

My Interpretation: Why Others Tear Down What I Have So Neatly Built!

Introduction

Because people have more disagreements about how to interpret the Bible than my dog, Izzy, has habits that annoy me, and because such disagreements often cause divisions between people, in this essay I address the problem of interpretive disagreement. Why do people so often disagree about the meaning of biblical texts? How do people settle their differences? When people are arguing about how a text should be interpreted, what are they actually arguing about? What are they both after?

Anyone who has had to defend their interpretation against someone who disagrees with them quickly realizes how *risky* interpreting the Bible can be. You soon find out that you aren't in control of *the convincing interpretation* like you thought you were. Opponents often reveal weaknesses in your logic that you didn't see, and they aren't convinced by your best arguments. You may find that you are uncomfortably vulnerable.

The messy, contentious side of biblical interpretation may at first have caught some of us by surprise (I know it did me), because when we first learn how to interpret the Bible in the controlled environment of the classroom, it is easy to get the impression that arriving at the right interpretation is a fairly systematic and mechanical process. In that setting, we often act as if learning how to exegete a biblical text consists of first learning the proper methodology that we can then apply to the text (sometimes in step-like fashion) in order to arrive at the *correct* interpretation.¹ Behind the classroom focus on methodology is the hope is that proper methodology will arm us with the tools we need to "dig out" or "discover" the meaning that is waiting for us in the text.

In a way, this view is comforting because it suggests that there are external and independent "controls" that all of us can count on to give us the right meaning. The hope is that once we learn the right method, it will lead to positive results. This view assumes that wrong interpretations (either on our part or someone else's) are based on mistakes that can be corrected by pointing to the correct facts (grammatical

facts, lexical facts, contextual facts, historical facts and so on). Once we input the right facts and work through the method we have learned, we can insure the correctness and persuasiveness of our interpretations.

Now, as long as different interpreters agree about many basic assumptions, as long as they have a lot of things in common, this appeal to method as a way to get to the right interpretation seems to work. Mistakes in understanding the syntax of a passage or the meaning of a Hebrew word are easily correctible, and where there is already large-scale agreement, most problems can be solved by simple explanations designed to correct misunderstandings.

However, what do we do in the case of interpretive differences that aren't due to "mistakes?" Nowadays we regularly face interpretive differences that go far deeper than mistakes. And we cannot at all presuppose that interpreters of the Bible share much in common at all.

Here is an example of what I mean: In their book, *The Jesus Legend*,² authors Paul Eddy and Gregory Boyd state upfront their belief that ". . . the Gospels are not only historically grounded but also that their central message is *theologically* true."³ After examining every perspective in the Gospel genre debate, evaluating every bit of evidence, and sifting through an immense amount of data, they reach the conclusion that all the evidence *supports* rather than *undermines* the historical intentionality of the Gospel authors.⁴ Furthermore, even though they find the exact nature of the genre of the Gospels difficult to classify, they are certain that the one proposal that finds no support is the view that the Gospels are intentionally crafted ancient fiction of any kind.⁵

In summarizing their conclusions on the Gospel genre, they say, ". . . there is no evidence that the Gospels were written as literary fiction" ⁶ And after looking at the mountain of evidence and close argumentation, who could disagree?

Well, Robert Price could. And does. Among a number of other endorsements at the front of *The Jesus Legend*, Robert Price recommends the book even though he says, "I would dispute almost every one of their assertions . . ." And in his most recently published book, *Jesus is Dead*, Price does just that.⁷

Price is as certain that the Gospels are fiction as Eddy and Boyd are that they are not. He says things like: "What I want to suggest next is that fundamentalists are (perhaps willfully) missing certain, I think, blatant signals in the texts themselves that their authors did not even want us to take them literally."⁸ And he says, ". . . we are

not dealing with historical reporting. We are not even supposed to be dealing with historical narrative."⁹ And again, "I see a number of features in the gospel texts implying that their writers were not trying to write factual histories."¹⁰

In other words, where Eddy and Boyd find no evidence that the Gospels were intended as fiction, Price sees evidence of fiction everywhere he looks. In his interpretation of the New Testament he works to prove his case, and readers don't have to read too far before they notice that his interpretation of text after text is as different from Eddy's and Boyd's as, well, fact from fiction. When compared to the traditional interpretation represented by Eddy and Boyd, in Price's readings, words have different meanings, names of people have different referents, texts match up in different ways, previously unseen tensions and difficulties appear, and different conclusions are drawn. The differences are not due to a few correctable mistakes. The interpretations are completely—from beginning to end--irreconcilable.

This is just one example of a situation that is repeated on text after text throughout the Bible.¹¹ Interpretive differences go much deeper than "mistakes." The differences cannot be solved by appealing to an agreed upon method that will bring the different interpretations into line because the disagreement is not due to miss-steps in procedure. And one can't appeal to an objective set of facts (grammatical, historical, literary) to solve the dispute because the "facts" and what counts as the decisive "facts" are themselves a matter of dispute. In other words, both Price and Eddy/Boyd present plenty of "facts" to support their interpretation and dismiss the "facts" of the other party.

So, what is behind their different interpretations of the Gospels? Well, as I indicated, both authors claim that they have figured out the authors' intentions. Each of them claims to have discerned how the authors of the Gospels intended their writings to be understood. And each of them presents arguments and evidence to support their case.

The realization that the interpretive disagreement between Eddy/Boyd and Price is disagreement about the authors' intentions suggests that *our* disagreements about a text's meaning, at any level, are at the same time disagreements about authorial intention. Put more positively, whenever any of us are trying to figure out a text's *meaning*, we are at all times trying to figure out the *author's intentions*.¹²

What is Interpretation: Discerning the author's intentions

In other words, there is no distinction to be made between meaning and authorial intention. When we are trying to figure out the meaning of a text we are actually trying to figure out what is in the author's mind of which the text is evidence.¹³ The author's intentions include the intention to communicate and communicate cognitive information, speech acts, affective and moral knowledge, emotions, along with the assumption that "an author's various intentions" may vary in strength.¹⁴

The assumption that it is the author's intentions that we seek, entails the assumption that a text has been produced by a particular author, on a particular occasion, and for particular purposes. It is actually the assumption of intention that makes a text a text and distinguishes it from accidental (and therefore meaningless) marks on a piece of paper.¹⁵

This means that as soon as we start reading, we are *starting with the belief that we are reading* a text that was written for some purpose, that it is intentional, and assuming intention we proceed.¹⁶ Even though we may not know anything about the author, and even without realizing it, as soon as we attempt to read, we are committed to the belief that there is an author who is a speaker of language and who intends to communicate something. If we don't assume that the written marks are the product of someone for some reason, we won't even see them as language. As Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels say: "to deprive [written marks] of an author is to convert them into accidental likeness of language . . . As soon as they become intentionless, they become meaningless as well."¹⁷ If we take intention away from a text, we take away the reason to interpret or even seeing the need to interpret.

