardian approaches to understanding.

In historical criticism one distills the outer event from the mythological expression, and the process of interpretation is the work of the human intellect. Then in revelation, an individual is empowered to transcend the past; to "stand out" (ex-istere) of one's self in so far as the self is complete, an object. But the past that one stands out of is simply the self's tradition; its given world. It is the outer event, which was obtained by historical criticism. God's un-veiling thus enables an individual to reappropriate the outer event (the results of historical-critical work) in a new way, so that it addresses the questions of the present. When an individual actively appropriates the possibility that is un-veiled in God's self-disclosure, (s)he engages in the second form of existential interpretation. The result of this creative appropriation is simply the answer to the present predicament of the person who interpreted. This answer is then the point of departure for a new critical reflection, which can then be transcended in another act of existential interpretation, and so the development continues. In this way the process of historical becoming is generated from the way in which critical reflection (human agency) works together with God's unveiling (divine agency) and existential interpretation (human agency). The resultant account of history is very similar to the nineteenth century view that
Bultmann initially attempted to criticize.

The broad strokes of Bultmann's philosophy of history can be seen in his discussion of the synoptic tradition. In the synoptic tradition we see a process of development in which, at each stage, the past is creatively appropriated to address the questions of the present. The past is given as "tradition." This is appropriated by a "redactor" that stands between the tradition and the problem of a given community. This "betweeness" (interest = being between) is the place of a new happening; one in which a new mode of existence is realized that better approximates the coming End. This process of becoming can be viewed as the continuation of God's creation. (Bultmann works this theme out in detail when he discusses the Jewish doctrine of creation and history.) The nature of this happening can be discerned by way of a discussion of the contrast between what Bultmann terms "believing" and "unbelieving" existence.

Although Bultmann does not elaborate on this, one can easily imagine what the synoptic tradition would look like if the redactors within the community were unbelievers. The unbeliever is a slave to the past, bound to previous expressions of truth and resting in worldly securities. In such a mode of being one is not free creatively to address the situations of the present. One's existence remains an answer to a past problem. If the New Testament redactors actualized their existence in such a way, concerned with
preserving the past rather than answering the present, then they would not have been engaged in interpreting but simply parroting previous articulations of the truth. (This would be how Bultmann would regard Gerhardson’s approach to the synoptic tradition. \(^{159}\))

Bultmann's approach to the synoptic tradition thus involves assumptions about how human existence was actualized by those involved in passing on (uberliefern) and redacting (auslegen) the tradition. \(^{160}\) This point is of central importance in appraising the possibility of ever attaining a single, authoritative account of the tradition. If the interpretation of the tradition rests on assumptions regarding the way in which human existence was actualized, then the interpretation will depend not just upon the general conditions that characterize all human interpreters, but also upon the specific mode of the interpreter's existence. E.g. if an interpreter is an "unbeliever;" i.e. if (s)he does not see the mode of believing existence as a true possibility, then (s)he will take a different approach to the synoptic tradition than Bultmann's, because Bultmann assumes a free interaction with the past that is characteristic of the believer, as Bultmann defines him or her.

This observation calls into question the project of historical criticism, which assumes one can apply a general hermeneutic to Biblical texts in a way that converges upon a single reading. Instead the observation points to an intimate
integration of theological, dogmatic concerns and the more "scientific" ones.\textsuperscript{161} It also shows that Bultmann's historical method is not separable from existential interpretation and both are intimately tied to his account of the kerygma.

For Bultmann, the message of Christianity (its kerygma) is simply the call for one to exist; i.e. to stand out of the past in the way outlined above. The condition of such an act is always God's act (step 3). But each individual can accept or reject the possibility that is opened up by that grace. To obey is to heed the call. It is to exist. And this, in turn, means: to interpret. \textit{Existential interpretation} is thus not a mere means to obtaining some content in the Bible. Bultmann's hermeneutic must be regarded as an attempt to express the believing mode of existence, which itself is an expression of Truth (the inner content). The Bible is likewise an expression of such an expression, because it seeks to thematize the creative interaction with the past that is expressed in modern terms as Bultmann's general hermeneutic.

In this context one can no longer sustain the sharp distinction between method and results that served as the point of departure for Bultmann's hermeneutical reflection. This recognition forces a radical reappraisal of Bultmann's whole project. Even further, it calls into question a fundamental axiom of modern Biblical interpretation; namely,
the axiom that states a biblical hermeneutic must be regarded as an instance of a general hermeneutic if one is to avoid presupposing the results of interpretation. Now it becomes clear that any presupposition regarding method is already a presupposition regarding results. It is equally clear, however, that we cannot have presuppositionless interpretation. Bultmann is undoubtedly correct when he notes that one must bring a question to a text, if one is to access the texts content. Here we see the metahermeneutical paradox which faces any present attempt to move the hermeneutical discussion forward.

Having thus deconstructed the generality of Bultmann's so-called "general" hermeneutic, we are in a position to reappraise the role of special hermeneutics. In this chapter we began with Bultmann's hermeneutical reflection and worked out some of the implications this hermeneutic had for doctrines of God, history and humanity. We saw how these implicit doctrines collided with Bultmann's account of the kerygma and special revelation. The general, philosophical strand and the special, theological strand came together in a philosophy of history that subordinated the kerygma to the western, Platonic metagame that assumed universal access to truth and continuity in the development of understanding. Further, this account did not allow for the Bible to play a significant role in mediating knowledge of truth.

Now, in the remainder of this dissertation, we shall take
an alternative approach. We shall instead begin with the doctrines of God, history and humanity that are found in the Christian kerygma and work out their implications for a uniquely Christian, special hermeneutic. Instead of beginning with a hermeneutic that is derived independently from theological concerns, we shall begin with the theological contention that revelation is mediated in and through the biblical texts and then move toward deriving a hermeneutic as a result. In this way we will do justice to the special revelatory function attributed to the Bible in the context of the Christian community.

NOTES


3. For a good example of this see David Friedrich Strauss, A New Life of Jesus (London: Williams and Norgate, 1856).


6. This line of interpretation is largely the one advocated by Neo-orthodox theologians themselves. It can be seen in Barth's own account: "For me personally a day in the beginning of August in that year [1914] has impressed itself as the dies ater. It is the day on which 93 German intellectuals published a profession of support for the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Included among the signers I was shocked to have to see the names of pretty much all my teachers-theologians whom I had until then loyally honored. Having been estranged from their ethos, I observed that I would also no longer be able to follow their ethics and dogmatics, their exegesis and historical interpretation. For me in any case the theology of the nineteenth century had no future any more," quoted in George Rupp, Culture Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 11. Note how the break with the nineteenth century is made central: First there is the alienation from the older ethos. Only then, second, is there a return to Luther and the Reformation.

7. This was the name of an important Neo-orthodox journal, which was founded by Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and other key figures in the movement.


9. Bultmann, Faith and Understanding, p. 34.

10. It is interesting to compare Bultmann's reflections on the law-like function of historical scholarship with the law-like function of Jesus' preaching. In a 1952 response to Barth's criticism, Bultmann states: "you are right that I have not thus far explicitly elucidated the significance of the historical Jesus for the kerygma. I do not see, of course, that I can understand the preaching of Jesus otherwise than as the preaching of the law, as Luther also did - with the radicalness, of course, that drives the hearer to cry for the grace of God" (Bernard Jaspert, ed. Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters 1922-1966. trans. Goeffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981], p. 97). If one were to combine the two sayings, one would come up with a meaning something like: even if the historical method could bring us to a knowledge of the historical Jesus (and it cannot), the knowledge we would obtain would serve the same function as the historical method; namely, it would show us our inability to obtain salvation by works (whether in the field of knowledge or act), thus manifesting our need for grace. In other words, the results one would obtain bring one no further than the method which is used to obtain the
results. Bultmann reconstitutes the theological implications of the results at the level of method. In this case we see that the "outer events" (the history available to the historical method - i.e. historisch) as well as the method that obtains them are "law". Later we will see that the "inner events" (the history not available to historical method - i.e. geschichtlich, giving the meaning rather than fact) as well as the method used to access them are "gospel".


15. When we see that Bultmann's recognition of the role of presuppositions is tied to a Kantian-type investigation into the a priori conditions of understanding, then it becomes clear that this recognition cannot be used to argue against the notion of a single, correct interpretation of the biblical texts. Interpretation of the Scripture does not depend on the particular factors which distinguish one interpreter from another. Intersubjective verification is then possible. Here Bultmann's approach should be strongly distinguished from reader-response criticism (at least in some forms) where no distinction is made between the general and particular conditioning factors. For a representative example of this see Mary Ann Tolbert, "A Response from a Literary Perspective", Semeia 53, pp. 191-202.

16. Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, pp. 15-28; Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, pp. 11-44.


23. One could say it gives the true understanding of the world but not of the human person. The true understanding would then by a worldview in which the true understanding of the world is combined with a true understanding of self. This presumably is the worldview which Bultmann advocates. But he wants to call the self-understanding of faith "scientific" after it is demythologized, and further wants to regard it as one mode of self-understanding among others within the scientific worldview. Then it could not be regarded as constitutive of the worldview. There is an ambiguity here in Bultmann's use of "Weltanschaung". In one case the emphasis is on worldview. Then the mode of self-understanding is not constitutive. But in the other case the emphasis is on worldview. Then it includes self-understanding.


27. For a good overview of the difference between understanding the world and self-understanding, see Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 58-69. According to Bultmann, the human person can understand self in two ways: from that which is "at hand", i.e. the world, or from that which is transcendent, i.e. God (Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, pp. 28-33). The first approach would involve understanding the human person as one understands the world or worldly phenomena. Then one grasps the explanans in terms of a known explanandum. The second approach involves grasping the explanans in terms of an unknown explanandum. This approach has important similarities to the mythological mode of understanding. But there is this important difference: the unknown is not represented as if it were a known, worldly phenomenon.

It is also helpful to note at this stage an important difference between the modern and ancient worldview that Bultmann does not sufficiently bring to light. In the
mythological worldview God and supernatural forces were more certain, i.e. real, than the world and worldly phenomena, which were often regarded as mere appearances (in Plato we have remnants of this). Thus one did not necessarily contradict the principle that understanding involves explaining the unknown in terms of the known. But somewhere in history there was a shift (I call it a "literary shift" for reasons that cannot be expounded upon here) and the worldly phenomena became certain and the supernatural uncertain. It is at this stage in history that one begins to have arguments for the existence of God. In the previous age God or the gods were the certainty and one needed an argument for the existence of the world. The shift in understanding thus does not involve a change in how one understands — in both cases one explains the unknown in terms of the known. Rather it involves a change in what is regarded as known.


29. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 148. It is important to distinguish between two meanings of science in Bultmann. On one hand, science is modeled on the natural sciences, and its mode of understanding is that delineated above; namely, understanding worldly phenomena in terms of the world. Here "[h]istorical method includes the presupposition that history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect" (ibid, p. 147). On the other hand, however, science is used in a very broad sense (the German "Wissenschaft"), and Bultmann applies it to existential philosophy and theology (ibid, pp. 45-67, 131-144). When he says that human self-understanding should be translated into scientific terms he does not mean the "science" which understands the self in terms of a known, worldly phenomenon. That would be "unbelieving existence" and it would run contrary to the translated content, which is to understand self in terms of the unknown, transcendent Force (Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, pp. 28-33). Here Bultmann equivocates on "science". There is also a further ambiguity in Bultmann's use of science since it is sometimes used of a worldview (the form of knowledge) and at other times used of a body of knowledge (the content). For more on this see note 31.

30. "With regard to historical interpretation there are two possibilities. First, your interest may be to give a picture of a past time, to reconstruct the past; second, your interest may be to learn from historical documents what you need for your present practical life. ... In the latter case your interpretation is not motivated by interest in a past epoch of history, but by your search for the truth" (Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 51).
31. It is important here to reflect on a second ambiguity in Bultmann's use of the word "science" (for the first ambiguity, see note 29). "Science" can refer to a way of understanding (Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology, pp. 131-133). Then it is constitutive of the worldview, and it can be distinguished in a relative way from the content of knowledge (ref. form/content distinction). But "science" can also refer to the body of knowledge one has of the world. Then it is the content. When Bultmann speaks of translating the inner content into the language of science he is using "science" to delineate the form of knowledge. But when "science" refers to the criterion by which concrete possibility is judged (this occurs in Bultmann's historical reconstruction), then the form/content distinction is no longer tenable (unless one uses it strictly for the distinction between the contingent and noncontingent in any event), and "science" must refer as well to the body of knowledge. For Bultmann, this body of knowledge will never contradict the inner content. Thus the church will not be in any conflict with science. Note that if Bultmann never used "science" to refer to the body of knowledge (the content) then he would have left open an interpretation of the New Testament accounts like that found in 19th century rationalism. E.g. the healings of Jesus occurred as reported but they were due to Jesus' knowledge of psychic healing techniques rather than supernatural forces. In principle such an explanation would still be "scientific" in form, i.e. it would explain the unknown in terms of worldly forces and thus be closed to supernatural forces, but it would involve the assumption that the past had a knowledge of science that the present does not have. This would have gone against the view of progress implicit in Bultmann's approach to the outer events. It would have enabled one to look for new possibilities by way of the historical method. To close this option off Bultmann will use the scientific body of knowledge and not just the scientific mode of understanding as the criterion, assuming that an account that cannot be explained in terms of the modern body of knowledge is not due to scientific knowledge we do not have, but instead due to the past, mythical mode of explanation.

32. Here Bultmann follows Kant, dividing myth into its sensuous (outer) and supersensuous (inner) dimensions. See Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, Theodore Greene and Hoyt Hudson, trs. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960).


38. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 35.

39. Note the contrast between this and what Bultmann says in Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, p. 25, where the canon of criticism is supposed to be the content and not the modern worldview.

40. Bultmann explicitly states that the being of nature "can be perceived in objectifying sight." This is in contrast to "the being of man". Rudolf Bultmann, Glauben und Verstehen, IV (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1952-67), pp. 128f. For more on this see Robert Roberts, Rudolf Bultmann's Theology: A Critical Interpretation (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 25f.

41. In Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, pp. 15, 27 the "true content" is identified with the Heilsgeschichten. There the emphasis is on the event (ibid, p. 26). On the ambiguity of the inner content (it is human possibility, on one hand, and the holy happening (truth), on the other) see the section in this dissertation on the incarnation, pp. 96-106. See also Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, p. 33 on "Geist" as the possibility of new life. Here we can see exemplified the two senses of inner content.

42. Although there is no plenitude that escapes expression in principle, this does not mean that at any particular stage of research the expression is fully appropriate to the content. Research is always in a state of relative completion. As one progresses the expression converges upon the complete articulation, but it is never fully there. To this extent one could speak of "plenitude" as that which is still lacking in any particular articulation. But this is very different than the plenitude of the inner content which necessarily transcends any particular articulation.

43. Both are objectifying forms of language (Jaspert, pp. 88, 95).

44. Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, p. 25: "Wenn nun in den letzten 20 Jahren zurückgerufen wurde von der Kritik zur einfachen Übernahme des neutestamentlichen Kerygmas, so
gerieten Theologie und Kirche in Gefahr, unkritisch die Mythologie des Neuen Testaments zu repristinieren und damit das Kerygma für die Gegenwart unverständlich zu machen. Gerhard Ebeling gives good commentary on this when he states: "Kerygma which is unintelligible conceals the true scandal and causes offence in the wrong way. As such it fails to call men to decision. When we seek to understand the kerygma as kerygma, we are concerned simply with this one question: how it is to be proclaimed as the scandal of truth, which passes judgment on reality and becomes intelligible, not because its kerygmatic character is resolved, but rather because this has been given full emphasis." Theology and Proclamation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 49. This does not mean, however, that one makes the content intelligible in the way one promotes understanding of the outer content. One rather makes clear its unclarity. Here "becoming incomprehensible to oneself is in fact a mode of existential self-understanding" (Jaspert, p. 90).

45. This will be further qualified in the two sections on existential interpretation at the end of this chapter, pp. 136-145.

46. It is significant to note here that Bultmann's programmatic essay on demythologizing ends with a quote from John 1:14: "Die Jenseitigkeit Gottes ist nicht zum Diesseits gemacht wie im Mythos, sondern die Paradoxie der Gegenwart des jenseitigen Gottes in der Geschichte wird behauptet:'Das Wort ward Fleisch'" (Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, p. 53). Here we see the prominence Bultmann gave to the incarnation in his hermeneutical deliberations. For his discussion of John's view, see Rudolf Bultmann, Theologie des Neuen Testaments (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1968), pp. 385-422. For Bultmann's appropriation of Kierkegaard on time and eternity, see Jaspert, p. 94.

47. Note Paul Althaus' criticism of this interpretation of Paul on "knowing Christ after the flesh", Fact and Faith in the Kerygma of Today (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 35.

At this point it is helpful to make a note on the relation between the gospels and Paul. In the above all-to-brief overview of Bultmann's position I simply bring together the discussion of the incarnation in John and Paul's comments on the historical Jesus. Bultmann could do this because of his solution to an important problem at the turn of the 19th century. In the early years of the 20th century theology was hotly debating the relation between the teachings of Jesus and the theology of Paul. Paul was regarded by many as a second founder of Christianity, replacing Jesus' simple teaching about God's kingdom with his complicated, Greek view of redemption. Bultmann saw that Paul was simply developing
themes that were already present in the tradition before him. The real problem is thus not Paul as the watershed but rather the transition from Jesus' proclamation to the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ. In Bultmann's words, the proclaimer becomes the proclaimed. As Nils Alstrup Dahl summarizes it, "The real problem is not 'Jesus and Paul', but rather, 'Who was Jesus and what has the Church made of him?'" ("The Problem of the Historical Jesus", in Kerygma and History, p. 141). With Bultmann the problem of Jesus and Paul was aufgehoben into the problem of the relation between Jesus and Christ. Several years later in the work of Eberhard Jüngel (Jesus und Paulus) the proclamation of Jesus (esp. the parables) will be directly related to Paul's proclamation of Christ in an attempt to develop the continuity. The next step in scholarship would be to bring together the two discussions, showing how the parameters of Jesus vs. Christ relate to those of Jesus vs. Paul, and how the discontinuity in each case relates to Jüngel's development of the continuity.


49. For Bultmann's discussion of these two ways of approaching the resurrection, see Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, pp. 47-52.


51. The Kerygma is the "Botschaft vom entscheidenden Handeln Gottes in Christus" (Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, p. 26).

52. The problem outlined here is well captured in the question "ob das christliche Seinsverständnis vollziehbar ist ohne Christus." Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, p. 33.

53. Althaus, p. 45. Note all of chapter 4 (pp. 43-46), appropriately titled "Bultmann's inconsistency". For more on this, see Hermann Diem, Dogmatik, p. 83. The use of "inconsistency" as a catch phrase originated in Diem's discussion.

54. Contra Macquarrie, this is the context for understanding Emil Brunner's argument that Bultmann depersonalizes the gospel. Cf. Macquarrie, p. 30.


56. The quote is from Ernst Käsemann, reproduced in Althaus, p. 34.
57. Macquarrie, p. 31. This is in contrast to R. Roberts who claims that "Bultmann provides us with the added advantage that he is a fairly clear writer" (Roberts, p. 10).


60. Note the way Bultmann deals with the message about Jesus in Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, pp. 44f.

61. Here we see Bultmann's concern with the facticity of the person's relation to Jesus (Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, p. 35).

62. Funk, pp. 24-26. Note esp. the quote of Bultmann's on p. 24: "The concept "Word of God" in the New Testament is likewise now understood [in the light of Old Testament usage] when it designates the quantity for which it is predominantly used: the Christian kerygma. It is a word which has power, which is effective. To be spoken is essential for this word; it is preached and must be heard."


64. Ebeling puts it well when he says "The That of the saving fact corresponds to the 'that' of its proclamation" (Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation*, p. 43).


70. E.g. Ernst Kinder, " Historical Criticism and Demythologizing", *Kerygma and History*, pp.55-85.


72. For more on this see pgs. 136-139.

74. On the two modes of understanding, see Moltmann, pp. 58-69; Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, pp. 28-33.

75. Thus Roberts can say "the fundamental idea shaping Bultmann's thought is a dichotomy of a peculiar sort, in which the reality of the human self is opposed to that of the 'world'" (Roberts, p. 22).


77. In this context one could say that understanding, as an expression of the object understood, is speaking. Then language, as an expression of the expression (i.e. of understanding), is writing. Language (both speaking and writing) is the writing of understanding, which can be regarded as speaking; i.e. its very nature is to be the sign of a sign.


81. Bultmann's work on reconstruction will be seen in the synoptic tradition and his attempt at reduplication will be seen in his sermons and theological work (including his reflection on hermeneutics). Kierkegaard's reflection on "reduplication" was influential on Bultmann. For a brief overview of Kierkegaard's view on truth and reduplication, see Louis Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), pp. 65-67.

82. This can be seen in Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, pp. 74-75, where Bultmann discusses the way language is learned by simultaneous initiation into the language and the experience of that which the language signifies.

83. Note here an important difference between Bultmann and Schleiermacher: Bultmann was concerned primarily with the event that was intended in the expression; i.e. with the exteriority that was interiorized in understanding and then exteriorized in language. He makes this clear when he distinguishes between "psychological sympathy with" and "under the guidance of the matter itself" (Jaspert, p. 4).
Schleiermacher, on the other hand, was concerned primarily with the human interiority in which, as he saw it, the Identity of Nature and Reason was expressed. But it should be noted that it was very difficult for Bultmann to maintain his orientation toward the event rather than the author's intention because of his radical skepticism regarded the knowledge of the historical Jesus. The "event" shifted from the content about which the author claimed to be speaking (e.g. Jesus) to the community and experiences of the author that was speaking. Is this result so far from Schleiermacher's?

In a fuller discussion we would need to also give the many variants on this. For example, instead of beginning with an experienced event, one could begin with a saying that gives a unique type of experience; e.g. a saying of Jesus that gives an experience of God's kingdom. Then one could look at the way this saying is explained. Or one could look at a saying that originated in a conflict situation (work on the Sabbath) and show how it gets incorporated into a miracle story. Here one gives an explanation in mythological terms of the utterance given in the conflict situation. If, on the other hand, one looks at the person of Jesus as the event, then one could view a miracle story about Jesus as an explanation of who he was. Bultmann will take an approach something like this when he argues that the role of the miracle story was to express the conviction that Jesus was the messiah. "Die wunderbaren Taten sind nicht Erwiese des Charakters Jesu, sondern seiner messianischen Kraft bzw. seiner göttlichen Macht" (Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition, p. 234). Note also how the miracle added to a saying (e.g. about the Sabbath for a healing) can change the significance of the saying by making it likewise an expression of Jesus messianic identity rather than about God's kingdom. This brings one to the second expansion: the event (or saying) and its explanation are then interpreted. One could also see this extension in broad terms by focusing on the way the "Christ myth" is given as the form (or rule) for the material from the life of Jesus. First the myth can be taken as "explanation" by providing the origin of Jesus: He is the heavenly Son of God that comes to earth. But then the explanation together with that which it explains is interpreted. The import of this interpretation can be given in Bultmann's "translation" in Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, pp. 43-53. Note also the role that the Sitz im Leben of the community plays in the development of the tradition. A question is implicit or explicit in a community (e.g. apologetic in the case of the apophthegmata), and this motivates the explanation and interpretation. The answers, in turn, motivate a new question in two ways: (1) simply as answer, it poses new problems that need to be answered, (2) a new context with new questions require one to give a new answer, and the tradition is appropriated as the material.
Notice, for example, Bultmann's discussion of the way imagination expands on the tradition: "According to Mark 15:37, Jesus died uttering a loud cry. What did he say? What were his last words? Luke 23:46 puts in the mouth of Jesus the quotation from one of the Psalms ... while the Gospel of John later represents Jesus as saying, 'It is finished' (19:30)" (Rudolf Bultmann, "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem", The Journal of Religion 6 (July, 1926), p. 346). Here we see how a question is posed not by one's circumstance (the Sitz im Leben) but by the tradition itself (this is like (1) above). Examples of (2) can be found at the end of each main section of Bultmann's Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition.

85."In the primitive community at Jerusalem the spirit of Jesus continued to be active, and his ethical teaching was progressively elaborated and expressed in utterances which were then transmitted as the sayings of Jesus himself. thus tradition shaped and handed down, in the form of words of Jesus, conceptions actually arising from the faith of the community, and portrayed these as regulations for church discipline and for missionary activity. ... We must recognize that a literary work or a fragment of tradition is a primary source for the historical situation out of which it arose, and is only a secondary source for the historical details concerning which it gives information" (Bultmann, "New Approach", p. 341; also note pp. 359-60).

86.For a summary of Bultmann's account of the "evolutionary" development, see Werner Kelber, The Oral and the Written Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 2-8. Note that at each stage of the development the interpreter does not necessarily know what the intended meaning was. (S)he simply takes the tradition and interprets it in the light of present concerns. "Frequently, however, it is no longer possible for us to determine just what the original meaning of a statement was. Even the Evangelists did not know, but sought each in his own way to apply a traditional word of the Master in some practical fashion to the circumstances which he faced" (Bultmann, "New Approach", pp. 353-4).

87.The analogy of unwrapping an onion has been drawn from an unpublished lecture by Werner Kelber. In that lecture Kelber refers to Bultmann's commentary on John and not to his work on the synoptic tradition. But the analogy applies to both, because, as I will argue later in this essay, Bultmann's historical critical work instantiates a philosophy of history that involves a particular notion about the way a tradition develops. This thesis could be well exhibited by a comparison of Bultmann's work on John and the synoptic tradition. Such a comparison would show that in both cases one finds the type of interpretation of interpretation that I give in general
terms here.


90. Generally one can say that Bultmann's account of the evolutionary development of the synoptic tradition is a particularized expression of the development of history in general, as seen in his philosophy of history. One begins with pure uniqueness (facticity) and the tradition develops by explanation and interpretation of the facticity. At each stage one interprets and explains the stage before. The tradition builds up from there. As the tradition grows it becomes more difficult to free oneself in a transcending movement that enables one to reappropriate the tradition (i.e. past) in a new way to address the present circumstances. The tradition gets an increasing inertia that makes it more difficult for an individual to play a significant role, and communal forces increasingly take precedence. In the later stage transcendence (the actualization of believing existence) takes place in the organizing of the past into a coherent whole. This is the function performed by Bultmann's conservative redactor. It is like the role of science. And it is not coincidence that the principle of organization will be the Christ myth, that that myth is an expression of the spirit of Hellenism, and that that spirit is closely associated with science. Bultmann's discussion of the synoptic tradition plays out the movement from myth (the Palestinian) to science (the Hellenistic) that will be so important in existential interpretation. But it plays it out at the pre-myth level, so the result is the myth that will serve as the point of departure for the next move. Like the form of the apophthegmata is applied to an utterance in the process of ancient interpretation, so Bultmann will apply the form of the synoptic tradition to the biblical texts in the modern interpretation. The result is "Neues Testament und Mythologie".


93. For Bultmann this is the first stage of the "synoptic problem" (Bultmann, "New Approach", p. 342). It is also first historically, as that which Bultmann inherited from the 18th and 19th century (Bultmann, "New Approach", p. 337). For Bultmann's discussion of the relation see Bultmann, "New Approach", pp. 343-347. Note also E.P. Sanders critique of this approach in The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 276-279. There is what may be viewed as a hermeneutical circle between
one's understanding of the relation between the synoptic gospels and one's understanding of the development of tradition. Bultmann took the two-document hypothesis for granted and then backdated the relation between Mark and Matthew/Luke. Even if one does accept the two-document hypothesis this does not imply that one can backdate the development seen among the synoptics. This point was clearly made by Kelber when he suggested that there may have been a radical disjunct in the move from oral to written tradition. One need not arrive at Kelber's radical conclusions to accept his criticism of Bultmann (which is likewise a criticism of all other work on the synoptics). All one has to accept in Kelber's argument is the possibility that the laws of transmission are not necessarily constant. Sander's makes this point as well.

94. See note 90. Note also that this does not mean that Bultmann explicitly formed his view of history first and then applied it. Actually his work on the synoptics was published before his more philosophical reflection. One could say that his view of history came to expression in his work on the synoptic problem.

95. Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology, pp. 73-76; 82-90; 146-51.


98. This strange combination of ignorance and knowledge (called by Plato "belief") will be related by Plato to the strange combination of being and nothing that one finds in the world. See Republic, pp. 474c-483e; 509d-511e; 533c-534a. For more on this see the discussion of Plato and Bultmann on pgs. 126-136.


100. Note the discussion of recollection in Plato's Meno 81c-86d, esp. 86a where Socrates speaks of "true opinions which can be aroused by questioning and turned into knowledge.


102. Moltmann, pp. 60-64.
103. "We might suspect that the paradox which the concept of pre-understanding is to resolve is something more urgently in need of resolution for him [Bultmann], than the general problem about how we can understand something unfamiliar to us" (Roberts, p. 204).

104. Jaspert, p. 83.

105. Jaspert, p. 29.


108. Note the relation between this paradox and Kierkegaard's "thought project" (Kierkegaard, pp. 13-54).

109. Paul Ricoeur has recognized the unique relation that pertains between philosophical and biblical hermeneutics. The latter, although it is to be regarded as an instance of the former, also is in some sense foundational for it. In Ricoeur's language, a philosophical hermeneutic is to be regarded as an organon of a biblical hermeneutic. But Ricoeur did not develop the relation as an extension of the hermeneutical circle, nor did he seem to recognize that the biblical content is itself to be explicated as a hermeneutic. See Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics: Ideology, Utopia, and Faith", in The Center for Hermeneutical Studies, vol. 17.

