Chapter 12

Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . .

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Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) is partly disparate movement, partly a call to reformation in biblical interpretation, partly a disorganized array of methodological commitments in hermeneutics, partly a serious enterprise and partly (I suspect) a fad. Different writers speak of TIS in fairly diverse ways. One might even argue that some people who offer the best theological interpretation of Scripture (note the lowercase letters) have very little connection with the movement known as TIS: one need search no farther than the honoree of this volume, whose astonishing range of expertise includes competent exegesis of the documents of both Testaments, an impressive grasp of the history of interpretation, a deep understanding of many nuances in the patristic period, in the Reformation age, and in contemporary (especially European) theology, and whose interpretation of Scripture is never flaccid or narrowly historical, but invariably profoundly theological. If all who align themselves with TIS were committed to pursuing the kind of theological interpretation of Scripture exemplified in the writings of Henri Blocher (most of whose work, sadly, has never been translated into English), the chapter I am now writing would be very different.

Another writer who does not connect his work with TIS but who is traveling down a parallel path is Peter Leithart,[1] who prefers to speak of entering into the depths of the text. Always evocative and sometimes provocative, Leithart provides another parallel to the TIS tradition: his actual handling of biblical texts, while invariably stimulating, is less frequently convincing.[2]

As I worked to canvas the literature, I had expected to write something that said "Yes" to an array of important points, and then to introduce my list of objections or questions with "But"—and indeed, not a few have written essays

[1] See especially his *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2009).

[2] See, for example, his work *The Epistles of John Through New Eyes: From Behind the Veil* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius, 2009). I have interacted with this work in my forthcoming commentary in the NIGTC series.

organized more or less in that fashion.[3] But as I worked on the material, I became dissatisfied with this way of organizing my reflections because the "Yes" and "But" components are closely intertwined. In other words, it is not that there are good points and more questionable points in TIS, nicely distinguishable, but rather that along every axis the good and the questionable are almost inextricably entangled. So in what follows, instead of two lists I have argued for a *sic et non* for each entry. The result, I fear, is rather messy—but so is TIS.

According to its proponents, TIS is both young and old. Apart from its use by Stephen Fowl in 1997,[4] the expression "theological interpretation of Scripture" is singularly elusive in the literature that predates 2005. Yet as the subtitle of Treier's introduction to the subject makes clear, proponents think of the movement less as an innovation than as a recovery of Christian practice.[5] This claim reflects one of the trends that has led to TIS: dissatisfaction with a great deal of contemporary exegesis, not least historical-critical methods that are enslaved by philosophical naturalism, and extravagantly speculative interpretations driven by contemporary agendas (e.g., homosexual readings of Scripture). Many desire to see more exegetical and theological continuity with the pre-Enlightenment church. Other motivations behind the rise of TIS—certainly not an exhaustive list—include suspicion of grammatical-historical methods (judged to be mechanistic and reductionistic), the sensibilities of the Yale School (especially Lindbeck), and a desire to work out how a faith-driven emphasis on the freedom of God will relativize all hermeneutical methods as believers apprehend the living Truth (think Barth).

In what follows, I shall provide six propositions and in each case offer my "Yes, but . . . "

Proposition One: TIS is an attempt to transcend the barren exegeses generated by historical-critical methods, and especially those readings of Scripture that are "historical" in the sense that they are frankly anti-supernatural interpretations determined by post-Enlightenment assumptions about the nature of history.

Yes: This is one of the important arguments in the influential book by Richard Topping.[6] Should the secular hermeneutical categories of habitual

[3] For example, Charlie Trimm, "Evangelicals, Theology, and Biblical Interpretation: Reflections on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 (2010), 311–330; Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14/2 (2010), 28–36.

[4] Stephen E. Fowl (ed.), *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology: Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997).