For example, since 2008, scholars have been working to decipher the inscription found on a broken piece of pottery at Khirbet Qeiyafa, an ancient city in southern Israel. Their interpretive efforts are driven by the assumption that this is a specimen of an ancient text written by a particular author for a particular purpose. But here too there is a lively debate about what the text might mean, and it focuses on figuring out the author's intention.¹⁸

But theoretically speaking, if some compelling evidence was brought forward which convinced everyone that the marks on the pottery were either accidentally made or were merely likenesses of language, the need to try to interpret the "inscription" (which would no longer actually be an inscription) would stop. To

suggest that the attempts to interpret should continue would be to say that marks on a page are language even though nobody ever meant anything by them.¹⁹

Therefore, in the move from being unsure of a text's meaning to pinning the meaning down it is not intention that is added to a sentence which already in the abstract has some intentionless meaning, but information about the intention.²⁰ In the example of the Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription, the assumption of intention/meaning is present from the start. (Indeed, we can't get started without it.) And proceeding on that assumption, scholars are using all the relevant linguistic, historical, and archeological evidence at their disposal in an attempt to pin down the meaning.

And in the case of the interpretive disagreement between Eddy/Boyd and Price, they both assume that the Gospels are texts written by particular authors, for particular purposes (vastly different ones, obviously). It is in the light of their different assumptions about the authors' intentions that the interpretations of the words take the shapes that they do. Both muster all the historical, linguistic and literary evidence that they can to make their case.

Since text's don't write themselves, in order to figure out a text's meaning, an interpreter always has to go behind the words in an attempt to construct the situation that gave rise to the text and in the light of which the words take on particular meanings. From the start, we make interpretive assumptions about the author, his goals, purposes, and situation that enable us to make sense of the text. And the shape of those assumptions is responsible for the shape of the interpretation.²¹

The ever present need for us to interpret the author's intentions (because texts don't interpret themselves) means that when there is an interpretive disagreement we cannot objectively (free of presuppositions) settle the dispute by appealing to what the words mean "just in themselves" because in the abstract, apart from the intentions of an author who gives them meaning, texts don't "mean." Therefore, the assumption that distinctions can be made between *language* and *speech acts*, for example, or between *sentence meaning* and *speaker meaning*, or between what a text *meant* and what it *means*, and that these distinctions can help us lessen our interpretive risk, don't hold up. Interpreters do not move from *language* to *speech acts*, nor from *sentence meaning* to *speaker meaning*, nor from what a text *meant* to what it *means*.²²

In each set of distinctions, the left side of the pair is commonly assumed to refer to that which can be interpreted with more certainty and in a more or less independently verifiable way, and the right side to refer to that which is more context-

dependent, unclear, and riskier to interpret. In other words, it is often assumed that interpreters have freer access to the items on the left and that these lend stability and a degree of objectivity to an interpretation. But actually, there is no choice to be made between them because they both imagine a form of language apart from intention, and again, there is no such thing.²³

In regard to language in general, *language* and *speech acts* are as inseparable as meaning and intention. The essence of a speech act is its intentional character. Intention is built in. And as I have tried to show, language has intention built into it as well. Language is irreducibly intentional. It consists of intentional speech acts.²⁴ When we assume that something is language, we assume it is a speech act. And so there is no choice to be made between language and speech acts. The only choice is to decide what speech act is intended, and that is not always easy to do.

As there is no choice to be made between language and speech acts, so there is no choice to be made between *sentence meaning* and *speaker meaning*. *Sentence meaning*, the idea that a string of words possesses meaning as an inherent property, or that the meaning of a sentence can be derived from its constituent parts alone, without assuming a context, and is simply a matter of decoding the words is impossible.²⁵

Interpretation always takes place within some context of assumptions, concerns, priorities, expectations, so that what an interpreter sees as the meaning emerges. An interpreter is never in the position of being able to focus on meaning independently of background or supplemental considerations. The meaning of a text does not announce itself. It must be decided upon, that is, interpreted. This is also true of contexts. They are not given.²⁶

The earlier observation that the Gospel texts look very different in the mouths of different speakers in different situations holds back the idea that statements "mean" in the abstract and leads to the conclusion that every speech situation is unique.²⁷ Any meaning a sentence might seem to have is the product of interpretive work.²⁸

Again, the interpretive disagreement between Eddy/Boyd and Price and any interpretive disagreement leads to the same conclusion. As another example, if agreement is ever reached as to what 1 Timothy 2:15 means (*nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self control*), that agreement will not have been obtained by decoding what the words mean "in themselves." Meanings are not "embedded" in words. They emerge in the light of

background assumptions that interpreters put in place that make them intelligible. Interpreters with different assumptions come to different conclusions.²⁹

In those cases in which the meaning of a text seems immediately available without recourse to anything but the words themselves, cases where any other meaning seems impossible, it is because the background context is so established and widely assumed and agreement is so extensive, that we are not aware of it.³⁰

For example, Jesus' words to Thomas, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6), is, as one commentary notes, ". . . commonly recognized as ranking with [John] 3:16 as an outstanding expression of the Gospel."³¹ Taken as an expression of the Gospel—like the so-called "Gospel in a nutshell"—Christians hear these words of Jesus as comfort that their faith is not in vain and as an invitation to believe in Jesus.

But Soren Kierkegaard connects Jesus' words, not with John 3:16, but with Matthew 7: 14, "But small is the gate and *narrow is the way* that leads to life, and only a few find it." At the beginning of his sermon, Kierkegaard writes: "But the fact that his [Christ's] life every single day, every hour, every moment expresses 'the way is narrow' is indeed a totally different continual and penetrating proclamation that the way is narrow than if his life had not expressed it . . . Furthermore, you see here that the proclaiming of Christianity for a period of a half hour, by a man whose life every day, every hour of the day, every moment, expresses the opposite, is at the greatest possible distance from the true proclamation of Christianity."