110. Another platonic-like approach (more akin to Schleiermacher's appropriation of Plato) would directly parallel the meta-hermeneutical circle with the hermeneutical one. Then the preunderstanding given in the general hermeneutic would guide an initial reading. The results of the interpretation would provide a new (or modified) hermeneutic that can then be taken to the text for a second reading. This process can be continued until one converges upon an identity between the hermeneutic used to interpret the text and the hermeneutic derived from the text.

111. Kierkegaard, pp. 49-54.


113. Kierkegaard, p. 52: "The paradox has made the understanding the absurd." Note the implications of this for the closure of science that Bultmann associated so closely with the modern worldview (Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 15).


117. Jaspert, p. 100.

118. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 49.


120. Ricoeur, pp. 390-394.


124. Meno 86b.

125. Note Socrates on the "dreamlike" nature of the opinion aroused by questioning (Meno 85c) and compare this to dreaming as the "confusion between a resemblance and the reality which it resembles" (Republic 476c). Note also the implications of the cave analogy (Republic 514-) and the discussion of that which lies between what is and what is not; i.e. becoming (Republic 477a).

126. Meno 82b-85b.

127. Republic 509d-518d.


132. Thus one finds a parallel in Bultmann between "Entmythologisierung" and "Entweltlichung" (Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, pp. 26, 31; Bultmann, *Theologie*, p. 428).
133. One can view myth as an imitation of an imitation. It is thus like writing. It is an exteriorization of the process of recollection (the fourfold process of interpretation). See Phaedrus 273d-276b on this. Note how writing is compared to a work of art, which in Republic 597e is called an imitation of an imitation. "[T]he artist's representation stands at third remove from reality." Bultmann identifies this parallelism between myth and world, where world is viewed analogous to a work, with the Greek spirit (Primitive Christianity, pp. 16-17).


135. See Republic 504d on the importance of "educational training" and 518d on the way the "turning around of the mind itself might be made a subject of professional skill".

136. Note Bultmann's discussion of the difference between philosophy and Christianity in Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, pp. 39, 43.

137. Bultmann, Faith and Understanding, pp. 30-34.

138. E.g. "Translation does not answer the question: "What shall I say to my children?" but consists in the question: "How shall I say it to myself?" or rather: "How shall I hear it myself?"
I can understand the NT as a word that encounters me only if I take it to be spoken to my existence, and in understanding it thus I already translate it. ... For an understanding of the question of existence that is put to me in the text is identical with translation" (Jaspert, p. 90).

139. E.g. this word is used over ten times in Bultmann's fifteen page response to Barth to positively denote the task of hermeneutics (Jaspert, pp. 87-102).

140. Here the preunderstanding is developed; i.e. interpretation is development of understanding (Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 50).

141. Here the "that" goes forth as "what". See note 90.

142. Here the two above movements - both seen in Bultmann's work - are brought together.

143. Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology, pp. 102, 106, 108. Note how Scripture must be heard as Word of God in the kerygma (ibid, p. 114). Hearing is essential, as shown by Funk, p.
24. See also Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 71.

144."Not in what the word of proclamation says or in what it points to, but in the fact that it 'happens', addressing, accosting, appealing, lies the event of revelation" (Moltmann, p. 66).

145.Jaspert, p. 82.

146.In Bultmann's terms one could say that when one connects the content of preaching with the life relation, then "eine prinzipielle Möglichkeit" is held for a "faktische Möglichkeit" (Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, p. 39). This factical possibility (which is actually pure facticity - the "that" of the person's own existence) becomes the basis for recognizing and judging the appropriateness of that which purports to be the Word of God. Here the "Eigentumlichkeit" Bultmann identifies with sin is seen in the power of recognition (Bultmann, *Kerygma und Mythos*, p. 41).

One could make this same point by noting that the thesis on the life-relation implies an "unobservable, hidden correlation of God and the 'self' of man" (Moltmann, p. 60), or an "identification of the hiddenness of God and man's self" (ibid., p. 62). This brings one back to the "Catholic" anthropology that Luther and Kierkegaard challenged. For more on this see Steven Ozement, *Homo Spiritualis* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969). Also see ch. 3 of this dissertation.


149.Kierkegaard, pp. 72-88.

150.Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, p. 39. Note how Bultmann's argument against "pantheism of history" does not deny horizontal development, but only that such development could serve as a basis for faith.

151.Bultmann contributes to this view himself by his emphasis on the vertical movement and by his criticism of 19th century liberalism. However, just as he did not see that his discussion of the life relation depended on an understanding of understanding that contradicted his understanding of the incarnation, so he did not see the implication of his hermeneutic for horizontal history.

152.Note, for example, Bultmann's discussion of creation and history in Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, pp. 15-22; esp. p. 21 on the historical process.
153. This is seen in the parallel between "Entmythologisierung" and "Entweltlichung" (Bultmann, Kerygma und Mythos, p. 31). Both are tied to "eschatologisch existieren".

154. In the body of this section I only give the general strokes. This could be worked out in detail by developing Bultmann's equation of "science" and the "Christ myth" with the "Greek spirit". Then the hellenization of the tradition can be shown to have the same problems as the demythologization of the Bible. The results of the synoptic tradition (i.e. the synoptics) relate to the present as the palestinian tradition related to the synoptic redactors.


156. Kierkegaard, p. 170. Note Kierkegaard's contrast between disinterested knowledge (objective, scientific thinking) and interest as the place of faith. Bultmann directly appropriates these ideas in New Testament and Mythology, p. 47.


159. For a summation of Gerhardson's position see Kelber, pp. 8-14.

160. This is seen in E.P. Sanders, p. 273, where it is recognized that one is concerned with the way an individual actualizes his self-understanding and not just general laws. Note also the hermeneutical circle in Sanders, p. 272.

CHAPTER 3

BABEL AND BEYOND:
A THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING FOR SPECIAL HERMENEUTICS

In the last chapter on Bultmann we saw that a so-called "general" hermeneutic was not general at all, because it entailed assumptions regarding God, human nature, history and language which cannot be abstracted from a particular theological system. There is no single, general hermeneutic which provides the metarules of interpretation, but only many special hermeneutics, each reflecting specific philosophical and theological viewpoints. Thus our deconstruction of the quest for a unitary metagame leads to a pluralism of competing games.

In this chapter we shall begin by asking whether deconstruction and pluralism should be taken as the final word on the quest for the meaning of the Bible, or whether there is a particular special hermeneutic - a Biblical hermeneutic - that can be set forth as a strategy of interpretation that uniquely does justice to the kerygmatic content of the Scripture. Operating within the theological circle, we shall see that deconstruction (as actualized by Jacques Derrida) has its own implicit theological assumptions, which do not fully
accord with the Christian vision of reality. Deconstruction
aligns with "law", not "gospel", and it does not do justice to
the sinfulness of human nature. Instead of starting with a
given hermeneutical or deconstructive strategy, we shall begin
with a Christian doctrine of God, humanity and language (as
seen in the writings of Martin Luther), and then attempt to
develop a hermeneutical strategy that does justice to this
theology. By developing the hermeneutical implications of
Luther's "salvation by grace", a positive meaning will be
given to the doctrine of sola scriptura.

I. "BABEL" AS A METAPHOR OF THE POST-MODERN PREDICAMENT

Babel has become a metaphor of our age. It designates
humanity's divine pretensions; its quest for universality and
totality. And it also recounts God's judgment upon such
pretensions, and the way in which confusion enters and people
are dispersed from one another. But after the dispersion,
in the context of the resulting "pluralism", new questions are
raised; questions about the lost unity, about the "new quest"
for understanding, and about the nature of the resulting human
condition. These questions point us to an answer that goes
beyond Babel. Or rather, they confront us with a question
about the limits of the human quest: Do we simply end with
Babel, and the continuing dispersion, or is there a new unity,
one which arises through God's act, rather than the human
quest for totality?

In our present philosophical context, Babel can be seen in/as the breakdown of general hermeneutics. Through a general understanding of understanding, "modern" philosophers sought to assure progress in the interpretation of all expressions of human life, especially language. Buttressed by nineteenth century confidence in "science" and "objectivity", it was thought that humanity could obtain the unitary, total meaning of text and context. This is the attempt to build Babel. But then the immediacy of knowledge breaks down, and an increasingly complex relation between interpreter and text is generated until, finally, the diverse dimensions of the text's meaning fly apart, and the hope for "clarity and certainty" is thwarted. This dispersion is especially apparent in the way historical meaning is separated from the existential import of a text. Instead of clarity, the texts become increasingly opaque, and confusion replaces understanding. The history which began with the Enlightenment turn to general hermeneutics ends with a post-modern antihermeneutic, in which Babel, understood as "confusion", is glorified.¹ In place of the quest for meaning, one advocates dispersion and difference.

The breakdown of general hermeneutics creates a special problem for Protestant churches. These churches have contended that their proclamation of God's reconstructive act is based upon the Biblical texts. It was thought that the
"clear and certain" meaning of Scripture could be obtained by a general hermeneutic. Thus, when general hermeneutics breaks down, one is left with a host of competing meanings, each set forth as the "revelatory content".⁴ Until the Church can effectively address this pluralism of contradictory meanings, it is left without authority; namely, without the authority of the Word of God, which constitutes the Being of the Church. If the post-modern antihermeneutic is the final word; if the Protestant sola scriptura depends upon the modern confidence in general hermeneutics, which has now been lost, then the Protestant churches can no longer proclaim an authoritative Word to the post-modern world. The question about whether or not we can move beyond Babel thus has a special theological relevance, which should not be underestimated.

"Babel" as Law

The post-modern advocacy of Babel is perhaps best seen in Jacques Derrida's "Des Tours de Babel". For Derrida, Babel "does not constitute just one figure among others." It gives "the myth of the origin of myth, the metaphor of metaphor."⁵ As such, it figures the impossibility of totalizing, and the inadequation of all words to their meaning. But most significantly, Derrida develops the theological implications of Babel: God deconstructs.⁶ This is the role of the work and word of God: to proclaim confusion where people seek to make
a name for themselves. The task of theology, aligning itself with the work of God, is developed in a largely negative way. It is not to promote (the drive to) a unitary meaning, but rather to thwart all pretensions to such meaning. Thus the via negativa is made central.

The work of God - God deconstructing - is closely aligned with what Derrida has, in another article, referred to as "the force of the Law." Derrida speaks of the inadequation between an "undeconstructible justice" (the mystical a priori) and a constructible (and therefore deconstructible) law (droit). Deconstruction finds "its privileged site" between justice and law. It takes place when the infinite is brought to bear upon all finite expression. The infinite, undeconstructible justice is the ethical expression for God. "God deconstructing" means "Justice is brought to bear upon the law (droit)."

The relation between Babel - God deconstructing - and the Law becomes clear when we look at the role of language in law. Every law must be expressed in an idiom; further, law is the expression of justice in an idiom. Injustice occurs when the force of the law is brought to bear upon someone who does not understand the language in which the law is expressed.

"This injustice supposes that the other, the victim of language's injustice, is capable of a language in general, is man as a speaking animal, in the sense that we, men, give to this word language." The idiomatic language is put forth as "language in general", the particular for the universal. In this extension of the
particular, sight is lost of the incommensurability between Justice and law, and between law and its expression. Man makes a name for himself by excluding woman from the genealogy. Woman is held accountable to an idiom that is not her own. This is Nimrod's babelian pretension: the tower, and the universal genealogy, are built at the expense of the women and slaves who are sacrificed for the completion of the project.\textsuperscript{13} It is at this juncture that God enters in and proclaims the Name, which breaks the identity between law and justice, between language and law.\textsuperscript{14} Here the incommensurability becomes manifest, and a way is made for the oppressed and excluded to escape and make their own name heard.

Is this the extent of God's Work? Is it simply to break up the oppression and then leave the future projects of construction to those who are now liberated? If this is the case, then Babel is, as Derrida says, the "myth of the origin of myth, and the figure of figures". It also becomes an affirmation of human responsibility.\textsuperscript{15} God enters to break up oppression, but the job of construction is left to humanity. Further, deconstruction is not purely the prerogative of God. At least Derrida makes claim to it. Thus humanity also has a role in breaking the oppression. This, again, is an affirmation of human responsibility.

It is not difficult to find parallels between the above account of deconstruction and a Neo-Marxist ideology
"Ideology" is understood as a justification of the status quo and of its hierarchy of power and privilege. It is assumed that when the ideology is deconstructed, then the oppressed are free to determine themselves. Liberty follows from the break up of the old, oppressive structures - this is the assumption.

But is this true? Once the law (droit) has been deconstructed, does humanity have the capacity for responsible self-determination, or does it instead become a slave to the lawlessness of eros? Could it be that there is a gulf between humanity and Justice (the mystical a priori), such that human ethical action is impossible? Could it be that we ought but cannot?

Derrida has not sufficiently considered this negative possibility. His account of law and the theological position that follows from it involves a certain kind of optimism. Although his work is pessimistic with regard to traditional projects of epistemology and metaphysics, it is optimistic with regard to the possibility of a liberating critique. It is thus not surprising to find Derrida attempting to retain the critical dimension he found in Pascal's work while rejecting the notions of original sin and the corruption of nature that one also finds in Pascal:

"[I]f we set aside the functional mechanism of the Pascalian critique, if we dissociate it from Christian pessimism, which is not impossible, then we can find in it, as in Montaigne, the basis for a modern critical philosophy, indeed for a critique of juridical ideology, a desedimentation of the
...superstructures of law that both hide and reflect the economic and political interests of the dominant forces of society. This would be both possible and always useful.  

If one could not separate the "Christian pessimism" associated with original sin from the critical mechanism that Derrida wants to keep, then deconstruction as justice would not be possible, apart from a revelatory event in which and by which the deconstructor is brought in relation to Justice, as the mystical a priori. But then deconstruction would become a penultimate stage to the revelatory event, or it would follow as the work that the revelatory event made possible. If deconstruction is "Babel", the revelatory event is "beyond Babel". In the revelatory event one would have the "lost unity" which both (1) enters at Babel to scatter the Babelian unity, and (2) enters to provide the way toward a nontotalizing unity beyond the confusion and war that Babel brought about.

Derrida's optimism regarding human responsibility and the possibility of justice assumes that "Derrida deconstructing" is continuous with "God deconstructing"; that Derrida has a relation to the undeconstructible Justice as well as the (de)constructible law (droit). Further, it is assumed that the relation is such that the incommensurability between the two can be manifest in the praxis of deconstruction, so that law is made responsible to the demands of Justice and not to the lust of lawlessness. In this context Babel is the "metaphor of metaphors", and the deconstructing event makes
the way for a human responsibility that is possible. The pluralism that results from the dispersion is then something to celebrate. The many who now each can make their own name heard, each of them can make their own case, and learn to speak the language of the other. From this a new, more just society of humankind will arise.

This sounds nice. But we must ask: is this a realistic possibility? Does humanity have the needed relation to Justice (the mystical a priori), or is there an absence of Justice that makes responsible human action impossible? To answer this we must consider the relation between God's invisibility (and thus absence) and that "Christian pessimism" called sin.

Experiencing God's Invisibility and/as Judgment

Derrida has launched a radical critique against what he refers to as "logocentrism"; namely, against the doctrine of the Word's identity and presence. This doctrine is associated with Christianity. Instead, he advocates différance (a differing difference) and absence, an advocacy which can be directly connected with his discussion of Babel and the force of the law. However, a simple dichotomy between presence and absence cannot be sustained when we consider the Christian literature. For example, Eberhard Jüngel quotes John 1:18, "No one has seen God", and
argues that this verse, pointing to God's invisibility, provides the point of departure for all theological reflection. The key question concerns not whether but how this invisibility will be experienced.²⁴

For Derrida God's invisibility is an indeterminateness. Humanity can only experience that God cannot be experienced.²⁵ All one can know is that God cannot be known; that there is a mystical a priori to which all are responsible, but which cannot fully be present to understanding. The human person is thus left alone with herself in the world.²⁶ Since there is no knowledge apart from self and world, the self must constitute itself by its works. There is a "primacy of praxis".²⁷ God's invisibility and absence becomes positively an affirmation of human freedom and responsibility. Because God is absent, humanity can and must constitute itself. God's justice and judgment is then the invisible, absent standard by which the self-constituting works of humanity will be judged.²⁸ This standard is brought to bear upon the law in/as deconstruction.

For a Christian theologian; for example, for Martin Luther, God's invisibility is experienced differently.²⁹ It is experienced in a twofold way: First, God's absence is experienced as an expression of human lack and need; even further, as a manifestation of lostness, unfreedom, and sin. God's absence marks a separation between God's intent for humanity, which entailed fellowship between the two, and the
present condition of humanity. The works of fallen humanity are then an expression of rebellion and pride. Humanity constitutes itself in relation to itself independent from God. Over all such works there stands the judgment of God. In this context humanity can only despair of its own ability (thus the "Christian pessimism" that Derrida identifies in Pascal).

But this negative experience of God's invisibility gives way to a second, positive experience; namely, the experience of the displacement from the indeterminateness to the determinate hiddenness of God.\textsuperscript{30} In place of condemnation, one experiences God's Justice as the activity by which God makes just the sinner.

In order better to understand the nature of this positive experience of God's invisibility, it is important to first grasp the difference between human and divine judgment. The human judgment of reason is related to what is, illuminating the world as it already is.\textsuperscript{31} Epistemologically, human judgment follows being, re-presenting that which already is. But God's Judgment is of a completely different character. It relates to what is not, calling forth its object in the act of judgment.\textsuperscript{32} Epistemologically, God's Judgment precedes being, as its ontological ground.

One finds a similar distinction between God's love (agape) and human love (eros).\textsuperscript{33} Erotic love is infinite negativity, seeking out that object which will determine its negation. Agape, on the other hand, is infinite plenitude,
going forth in its determination of an object's negativity. God's love thus is directed toward the nothingness of ugliness, need, want and evil. It calls forth good where there is none.\textsuperscript{34}

Faith is a human judgment that participates sacramentally in the Judgment of God. Unlike human reason, it relates to the invisible rather than the visible.\textsuperscript{35} And it relates to the unseen in a twofold way. First, it relates to the Judgment of the unseen God. This is the positive experience of God's invisibility (gospel) that follows upon the negative experience of that same invisibility (law).\textsuperscript{36} Now God is experienced as present in hiddenness, doing for humanity that which it could not do of itself. Humanity is no longer alone in the world. God is present and working, although this presence is unseen: an \textit{absent presence}.\textsuperscript{37} God's invisible work is concretely experienced as the displacement from the negative experience of God's invisibility (condemnation) to the positive experience (grace). Or rather, the positive experience is the experience of displacement whereby one shifts away from the indeterminateness of God.

Second, faith relates to the nothingness (invisibility) of the object upon which God's Judgment is directed. It works itself out in love. But here the work follows the relation to that Judgment of God whereby the self is constituted. This is in contrast to the experience of God's invisibility as indeterminateness, where the work constitutes the self.
In sum: There are two ways in which God's invisibility can be experienced. In one case it is interpreted as implying human freedom and responsibility. Ethics is given primacy, and the self constitutes itself through works. In the other case, God's invisibility is interpreted as implying human unfreedom and sin. God then does for humanity that which it could not do for itself. Through faith God's Word is appropriated as the work by which humanity is constituted. Human works then follow from God's Work, not as the mode of human self-constitution, but rather as the expression of that constitution. Here ethics, as reflection on human works, follows theology, as reflection on the work of God. Luther obviously takes the latter approach to God's invisibility, Derrida takes the former approach.

"Beyond Babel" as Gospel

The Christian doctrine of sin challenges the possibility of justice and of human responsibility. Humanity is severed from the "mystical a priori" of Justice, which is the infinite plenitude of agape, and this means that human praxis will be an expression of lawlessness, even if it goes under the name of "deconstruction as justice". Further, to assume that "Derrida deconstructing" is continuous with "God deconstructing" involves a repeat of the Babelian pretension. The "infinite" to which human praxis relates is not the
Justice to which the law is responsible, but the negativity of
eros against which the law stands. Humanity is in need of a
Word from God, which not only breaks up false pretensions, but
also makes the way for a human work which is just. The
central affirmation of Christianity is that God's Word has
made and does make the way for just act through and in the
person of Jesus Christ. This person is the Name of God, which
was proclaimed at Babel and dispersed the sinful drive toward
totality. But the dispersion of Babel was not the final word,
the "metaphor of metaphors". God's deconstruction is
penultimate, and finds its purpose in the reconstruction of
human life that takes place in the Word of Jesus Christ.
Further, Christianity claims that this Word is mediated in the
biblical texts. Or, in other words, through the Scripture
humanity has access to the Word that brings us beyond Babel.
This hermeneutical horizon is definitive for Christianity, and
it enables us to address the crisis which the disintegration
of general hermeneutics raised for the Church.

The paradox that confronts the interpreter of Scripture
in the post-modern world is structurally similar to Luther's
characterization of the paradox of "works righteousness".\textsuperscript{39}
In order to obtain absolution, Luther sought to do righteous
works. But he perceived that all his works were unrighteous,
even those he attempted to do to obtain absolution, because
they arose out of a heart which was divorced from God. He
thus was faced with a paradox: in order to obtain
righteousness, he had to do good works, but in order to do works which were truly good, he had to be righteous. Thus he concluded that the sinner could not be justified by works. God must do for the human person that which (s)he cannot do by her or himself.

This paradox also has a hermeneutical form: In order to move "beyond Babel", one needs the content that is mediated by the Biblical texts. But in order to arrive at the Biblical content, one needs a hermeneutic that can address the confusion of tongues, and bring one from the text's opacity and polyvalence to its theological meaning. One thus needs to be beyond Babel in order to access the content that enables one to move beyond Babel. A general hermeneutic cannot provide the needed link; in fact, it is an expression of the human hubris that one must transcend.

The answer to the hermeneutical paradox is the same as that found in the case of the ethical one: God does for humanity that which it cannot do for itself. Concretely, this means that it is through the content, which the text mediates, that one comes to understand the text. This content is none other than the infinite plenitude which addresses the negativity of the moment and calls forth a fullness where there was only emptiness and need. This special hermeneutic is the Word of God, which actualizes the displacement from the indeterminate experience of God's invisibility to the hidden presence, whereby one is empowered to act justly, and to know
rightly. Only from this perspective, from the perspective of faith, can one sacramentally participate in the divine deconstruction and the reconstruction of life that follows. A biblical hermeneutic must thus be developed as the doctrine of the Work and Word of God. To explicate this hermeneutic involves thematizing a text's content in terms of the way that living content mediates itself to the reader through the text. This explication will be the Church's response to general hermeneutics and to deconstruction.

II. MARTIN LUTHER'S "EVANGELICAL" HERMENEUTIC

Luther did not perceive the parallel between the dilemma of works righteousness and the metahermeneutical circle. Faced with the two extremes of (1) a Roman Catholic hermeneutic in which dogmatic prejudgment fixed the meaning, and (2) a radical, "spiritual" hermeneutic which led to capriciousness in interpretation and undermined the possibility of resolving disputes over meaning, Luther opted for (3) humanistic methods, which he believed could determine the "clear and distinct" meaning while avoiding dogmatic prejudgment. **Sola scriptura** thus came to be associated with a general hermeneutic.\(^4\) The "problem of hermeneutics" was solved in one way, and the problem of salvation was solved in another, and the two solutions conflicted with one another.\(^4\)

Luther's general hermeneutic assumed that one could begin
with a "plain sense" which could be univocally and lexically determined, and then one moved from that "clear and distinct" meaning to an inner, theological sense. But Luther also has an implicit evangelical hermeneutic which recognizes that an interpreter begins with opacity and polyvalence, and then, by the grace of God, moves to a clarity that cannot be specified in secular terms. There are thus two competing hermeneutical principles operative in his thought, and these are aligned with the two strands (the general and special) that broke apart in the high Middle Ages.

In the remainder of this chapter, we shall attempt to make explicit the implicit evangelical hermeneutic, and show where it collides with Luther's general hermeneutic. First, we shall provide an account of Luther's understanding of God, humanity and language. This account will be taken from Eberhard Jüngel's The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology. Jüngel develops the themes in a way that makes them directly relevant to present theological and philosophical debates. This serves as a good point of departure for our next step, which will involve the reconstruction of Luther's sola scriptura so that it accords with sola gratia and sola fide, and so that it at the same time addresses the metahermeneutical circle. This reconstruction will simply extend the account of God, humanity and language to its hermeneutical implications. The resultant, special hermeneutic will provide the
epistemological form of the process of justification that answered Luther's paradox of works righteousness.

An Overview of Luther's Theology

Eberhard Jüngel's *The Freedom of the Christian* provides an interpretation of Luther's text by that same name. In the next three sections we shall overview the anthropology, christology, and the account of language, which Jüngel draws from Luther's text. Then we shall summarize our results and identify problems in Jüngel's analysis.

A. Christian Anthropology

The Scripture, as the authentic expression of God's Judgment, speaks of the human person in what seems to be contradictory terms.\(^4\) It declares that the Christian is simultaneously free lord of all and servant of all. This contradictory affirmation confronts the theologian with the task of making proper distinctions; of interpreting in a way that is appropriate to the content.

In order to resolve the dialectic, Luther distinguishes between the *inner* and *outer* person.\(^5\) Several modern philosophers have challenged this distinction, arguing that it removes from a person all responsibility for their actions.\(^6\) Further, it leads to a justification of social unfreedom,
dividing the inner freedom off from the outer unfreedom. In the words of Marcuse:

"freedom was assigned to the 'inner' sphere of the person, to the 'inner man', and at the same time the 'outer person' was subjected to the system of worldly powers ... actual unfreedom and inequality were justified as a consequence of 'inner' freedom and equality."\(^{48}\)

The positive thesis of those who criticize Luther's distinction, attempting to eliminate his hierarchy of inner over outer, is the same that we saw earlier in our discussion of the experience of God's invisibility as indeterminacy: praxis is primary.\(^{49}\) Through works an individual's freedom is constituted as actual. Here freedom is a function of outer conditions in the world (exteriority), not inner conditions that are somehow independent from the world (interiority).

According to Jüngel, an authentic Christian anthropology will develop human existence in terms of the event that encounters it, namely the event of God's Word. Luther provides such an authentic anthropology.\(^{50}\) The human person is thus not defined in terms of herself, nor in terms of some special class and its specific difference. Instead humanity is developed as the creature between God and the world.\(^{51}\) God's Word constitutes the human person as the becoming in which the self-relation of the sinner is broken and the inner person is extended outward to its other.

The distinction between inner and outer need not imply the Platonic understanding of understanding, which we recounted in the previous chapter on Bultmann. The key issue
in determining whether or not an understanding of understanding is "Platonic" does not concern whether or not there is a distinction between inner and outer, but rather whether a person has a life-relation to the content, which is constitutive of human existence.\textsuperscript{52}

For Luther, the inner person is the person proper, and the outer person is the work.\textsuperscript{53} In unbelief the inner person chooses an existence which is the double of the outer person.

In unbelief person follows work, as the self-justification of one's deeds. This is the reverse of the self-relation expressed in the freedom of the Christian. There God rules over person, and person rules over work.\textsuperscript{54} As God's creative Word brings forth a person worthy of God's love, so the person creatively brings forth a work that glorifies God. Here the good work follows freely from the good person, who has been made good by God.\textsuperscript{55} It is thus incorrect to say that Luther removes from a person responsibility for works and that he justifies unfreedom in the world. To the contrary, he sees a free work in the world as possible only when person is freed from work by the Word of God.

The event of God's Word, which makes righteous the ungodly, reverses the reversal of unbelief. Unbelief involves a reduplication, whereby the person (inner person) is made the double of the work (outer person). Here an identity is established, effectively eliminating the viability of the distinction between inner and outer. This is how Luther would
regard the (post)modern philosophical attempt to eliminate this distinction: it is an expression of human sin. God's Word breaks the identity, and establishes a difference between inner and outer. It then reverses the hierarchy whereby the person was made the double of the work and the difference overcome. The breaking of the identity is the condition of the hierarchical reversal and visa versa. Once it is accomplished, then work can follow from person as a creative expression of the person who is an expression of God's Work.

We can now see how the Christian is simultaneously free and servant. When God's Word calls forth the inner person out of the outer person, she is freed from world and self. The self transcends itself in freedom. It is no longer bound to its deed in self-justification. But in this self-transcendence, the self is free for the other, for God and the world. As such it is in love a servant to all. By means of the inner/outer distinction, the seeming contradiction in Scripture is resolved.

B. The Ontical Ground of Luther's Anthropology

For Luther, the reversal of reversal that takes place in justification is itself grounded in an exchange between God and humanity. This exchange takes place in the person of Jesus. Jesus, as the concrete Word of God, is the event of displacement whereby God's life is given as a gift to
humanity. Freedom is a divine predicate which is bestowed upon humankind in the incarnation and cross.\textsuperscript{58}

The unity of God and humanity in the person of Jesus provides the "ontical basis for the possibility of the happy exchange between the divine righteousness or freedom and human sin or servitude."\textsuperscript{59} In the work of Jesus this birthright (the unity of God and man) is shared with Christians so that they can be priests and kings. In this way the classical christological categories of person and work (office) are made directly relevant to theological anthropology. The relation between person and work in Jesus is reduplicated in the person-work of the Christian.