[5] Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008). Cf. also Kevin J. Vanhoozer (gen.ed.), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

[6] Richard R. Topping, *Revelation, Scripture and Church: Theological Hermeneutic Thought of James Barr, Paul Ricoeur, and Hans Frei* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Cf. also Mark Alan

naturalism constrain our reading of the Bible, or should we read the Bible as Christians? Certainly it is easy to think of excellent targets for the criticism that TIS levels. One need only think of, say, the anti-supernaturalism of Rudolf Bultmann in the last century, or of Heikki Räisänen at the end of that century and in ours. But those are easy targets. More subtle are the many writers who are not anti-supernaturalists but whose exegetical work feels as if it is grounded in anti-supernaturalism. To cite Schlossberg:

> If we wish to consider the Babylonian captivity of the kingdom of Judah in 587 B.C., we shall find sufficient documentation and archaeological evidence to speak of the political, economic, social, and military causes of the debacle. But the Hebrew prophets said that it took place because God's judgment had fallen on the Judeans for their idolatry and wickedness. From that perspective, the "causes" that the historian's explanation advances are not causes at all, but effects, and are thought to be causes only because of the meta-historical commitments that the historian brings to the evidence.[7]

Still more subtle are the ways in which many biblical interpreters are pretty careful with individual texts, even listening attentively to their attestations of supernaturalism, yet exhibit no interest in (and not a little suspicion of) putting the biblical texts together under the conviction that one Mind finally stands behind all of Scripture. TIS stands for the unity of the Bible, a unity often lost in the world of biblical scholarship that has moved downward and inward from biblical theology to the theology of the two respective Testaments to the theology of the individual corpora of each Testament to the theology of the putative sources (real and imagined) of each corpus. Atomistic readings reign.

Insofar, then, as TIS challenges these common habits of mind in the guild of biblical scholars, it stands within the circle of many Christians who have leveled similar criticisms toward some trends across the last quarter-millennium.

But. . . . This emphasis in TIS is often cast in terms of the conflict between history and theology, with history made out to be the villain. One understands why this is so, not least when reading, say, Räisänen's insistence that the project of New Testament theology should be replaced by (1) "a history of early Christian thought" from a strictly neutral vantage point,[8] and (2) an examination of the history of the influence of the New Testament from a philosophical

Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Richard B. Hays, "Reading the Bible with Eyes of Faith: The Practice of Theological Exegesis," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1 (2007), 5–21.

[7] Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 22; cited also in Hans Madueme, "Review Article: Theological Interpretation After Barth," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 (2009), 143.

[8] Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology* (2nd edn; London: SCM, 2009), 209, self-consciously returning to the agenda of W. Wrede in 1897.

perspective shaped by our awareness of religious pluralism. Yet surely it is not history that is the problem, but a kind of naturalistic history.

In fact, there are two overlapping dangers to avoid. *First*, many biblical scholars use the word "history" to refer to what has happened in the past, or to reports of what has happened in the past, on the assumption that the only way in which we may legitimately claim any knowledge of such past events is that they belong exclusively to the natural world. This does not mean, for example, that they deny that Jesus rose from the dead in some literal sense (i.e., that Jesus' pre-death body, complete with stigmata, has some real connection with the body that rose from the tomb, which was thereafter empty), but only that Jesus' resurrection cannot claim to be an *historical* event: it is an "event" accessible only to "faith."[9] This is rather different from thinking that "history" refers to what has actually happened in the past, or to reports of what has actually happened in the past, regardless of whether the putative past events belong exclusively to the natural realm or not. In this sense, Jesus' resurrection *is* an historical event, and is accessible to historians in much the same way that all past events are accessible to historians—through witnesses of various sorts. The issues are so *theologically* important that I would have thought that theological interpretation would be careful not to cast itself over against historical interpretation, but to reflect more profoundly on how in Scripture many revelatory claims about God are grounded in history (in the second sense).