And after Kierkegaard has described that narrow way, which is Christ, growing narrower into death, and then declares that the demonstration of Christianity really lies in *imitation*, and then urges me to say to myself, ". . . I have coddled myself with respect to *imitation*, that my life is not exerted enough in this direction, that I have too easy a life, spare myself the dangers bound up with witnessing for truth and against untruth," I begin to see that Jesus' words are not meant to comfort us that our faith makes us "okay with God," but they are an awesome challenge to take up our cross and follow him that leaves no corner of our lives untouched.³² The point again: When meanings seem obviously derived from "the words themselves," that is because the background assumptions for understanding them are deeply and almost unconsciously in place. But in the light of different assumptions, even the obvious, common meaning can be dislodged.

Another distinction, commonly made in biblical studies, is the distinction between what a text *meant* and what a text *means*.³³ The distinction is often invoked in order to describe the differences between the interests of the Bible critic and the theologian. The Bible critic, in other words, is purportedly interested in what the text *meant*—sometimes characterized as the meaning texts have "in themselves" or originally (and therefore the meaning that can be discovered by the right method); while the pastor or theologian is interested in what the text *means* in the present, freed from the original circumstances of its production.³⁴

There are at least three problems with the distinction. First, the "what the text means" side of the distinction is sometimes used as a description of how a text is *applied* by subsequent readers.³⁵ As a result, "meaning" and "application," concepts that certainly are related but should be kept conceptually distinct, become confused.³⁶ Second, the contrast implies that a text has no meaning that persists across time. What you actually have is a series of possible meanings.³⁷ And third, the distinction implies two different kinds of meaning, "intentional" and "intentionless" and two kinds of interpreters with different competencies to discover the two distinct types of meaning.³⁸

Now, it is true that the history of biblical interpretation, a history amply demonstrating that the description of a text's meaning has undergone repeated revision at the hands of subsequent generations of readers, seems to support the distinction.³⁹ History seems to show that texts change meaning as time and circumstance change and take on meanings quite beyond the original intentions of the author. And this leads to the conclusion that what a text originally meant should be separated from what it means.

But to maintain the distinction is to again introduce the possibility of intentionless meaning.⁴⁰ And to introduce that possibility is to suggest, given the absence of *authorial* intention as the object of interpretation, that readers (individual or in community) are *free* to make the text mean whatever *they* intend. And it is to say that this is what various interpreters throughout history have been doing.⁴¹

Now of course, the history of interpretation does show that subsequent generations of interpreters have proposed very different meanings for the biblical text. And different meanings of texts are proposed daily. But the reason for this is not because meaning can be set free from the intentions of the author or because historical distance has separated meaning from intention and shifted *intention* from

the author's intentions to the reader's, but it is because of the difficulty of figuring out what the author means and the disagreement that results from that pursuit.

Readers argue about what a text means because each side believes that they have grasped the true meaning of the text, the meaning that the author intended, and previous interpretations have not.⁴² The history of interpretation is partly a history in which one interpretation is contested by another, with arguments designed to show why the one is right and the other is wrong.

If there is such a thing as intentionless meaning, then we waste our time arguing that any other interpretation is wrong and there is no point in trying to persuade others that our interpretation is right because there would be nothing to "get right." We could simply praise the interpretive ingenuity of other interpreters. No one need be concerned about what they insist are egregious miss-readings of the text. Better yet, to the relief of our students, all our exegetical classes could become creative writing classes. The process of interpretation, the necessity for arguments and demonstration, the desire to persuade only makes sense if, ". . . there is something everyone is after."⁴³

So far, I have been arguing that because meaning is identical with authorial intention; that is, because interpreters trying to figure out a text's meaning are always trying to figure out the purposes, intentions, and situation of the author behind the text, there is no independently verifiable, interpretation free, neutral ground on which interpreters can stand in order to settle interpretive differences.

Sentence meaning, or "what the words mean in themselves" apart from a speaker is not a candidate because texts do not author themselves. And without assuming that the words were written by an author who intends to communicate something, we wouldn't even see it as a text or try to interpret it. (It would be accidental marks.) As soon as we decide something is a text or that it is language (Greek, Hebrew, or whatever), we already have some information about the speaker—that he or she is a writer of language and intends to communicate. What we are trying to figure out in pinning down the interpretation is what the author has in mind for which the text is evidence.⁴⁴

The dictionary is not a candidate because a dictionary only gives us a record of what people ordinarily mean when using a word. It is a record of possible meanings/intentions, and there is no way of specifying which one is the intended one.⁴⁵

The *reader's* intentions are not a candidate because then the "interpretation game" would have no point.⁴⁶ It would be like telling someone that to play basketball, you can do whatever you want with the ball. There are no rules and there is no object that you are after. Just do whatever you want and have fun, and no one will argue. Every time you play, you would be playing a new game. Doing this amounts to rewriting a text, not interpreting it.

The upshot of all of this again, is that there is nothing that demands or controls an interpretation that is not itself a product of interpretation.⁴⁷ Neither the interpretation of Eddy/Boyd nor Price is stabilized by a pre-interpretive or interpretation free anchor.

How Do We Settle Interpretive Differences?

But this does not mean that our respective authors made the decision to interpret the Gospels as they do *freely*—that is, as if they could have just as easily decided to go in a different direction. Though there is no neutral or pre-interpretive constraint, as I have said, their interpretations inevitably take shape from the beliefs and assumptions that they hold, or rather, that have a firm hold on them. Their beliefs hem them in on every side, and they cannot escape from them. Neither of them put aside their beliefs or stepped away from them in order to interpret the text more "fairly." It was their beliefs that enabled their reasoning about the text to take the paths that they did and constrained them from other directions.

All of us (Price, Eddy and Boyd included) interpret in accord with who we are, and who we are is a consequence of the beliefs that hold us and as a consequence of which we interpret the world as we do.⁴⁸ Our minds are an assemblage or a structure of related categories, logics, assumptions that we *think with* and that enable us to reason and argue about a text and make the sense of it that we do.⁴⁹

We are all extensions of numerous communities with their own networks of beliefs (some of which overlap), and we have been taught to interpret the biblical text within this network and with logic internal to the structure of beliefs—a logic which delivers interpretations that seem obvious and obviously right to us. It is these constellations of beliefs that form the important context within which we interpret a text.⁵⁰

And so, both Price's and Eddy/Boyd's interpretations of the Gospel texts emerge from the different structures of beliefs which hold them in their grip. In a

sense, their beliefs put them in conceptually different worlds where they see the text differently;⁵¹ where words can have different meanings; where different standards of evidence are in place; where what counts as "facts" can vary; where different ways for determining genre are in place; where different criteria apply for deciding correct and incorrect interpretations; where there are different ways of reasoning, different ways of dealing with problems and so on.