C. Metaphorical Displacement - Luther's Account of Language

Martin Luther's "Reformation breakthrough" concerns the transforming power of God's Word: By the Word of God the sinner is made godly. God's creative gaze (God's Judgment) is directed upon the nothing of the unfree individual, and that individual is brought to freedom. This event of transformation is illustrated by baptism: The "old Adam" is put under the waters from which a "new Adam" emerges. There is a displacement from old to new "I". According to Jüngel, Luther develops this same dynamic in linguistic terms. In Christ the old words of our language gain a new meaning. Old and new meaning relate in the same way that old and new "I" do
in baptism.\(^6\)

This extension of meaning - the divine metaphoricity - is illustrated by a discussion of the meaning of "sin". In interpreting Paul's statement that "God made the one who knew no sin to be sin for us", Luther states that "Christ ... is made sin for us metaphorically". To understand what Paul means when he says that Christ became sin, we must first begin with the old meaning of sin, its "plain sense". This word is then stretched, translated metaphorically to apply to Christ. It then obtains a new meaning that is related to the old one but yet different from it.\(^7\)

Jüngel now makes an extremely insightful observation in his interpretation of Luther: For Luther an ontological grounding is given to the metaphorical transfer. The displacement from the plain sense of sin to its metaphorical sense is rooted in the event whereby our sins are actually transferred to Christ.

"The grammatical metaphor is, so to speak, reduplicated in ontological fashion. Luther uses the figure of the metaphor metaphorically - not, of course to allow an inauthentic way of speaking to become even more inauthentic, but to show that through its ontological reduplication the Christological soteriological metaphor is an authentic way of speaking, and of such a kind that a transfer of existence already occurred [and] is given decisive expression in the word-transfer which corresponds to it" (my emphasis).\(^8\)

One could say that the metaphorical transfer relates to the ontological transfer as the plain sense of sin relates to its new metaphorical sense. By means of this metaphorical use of
metaphoricity, the ontological transfer that takes place in the Word of God (the event of atonement) is authentically expressed.

In God as the Mystery of the World Jüngel develops the problem of the speakability of God as the central problem of theology.\textsuperscript{63} If God's Word cannot be authentically expressed in human words, then the Bible and preaching could be nothing more than a reference to the absence of God (the via negativa), saying what God is not, but not what God is. Then God's invisibility could only be apprehended as indeterminateness, and one returns to a priority of human praxis. Luther's account of the metaphorical use of metaphoricity thus answers a central need in theology. It points to the speakability of the displacement that takes place in God's creative Judgment. This speakability is the condition of the hidden presence of God, and thus of the experience of God's invisibility that is captured in the motto "salvation by grace".

D. Summary

Jüngel's The Freedom of a Christian identifies six important displacements in Luther's theology:

1. Linguistic

A. Grammatical - There is a displacement from the plain sense to a new meaning in metaphor.
B. Metaphorical use of metaphoricity – There is a displacement from the grammatical displacement of metaphor to the ontological displacement that takes place in the person of Jesus.

2. Anthropological
   A. Justification – There is a displacement from the old person (the redoubled identity) to the new person
   B. Work of faith – There is a displacement from the new person to the needy other.

3. Christological
   A. Person of Jesus – There is a displacement from God to humanity that takes place in the kenosis of the incarnation.
   B. Work of Jesus – There is a displacement from the God-man (the person of Jesus) to the concrete individual in need. This displacement takes place in God's address.

These diverse movements work together. Through the grammatical displacement, the person who is in need of salvation gains access to the ontological displacement (the work of Jesus) which, in turn, actualizes justification. The Christological displacements (the Word of God) are thus mediated to humanity in and through language (the linguistic displacements).
According to Jüngel's account, the interpreter gains access to the Word of God through the grammatical displacement. There is a "plain sense" that is lexically determinable. This is then stretched in the grammatical metaphor. The whole grammatical metaphor relates to the ontological displacement (the Word of God) in the same way that the plain sense relates to the new meaning in the grammatical displacement itself. "Divine metaphoricity" links the grammatical (sensus litteralis) and the ontological (sensus propheticus) in a way that reduplicates the displacement that takes place in the grammatical metaphor.

This approach uses a concept of metaphor in a double sense, and it provides a profound account of the relation between the inner and outer senses of Scripture. But it does have some serious difficulties, which we have already elaborated upon. The metaphorical displacements begin with the "plain sense" of a word, and it is assumed that this sense is determinable in a general way - i.e. that a general hermeneutic can provide the meaning. The sensus litteralis can be discerned on the basis of secular learning alone, independent of one's faith or lack of it. Faith only makes a difference when it comes to the spiritual meaning, the sensus propheticus.

The problem with this approach is well phrased by Erasmus, who puts forth the following questions:

(1) If the literal sense of Scripture is as clear as Luther
asserts, how is it that so many people for so long have not been able to understand?\textsuperscript{64}

(2) How is one to decide among the competing interpretations of Scripture and judge for himself which interpretation is the right one? What criteria does one use?\textsuperscript{65}

According to Erasmus, the debate between Luther and the Catholic Church was not over Scripture - both love and revere it - but about the sense of Scripture.\textsuperscript{66} Luther's contention that the \textit{sensus litteralis} is "clear and distinct", and determinable by secular methods alone contradicts the fact that there is considerable dispute about the meaning of the text - a dispute that Luther is himself involved in.\textsuperscript{67} Thus Erasmus contends that Scripture is not always clear.\textsuperscript{68} In the case of the freedom of the will (the topic Erasmus addresses in his diatribe against Luther), the text does not have a grammatically determinable "plain sense" with which one can begin.\textsuperscript{69}

Luther responds to Erasmus by arguing that Scripture is clear and certain not just in some things but in all things. Although there are some \textit{places} where there may be an obscurity due to "our ignorance of certain terms and grammatical particulars" (p. 26), there are no \textit{things} that are obscure, since the same thing that is said obscurely in one place is said clearly in other places.\textsuperscript{70}

According to Luther, people do not understand the grammatically determinable text because they are \textit{blinded by}
Satan and are unfree. The fact that people do not see, even though the text is so clear, simply shows that there is no free will; people are bound.

"[T]hey ... manifest how great that dominion and power of Satan is over the sons of men, when they can neither hear nor comprehend the all-clear words of God, but are as one cheated by a juggler, who is made to think that the sun is a cold cinder, or to believe that a stone is gold." 7

The bondage of the will thus has hermeneutical implications: Because of one's unfreedom, one cannot understand those texts that are clear and unambiguous.

This answer obviously creates considerable difficulty for Luther's account of the way in which the Biblical text mediates the Word of God to the one who is in need of salvation. According to Luther (as summarized by Jüngel above), the sinner is initiated by the "plain sense" into the ontological displacement which actualizes the "happy exchange" that takes place in justification. But the sinner is also the one who is bound, who does not have the ability to see the "clear and certain" plain sense, because he is cheated by Satan. Thus we have the paradox, which is the hermeneutical form of the dilemma of works righteousness: One needs to be free, in order to understand the "plain sense" of the text, but one must understand the "plain sense" in order to become free.
Internal and External Clarity

In order to address this paradox in a way that does justice to Luther's *sola fide*, it will be helpful to briefly review Luther's account of the internal and external clarity of the text, and then relate this discussion to the inner and outer person, as set forth in Luther's anthropology. We shall find that Jüngel's account of the relation between language, anthropology and Christology was structurally sound, only the direction of the displacement was incorrect. Instead of beginning with a "plain sense", and then ascending to the Word of God, the process must begin with the Word of God, which descends to the grammatical displacement. The "plain sense" will not be a generally determinable meaning, but rather the particular meaning of a particular individual to whom the Word of God comes.

Luther responds to Erasmus' question about how one can know which interpretation is correct, by distinguishing between two different senses of clarity:72 (1) The *internal clarity* of Scripture concerns an individual's spiritual understanding, and this depends upon the Spirit of God. (2) The *external clarity* of Scripture, however, depends on the teaching and preaching ministry of the Church, and it can be manifest to all people. Although Luther does not directly reflect on this, one can discern from the context that the external clarity concerns the grammatical meaning and it
should thus be identified with that which Luther in other places refers to as the sensus litteralis. Likewise the internal clarity should be identified with the sensus propheticus. The relation between the two forms of clarity is thus proportional to the relation between the two senses of Scripture. As with Bultmann, there are two contents (outer and inner) and two methods (a general and a special one).

The question we need to ask is: how does one come to have the internal, salvific clarity - that clarity which is in faith? This clarity is quickened by the Holy Spirit; it is the Work of God. As Jüngel notes, freedom is a divine predicate, which is conveyed in and through Jesus Christ. The inner clarity is thus directly connected with the freedom which is given as a gift by God. But God has chosen to mediate this salvific work through the human words of preaching and Scripture. The question thus concerns the way in which human words, which constitute the external, grammatical meaning can mediate God's Word, which constitutes the internal, spiritual meaning.

Before we develop the way in which the incarnation makes the divine glory (God's Word, which gives freedom) accessible in flesh (human words), it will be helpful to further reflect upon the nature of the "sinner" to whom the incarnate word comes. Anthropologically, the bound individual is the redoubled self; the one whose inner man is the double of the outer man. This person is trapped in the circle of self.
Person follows work, as its justification (self-justification). In order to come to freedom, the self-relation must be broken, and the person must perceive the insufficiency of self. Then, in the next step, the person must be called out of her work by the Word of God, which gives life. This self-transcendence is the freedom, which Luther associates with inner clarity. It depends not upon a general relation to God, but on the special revelation of grace.

One of the characteristics of the bound individual is blindness - (s)he cannot perceive the "clear and certain" external sense of Scripture. Further, there is a double blindness; one is blind and one is blind to one's blindness. This means that one thinks one understands. There is thus a clarity that is regarded as an external clarity, although it is actually an expression of misunderstanding. In this context the movement toward clarity and freedom will involve two steps: First, one will be brought to an awareness of one's blindness (the conviction of sin), and second, one will be brought to clarity (grace). For the one who is aware of blindness, the Scripture will be grasped as opaque and unclear. The one who grasps the Scripture as unclear is thus between double blindness and true clarity.

In order to show how language mediates the freedom to the redoubled self, we must now further develop the parallel between language and human nature that we saw previously in Jüngel's account. This will enable us to show the link
between the redoubled self and double blindness. Then we can account for the way in which language overcomes double blindness and mediates the life of God.

There is a double sense of language, just as there is a double nature to humanity. In the redoubled self, the inner self is made the double of the outer self; person follows work. In double blindness, the inner sense of language is made the double of the outer sense. As we saw in our earlier discussion of Derrida, the two senses of language can be accounted for in terms of the general and particular. In every particular expression (parole) a general potentiality (langue) is actualized. Injustice arises (in Derrida's evaluation) when the particular expression is set forth as if it were the universal; when the articulation of justice called "law" (the external sense) was set forth as if it were justice (the inner sense). In the same way, the blindness of an individual arises when a person defines the meaning of a word in terms of a particular use of the word. That person can not transcend the narrow meaning given to a term, in order to be guided by its broader potential. The general is made the double of the particular use. This redoubled, univocal meaning, however, is only the individual person's meaning. It is not a universal, lexical meaning, but rather an idiomatic meaning.

The person who seeks to read a text begins with language as (s)he understands it. The redoubled meaning, defined in
terms of the persons own use of language, thus serves as the point of departure for her or his attempt at understanding.\textsuperscript{78} That which is perceived to be the "plain sense" is an idiomatic sense that is only plain to that individual reader; it is not a universal, lexical sense. The redoubled meaning is an inappropriate one; it keeps the person trapped within her own world, alienated from others with their different meanings. In order to bring that person to the inner sense of language, the redoubled meaning must be broken. Its univocality must be shattered, and the particular must be divided off from the universal. Only then can a person be brought outward to a new, liberating meaning.

A gap is opened between the universal and particular senses by using a word in a way that is contrary to the redoubled meaning but in accord with the new, universal import. The absurdity of the new use, as perceived from the perspective of the person who is trapped within the idiomatic use, confronts that person with the task of finding a new meaning for that which was previously clear and certain.\textsuperscript{79} Thus the person is brought from the presumed clarity of double blindness to the opacity of single blindness. Then the person is called out of the old, univocal, redoubled world into a new linguistic domain. There a second clarity is obtained. The call and challenge is provided by the metaphor, which links up the old with the new.

We can now return to Jüngel's account of metaphor, but
with one very significant difference. For Jüngel (and Luther) the plain sense, as the point of departure for the metaphorical displacement, was univocal and lexically determinable. But we have seen that such a meaning cannot be the point of departure for one who is still in bondage. Before such a person can be brought from the external to the internal sense, (s)he needs to be brought from her or his redoubled meaning to the external sense. Instead of starting with a plain, lexical sense, our account of metaphor thus starts with a redoubled, idiomatic meaning. The metaphor then brings a person out of the purely idiomatic sense into a broader, community building sense.

Since each person or group has a different idiom and thus a different point of departure, the metaphor will function differently in different contexts. This means that the Scriptural texts themselves will function differently in different contexts, although they will bring all toward the same telos. The singular meaning of the texts is thus delineated eschatologically, rather than in terms of some lexically determined point of departure. Under penultimate conditions, however, there are many legitimate meanings, each on the way toward the eschatological meaning.

Since the "sinner" is bound within the circle of redoubled meaning, (s)he is unable to come of herself into the metaphorical displacement, which leads to a new meaning. The displacement must thus come downward, before the person can
step out of the old world. Here we see another important difference between our account, and the account provided by Jüngel (and Luther). In their account, one begins "from below", with the plain sense, and then rises from it to the inner, spiritual sense. The hermeneutic thus involves an ascent from the grammatical to the spiritual. In our account, however, the spiritual meaning descends to the reader.

The model for the linguistic descent is found in the incarnation: the Word becomes flesh. The sarx is the exteriority of the doxa. The internal-external relation is thus seen in the Word-flesh. But this descent continues: flesh becomes text. Now the internal-external relation is seen in flesh-text. (In this second case, "flesh" is interior, while it was exterior in the first case.) Then, by the Spirit, the external meaning is again extended from text to the redoubled meaning of the interpreter. This "event" takes place when the interpreter reads in faith. The Spirit actualizes the ontic displacement (the person-work of Christ) in the metaphorical transfer that takes place in the interpretive process. There is thus a direct parallel between incarnation, which links God and humanity, and metaphor, which links (a) inner and outer sense of language, and (b) the inner and outer self (person and work). In order to provide an account of Scripture (Luther's sola scriptura) that does justice to revelation and grace (Luther's sola gratia), a
biblical hermeneutic must thus be developed out of the doctrine of the incarnation, since this doctrine connects christology, anthroplogy and language in an authentically Christian way. The six displacements identified by Jüngel are rightly related to one another in the "becoming flesh" of God's Word.

In light of this discussion, the words of the New Testament can be regarded as the link between the plain sense of the people at the time the texts were written - their redoubled meanings - and the exteriority of God's Word, which is the flesh of Jesus. Or, in other words, the body of Christ is the exteriority of God's Word. This Word is then extended outward to others in the words about the word. In the New Testament we have such words. Jesus is the determinateness to which the writers of the New Testament sought to bring their reader.

The content of the New Testament is thus the displacement from the redoubled meaning of the intended reader to the person of Jesus, as the exteriority of God's Word. A hermeneutic which provides access to these texts will simply initiate a reader into the metaphorical displacement, which makes salvation possible. Further, the content of these texts, as a displacement from redoubled meaning to external sense, is itself a hermeneutic. A Biblical hermeneutic thus has a double meaning: it is both the content and the way by which one accesses the content.
Luther's Practical Exegesis

We have seen that Luther's account of the "plain sense" and its grammatical determination is problematic in the light of that which he says about the bondage of the will. His good news of sola gratia leads us to another account of interpretation that focuses on the transition from the sinner's redoubled meaning to external clarity. This implicit, evangelical hermeneutic has a different point of departure than Luther's explicit, general hermeneutic. In one case one begins with polyvalence and obscurity, in the other one begins with a clear and certain meaning.

When we turn to Luther's account of how he was led by the text - especially, Romans - to salvific clarity, we find that Luther followed the implicit, evangelical hermeneutic and not his general one. This can be seen in Luther's own reflection on the "Reformation breakthrough":

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I
felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul become to me a gate to heaven."⁸⁴

Here we have Luther's account of the way in which Scripture led him from darkness to salvation and light. Negatively, it is important to note the following:

1. Luther's interpretation of Scripture did not begin with a clear and certain meaning. Instead he began with the meaning of "justice", which was common to people in the Middle Ages and tied up with the Catholic sacramental system, of which indulgences was an integral part.⁸⁵

2. Luther did not begin with a univocal meaning, but rather with a contradiction. He could not figure out how to reconcile God's justice with "the just shall live by faith". The text was thus opaque and contradictory, and this posed to him a task; namely, the task of interpretation.⁸⁶

3. Luther did not begin with a singular meaning.⁸⁷ God's justice had at least two meanings, one which he initially presupposed and one to which he was led in the interpretive process.

In sum, the point of departure for Luther's salvific interpretation of Romans was opacity, contradiction and polyvalence, not a grammatically determinable "plain sense".

In the next step, positively, Luther experienced a
displacement from the old, redoubled meaning of "justice" to a new meaning, which is rooted in the unique activity of God. In this displacement Luther steps out of the old, univocal sense of "justice". He leaves behind the meaning that is defined in terms of the particular, human use of the word. The metaphorical displacement, which is rooted in an optical displacement (God's activity), is then reduplicated anthropologically in Luther's experience of salvation, whereby he moves from a negative to a positive experience of God's invisibility. The transformation from "hate" to "love", from "old man" to "new man", from unjust to just reduplicates in Luther's life the displacement from the old redoubled meaning of "justice" to the new meaning. This experienced displacement from the indeterminate absence of God to his hidden activity is expressed in and as faith, which relates in trust to the invisible activity of God manifest in Jesus Christ. Faith initiates one into the displacement which makes possible and is made possible by the metaphorical transfer from old to new meaning that takes place in the interpretive process.

It is fitting that Luther's autobiographical sketch of the "Reformation breakthrough" exhibits the implicit evangelical hermeneutic that follows from his doctrines of God, humanity and language. When sola scriptura is disassociated from general hermeneutics and aligned with a particular, Christian, special hermeneutic, then it can be
taken as the epistemological and linguistic form of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, which are respectively the theological and anthropological expressions of that same "good news". To put it in the words of Karl Barth, we can now "perceive the range of the decisive connection between the problem of justification and the problem of the knowledge of God, between reconciliation and revelation." By means of its special hermeneutic the Church can steer a middle course between general hermeneutics and deconstruction, and the New Testament can be interpreted in a way that addresses the confusion of tongues that one finds in the post-modern world. In this way we move "beyond Babel".

NOTES

1. Jacques Derrida, "De Tours de Babel", *Semeia* 54: *Poststructuralism as Exegesis* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 3-34; p. 3: "[T]he narrative as the myth of the tower of Babel...does not constitute just one figure among others. Telling at least of the inadequation of one tongue to another, of one place in the encyclopedia to another, of language to itself and to meaning, and so forth, it also tells of the need for figuration, for myth, for tropes, for twists and turns, for translation inadequate to compensate for that which multiplicity denies us. In this sense it would be the myth of the origin of myth, the metaphor of metaphor..." For a list of others who use Babel as a metaphor of the present, human predicament, see Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Boston: Bacon Press, 1988), pp. 1-2.

2. Derrida, "De Tours", pp. 4-10.


of *sola scriptura*, the scriptures alone, has not brought the certainty he anticipated. It has in fact been responsible for a multiplicity of explanations and interpretation that seem to render absurd any dependence on the clarity of the Scriptures."

5. Derrida, "De Tours", p. 3


7. Derrida, "De Tours", pp. 4-5, 8.


11. Compare Derrida, "De Tours", p. 7 with Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 1023, where Derrida states that "God" is taken as "nothing other than a reference to the irreducible singularity of each situation." Note also Derrida's decision of the "theological" in law (Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 993).


18. For Derrida "there is no justice without this experience...of aporia" (Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 947). This is an "experience of inadequation" between law and justice, and it is here that deconstruction finds its privileged site (Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 957).

19. In Pascal's terms, could it be that "our justice comes to nothing before divine justice?" (quoted in Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 941).


21. Derrida, Grammatology, p. 71. "The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plentitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without difference: another name for death, historical metonymy where God's name holds death in check."

22. For a good overview of what Derrida means by this term, see Positions, pp. 8-10.

23. In some cases Derrida speaks of a "radical absence" (Limited, Inc., p. 8), while in others he speaks of a paradoxical simultaneity of presence and absence (Derrida, "De Tours", p. 31; Derrida, "Force of Law"). Generally, one can say that when Derrida focuses on semiotics - especially when he discusses the sign - he moves in the direction of "radical absence" (the nihil), but when he takes up ethical motifs he moves in the direction of a paradoxical presence-absence, which is close to Levinas' "radical otherness"; namely, a presence which is absent to totalizing thought.

24. The following account of God's invisibility is taken largely from Eberhard Jüngel's The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology, Roy Harrisville, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), pp. 29-37. Jüngel outlines the contrast between Erasmus and Luther. I have taken Jüngel's characterization of the Erasmian position and transferred it to Derrida. [Hereafter I will refer to Jüngel's work by the name The Freedom of a Christian. Luther's work by the same name will be designated by the volume and page number in the standard English edition of his collected works, eg. LW 31, p. 000.]

25. Compare Jüngel's account of the way in which "the experience that he [God] cannot be experienced" leads to "orthopraxis" (Jüngel, Freedom of a Christian, pp. 29, 30)
with Derrida's account of "the experience of the aporia" and of "the mystical" (Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 947).

26. It is not too difficult to see this as an example of what Oberman regards as "a nightmarish conclusion; namely Heaven is empty; we stand alone" (Oberman, p. 213).

27. Jüngel puts it well when he ties the objection to Luther's inner-outer distinction with Max Scheler's "positive thesis", which reads: "only at the portal of the deed do the contents of life divide, and they retain the unity of the...person" (quoted in The Freedom of the Christian, p. 56).

28. "God...is nothing other than a reference to the irreducible singularity of each situation" (Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 1023).

29. Luther developed his account of the Christian experience of God's invisibility in Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976). There, as Oberman notes, "Luther took up and emphasized the subject of the distant (i.e. absent!) and present God" (Oberman, p. 211).


33. The classic account of these two types of love can be found in Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, trans. Philip Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1953). Unfortunately, in that work Nygren does not sufficiently appreciate the legitimate place of eros. Recent works, however, following the Greeks and, in more recent times, Freud, have gone to the other extreme, and have not sufficiently appreciated (1) the difference between human and divine love, and (2) the "worldliness" of human love. At the heart of debates about the role of "eros", we find the question, which we raised earlier, about whether or not a life-relation to God can be taken as constitutive of human identity. If we answer "yes" to this question, then "eros" can be aligned with the quest for God, and it is an expression of the plenitude of human inferiority. If, on the other hand, we answer "no" to that question, eros becomes an expression of the negativity of human inferiority, and the discontinuity between human questioning and the divine answer is more radically conceived. In this dissertation I have taken the latter approach which leads to a greater emphasis on special
revelation and is rooted in an anthroplogy that gives greater weight to a doctrine of sin.

34. On the contrast between human and divine love, see Jüngel, Freedom of a Christian, pp. 36-37.


37. Jüngel, Freedom of a Christian, p. 32: "God as the absent One is present." See also pp. 33-34.

38. Jüngel developed these two approaches in terms of Erasmus versus Luther; I developed them in terms of Derrida versus Luther. In either case, Oberman is right when he notes that the contrast is not the Middle Ages versus the modern era [or the modern versus the post-modern], but two interpretations of man and history drawn from divergent perspectives and experiences, neither of them indisputably 'obsolete' or 'progressive'" (Oberman, p. 218). We see a conflict between the two strands that broke apart in the middle ages and that continue to vie with one another up to the present (Oberman, pp. 218, 220). They express two understandings of understanding, and Derrida is very close to the Platonic approach which he criticizes, since he likewise assumes a life-relation to the mystical a priori.


40. One could also put this paradox in terms of self-questioning (Oberman, p. 173).

41. It should be noted that this approach to sola scriptura was not contrary to Medieval approaches (Oberman, p. 173).

42. Oberman, pp. 221 properly recognizes the differences between sola scriptura, on one side, and sola fide and sola gratia on the other, but he does not sufficiently appreciate that they are connected with two competing strands. His call for each to enlighten the other (p. 225) sets up a project which cannot be brought to completion. Also see p. 172.

43. Consider, for example, Luther's response to Latomus in LW 32: 195-196.

44. We use the term "evangelical" to designate the implicit hermeneutic for two reasons: (1) The Protestant churches in Germany are designated as "Evangelisch", and (2) the implicit
hermeneutic does justice to the gospel, or "εὐαγγέλιον", rather than secular principles.

45. LW 31: 344.

46. LW 31:344. "Man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily one. According to the spiritual nature, which men refer to as the soul, he is called a spiritual, inner, or new man. According to the bodily nature, which men refer to as flesh, he is called carnal, outward, or old man...Because of this diversity of natures, scriptures assert contradictory things concerning the same man, since these two men in the same man contradict each other." It should be noted contra-Jüngel (p. 57), that in this passage Luther does not fully avoid the "Platonic-Augustinian anthropology," which makes humanity free in its spiritual nature and bound in its bodily nature. Jüngel's account explicates the more authentically "reformation" anthropology, but he should have also recognized that Luther is still working with contradictory premises, and he has not fully set aside the Augustinian, Neoplatonic interiority, which assumes a constitutive life-relation to God. This same point could be made in response to Steven Ozment, Homo Spiritualis (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969). Ozment rightly identifies the occasionalism of revelation and grace and the consequent desubstantial nature of Luther's anthropology, but he does not sufficiently appreciate that Luther did not work out this anthropology to its full complexities. There are thus remnants of the mystical anthropology of Tauler and Gerson.


49. We can see this same thesis in Derrida's attempt to eliminate the hierarchy of inner over outer.

50. Jüngel, Freedom of a Christian, pp. 60-61. "It [the Word of God that constitutes humanity] is not a word which the soul speaks to itself, but a word which addresses it and ... by this means distinguishes inner from outer, the new from the old man. It is God's word entering from without which first turns one inward and in so doing distinguishes that one as inner man from himself or herself as the outer man."


52. It is on this issue - whether there is a constitutive life-relation to God - that Luther's key reformation insight rests, and it can be seen in his sola fide and sola gratia. Steven Ozment rightly ties these insights to a desubstantial anthropology and contrasts Luther's Protestant anthropology
with the mystical anthropologies of Johannes Tauler and Jean Gerson, since they involve a Platonic understanding of understanding, which posits a life-relation to God in human interiority. It should also be recognized, however, that Luther's sola scriptura, when connected with a general hermeneutic, involves the Neoplatonic, mystical anthropology—a substantial, not desubstantial one. This can be seen in his identification of the spiritual, new man with interiority, and the carnal, old man with "body", as exterior (LW 31:344; see note 000). The full epistemological implications of sola gratia and sola fide have not been developed, nor would they be throughout Luther's life. Thus we also see competing anthropologies—the mystical, platonic and the desubstantial, pauline.

53. Jüngel, Freedom of a Christian, p. 77


56. In a more detailed discussion, we would need to further qualify this, since the post-modern account of the relation between inner and outer is quite complex; for example, Derrida, Grammatology, pp. 30-65. However, in a more detailed account we would still come to the same contrast: Derrida's approach aligns with an account that gives primacy to praxis, and does not do justice to the constitutive role of the Word of God.

57. In this way we can account for a legitimate, penultimate function of deconstruction, and we do it in Derridan terms. Here deconstruction (the double movement of breaking identity and reversing hierarchy—i.e. difféance) relates to the reconstruction of grace, as law relates to gospel. One is reminded here of a verse that Luther often quoted: "The Lord kills and makes alive; he brings down to hell and brings back again. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he humbles and exalts" (I Sam. 2:6-7). Luther interpreted this to mean: "It is God's nature first to destroy and to turn to nothing whatever is in us before he gives us his own" (Quoted in Wilhelm Pauck's introduction to Luther: Lectures on Romans [London: S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1961], p. xi). We could paraphrase this to read "it is God's nature first to deconstruct and to reverse all hierarchies—i.e. make humble the proud—before he gives grace in reconstructing life."

58. "[T]he 'happy exchange' between God's everlasting nature and our lostness [is] and exchange occurring in the story of the incarnate Son of God" (Jüngel, Freedom of a Christian, p. 62; see also pp. 66-70).


65. Winter, pp. 18-19.

66. Winter, p. 15

67. Winter, p. 16.

68. Winter, p. 8. "Holy scripture contains secrets into which God does not want us to penetrate too deeply, because if we attempt to do so, increasing darkness envelopes us, so that we might come to recognize in this manner both the unfathomable majesty of divine wisdom and the feebleness of the human mind."

69. Winter, p. 9. Speaking of the debates regarding the freedom of the will, Erasmus states that "men were not wont to intrude upon these concealed, even superfluous questions with irreligious curiosity...some things God wishes to remain totally unknown to us...." Later, Erasmus will argue that the seeming contradiction of scriptures on this issue shows that it cannot be resolved (p. 20).


73. "[O]nly God's Spirit can bring clarity and awaken in us the readiness to listen to the text with an open mind and then to accept it" (Oberman, p. 215).


