

# A PROLEGOMENON TO A HERMENEUTIC OF THE BIBLE ACCORDING TO THE INTRINSIC BEING OF GOD

BY KERRY S. ROBICHAUX

**T**he interpretation of the Bible, long the subject of debate among Christian scholars, is perhaps singly the most important issue in Christian study, simply because it is so foundational to all other Christian thought. Whether we admit it or not, we come to the Bible with an interpretational “slant,” a bias, that helps us read and comprehend the text. We do well to admit the bias from the outset, and we do even better to identify it as accurately as we can. Often this bias is grounded in a fundamental notion concerning God Himself. For example, I may believe that God moves through miracles, and such a belief affects how I view the divine activity in the Bible. Or I may believe that God does not move through miracles in this age, and this provides an interpretational framework for my reading. The most basic tenet of the Christian faith—that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh—provides an interpretational bias that has generated a reading of the Hebrew Scriptures which is radically different from that of the community of Jews. The Christian now reads Genesis with Christ in mind, appropriating to varying degrees the ancient text to a Christian model of God’s activity among humankind. The seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 is now a reference to the Christ who conquered God’s enemy on the cross; *Elohim*, to some, is a latent reference, inspired by the Spirit, to the (Christian) Triune God; and so on. Even in the Christian testament, interpretation guides our reading, Lutheran readers discriminating between law and gospel, Reformed readers seeking out the covenants, fundamental readers divvying up the text according to dispensations. There is an obvious Eastern Orthodox reading of the text as well as a typically Roman Catholic one.

The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century heralded a new age of *sola scriptura*, “Scripture alone,” intending to peel away from the Bible the thick layers of scholastic theology that had accumulated over centuries of medieval Bible interpretation. But, contrary to what many today believe, theirs was not a cry of “No interpretation,” as their own history with the biblical text soon proved. *Sola scriptura* points to the affirmation that authority for Christian and church doctrine resides solely (or to some, firstly)

in the Bible and not equally in the traditions of the Church. Such an affirmation, however, did not settle all controversies in the Reformers’ understanding of biblical truth, for not all read the Bible the same way. Thus, without defying the basic watchword of their cause, the primary Reformers soon diverged from one another in their understanding of key notions of doctrine. All still holding to *sola scriptura*, they differed in their understanding of what the Scriptures tell us about things as basic as the extent of Christ’s redemption, the assurance and security of Christian salvation, and the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. *Sola scriptura* is certainly a needed principle, but the principle little assures that what we find in applying it will be the sole truth. The text is static, but the interpreters are not; and this results in a plethora of views on the text, all from interpreters who, in good conscience, hold to the belief that Scripture alone should be the basis of our understanding of biblical truth.

## Meanings of Meaning

From a hermeneutical standpoint, the Reformation opened a Pandora’s box of biblical interpretation. Pre-Reformation interpretation was certainly not monolithic, but subsequent to the Reformation, interpretation of the Bible became as diverse as every group of students who approached the task. Indeed, today biblical interpretation seems to offer more a reflection of the interpreters than that of the text, and this in itself points to a crucial development, with attendant controversies, in the debate concerning the way the Bible should be understood. While the eventual result of Reformation hermeneutics was a variety of interpretations about what the Bible means, today the issue is even more thought provoking: What does it mean to mean? In other words, what are we saying when we make claims to understand what the Bible means? At first glance, the question seems almost trivial, but the immense energy expended by Christian scholarship on this question testifies to the fact that there is indeed a demanding depth to the issue. Before we can properly set forth any

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hermeneutic of the Bible, we owe it to ourselves and to those who pay us any attention to set forth a position on this current and relevant controversy.

Perhaps a simple illustration will help define the issue and clarify the major positions held. I assume that we have all struggled with poetry to some extent, that we have all encountered a poem or two that challenged our ability to derive meaning. After digesting the language of such a piece, the common question seems to be this: "But what does it mean?" This disarmingly simple question itself has to be understood before it can be offered an answer. There can only be three interpretations of the question:<sup>1</sup>

1. "I have read the poem, but what did the author intend?"
2. "I have read the poem, but what is the poem saying?"
3. "I have read the poem, but what do I make of it?"

The basic issue here concerns the source of meaning in the poem. Where do we look to find the "meaning" in the poem? Those who ask the first question look back to the author of the poem for its "meaning." If we could only ask the author what he or she meant, we would find the true meaning of the poem. This seems the most natural way of approaching meaning, but not all readers submit so easily to what the author intended. Those who ask the second question would say that once the poem was written, it took on a "life" of its own, regardless of what the author intended. After all, the words are there on the page, the structures are conventional (or para-conventional), the ideas belong to the community of the language users. Hence, do we really need the author to dictate what the poem means? We have the poem itself to speak for itself. Besides, what if the author was not so skillful in communicating what he or she meant? The poem nevertheless is before us and means what it says, apart from the skill level of its author. What we *actually* have is a poem, not an author, and thus we should look to the poem itself for meaning, not to its author. While this approach to meaning may surprise some, many readers of poetry operate according to it. Meaning for them resides solely in the text, and an appeal to the absent (and often deceased) author is entirely irrelevant. But taking things further, those who ask the third question would say that they as readers have just as much right to assign meaning to the poem as the author did and as the poem itself can. For them deriving meaning from the poem is as creative a process as writing the poem was for the author. The poem means what the reader makes it mean. This way of deriving meaning from the poem, though highly irreverent to some, no doubt offers its users the greatest amount of satisfaction, for it allows a reader to be a bit of a poet too and makes the reading of poetry not merely an act of communication but more gloriously an act of creation.

These possibilities for meaning may seem appropriate only

for poetry. But are they valid in the interpretation of the Bible? Can the Bible be properly interpreted in any way other than seeking the author's intention, the first kind of meaning above? While most Bible readers would probably be content with ascertaining the author's intention, there are growing ranks of biblical interpreters according to the second and third kinds above. They have raised a number of issues for biblical hermeneutics which no reasonable approach to the understanding of the Bible can afford to ignore. In fact, many of the new theologies that have sprung up in this century owe their existence to the fundamental belief that meaning in the Bible need not derive from the author, human or divine, that the Bible itself or the reader of the Bible provides just as valid a source of meaning as the author. We could view these new approaches as studies in mere possibility and ignore them completely, but in doing so, we may lose some insights not only into how the Bible should be properly understood today but also into how the understanding of the Bible has shaped Christianity over the centuries and made it what it is today, both positively and negatively. Hence, it is appropriate, in defining a hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures, to consider these three possible sources of meaning more finely.