Second, one can make a case that the distinctiveness of New Testament treatment of the Old turns in part on a certain *historical* reading of the earlier biblical documents—and that this *historical* reading is determinative for a great deal of *theological* interpretation. Numerous scholars, of course, have rightly pointed out that New Testament writers commonly deploy many of the same exegetical techniques and hermeneutical assumptions that one finds among the rabbinic *middoth*. Nevertheless, the more we underline the similarities between early Christian readings of the Old Testament and early non-Christian Jewish readings of (what Christians call) the Old Testament, the more hardpressed we are to explain why their readings of the same text issue in such different theologies. To make the matter more concrete, what are the hermeneutical differences between the way Paul read the Hebrew Scriptures before his Damascus Road experience and the way he read the Hebrew Scriptures after his Damascus Road experience? It is correct to say that the Christian Paul read those Scriptures through the lens of the resurrected Christ—but that tells us what triggers the hermeneutical shift, not what the shift itself is.

[9] We are tripping closely to distinctions that some theologians have made between *Geschichte* and *Historie*, distinctions that have bedeviled discussion of the nature of "salvation history": see especially Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology* (History of Biblical Interpretation 2; Leidendorp: Deo, 2004).

Arguably, two or three hermeneutical shifts can be identified, but I shall mention only one. Unlike unconverted Jews who tended to read the Hebrew Scriptures in such a way that *Torah* was elevated to a point of hermeneutical control, Christians tended to read those same Scriptures by underscoring *historical* sequence. Thus Paul in Galatians 3 emphasizes the promise given to Abraham *before* the giving of the law, a promise received by faith—and he insists that the law, when it was *later* given, could not annul the promise, nor could it overturn the fact that Abraham was justified before God *before* the law was given. He concludes that the law must therefore have *other* functions. In Heb. 4:1-13, *Auctor* observes that in Psalm 95 God is still offering "rest" to his covenant people, even after some of them, at least, have entered into the "rest" of the promised land, so he concludes that entrance into the promised land could not have been the ultimate rest God envisaged, since he *later* beckons them still to enter God's rest. Reflection on the fact that it is *God's* rest that is the ultimate appeal ("*my* rest," God says in Psalm 95), *Auctor* builds a trajectory from God's rest at the end of creation week (Genesis 2) through sabbath, entry into the promised land, and the promise of Psalm 95, to show that in his own day the promise of some greater rest than that of entering Canaan still stands. In Hebrews 7, *Auctor* argues that the announcement of a Melchizedekian priest-king in Psalm 110, *after* the establishment of the Levitical priest and the *Torah*'s insistence that priest and king belong to separate tribes and must never be the same person, shows that God himself did not envisage *Torah*'s arrangements for priest and king to be permanent. And if you change the regulations regarding the priest, you transform the entire law-covenant, for the law-covenant is hugely bound up with the priestly arrangements (including tabernacle, sacrifices, the significance of *yom kippur*, and so forth). In other words, reading Psalm 110 in its sequence *after* the giving of the law establishes that the entire law-covenant is in principle obsolete once Psalm 110 is written. A similar conclusion is drawn from historical reasoning in Hebrews 8: the promise of a *new* covenant in the time of Jeremiah, long *after* the giving of the law, renders the law obsolescent in principle: it is bound to pass away (8:13).

The point is that these (and numerous other) New Testament readings of the Old Testament Scriptures turn on *historical* distinctions (not least sequence in time to establish continuity and discontinuity) in order to establish *theological* instruction (what God's purposes were in the giving of the law, the status in God's mind of that law-covenant in *Auctor*'s day, the way in which it points forward to something different and greater, ultimately fulfilled in Jesus).[10] Theological interpretation is here tightly intertwined with subtle