75. This false clarity rests on the "common sense" consensus on what is self-evident (Oberman, p. 215). It would be very interesting to contrast Luther's criticism of common sense with the central role that Gadamer gives to the *sensus communis* in *Truth and Method*, pp. 19-30.

76. Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 951. Note also Derrida's discussion of Babel as that which is simultaneously a *proper name* and a *common noun* (Derrida, "De Tours", pp. 4-10). This is the problem of all language: it is simultaneously general and a particular use.

77. "The violence of an injustice has begun when all the members of a community do not share the same idiom throughout" (Derrida, "Force of Law", p. 951). We see this theme in Luther, when he talks about the reader's equivocation on language (Oberman, p. 215).

78. The reader of Scripture thus does the same thing with language that (s)he does with knowledge of God. Oberman notes that, for Luther, "[s]ince the fall every man has been a philosopher, for he has taken his experience of the world and his knowledge of reality - which he has succeeded in describing scientifically - as a standard by which to measure God" (p. 170). In like manner, (s)he takes her use of language - determined by a "scientific", general hermeneutic - as the standard for interpreting Scripture. But, as Luther notes, the Scripture uses words in a way that goes contrary to expectation (p. 215).

79. Derrida, "De Tours", pp. 20-21. Luther himself recognizes this principle, although he attempts to domesticate it, by making it the exception. Cf. E. F. King, *From Luther to Chemnitz: On Scripture and the Word* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans' Publishing Company, 1971), p. 104 Luther states that "no 'implication' or 'figure' may be allowed to exist in any passage of Scripture unless such be required by some obvious feature of the words and the absurdity of their plain sense, as offending against an article of faith." The problem with this passage is (1) it does not sufficiently recognize that the lack of an apparent absurdity in a passage may indicate the double blindness of a reader, rather than a plain sense. Further, (2) when he sets up the articles of faith (a credal hermeneutic) as the standard, he makes an interpretation of the gospel the standard of Scripture. But what if that interpretation is penultimate or even
inappropriate (as Luther thought the Catholic formulation was). This eliminates the basis for using Scripture to criticize the status quo of the Church.

80. One finds here interesting parallels with Walter Benjamin's account, as recounted by Derrida in "De Tours de Babel", p. 31. Note especially the account of translation as a "holy growth of languages", which "announces the messianic end."

81. As Pauck notes (pp. xxxi-xxxii), Luther saw the hermeneutical implications of reflections on ascent and descent. Unfortunately, he did not carry these out in a fully consistent way, nor did he work out the implications of his position for the point of departure; i.e. whether one begins with the "plain sense" or not. Pauck is thus incorrect when he argues (on p. xxxii) that Luther provided a new integration of literal-historical exegesis (concerned with the sensus litteralis) and a christocentric exegesis (concerned with the sensus spiritualis). As we have now oft stated, these approaches represented two contradictory strands that were never fully integrated. In like manner, there were two approaches to ascent and descent; one gave priority to ascent (the general hermeneutic), the other to descent (the spiritual, christocentric hermeneutic).

82. It is in this context that we can best understand Paul's statement that "God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God." When God makes Jesus "sin", he extends him outward to include the redoubled humanity that was excluded from the life of God. God extends the meaning of his word so that it includes those that have excluded themselves by closing themselves within themselves. When the Word has been displaced to include the redoubled meaning, then the way is made for the previously bound person to step out of the redoubled meaning into the Word that now encompasses it. For Jüngel's discussion of this passage in Paul, see Freedom of the Christian, p.42.

83. Oberman is correct, when he notes that Luther did not develop an incarnational understanding of Scripture (Oberman, pp. 220-221). "God and the scriptures are two different things" (ibid, p. 224). But Oberman is wrong when he suggests that an incarnational approach to the Bible leads to Fundamentalist literalism (ibid, pp. 220-221). The incarnation can be used to further develop Luther's christological hermeneutic, and we find the basis for such an approach in Luther's own writings; e.g. LW 37: 225-256. For more on this, see Klug, pp. 103-104; Jüngel, p. 99, note 54; Pauck, pp. xxxi.; Bainton, pp. 258-259.
84. I use Bainton's translation (pp. 49-50). It should be noted that this passage is almost always quoted at some length, when one speaks of the "Reformation breakthrough"; e.g. Oberman, p. 154; Pauck, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii, to give just two examples. It is thus important to consider the hermeneutic that is implicit in this pivotal passage.

85. Oberman, pp. 152, 169.

86. It is interesting to note that Luther's Freedom of a Christian - the text which Jüngel interpreted at some length - also begins with a contradiction in Scripture; namely the contradiction between the Christian as free and as slave.

87. Luther recognized the problem of polyvalence, but muted its import (Oberman, p. 214).

88. Then Oberman's account rings true: "following him [Luther] means being initiated into life between God and the Devil, the vital problem of his theology, where scripture, grace and faith - the three basic Reformation concepts - interpret and clarify one another" (p. 225, my emphasis).
CHAPTER 4

JOHANNINE HERMENEUTICS

In this final chapter we shall concretely develop some of the themes, which we have thus far only discussed abstractly, and we will do this by thematizing the content of John's Gospel as a special hermeneutic. This will complete our movement from general hermeneutics to special hermeneutics and, finally, to a particular biblical hermeneutic.

We have seen that a hermeneutic implies a given theological position, and visa versa. Attempts to work with a so-called "general" hermeneutic were inappropriate because these approaches involved a doctrine of general revelation, which was discordant with the doctrines of sin and special revelation that one finds in Christian theologies. Further, on philosophical grounds, we found that the implicit assumption regarding the independence of the metagame from particular games was not tenable. Instead of beginning with a hermeneutic that is developed independent of the biblical texts, we should thus seek to develop a hermeneutic from the content that these text's express. In chapter 3 we took a first step toward doing this by extending sola fide and sola gratia to their epistemological implication. But this was not
enough. Luther claimed that these doctrines were themselves derived from Scripture. They must thus be critically related to the texts and to the hermeneutic that does justice to these texts as revelatory. In order to carry *sola scriptura* to its full implication, the special hermeneutic associated with the doctrine must itself be derived from Scripture and not simply from a formulation of the *kerygma* that is derived from Scripture. In this chapter we accomplish this step by developing the hermeneutical implications of John's account of incarnation and special revelation. The result is a "biblical hermeneutic", which does justice to the unique status and authority of the biblical texts in the Christian community. More specifically, this Johannine hermeneutic will thematize the content of John's text in terms of the way that living content (the Word of God) mediates itself to the reader through the text.¹ The reader's response, seen in the principles of her interpretation, will mirror the response to God, which is expressed in the doctrine of *sola fide*.

I. REVELATION AND THE METAHERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE

Gail O'Day astutely observes that "one's approach to and appropriation of Scripture is governed by one's understanding of revelation."² For example, if one believes that revelation provides a moral example or propositionally stated doctrines, then one will look for the way in which Scripture communicates
such information. On the other hand, if one sees revelation as the inbreaking or uncovering of a pure otherness - the "holy", taken as the facticity or "that" of existence - then one will focus on the way in which the text confronts the reader in a paradoxical or absurd manner.

Some see revelation as conveying clear and distinct ideas, while others see it as overthrowing such ideas. These approaches are then reflected in the methods one uses to interpret the text.³ For example, redaction criticism will approach an awkward transition or paradoxical passage as an expression of a redactor's inability to carry to completion a synthesis of previous sources. This is because the critic looks for clear ideas or themes (the theology of the redactor). The ambiguous or opaque is then an aberration - a place where the authorial task of revealing revelation has not arrived at closure.⁴ By contrast, the literary critic will look at the same material and regard it as an author's attempt to deliberately convey a content that could not be conveyed in a direct way. Through paradox and irony, for example, a revelatory perspective on life's ambiguity is disclosed. And if one can account for a textual paradox in terms of a literary trope, then one does not need to account for it in terms of a redactional oversight.⁵ It is important to see here that there is not a simple continuity and complementarity between "historical critical" and "literary critical" methodologies.⁶ Every single aberration in the patchwork of
a text — every change in style or vocabulary, every paradoxical transition or awkward ending, every shift in content — can be regarded as an intentional mechanism used by the author to convey a certain type of content. Likewise, every use of irony or paradox, etc. which is understood as a literary trope, can be interpreted as an unintentional, accidental result of redaction. All interpretation involves fundamental choices about how to regard the textual material, and these choices depend in large part on the interpreter's preunderstanding of revelation.

In John's Gospel the nature of revelation is explicitly thematized: Through Jesus Christ God is unveiled (1:17). This unveiling is further regarded as a "declaring" or "interpreting" (ἐξηγοῦμαι) of God (1:18), so that the reader may have the life that comes in and by God's life-giving Word (20:31). John will seek to make available to the reader the way in which Jesus reveals the Father. His text thus has the role of revealing revelation. This function will obviously have implications for the way in which the text should be approached.

Whether Catholic or Protestant, the Christian Church has claimed that God's liberating Word is made available to the world in and through the biblical texts. The Church thus makes a claim for these texts that is similar to the claim John makes of Jesus: John claims that through Jesus God is unveiled, and the Church claims that through the texts the
Word of God, who is Jesus, is unveiled. The Church's claim about the text coincides with the claim implicit in John's own Gospel: the text reveals revelation. Although the Christian churches agree that the text has such a revelatory function, there is considerable dispute about how the texts reveal the content and what that content is. Instead of seeking an answer to these questions independent of the biblical texts, I will attempt to extend John's own account of revelation so that it addresses hermeneutical concerns. We will look at the way in which Jesus reveals God, and then use this knowledge to show how the text reveals Jesus. We will find that John's understanding of revelation involves the following analogy: As Jesus relates to the Father, so the text (language) relates to Jesus. The Word becomes flesh (1:14), and then the flesh becomes text. In this way the text is regarded as a linguistic extension of the incarnation.

My approach to the text obviously involves a paradox: I derive the hermeneutic from the text's account of revelation. But I need the hermeneutic in the first place to obtain the text's account of revelation. The hermeneutic is both the beginning and the result of the hermeneutical process of interpretation. This paradox is an expression of the metahermeneutical circle.

It is interesting to note that John's text entails paradoxical statements regarding Jesus' beginning that are similar to the metahermeneutical paradox. Consider, for
example, the words that John the Baptist says about Jesus:

"After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me. I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."

How can the coming one be before the one who announces the arrival? How does John reveal one that he does not know? The dynamic here is like the one between hermeneutic and text: Hermeneutical preface relates to the text as John the Baptist (the witness) relates to Jesus. In both cases the precursor "paves the way", announcing the arrival of the foundation.

After we have carefully developed the relation between the witness motif and Jesus, then we can more specifically address the metahermeneutical circle. At this stage, however, we can only put our answer in terms developed in the previous chapter. My words in this chapter will provide access to John's text by extending the text's content outward to the redoubled meaning of the reader. Practically, this will mean that I begin with the interpretations of John's text that are current in the scholarly literature on John (the redoubled meanings) and then bring the reader to the text's meaning by way of a displacement that has a double movement: (1) Overthrow the redoubled meaning by exhibiting its inability to account for the dynamics of the text. (2) Reconstitute the text's meaning in terms of the categories of the deconstructed redoubled meaning, so that the reader may move from the known (the redoubled meaning) to the unknown (the Word of God).

My interpretation of John will consist of three parts:
(1) The logic of revelation: I will first focus on the way God is disclosed in the person of Jesus, independent of the relation between Jesus and a particular hearer. This focus has been referred to in theology as "objective revelation". Beginning with "metaphysical" and "functional" misunderstandings of John's christology (the redoubled meanings), I will show how the person-work relation of Jesus reconstitutes in earthly terms (flesh) the invisible, founding relation between God and the creative Word (glory).

(2) The rhetoric of revelation: Next I will focus on the relation between the person of Jesus and his hearer in the gospel narrative, looking at the way in which the revelatory content is made manifest to that hearer. This focus has been referred to in theology as the "subjective revelation". In this section I will consider the function of signs, witness, and figurative language.

(3) The hermeneutic of revelation: Third, I will establish a relation between the content of John's text and the reader: The reader relates to John's text as the hearer in John's text relates to Jesus. Using the logic and rhetoric of revelation, the hermeneutical dynamics between reader and text will be derived. The text will be understood incarnationally as the linguistic extension of the Word-flesh. This provides a Scriptural justification for the theological account given in the
previous chapter and restores special hermeneutics to its rightful place in Christian theology.

II. THE LOGIC OF REVELATION

The Problemata of John's Christology

Revelation and christology are intimately intertwined in John's gospel. The central focus of the gospel is the person of Jesus. In him God's salvation is manifest, and the way is made for a person to obtain eternal life (the life of God's kingdom, 3:5). Revelation involves the unveiling (aletheia) of that life/light, so that the human person, who is blind and enslaved to the world, can come to a relation with God, who is the Father. In other words, revelation is the answer to the need implicit in the human condition, and Jesus is the locus of that answer.

Two models have been used to interpret John's christology:

(1) Metaphysical - Here human existence, which is ultimately spiritual (glory), is alienated in the material world (flesh). But people are blind, ignorant of their true existence. Their focus is wrongly set upon the material world. To bring salvation, the glory of the spiritual realm is manifest within the realm of the flesh, in order to break the focus on worldly things and redirect people to the heavenly realm. Salvation
is then regarded as a spiritual/inTELlectual movement (knowing) in which one ascends from the material to the spiritual, and Jesus is regarded as the God who descended to make the way for the ascent. Such an approach can be seen in much of the patristic literature on John and in the modern interpretations of Ernst Käsemann and, to a lesser extent, Wayne Meeks.

(2) Functional - Here, in contrast to the metaphysical approach, the created world is the appropriate locus of human existence. The need of humanity concerns the norm of ethical action; namely, the will of God. Revelation entails the manifestation of the archetype of the good, so that it can serve as the norm of human act. The focus is then placed on doing, rather than on an intellectual or spiritual ascent. The archetype descends, and humanity is thereby empowered to be in the world but of God. Here Jesus is seen as an instantiation of the archetype. Variations of this approach can be seen in the interpretations of Robert Kysar, Gail O'Day, and J.A.T. Robinson.

The metaphysical and functional models have been used to interpret John's text but neither does justice to his christology. To appreciate John's view of Jesus and revelation we need to consider these themes in the broad context of John's cosmology (his dualism), developing his christology as the answer to the need of humanity, as that need is explicated by John. The resultant "logic of
revelation" will involve an integration of the metaphysical and functional approaches.

Let us begin by looking at the factors that are to be accounted for, if we are to do justice to the dynamics of John's text. Three problemata characterize his christology:  

1. The Relation Between Flesh and Glory

In 1:14 we read that "the Word became flesh ... and we beheld his glory". This verse seems to be central for John's understanding of Jesus, but its meaning is unclear. How can glory be manifest in flesh? The answer to this depends largely on the meaning one gives to the two terms. If they are tied to a metaphysical dualism of a proto-gnostic sort, then "glory" will refer to the being of the heavenly realm and "flesh" will refer to the being of the earthly. In this context, since the two modes of being are oppositional, the "becoming flesh" of 1:14 will be more like a "coming into the realm of flesh". Although Kasemann states that John does not have a full metaphysical dualism, he does argue that there is a "naive docetism" in John. Jesus is then "God walking about on earth", and the flesh is more a veiling than an unveiling of the glory.

If, on the other hand, one takes a more functional approach to the text, then the glory can be regarded as the archetype (the new commandment) and flesh can be regarded as
its concrete embodiment. Here one can do justice to the flesh in a way that the metaphysical approach could not. But one still cannot do justice to the "becoming flesh". The archetype is separable from its concrete embodiment. Thus the fate of the concrete individual - in this case, Jesus - does not bear upon the archetype. Here the glory is only accidentally related to the flesh.³⁰

The challenge facing any interpretation of John's christology is to account for the meaning of the "becoming flesh" in 1:14. Is this simply a "coming into flesh", or is the "becoming" significant? Connected with this question is the significance of the cross. Is that simply a going back to heaven of the glory, or does the cross bear upon the glory in some essential way? In sum: How can the flesh be an unveiling of the glory? Is the glory still glory, and the flesh still flesh, when the glory is beheld in flesh?

2. The Relation Between Function and Person

Robert Kysar states that the relation between Jesus' person and what he says and does (his works) provides the model by which one can best understand John's christology.³¹ This approach uses terms that are directly derived from the gospel itself. Although the terms "flesh" and "glory" are also found in the gospel, Kysar argues that they have been too tainted by debates about the divinity and humanity of Christ to be helpful.³² In response to Kysar, however, it is
important to note that the nature of the person-works relation, while indeed central, is far from immediately clear, and this relation is tainted by debates over the office of Christ.\textsuperscript{33}

Kysar's emphasis on function also goes well with Gail O'Day's account of the how of revelation, as opposed to its what and that.\textsuperscript{34} Johannes Riedl qualifies the function-person relation further by arguing that the function of Jesus (the works) reveals person. On the basis of this contention, Riedl contends that the Son and the Father are two independent actors in the gospel. Jesus is thus a free individual united with God in singleness of purpose and fully dependent upon him.\textsuperscript{35}

The problem with these interpretations is that they do not do justice to those passages which emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus vis à vis other people, nor do they account for the more metaphysical aspects of the unity of Father and Son. To give just one example, 1:1-3 seems to emphasize both the uniqueness of Jesus, as pre-existent word, as well as the metaphysical unity of Jesus and the Father.

The relation between function and person can be summarized by asking how Jesus' works - those he refers to as my works - are simultaneously the works of the Father, and, connected with this, how the works are revelatory of the person?
3. The Relation Between Father and Son

We have seen that in order to understand the relation between the person and work of Jesus we must also consider the relation between Jesus and God. Käsemann argues that the sole doctrine of John's gospel is the unity of the Father and the Son.36 The problem of this relation can be put as follows: There are many passages which seem to highlight the subordination of the Son to the Father (5:30, 8:28, 13:10, 10:33-36). These are emphasized by those who take a functional approach.37 But other passages seem to highlight their unity and even identity (1:1-5, 5:17-18, 5:26, 10:30, 14:9). These are emphasized by those who take a metaphysical approach. How does one account for both the unity and the subordination passages?

Interpretations of John usually focus on the cluster of problems that surrounds one of the three key relations, then the answer given to that cluster of problems is extrapolated to address the remaining two clusters. However, I shall argue that in order to understand John's christology we must simultaneously consider all three relations. The relation between the Father and Son, which is the glory of Jesus, is manifest in the flesh, as the relation between person and work. This will be the key motif in John.38 Before further elaborating on this, however, it will be important to first set the context of John's account. This will be done by way
of a discussion of his cosmology.

John's Cosmology

John's gospel uses dualistic terms (e.g. light/darkness, truth/lie, heaven/earth, etc.) and there has been considerable debate about how these should be interpreted. Some argue for what may be called a **metaphysical** dualism. Here the dualism is of two substances, one good the other evil. Heaven and earth are then characterized in terms of a good place and bad place. Redemption is movement toward heaven. Kasemann argues for such an equation of redemption and movement away from the earthly and toward the heavenly. This characterization of the dualism often goes hand in hand with those interpretations that strongly emphasize Jesus' **glory** at the expense of the flesh, thus taking a metaphysical approach to christology.

Another approach to the dualism is **ethical**. Here the two realms are realms of decision: those who accept the truth vs. those who reject the truth. This characterization is often connected with those interpretations that take a functional approach to christology and that deemphasize the uniqueness of Jesus' divinity.

Both of the above characterizations (metaphysical vs. ethical) are one-sided and do not do justice to the different dimensions of John's text. This is because John does not have
just one dualism. He has two: a dualism of place (heaven and earth) and a dualism of decision/action (accept vs. reject God). Consider, for example, the dualism of place (but here I use "place" metaphorically, because it does not just concern space). This rests on the distinction between Creator and creation (1:3) and the two realms need not be oppositional. In fact, in their intent they are complementary. Their complementarity can be seen in the sign function of many of Jesus' works, which rest on the capacity of earthly things to manifest heavenly things (e.g. the role of bread, water, light, life, etc.).

When John speaks of God vs. all things made (1:3), glory vs. flesh (1:14), invisible vs. visible (1:18), heaven vs. earth (1:51), or heavenly things vs. earthly things (3:12) - in all this he refers to a dualism of place, in which the realms are complementary. But when he speaks of those who are of the flesh vs. those who are of God (1:13), those who receive him vs. those who do not (1:11), those who love darkness vs. those who love light (3:19), those who practice evil vs. those who do the truth (3:20), those who are of the devil vs. those who are of Jesus (8:44) - in all this he speaks of a very different dualism than the complementary one of place. In the dualism of decision, the two realms relate in an oppositional way, and they can be aligned with good and evil.

In gnosticism these two dualisms are conflated, with the
heavenly as good and the earthly as evil.\textsuperscript{43} But in John these two realms are distinct. One could say that for John, the dualism of place provides the context in which the dualism of decision is acted out.

One can also make a further distinction between the initial condition of creation and a post-revelatory one.\textsuperscript{44} Initially creation is blind and in darkness. John nowhere recounts how this came about, whether it was due to some fall (e.g. of Adam and Eve) or whether it was a part of the intent of creation. John simply begins with this.\textsuperscript{45} We can then distinguish between the darkness vs. light dualism (e.g. John the Baptist is not \textit{the} light, but that does not mean he rejects the light - 1:18) and the love darkness vs. love light dualism (3:19). Darkness is the initial condition. It is the condition of creation, which is blind to its creator (to all things beyond the earthly). But then light comes into the darkness. This is the incarnation. The Word becomes flesh. Some receive him and others reject him.\textsuperscript{46} Thus the good/evil distinction for John is really only possible after those in darkness have been confronted by the light.\textsuperscript{47} John will then develop the dualism of decision as the dynamic seen in the reception of Jesus. The drama of the gospel is set in the context of a cosmic dualism of place in which people are blind and the light comes into the realm of darkness. This is the setting - the stage - for the interpretation of who Jesus is (John's christology). It gives the human need to which Jesus
is the answer.

In the Beginning

The general problem of the drama can be put as follows: how can/does the blind creation come to a knowledge of and relation with the Creator? John's answer to this will be the incarnation. And it is here that we will need to address that "puzzle" regarding ascent/descent that has been viewed as so important in Johannine interpretation. Before, however, we develop the nature of the incarnation it will be helpful first to look at what may be called its prehistory.

John has three beginnings:

(1) The beginning before all beginnings: this is the unity of the Word and God that was before all things are made.

(2) The beginning of creation: most likely, the background for John's text is Genesis 1.49 God creates all things through his spoken word. He says "let there be light" and there is light. (Gen. 1:3).

(3) The beginning of John's story of revelation: namely, when the light that even preceded earthly light (i.e. the Word that called light into being), comes into the world to enlighten those who are blind.50

It is important to note that there will be an ambiguous relation between the beginnings: the beginning of John's story, which is the incarnation, comes after creation, but it
is the manifestation in creation of the beginning before the beginning.51

Note that the beginning before the beginning is not an identity. It is already a difference: the Word is both different from God and one with God.52 This difference-in-unity will be important for John, as it is explicated as the unity of the Father and Son. But it is important not to take it in the terms of later dogmatic reflection on the Trinity. As we will see shortly, the analogy for the unity is person-work (i.e. the difference in unity of the single person of God) rather than three persons. The God-Word relation will be manifest, for John, in the person-work relation of Jesus.

Since the beginning before the beginning is not an identity, it is only in a qualified way that the incarnation can be viewed as a grammatical movement in which an initial logocentrism is shattered.53 While there is a break in the closure of God-Word, it is not the establishment of a previously nonexistent difference. Instead, for John, it will involve the manifestation in visible terms of an already established but invisible relation.

The relation between the second beginning (creation) and the first (the beginning before the beginning) is one of origination. The analogy for it is speaking (Gen. 1). By the spoken word, God establishes all things that are made.54 But for John this establishing relation (the creative act; work) is unknown to the presently blind creation. All are in
darkness. This darkness is the closure of the earthly; the inability to see heavenly things. As a result of this inability (1:18)\textsuperscript{55}, creation cannot be of God (of the heavenly). Further, the blindness is a double blindness: people are blind to their blindness. They are in the earth and of the earth (8:23); they thus judge according to the flesh (8:15). This is to be "of the devil;" namely, to be only out of one's own resources (8:44) and not from another. Jesus speaks from another authority (not from his own); i.e. he manifests/declares the invisible within the visible (1:18). He thus makes present the relation of origination that cannot be seen by creation. He reconstitutes the establishing relation of creation within creation, as a relation between person and work. It is to this extent that the incarnation can, with qualification, be viewed as a grammatological movement. The Word is divided off from the Father and sent, like a letter, into another land.

The "That", "What" and "How" of Revelation

Now we must ask, for John what is the content of the letter? What message is given in the person of Jesus? Rudolf Bultmann argues that in John's gospel there is no content to revelation.\textsuperscript{56} All one finds is that the revealer reveals. The only content of the letter is the fact of sending it. Or, to put it in other terms, there is no "what" to revelation,
but only the "that" of revelation. Bultmann develops this same theme when he speaks of the incarnation (manifestation of doxa in sarx) as the paradox that indicates revelation but gives no specific content other than the revealer's revealing\textsuperscript{57} (unveiling - aletheia\textsuperscript{58}). Bultmann then contends that John took up the standard redeemer model available at the time but de mythologized it, leaving only the bare fact of the redeemer's coming.\textsuperscript{59}

Käsemann rightly disagrees with Bultmann, stating that it is inappropriate to read the modern project of de mythologization back into John.\textsuperscript{60} And, further, he argues that all must have dogma; i.e. some sort of affirmation about the nature of Jesus that is independent of one's subjective appropriation of revelation.\textsuperscript{61} The bare fact of revelation - its "that" - is not enough. According to Käsemann, John has only one dogma: the unity of the Father and Son. This is the content (or "what") of revelation.\textsuperscript{62} The content of the letter is that the letter is one with the sender. Then the message is not simply that God sends his Word, but that God comes and is present in his Word. (This is like an oral speaking rather than the sending of a letter.) In response to Käsemann, however, we must ask: what is the nature of this unity? Käsemann does not really address this question, assuming that the unity is self-evident.\textsuperscript{63} He thus interprets it as identity, rather than unity. Jesus is then viewed as "God who goes about on earth."\textsuperscript{64} But in John, the
unity of Jesus and the Father is not at all self-evident. This is clear from the continual misunderstanding that accompanies statements on the unity; misunderstandings that will even persist through the farewell discourse (14:7-11). It is thus inappropriate to regard the unity of the Father and Son as the only dogma, as if this unity were self-evident. For John, this unity is the same as the unity of God and the Word in the establishing of creation and the whole point of the blindness of creation is its ignorance of this.

Gail O'Day seeks to address the content question by shifting the focus from both the "what" and "that" of revelation and turning to the "how" of revelation;\textsuperscript{65} I.e. do not look at the fact of the sending of the letter, or at what the letter says, but rather at how it is sent. She seeks to develop this "how" by way of a discussion of irony, but in her discussion she abstracts from the person of Jesus and focuses almost exclusively on the dynamics of irony.\textsuperscript{66} This has the same effect as the functional christologies which develop an archetype that is abstractable from its concrete instance. It amounts to saying, contra Käsemann, that the unity of Father and Son is not important, but only the dynamics found in e.g. the relation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

It is important to bring together the insights of all three scholars: the "that" of Bultmann, the "what" of Käsemann, and the "how" of O'Day. Then we can present revelation as follows: for John, the invisible unity of
Father and Son (the beginning before the beginning) is manifest in the visible unity of the person and work of Jesus. This extension of Käsemann's "one dogma" lets us see how revelation comes about: the invisible is reconstituted in terms of the visible, and then one can be brought through the visible (as a sign) to the invisible (signified).

Käsemann was correct when he saw the unity of Father and Son as the central concern, but he was wrong when he thought it was self-evident. The whole point of revelation is the manifestation of this unity in the person-work relation of Jesus. Bultmann missed the specificity of the content completely, probably for theological reasons. For Bultmann, a myth was the constitution in earthly terms of a transcendent content. Bultmann saw this as negative, expressing a worldview we could no longer accept. Thus he argued that our task should be to demythologize (in John this is also developed as "Entweltlichung"). He then attempted to ground the demythologization project in John's relation to the redeemer myth. But if I am correct in my interpretation, the whole point of revelation for John was:

(1) The shattering of earthly closure (this would have some similarities to the demythologization project).

(2) The reconstitution in the world of the invisible, transcendent relation.

This second aspect ran completely counter to Bultmann's whole project, because here the very constitution of the myth is
revelatory. For John, the person's self-understanding is demythologized, not the revelatory content, which is a reconstitution in earthly terms of a heavenly content.

The "how" of revelation (O'Day's concern) is seen in the way the reconstitution is developed and also the way one then moves from the visible (the person-work) to the invisible (Father-Son). For John, once one sees that the person-work, as a whole, is the work of the Father, then one can use the knowledge of how person is manifest in work (as seen in Jesus) to move from the work of Jesus (the signs) to the work of the Father (Jesus).

Put in terms of beginnings, one can say that the beginning before the beginning; namely, the originating relation between God and the spoken Word, is manifest in creation, as the person-work of Jesus. The descent motif can then be directly connected with the originating relation. The invisible, absent origin descends by means of the incarnation, which is the reconstituting event, whereby the invisible is made visible. This is why Jesus can say that "he who sees me has seen the Father" and why one should "believe on account of the works".