The author's original intention, the first type of meaning above, has been the traditional source of meaning for interpreters of the Bible (as well as other texts). These interpreters seek to reach back into the author's mind in order to ascertain what he or she was trying to say. For biblical texts the author whose intention is sought can be human, divine, or both. Many Bible interpreters limit themselves to the human author's intention, understanding it to be co-extensive with the divine Author's. They understand that the divine meaning is fully expressed by the human author's intention. For them, the task is to reconstruct as fully as possible what the human author would have meant in the full context of his or her writing. This often involves reconstructing the author's historical, social, physical, and even psychological situation through what is termed the historical-critical method. Other interpreters permit the possibility that the intention of the divine Author could be different from that of the human author, that there are multiple meanings in the text because there are multiple authors, the human and the divine. For example, historical events recorded by the human authors could have allegorical meanings intended (and known and communicated) only by God. Many exegetes have rejected this allegorical approach to meaning, perceiving the difficulty in validating interpretations based on them, but the New Testament itself employs the method in some places (cf. Gal. 4:21-31; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 9:9-10), and some of the crucial tenets of the Christian faith were founded in part upon the method in the early church.<sup>2</sup> With its variations in expression, authorial intention remains the dominant source of meaning for Bible interpreters.

The second possible source of meaning for a text is the text itself, as it exists in itself and without recourse to the author who initially engendered it. Proponents of this view are not concerned with what Moses or Paul meant but rather with how the text on its own expresses meaning. This is not so uncommon a view as one may think. Often readers of the Bible prefer to ignore what the text may have meant to the author and to let the text supply meaning based on how it “reads.” To ward off individual and subjective readings of the Bible, proponents of this approach appeal to the community of readers as the validating principle.<sup>3</sup> The meaning of the Bible is what the community perceives it to be, and of course, meaning varies from community to community. A case may be made that the major theologies are based on such a handling of the Bible. Lutheran theology, with its emphasis on the distinction between law and gospel, can certainly claim to have found God’s true voice in the Bible (authorial intention), but other theologians would just as certainly claim that this is simply a Lutheran reading of the text, even if to a large extent that reading is based on the “internals” of the text. So also with Calvinist interpretation and many other schools of hermeneutical thought. Only the proponents of each particular theology would be offended by the charge; all others would simply say that they are speaking the truth. What we may in fact be noticing is that the Bible has a variety of “readings.” Each perspective may be 100% “right,” even if each perceives only 1% of the full truth. The question is, can this sort of multi-valance in meaning be possible? In other words, is Christian faith properly sustained if there are a number of meanings in the Scriptures, or is “the faith” limited to a single view of the Scriptures? I cannot presume to answer.

The final approach to deriving meaning depends on what a reader himself or herself can assign as meaning to the text. Such meaning need not respect what the author meant or even what a community of readers perceives as meaning. Broadly known as deconstructionism,<sup>4</sup> this approach to meaning attempts to liberate the reader from the domination of the author and the text. At the core of this endeavor is the belief that texts are sophisticated devices that allow some to rule over others. Among human beings there is an understood but unstated struggle for mastery over others—male over female, adult over youth, wealthy over poor, developed over underdeveloped—and the most powerful weapon in this struggle is our linguistic ability, that is, our capacity to speak and write. No text should be naively taken at face value, because it inherently embodies this latent struggle for mastery, even if the authors themselves are unconscious of it. The real “meaning” of the text lies in the full disclosure of the struggle and in the resulting liberation of the oppressed. Many modern hermeneutics

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are based on such an approach. Perhaps the most controversial of these modern endeavors is feminist theology, which currently seems to take the brunt of theological criticism for using a deconstructivist approach. Feminist theologians come to the text with the belief that the authors and, by extension, their texts express and enforce a false picture of the world with regard to women. Women are not subservient and secondary, even if authors say so, readers think so, and texts appear to portray so. For the feminist interpreter the more important task is to discover and peel away (i.e., deconstruct) the arbitrary linguistic structures that perpetuate systems of belief that are false and oppressive to women. Interpretation becomes a moral act, not simply a communicative one. From this perspective, good interpretation liberates the reader from the oppressions perpetuated by the author and the text; it does not simply inform the reader of the meaning from the author or in the text. Hence, the interpretive process in this approach is not a search for meaning outside the reader but a search for what is meaningful, on an ethical and social level, for the reader. Naturally, what is meaningful and its attendant morality are determined by the interpreter or the interpretive school. For feminist interpreters, it is the proper appreciation of women in society; for liberation interpreters, it is the proper dignity of all oppressed peoples; and so on.

It is easy to dismiss this whole third approach to meaning by complaining that it is against the very grain of communication. As readers, do we not come to texts, the Bible included, with the assumption that the author or the text has something to say and that we must listen? If we did not care to hear the message, or if we ourselves wanted to be heard instead, would we come to the text in the first place? Interpreters of the third kind would say that, as readers, we do indeed come to listen, but that is not our main objective; rather, we come to dialog with author and text, to make our own voices heard, not simply for creative purposes, but for the moral good of liberating ourselves as readers from false presumptions in our society that have been confirmed and maintained by author and text. In the process, the act of text interpretation becomes as meaningful as the act of text composition, and readers “author” meaning just as authoritatively as authors do in the initial production of the text.