Robert Price categorizes the Gospels as "fiction," because his beliefs constrain him from seeing anything else. And what he sees he knows. For him, the choice is obvious, and he is certain that he is right. And the same goes for Eddy/Boyd. Both give coherent reasons and justification for their interpretations, but they are reasons from within their perspective and not outside or free of it. This is why, when the "facts" from one side of the divide are presented to the other side, facts which seem obvious and incontrovertible, the arguments are quickly discounted, or they are not seen as decisive, or the evidence is re-characterized (re-interpreted) to arrive at another conclusion.⁵²

Some important implications come from our look at the Price vs. Eddy/Boyd debate. Once again, some other distinctions commonly called upon by professional biblical interpreters are compromised. Namely, the *faith vs. fact* distinction and its relatives: *faith vs. knowledge* and *faith vs. reason*.

Just this summer, in what has become a controversial editorial, biblical scholar Ronald Hendel used the *faith vs. fact* assumption to characterize the difference between biblical interpretation by the overtly religious types he opposes and the "critical" (i.e., the assumed to be more "objective," more scientific and therefore more prestigious) biblical scholarship he supports. In an editorial entitled "Farewell to SBL: Faith and Reason in Biblical Studies" he compared faith and reason to oil and water, things that do not mix and should not be confused. He wrote, "That is to say, facts are facts, and faith has no business dealing in the world of facts."⁵³

But Hendel cannot be right. The easy opposition between faith and fact rests on the assumption that we have minds full of beliefs, but they are beliefs that are always subject to a world of independent fact checking that can either confirm or reject belief's correctness.⁵⁴ It assumes that all we have to do is stand at a distance from our beliefs, check the facts against them and adjust our beliefs according to the facts. It's like imagining "facts" to be these supremely benign arbitrators handing out unvarnished truth to all who ask.

But as we have seen, the relationship between faith and facts is the other way around. Facts are not just "hanging around" waiting to be uncovered by unbiased observation or there would be no debate about them. Facts are seen as facts, they take the shape they do, in the light of the beliefs and assumptions of interpreters who see them from the perspective that has been provided by their beliefs. That's why Robert Price so easily (in his view, at least) dismisses all the facts of Eddy/Boyd and asserts his own facts (which, by the way, Eddy/Boyd also reject as legitimate). Facts aren't separate from belief. They depend on belief for their livelihood.

As there is no opposition between *faith and fact*, so there is no separation between *belief and knowledge*. What we believe, we believe is true, and what we don't believe we believe is not true. Having beliefs *is* being committed to the truth of what is believed and the falsehood of what isn't. We cannot escape our beliefs and become disinterested "knowledge seekers," so that we can then base our beliefs on a foundation of knowledge more certain—because more true--than our beliefs themselves. There is no neutral knowledge that makes our beliefs more secure.⁵⁵ Believing *is* seeing and seeing *is* knowing! By no coincidence, the author of Hebrews writes, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. Exactly right.

In the same way, *faith* is not independent from *reason*. Again, it is the other way around. Reason needs faith to get started. Without some premises and presuppositions already in place, there is no direction for the reasoning process to take. You can't have one without the other. That is to say, it is the structure of beliefs—beliefs of which the mind consists—that directs the way we reason about a text's meaning. Each of our authors, Price, Eddy and Boyd reason about the text in ways dictated by their beliefs and not independently of them.⁵⁶ Hendel's imagined "battle royal" between faith and reason does not, in fact, exist.⁵⁷ The battle (and it does exist) is between different systems of deeply held beliefs which yield competing arguments of what counts as evidence, competing ways of reasoning, and competing visions of the truth.

Throughout this essay, I have been arguing against the possibility, this side of heaven, of escaping our limited perspective, the limits of our language and our descriptions, to take on a God's eye view of things. This means that we can't *objectively* decide between Price and Eddy/Boyd, if by *objectively* is meant with a neutral eye, or with our beliefs and assumptions bracketed out of the decision making

process. There is no moment when we are free from our beliefs. There is no part of our mind that can proceed without assumptions or categories that make thinking possible.⁵⁸

This does not mean that we cannot decide who is right and who is wrong (in this case, Eddy/Boyd or Price) and give reasons for it. We certainly do decide who is right and who is wrong. We do make distinctions between correct and incorrect, good and bad interpretations. We see clear differences. But it is because our beliefs deliver the distinctions to us.

A mind free of belief and conviction is an impossibility. These are the necessary conditions for being able to think and categorize and make the interpretive decisions that we do.⁵⁹ As Christians we read the Bible as we do, not because we have independently decided to stand on faith and ignore fact, or because we have decided to ignore rationality and actual knowledge and rely instead on irrational, subjective belief, but because the structure of beliefs, convictions and assumptions that inhabit us deliver for us a world of facts that we see, because we see and see clearly, and what we see we know to be the truth.

How Should Christians Interpret the Bible?

What core beliefs and convictions about the truth have us and the people we serve in their grip? What beliefs guide and also constrain our interpretation of Scripture and enable us to determine the correctness or incorrectness of our interpretations and also our doctrinal formulations? Most of us would probably answer: "Well, ultimately it is our belief in Jesus. We call him the key to understanding the Scriptures." But the obvious problem once again, is that the identity of Jesus and the significance of his mission are not self-interpreting. Who do people say Jesus is? Different answers are possible.⁶⁰ Already in the 2nd century, the church father Tertullian recognized this. He wrote: "I say that my gospel is the true one. Marcion says that his is. I assert that Marcion's gospel is adulterated. Marcion says that mine is."⁶¹

Different answers to the question, "Who do you say Jesus is?" are also behind the differences between Eddy/Boyd and Price. How do we then adjudicate between different accounts? Tertullian made his case for the correctness of his gospel preaching by appealing to a core of beliefs or a framework that came to be known as

"the Rule of Faith," which the community of Christ's disciples had confessed from the very beginning of the Christian era.⁶²

The term "Rule of Faith" was used to describe various types and sizes of formulae—sometimes semi-creedal—a kind of theological framework--outlining key articles and features of the true Gospel that was to be believed and taught.⁶³ In its varying forms, the Rule provides Scripture's subject matter (*hypothesis*). Reflected to a certain extent in the later Creeds, it summarized the unified actions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, most especially the saving acts of the Son, who brings all things to full consummation in and through his life, death and resurrection.⁶⁴ Through the Rule of Faith, the complexity of Scripture was rendered coherent. As one author says, ". . .the various notes sounded by Scripture are brought together into a rich and satisfying harmony."⁶⁵