As Jesus constitutes in his person the creative act of God, which was invisible, so the disciples are to follow by reconstituting in their person the person-work of Jesus. Here we see the significance of the functional interpretations which emphasize the doing of the archetype. The disciples are
to glorify Jesus as he glorified the Father. The incarnation, as descent, will be extended into the johannine community. The ascent then takes place as the liberation from the world and its closure. The disciples are no longer "of the world". The death to the world is interpreted as ascent, which the descending "beginning before the beginning" made possible. Paradoxically, descent, which takes place when one is "of God", is ascent. It is a process that begins by manifesting Jesus' glory and ends with death, just as Jesus' descent begins with manifesting the glory of the Father and ends with his "being lifted up" on the cross.

Before, however, we further consider the way in which the disciples "glorify" Jesus, we need to first look at the process by which one becomes a disciple. Thus we turn from the logic of revelation to revelation's rhetorical function.

III. THE RHETORIC OF REVELATION

We have now considered the dynamics by which the invisible relation between God and His Word (glory) is reconstituted in terms of a visible relation between the person and work of Jesus (flesh). This provides the "objective" structure of revelation; i.e. it gives a content that is independent of the reception (this is what Kasemann calls "dogma"). Our next step is to turn to the subjective appropriation of the objective content. Here our focus
will shift from the relation between Jesus and the Father to the relation between Jesus and humanity. Through signs, witness and figurative language people will be brought to the knowledge of God and empowered to manifest in their lives the creative, life-giving Word which was disclosed in the person and works of Jesus.

Signs

Roughly the first half of John's Gospel involves the narration of seven signs: (1) turning water into wine, (2) healing a Nobleman's son, (3) feeding of 5000, (4) walking on water, (5) healing a lame man, (6) healing a blind man, and (7) raising Lazarus from the dead. In most instances these signs set the stage for extensive monologues in which Jesus interprets himself and his mission. Any adequate account of John's Gospel must exhibit the role of these signs in revelation, and develop the relation between the work (the earthly sign) and the words (the discourses) that follow. 72

A sign involves two levels. These levels may be distinguished in terms of being, operation, function, place, time or a combination of these. Something at one level (the signifier) is then correlated with or related to something at the other level (the signified).

It is important to note that the nature of a sign is not the same in all cases. The interrelation between levels plays
a central role in determining the character of the sign. Thus the understanding of the signs motif in John must be developed in the context of John's dualism. For example, if one takes a metaphysical approach to the dualism, then the content of the heavenly level (glory) will be present in the earthly level. Signifier will relate to signified as part relates to whole, and the glory of the signified will be given in the sign. Here the sign relates to that which it signifies in much the same way as a heartbeat (sign) relates to life (signified) or a high white blood cell count (sign) relates to sickness (signified). One cannot separate the signifier from the signified without changing the nature and character of the signified. On the other hand, a sign can be externally related to that which it signifies. Then the levels are different and distinct, and they do not interpenetrate in the way they do in the whole-part relation. When a road sign with a bridge on it signifies a coming bridge, or a treasure map outlines a location, in each case the sign is different from the signified; glory is not present in the flesh of the sign. Once one comes to the signified (the bridge or the treasure) then one can discard the sign, which was only externally and accidentally related to the content. Thus in the functional approach to John's dualism, Jesus and his works are separable from the archetype that they instantiate, while in Käsemann's metaphysical account, Jesus is "God walking on earth". 
The signs motif is not just intertwined with John's dualism; it also is conditioned by and conditions the person-works relation of Jesus. Through the person-works relation, the invisible relation between God and his life-giving Word is manifest. But now we must ask: What is the specific character of the relation between person and work? In John's Gospel, Jesus' works are signs. For example, the narrative of the feeding of 5000 leads from the food Jesus gives (level 1 - the earthly bread) to a second level, where Jesus is the food given to humanity (level 2 - the heavenly bread). This parallel between two levels of food (earthly and heavenly) is seen earlier in John's gospel in a similar parallel between two levels of water (earthly and "living" water). Likewise, it is seen in the work whereby Jesus gives sight to the blind or raises the dead. In each case one moves from an earthly light or resurrection given by Jesus (work) to a heavenly light or resurrection which is identified with Jesus (person) and given by the Father. The work, with its earthly result (food, water, light, life) is a sign which points to Jesus, as the signified. But the shift from e.g. earthly food to heavenly food simply shows that the signified is himself the signifier. As Jesus gives bread, so the Father gives Jesus. One is to move from the bread, as sign, to Jesus. Then one moves from Jesus, as sign, to the Father. When one understands how the works are signs, then one can see how Jesus manifests the Father.
Note the grammatical structure of this account: the signs signify signs. We should expect such a dynamic when the content to be manifest is referred to as "the word." In creation God speaks: "Let there be light." By this spoken word all things come forth (1:15). But in the incarnation the spoken word is inscribed; it becomes flesh.77 The word that called forth light is sent into the world as a light. The inscription then signifies the expression. There is now a written word (the word-became-flesh) and a spoken word (through which all has been made). In both cases it is reality itself and not human words about reality that is given a linguistic description. These two words (spoken and written) function in different ways, and an account of signs in John's gospel must do justice to both.

Several scholars have recognized that there are two types of signs (or response to signs) in John's gospel.78 Usually the distinction in types is attributed to John's use of an antecedent signs source.79 Supposedly John's source, narrating the seven signs, advocated a simple approach to belief, which only involved an acceptance of the "wonder" character of the sign. John then sought to deepen that by moving to the way a sign manifested the person of Jesus.

In the account I have given of the sign, the two types do not arise as an accidental result of the redactor's attempt to deepen an antecedent tradition.80 These two types are essential to the content being communicated, and they
highlight the grammatical structure of the incarnation, where one has a sign (type 1) of a sign (type 2). It is important now to show how the "simple belief" (type 1 sign), which was attributed by scholars to the sign's source, functions in bringing the hearer/reader to the "deeper belief" (type 2 sign), by which one "has life in his (Jesus') name" (20:31).

The rhetorical function of the sign must be developed in the context of John's dualism and his christology. Remember that the initial condition of creation is blindness. Further, it is a double blindness: people are blind to their blindness. The movement to sight will thus involve two steps: (1) manifest to the blind their blindness, (2) manifest light in the darkness, which enables the blind to see. These two steps are performed by the twofold sign function:

1. **The evidentiary nature of signs**: The evidentiary character or first type of a sign simply signifies that there is a realm beyond the earthly (it refers beyond itself). It thus breaks the closure and makes known to the blind their blindness, but the people are not yet brought to true sight. Here are a few examples: Many "believe" when they see the signs that Jesus does (2:23), but this is not a deep acceptance of Jesus. Jesus does not trust himself to these people because he knows their nature (2:24). Such people are like Nicodemus. He comes to Jesus in the night and knows Jesus is from God "for no one can do these signs that you do
unless God is with him" (3:2). But Nicodemus knows "neither the earthly things Jesus tells him nor the heavenly things (3:12). Likewise, people come to Jesus after he miraculously feeds them - a seeming indication of acceptance or belief - but shortly after that they challenge him to give a sign (as do "the Jews" in 2:18) and then fall away when he says his hard sayings (Ch. 6, esp. vs. 30, 41, 60). In these accounts the signs do not bring people to the fullness of faith. But they succeed in getting their attention, indicating that something beyond the ordinary is taking place and a time of decision is at hand.

In John, one cannot take for granted that the wonder (first type sign) will bring about its world-shattering, closure breaking result. People can refuse to accept that Jesus is from God, denying the merit of the sign (9:26-34). Those who refuse to acknowledge that the worker of the sign is from above are the ones who claim not to be blind. By saying that they see, however, they remain in their double blindness. Those who admit they cannot see will be the ones who are brought to sight (9:39-41). The "sin" of the double blind remains (9:41) because they continue to be "of their own" (8:44); i.e. they maintain the closure of the earthly.

Here we see the dynamics of the dualism of decision, set in the context of a dualism of place. Through the evidentiary function of the sign those who are in and of the earth are confronted with an event (the wonder) which cannot be
accounted for in earthly terms. The pure fact - i.e. the "that" of the event - confronts the hearer with a decision: maintain closure or give it up and enter into a new level where a deeper decision is evoked. The Pharisees and Jews, who refuse to give up closure, exhibit the deepest evil. Those who accept the first level but reject the second level (e.g. those who fall away at Jesus' "hard sayings" about eating his flesh) exhibit a lesser evil. They accepted that Jesus is from God but fall away when Jesus makes clear what they must do. The first type of sign thus serves as a threshold which initiates some to a second threshold.

In the evidentiary sign (type 1) the sign relates to the signified in an external way; e.g. it relates as the road sign "bridge" relates to the coming bridge. In the feeding of 5,000, the bread that is given is a sign that brings people to follow Jesus. But they follow because they want food (6:26); i.e. they focus on that which was supposed to signify Jesus but is still external to him. One can throw away the bread when one comes to Jesus, as one can throw away the sign "bridge" when one comes to the bridge that it anticipated. Jesus, as the "bread from heaven," is the content (signified) that was anticipated by the earthly bread. The move from earthly bread to Jesus is a move from type 1 sign to type 2 sign. At the second level, Jesus giving the bread (person-work relation) is a sign of the Father giving Jesus (Father-Son relation; ref. 3:16). In this second case, the signifier
will be a part of the signified: Jesus giving the bread is constitutive of the Father giving Jesus.

(2) The apophantic nature of the signs: The character of signification changes when one moves from the first to the second type sign. At the first level, signifier and signified are **static objects**, which are correlated by an arbitrary, external relation; e.g. "bread" is correlated with "Jesus." But at the second level, signifier and signified are **dynamic relations**; they are **verbs** rather than **nouns**, and one is concerned with an activity; e.g. *Jesus giving bread* (person-work relation) is a sign of the *Father giving Jesus*. "Jesus," as person, "gives bread", as work. But the "Father", as the person of God, "gives Jesus", as work, and the giving of Jesus is concretely actualized in "Jesus giving bread." In this way the signifier is an essential, constitutive moment of the signified. It is not arbitrarily and externally related. Or, in other words, the signified is not just anticipated in the signifier; it is **present** therein, although, as we shall see later, it is paradoxically present."

This contrast between two modes of signification can be constituted in terms of a contrast between **writing** and **speaking**. In phonetic writing a **mark** is externally and arbitrarily correlated with a given **sound**. Through the inscribed signifier one can anticipate a speaking event. This is like the first type sign function in John's gospel. But the spoken word expresses in a different way. It is active,
providing an intervention in a world which is essentially related to the individual who is speaking and intervening by way of his or her spoken word.\textsuperscript{87} Here we find the dynamic of John's second type sign.

The second type sign does not just signify that God's word comes; it signifies what that word is. The Word is manifest as active; it is the event of God's self-disclosure seen in Jesus' self-disclosure. The works of Jesus reconstitute visibly the invisible work of God. Then the hearer is called on to reconstitute in his/her person Jesus' works, as Jesus reconstituted in his person God's work.

Note that this oral mode of signification integrates the literary mode of signification as a constitutive moment, even as it excludes the literary signifier as external. The signifier relates to the mode of signification as creation relates to the act of creating. In that act the "that" and "what" of God's word are united. In the incarnation, the "what" is reconstituted in earthly terms which are exterior to the unity (as creation is exterior), but which simultaneously are exterior to their exteriority by means of their participation in the creative event. This dynamic of the creative act/work then provides the archetype that is to be reduplicated in the disciples of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you."

When the disciples "do" (as opposed to merely "know") the works of Jesus, then they will pass the deeper threshold, and
come to the place where Jesus and the Father (in their relation) are disclosed to that disciple:

"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and we will disclose ourselves to him."

This "doing" depends upon the content manifest at the second level of the signs (the "what"). The disciples are to love one another as Jesus loved them. And this "as Jesus loved" is seen in his works, which the disciples are exhorted to emulate. Here we see the merit of functional approaches to John's Christology. But we must simultaneously remember that the archetype to be performed is not separable from the person of Jesus.

Witness

For John the nature of signs and witness are the same. Both require two levels, and John will have two types of witness (entailing different relations between the two levels) just as he has two types of signs (evidentiary and apophantic).88

The first type of witness functions like a wonder: it shatters the closure of the earthly. Instead of doing this by way of a work that no person can do apart from God, it is done by a word that challenges the ordinary, earthly understanding. For example, John says to priests and Levites:

"There stands one among you whom you do not know."
It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." (1:26-27).

And the prologue summarizes John's witness as follows:

"John bore witness of him [the Word become flesh] and cried out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me is preferred before me, for he was before me"' " (1:15).

This paradox forces one to move beyond normal, earthly sequence if one is to understand it. In earthly terms, John is before Jesus; he first comes on the scene and announces Jesus' coming. But how then is Jesus before John? The only way to answer this is to open another, vertical sequence: Jesus is before John in his heavenly origin (this theme of origins will be developed in 6:42, 7:27-28). In this way, the hearer in the narrative (as well as the reader of the narrative) is turned from a horizontal, temporal origination to a transcendent Ground. Through the first type of witness, however, one only comes to the bare fact - the "that" - of the heavenly realm. As in the case of the evidentiary sign, this function of witness only "prepares the way," like the Baptist, for that which is yet to come. It shatters the self-enclosed world of the hearer in the anticipation of "one who will come after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." But it does not say what the content is to which testimony is given. It reveals to the blind their blindness, but does not provide light.

Corresponding to the paradoxical witness (type 1), there
is a first level of belief, entailing a response that is appropriate to the witness.\(^{89}\) The paradox shatters the continuity and coherence of the hearer. One can either reject the viability of the witness or one can give up the course of one's previously coherent life.\(^{90}\) The first response is seen in the priests and Levites, who seek to place John and his testimony within the context of their understanding of the world (1:21-22). When John refuses to be categorized in such terms, the priests and Levites question the legitimacy of his witness and activity (1:25).\(^{91}\) On the other hand, those who receive John's witness are the ones who are willing to break with their past — even with John (1:35-42) — and follow the one who is to come. They are initiated into the expectation by the Baptist's words. One breaks with the past, its coherence and closure, and turns around to the anticipated future.\(^{92}\) Or, in other words, one breaks with the illusion of sight, accepts one's blindness, and looks for a light that is to come.

In the world-shattering, evidentiary moment of the sign, the glory of the signified is not present in the signifier, which only "prepares for" or anticipates it (the two are externally related). But the presence (as "that") is actual in the signification. In like manner, the announcement of the immanent arrival of glory involves the coming content as its condition;\(^{93}\) John the Baptist speaks prophetically. Here again witness parallels signs. This prophetic speech, which
anticipates a coming content and is grounded in the activity of God's Spirit, should be contrasted with the words and works of Jesus, which are beyond the prophetic in the sense that Jesus gives the Spirit as the content of his expression (6:63).

John is sent to baptize with water. This activity prepares the way for the coming one, who will baptize by the Spirit. We learn later in the gospel that water is an external signifier of Spirit; it relates to Spirit as the earthly bread relates to heavenly bread.

In the transition from John's baptism to that of Jesus⁹⁴, we can see the movement from the first type of witness to the second type. Correspondingly, we will see a deepening of the response from a break with closure (first level response) to an understanding of the "new commandment", which is manifest in Jesus (second level response).⁹⁵ The transition to the second type of witness is seen in 1:29-34, where John sees (witnesses!) the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus (the witness witnesses descent!). The same Spirit that sent John to baptize with water⁹⁶ now comes down and remains (note the importance of menein in John) on Jesus, who is the announced one. After the descent, the water, which is the external signifier of Spirit, is set aside, and the signified takes the place of the signifier: Jesus will baptize with the Spirit. That which was announced or anticipated in the sign (water) is now present. It was previously present in the
founding of the significatory act (in the sending) - it was the "that" of the event - but now it is present as a unity of the founding and the act - both "that" and "what".

After the Spirit descends upon Jesus, the nature of John's witness also changes. It turns from announcement to self-negation: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30). The external witness is set aside as one moves to the second level, and the "coming one," which even John did not know, is identified: Jesus is the one of whom John spoke (1:30). With this identification the shift from John to Jesus takes place (1:35-42).

Unlike John, who did not know that to which he bore witness (1:31), Jesus testifies to what he clearly perceives: "Most assuredly, I say to you, we speak what we know and testify what we have seen" (3:11). It has been often recognized in Johannine scholarship that the content of Jesus' witness is none other than his self; i.e. it is a self-witness concerning his relation to the Father. But exegetes like J.C. Hindley and Robert Kysar are incorrect when they contend that the revelation (the self-witness) is contentless.97 As we have seen in our discussion of the logic of revelation, the content is given in the person-works relation, taken as a reconstitution of the Father-Son relation. Jesus' testimony, which is indeed a self-witness, has the rhetorical function of making the revelatory content accessible to the hearer.98 Jesus' words reflect upon the way in which his works reveal
his person and the way they, in turn, reveal his relation, as Word, to the Father. Further, the witness of Jesus makes known to the hearer the way in which (s)he is to live her or his life. This is because Jesus gives in his person the "new commandment," which others are to follow.\textsuperscript{99}

This characteristic of the second type of witness - that it reveals the way a person is to live by clarifying the person-work relation of Jesus; it is the light - is seen in the pericope on Nicodemus. In 3:3-8, Jesus testifies of being "born from above" and this birth is understood as twofold: of the water and the Spirit. Raymond Brown well notes that Jesus "is in a position to know of this, for he has come from above"\textsuperscript{100}. And it is not coincidental that the terms "water" and "Spirit" are exactly the terms used in the earlier discussion of the twofold baptism, where the transition from the first to second level of witness comes about by the descent from above of the Spirit. John's witness (born of water) is seen in his paradoxical words, which break the closure of the earthly sequence and force one to open a vertical sequence (origination in heaven) that contrasts with the earthly. After this the focus shifts to the specific content that comes down from heaven and empowers one to see (light) and enter the kingdom of heaven (3:3,5). The transition from external witness (John) to the self-witness of Jesus is simultaneously a transition from the content of revelation (as external to the hearer) to the reception of the
content. Jesus' self-witness makes the person-work relation accessible to the hearer. This is exactly the function given by the evangelist to the Spirit: it takes the things of Jesus and brings them to the hearer (14:26). Jesus says: "He [the Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take of what is mine and declare (ἀναγγέλλω) it to you" (16:14). Compare this with 1:18: Jesus declares (ἐξάγω) the Father, who no one else has seen. He does this by reconstituting in the person-work the relation between Father-Word. The Spirit then takes this "objective revelation", which is independent of reception, and makes it accessible to the hearer (the disciples)."101

The rhetorical function given to the Spirit is exactly the function given to Jesus' self-witness. That is why Jesus' words are spoken of as "spirit" (6:63), and why the giving of the Spirit can be identified as the coming of Jesus:

"If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another helper, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; but you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (14:15-18).

The Spirit dwells with them as Jesus. Jesus will be in them as Spirit, quickening to them the way of person-work, which gives the "new commandment" that the disciples must keep (13:34).

This interpretation gives Jesus' self-witness a very different function than the one outlined by H.C. Hindley, who focused almost exclusively on the evidentiary function which
we have developed as the first type of witness. Hindley criticizes the self-referential role of Jesus' words because they violate the rules of evidence, thus proving nothing. But the role of witness was not to bring about acceptance. That was accomplished by the first level, and it is a condition of knowledge. Jesus himself recognizes that the self-witness cannot prove anything (5:31), thus he admonishes people to "believe on account of the works". The self-referential words of Jesus presuppose a belief that has been evoked by the wonders (first type sign) and the external testimony of people like John, who witnessed the Spirit descending upon Jesus (other external witnesses include the prophets and Moses, as well as the evangelist who wrote John's gospel, testifying to all things, 21:24). The role of self-witness is thus not to prove, but to give content to and deepen the presupposed, first level belief. The words of Jesus (his self-witness) initiate the believer into the subjective appropriation of life that has been objectively given in the incarnate Word. Instead of bringing about belief, the self-witness unveils (aletheia) what one is to believe. This reverses the conventional philosophical assumption regarding knowledge, which states that one begins with what one believes and then follows with a belief that is based on evidence that confirms the truth of the content.

Rudolf Schnackenburg well summarizes the relation between the first and second level of witness in John's Gospel:
"First there must be an act of total submission, inner assent, and personal commitment (6:68), which of course, includes the conviction that Jesus is "the Holy One of God" (6:69). Then it becomes a task for the believer to penetrate his faith with a progressive understanding ... That is the progress a fide ad intellectum."103

Schnackenburg then notes that "the revelation accepted in faith calls man to action"104. The role of Jesus' self-witness is to make apparent what has been revealed; to move one from the "that" to the "what" of revelation. Then one is to obey. This entails following the archetype that is given in and as the person-work of Jesus.

Why do we have this curious reversal in John, such that a knowledge of what one believes follows the belief? This seems to violate all rules of reason and evidence. To grasp the answer to this question, we must now turn from the role of signs and witnesses in establishing understanding to the nature of misunderstanding and unbelief. We will find that any attempt to understand, which is based upon pre-established categories derived from the earthly realm and its closure, can only lead to misunderstanding. Instead one must give up the pre-understanding and learn to re-understand the earthly terms (like water, light, and bread) that are then used as signs of heavenly things. Nicodemus, for example, perceives neither earthly nor heavenly things. And if he does not grasp the former, then he cannot grasp the latter; he cannot appreciate what has been revealed.
Figurative Language and Misunderstanding

In order to understand heavenly things, one must come to the place where one understands that earthly things like water, bread, and light are a language by which God conveys a knowledge of heavenly things. Through figurative language, John's Jesus brings the reader to see earthly things as a language of God. This language, spoken in and as the works of Jesus (the signs), will then be used to teach the disciples about the Father. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on one's perspective), the disciples are not always the best students, when it comes to learning this language. The misunderstanding and irony found in the narrative helps clarify the obstacles to discerning the revelatory content conveyed by the heavenly language.\textsuperscript{105} In this section we will develop an account of language and communication that brings together the previous discussions of signs (works) and witness (words).

The overall intent of Jesus' words in John's gospel are as follows: Jesus seeks to shatter "the lie" (8:44), i.e. the closure of the "earthly" (creation), and make known (unveil - \textit{aletheia}) the nature of the heavenly realm to which all people are blind. As he himself, in his own being, expresses in an earthly person and work the heavenly person and work of God, so his earthly words express heavenly words. But, for John, the earth is already an expression of the heavenly. Heavenly
words are thus earthly things. Through figurative language earthly things are used as signifiers of other things, replacing the linguistic signifiers that are conventionally used. 106 Then, in a second movement, John will use the earthly thing as a conventional signifier in the heavenly language, thus moving from figurative to plain expression (16:25).

To understand the way figurative language operates, we must develop a theory of language that does justice to the dynamics of communication between Jesus and a hearer in John's narrative. Let us begin by noting that such communication presumes two worlds. For now let us simply refer to these worlds as (1) the world of the speaker (or writer), and (2) the world of the hearer (or reader). But this is not enough. Communication also involves an overlap between their worlds. Take, for example, the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. Minimally, the overlap between their worlds involves three things: (1) a common context - the surroundings where they meet, the well and water pot of the woman, etc. (2) a common language - the differential system of spoken sounds or written marks, that is used to express an idea or experience, and (3) a correlation between the common context and the common language. The linguistic level is adjusted to a given context in the case of any particular expression. In sum, one must have two levels, the "earthly" and the linguistic, and there must be a correlation between
the two. Then, through language, an existential intention can be conveyed; one can have communication. When Jesus says to the Samaritan woman "give me to drink", an invisible intention within the speaker's world (the desire for water) is conveyed to the hearer.

In the light of this basic, overly simplistic account of communication we can provide a characterization of two important forms of communication: the literal and figurative. It is important to note that these characterizations pertain to the correlations between existential and linguistic levels and not to the linguistic level alone. In literal, direct communication one has a single correlation between the existential, earthly domain and the linguistic domain. The speaker says a word, e.g. "water", which is taken to directly correlate with the domain at the earthly level, e.g. that stuff that the woman has in her pot and which she drew out of the well.

Figurative, indirect communication involves a double correlation; namely, a correlation of (at least) two correlations. It also involves (at least) a double reading of the passage which is interpreted figuratively. A first, virginal reading is always literal. In a figurative expression, however, there is an absurdity or an insufficiency in the literal reading, which forces a re-reading and thus a second interpretation. On the second reading, one looks for associations and extra-textual allusions that enable one to
overcome the insufficiency or absurdity in the direct reading. The indirect, figurative interpretation reads one text by way of another; the present text is interpreted by way of an absent one.

Consider, for example, the word "water" in Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman which says "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (Jn. 4:14). On an initial, literal reading, this statement is absurd. Although the absurdity is not clear to the Samaritan woman (4:15), it is clear enough to the reader. (In what follows, I will consider the way in which the figurative meaning is constituted for the reader.) Once the virginal reading has proved unfruitful, the reader looks for the absent text, which will enable her to overcome the initial absurdity. One obvious candidate is found in John 7:37-39:

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this he spake concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in him would receive ..."

These verses provide the genesis of the figurative use of "water" as a replacement for "Spirit". Then, for the reader (who must be a nonvirginal reader of John's text, since the text that provides the key to interpreting 4:14 does not come until 7:37-39), a re-reading of 4:14 enables one to understand that Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman about receiving the Spirit.
Let us now look at the identification of "Spirit" and "living water", which generates the figurative meaning of "water" in Jesus' statement to the Samaritan woman. We find here a correlation of two literal, direct correlations: (1) the correlation between the word "water" (linguistic level) and that stuff that can be poured and which bubbles up from a natural spring (existential level), and (2) the correlation between the word "Spirit" (linguistic level), and that nebulous, moving something which is like breath or wind, but which designates a heavenly reality (existential level). Through the double correlation, the existential reference of the word "water" becomes the word - the linguistic designator - of that nebulous something designated by the word "Spirit". By the double, figurative correlation, one existential domain is made into the name of another, and the two linguistic designators (the words "water" and "Spirit") are canceled out. When one comes to Jesus' statement "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give ...", then one generates meaning by a double reference: the word "water" (linguistic level) designates the flowing substance which bubbles up in a spring (earthly level), which in turn is taken as the designation of that nebulous something, which is associated with the activity of God (heavenly level).

When the earthly level is taken as the name that designates the heavenly level, then the relation between name and named is different than when one uses a linguistic
designator (the word "water" or "Spirit") that is arbitrarily related to that which it designates. The bubbling substance (the referent of "water") which names the heavenly activity (the referent of "Spirit") reveals something about the named, while the linguistic designator of that heavenly activity (the word "Spirit"), when used by itself, says nothing about that which it designates, but rather presupposes it.\textsuperscript{107}

Summarizing, literal speech is direct, using only a single correlation. But figurative speech is indirect, using multiple correlations. Misunderstanding occurs if one confuses literal and figurative communication.\textsuperscript{108} For example, when the Samaritan woman responds to Jesus by saying "Sir give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw", it is clear that she has only used a single correlate of "water", which leads to misunderstanding of Jesus' expression. The absurdity of the direct reading should have led her to a re-reading of the words. The art of understanding involves learning to read the absurd a second time, by indirection. Through the detour, the paradox is overcome and one penetrates a new world - one in which coherence is regained, but only by stepping out of the old coherence. This reading by indirection, reading by re-reading, will provide the key to understanding misunderstanding in John's gospel.

Before giving some examples of how misunderstanding works in John's gospel, it will be helpful to note one additional
literary tool that can be generated from the literal and figurative readings. Imagine that a given sentence can be read in both a literal and figurative way. For example, consider what Jesus says to the disciples: "I have food to eat of which you do not know" (4:32). At the literal level, this has a nonabsurd meaning. It could say something about the direct correlate of the words "eating food". But it can also be read figuratively. Then it says by indirection something about "doing the will of God" (4:34). In the previous example on water, there was an absurdity that forced the reader to reject the literal reading and move to the figurative one. But in our present example about food, the virginal and secondary readings can be maintained simultaneously. One does not know that Jesus speaks figuratively until reading John 4:34. The literary techniques of comedy and tragedy can then be generated by the way the two levels are brought together.

Here I shall simply consider one literary technique which plays an important role in tragedy; namely, irony. Irony takes place when two readings are possible, and one develops a direct reading as consequential without recognizing the indirect reading. Then a whole domain of discourse (the figurative) will provide an implicit commentary upon the reader who only grasps the direct reading. Here a form of misunderstanding will be realized as a constitutive moment of the ironic. But this misunderstanding will differ from the open misunderstanding (the confusion or lack of understanding
found when the literal meaning is absurd) in that the person misunderstanding will not understand that he or she does not understand. This double misunderstanding can be seen in the Samaritan woman's response to Jesus in 4:15. In John's gospel it will also be directly associated with the blind who think they see (9:41).

The move from double blindness to sight — i.e. the move from a victim of irony to an insider — involves two steps:

(1) Move from the double misunderstanding of irony to the single misunderstanding of confusion — this will entail realizing that one's presumed understanding (the literal interpretation) is actually misunderstanding. In this movement, the absurdity and paradoxical nature of the literal will become manifest, overthrowing the first reading.

(2) Move from the absurd (paradox, confusion) to the second, indirect reading in which an absent text will provide the key for understanding the text in question (the present text).