### Meaning and Authority

On a deeper level, these varying perspectives on how we should ascertain meaning in the Bible actually represent positions on who has the authority to decide on what the Bible means. Ultimately, the core issue is authority in the church. Whoever has the right and authority to decide

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what the Bible means has the right and authority to determine how the church should be. The first perspective looks to the author as the ultimate authority on meaning in the text. This seems quite natural since the author originated the text. But upon closer inspection an appeal to the author is rarely practicable; authors are frequently not with us and hence not available for comment. For the biblical text, interpreters look either to the human authors solely or to both the human and the divine authors dually for meaning. The human authors have gone to be with the Lord, and though the divine Author is ever present and ever available, He does not speak openly. For this reason, it is often necessary to reconstruct the author in one way or another. If we look to the divine Author as the authority for meaning, we must perceive Him spiritually, which may not be satisfactory to all involved. We could be deceived in our perceptions or deceived in perceiving what God is speaking through others. If we are content that the human author expresses the full, intended meaning of the divine Author, we must ascertain through method the intention of the human author. In either case, what we end up with is not the author at all, but persons who either through spirituality or expertise in method declare to us what the author “meant.” What we get is author-by-proxy, and all we can hope is that the proxy is good at what he or she does. Across the centuries of the Christian church, interpreters have attempted to demonstrate, with claims of better accuracy, what the authors of the Bible meant. At a reduced level, the Reformers were attempting just that, and since the time of the Reformers, school after school of interpretive thought has made the similar attempt. Today, it appears that those who best wield the historical-critical method are the ones who would seem to best know what the original authors of the Bible meant. In mainstream Christianity the proxy-authors today are scholars, and non-scholars are taught to look to scholars for final, authoritative help in understanding the Word of God. Certainly a lot of interpretation goes on at the “grass roots” level—in local congregations, in small Bible-study groups, and in private study—but none of this is considered authoritative, and for the most part anything “discovered” at this level is minified unless it accords with the standard scholarly responses to the text. Ironically, the interpretive monopoly of the medieval Catholic Church has been replaced by a modern scholarly consensus, even if it is far less formalized and far less magisterial.

**F**or those who look solely within the text for meaning and disregard authorial intention, authority shifts from author to reader. However, adherents of this view of meaning do not generally espouse a free-for-all approach to validating what the text means. Rather, readers belong to a community of readers, and the community implicitly restricts what the text can mean and what it does mean for the community. At the community level, meaning becomes self-authorizing, and there really need not be single authorities

on the meaning of the text. Subjective and individual interpretations are restricted and corrected by the community’s response to them. What the body of readers cannot accept is expunged socially. Further, as the community develops in its experiences and understanding, interpretation shifts accordingly and acceptably. Authority therefore resides within the community of readers, and readers constantly look to the community for confirmation or rejection of their own interpretations. Proponents of this view do not claim that the authority of the community of readers is a theoretical alternative to the authority of the author; rather, in their view the community is where interpretive authority actually abides, regardless of any theoretical pretenses. A community of readers may claim to have found the true voice of the author (and of God), but in actuality the only practical validation it has for its claim derives from the community itself. This is not to say that a community cannot settle upon the original authors’ intention in the Bible, but whether it does or not is somewhat academic in this point of view. What matters is what the body of readers accepts as the “meaning” of the Bible. This alone satisfies the requirements for validation.

Interpreters of the third type look neither to the author nor to the text itself for the ultimate meaning of the text; rather, meaning is as much a reader’s contribution as both the author’s and the text’s are. In addition and most importantly, the reader brings to the text a morality (hopefully a noble one) that provides significance for the text, which is admittedly beyond the significance contributed by the author originally or by the text internally. Women, persons of color, poor people, and other marginalized groups are not subservient and secondary to those groups that enjoy advantages, and moralities that declare this are certainly not far afield of the Christian message. In fact, interpreters of this kind would argue that this *is* the higher message of the Bible and that even the writings of the Bible themselves must be scrutinized according to these moralities. Authority in these circles is not as clean-cut as in other hermeneutical circles. Here readers become authorities on meaning, but the external morality that drives the interpretation constrains the reader and provides any interpretation its worth. Good interpretations are ones that lay bare the biases and prejudices which are encoded in the text and which offend the morality being held as the standard. Any given text, and certainly the Bible as the book of highest morality, can be deconstructed in this way—from a feminist theological perspective, from a liberation theological perspective, from a racial theological perspective, and so on—and can have a multitude of meanings, each of which is anchored in a reader morality. In contrast with other approaches to meaning, the deconstructionist approach depends primarily on the resources of the reader and particularly on a moral standard of his or her active choosing; it is not a passive approach to ascertaining meaning as is the search for authorial intention or the consenting to a

community of readers. The text is what the reader makes of it, just as long as the moral prerogative is respected. Although the reader may not demand that his or her interpretation be respected as the sole authoritative meaning for the text, the expectation is that the sole authority of the author or of the reading community is to be undermined and that readers are to be given just as much authority in declaring meaning.

Biblical interpretation today stands in the midst of these hermeneutical gale storms. In previous times biblical interpreters were content in the assumption that the author's intention was the meaning of the text. For them the issue was whether the intentions of the divine Author and the human authors coincided or not, and what they could make out as the authors' meaning. Even today the matter is far from being settled among advocates of this type of meaning. But to this controversy are now added the other possibilities for meaning, and today studies are being published in abundance that advance new hermeneutical models of the Bible, each founded upon one of the approaches to meaning that we are examining here. While these new models provide some valuable insights into the possible meanings of the Bible, many Bible readers, it would seem, are not comfortable with abandoning the author's intention—and authority. After all, the Bible is supposed to be “the Word of God,” and we should be understanding what God is saying in it. If we abandon the author's intention, are we not abandoning God as well? The anxiety is understandable. Yet, in defense of the newer models, it is indeed the case that we must rely on indirect methods to get at authorial intention, and this indeed calls into question whether we can truly get back to the author's intention. The long history of biblical interpretation has at least this somber lesson for us: Honest and genuine attempts by various interpreters to reconstruct the author's meaning yield different understandings of the Bible. Each interpreter can, of course, claim to be right and all others wrong, but this is hardly satisfactory. The newer models of biblical meaning acknowledge from the outset the difficulties (they would say impossibilities) in validating authorial intention and instead confess and condone relativity in interpretation. What a hermeneutical morass for us all!

### A Modest Proposal

It appears that each approach, in one way or another, has serious flaws, and this can almost debilitate a Bible interpreter. Much effort is spent in the numerous studies I mentioned defending one position or another and assaulting the counters, the assumption being that only one approach can be correct. Author, community of readers, or reader with an external morality—which one shall be

monarch and guide our understanding of the “Word of God”? Rather than recommending a champion, I would like to propose yet another alternative for the controversy, which I hope will give equal credence to these approaches and equal respect to their motives. But first, a short review of the history of God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” How striking that God has revealed Himself to be linguistic—shall we say textual—in His eternal being! Lest we fall into anthropomorphism, we should observe that He is first in this quality, and humankind is only reflective of it, and by comparison, poorly reflective. Kevin Vanhoozer calls God's very being “a self-communicative act” (456). And in addition to being communicative in being, God is communicative in activity. Creation amounts to a series of speech acts: “And God said....And it was so” (Gen. 1). The patriarchs enjoyed the direct speaking of God, who directed them with His words and made of them by His speaking a unique nation, Israel. But at some point, the priority of speaking was replaced with the priority of the written record.