It is important to note that the teaching of the true Gospel, and the key Christian beliefs and commitments existed *prior to* the NT Scriptures. This is the teaching that Jesus passed on to his disciples as he prepared them to succeed him in ministry.⁶⁶

When confronted with "heretics" who believed very differently about Jesus and disputed their interpretation of the Scriptures, the early church fathers appealed to the tradition, which Christ delivered to the apostles, which the apostles delivered to the churches and which was guarded by the churches. Irenaeus writes: "Even if no writing had been left by the apostles, nevertheless, from that tradition which the church had received from the apostles and which it had preserved uncorrupted until that time, it could be learned what the true apostolic doctrine was."⁶⁷

The teaching of the true Gospel received from Jesus and the apostles and integral to the Christian faith was passed down originally in oral form.⁶⁸ Again, what later became known as the Church's Rule of Faith existed prior to its Bible and is not identical to the biblical canon. It helped to determine what books would be included in the Christian Scriptures. In other words, as Robert Wall says, certain Christian writings were added to the OT Scriptures and received as God's Word because their content cohered to the core beliefs of its Christological confession.⁶⁹ He writes: "The Christian Bible gives written (and so fixed) expression to the Rule of Faith. The hermeneutics used to decide which writings to preserve (or not), then to canonize (or not), even including the decision to accept Judaism's biblical canon as Christianity's OT, are at every stage of the canonical process explained within this confessional

framework. That is, the Bible's original intent (and aim of its interpretation) is formative of a particular faith community whose public life and faith accords with its prior confession that Jesus is Creator's Messiah and creation's Lord."⁷⁰

This means that Scripture was never a stand alone, self-interpreting text. Again, when the early church was contending with heretics over the exposition or meaning of Scripture, Chemnitz notes that Tertullian and Irenaeus appeal to the true tradition of the church. He says that there is no doubt that the primitive church received from the apostles not only the text of the Scripture but also its legitimate and natural interpretation.⁷¹

In their writings, taught by Jesus and with their minds opened by the risen Lord so that they could understand the Scriptures,⁷² the apostles interpreted the OT Scriptures in the light of the Rule of Faith—their account of the Gospel—already present in the life of the community.⁷³ And it is these beliefs that give their OT interpretation the shape it has. In their interpretation of Old Testament texts, which they worked to construct and justify, their primary goal was to discern Christ in the Scriptures and to better comprehend Christ and his work and its implication for their lives. It was not primarily to solve textual or historical difficulties.⁷⁴

In more traditional terms, in the typological and figural interpretations that are characteristic of their "Christ-centered" ways of reading, the events and people and prophetic words in the Old Testament find their meaning not only in the contingencies of their historical situations, but in the event of master significance—Christ's incarnation and redemption—which is *before* history in the sense that it occurred in eternity, but is also the *content* of history in the sense that the events in the Old Testament reflect and anticipate it. To read the OT this way is to always be referring its contents upward, so to speak, to the source of their meaning—to Christ—and not just forward to the next event in the historical sequence.⁷⁵ And so, for example, Paul calls the OT festivals—the new moon, the Sabbath—shadows of things to come of which the substance is Christ (Col 2:17). And in their preaching, the apostles commonly quoted OT texts, such as Psalm 2, and proclaimed that in Christ God had fulfilled what he said.⁷⁶

As Christians, the writings of the apostles regulate the way we interpret the Old Testament and the way we answer the question "Who is Jesus?" or "What is Jesus to us?" The Gospel we proclaim and live by follows theirs. So, for example, with them we confess that Yahweh IS the Creator and Ruler of the world and the only true

God. In his mercy, this one true God chose a people for himself over whom he exercised his rule. He gave them a name, and he promised them that they would be his people, and he would be their God. He is the Father and he made Israel his son. And he promised that through Israel, his son, all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Throughout Israel's history, from the age of the patriarchs to the time of the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness, to Israel's entrance into Canaan and into the time of the judges, in the monarchy and even in the exile to Babylon and the return, Yahweh, the King, exercised his rule through acts of judgment and then grace, handing unfaithful Israel over to death but because of his undying love always bringing Israel to life (Eze 37). Always working to create a people with a heart faithful to him alone.

Israel's experience of Yahweh's judgment and then grace, bondage and then deliverance, death and then resurrection, anticipated what Yahweh, through the prophets, said he would do for all creation. There would come a day, they said, when God would put all things right and all sin and even death itself would be judged and the promises God had made his people would come to pass completely.⁷⁷

Christians proclaim that in Jesus and his life, death and resurrection, that long promised, eschatological day came ahead of time. Yahweh kept his promise. Jesus was his faithful Son. Nevertheless, at the cross his Father treated him as a sinner. He turned his face away from him, like he had hidden his face from unfaithful Israel throughout her history. But just like ancient Israel, the Father loved his Son and could not give him up.⁷⁸ He could not hide his face forever, and so he raised Jesus up from the grave. And in that victory, sin, death and all of God's enemies were judged, and the promises God had made to his people and to all people were fulfilled. In the resurrection the Father gave to this Son all the blessings that he promised Israel.⁷⁹ *And that's why Christians say that Jesus is Israel condensed into one.*

And Christians believe that it is through Jesus that this story becomes our story. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit has incorporated us into Israel's/Christ's death and resurrection, judgment and grace (hi)story. That becomes our experience too. We are "buried and raised with Christ." In Christ, we are "sons of Abraham" and heirs of the promise.⁸⁰ In other words, *through Him* God's people inherit Israel's blessings with him. *And so he is also our Savior, the Deliverer of Israel.* He is THE Moses, THE Joshua, THE Samson, THE Priest, THE David, THE prophet, and so on, for US. And just like Israel of old, Christians are waiting for Jesus to return on that

Last Day to make his victory known. And until that time we endeavor to follow him as he calls us.⁸¹

An account of the true Gospel like this answers the question for Christians: "Who is Jesus?" and provides the context for understanding Jesus' Advent. This way of reading the Scriptures and talking about our life with Jesus is often condemned as hopelessly anachronistic.⁸² But under the conviction that God is the Creator of all things, and the author of all historical events (nothing escapes his control), the assumption that neither He, the Divine Author, nor the inspired authors, are bound by the constraints of chronology becomes obvious. The charge of "anachronism" is itself a cultural concept tied to the western, enlightenment view of time as unidirectional and irreversible. The West, unlike other cultures, views time as a straight road stretching to the future, along which we progress. The road has segments or compartments that must be kept separate. At the same time, this uniform and linear view of time is compatible with and enabled by a mechanistic worldview in which belief in the supremacy of God grows weak.⁸³

But for Christians, God—who is all in all—operates without temporal constraints. "Ana-Chronism" is no problem for God. In saying this, we do not "collapse history," as if God's prior dealings with Israel are of no consequence. This means that we should not *allegorize* OT narrative in a way that God's dealings with Israel are rendered disposable. Nor, should we treat the OT simply as stories providing moral examples or prescriptions for us to imitate, thereby making the OT characters virtual "stand-ins" for the modern Christian (another form of allegory). Nor should we collapse history by quickly substituting the voice of Jesus for the OT voice. For example, it is improper to hear only Jesus speaking a Psalm, not David or to see only Jesus in a prophecy and not the historical shadow, which may be Israel or the prophet.