[10] In fact, this kind of reading of the Old Testament by several New Testament writers stands behind a dramatic tension in the New Testament texts: the same gospel that is often said to be prophesied in the Old and fulfilled in the New is often said to be hidden in the Old and revealed in the New (i.e., before Jesus came, this gospel, or some aspect of it, was a musthvrion). The gospel was, as it were, hidden in plain sight, and seeing the Old

historical reading of biblical texts. I am grateful that the ablest TIS supporters recognize many of the typological ways in which Old Testament texts point forward to Jesus.[11] It is good to read the words of Vanhoozer: "The Old Testament testifies to the same drama of redemption as the New Testament, hence the church rightly reads both Testaments together, two parts of a single authoritative script."[12] Of course, this is not an exclusive distinctive of a movement called TIS. Countless confessional evangelicals have argued along these lines for a long time. It is appropriate to speak of "the same drama of redemption" across the entire Bible. Yet this drama embraces points of continuity and discontinuity, of announced obsolescence of some parts as they point to "new" parts—and some of these distinctions are discoverable by the kind of exegesis that listens while the text makes *historical* distinctions. It would be reassuring to hear proponents of TIS who warn against historical criticism express appreciation of the rightful role it may play.

For at least some proponents of TIS, to foster a clash between theology and history is in danger of approaching the issues with a meat cleaver when a scalpel is needed. To push for the unity of Scripture is a grand thing, but it is one thing to argue that all of Scripture is finally in support of a unified theology and another thing to argue that that unified theology is precisely what unifies the Bible. The ways in which the unity of Scripture should be defended are subtle and multifaceted, and embrace distinctions historical, genre-related, author-related, and other distinctions that cannot rightly be skated over in the rush toward theological unity. TIS shows at least some sensitivity to genre; so far it has shown less sensitivity to history. (I shall return to further reflections on the role of history in the third proposition, below.)

Proposition Two: More broadly, TIS aims to bring biblical studies and theology closer together.

Testament text through Jesus Messiah and his cross and resurrection enables believers to see patterns in the Old Testament documents—often patterns established by historical sequence—that they had not seen before becoming Christians. The trajectories they thus trace out drive them to conclude that Jesus the Messiah is simultaneously Davidic king and legitimate priest, triumphant conqueror and suffering servant, and so forth, and that these *theological* conclusions *are truly grounded in the older Scriptures even if they were not fully seen until the coming of Jesus.* In other words, massive theological conclusions are grounded in a complex reading of the Old Testament Scriptures that is steeped in historical nuance. I have tried to unpack some of these connections in "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and the New," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul* (WUNT 181; eds, D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 393–436.

[11] For example, Peter Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006).

[12] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Ten Theses on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Modern Reformation* 19/4 (July/Aug 2010), 17.

Yes: Certainly there is a fair bit of antipathy between biblical scholars and theologians,[13] not least because their respective disciplines seem to pull in quite different directions. Writing from a Catholic perspective, Reno observes:

> For the accordance of doctrine and Scripture is by no means obvious. At times, what Scripture says is opaque, but doctrine is clear. At other times, what the Church teaches is either puzzling or undeveloped, but the plain sense of Scripture seems perspicuous and compelling. At still other times, the Bible seems to blatantly contradict dogmatic claims, or strike at oblique angles, or even hover with perplexing irrelevance. Just think of the Catholic doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the bodily Assumption of Mary.[14]

The challenge is not exclusively Catholic, of course. In the wake of the Reformation, Protestants have customarily thought of sanctification as that process by which Christians become increasingly conformed to Jesus Christ, that process by which they grow into more holiness, even if that process will not be complete until the consummation. That is the controlling usage of "sanctification" in Protestant theology. Close study of Pauline (indeed, New Testament usage) shows that a high proportion of the occurrences of the noun refer instead to what is sometimes called positional sanctification or definitional sanctification.[15] People may be set aside for God, holy or sanctified in that sense (in a not-dissimilar way that the shovel that takes the ash away from the altar in the Old Testament is said to be sanctified) without demonstrating characteristics of personal holy behavior.[16]

Other examples concern both Protestants and Catholics. Shall we continue to defend the eternal generation of the Son? In the past, however, that doctrine was commonly tied to the word μονογενής~. A large majority of philologians today holds that the word does not mean "only begotten" but "unique" or even "unique and beloved" (note the usage in Heb. 11:17). So on what does the eternal generation of the Son rest? Or again: from the third century on, Mary was called θεοτόκος, "God-bearer," often loosely rendered "Mother of

[13] In this chapter I shall use "theologians" as a shorthand for "systematic theologians" or "dogmatic theologians," and "theology" as a shorthand for "systematic theology" or "dogmatic theology." That reflects dominant usage in North America. Readers in, say, the United Kingdom, use "theology" and "theologians" as the large categories that *include* subsidiary disciplines such as biblical exegesis, historical theology, and so forth.