And YHWH said to Moses, Come up to Me at the top of the mountain, and be there; and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and the commandments, which I have written for their instruction....And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave to Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exo. 24:12; 31:18)

From that point on, though God would speak both directly and through prophets and later apostles, it would be the written record that would ultimately have the greater priority among the people of God. Even in the incarnation, when the Word became flesh, it was only a small circle of disciples that was able to enjoy the priority of God's speaking; in time, the written record would again become primary for the people of God. What we know of Jesus, even as narrated sayings, is communicated to us today in writing, in the Gospels; and the teaching of the apostles has long ago ceased to be an oral tradition and now exists purely as the written record of the Epistles.

The question is, why would God, who in His eternal being is Word, entrust His revelation to writing? Certainly He could foresee the myriad problems associated with text interpretation, the problems I have outlined above. Certainly He realized the inherent risks with absented authors, with reader communities, and with external moralities. Why, when in His omnipresence and omnipotence He could have maintained communication by speaking directly and

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instantaneously to humankind throughout all time, did He choose instead to relegate His communication to a written text? I suspect that the decision reflects His omniscience and that what we perceive as risks are instead benefits. What I wish to suggest is that perhaps the qualities of the written word, particularly these so-called “flaws,” are better suited to the requirements God has in His economy for His divine operation. Further, I wish to suggest that while with texts other than the Bible the problems related to meaning are genuine, with the Bible, whose ultimate Author is divine,<sup>5</sup> the problems are merely apparent.

The first problem associated with authorial intention is the absent author. In the case of the Bible, the human authors have all died and gone to be with the Lord. But the divine Author is as much present as He ever was; in fact, with the New Testament believers His presence is more intimate than it was with the Old Testament saints. “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17); “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you” (2 Tim. 4:22). The God who in His being and activity is a “self-communicative act” dwells within His people now, and this cannot be overlooked or even trivialized insofar as it relates to the interpretation of the Bible. “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak; and He will declare to you the things that are coming” (John 16:12-13). Certainly this was fulfilled when the apostles later ministered and wrote, and the great development in the divine revelation contained in the Epistles, particularly Paul’s, can be accounted for by this word of the Lord. But the Lord’s presence with the believers continues to the present day, and within us He is able to communicate meaning in the biblical text. Even as soon as the day of His resurrection the Lord appeared to some of the disciples and personally helped them to understand the Scriptures. “And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He explained to them clearly in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). The disciples testified that inwardly there was a witness to the opening of the Scriptures. “And they said to one another, Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was opening to us the Scriptures?” (v. 32). Later, the Lord appeared to the rest of the disciples and “opened their mind to understand the Scriptures” (v. 45). Are these exceptional experiences, limited only to the first days of the church, or can they be typical for all the believers? Even if in actuality most believers today do not routinely enjoy the benefit of the Lord’s presence in this way, I believe that the possibility exists for the believers to be guided into the full meaning of the biblical text through the Lord’s inward presence. Throughout the history of the church we should expect that the Spirit has been progressively guiding the believers into all the reality

and that the Author’s intention has been unfolding gradually but steadily before us. No other text can lay claim to the author’s meaning, even if the author is alive and present with the reader. Living authors could tell us what they mean by their texts, but this is an imperfect enterprise, and actually one troubled with one logical issue: If the author could not communicate his or her meaning through the text, can we expect that he or she could do better by telling us directly what he or she meant? What if the telling is not clear, or even worse, obfuscates the intended meaning? The divine Author is not only very present with the believers but also has a way to communicate precisely and accurately. This is not to say that we always do understand the meaning of the Bible. Indeed, we certainly fall short. But the lack is not on the side of the Author but on the side of the reader. Perhaps like the disciples with the Lord, we cannot bear the full meaning yet. But as a whole, the believers are being brought into all the meaning of the text through the Spirit within them. The Author is not absent at all, and the Author is not incapable of precisely communicating what He means by His text. Throughout the centuries of the Christian church, He has been leading us to apprehend with all the saints what the text means. In this sense, biblical interpretation *is* Christian history.

**B**ut there is a second problem with authorial intention. Many modern interpreters would not accept the meaning of the author as final even if it could be communicated perfectly. For them, meaning derives as much from the reader as it does from the author, and meaning originating from the reader is as equally valid as that originating from the author. I do not believe that their position is founded upon base motives, that they are simply trying to exalt themselves as readers vaingloriously. Rather, it appears that interpreters who reject the author’s meaning as the sole meaning do so out of suspicion of authors. In their view, authors, either deliberately or subconsciously, are trying to master their readers through their texts. Thus, the long literary heritage of the Western world is seen as serving to perpetuate the misguided notion that women are subservient and secondary, or to enforce the mistaken view that Judeo-Christian values are superior to all others and should take precedence over them, or to advance any number of other suspicious cultural programs. In the Bible, Matthew is perhaps trying to quash latent Jewish sentiment in the church, John is attempting to nip in the bud any incipient Gnostic appropriations of the life of Jesus, and Paul is master of them all, breaking, building, and ruling all that does not conform to his own view of the Christian faith. The apostles themselves have fallen prey to the cultural maladies that plague humankind.

Perhaps such suspicions are well-founded with respect to human authors, but are they appropriate to the divine Author? “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), and love is the highest form of respect. Certainly, God harbors no ill toward

any group of human beings; none are marginalized by Him. "God is not a respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). He is alert to those who are oppressed and is for them. "A bruised reed He will not break; / And a dimly burning flax He will not extinguish" (Isa. 42:3). Hence, any meaning in the Bible that can be attributed to God is not tainted by a desire to master others and need not be suspected. Such meaning is as pure as its source, and as readers we cannot hope to provide greater or more valuable meaning for the text than what He has intended. The motives for creating new meaning for the Bible do not obtain if we accept its ultimate divine authorship. If, however, our reasons to assert our own meaning are base and vainglorious ("I will ascend to heaven;...I will make myself like the Most High," Isa. 14:13, 14), we invalidate our purpose in getting at meaning in the first place; we are less suspicious of the author than we are eager to assert ourselves.