Because the Scriptures, for Christians, are not just a *description* of the beliefs and lives of someone else, but we *identify* with the beliefs of the authors and the experiences of God's people, we also believe that in the OT and NT Scriptures God still speaks to us across historical boundaries and what he has to say there is still relevant for us, and we read and interpret it that way.⁸⁴ They have a hold on us that other texts do not. As Paul writes, the Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness . . . (2 Ti. 3:15-17).

And so we eagerly search them for their life-giving message. But again, we do not read as independent agents. By God's grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are born into a family of interpreters who have given us a tradition of texts and teachers that have sought to discern and clarify the voice of God for us. Our Creeds and Confessions are based on the Scriptures and are congruent with the apostolic beliefs within which they are correctly interpreted. These writings crystallize our core commitments, and in many cases embody the interpretations of the biblical text that emerge from them and that also function as justifications for those beliefs. They guard us against false teachings, sharpen our focus, and help us to understand the central and unifying message of the Scriptures.

These other authorities vary in their weight or importance in relationship to Scripture depending on who we are and how we identify ourselves. (For example, as Lutherans, we usually will listen more carefully to Luther than Calvin or the Book of Concord rather than the Decrees of the Council of Trent). In varying degrees, these other "family members" explain and defend our faith. They say, in effect, "This is what we believe the Scriptures teach about God (and why). This is what we believe the Scriptures teach about Salvation. This is what we believe the Scriptures teach about Baptism. This is what we believe the Scriptures teach about how Christians are to live. And so on."

Like any family, we learn from these witnesses to the faith how to be "one of the family." Their words shape us and form us so that we bear the family resemblance. They give us an identity. They are also a way of saying to others, "Try on these beliefs! Make these, rather than some other system, the beliefs by which you think and live! And with them, look at Scripture this way rather than that way, and see what you see!"

Granted our constellations of beliefs, our minds become engines that work to produce Scriptural interpretations faithful to the community of which we are a part. But they are also interpretations that justify and defend our beliefs. This circle is common. (Descriptions produced by belief also produce belief.)

Guided by the Holy Spirit, from within our constellation of beliefs of which our understanding of Jesus is central, Christians still work to produce faithful interpretation by which we can speak to our modern world. We work to solve problems that arise, and we work to defend the faith and lead others to it. We discuss and debate what certain verses can mean and cannot mean. *This is my body*, for

example. We decide what a given author is referring to in specific passages and what individual words mean in a given text.

Guided by our understanding of who Jesus is, from within our communities we make genre decisions (deciding what is history and what is fiction for example). We decide when language is "literal" and when it must be interpreted symbolically. We address new questions that arise, such as what are the responsibilities of the Christian to the environment? Or, how ought Christians to live under a secular government? We evaluate the contents of the canon and give reasons as to why some books ought to be more central to the life of the Church than others. And so, for example, from our understanding of Jesus and his work, we give reasons for insisting that Revelation must be read in the light of Romans, and not visa versa. And we explain why Proverbs needs to be understood as "general truth" and not prescriptive law. Within our community, we determine how to use or apply the meaning of texts we have interpreted.

The Christian tradition is a very wide and deep one, and we do our interpretive work within it. Because we share many core convictions, at many points there is substantial agreement as to what a text means. There is little debate. The meaning seems obvious. But often, there is disagreement (and lots of it). This is because all of us are extensions of many communities whose beliefs sometimes overlap but often do not. We don't "see the text in the same way" because our beliefs constrain us from some perspectives and enable us in others.

Again, this does NOT mean that one interpretation is as good as another or that uncertainty rules the day. What we believe, we believe is true, and what we do not believe we believe is not true. So in the case of interpretive disagreement, what we do not do is enter a neutral ring with our adversaries and gaze together in uninterested splendor at the only right conclusion. We do what we always do and what we can only do. We do what Robert Price and Eddy/Boyd have done: We provide arguments and evidence for our beliefs. We present the "facts" that our beliefs have delivered to us, and we reason from them in an attempt to get others (the obvious unbelievers) to see what we see. "Come over to my side and all will become clear," we promise. And we pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and those to whom we speak.

If the practice of interpreting the Bible is as I have described it in this essay,⁸⁵ then there is no neutral, over-arching methodology that you can apply to a text, which

will *determine* what course your interpretive reasoning will take. In the middle of a basketball game, players cannot resort to theory to determine what the correct pass or shot or play might be. The ability to do those things comes from practicing, from repetition, from being mentored by those who are proficient in the game, by having others watch and correct and suggest and provide rules of thumb—until the moves of the game become instinctive and seem natural—self-evident—to the players.

But in our interpretive practice, as Christian interpreters we ought to remember to act with a spirit of humility we too often forget.⁸⁶ Martin Luther's lifetime of studying the Psalms led him to humbly confess that he could never possibly fully understand the Scriptures. At one point he says, "I must openly admit that I do not know whether I have the accurate interpretation of the Psalms or not, though I do not doubt that the one I set forth is an orthodox one."⁸⁷ "The Spirit reserves much for Himself," he writes, "so that we may always remain His pupils. There is much that he reveals only to lure us on, much that He gives only to stir us up. And, as Augustine has put it so clearly, if no human being has ever spoken in such a way that everyone understood him in all particulars, how much more is it true that the Holy Spirit alone has an understanding of all His own words! . . . Our life is one of beginning and of growth, not one of consummation."⁸⁸

² Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁷ Robert M. Price. *Jesus is Dead* (Cranford: American Atheist Press, 2007).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹¹ James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), is an Old Testament scholar who takes up the task of narrating some of the history of what he calls ". . . two opposite ways of reading [the Old Testament] . . ." between which modern readers are caught." Starting from Genesis, Kugel goes through the entire Old Testament and in exacting detail shows the breadth and depth of disagreement over the interpretation of Old Testament texts—interpretive disagreement which is startling and irreconcilable (p. 672). Correctly, he observes that changing the way in which the words are approached and understood, amounts to a massive act of rewriting (p. 672). John Barton agrees: "A text can in that sense change its meaning over time, but by dint of becoming a new text verbally identical with the original one. This sounds both paradoxical and complicated, but we deal with it daily and with no difficulty at all. We use quotations from the Bible, from Shakespeare, from other works in quite a different sense from what they have within those works, and are perfectly happy to mean by them what *we* mean . . ." (Barton, *The Nature*, 84)." See also *Against Theory* 2, 1-11.