[14] R. R. Reno, "A Richer Bible," *First Things*, 205 (Aug/Sept 2010), 41.

[15] See David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (NSBT 1; Leicester: IVP, 1995).

[16] I have teased out this example a little more in "'A Holy Nation': The Church's High Calling," in *Holy, Holy, Holy: Proclaiming the Perfections of God* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2010), 73–89.

God." Neither expression is found in the Bible. Should it be defended, or not? If so, why? If not, why not?

It is easy to multiply examples. So how can one not be concerned to bring biblical exegesis and theology closer together?

The broader problem is that a great deal of popular preaching and teaching uses the Bible as a pegboard on which to hang a fair bit of Christianized pop psychology or moralizing encouragement, with very little effort to teach the faithful, from the Bible, the massive doctrines of historic confessional Christianity. Surely we ought to expend effort to bring the Bible and theology closer together.

But. . . . The illustrations I used are not all of a piece. When they are analyzed, they disclose that the ways in which Scripture and theology are likely to be brought together will differ strongly in different theological traditions. For Reno, the authority of the Catholic magisterium is not inferior to the authority of Scripture. It will not occur to a devout and faithful Catholic that the Church might be wrong in its teaching regarding the immaculate conception and the assumption of Mary or that they should be corrected by Scripture. What "bringing the Bible and theology together" means in such instances will be quite different for the Catholic and the Protestant. The promulgation of the doctrine of the bodily assumption of Mary took place in 1950. Even on the most generous tracing of the history of doctrine, it is difficult to affirm that this doctrine was universally believed in Catholic heritage across the centuries. It is extraordinarily difficult to tie it to serious interpretation of Scripture. From a non-Catholic perspective, if this is what is meant by the theological interpretation of Scripture, biblical scholars have the right to be skeptical of TIS. Surely a distinction must be made between a richer reading of Scripture that deploys more than historical-critical methods to find doctrine in Scripture that fair-minded readers can see is truly there once the blinkers of a reductionistic method are removed, and another thing to impose one's doctrine on Scripture in the name of bringing Scripture and theology together.

One must ask if the example of sanctification is of the same order, apart from the absence of a Protestant magisterium. Does the Protestant doctrine of sanctification function so authoritatively in various confessional Protestant communities that within those communities it is being imposed on Scripture? The answer must be carefully nuanced. There are passages in the New Testament in which the doctrine of sanctification is clearly taught even though the word sanctification does not appear. One thinks, for example, of Philippians 3, in which Paul does not think of himself as having arrived at his goal, but is self-consciously pressing on to maturity, to a greater knowledge of Christ and fellowship in his suffering and power. In other words, here is sanctification without (the word) "sanctification." It appears that the doctrine of sanctification is amply attested in the New Testament even when the word is not found, while the passages in the New Testament that use the word

frequently use it in a way rather different from its usage in Protestant theology. On this topic, the domain of discourse of the Bible (in particular, of the part of the Bible written by Paul) is different from the domain of discourse in much confessional Protestant theology. If one reads such theology into all the passages where Paul uses the word "sanctification," inevitably one will be imposing one's theology (no matter how confessionally defensible) onto the biblical text. On the other hand, if one demonstrates how the confessional standards on this subject can be shown to reflect biblical (including Pauline) teaching even where the word "sanctification" is not used, and if one carefully notes how vocabulary usage in different domains of discourse can be quite disparate, it might be quite possible (and surely highly desirable) to bring the Bible and theology closer together. Note, however, that this desideratum is not being achieved by a methodological device called TIS that enables us to read the Bible more theologically. It is being achieved by patient and careful reading of both biblical and later theological texts, observing their distinctive vocabularies and emphases. And of course the subject becomes more complex yet when we integrate the different ways the Bible deploys the holiness word-group in both Testaments.