Yet it must be admitted that in the Bible, even according to a hermeneutic that admits the divine authorship, human authors contribute significantly to the text, and the traces of their humanity are evident and obvious. These perhaps taint the pure meaning of the Bible and should be suspected of enforcing biases that are morally wrong. I do not deem myself worthy or able to defend the human authors of the Bible, but a defense, even a weak one, is certainly necessary. The authors of the Bible were indeed human beings, living in their respective cultural settings and utilizing the very human resources of their day to communicate in writing their message. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). But this was not the full extent of their resources. "For no prophecy [of Scripture] was ever borne by the will of man, but men spoke from God while being borne by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). In spite of the earthiness of the human authors, there is a divine transcendence in their writing that gives to it a quality which rightly qualifies it to be called the Word of God, and this transcendence, like its source God Himself, need not be suspected of advancing an immoral social agenda. God is love, but how have we come to know this, except through the writing of the human authors of the Bible? "And we know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. In this has love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of the judgment because even as He is, so also are we in this world" (1 John 4:16-17). Far from being suspect of oppressing the marginalized, the human authors of the Bible, unlike human authors of any other kind, identify with the divine Author and reflect His own transcendent message and meaning. Even as He is, so also are they in the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

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MEANING IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT.

I fully sympathize with those who argue against authorial intention as the locus of meaning in texts. With all texts but the Bible, for all practical purposes, authors are "dead" once their texts leave their pens. In addition, morally fallen as they are, authors should be suspected of advancing agendas that can oppress, even if they are no less victims themselves. But the Bible as the Word of God is textually *sui generis*—the Author is not dead and certainly not oppressive (or a victim to oppression). The meaning in His text is accessible and, reflective of His very being, worthy of trust. The supreme worth of His being causes any alternative meanings to pale in comparison to His meaning. There are no actual problems with authorial intention in the Bible, no obstacles to it and no detriments in it. This being the case, is there any motivation for seeking meaning elsewhere? Should we look to interpretive communities or to external moralities for meaning in the Bible? Most adherents to authorial intention would say no, but I am not so certain that we can easily dispense with these other viewpoints.

In interpreting the Bible we need not dismiss the intention of its divine Author. But how can we be certain that we are arriving at the Author's intention? Further, how do we account for the historical phenomenon of community after community claiming to have found the voice of God in the Scriptures and yet the messages varying so much? An appeal to the second type of meaning, sourced in the interpretive community, may help us here. I have hinted above at the possibility that a reader community could in fact "discover" the author's intended meaning, and should this be the case, we would have a situation where the author's intention and the reader community's interpretation coincide. What I am suggesting is that with the Bible as the Word of God and the church as the Body of Christ this is exactly what happens, and that this is by design. Throughout the centuries of Christian history, there have been numerous reader communities who have independently studied the Bible and arrived at some kernel of truth. Some communities have been large and have exercised great influence; others have been small and have contributed only a minimal influence. For example, Luther and his followers are an extremely influential reader community in Christian history, whereas the Waldenses (late 12th century) have been considerably less influential overall. Is it possible that while each of these communities establishes its own version of the truth (sometimes quite dogmatically), each actually arrives at the intention of the divine Author to some degree? Again, an appeal must be made to the Author's ability to communicate His meaning in the reader community through His Spirit, and yet, at the same time, it is the meaning derived from the reader community that is being advanced.

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As an illustration, let me use the settlement of the christological debates at Chalcedon in AD 451. The final resolution of these long-standing debates is embodied in the classic theological formula concerning the person of Christ: "One hypostasis in two natures." This has become the opinion of orthodoxy since the fifth century. Yet the formula, and many would say the notion, is certainly not to be found in the New Testament. The scholarly consensus is that Chalcedon provided a watershed in christology, after which, discussion concerning the person of Christ would be molded to the fundamental distinction between His divine and human natures. Some go so far as to say that only with great difficulty are we able to penetrate to an understanding of Christ that was held prior to Chalcedon, including that in the New Testament itself. Morna Hooker, for example, in her study on the influence of Chalcedon on our understanding of what the New Testament says, laments that "generations of Christians have read the New Testament through Chalcedonian spectacles" (74), imposing, as it were, a fifth-century interpretation upon the first-century text. In accepting Chalcedon are we accepting the meaning of the biblical Author, or are we instead authorizing the interpretation of one very influential reader community, the primarily eastern branch of the fifth-century Christian church? Reading the account of the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon with its political factions and intrigues,<sup>7</sup> one wonders if such a band could have indeed arrived at anything of the divine Author's intended meaning, and the immediate suspicion by many in that day was that they did not. But the millennium and a half of historical theology that follows and the consensus among the many branches of Christendom that now obtains serve to validate the interpretation that Chalcedon put forward, that Christ is one person existing in two natures. Either the Christian church is adhering to something that is not theologically true, or what Chalcedon discovered is actually what the Author of the Bible intended.

**T**he point I wish to make here is that the Author needed a Chalcedon to discover His meaning and that without the interpretive community His meaning would never have been perceived. In His omniscience and through His secret working in human history and culture, God produced a Chalcedon to perceive His meaning in the text. Not only has He authored the text, but He has also "authored" the interpretive community and fashioned it to read the text in such a way that only it as an interpretive community can. Hence, He needs not only the human authors to bring forth His meaning but also the human readers to grasp His meaning. By His grace He operates to produce authors and by His grace He operates to produce the reading community. His Spirit bears the authors to speak from God, and His Spirit bears the reading community to hear from God. The reading community that God produces must be one that enjoys His Spirit (as Communicator) intimately, and this can only be

the Body of Christ. Seen from the perspective of the interpretive process, the members of the Body of Christ are in fact readers, and in a real sense the function of the many members and of the Body as a whole is to read and interpret the text of the Bible.