Examples of this double movement can be found throughout John's text.\textsuperscript{110} For now, I will look at only one case early in the Gospel. In John 2:13-22 we have Jesus' cleansing of the temple.\textsuperscript{111} The "Jews"\textsuperscript{112} ask Jesus what sign he gives to justify his action and he answers by stating: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Because of the context in which Jesus says this, the Jews misunderstand.\textsuperscript{113}
They assume that he is speaking of the building that Jesus just cleansed. They then point out the absurdity of such a literal reading: "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But instead of letting the absurd (which ironically is not absurd, given Jesus' power to work wonders) bring them to a second reading\(^{114}\) - a reading they could not yet attain anyway, because they do not have the vantage point of the resurrection - they take it as an indictment of Jesus (this will become clear as the antagonisms develop later in the narrative). They demand a sign. But Jesus does not provide a sign that satisfies them. Instead he gives to them an absurdity that challenges their categories. For the (future) disciples (i.e. the reader), however, the second level is made apparent. It depends upon the absent correlation of "temple" and "body" (2:21). On the basis of this, one can know that the statement about the temple is, on a re-reading (figurative correlation), a statement about the body of Jesus, referring to the death and resurrection.

In this johannine example the movement to understanding involves (1) the recognition that one's initial interpretation of what Jesus said - his reference to the raising of the destroyed temple in three days - does not entail a direct, literal correlation. One must understand that one has misunderstand. (2) Next, one needs the absent text - the correlation between "temple" and "body" - which enables one to
re-read, by indirection, the text that was initially misunderstood. This absent text is the key that initiates the "outsider" into the fellowship of the johannine community.

Note two important characteristics of this narrative about the temple: (a) The sign which Jesus offers as a justification of his present, temple cleansing is in the future (the resurrection); it is thus an eschatological justification rather than a protological one.\textsuperscript{115} (b) The words Jesus uses to speak of the future sign are figurative, and they require an absent text (the correlation between "temple" and "body") in order to be rightly understood. The Jews thus are not in a position to understand what Jesus said, and even if they were, the sign Jesus offers - the resurrection - would have been no more convincing than the misunderstood sign regarding the raising of the literal temple. But if this is the case, then how can the Jews be culpable for their rejection of Jesus? Or do we have, as Kysar suggests, a simple predestination in which some are excluded on no other basis than God's election?\textsuperscript{116} Could one be held accountable for refusing to accept a future event, expressed in an unintelligible way, as a justification for present activity which challenges the established religious practices of a community?

In order to address these questions, we need to reflect on the temple cleansing pericope in the context of John's whole gospel. We have stated that the sign which Jesus offers
is in the future (the resurrection). But this must be further qualified. In John 11:23-25 we find the following dialogue between Jesus and Martha, the sister of Lazarus:

"Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day". Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live."

In this dialogue Martha pushes the import of Jesus' words into the distant future - the last days. But Jesus brings the future into the present: "I am the resurrection". By doing this, he affirms that the condition of the fulfillment of his words ("your brother will rise again") are already satisfied, and "belief" (11:25) is made the condition of the condition. This seems to make the hearer responsible and it blunts the more deterministic passages in the gospel.

If we interpret John 2:13-22 in the light of 11:25, then we see that the sign which justifies Jesus' activity is indeed present. As the resurrection, Jesus himself - his personal presence - provides both the justification of his activity and the condition of understanding his words. If the Jews pursue the discussion further, seeking to understand what Jesus says, and how his words provide an answer to their question, then they can be led to an appreciation of the significance of Jesus' action.117 This is seen in the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4), where the woman starts out like "the Jews" (she also did not have the absent text needed for understanding) but moves to discipleship by engaging
Jesus. "Unbelief" closes off the discussion, by refusing to let go of the initial interpretation given to the events.

The Jews thus have the condition as "that" - the personal presence. But in order to understand they must engage Jesus; the condition must be actualized. Then, in the course of the dialogue, they could come to understand what the condition is. The movement from "that" to "what" is exactly what takes place in the process of re-reading, by indirection. In John's gospel the narrative development will involve this movement, and it can be seen in the deepening of one's understanding of "resurrection" from its initial manifestation as "cleansing" to the resuscitation of Lazarus, culminating in Jesus' being "lifted up" on the cross and rising to a new mode of existence. The full narrative development would be too lengthy for us to recount here, but an account of the temple cleansing pericope illustrates how the process operates.

John 2:13-22 takes up themes that have been introduced earlier. We have already outlined the role of cleansing in John's water baptism. This baptism anticipated Spirit baptism, and the account of John's testimony of Jesus developed the transition from the first level of witness (break closure) to the second level (unveil glory). Again, in the pericope on the Cana wedding, we see the same motif: water set aside for purification is transformed into wine, which celebrates new life in marriage. This motif of cleansing and its transformation is central to 2:13-22.
The moneychangers, etc. corrupt the temple; they make it impure (they change it into a "house of merchandise"). It is now in need of water cleansing (John's baptism). The act of corrupting the temple anticipates the activity of "the Jews"; they will crucify Jesus, lifting him up on a tree. They will destroy Jesus' body (figurative temple) as the moneychangers destroyed, i.e. corrupted, the temple building (literal temple). Jesus purifies the literal temple with a whip of chords. This is water baptism; it anticipates the work of cleansing that takes place in the passion and cross. Note the sacrificial imagery:¹¹⁸ the temple cleansing takes place when the Passover is at hand (2:13). Jesus is the "lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (1:29). But even further, Jesus' literal cleansing anticipates the resurrection. When the Jews ask for a sign, Jesus says "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". The parallel with the present pericope is clear:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jewish Activity</th>
<th>Jesus' Activity</th>
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Level 1: Temple

1. Destroy the literal temple 1. Cleanse the literal temple by by turning it into a house driving out the corruption - of merchandise. water baptism.
Level 2: Body

2. Destroy figurative temple by crucifying Jesus. 2. Cleanse figurative temple by raising up the body to a new mode of existence - Spirit baptism.

Jesus thus answers the request for a sign by pointing to the deeper events that are pre-figured in his present activity. In essence, Jesus says to them: "You want a sign. That is what my present activity is. It signifies to you what you will do to me - your activity. And it also signifies what I will do in response - my activity." As the temple relates to the body of Jesus, so "cleansing" relates to "resurrection". But note the self-reflexive nature of the relation between literal and figurative levels (self-witness): Jesus is himself the temple. In him God "tents" among us (1:14). He is likened to Bethel (the "house of God"), where angels of God ascend and descend (Genesis 28:12 with Jn. 1:51). But note that he is not a simple replacement for the temple. One could say that the type of God's presence anticipated in the temple is now fulfilled in Jesus. To this extent the temple is no longer needed; Jesus is its destruction. But the temple is also raised up to a new level in Jesus. Borrowing a word from the philosophy of Hegel, we can say that "temple" is aufgehoben in the body of Jesus, with the double meaning of "dirempted" (destroyed) and "sublimated" (raised). The nature
of the cross and resurrection is thus seen in the relation between temple and Jesus. By reflecting on the person and work, we can see the event to which the words refer. In this way the double reading of the narrative enables the reader to see the temple cleansing as an expression of the resurrection, leading to a knowledge of that which is initially opaque. The reader can also see how the two types of signs and the two types of witness work together in figurative discourse, guiding a hearer/reader to subjectively appropriate the objective revelation.

IV. THE HERMENEUTIC OF REVELATION

We have considered the logic of revelation in John's gospel, focusing on the way in which the invisible relation between Father and Son is reconstituted in earthly terms as a relation between the person and work of Jesus. This reconstitution is the incarnation: the "becoming flesh" of God's Word, understood as a grammatological movement. Next, we evaluated the rhetoric of revelation, turning in this case to the relation between Jesus and his hearer. Through signs, witness, and figurative language the "objective revelation" is made subjectively accessible to the doubly blind person who is opened to a Word from a world beyond her own. Finally, in this last section, we shall develop John's hermeneutic of revelation, explicating the way in which the subjectively
appropriated content is conveyed by a hearer-turned-disciple to another who is doubly blind and in need of a Word from God. Here our focus turns from the relation between Jesus and a disciple to the relation between the disciple and another person. More specifically, we will consider the relation between the author of John's gospel and his reader.

For the evangelist, belief will lead to an obedience in which the disciple carries on the work and witness of Jesus. As Jesus reconstitutes in earthly terms the invisible relation between God and his Word, so the disciple will reconstitute the person-work of Jesus. The evangelist's activity in writing his text can be taken as an instance of such a work, incarnating in linguistic terms the revelatory event that takes place in/as Jesus. The grammatological movement is thus extended from Word-become-flesh to flesh-become-text.

To fully appreciate John's hermeneutic, we must bring together two important dimensions of interpretation. First, we must consider how the evangelist extended the incarnation. This, in turn, will entail a discussion of the way such activity is an expression of discipleship with its obedience to the "new commandment". Second, we must also consider the way in which a reader of John's text appropriates the content (the text) which results from the evangelists activity. The hermeneutic will thus entail bringing together two horizons; the merging of the disciple's extension of the logic of
revelation (grammatological movement) with the reader's reception, taken as a rhetorical event. We can use our previous discussion of the logic and rhetoric of revelation to address these hermeneutical concerns.

The New Commandment

According to John, people in the world are "doubly blind," and they are brought to sight by a twofold process. First, the closure of the person's world is shattered by a work that cannot be understood in earthly terms (sign) or a word that is paradoxical (witness). If the person responds by giving up the coherence of her world, she is brought to a second threshold, where a deeper decision is evoked. At the second level, the person is called on to understand what has been revealed. This requires a re-reading of the initial, world shattering event. Through indirection, the words of Jesus bring one to see the way in which his works reveal his person, and the way the person-works relation, in turn, reveals the unity of the Father and the Son.

In this twofold process the person is empowered to partake of the life of God. This life is the unity of Father and Son, set forth as the basis of communal life and as a pattern to be emulated by the hearer-become-disciple. The disciple now knows that God has revealed himself, what that revelation entails, and how to reduplicate that life upon the
earth. Together, this revelatory content makes up the "new commandment", which has been given by and as Jesus. In the light of this commandment the emphasis in John's gospel shifts from believing and knowing to doing God's Word (14:21,23).

It is important to understand how belief, knowledge, and obedience work together in John's gospel. Does discipleship entail an ascent, in which the hearer arises to a mystical vision of heavenly things, so that knowledge is the final end? Or does it entail a doing of the archetype - the new commandment - such that knowledge is subordinated to works of love? In John there is a spiral between knowing and doing,\textsuperscript{122} but we have yet to resolve whether one takes precedence over the other. When we answer these questions, we will be able to give a resolution to the dichotomy between functional and metaphysical approaches to John's christology. Further, we will be able to use the information to determine the purpose of John's text. This, in turn, will be a vital part of an explication of John's hermeneutic.

Our discussion of the interrelation between knowing and doing will involve: (1) An account of Moses and the Law. By contrasting the relation between the old and new commandments, we can better appreciate the specific function John gives to obedience. (2) Then we will develop the role of ascent and descent in the gospel, outlining the contrast between a gnostic, mystical account and John's understanding. Finally, (3) we will look at the way in which the new commandment
involves a manifestation of the heavenly life, which is to be the basis of the Johannine community. We will find that doing is a form of reception in which one participates in the life of God. This is why "abiding" in the Father and Son is directly connected with "keeping the commandments". In the knowing/doing whereby one keeps the new commandment, the incarnation is further extended from Jesus into the works and words of the Johannine community.

A. Moses and the Law

Many scholars have recognized that traditions about Moses play an important role in John's gospel. At the climax of the prologue, for example, one find the following contrast:

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (1:17-18)

Could this verse involve a rejection of a tradition in which Moses is regarded as a soteriological figure who has ascended into heaven and beheld God? Then 1:18 interprets the contrast in 1:17: Even Moses, through whom the law came, has not seen God. Jesus is greater, since he has seen (6:46) and declares what has been hidden from all others. From this it follows that the law is insufficient; it did not manifest the Father in the complete way that Jesus manifests him. "Grace and truth", which are given through Jesus and which enable one
to receive eternal life, were not available through the law.

If this interpretation is correct, then, according to John, Jesus performs the function which the tradition incorrectly attributed to Moses.\textsuperscript{125} In that tradition Moses is regarded as pre-existent, an agent of creation, and the Law is understood as the full and final expression of God's will.\textsuperscript{126} The world is created through and for the Law.\textsuperscript{127} But for John, Jesus is "the Prophet", the preexistent agent of creation who fully expresses the will of God, not Moses or the law.\textsuperscript{128}

A careful reading of John's text shows that Moses and the law have the same role as the witness of John the Baptist:\textsuperscript{129} they confront people, manifesting to them the insufficiency of their world, and opening them to the coming Word, in which grace and truth are manifest. As in the case of a type 1 sign, Moses and the law are external to that which they signify. The "new commandment" is greater than the law, and Jesus greater than Moses, in the same way that the signified is greater than the external signifier. This contrast is especially clear in John 6.\textsuperscript{130}

In our previous discussion of the bread of life discourse, we found that there were two levels of signification:

(1) \textbf{Earthly bread} is used as an external signifier of Jesus, who is the \textbf{heavenly bread}.

(2) \textbf{Jesus giving bread} is used as a constitutive signifier of
the Father giving Jesus.

We are now in a position to expand on this by integrating our earlier discussion with our present account of Moses and the law. Bread/manna is related to the Law (Torah) in Jewish thought of the first century.\textsuperscript{131} This fact, coupled with the reference to Moses in 6:32 enables us to read John 6:25-59 as a commentary upon Moses and the law on one side, and Jesus and the new commandment on the other.

Consider the following verses:

6:27 Do not work for the food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

6:32-33 [I]t is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

6:45-51 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

When these passages are taken together we can come to the following conclusions:

(1) The food that Moses gives, namely the law, is the food that spoils (6:27). 6:32 should not be interpreted to mean that Moses does not give bread; i.e. that he did not give the law. The contrast is not between "giving bread" and "not
giving bread", but rather between "giving bread" (earthly) and "giving true bread" (heavenly); it is a dispute over the type of bread that is given. This becomes especially clear in 7:19, where Jesus acknowledges that Moses gave them the law. Again in 6:49-50 we see that the contrast is between the bread that the children of Israel ate in the desert, which does not give eternal life ("they died") and the bread that comes down from heaven, which gives eternal life. The "food that endures" is the new commandment, which replaces the law. Thus the law of Moses relates to the new commandment, which is Jesus, as the earthly bread relates to the heavenly bread; i.e. as external signifier.

(2) In 6:46 we find a repetition of 1:18, "no one has seen the Father." It is not coincidental that in both cases the passage occurs in a context where Moses is contrasted with Jesus. Moses is one who has not seen God, while Jesus has greater access, because he has seen the father.

(3) Initially, Jesus is the one who gives the heavenly bread (6:27). Here the contrast is between the activity of Moses and the activity of Jesus, with the latter giving the greater gift. But in 6:32-33 the Father becomes the one who gives and Jesus is the heavenly bread that is given. Jesus thus takes the place of both Moses, as the giver, and the law, as the gift. This twofold function becomes clear in 6:51, where Jesus says "[t]his bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."
Peder Borgen argues that this merging of functions exhibits a "juridical mysticism", thus he brings the content closer to the metaphysical christologies we discussed earlier. He then argues that John critically engages this. But this conclusion is unwarranted. Instead, we can take the merging of functions as a specification of the nature of the new commandment. In the past the activity by which the law became known was separate from the activity which was commanded by the law. The law gave the form of life of the community. But the activity of Moses was individual, entailing an ascent away from the community, in order to obtain the form of communal life. In the case of Jesus, however, the activity by which the commandment is manifest, namely, the grammatological movement of the incarnation, is the very form of communal life. Here the giving of life, understood as self-giving (love), is the "new commandment". Instead of an ascent away from community, implying a hierarchy, one has a descent, where the leader is the servant. This motif is clear in the footwashing pericope, and it is significant that Jesus ends that narrative by stating "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (13:15). This theme is then summarized in 13:34: "A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." In the very act of giving himself, his life, Jesus is the new commandment that is given. Once that life is obtained, the disciple obeys
by conveying that life to another.\textsuperscript{140} This will become the basis of the communal life of the johannine community (13:35).

(4) The process by which Moses made known the law involved human teaching. Further, each person who learns the law must receive it by that same process; (s)he must be taught by a human teacher. But the new commandment is initially given in a different way: the Father gives the Son. It is thus conveyed by God directly, not by a mediator. Further, each person will be brought to a knowledge of that objectively given law by God; namely, through the Spirit. We have the following contrast: the law of Moses is taught by human teachers, thus mediated, while the new commandment is taught by God (6:45).\textsuperscript{141}

Summarizing, according to John, Moses is inferior to Jesus because (a) his access is of a lower type, since he cannot see God, (b) he gives a lesser gift, since the law is not the food that endures, and (c) his teaching has a mediated character. Further, the law is inferior to the new commandment because (a) it does not give eternal life, (b) it brings judgment, manifesting the need for a mediator and thus the sinfulness of the hearer, (7:19 - none of them do the law) and (c) it is external and thus must be taught by humans. In Jesus the functions of Moses and the law are combined; the one who brings the new commandment is the new commandment in the act of bringing life. In the light of Jesus, Moses and the law are relativized to the status of witness. They testify to
the new covenant (Jn. 5:39) and can thus be understood according to the model of external witness that we discussed in the last chapter.

There is, however, a significant problem that we have not yet sufficiently addressed. We discussed the difference between human and divine teaching. The hearer who encounters Jesus can be taught directly by God. But what about the person who comes to Jesus after Jesus died? Does not (s)he depend upon the witness of a disciple of Jesus? This puts a human mediator between Jesus and the hearer, and seems to restore one to the type of relation one had with the law, where there is a mediator between God and man. This can be referred to as the problem of the secondary follower. The primary follower (the disciple of Jesus) has a direct relation with Jesus. Because of the nature of Jesus, (s)he is taught by God. But the secondary follower (the disciple of Moses) has access to Jesus only through the words of another person. (S)he is thus taught by a human teacher, and this puts her or him in the same predicament as one who is under the law. The key question is then: How can one be a disciple of Jesus after Jesus dies?

B. Ascent and Descent

One way of addressing the problem of the secondary follower can be found in a tradition about Moses: by ascending
into heaven one gains access to an immediacy with God. Thereafter one can be taught of God. There are then two steps: (1) a human teacher teaches how to ascend to an immediacy with God; then (2) God teaches the person who has successfully ascended. The human teaching is then identified with the law, and the divine teaching with the new commandment. Fulfillment of the law then becomes a condition of gaining access to the immediacy, which is needed for divine teaching and the new covenant. By obeying the law, one can follow Moses in his ascent up Sinai, where the vision of God can be obtained.\textsuperscript{145}

Such a model could serve as a Jewish-Christian account of the relation between the law and Christ and it may serve as a background tradition against which John reacts. For the Jewish-Christians the law would still be in effect, and would serve as a necessary beginning for the person who wishes to attain a full knowledge of God. By obeying the law, one fulfills the condition needed for ascending into heaven and obtaining the \textit{vision of the resurrected Christ}. \textit{Human teaching}, carried out in the Christian community or Synagogue, is needed for the \textit{secondary follower}. As the follower puts into practice the principles of the old covenant, then (s)he is empowered to \textit{ascend to Christ}, where (s)he is transformed into a \textit{primary follower}, like the initial disciples of Jesus, who serve as examples.

In the last section we considered \textit{Moses the lawgiver},
focusing on the relation between him and the people. Now we shift to Moses the visionary, developing the relation between him and God. In John there is an obvious polemic against the idea that immediacy with God can be obtained by ascent.\textsuperscript{146} Instead of associating ascent with the vision of God and life, John paradoxically reinterprets the Mosaic theme so that ascent is associated with judgment and death. This undermines the contention that obedience to the law enables one to overcome the problem of the secondary follower.

There are at least four components to John's reinterpretation of the Mosaic ascent tradition:

(1) The law is itself associated with judgment (5:45-46) and death (6:49), and the presumption of obedience only manifests one's double blindness and thus one's inability to ascend.\textsuperscript{147} "The Jews" think they are not in bondage (8:33), but this only manifests their slavery. "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (8:34). If "the Jews" acknowledged that they do not have a vision of God, i.e. that they do not see, then their sin would be removed. But since they stand fast in their presumption, their sin remains as a barrier (9:39-41).

(2) The emphasis is shifted from the ascent of Moses at Sinai to the descent of God in and as the Word.\textsuperscript{148} It is not Moses who goes up to get the bread (Torah), but the Word of God which comes down as the true bread (6:32-33).

(3) The theme of ascent is directly connected with Jesus
being "lifted up" on the cross.\textsuperscript{149} It is thus associated with death, not life. This point is especially clear in 3:13-15:

"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

Here it is explicitly stated that Moses did not ascend into heaven, since only the descending Son of Man has ascended. Further, the "lifting up" of the serpent is directly linked with Jesus being lifted up on the cross in 12:32-33.

(4) There is a juxtaposition between Moses' ascent at Sinai, where he receives the law, and Moses' ascent at Nebo where he sees and dies.\textsuperscript{150} The whole farewell discourse follows the general pattern of the final speech Moses makes to the children of Israel before Joshua leads them into the promised land (Deuteronomy).\textsuperscript{151} Because of Moses' sin, he cannot enter (Deut. 32:51). Thus God says to him:

"Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho; view the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel as a possession; and die on the mountain which you ascend, and be gathered to your people" (Deut. 32:49-50).

In another place God says to Moses "go up ... behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan" (Deut. 3:27).
It is significant to note that just before Moses ascends to has death, he explicitly forewarns the children of Israel to obey the commandments and not be concerned with ascent:

"This commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?" ... But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deut. 30:11-12, 14).

Although Deuteronomy does associate obedience to the law with life, the curses in Deut. 28:15-68 make clear that disobedience will entail death. Since for John people cannot obey because of their bondage to sin, all will be under the curse, and this will connect the law with death. Even Moses, through whom the law came, did not receive the blessings and life that come with obedience, thus he ascends to death.

Taken together these four johannine reinterpretations of ascent provide a strong polemic against a Jewish-Christian solution of the problem of the secondary follower, which sets up the law as a way of gaining access to the presence of God. But this does not mean that John advocates the absence of God. There are several passages that indicate Jesus will be with the disciples even after his departure, and, as we have seen, the presence of God is a condition of the new covenant, which promises that people will be taught of God.
The question is not whether we have pure absence or pure presence, but rather what is the nature of God's paradoxical presence and how does one gain access to it.

C. The Life of the Johannine Community

Instead of an advocacy of ascent, John proclaims the priority of the descent of God's Word. This descent initially takes place as the incarnation, when the word becomes flesh. But it does not end there. When Jesus is "lifted up" on the cross, the condition is established for the further descent of God's presence into the community of those who believe. By means of this extension of the incarnation, John solves the problem of the secondary follower. Since God's presence is available in the johannine community, a new hearer can still be taught of God.\textsuperscript{153} Thus the Spirit (Paraclete) "will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (16:8) and he will "guide you into all truth" (16:13). Viewed in this way, the coming of the Paraclete is continuous with the descent of the Logos.

In order to understand how God is present in the community, we need to briefly review the way in which God was present in Jesus.\textsuperscript{154} The body of Jesus was regarded as the temple of God; the place where the Shekinah dwells. This theme is central to the meaning of the incarnation, which actualizes the glory (doxa) in the flesh (sarx), and is
defined as God "tenting" or "tabernacling" among us (1:14). In the logic of revelation we saw that the glory, which is the invisible unity of the Father and Son (the life of God), became present in the flesh (the body of Jesus) in a threefold way: the that, what, and how of revelation.

As that, God's glory is the unspecified and unspecifiable presence of God in his otherness. Thus Jesus encounters his hearer as one who is alien, from another world. The wonder character of the signs, the paradoxical nature of witness, and the absurdity of an initial reading of figurative language each confront the closure and unity of a hearer's world and announce an other-worldly presence. If the hearer responds negatively, in unbelief, then (s)he cuts her or himself off from God's presence, rejecting the glory of God as if it were the demonic (8:48). But if one believes, then one can engage that presence, and a discipleship relation is initiated. Belief is thus a way of appropriating an offer which is made possible by the manifest glory; namely, it is the appropriation of the opportunity to be taught by God.

As what, God's glory is the relation between God and his Word, which was operative in the creation of the world, and which can also be spoken of as the unity of the Father and Son. This is the form of divine life, and for John it is manifest in the person-works relation of Jesus. The content is subjectively appropriated as knowledge by the one who reflects upon or re-reads the initial event that confronted
the hearer as paradoxical or absurd. Through signs, witness, and figurative language the disciple comes to see what is revealed in the words and works of Jesus. For those who initially believed, but then did not accept what Jesus tells them, the belief turns into unbelief. Unlike the Pharisees, they were willing to accept a word from a world beyond their own. But when they discovered what that word said, they were offended and fell away.

It is important to see that belief and knowledge are ways of responding to and appropriating the life and light that is made available in the revelatory event. They are not ways of gaining access to a content that is absent. The same thing will be true for the "how" of revelation and its appropriation, which is called "obedience."

As "how", God's glory is the way of descent. It is the displacement from the heavenly to the earthly, whereby the invisible unity is reconstituted in visible terms. We see it in the logic of revelation. Further, it is the displacement from the objective, earthly content of revelation - the what - to the subjectively appropriated awareness of that content, which is called "knowledge." We thus see it in the rhetoric of revelation as well. This "way" (14:6) is subjectively appropriated in the act of obedience, whereby the displacement is extended from the knowledge of the disciple into her or his words and deeds. Knowledge is then reduplicated in/as expression (act). This is analogous to the creative word by
which God called life into being. In the act of obedience, the life of God, which is the unity of Father and Son, becomes present in the johannine community.\textsuperscript{161} God will "tabernacle" among the disciples in the same way he "tabernacled" in Jesus, and this will mean that we can now look for the threefold presence in the community of faith.

The **unity of Father and Son** is the **life** of God. Jesus made this life present on earth by reduplicating it in his person and works.\textsuperscript{162} He saw what the Father was doing (spoken word by which life came forth) and then did as he saw. The deeds which he performed then enabled God to "abide" on earth. Through his obedience, Jesus abides in God's love (15:10). When one sees what Jesus is doing (s)he likewise sees what the Father is doing, since Jesus did nothing on his own. By reduplicating Jesus' deeds, by keeping his commandments, the disciple likewise enables God to abide on earth. They will abide in the love of Jesus, just as he abides in the love of God.\textsuperscript{163} In this way the disciples have in them the life and love of God, and they can convey it to another (6:57). To obey is to do as Jesus did, because Jesus himself is the new commandment.\textsuperscript{164} He brings together the function of Moses as giver of the law, and the law, as gift. In this case the gift is life, and one gives it by reduplicating it in one's action, so that another can be given the opportunity to partake of it.

These themes are well exhibited in the following exchange
between Jesus and Judas (John 14):

(19) "A little while longer and the world will see me no more, but you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (21) He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

(22) Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"

(23) Jesus answered and said to him, "if anyone loves me he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

On a first reading, 14:21 seems to imply a Jewish-Christian approach like that we criticized in the last section; namely, obedience to the commandments seems to be the condition of presence and disclosure. On a more careful reading, however, we find important differences. In 15:10 Jesus says:

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."

We cannot conclude from this that obedience was the means by which Jesus ascended into God's presence and obtained the knowledge and love of God. It is clear throughout the gospel that the sight of God is the condition of Jesus' obedience; it is not something he arrives at after he is obedient. Since the "just as" in 15:10 directly connects the way of the disciples with the way of Jesus, it is clear that obedience is not set up as an ascent. To the contrary, the parallelism between 14:21 and 14:23 makes clear that the "manifesting" and "abiding" involve the descent of God's presence into the words
and works of the disciple. The Father and Son will come and make their home. Several English translations of 14:23 highlight the parallel between this disclosure and the incarnation by the somewhat free translation of μονή as "make our home." God initially "made his home" (Bethel, temple) in the person of Jesus (1:14). After Jesus' departure, however, this home will be made among the disciples. Then the disciples will have in them the life of God, and they will see Jesus (14:19), as Jesus had seen the Father (6:46). Those outside the community will not see Jesus, just as no one other than Jesus has seen the Father (1:18 with 14:19, 22-23).

The disclosure spoken of in 14:21 must thus be regarded as a deeper mode of appropriating God's presence. Initially Jesus was with them. This is the condition of being taught by God, and we see the first stages of appropriation in belief and knowledge. By obedience, however, the conditions are established for a further displacement whereby God will be in them (14:17). The imagery John uses is like that one finds in Deuteronomy, when God's shekinah descends upon the tabernacle. He will "come" and "make his home" with the disciple (14:23); i.e. he will tabernacle in them (1:14). Obedience to the commandments is therefore a way of appropriating the life that is offered as a gift; it is to feed on Jesus. Then one has the life inside, just as Jesus had in him the life of the Father (6:57). Obedience is not a way of ascending to presence. It rather presupposes the presence, which is the
external condition of understanding the commandment, and which enables one to partake of that presence, so it is interiorized as "life."

In every way John reduplicates the relation between Jesus and the Father as a relation between the disciple and Jesus. This is a reduplication of a reduplication, whereby the grammatical movement of the incarnation is extended into the words and works of the johannine community. As a result, the dynamics that were present between Jesus and a hearer will also be present between a hearer-become-disciple and his or her hearer/reader. In essence, there will be no secondary follower because the person who encounters the disciple will encounter Jesus, who is in the disciple as the Spirit. The unity of the Father and Son will be expressed in the community as the unity of Jesus and the disciples. They will relate to one another in love, which is the mark of their discipleship, since it is the life of God.