As for the third example introduced above, if the eternal generation of the Son is detached (as it should be) from μονογενής, it may nevertheless remain attached to Scripture in a passage such as Jn 5:26. This admittedly difficult verse occurs in an extended section dealing with the relationships between the Father and the Son (5:16-30). On the one hand, the Son can do nothing by himself; on the other hand, whatever the Father does, the Son also does (5:19). Within this discussion, the text affirms that God has "life in himself" (5:36). The expression is slightly odd. It appears to mean more than that he has life: rather, he has life that does not depend on another, he has self-originating life. He is self-existent. If that is the meaning, how is the rest of the verse to be understood? "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (5:36). If the text had said, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life," the logic would be plain, but the Son would certainly not be identifiable with God in any sense. Conversely, if the text had said, "For as the Father has life in himself, so also the Son has life in himself," the self-existence of the Son would be preserved, but it would be difficult to avoid theism. Instead, we are told that "as the Father has life in himself, so he has *granted* the Son also to have life in himself." How does one *grant* "life-in-himself," self-originating life as God has self-originating life? If it is granted, how is it self-originating? Of the many solutions commonly offered, that one is best which argues that this is an *eternal* grant. That reading certainly seems to fit best with the rest of the passage. If it is correct, the notion of the eternal generation of the Son might be connected with the Scriptures through this passage.

The final example, concerning θεοτόκος or "Mother of God," is a little different again. In most of the early usages, up to and including the sixth century, the expression said relatively little about Mary and a great deal about Jesus. Was the baby whom Mary bore *already* truly God? If so, she was the God-bearer. The issues were primarily Christological. When that topic was no longer disputed, the title, in line with increasing focus on Marian theology, came to say much more about Mary than about Jesus. From the perspective of a Christian who holds that Scripture sets bounds to what may truly be said to be Christian doctrine, there are some understandings of θεοτόκος that I am happy to affirm as in line with Scripture (even if the word is not applied to Mary), and other understandings I must disavow. Once again, how one brings Scripture and theology together turns on an array of other commitments that must not be sidelined because of some sort of hegemonic view of TIS.

Proposition Three: TIS accords greater credibility to pre-critical exegesis—patristic, medieval, reformational—than to contemporary exegesis, and especially to patristic readings.

Yes: We have returned to the element of TIS that claims it is not new but is returning to older ways of reading the Bible that yielded far great theological richness than do contemporary historical-critical and grammatical-critical exegeses. One worries about interpreters who are always striving to find something *new* in Scripture but who rarely take the time to show how their readings are nestled within the massive confessional heritage of historic Christianity. The influential essay by D. S. Yeago has powerfully argued that the church's confessional traditions will provide hermeneutical aid, not hindrance, to responsible theological tradition.[17] How could we possibly imagine that we have nothing to learn from generations of believers before us who devoted their lives to studying and meditating on the Scriptures we are reading?

At heart is a self-conscious return to the *analogia fidei*, the "analogy of the faith" or the "rule of faith" (early summary of fundamental Christian beliefs), as well as to an array of creeds and confessions. Not a few TIS writers assert that the *analogia fidei* is one of its central interpretive principles. Thus Treier, introducing TIS and referring to his own description of the new Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series, writes:

> The series "presupposes that the doctrinal tradition of the church can serve as a living and reliable basis for exegesis." This tradition, more specifically, is that doctrine surrounding the Nicene Creed. The series promotes "intratextual analysis" as its "key method," along with drawing upon "the liturgical practices and spiritual disciplines of the church as a secondary dimension

[17] "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (ed. Stephen S. Fowl; Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

> of the canonical context for exegesis of scriptural texts." Such an approach can lead to various senses of Scripture, including "allegorical" readings, and requires that contributors engage the history of exegesis, not in order to provide readers with a summary of past interpretation, but in order to shape exegetical judgments in conversation with the tradition.[18]

Within measure, even Treier's self-conscious stepping beyond mere *Rezeptiongeschichte* ("not in order to provide readers with a summary of past interpretation") is a helpful reminder not only of our *doctrinal* indebtedness to the past but of our *methodological* indebtedness to the past.