I suppose what is at issue here is whether or not the authority of the Author and the authority of the interpretive community are mutually exclusive. In other words, must the interpretation of a reader community by definition be independent of and different from the author's intention? Most proponents of the authority of interpretive communities view authorial intention as unavailable for all practical purposes, and hence, for them the issue is academic at most. But again we must deal with the implications of a divine Author, who is ever present, available, and communicative. These are the same implications that I have addressed above, that He is able to communicate His meaning and that His meaning is in the very best interest of the reader on every level. Further, with respect to the authority of the interpretive community, we must deal with the implication that *the interpretive community is the Body of Christ*. Perhaps the designation has lost its full significance through overuse, but we should remember that the term *the Body of Christ* indicates that the church (the reading community) embodies Christ (the Author) and is indeed identified with Him. Mystically, the Author abides in the interpretive community and, more deeply, the interpretive community expresses and manifests the Author through its organic union with Him.<sup>8</sup> Now Author and interpretive community are identified, and through the union the reading community has the ability to author meaning in the text which is at the same moment both the reader's and the Author's. No other text can lay claim to this mystical union between the divine Author of the Bible and the Body of Christ as the reader community of the Bible. And no other text can lay claim to as legitimate an interpretive authority as the Body of Christ can, in that its authority derives from the Author whom it embodies.

**T**his is an extremely potent notion for biblical hermeneutics and one unique to the situation of the Bible in its privileged interpretive community. I say privileged because there are many readers of the Bible, but not all are the Body of Christ. The quality that makes a group of people distinctly the Body of Christ turns out to be the same quality that makes them the only interpretive community that has privileged access to the Author's meaning, that is, God in Christ as the Spirit indwelling them. Only the Body of Christ, as an interpretive community indwelt by the divine Author and expressing Him, can arrive at the meaning of the Author with certainty; all other interpretive communities (or individual readers) must resign themselves to the fact that the author is absent and silent, and that the meaning they arrive at can only potentially be the author's, if they are even interested in it in the first place.

Turning to a consideration of the third approach to meaning, we must ask, Should an external morality be applied to the biblical text so that the text can be “deconstructed” and (repressed?) meaning can be recovered? Ideological interpreters who defend marginalized minorities and viewpoints would certainly answer affirmatively, but many others find the interpretations engendered by this approach radical and far afield of what the Bible seems to be saying. However, is the complaint against deconstructionist interpretations purely a criticism of technique, or is there in it a latent criticism of the external moralities being brought to the text? In other words, are critics really reacting to the ideological perspectives of deconstructionist interpreters, for example, to the feminist point of view or to the African-American position? I believe that to a large extent they are (which only serves to strengthen the motivation of deconstructionist interpreters). If the external morality being brought to the text were different, would there be a complaint? Actually, I think the question should be posed in this way: Why haven’t there been similar complaints when other moralities were applied to the text so as to deconstruct it? Are not law/gospel and the covenant relationship moralities that have been applied to the text to deconstruct it and recover repressed meaning? Certainly these approaches are not as thoroughgoing as most deconstructionist approaches, but nevertheless they employ similar techniques for ferreting out meaning from the Bible. For example, a Lutheran interpretation of the text attempts to evaluate whether any given passage advances the principle of law or the principle of gospel, and if the passage advances the principle of law, it is immediately deconstructed so that the principle of gospel may be brought into focus. Every discovery of law invites and even implies a recovery of gospel. And why is this done? Because an external standard, at least external to the passage itself, has been accepted as the determinant of meaning in the Bible.

What then is the difference between, let’s say, an external feminist morality and a Lutheran one? Perhaps primarily that the former is not particularly theological, while the latter is. In all fairness to the critics of deconstructionist interpretation, perhaps the real basis of the complaint is that many ideological interpretations bring moralities to the Bible that are seemingly not particularly Christian, not particularly theological, or not particularly biblical. The moralities are too external. Such concerns would not shatter the faith of deconstructionist interpreters in what they do, I am sure—the morality can be totally independent of the text. But for many interpreters there should be at least an “organic” relationship between the text and any hermeneutic standard applied to it, and the basis of that organicity seems to be the inclusion of God’s direct involvement with humanity. The distinction between law

THE READING COMMUNITY THAT GOD PRODUCES MUST BE ONE THAT ENJOYS HIS SPIRIT (AS COMMUNICATOR) INTIMATELY, AND THIS CAN ONLY BE THE BODY OF CHRIST.

and gospel conforms to a major distinction in the interaction between God and humanity; covenants conform to definite activities of God in His relations with humankind; dispensations conform to actual demarcations in the history of God’s dealings with humankind. Deconstructionist interpreters can rightly say that the moralities which they bring to the Bible are according to God, for ultimately God is the source of all good. There is indeed a genuine religiosity in their approach. God is no respecter of persons, and neither should readers of the Bible be. But it is a religiosity that looks only at the human condition, not at the divine situation. Traditional hermeneutical systems, even with their shortages, hold this in common, that they attempt to circumscribe the meaning of the Bible in terms of God’s interaction with humanity.

In answer to my own question above, an external morality should be applied to the biblical text in order to recover meaning; in fact, it must be. Otherwise, how are we to deal with the very difficult passages that seem to run counter to Christian ideals? David prays frequently for the swift destruction of his enemies, but the Lord Jesus says, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Paul, quoting Proverbs 25:21-22, exhorts us in this way: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing this you will heap coals of fire upon his head.’ Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good” (Rom. 12:20-21). Are we to ignore David’s prayers, to excise them from the text? These prayers of David have meaning on their own, expressive of the author, but for the Christian reader the meaning is hardly acceptable. We must bring to these prayers some external standard to make them meaningful to us. We should not think that it is within our rights as Christians to hope and even pray for the destruction of our persecutors; we do not have the right to marginalize even those who mistreat us. Christ held nothing against His enemies, and we as the members of His Body and as ones indwelt by Him must live Him out and so express His own perfect heart toward all. We cannot stand with the meaning of the text as it stands; we must peel away at the text and expose the false assumptions of the text which marginalize. The meaning of these prayers for the Christian reader is negative: Pious persons can be misguided, and their sentiments can be mixed; they can be destructive, hateful, and even against the very heart of God. We learn how not to be when we read these prayers, and we come to this meaning by applying an external New Testament morality to the text.