¹² Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism* (ed. W.J.T. Mitchell; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19; Stanley Fish, "There is No Textualist Position," *San Diego Law Review* 42 (2005): 5, calls the words in an utterance "tokens" of intention.

¹⁴ That is, some intentions are more central than others. On this, see Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance Theory: Communication and Cognition* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 75-83; 217-254. This is in contrast to the notion of Jason Byasse, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 31, who writes about "intention": If there is a single authorial intention buried in a text, which the exegete must unearth, then the entire history of biblical interpretation in the church must be regarded as a series of failed excavation attempts before today's climactic discovery." Using the metaphor of "excavation" to describe exegesis misrepresents what interpreters do. Byasse draws the wrong conclusion from the history of biblical interpretation as well.

¹⁵ Knapp and Benn Michaels, "A Reply to Richard Rorty: What Is Pragmatism," in *Against Theory*, 140-141.

¹⁶ Fish, "Rhetoric," in *Doing*, 491: ". . . any determination of meaning must always proceed within an interpretive construction of a speaker's intention."

¹⁷ Knapp and Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," in *Against Theory*, 16.

¹⁸ Gordon Govier, "Archaeology: What an Ancient Hebrew Note Might Mean," n.t. [cited 18 January 2010]. Online: <http://www.rollstonepigraphy.com/?p=56>.

- ¹⁹ Knapp and Benn Michaels, "Reply," in *Against Theory*, 142.
- ²⁰ Knapp and Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," in *Against Theory*, 14.
- ²¹ Stanley Fish, "With the Compliments" in *Doing*, 43.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 14-15.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 25
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-22.
- ²⁵ Fish, "There is No Textualist Position," 1-22.
- ²⁶ Fish, "Consequences," in *Doing*, 329-30.
- ²⁷ For another example, see John Barton, *The Nature*, 82-83, where he describes Borges's work "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." He writes: "Borges imagines a modern author who sets himself the task of writing a new work that will have identically the same wording as Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. He then shows how a given passage of this work will have a different meaning from . . . the original *Quixote*, because it has been written against a wholly different intellectual background."
- ²⁸ Fish, "Introduction: Going Down the Anti-Formalist Road," in *Doing*, 2.
- ²⁹ Fish, "Consequences," in *Doing*, 321, writes: "Linguistic knowledge is contextual rather than abstract, local rather than general, dynamic rather than invariant; every rule is a rule of thumb; every competence grammar is a performance grammar in disguise."
- ³⁰ For another example, see "Don't Know Much About the Middle Ages: Posner on Law and Literature," in *Doing*, 295.
- ³¹ George R. Beasley-Murray. *John* (WBC vol. 36) Waco: Word Books, 1987, 252.
- ³² Soren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination, Judge for Yourself*. (ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 57-87.
- ³³ Knapps and Benn Michaels, *Against Theory* 2, 5; see also K. Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *IDB* 1:418-432.
- ³⁴ Barton, *The Nature*, 80-81; Jensen, "A Second Thought," 395.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, *The Nature*, 84.
- ³⁶ Application is how a reader uses the meaning, or what he does with it. Certainly this involves figuring out the author's intentions for the text, but it also involves

readers asking questions such as: "What am I doing as I read?" or, "What is the text doing to me?" or, "How does the text illuminate my life?" or, "How (why/should) I live as the text suggests?" And so on.

³⁷ Barton, *The Nature*, 86.

³⁸ In arguing against this distinction Robert Jenson, "A Second Thought About Inspiration," *Pro Ecclesia* 13 (2004): 395, says, "The trouble is, when the two senses are contrasted—the original of the Bible scholar and the meaning given it by the pastor or theologian, inevitably the latter will appear as an imposition on the texts, a reading in what is not really there—tolerated for homiletical or a "fairly suspect" enterprise as systematic theology, but not quite the real thing." See also Ben C. Ollenburger, "What Krister Stendahl 'Meant'—A Normative Critique of 'Descriptive Biblical Theology,'" *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 8 (June, 1986): 61-98, who shows the confusion in Stendahl's formulation and the confusion of others that results from it.

³⁹ Fish, "There is No Textualist Position," 14.

⁴⁰ Knapp and Benn Michaels, *Against Theory* 2, 1-11.

⁴¹ Fish, "There is No Textualist Position," 14. In other words, it is to say that as the reader's understanding changes, the properties and meanings of the text change too.

⁴² Fish, "There is No Textualist Position," 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁴ Knapp and Benn Michaels, *Against Theory* 2, 39; *Against Theory*, 14.

⁴⁵ Fish, "There is No Textualist Position," 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷ Stanley Fish, "With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida," in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 37-67; Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, *Against Theory 2: Sentence Meaning, Hermeneutics* (ed. Wilhelm Wuellner; Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1986), 2, writes: ". . . any noise or mark can be used as a signifier, and . . . any signifier can be attached to any signified. On this account, saying 'yes' and meaning 'no' would be no different from saying 'no' and meaning 'no'; it would simply amount to changing the signifier."

⁴⁸ Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 15, 266-67.

⁴⁹ Fish, "Anti-Professionalism," in *Doing*, 246, says, "It is thus a condition of human life to always be operating as an extension of beliefs and assumptions that are historically contingent, and yet to be holding those beliefs and assumptions with an

absoluteness that is the necessary consequence of the absoluteness with which they hold—inform, shape, constitute--us."

⁵⁰ Hiebert, *Transforming*, 13-16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵² For a good example, read how Robert Price deals with N.T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* in Price, *Jesus is Dead*, 171-74, where he says (among other things), "What credibility his book appears to have is due to the imposing wealth, power, tradition, even architecture, of the social-ecclesiastical world that he serves as chaplain and apologist. It is sickening to read his phony affirmations of the allegedly political and radical import of a literal resurrection (if you can even tell what Wright means by this last)" 172.

⁵³ Ronald S. Hendel, "Farewell to SBL: Faith and Reason in Biblical Studies," *BAR* 36, no. 4 (July/August 2010): 28 and 74.