But. . . . Numerous qualifications cry out for a hearing. It may be organizationally helpful to serialize them.

(1) Depending on which sector of the defenders of TIS is speaking, it is not entirely clear why so much emphasis is placed on the patristic period. For many Catholics, the appeal to the magisterial authority expressed through the first seven (ecumenical) councils may be part of the reason; for many others, a similar appeal is made to the Great Tradition. Both parties sometimes write as if either (a) these ecumenical councils share the authority of Scripture, or (b) at very least they are not to be questioned because they were both ecumenical and much closer to Christ and his apostles than we are; and so, further, (c) they constitute all that is necessary to establish a confessional bond of true Christians today—a stance which, of course, marginalizes the Reformation standards.

No informed confessional evangelical will agree to (a): there is an ontological gap between the books of the Bible and all other documents. That the early councils were ecumenical—so (b)—is something for which to be grateful, and warrants that Christians everywhere should pay the more careful attention to them, but even council documents and creeds must be tested by Scripture, not the reverse (even while we quickly insist that this must not be taken as a glib formula, since what the Scriptures are truly saying may be adequately summed up in creeds and confessions on this point or that, and we who interpret Scripture enjoy no *tabula rasa* approach to biblical interpretation but necessarily interpret out of a framework which *itself* must constantly be tested). Moreover, the church has sometimes charged ahead toward false teaching that was corrected by heroic people who challenged the consensus: one thinks of Athanasius' *contra mundum* or Luther's "Here I stand."

The fact that the fathers were closer to the events described in the New Testament and to the time of writing of those documents is almost irrelevant. Most of them were, after all, hundreds of years removed. In the patristic period as in all others, there were better interpreters (John Chrysostom,

[18] Ibid, 40.

Augustine) and worse interpreters (Origen). Some years ago I set myself the task of reading Origen's massive commentary on Romans. The Greek original is no longer extant; I read it either in Rufinus' Latin version or in the magnificent English translation of Rufinus by Thomas Scheck while Scheck's work was still in manuscript form.[19] With the best will in the world, I find it difficult to imagine that many would be so bold as to claim that Origen understands what biblical texts are actually saying as well as Chrysostom does, or as well as, say, John Calvin understood Romans in the Reformation period, or Joseph Fitzmyer does today. And in any case, in response to (c), why should we think the Great Tradition is a *sufficient* ground for a common Christian front? One could make a serious case that it provides a *necessary* ground, but *sufficient*? Are we to think that no serious aberrations would or could ever be introduced into the life and thought of the church after the patristic period? If so, why are proponents of TIS so eager to correct errors that they adjudge to be egregious today? Does the fact that the issues surrounding the Reformation had more to do with authority and justification and less to do with Christology and the Trinity make them any less intrinsically important? Many have observed that the church's thought may remain relatively fuzzy in this or that doctrinal area until it is challenged by something clearly aberrant and strongly opposed to the Christian heritage. Does the mere *sequence* of such aberrations, and therefore of the theological work undertaken in consequence, have any necessary bearing on the importance of the topic—Christology in the patristic period, the threat of Islam in the time of Aquinas, justification in the sixteenth century? It is not that the Fathers of the early centuries wrote nothing about justification.[20] Rather, because they were not deeply and perennially challenged in that arena, they devoted less attention to it, and consequently strove less for consistency and widespread agreement. More importantly yet, if one is looking for excellent models of how the patristic and medieval fathers *should* be cited and used abundantly if discerningly, one could do a great deal worse than begin with Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers. The links between Calvin and Thomas Aquinas have frequently been probed, and his grasp of patristic sources is wholly admirable. So why the frequent marginalization of Reformational voices in TIS literature?