What I am suggesting is that meaning sourced in an external morality is just as necessary in interpreting the Bible as the other two types of meaning we have been examining. The Body of Christ as the privileged interpretive community

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must bring to the Bible the highest morality of Him whom they embody, and this morality must guide their interpretation and evaluation of the text. Again, the proper apprehension of this morality depends on the communication between Christ and His members through the Spirit. But more important than the approach is the nature of the external morality that is applied. I will conclude this essay with the consideration of a morality which, I believe, best deserves to be employed. Here, however, let me conclude this modest proposal with the observation that the various approaches to meaning embroiling modern biblical hermeneutics are not as foreign to how hermeneutics has been done across the ages as many have supposed. Reader communities have imposed external moralities on the Bible and have defined meaning based upon them. I do not wish to suggest that these communities are misguided; rather, insofar as they function genuinely as the Body of Christ and thereby express the divine Author in a very present way, the application of their moralities serves to elicit meaning that is certainly valid. Because of the indwelling presence of the Author (Christ) in the reader community (the Body), the morality brought to the text actuality turns out to be at the same time the intention of the Author. With the Bible, and only with the Bible, the authority of the Author, the authority of the interpretive community, and the authority of an external morality converge. The competition among these three sources of meaning dissolves when the spiritual presence of the divine Author exists in the interpretive community and the Body of the Author manifests His mode of existence as its own highest morality.

### **A Hermeneutic of the Bible according to the Intrinsic Being of God**

If an external morality is needed for the interpretation of the Bible, we ought to pay careful attention to the nature of that morality. Modern ideological interpretations, though satisfying to their few adherents, are not particularly natural to the Bible and leave one with an uneasy sense of inappropriateness. I have suggested that traditional hermeneutical schools are actually applying external moralities of a sort and that these meet with wider acceptance—that is, reader communities spring up in support of them—because they follow a more natural quality of the Bible, the interaction of God with humankind. But these hermeneutical standpoints are based on the activities of God, not so much on His being. I believe that the highest morality to be found, and thus the greatest hermeneutical key, should be drawn from the revelation of how God is, not merely of how He acts. Law/gospel, covenants, and dispensations are all principles of God's activity, but they do not express, except indirectly, how God is in His intrinsic being. Further, because they do not directly reflect the being of God, these hermeneutical perspectives can never fully provide meaning for the Bible. The dispensational approach to the Bible, for example, leaves out much of the

data and often points to contradictions which ultimately must be ignored. As with any explanatory theory, such phenomena indicate flaws in the approach. If our hermeneutic is based on some role that God takes in His relation to humanity, we will find ourselves ignoring other roles that He takes. Luther, in his hermeneutical approach to the Bible, viewed God primarily as a Judge who adheres strictly to His righteousness. That perspective at first caused Luther to abhor God, as fear of impending doom, invited by even his most trivial sins, gripped him constantly. Later, the same perspective caused him to love God and exult in Him, as he accepted by faith that God in His righteousness had been appeased for the sins of the world by the death of His Son. Luther's perspective is not at all wrong, but neither is it all that is right. There is more, much more, to God than His righteousness and His role as Judge. I have often wondered what the face of the Reformation would have looked like, and even the face of later Western culture, if Luther had been sensitive not to unrighteousness, but to spiritual death. Paul says that as unbelievers we were dead in our offenses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5). Luther was more keen to the condemnation brought on by sin, but there is also the dimension of spiritual death related to sin. If there can be a complaint against the Reformation, it would be that its emphasis is too judicial and hardly sensitive to the organic aspect of God's salvation. This imbalance derives, I feel, from a somewhat myopic view of God, based on a single role that He takes in His economy, and this view obscures other aspects of God which would be necessary to a proper hermeneutic of the Bible. The solution is not to compound the many roles of God into some composite hermeneutical monster, but to reach further back, beyond our understanding of what God does, to an understanding of what God is. Not only will such an understanding help us to better grasp the meaning in the Bible, but it will also help us to better understand the many roles that God has in His economy. This is a more powerful hermeneutical approach that should overarch all other hermeneutical perspectives without invalidating them. Like the psalmist, we should extol the approach that better perceives who God is: "He made His ways known to Moses; His acts, to the children of Israel" (103:7).

**I**ntrinsically, God is triune. The import of this revelation cannot be fully fathomed, and its impact upon our understanding of the Bible is profound. Traditional hermeneutical perspectives do not employ this basic revelation concerning God (other than to acknowledge it). Views of God as Judge or God as gracious Maker of covenants do not need to appeal to His trinity in order to obtain. Vanhoozer has recently attempted to posit a "trinitarian hermeneutics," and this in itself is, I feel, a grand step in the right direction. But even in his notion of the trinity of God, Vanhoozer is limited to the activity of God and fails to relate his hermeneutics to the more intrinsic existence of God.

From a Christian perspective, God is first and foremost a communicative agent, one who relates to humankind through words and the Word. Indeed, God's very being is a self-communicative act that both constitutes and enacts the covenant of discourse: speaker (Father), Word (Son), and reception (Spirit) are all interrelated. (456)

Having been trained as a linguist, I greatly admire Vanhoozer's application of the "linguistic" view of the Trinity (drawn from Barth). But in making the application, he is forced to deal with the three of the Trinity in indirect terms. His Trinity is one of Speaker, Word, and Reception, not directly one of Father, Son, and Spirit. In other words, when we must relabel the Father, the Son, and the Spirit into some other roles, we are not yet at the most intrinsic level of God's triune existence. Our hermeneutic must not only respect God's triuneness, but most critically it must account for the fact that He is triune as Father, Son, and Spirit. We must make something of these three designations as they are, without renaming them and robbing them of their significance.

I do not presume to fully grasp what *Father, Son, and Spirit* tell us about the Trinity; a fuller apprehension belongs to the entire Body of Christ and will require an eternity. But there are three points that can be made and which should serve as key pillars in our hermeneutic of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> First of all, that He is eternally the Father, the Son, and the Spirit points to His eternal, organic existence. Above all, He is a God of life and enjoys an existence of relationships in life. He exists as Father by virtue of the existence of the Son and the Spirit, as Son by virtue of the existence of the Father and the Spirit, and as Spirit by virtue of the existence of the Father and the Son. Life is the factor that defines Him as a Father in relation to the Son and as a Son in relation to the Father. I venture here, but I suspect that the Spirit is that defining factor; He is the Spirit of life between Father and Son. Our hermeneutic of the Bible must above all respect this organic aspect of God's existence. All our understanding of God's economy in the Bible must acknowledge that it is primarily an economy in life, not merely in righteousness, holiness, or power. We must recognize God's organic emphasis in His dealings with man, and even "see through" to this emphasis. All His activity is directed toward His being life to His believers. For example, Christ's death on the cross must be seen in its organic perspective: "Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). His death, though certainly redemptive, is also generative. He redeems in life; He regenerates in life; He transforms in life; ultimately He glorifies in life. I believe that this journal has been more than faithful to demonstrate this point. Our

organic emphasis, generally expressed throughout all the issues of this journal but particularly with respect to biblical interpretation in the other articles of this issue, is driven by our realization that God is organically triune, that is, that His triune existence is one of divine life and directed toward the dispensing of the divine life.