The signs that Jesus did will be done by the disciples as well. For example, they too will feed the multitudes. The bread they give is the Eucharist, which is susceptible to a double reading (literal and figurative) just as in the case of Jesus’ feeding miracle. On a first reading, the bread given by the disciples is an external sign of the spiritual bread, which is Jesus, who is present in the disciples as the Spirit. But on a second reading, the disciple giving bread is a constitutive sign. It manifests the glory, which is the
life of God. In this way an understanding of the twofold sign-function enables us to address the problem of the "real presence" which has been at the heart of sacramental theology. The extension of the incarnation into the community, becomes the key to determining the modes of God's presence in the acts and words of that community.

Likewise, the self-witness of Jesus is seen in the witness of the disciples. Their words express the presence of Jesus in their deeds. This point has been well demonstrated by J. Louis Martyn, when he exhibits the two levels of johannine discourse.174 At one level, obviously, the words speak of the words and works of Jesus. But at another level they speak of the events that take place in the johannine community. Thus, for example, the man healed from blindness in John 9, who is expelled from the synagogue for following Jesus, is actually a post-resurrection "believer" who has been expelled for following the teachings of the johannine community.175 The narrative of the life of Jesus has been constructed in a way that makes clear that it is simultaneously a narrative of the community of faith. This shows that the writer of the gospel believed that Jesus was "present" in the community not just in terms of his brute facticity (the "that") but also in terms of the concrete narrative of his life (the "what").176 The witness of the community is a self-witness of their own being, recounting a narrative which legitimates their words and deeds by grounding
them in the person-work of Jesus. Now one can see the unity of Jesus and the disciples and from this one can understand the unity of the Father and Son.

The function of the disciple's self-witness is the same as that of Jesus: as a part of the rhetoric of revelation, it enables a hearer/reader to subjectively appropriate the content (paradoxical presence) which is objectively given. We can see this in the way it links up an external event (the life of Jesus) - which is the content that is life - with the concrete circumstances of the community, which are given meaning by means of their participation (abiding) in the external event. Through the disciple's self-witness, the life of Jesus is made near and linked up with present surroundings. The constitution of the self-witness is thus the extension of the incarnation. The disciple's self-witness by itself is the "what", but the constitution of that self-witness is the "how," which extends the "what" of Jesus into the words and deeds of the present community. The performance of this extension is "obedience." Through this obedience the life of Jesus is made available - un-veiled - to others who are in need of that life.
The Purpose of John's Text

"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:30-31).

John specifically states that the purpose of his text is to convey the life that has been given in Jesus. One partakes of this life by believing that the person here and now - this Jesus - is given by God; he is the Son of God. By this belief, one engages a presence that links heaven and earth (1:51).

For the reader of the fourth gospel, the person here and now, Jesus, is none other than the person whose works and words are recounted in and as the text, which is being read. The text thus links the reader with that Jesus, who is the Christ. This raises the question of how the text mediates the life that is manifest in the person of Jesus.

One approach to answering this question regards the text as an external witness, analogous to the witness of John the Baptist. The text, like the law, would then operate under conditions of absence, pointing the reader to the coming one, who subsequently gives the life which John promises and the reader seeks. On this interpretation, the gospel text has only a penultimate function, which can be set aside when the presence of Jesus has been obtained. It would decrease, as Jesus increases.
There are several problems with this interpretation. As an external witness, the text would not bring the reader any further than a person who is under the law, or a disciple of John the Baptist. One would still be waiting for the one who is yet to come. The condition is thus not present for believing that Jesus is the Christ, because one does not have access to Jesus.

One can address this problem by arguing that the role of the text is to bring the reader to Jesus, and then one can obtain life. But this sets up a relation between the reader and Jesus which is analogous to the relation between a hearer and the resurrected Christ in the Jewish-Christian ascent tradition that we outlined above. Now the text serves like the law, giving one a ladder that enables one to ascend from absence to presence. Such an approach would contradict John's whole polemic against the ascent tradition, setting up a contradiction between the content of his text and the function that he gives to it. 179

A second approach to interpreting the function of John's text can be developed from an incarnational understanding of the johannine community. We have already seen that John extends the grammatological movement from the flesh of Jesus into the words and works of the disciples. In the context of such an extension, the text could enable a reader to reflect upon how Jesus is present in the community. Objectively, the Word is given in the community of disciples. The text then
performs the rhetorical function of making the objective content accessible. It operates like the self-witness of Jesus, which brought the hearer to re-read the works in such a way that (s)he sees how they manifest the glory of God.

On this interpretation, the gospel text cannot be set aside, as in the case of its law-like function. But neither can the text operate by itself, nor can it be understood by itself. The content - i.e. the life - is conveyed in and through the community of faith, and the text simply enables the reader to subjectively appropriate that which is objectively given in a way that is separate from the text.

There is considerable warrant for such an approach to John's text, and it is likely that much of the material that has been appropriated in the final redaction served such a function. But there is one significant deficit in this approach: it cannot account for the medium of the message. Why is this content written?\textsuperscript{100} If the intent of the words is to enable an initiate to appropriate the life that is made available in the incarnationally understood community, then the words would serve even better if they were spoken by the disciples who are present and understand how God is present. Such an understanding on the part of the disciples is necessary as a condition of their obedience, and the obedience is necessary for the extension of the incarnation and the "abiding" of the Father and Son.

One way to answer this objection is to say that the words
were written to enable later disciples to remember after the earlier disciples die off. Then the text serves as a canon for the community, and it functions like a crutch, which helps the disciples in performing the rhetorical function of revelation. But this changes the function of the words. Then John would have to say "these words have been written that you may remember ...". However, 20:31 focuses upon belief and not remembering. Although the act of remembrance was obviously central in the writing of the text, and it will be important to anyone who wants to convey the content of the text to another person, the evangelist does not write the text as an aid to memory. Instead he writes it so that the reader may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing may have life in his name. It is not assumed that the reader already knows Jesus and needs to remember him. Instead, the written words initiate one who does not know Jesus, revealing who Jesus is.  

This leads us to a third approach to John's text: Instead of the reader ascending to Jesus by means of the text, Jesus descends to the reader in/as the text. On this interpretation the locus of revelation shifts from the incarnational community to the incarnational text, and the evangelist's act of writing, as an act of obedience to the commandment which Jesus said and is, extends the displacement from Word-flesh to flesh-text. As the invisible unity of Father and Son was reconstituted in fleshly terms as person-work, so the fleshly
unity is reconstituted in purely linguistic terms. Now the objective revelation is in the text, and this content is subjectively appropriated in the process of interpretation.

Note how the function of the disciples' spoken word changes when it is written. When the community was the locus of revelation, the words of the disciples functioned as the rhetoric of revelation. Like the self-witness of Jesus, they enabled a hearer to appropriate the life that was present in the works of the community. But when the words are written, then the link between subjective and objective revelation is transformed into the objective content; rhetoric becomes logic; Spirit becomes flesh. This is exactly what happens when the Creative Word—God's spoken word—becomes flesh in the incarnation, and it shows us again why the "becoming flesh" can be regarded as a grammatological movement (with the qualifications mentioned on pp. 234-235). By means of the inscription, the invisible link between heaven and earth becomes visible (1:51), and then it becomes the content to which one relates rather than the relation. Through the obedience of the disciples, the inscription is continually extended outward toward the other who is in need of a word from God.

In sum: writing takes the invisible spoken word and makes it visible. The spoken word (self-witness of the community) served the rhetorical function of linking hearer and objective content. When it became flesh, the invisible link became
visible; the quickening force between objectivity and subjectivity became itself the objectivity to which one relates. This "becoming" is the incarnation, which makes the heavenly life present in earthly terms so that an individual may partake of that life. John's writing further extends that life from flesh to text.

This interpretation accords well with the function John gives to the text in 20:31. As a result of the extension of the incarnation, the reader relates to the text in the same way that a hearer in the text relates to Jesus. The logic of revelation enables one to understand how the text was written and what one seeks therein. The rhetoric of revelation then enables one to appropriate the content that has been textually given. The process of interpretation involves the appropriation of the content made available in the text. This content is the life given in Jesus. As we have seen from our previous discussion, three steps will be involved in appropriation: belief, knowledge, and then obedience. In the final subsection of this dissertation we will develop some of the hermeneutical implications of this appropriation process.

Hermeneutical Principles For Interpreting John's Text

For John, the presence of God is given in and as the text, which is regarded as the linguistic extension of the
incarnational body of Jesus. The dynamics between the reader and this text can be extrapolated from the text using the analogy of proportionality that results from the incarnational extension: As the body of Jesus relates to a hearer in the narrative so the text will relate to a reader. Since we know how the hearer can appropriate life through belief, knowledge and obedience, we can now use the logic and rhetoric of revelation to show how the reader can obtain life through the process of interpretation: Initially, the text confronts the reader as an alien word - the "that" of revelation. Upon re-reading, the rhetorical tropes, which are a constitutive moment of the text, enable the reader's initiation into and appropriation of the objective content. Then, as the reader puts into practice the knowledge gained from the text, the presence of life enters the reader-become-disciple, and the incarnation is thereby extended from the text into the words and works of that reader.

When we more specifically develop the dynamics of the relation between reader and text, we arrive at the following hermeneutical principles:

(1) The text will initially strike the reader as paradoxical and absurd, just as the words and works of Jesus initially seemed wondrous or paradoxical to the person he encountered in the narrative world. This absurdity confronts the coherence and categoriality of the reader's world, and it evokes a fundamental decision about the character of the
absurdity.

(2) **Belief** is a condition of understanding John's text, just as it was a condition of understanding who Jesus was. The decision evoked by the paradoxical nature of an initial reading of the text can be resolved in two ways: belief or unbelief. The believer is the one who allows the absurdity to overthrow her own world, and is thus open to a word from a world beyond her own. Further, belief involves a certain type of engagement with the text's content, such that the reader gives primacy to the textual categories and dynamics.

(3) There is a fundamental discontinuity between the reader's preunderstanding and the content revealed in the text. This is why the content initially encounters the reader as absurd. In order to understand, the reader must give up the preunderstanding - its categories and coherence - and learn to re-read the text in terms of the categories provided by the text. This will involve a process in which one steps out of the redoubled meaning of one's initial conceptualization and steps into a new meaning.

(4) The text **cannot be understood on a virginal reading**; it must be re-read. This point is made clear in John's own text when he explains one character (Mary) by referring to an event that is not narrated until later in the text (compare 11:2 with 12:3). But it is also apparent from our account of figurative language.

(5) The text **cannot be fully accounted for in worldly**
terms and conditions, just as Jesus could not be fully understood in such terms. In one sense Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph and all people knew him, but in another sense he is from God and no one knows his origin. The same is true of the text. In one sense it can be understood in the categories and terms of its own day, but in another sense it is from God and no one can account for its genesis. The hermeneutically significant dimension is the latter, when we consider the theological import of the text, but this is what has not been accounted for in modern and even post-modern strategies of interpretation. The uniqueness of the text, its specific content, is "from above".

This does not mean, however, that the immanent earthly content is insignificant. To the contrary, the function of the incarnation is the reconstitution of the heavenly in earthly terms. The key to interpreting the text thus involves discerning the way in which the earthly conveys the heavenly. (This will be the key to bringing together dogmatic and historical-critical approaches to a biblical text.)

(6) There is no generally available life-relation to the content, which enables a reader to access the text. Contra-Bultmann, John argues that people are blind. They do not have the light needed to understand. It is through a special, life-giving-relation that the reader is empowered to subjectively appropriate the objectively given content.

For John, the life-giving-relation is initiated by God,
who comes down to the hearer/reader in and through the incarnate body or, in this case, the incarnate text. But not everyone who has access to the body/text has the condition for understanding it. God's paradoxical presence, i.e. the life-giving-relation, is only manifest to those who God chooses. We saw this in the case of Jesus. Many could see his body and works, but the only ones who could come to him are the ones who the Father called (Jn. 6:44).

(7) One can only appropriate the life that is manifest in the text if one is taught of God. Concretely, this means that one comes to understand the text by the Spirit. Previously, we saw that Jesus referred to his own words as "spirit". By this he meant that the words enabled a hearer to appropriate the content that was manifest in the person-work relation of Jesus. The rhetoric of revelation thus brings about the subjective appropriation by means of the agency of the Spirit. This will also be true of the appropriation that takes place in the incarnate community. When the words of self-witness are spoken in the community, then they serve a rhetorical function by bringing a hearer to focus on the presence of God in the words and works of the incarnate community. But when those words are written, the act of writing serves as an extension of the incarnation, and that which was the rhetoric now becomes the objective content. Spirit becomes flesh by means of the grammatological movement. After the rhetoric has become the objective content, the need is set up for a link
between the subject and that content. This need is satisfied by a new rhetoric, which is the work of the Spirit.

(8) **Old Testament accounts serve as types** which prefigure the activity of Jesus. They help one understand who Jesus is, just as Jesus helps one understand the true import of the Old Testament text. This means that a proper understanding of John's text will involve an appreciation of the hermeneutical circle that exists between the Jewish Scripture and John's account of Jesus. The specific character of the relation is seen, for example, in the relation between Jesus' body and the temple, or between Moses/law and Jesus. This typological relation enables one to better understand the rhetorical tropes (e.g. figurative language), since the hermeneutical dynamic between Old Testament type and Jesus is similar in structure to the dynamic between different levels of interpretation (literal and figurative).

(9) **A literal reading is a necessary first step but it does not lead to certainty and clarity.** Consider, for example, Jesus statement about the destruction and raising of the temple. A first reading is necessarily literal, but this leads to absurdity. Then one re-reads it indirectly, by means of the future text (the resurrection), in order to arrive at clarity. The same will be true for John's whole text. The end provides the key to the beginning, the epilogue the key to the prologue.

This dynamic between end and beginning can even be seen
in the very structure of belief that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God". In John's prologue we find a preliminary specification of the nature of "Christ, the Son of God". But later, in the body of the text, we find out who Jesus is. Then we connect the two: this Jesus (here and now, given in and as the text) is the one from beyond (pre-figured in the prologue). When the two are connected, then "Jesus" gives meaning to "Christ, the Son of God" and visa versa. By entering into the circle between the two, the reader gains access to the life that comes in Jesus' name. Through the process of interpretation the reader then appropriates that life.

(10) The text is polyvalent. This point is nowhere clearer than in the bread of life discourse in John 6. This passage is simultaneously about (a) the import of Jesus' miraculous feeding miracle, (b) Moses and the law, (c) the Eucharist, (d) the Passover.

(11) There can be no general hermeneutic that functions like a law, enabling one to gain access to the text's content. John's polemic against ascent must simultaneously be read as a polemic against any approach which sets up some "way" or strategy that is needed to move from absence to presence. It is not by the general processes of understanding that one understands the truth that is manifest in the person-work of Jesus. To the contrary, the revelatory content is such that it overthrows normal, worldly approaches to understanding,
which depend on the ability of the reader/hearer to move from the known to the unknown. For John, the text's content descends to the reader in the process of interpretation, the reader does not ascend to the content. This movement is a corollary of the affirmation that the reader is "taught of God".

(12) One cannot determine a priori who does or does not have the condition to understand. A so-called "believer" can come to the text with a dogmatic strategy that functions in the same way as a general hermeneutic, and (s)he can impose that strategy in a way that does not involve an openness to the life that would disclose itself. This means that people who would seem to be "outsiders" may gain access to the deeper import of the text in a way that "insiders" do not. This point is clearly manifest in the text when the masters of the law stumble and do not believe, while the blind and alienated are able to grasp that Jesus is from God. There is thus an iconoclastic function of the text that defies all prediction and leaves the judgment up to God alone.

(13) The process of interpretation only comes to completion in an act of obedience whereby the reader reduplicates the content in his or her own words and deeds. The reader's appropriation of the life that is manifest in/as the text involves three steps: First, one responds to the paradoxical nature of the text in belief, thereby opening one's self to a word from a world beyond. Second, by means of
re-reading the absurdity, one comes to know what has been revealed, and this knowledge is given in the form of a commandment; namely, the injunction to follow the way of Jesus, who is the giver of the new command, and the new command that is given. Then, finally, one must obey that command, by reduplicating the knowledge in one's own being. This reduplication takes the form of expression.

(14) The reader's obedient expression can take two forms: that of the logic or the rhetoric of revelation. If it takes the rhetorical form, then the reader's words will focus on manifesting to another the way in which God is present in the text. The words are then dependent upon the text in the same way that the spoken words of a disciple are dependent upon the presence of God in the incarnate community. The paradigm for this form of expression can be found in the self-witness of Jesus and its relation to the works that functioned as signs. If expression takes the logical form, then it will involve a further extension of the incarnation into the words and deeds of the reader-become-disciple. By means of this grammatological movement the presence of God will become accessible to another independent of the text which is the point of departure of the extension. Thus in the case of the rhetorical form, the reader's expression functions together with the text, while the logical form of expression reconstitutes the textual content in new words so that the objective content is accessible independent of the text.
(15) The reader's expression will serve as a link between the reader's reader or hearer and the text. Expression will not be expression in general, but always a particular word to a particular hearer or reader. One is concerned here with parole not with langue. This is because the new commandment calls for a concrete act of giving: one obeys by making the life accessible to an other. In rhetorical expression, one makes the objective content of the text subjectively accessible by means of tropes in which the redoubled meaning of the reader/hearer is opened to the meaning of the text. In logical expression, one reconstitutes the text's meaning in terms of the redoubled meaning of the reader/hearer. In both cases one deals with a particular context - the redoubled meaning of particular readers or hearers - and one's words serve as a bridge across which the Word of God descends to the person who is in need of that word. In the act of obedience, the reader-become-writer/speaker will reconstitute the invisible unity of the Father and Son, which is the life of God, in terms of the reader's reader's or hearer's world - its categories and concepts. But this is done in such a way that it simultaneously overthrows that world and leads a person to a knowledge of the world and way of God. God honors the obedience by descending into the expression, whether it is rhetorical (speaking) or logical (writing). The God who was with the reader is then in the reader-become-writer/speaker.
All fifteen of these hermeneutical principles obviously run counter to the Enlightenment assumptions that have reigned in New Testament interpretation for nearly two hundred years. They show that the way of understanding that takes place in the process of interpretation cannot be separated from the particular content with which one is concerned. The special revelatory content mediated through the johannine text makes unique demands upon the reader, and it also offers unique opportunities. By making explicit these demands and opportunities, we have extended the text's content outward to confront the redoubled meanings of the modern, general hermeneutic and the post-modern deconstruction that leads to Babel. In doing this we have manifested the offer, which the Church gives, when it proclaims its kerygma. The reader is invited sola fide, sola gratia, and sola scriptura, to read and re-read John's text in such a way that (s)he experiences the displacement from God's indeterminate absence to the hidden presence, whereby one is empowered to believe steadfastly, know rightly, and act justly.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that this approach is not just important from a theological point of view. It is also important from a purely exegetical point of view. In The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), Robert Rysar notes that "the hermeneutic of the fourth evangelist", namely "his interpretation of the past and his way of understanding both that past and the data of his own experience", is of central importance, if one is to understand
the Gospel's content (p. 261-262).


3. O'Day, chapter 2 gives a good overview of the relation between method and one's view of revelation. Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, speaks of two general hurdles for biblical hermeneutics: "those connected with the interpreter and his method, on the one hand, and the nature of the content of the document, on the other" (p. 175). With respect to the first hurdle, Kysar goes on to state: "The methodology of the theological interpreter of the fourth gospel is still further most acutely vulnerable at the point of the dogmatic and philosophical presuppositions brought to the task. Nowhere else does the dogmatic pre-understanding of the interpreter seem more evident than in the interpretation of the thought of this gospel. The careful observer of the criticism of the fourth gospel will note in dismay, for instance, the degree to which the lines of difference on the theological meaning of the gospel coincide with the differences among the theological persuasions of the critics" (ibid). With respect to the second hurdle, Kysar states: "The peculiar structure of the johannine categories of thought and symbolism are unequaled in their opaqueness. It is the uniqueness of the evangelist's thought and language...it is the method of his "reasoning" which stumps the interpreter...not least among the tasks of contemporary interpretation is the general task of attempting to understand the nature of johannine thought itself" (p. 176). Obviously there is a circle between these two hurdles; one which I have termed the metahermeneutical circle. To unlock John's text, the interpreter must follow the method of John's reasoning. But that is exactly what the interpreter does not have; it is what is opaque. The content of the text thus cannot be separated from the method of the interpreter. And if the interpreter's pre-understanding is at variance with the text's content, then (s)he will only find unclarity.

4. Consider, for example, John 6:1 or the discontinuity between chapters 20 and 21. Are these expressions of a "clumsy editor" (Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 36), or are they better explained as literary tropes (ibid, p. 33). A good example of this problem can be seen in Marcan scholarship. Calling on a certain model of oral transmission, John Meagher's Clumsy Construction in Mark's Gospel (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellan Press, 1979) makes the presupposition of clumsy redaction into a full hermeneutical principle. In addressing those "deformations" and "oddities" that have been explained by means of the idea of the messianic secret, Heagler states that "the dominant point is the universal applicability of the principle of clumsiness...I
mean to suggest that the contemporary search for subtle innuendo in Marcan pericopes...and the parallel search for subtle innuendo in Marcan editorial touches...are importantly misguided attempts to project finesse into the awkward performances of ordinarily weak, if occasionally talented and creative, story-tellers of ancient times" (pp. 29-30).

5. Thus O'Day takes an "apparent disjunction of scenes [in John 4]", which "has led many scholars to question the textual integrity of this episode" (p. 49), and she goes on to argue that "[i]nstead of viewing vs. 8 and 27 [in chapter 4] as clumsy seams that reflect the evangelist's attempt to attach one story to another, these verses should be viewed as signs of the author's careful crafting as he intentionally interweaves two complementary dialogues into a complex narrative with one beginning, middle and end" (p. 50).

6. Fernando Segovia, "Towards a New Direction in Johannine Scholarship: The Fourth Gospel from a Literary Perspective", Semeia 53, pp. 1-22; p. 14. "[T]here can be little doubt that the gulf between the more traditional approach and the newer approaches becomes increasingly wide and extremely difficult to negotiate: the more any text is shown to be meaningful and coherent as it stands, the more difficult it becomes to accept the presence of aporias as traditionally conceived and defined, to argue for substantial reconstructions of underlying sources and subsequent redactions and to begin with the prehistory of the text in the search for meaning."


9. There is, of course, debate about whether "the world" can interpret that text, or whether such interpretation is the unique prerogative of the church and, in particular, its ministers. Cf. Tertullian, On Prescription Against Heretics. But this does not change our main point.

10. This will answer the question that Kysar leaves us with on the last page of his outstanding overview of johannine scholarship: "[T]he question facing the theological analyst of the gospel is the explication of the hermeneutical thought and method of the fourth evangelist" (The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 281).

11. See note 3.

use it for a different purpose than both of them.

13. Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 178. "There is little doubt that for the fourth evangelist the person and work of Christ is the heart of the gospel from which all other concepts are sustained."


16. O'Day, ch. 4 speaks of the gospel narrative as the locus of revelation. But we need to distinguish between the locus of revelation in the story time-space of the narrative and the locus for the reader. In the story time, the person of Jesus is clearly the locus. The question is then how the locus of revelation for the reader - i.e. the written narrative - relates to Jesus, as the locus of revelation in the story time-space. For the answer to this see pp. 297-302 of this dissertation.

17. This is an interpretation that one often finds in patristic literature on Jesus. Consider, for example, Origen's Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1-10 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 1989). In present-day scholarship, we find this "metaphysical" interpretation among those who emphasize the Greek intellectual milieu, and who see a gnostic or proto-agnostic background. Examples of this approach could be multiplied endlessly. Here are a few: Siegfried Schulz, Untersuchungen zu Menschensohn - Christologie im Johannesevangelium (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957); Luise Schottroff, Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt: Beobachtungen zum gnostischen Dualismus und seiner Bedeutung für Paulus und das Johannesevangelium (Neukirchener Verlag, 1970); Rudolf Schnackenburg, Das Johannesevangelium, in 4 volumes (Freiburg in Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1972). Schnackenburg's work is representative of general modern studies in that he recognizes a strong Jewish influence, but still sees Greek thought as playing an important role (Vol. 2, pp. 101-131). His "metaphysical" approach can be well seen in his discussion of "life" (vol 2., pp. 434-445).


20. In present-day scholarship we find the "functional" interpretation among those who emphasize the Jewish intellectual milieu and who see an anti-gnostic polemic. The best example of an ethical, "archetypal" approach can be found in W. H. Cadman, The Open Heaven: The Revelation of God in the Johannine Sayings of Jesus, G. B. Caird, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969). This work well illustrates the direction in which johannine scholarship may have gone if Rudolf Bultmann had not published his epochmaking commentary. Although as Kysar notes, Cadman's work exhibits "the marks of a pre-Bultmannian day" (Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 195), Kysar is wrong to dismiss it as "an older liberal biblical interpretation" (ibid). More and more we see scholarship moving away from Bultmann and toward Cadman! Kysar's own work is close to Cadman's, when he emphasizes the "ethical dualism" and makes the function-person relation more important than that of flesh-glory, in discussions of John's christology (ibid, 200-206).


24. I follow Kysar's division of the christological issues into three categories (Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, pp. 178-206), but I replace his "history and faith" discussion with "Father and Son." I think that "history and faith" are not primarily christological categories, and the issues they address can be dealt with in terms of "flesh" and "glory." (Cf. W. Nicol, The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972], p. 119-122). On the other hand, the relation between Father and Son is central for John, and it cannot be dealt with under the other two headings of "flesh and glory" or "function and person". "Father and Son" is as different from "flesh and glory" as Nicaea is different from Chalcedon.

25. Thus Nicol can say that "Glory is the primary concept by which John denotes what revelation is to him" (The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel, p. 119), and Rudolf Bultmann, speaking of 1:14, can say "Jetzt wird das Rätsel gelöst, indem das Wunder
ausgesprochen wird: der Logos ward Fleisch!" (Rudolf Bultmann, Johannesevangelium [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953], p. 38). Luise Schottroff echoes the same appraisal when she says: "Man wird vermuten können, das der Satz 1:14 für das Johannesevangelium programmatische Bedeutung hat, so das mit der Aussage über die Fleischwerdung alle jene Einzelthemen, die die innerweltliche Existenz Jesu behandeln, Zusammengefasst sind" (Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt, p. 271). Schottroff then goes on to say interpretation of 1:14 depends upon whether it is indeed programmatic or not, and this is determined by placing it in the context of John's dualism.

26."[E]ine Auslegung von Joh. 1,14 in johanneischen Sinn ist nur möglich, wenn man diesen Satz unter Zuziehung der Theorie der doppelten Wirklichkeit...interpretiert" (Schottroff, Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt, p. 272). Schottroff then goes on to align "glory" with the heavenly reality, and flesh with a pre-given christological tradition that does not play a central role for John ("flesh" is not related to the negative pole of the gnostic dualism, but rather to the pole of something like a philonic dualism, which was found in the tradition that John inherited - pp. 272 with 274). The previous flesh-spirit tradition does not play a role for John, thus John, according to Schottroff, leaves "flesh" and "glory" together, but the emphasis is completely on "glory." In this context, the "becoming flesh" (1:14a) is not that important. The emphasis is rather on "we beheld his glory" (1:14b).

For the oppositional relation between flesh and glory, see Ernst Käsemann, The Testament of Jesus.

27.Käsemann, p. 20. "Neither the incarnation nor the passion...make a change in Christ according to his nature, but only a change in terms of 'coming' and 'going'."


30.This approach can be found in Cadman, The Open Heaven and in J.A.T. Robinson's work on John.


32.Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 203. Kysar falls prey to this error himself when he introduces his section on flesh and glory with the human/divine distinction
33. For example, the use of the categories of "prophet-king" to interpret Jesus' person and function are probably as much influenced by Jean Calvin's account of the office of Jesus as they are by the historical record of Moses as "prophet" and "king." Cf. Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses' Traditions and The Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967).


36. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, 49. This approach is developed by a student of Käsemann's, Mark Appold, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1976); p. 271: "I and the Father are one (10:30). This climatic sentence reflects the core confession of the Johannine church and may well be regarded as a concise summary of the evangelist's theology and the distinguishing mark of his christology."


38. Here I bring together each of the motifs that have been deemed to be central: (1) person - work, which is the "key" for Kysar and de Jonge (see note 31), (2) flesh-glory, which is the "primary concept" for Nicol and Schottroff (see note 25), and (3) the oneness of Father and Son, which is "the most prominent part of the gospel" (Appold, p. 280; also p. 261). Each of the above authors is correct, but none has seen the right interrelation of the three themes.


40. Although Käsemann states that "[t]he Johannine dualism is certainly not a metaphysical dualism" (*Testament of Jesus*, p. 63), all of Käsemann's conclusions imply that John's thought is developed in the framework of such a dualism. This is clear when Käsemann goes on to speak of the incarnation as an "encounter between the heavenly and the earthly" (p. 65), and when he talks about the integration of the community into the unity of Father and Son, which he terms "gnosticizing" (p. 70). Then the community too will be moved up to the heavenly (p. 72).