⁵⁴ For nice argument against this essentialist epistemology see Stanley Fish, "The All Spin Zone," n.p. [cited 6 May 2007]. Online: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/05/06/the-all-spin-zone/> and *Ibid.*, "Another Spin of the Wheel," n.p. [cited 3 June 2007]. Online: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/another-spin-o>.

⁵⁵ Knapp and Benn Michaels, *Against Theory*, 26-27.

⁵⁶ Stanley Fish, "Why We Can't All Just Get Along," *First Things* 60 (February 1996), 18-26.

⁵⁷ Hendel, "Farewell," 74, writes: "The battle royal between faith and reason is now in the center ring at the SBL circus. While the cultured despisers of reason may rejoice—including some postmodernists, feminists and eco-theologians—I find it dispiriting."

⁵⁸ Knapp and Benn Michaels, *Against Theory*, 25. Eddy/Boyd don't seem to see this, and as a result they become incoherent in their claim that they are not neutral, yet believe that they can approach "objective truth" but placing their commitment to pursue truth above everything else and then submitting their conclusions to the wider world for critical evaluation (pp. 21-24). Again, it is within their bias that "truth" is seen. It is not available independent of it.

⁵⁹ Stanley Fish, "Critical Self-Consciousness, Or Can We Know What We Are Doing?" in *Doing*, 436-467.

⁶⁰ Hans Frei. *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975, discusses a number of different answers to the question, "Who is Jesus?"

⁶¹ Adv. Marc. 4.4. Quoted by Robert W. Wall, "Reading the Bible from within Our Traditions: The 'Rule of Faith' in Theological Hermeneutics," in *Between Two*

Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies & Systematic Theology (ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 88.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁶³ Lewis Ayres, "On the Practice and Teaching of Christian Doctrine," *Gregorianum* 80 (1999), 51. Paul Blowers, "The Regula Fidei and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith," *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997), 199-228, makes the case against others that the *regula* should be thought of in terms of a narrative; Nathan MacDonald, "Israel and the Old Testament Story in Irenaeus's Presentation of the Rule of Faith," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 (2009): 281-298, argues against Blowers and others that take his position. Trevor Hart, "Tradition, Authority, and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture," in *Between Two Horizons*, 185-89; see also fragments of early core beliefs in various creedal formula and hymns in the NT: Luke 1:46-55, Phil 2:6-11, Col. 1:15-20, 1 Tim. 3:16, and Rev 1:5-8 (*Ibid.*, 98).

⁶⁴ MacDonald, "Israel and the Old Testament," 289-90.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 290; In *Ibid.*, 289, MacDonald notes that it is the bringing together of diversity that lies behind Irenaeus's famous picture of the mosaic in *Haer.* I.8.1.

⁶⁶ Luke 24:44-46; Acts 1:2-3. Wall, "Reading the Bible," 97.

⁶⁷ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent: Part 1*, (trans. Fred Kramer; St. Louis: CPH, 1971), 235.

⁶⁸ Wall, "Reading the Bible," 98. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 233.

⁶⁹ Wall, "Reading the Bible," 98 and 100.

⁷⁰ Wall, "Reading the Bible," 100.

⁷¹ Chemnitz, *Examination*, 244.

⁷² Luke 24:25-27; 45-48; 1 Cor 2:16; 2 Cor 10:5; Ro 8:6-11.

⁷³ Ayres, "On the Practice," 51.

⁷⁴ Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking*, 38-41, observes this in his defense of allegory. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, (trans. Peter Winch; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 31e, writes about the Bible: "Question: but in that case why is this Scripture so unclear? If we want to warn someone of a terrible danger, do we go about it by telling him a riddle whose solution will be the warning? —But who is to say that the Scripture really is unclear? Isn't it possible that it was essential in this case to 'tell a riddle'? And that, on the other hand, giving a more direct warning would necessarily have had the *wrong* effect? God has *four* people recount the life of his incarnate Son, in each case differently and with inconsistencies—but might we not say: It is important that this narrative should not be more than quite averagely historically plausible *just so that* this should not be taken as the essential, decisive thing? So that the *letter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper

and the *spirit* may receive its due. I.e. what you are supposed to see cannot be communicated even by the best and most accurate historian; and *therefore* a mediocre account suffices, it is even to be preferred. For that too can tell you what you are supposed to be told. (Roughly in the way a mediocre stage set can be better than a sophisticated one, painted trees better than real ones,--because these might distract attention from what matters.)" (cf. also *Ibid.*, 32e)

⁷⁵ Stanley Fish, "Transmuting the Lump," in *Doing*, 276-77.

⁷⁶ Acts 15, 17:2-3, 10-15, Acts 2:23; 3:18, 22,24; 13:32; 26:5-8, 22-23; 8:35, 13:36-37; 17:2-3; 3:24.

⁷⁷For a more detailed account of this summary, see Jim Voelz. *What Does This Mean?* St. Louis: CPH, 246-62.

⁷⁸ Hosea 11; Ezekiel 37.

⁷⁹ 2 Cor 1:19-20.

⁸⁰ Ro 6 and Gal 3.

⁸¹ Blowers, "The Regula Fidei," 212-213, lists Iraneaus' exposition of the Rule to his friend Marcianus in his *Epideixis* as an example of the Rule which consists of re-telling Scripture's own story line; see also R. Kendall Soulen, "YHWH the Triune God," *Modern Theology* 15 (January 1999): 25-54, who argues that the Rule as we have it in many examples needs to be supplemented with the OT story.

⁸² Barton, *The Nature*, 71.

⁸³ Hiebert, *Transforming*, 51-52, writes: "Despite Einstein's theory, which holds that time is a dimension of the universe and relative to the observer, that different observers may experience the sequence of events differently, that time for you need not be the same as time for me, and that reality embraces past, present, and future, most modern people still see time as an absolute clock by which the universe operates."

⁸⁴ Soren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination: Judge for Yourself* (ed. And trans. By H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 36-44, suggests and illustrates that when we read God's Word in everything we read we continually say to ourselves: "It is I to whom it is speaking, it is I about whom it is speaking . . ."

⁸⁵ Brock, *Singing*, 241, describes biblical interpretation as a developing craft and that the act of reading Scripture is not a destination but a path.

⁸⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 177, writes: "To enter into a practice is to accept those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice . . . If, on starting to play baseball, I do not

accept that others know better than I when to throw a fastball and when not, I will never learn to appreciate good pitching let alone how to pitch."

⁸⁷ *LW* 14, 285.

⁸⁸ *LW* 14, 284-85 as quoted by Brock, *Singing*, 169.