Second, the three of the Trinity exist in a condition of perfect, eternal, unfathomable love. None can express how high this love is and how deep it is among the three. We can at most utter what John has declared: "God *is* love." It is not only divine life that makes Father, Son, and Spirit one eternal being, but deep, unspeakable divine love. The Father holds the Son not merely in life but more intimately in love, and the Son likewise holds the Father intimately in love. Augustine and Aquinas both identified the Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son, and with this there can be no fault. Our hermeneutic of the Bible must respect the fact that God is love and that all His actions are drawn from His being love. For example, while the death of Christ on the cross has a definite judicial aspect to it, more deeply there is an expression of love in it: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life" (John 3:16). This love, which is God, can be practically expressed only by the believers, who manifest it toward God, toward their fellow believers, and toward humankind in general.

Third, the three of the Trinity are an "incorporation."<sup>10</sup> The three of the Trinity mutually coinhere and mutually indwell one another. The Father is Father because there is a Son. The Son is Son because there is a Father. The Son is in Father, and the Father is in the Son (John 14:20; 17:23); the Spirit is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son (Matt. 10:20; Gal. 4:6). The three exist by virtue of one another, and they exist within one another. Though eternally distinct, they are never separate, and they never act independently of one another. Every single operation of God is the simultaneous action of the three. In eternal existence, the three of the Trinity are not united but mutually inherent in the existence of each of the three. Our hermeneutic of the Bible must respect the incorporate existence of God. We must understand that all God's activity in His economy is reflective of this quality. For this reason, He created man corporate. "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). We must penetrate to the incorporate meaning in the Bible. For example, the death of Christ not only terminated the fallen race and germinated a new creation, and not only demonstrated the deep extent of God's love, but also brought forth a new corporate man (Eph. 2:15).

THE GREATEST HERMENEUTICAL KEY  
SHOULD BE DRAWN FROM THE REVELATION  
OF HOW GOD IS,  
NOT MERELY OF HOW HE ACTS.

What we should bring to the Bible as an external morality is the revelation of the very being of God, that He is intrinsically life, love, and an incorporation. But this does not only open up the meaning of the text with full regard for the being (meaning) of the divine Author; it also actually defines the existence of the privileged interpretive community, the Body of Christ. Casting away the shallow and even false notion that the Body of Christ is a mere metaphor for the collection of believers, we should see more deeply that by God's splendid design the Body is the one entity that best expresses these three qualities of the intrinsic being of God. The Body is the organism of the Triune God, constituted with the many members who have been regenerated with the life of God, who have been transformed by His life and even reign in His life, and who express the divine life. The Body grows and builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:15-16), the love that is God Himself and that is spent upon the many members by the many members (1 Cor. 12:25-26). And the Body is an incorporation akin to the incorporation that the Triune God Himself is. "That they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me" (John 17:22-23). The Body of Christ has been incorporated into the Triune God in order to express who He is and how He is: life, love, and an incorporation.

**T**he Father, the Son, and the Spirit, with the full implications of who He is, *is* the meaning of the Bible and *is* the meaning of the Body of Christ; the Triune God is the external morality that defines our reading of the Bible as well as our very existence as its privileged readers. God's own intrinsic being turns out to be not only His intention as Author in the Bible but also, by virtue of His embodiment in the interpretive community, the basis of existence for the interpretive community and indeed the very basis of its interpretive authority. This we should bring to the Bible as our interpretive rule and judge every passage according to it. AFC

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998). Vanhoozer's presentation of the issues and positions in modern literary theory is superb, both as a clear introduction for one who is new to the issues and as an insightful re-examination for one who is familiar with them.

<sup>2</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 182-200.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Stanley Eugene Fish. *Is There a Text in This Class? The*

*Authority of Interpretive Communities*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup>The term and approach were introduced by Jacques Derrida. Cf. his *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the 1997 corrected edition by Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>5</sup>This point need not be defended; and if the reader does not accept it, he or she need not read on, as the whole remaining depends on it.

<sup>6</sup>As my exemplar, I have used the apostle John, who rarely incites complaints by deconstructionist interpreters. At the opposite extreme, one may wish to consider David the king, who is frequently far from the purity of God. Augustine's famous complaint against David's prayers for violence upon his enemies was resolved by recourse to allegory. In that an external morality was brought to the text and meaning was determined by it, it could be said that Augustine was "deconstructing" the text. However, Augustine would, I believe, claim that here the allegorical meaning is the divine meaning in the text. The deeper and true meaning of David's "faulty" prayers is indeed the reader's, yet in the greater omniscience of God, the reader's meaning turns out to be ultimately the Author's as well. In essence, this is the point that I will attempt to make later regarding the third type of meaning.

<sup>7</sup>The events of the Council are fully narrated in R. V. Sellers, *The Council of Chalcedon: A Historical and Doctrinal Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SPCK, 1953). The official minutes of the sessions are preserved in *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*. Ed. E. Schwartz (Rev. ed. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1962, 1965), 2,1,1.55—2,1,3.136.

<sup>8</sup>I might add here that insofar as it is the expression of the Author, the Body of Christ as an interpretive community begins to function in the same way that a text does, to manifest the meaning of the Author. Another dimension of the hermeneutic that I am presenting, though I will not develop it here, is the Body of Christ as a text (cf. 2 Cor. 3:2-3) and the New Jerusalem as the ultimate text that incorporates both Author and reader.

<sup>9</sup>Much of this was more fully developed in my article "Axioms of the Trinity," *Affirmation & Critique*, I.1 (January 1996): 6-11.

<sup>10</sup>The term is borrowed from Witness Lee, *The Issue of Christ Being Glorified by the Father with the Divine Glory* (Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1996), pp. 19-26.

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