Schottroff explicitly argues for a metaphysical dualism in John (pp. 228-244), although she recognizes that there is also a nonmetaphysical kind, which she attributes to the antecedent tradition (pp. 271-277). The metaphysical dualism - or, in her words "kosmologischen Dualismus" - is, however,
constituted through an existential act. "Die mythische Vorstellung eines kosmologischen Dualismus wird von Johannes also umgedeutet, existential interpretiert" (p. 236). These existentially constituted realms are then spatially oriented, with the good as "above" and the bad as "below" (ibid). In this, Schottroff follows Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, vol. 2, tr. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 21.

41. Bultmann was the first to speak of the dualism as one of decision (ref. Käsemann on Bultmann, Testament of Jesus, p. 63). This approach has been developed independent from Bultmann's gnostic framework by Günter Stemberger, whose work Kysar summarizes in The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, pp. 216-218.

42. Several people have recognized that there are different dualisms, but they do not maintain the legitimacy of both kinds. For example, Schottroff identifies a nonoppositional dualism of flesh-spirit, which she contrasts with the oppositional gnostic dualism, but she dismisses the former type as a remnant of tradition which does not play an important role for John (Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt, pp. 271-277). Likewise Kysar identifies a "human dualism" and a "cosmic dualism", but then he conflates the two: "[T]here are two ways of existence open to persons...and they constitute two entirely different worlds. These two worlds are described in the Gospel both in terms of a human dualism and a cosmic dualism - but the latter is probably simply a way of asserting the enormous importance of the former" (John the Maverick Gospel, p. 63).

On p. 54 Kysar notes "we have a double dualism - a cosmic division of all reality into two realms, the created and divine (especially, 8:23), and a division among ways of being human, best expressed, perhaps, in the truth-falsehood dualism. The various symbols all mean the same thing. There is the essential difference between the dualism of light and darkness and the split of the above and below." Here Kysar comes very close to specifying the right relation between the two dualisms, but then he conflates them again.

43. One finds such a gnostic conflation in Eric Lane Titus, The Message of the Fourth Gospel (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 29: "There are two worlds: One that is above and spiritual, the other that is below and material. The first is the realm of God and the true believer; the second is the order of flesh and unbelief."

44. At this point we cannot address the relation between the post-revelatory condition and the final condition of the eschaton. But this would be a good context to address the issues of realized eschatology in John's gospel. For a good
overview of this debate, see Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel*, pp. 207-214.

45. As Schottroff notes, "Wenn man also fragen würde: gab es denn vor dem Auftreten der Offenbarung, d.h. Jesu von Nazareth, keine Sünde? Was war der κόσμος vor der Offenbarung? Diese Fragen treten...gar nicht in den Blick des Johannes" (p. 229). Schottroff thinks these questions are not raised because of John's dualism, but that is another issue. That they are not raised is clear; the reason why is not so clear.

46. Here it may be useful to introduce yet a third dualism, one which Kysar, following Ernst Haenchen, has called a "dualism of knowledge" (*Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel*, p. 195). The darkness-light dichotomy (Jn. 1:5), referring to the initial condition of ignorance-truth, cannot be identified with the good-evil dichotomy, but neither can it be fully identified with the Creator-creation dichotomy. Then, after revelation, one has the dualism of decision, which is the oppositional one of "love the darkness" vs. "love the light" (Jn. 3:19). In other words, the good-evil dualism arises out of the response to the light, which comes into the darkness. Evil ("love the darkness") is seen in those who do not want to give up their darkness; who want to keep the status quo.

47. "Wenn es die Offenbarung nicht gäbe, gäbe es auch keine Sünde" (Schottroff, p. 229).

48. As Origen notes, "the designation 'beginning' means many things" (*Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, p. 52).


50. This is the protological orientation that Käsemann rightly identifies in John (*Testament of Jesus*, p. 21). This beginning before the beginning will also be the end, thus protology does not negate an eschatological orientation.

51. The fourth evangelist plays on this ambiguity in his account of John the Baptist (vs. 1:15,27).
52. Here I take issue with Werner Kelber's "Die Fleischwerdung des Wortes in der Körperlichkeit des Textes", Materialität der Kommunikation, ed. H.U. Gumbrecht and Ludwig Pfeiffer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), pp. 31-42. He argues that John's text exhibits a tension between an initial logocentrism — regarded as an undifferentiated identity — and its deconstruction. The text of John recounts a decentering of the identity. In the end there is a circle between logocentrism and deconstruction (p. 40). If, however, one sees the beginning before the beginning as an identity-in-difference, then the grammatological movement can be taken as a reconstitution of the identity-in-difference in earthly terms, rather than a deconstruction of an arche-speech. In our discussion of "the rhetoric of revelation", we shall develop this theme at greater length.


54. For a theological reflection on the "speaking" in Jn. 1 and Gen. 1, see Romano Guardini, Im Anfang war das Wort: Eine Auslegung von Joh. 1, 1-18 (Würzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1940), pp. 4-6.

55. For a good overview of these themes, see Ernst Haenchen, "Der Vater, der mich gesandt hat", New Testament Studies 9 (1963), pp. 208-216, esp. 211.


63. The same criticism can be made of Appold's account of the unity of Father and Son. Appold does provide some clarification when he speaks of the unity as a "relational oneness" (The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel, p. 279).

64. Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, p. 27.


67. Appold rightly notes that "[t]o testify to this oneness is the evangelist's most basic concern and appears as his Gospel's most distinguishing and pervasive characteristic" (The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel, p. 261). But Appold is incorrect when he states that "the evangelist nowhere attempts to work out an explanation for the Father-Son relation" (p. 281). Against Käsemann, Appold sees that the oneness is not "a simple transparency" (p. 283), but he does not see that its character is manifest in the person-work of Jesus.

Marinus de Jonge comes very close to the main thematic when he reflects on the meaning of ἡγούμενος: "In all cases Jesus uses it in order to give expression to his unity in intention and action with God. The words 'Son' and 'Father' occur in this context...study of the ἡγούμενος passages leads us to the heart of the matter and the center of Johannine christology and theology." (Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God, p. 132).

68. See Ch. 2 of this dissertation.


70. See pgs. 288-296 of this dissertation.

71. Our focus thus turns to the way language mediates the objective revelation to a particular individual. As Gail O'Day notes, "We cannot answer the question, 'How is God made known in the Fourth Gospel?' apart from a discussion on how Johannine language creates and communicates the revelation experience." (Revelation in the Fourth Gospel, p. 48).


72. For an overview of the role that signs and a sign's source plays in John's Gospel, see Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel, pp. 13-37; 225-227.
73. For example, Robinson can say that "as a mere man he is utterly transparent to another, who is greater than himself and indeed than all" ("Use of the Fourth Gospel for Christology", p. 74).

74. Käsemann, p. 27.

75. There is a considerable amount of literature in johannine scholarship which considers the relation between "work" and "sign." For a representative sample, see W. Nicol, The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel, pp. 113-124; M. de Jonge, Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God, pp. 67-72. In a more detailed account, I think it could be shown that "work" (ἔργον) refers to the second level sign function, in which "event" and "meaning" are one (Nicol, p. 122). It refers more to the objective revelation, while "sign" (ὁμοιότης) refers to the rhetorical expression of that content for the sake of its appropriation. This is why I used "person-work" to refer to the content, which is given - i.e. the flesh, which reconstitutes in earthly terms the invisible, absent unity of God-word - while I used "sign" to refer to the rhetoric of revelation.

76. One can say that the signs initiate one into appropriating the works of Jesus as the unveiling of the Father. The word "work" is thus closely associated with the person of Jesus and his relation to the Father, while the word "sign" seems to be more external and associated with "wonder." This is because "signs" draw others into the proper relation with the works. De Jonge identifies this relation between "signs" and "works" in Jesus: Stranger from Heaven, p. 132. Especially interesting is his observation that the term "ἔργον" is closely associated with the words "Son" and "Father" and it is used to give expression to their unity. See also Nicol, p. 122: "somewhat schematically it may be said that semeion illuminates the unity [of event and meaning] from below, doxa from above, and ergon from the side. A semeion is basically a miracle, but also a miracle-with meaning; doxa is primarily the grace and truth, but not revealed without powerful miracles; in ergon, the two levels are represented with more or less equal weight." This is exactly how I am using these terms in this dissertation: the doxa is the unity of Father and Son, which is manifest in the person-ergon, which, in turn, is mediated through the semeion. There is obviously a parallel here between the incarnation (doxa is manifest in sarx) and the nature of the sign, which extends that incarnation outward so that it can be appropriated. For more on this parallel see Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Gospel of John, vol. 1 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 524-525.

77. Kelber, "Die Fleischverdung des Wortes in der Körperlichkeit des Textes".
78. Nicol, 99-106; Raymond Brown, vol. 1, p. 196; Schottroff, pp. 245-263.

79. For an overview see Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel, pp. 9-37, 69-76.

80. This does not mean that John did not work with an antecedent signs source, which had only the inferior type of faith in mind. But when we see how intimately the two types of faith are related to the two levels of sign, and when we see how carefully the distinction between "sign" and "work" is developed, then it makes it more difficult to simply account for the levels in terms of tradition and redaction.

81. This function of the sign is well expressed by the word "wonder". It is closely associated with the "that" of revelation, which Bultmann made central. Here the only thing revealed is that there is revelation; one has no specific content (Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, p. 66). I call this "evidentiary" because it is closely associated with the evidential consideration which is central in J.C. Hindley's article "Witness in the Fourth Gospel", Scottish Journal of Theology 18 (1965), pp. 319-337. But I think Hindley is wrong when he argues that John is not concerned with the content of revelation (ibid, p. 324). Both Hindley and Bultmann only saw the first level, where there is only the "that", and they never went on to the second level, or "what", of revelation.

82. In other words, the signs break up one's world (the closure of the earthly) and this crisis provokes a decision, which is well expressed by Kysar: "The signs of Jesus simply open up the possibilities - either Jesus is one empowered by God in a special way, or else he gains his power from other sources, most likely demonic. In this way, the fourth evangelist continues a biblical view of wondrous deeds, namely, that in themselves they are not absolute proof, but are ambiguous" (John the Maverick Gospel, p. 71).

83. There is some debate in Johannine scholarship over whether the first level of belief has merit as an initial stage, or whether it is inappropriate. Schottroff argues that the first level is false, because it is directed to a false object, not to Jesus as the revealer. (Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt, pp. 251-258). Nicol sees the two levels as continuous in development (The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel, pp. 99-113). In this essay I follow Nicol, but I relate the two levels as "that" and "what" of revelation.

84. Thus, for example, de Jonge (Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God, p. 132) and Nicol (The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel, p. 122) recognize that "signs" (which I speak of as
level 1 signs) are external, while "works" (which I relate to the second level of signs) are more intimately related to the unity of Jesus with the Father.

85. Here the sign is more a work than a static thing. A good analogy for this role can be found in the Hebrew word for "word" (dabar), which is more active (the spoken word, which is simultaneously a work).

86. In Nicol's words, we could say that "event" and "meaning" are one (The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel, p. 122). Sebald Hofbeck overviews the view of H. van den Bussche, in giving an account of the deepening of meaning and presence (=mystery):
"Die Zeichen künden die Ankunft des Messias an, sie sind messianische Offenbarungen. Die Werke dagegen zeigen das tiefere Geheimnis der Existenz Jesu an." (Semeion, p. 70).
Contra-Hofbeck, I think Bussche is correct in his account. The key to understanding the distinction is the rhetorical function of the signs: they enable one to appropriate the revelation content given in the works. At the second level, the sign, as work, gives the content (the "what"). Hofbeck is not so far from this second-level sign-function when he notes that "in den σημεία Jesus leuchtet die δόξα Jesu auf" (p. 68).

87. For an overview of the distinction between speaking and writing and its philosophical/theological import, see George Khushf, "Grammaticentrism and the Transformation of Rhetoric", Philosophy and Rhetoric (forthcoming).

88. There is an external witness and the internal witness of the Spirit (Cf. James Boice, Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970], p. 31). As with signs, the witnesses serve a rhetorical function making the person-work of Jesus accessible (Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel, pp. 227, 235). It is thus not surprising to find that "works" are referred to both as signs and witness (see Nicol, p. 118; de Jonge, p. 132). Or, in other words, the inner meaning (or "what") of both signs and witnesses is the same thing: the person-work of Jesus.

89. Kysar, the Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel, p. 227.


91. On John's refusal to be categorized, see Rodney Whitacre, Johanne Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 92: "The Baptist does not fit into any of these categories [put forward by the agents from Jerusalem] any more than Jesus fits the expectations of those who think they know how God works."
92. Although, curiously, the author of John's gospel does not directly characterize John's baptism as one of repentance, "μετανοεῖν" well captures the response that the first level of witness evokes.

93. John the Baptist "gives a cryptic answer that says everything and nothing, and also expresses his humility. He says nothing whatsoever as to why he is baptizing, he only states as briefly as possible that he is doing so (1.26). He then goes on to identify himself solely in terms of 'he who comes after me' (1.27)" (Whitacre, p. 93).

94. Although the fourth gospel does not have a "baptism of Jesus" in the sense of the synoptic gospels, it does have a "Spirit baptism", which takes place when John witnesses the Spirit descend.

95. Through the second level, "inner witness" of the Spirit, a person is brought to comprehend the meaning of the Christ event (Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 235).

96. At this stage one should not contrast God, who sends the Baptist (Jn. 1:6, 33), and the Spirit, since God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24).


98. Boyce puts it well when he speaks of witness as concerning the "subjective appropriation" of truth (Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John, p. 31).

99. For more on Jesus as the "new commandment", see pp. 275-297 of this dissertation.


101. Thus "one of the chief functions of Spirit is witness" (Whitacre, p. 98f.), and this witness enables the understanding of what has been revealed in the person of Jesus (Boyce, pp. 120-122).

102. J. C. Hindley, "Witness in the Fourth Gospel".


105. "The most significant function of the misunderstanding...is to teach readers to read the gospel. The misunderstandings call attention to the gospel's
metaphors, double-entendres, and plurisignations. They also
guide the reader by interpreting some of these and ruling out
the literal, material, worldly, or general meanings of such
references" (R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel:
A Study in Literary Design [Philadelphia: Fortress Press,
1983], p. 165.

106."[T]he symbols drawn from 'this world' (below) show that
it is not inherently evil or opposed to the realm above.
There is a profound relation between the symbolism in John and
its affirmation that Jesus is the logos, the creative agency.
The creation is inherently good, and the created order
eminently suitable for revealing the nature of the
creator...Everything in the world is capable of 're-
presenting' the realm and reality of its creator" (Culpepper,
pp. 200-201, my emphasis).

107. The above account of literal and figurative language bears
a close resemblance to the patristic and medieval account of
language (the sign). Consider, for example, the account of
Thomas Aquinas, which in turn is derived from Augustine: "God
is the author of Holy Scripture: He has given a meaning not
only to the words but also to the things they signify, so that
the things signified in turn signify something else. First of
all, the words signify things, which is the historical sense;
but secondly, the things signify other things, and we get the
spiritual sense" (Quoted in Wilhelm Pauck's introduction to
Luther: Lectures on Romans [London: S.C.M. Press, Ltd.,
1961], p. xxvii). It should be noted, however, that such an
account arises naturally out of the understanding of creation
that one finds in first century Jewish thought, where earthly
things like bread, water and light were taken as symbols of
heavenly things (Severino Pancaro, the Law in the Fourth

108. Here I give an account of misunderstanding, which is
informed by the previous discussion of literal and figurative
communication, and which can be taken to apply to all uses of
misunderstanding in John's gospel. In Herbert Leroy's Rätsel
und Missverständnis (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1968),
misunderstanding was regarded as a type of riddle concealed in
a dialogue, and it was unique in John. It was theologically
determined by the resurrection, which was the key to
understanding. But because of the specific way he defined the
term, several passages in John that seem to exhibit
misunderstanding are not called "misunderstanding." Culpepper
rightly criticizes Leroy for this and extends the list from
Leroy's 11 examples to 18 examples (Culpepper, pp. 161-162).
Culpepper follows Francois Vouga in arguing that
misunderstanding is not a technique that is applied the same
in all cases. This keeps him from identifying what makes
misunderstanding occur. While we can argue that
misunderstanding is not a "technique" that is applied, we should see that it does have an identifiable structure; namely, the confusion of direct with indirect speech.


110. Leroy, pp. 49-155; Culpepper, 152-165.

111. For a specific discussion of this misunderstanding in John, see Leroy, pp. 137-146; Culpepper, p. 155.

112. In the narrative that follows, I work with "Jews", "Pharisees", and "Levites" according to John's use of the terms (which is not fully consistent; cf. John the Maverick Gospel, p. 551). I in no way intend for these terms to be extended to encompass those who for religious or racial reasons are identified as "Jews" today. Further, because of the way in which New Testament passages have been used to argue for anti-Semitism, it is important to make clear that a religious use of these texts, as I argue for in this dissertation, does not support the antireligious conclusions that some have derived from these texts.

113. As Whitacre notes, "[T]his enigma tests their hearts. There is no way anyone could have understood this saying at the outset of Jesus' ministry" (Johannine Polemic, p. 100).

114. "The impossibility of rebuilding the temple in three days should compel the Jews to find an alternate interpretation of Jesus' statement" (Culpepper, p. 155).

115. We saw this same structure in our reading of John 4:15. The text which provides the key to understanding (7:37-39) comes later in the narrative of John's Gospel.


117. As Whitaker notes, the problem is that they jumped to a conclusion and remained steadfast in it. The disciples, who also did not understand, remained open, and thus could later come to knowledge (Johannine Polemic, p. 101).


119. In the remainder of this chapter, I will use "disciple" to refer to one who follows Jesus in belief, knowledge and obedience. It can refer to a true follower in the narrative (as opposed to those who murmur and fall away) as well as a believing reader of John's text.
120. See pp. 300-302 of this dissertation.


122. Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 71 speaks of a spiral between belief and knowledge. This can be further extended to address obedience.


128. Reim, pp. 115-129.

129. Meeks, p. 319: "Moses is now stripped of those functions [which have been transferred to Jesus] and made merely a 'witness' to Jesus (like John the Baptist)." As Kysar notes, Moses "prepares the way" for Jesus (The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 141).

130. Glasson, p. 45: "The sixth chapter of John supplies one of the clearest examples of the importance of the wilderness imagery." For a detailed study of John 6 and its relation to the Jewish tradition, see Peder Borgen, Bread From Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965).

131. Kysar, The Fourth Evangelist and his Gospel, p. 123. For more detailed discussion of this see Pancaro's account of "the metamorphosis of 'nomistic termini' and the transferral of symbols for the law to Jesus", pp. 367-487, esp. 454-472; also see Glasson, pp. 45-47; Meeks, p. 291; Borgen, pp. 148-179.
gives an extensive discussion of bread as a symbol.


134. For a detailed discussion of this see Pancaro, pp. 454-472. He summarizes it well when he says that "the manna (revelation of God given through Moses) and the bread of life (revelation of God given in Jesus) stand in the same relation to each other as prophecy to its realization, promise to fulfillment" (p. 472). See also Borden on external Torah: "John places the events of the past in the external sphere and the bread from heaven of the present in the spiritual sphere" (p. 172; also p. 148).

135. "Jesu unterscheidet sich darin grundsätzlich von Moses, das er Gott gesehen hat" (Reim, p. 140).


138. Thus the mystical ascent tradition can be associated with an individualism that undermines the covenant community. While the theme of ascent and its association with a mystical type of Judaism has been explored in some depth, the individualistic implications of this and their relation to the johannine theme of communal unity has not, to my knowledge, been investigated.

139. This can also be viewed as the new Torah (Glasson, p. 93). Note especially the quote from Ecclesiastes R.11.8: "The Torah which a man learns in this world is vanity in comparison with the Torah which will be learned in the days of the Messiah."


141. For the background of this theme, see Edwin Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), pp. 17-20. The themes in John 6 are closely intertwined with the Old Testament themes that one finds in the context of the passages to which the quote in Jn. 6:45
refers. Thus Pancaro speaks of Jn. 6:45 as "one of the most important works for understanding the Johannine symbolism contained in chapter 6" (Pancaro, p. 281). For an overview of the import of the passage see ibid, pp. 281-287.


143. Woll speaks of this as the problem of succession (Woll, p. 48), and he rightly notes that it raises significant questions, which John's gospel intends to answer. This problem also has an important parallel in the Old Testament, where Joshua succeeds Moses. The farewell discourse in John can then be related to Deuteronomy, as the farewell discourse of Moses. See Glasson, pp. 82-85, and Whitacre's discussion of "disciples at second hand" (Whitacre, pp. 12-19). This last phrase is Kierkegaard's and the concept plays a role in Bultmann's commentary (ibid, p. 193, note 38).

144. Reim, pp. 142-144 notes that the contrast between a disciple of Moses and a disciple of Jesus is central for John. The problem of the secondary follower confronts the post-crucifixion disciple with the question about whether one must be a Moses-type disciple or whether it is possible to be taught of God. As Woll notes (pp. 80, 89) John will answer this problem by his account of the Spirit.

145. If one combines 9:28-29, where "the Jews" state "we know that God spoke to Moses", with the polemical passages against an ascent tradition in John, then we can surmise that the background tradition connected "being taught of God" with a mystical ascent. Such mystical experiences could then be made the mark of "insiders" in the community.

If John were critically engaging such a tradition, then it seems likely that we do not simply have a Jewish-Christian conflict like that suggested by Martyn. It may be that some Christians were using such an approach to address the problem raised by the departure of Jesus (Cf. Woll on the problem of succession and John's charismatic, i.e. mystical, opponents). Some Christians may even have reinterpreted such a mystical Jewish tradition so that they could avoid being expelled from the synagogue (they could speak of Moses as a symbolic expression of Jesus). Then John's discussion of a Mosaic tradition may reflect an intra-Christian dispute as well as a Jewish-Christian dispute.

146. Meeks, 297-301; Woll, p. 97: "The authority of the disciples...is derived from the descent of the Son, in the form of the Spirit, not from their own ascent to heaven."

147. Whitacre, pp. 33-35.

149. Meeks, p. 297.

150. Meeks, p. 296.


152. Contra-Woll, p. 19. Woll is correct, however, when he criticizes Becker's emphasis on a mystical full-presence (ibid, p. 17). Woll will later correct his initial overemphasis on absence when he notes that Jesus is present to the disciples in the form of the Spirit (p. 89). The earlier discussion of absence can be taken as Woll's way of delineating the problem of the secondary follower.


154. As Appold notes (p. 270), "ecclesiology is determined by Christology."

155. In de Jonge's words, Jesus is the "stranger from heaven" (M. de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God*).


158. As Appold notes, "the projection of this oneness in the person of Jesus into the earthly sphere constitutes its revelational aspect" (p. 283).


160. Appold, pp. 282, 286. This can be viewed as a part of a johannine polemic against Jewish-Christians who would set up the law and obedience as a way of "ascending" to the status of primary follower.

161. Woll, p. 89. As Appold notes, "man's integration into the projection of heavenly oneness constitutes the saving event" (p. 284).

162. The life is the eschatological oneness into which believers are to be initiated (Appold, pp. 279).
163. Membership in church is initiation into God's oneness (Appold, pp. 265, 270). This is "the essence of salvation" (p. 284). In John the atonement is not primarily vicarious, but rather it is concerned with actualizing the unity of Father and Son in the community of believers (pp. 273-274). Obedience does not give one access to this oneness; rather it flows from it, as a consequence. The person-work of Jesus, which is the expression of oneness and as such the "new commandment", is reduplicated in the disciples' works.

"Love" is another way to speak of the life of God (the oneness). Thus the love of the disciples for Jesus is simply the oneness into which they are initiated. But this love is not simply "belief." Here I disagree with Fernando Segovia, Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 171. The "life" becomes present in the disciples as belief (response to the "that"), knowledge (the "what", as appropriated), and obedience (the reduplication of the "how"). This obedience can be regarded as the ethical element, which Segovia finds absent (ibid), but it flows from the revelatory element, which is prior to the ethical.

164. Käsemann, p. 49.

165. "Jesus does not achieve or acquire oneness with God. He prays for the unity of the church but not for his relation to the Father since this oneness is presupposed..." (Appold, p. 282).

166. "Just as Jesus' oneness with the Father is not established through moral action, so the oneness of the church cannot be a human creation accomplished through the works of man" (Appold, p. 286). Woll makes clear that "the authority of the disciples...is derived from the descent of the Son, in the form of the Spirit, not from their own ascent" (Woll, p. 96). This same conclusion can be extended to address the oneness, life, and love of the disciples— all come about by the descent of the Spirit, not by ascent.

167. "As the place where the Father, with Son, comes to make his mone, or dwelling place (14:23), the disciples assume the role of temple" (Woll, p. 88).

168. Then the preaching of the disciples can be viewed as an extension of the preaching of Jesus, just as Jesus' words were an extension of the words of the Father (Ernst Haenchen, "Der Vater, der mich gesandt hat", New Testament Studies 9 [1963], p. 216). "The picture here is...that of an emanation sequence or a chain of action whereby oneness describes, as point of origin, the relational/revelational correspondence of Father and Son, and then successively but interconnectedly the relation of Revealer and believer, and also believer and..."
believer. Thus the line leads from Christology to soteriology to ecclesiology, and oneness serves as the theological abbreviation for the constitutive aspects of all three" (Appold, p. 285).

169. Schnackenberg refers to this role, which the disciples have in mediating revelation, when he says that "der Geist wird von der Kirche vermittelt" (Johannesevangelium, vol. 1, p. 32). Appold interprets this to imply that Christology is made secondary to ecclesiology (Appold, p. 271). But this does not follow. Schnackenberg simply develops an incarnational view of the church as the body of Christ, and this is indeed found in John.

170. Speaking of the primary followers, Whitacre notes that "their experience of God is not qualitatively different from that of later disciples" (Whitacre, p. 13).

171. Appold, p. 262.


173. For a background discussion on the "greater works", which the disciples are to do, see Woll, chapter IV.


175. Martyn, pp. 24-62.

176. Appold is correct when he notes that "the church's goal is to realize the full presence of the divine Jesus" (p. 286, my emphasis). It must be emphasized, however, that this goal is not yet realized; that there is a paradoxical simultaneity of presence and absence that keeps one eschatologically oriented (pp. 268-269). The "not yet" of "full presence" can be identified with the "that" of revelation, while its "already" can be identified with the "what" of revelation. This "not yet" of full presence requires that Appold qualify the account of "real presence" (p. 286). For more on the need of such qualification see Woll, pp. 17-20.
177. Kysar, "The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel," pp. 147-165 gives an overview of the debate regarding the purpose of John's text. Culpepper, pp. 211-227 extends the overview and provides additional observations from a literary-critical perspective. See also de Jonge, pp. 1-7.


179. One could make a better case for the contention that the purpose of John's text is to argue against such a position rather than for it. Such an approach to the text's purpose finds support in studies like those of Meeks and Martyn. Thus, for example, Whitacre concludes: "I believe one of the author's primary purposes in writing this gospel is to interpret this division that has taken place [between Church and Synagogue]. He is concerned first and foremost with comforting and assuring his Christian readers in their new identity, separated from the synagogue" (p. 10). While there may indeed be such a conflict at the background of John's gospel, there are significant problems in the attempt to view John's gospel as an occasional document, which has as its main goal the resolution of the problems raised by the conflict. First of all, why doesn't John say that is his purpose? Further, why didn't he write a letter or theological treatise that directly addressed the problem? Why a gospel narrative? In the light of 20:31, it seems that John's purpose was broader than an attempt to address a particular dispute, although the problems surrounding such a dispute may indeed have been a peripheral concern.

180. Thus O'Day observes: "The Fourth Evangelist does not say, 'These things were done in order that you may believe.' He says, 'these things are written in order that you may believe.'...Revelation does not lie in deeds that exist outside of the world of the Gospel because the deeds in and of themselves are not revelatory." (p. 94). I agree with O'Day's contrast between "done" and "written", but not with her final contention that deeds are not revelatory. On the contrary, the function of the writing is to further extend the revelation that is made accessible in and as the works of Jesus.

181. There is a considerable debate in Johannine scholarship regarding whether 20:31 should read "begin to believe" or "continue in belief." I think there is an emerging consensus that the latter is more appropriate, thus John was written to believers not to unbelievers. However, I think a few observations are in order regarding the debate. First, as we have seen, there are different levels of belief in John and thus there are more options than the belief-unbelief dichotomy implies. For example, John may have assumed a general acquaintance with a Jesus-tradition and even an interest on
the part of his reader (why else would they read the text?), and this acquaintance may be regarded as a first level of belief. Such a first level would explain material that Culpepper uses (pp. 211-227) to argue for the "continue to believe" interpretation of 20:31 while at the same time allowing for the "begin to believe" interpretation (i.e. the text enables one to really believe - level-two faith). Second, given John's clear use of double meaning and polyvalence, he may have intentionally made 20:31 ambiguous; (it is not just variant sources that leads to the ambiguity; see de Jonge, pp. 1-3) i.e. both interpretations ("begin to believe" and "continue to believe") may be correct. It is assumed that John must have had a single, overriding purpose in mind. But why accept this assumption? Perhaps he had several complementary (and even competing) purposes in mind, and he constructed the text in a way that allows it to be read differently by different people. Third, as an argument for the "begin to believe" option, we can use 17:20 to interpret 20:31. The parallel between these passages has not, to my knowledge, been sufficiently explored. Finally, in 10:16, Jesus speaks of "sheep who are not of this fold." There is debate over whether this refers to Gentiles or to future believers. If one takes the latter interpretation and connects it with 20:31 and 17:20, then one can account for dynamics in the text that have puzzled some interpreters.

182. O'Day, pp. 47, 94.

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