Nothing I have just said justifies failing to listen attentively to, and learn from, believers in these pre-critical eras. By and large, however, TIS supporters do not address these questions, and their implicit answers are often vague and troubling.

(2) In his support for TIS, Treier, as we have seen, includes allegorical readings of Scripture among the approaches he is willing to support. Unfortunately,

[19] Thomas P. Scheck, ed. and trans., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001–2002).

[20] Cf. Thomas C. Oden, *The Justification Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

he gives no hint at what he means by allegory. Many in the orthodox heritage embrace figurative allegory, narrative allegory, and typological allegory. Would Treier do so? Is he adopting the fourfold readings much loved in the Middle Ages—literal, moral, tropological, and allegorical? Would he try to deploy all four readings in every text, as advocated by many in the pre-critical eras? If we are to learn from the last big wave of pre-critical thinkers (the Reformers) and not only the first big wave (the Fathers), what shall we make of the Reformers' rejection of the fourfold interpretive scheme? Isn't the pre-critical *versus* post-Enlightenment polarity a hopeless reductionism?

More narrowly, is Treier thinking of allegory in nothing more than the sense deployed in Gal. 4:24 (ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα)? Whether designated figurative or typological, who would want to deny the existence of allegory *in this sense*? In his book on parables, New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg insists that Jesus himself interprets at least some of his own parables in an allegorical fashion.[21] I remain unpersuaded that allegory is the best category for what is going on in the parables, but if one accepts it, is that all that Treier means? If so, we do not need to appeal to patristic exegesis to warrant allegorical interpretation. On the other hand, more sophisticated treatments of allegory do not simply look for the figurative elements in narrative parables or the typological patterns in narrative literature (as in Galatians 4). Rather, they argue that the distinctive element of allegory is that it requires an interpretive grid not grounded in the text at hand, an extratextual grid.[22] When Philo tells us that the respective meanings of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the three fundamental principles of a Greek education, with the best will in the world it is difficult to see how this conclusion derives from the text of Genesis. An extratextual grid has been superimposed on the text. What, then, is the warrant justifying this kind of allegorical reading of Scripture—dependent on an extra-biblical grid? Nor will it do to argue that the *analogia fidei* might be a legitimate extratextual grid, for the *analogia fidei* itself must be shown to be grounded in the text of Scripture. Moreover, the *analogia fidei* functions better to provide boundary interpretations than to stipulate that a specific component of the *analogia fidei* is found in a particular biblical passage, *absent any textual evidence of any kind.* Speaking of learning from past thinkers of the

[21] Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990); cf. also his essay, "The Parables of Jesus: Current Trends and Needs in Research," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (eds, Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 231–254.

[22] That is why Hans Weder, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu als Metaphern: Traditions und redaktionsgeschichtliche Analysen und Interpretationen* (2nd edn; **Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des AT und NT** 120; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980), observes that the figurative (allegorical?) elements attached to the details of the parable of the soils are intrinsic to the narrative and draw their force out of the narrative, rather than depending on an extratextual grid. If the extratextual grid is the criterion for allegory, the parables are not allegorical.

pre-critical eras, one begins to grow in respect for the Reformers who thought their way clear of fuzzy notions of allegory to a greater dependence on "literal" interpretation (without losing a sophisticated grasp of metaphorical language), and less of TIS support for unspecified allegory.

(3) Perhaps this is the place to enter a small demurral against the way the Enlightenment becomes a whipping boy in TIS, with everything before it being called "pre-critical" and therefore approved, and everything from the Enlightenment on generally frowned upon. I have already suggested that a little discretionary frowning toward the pre-critical side of this divide might not be out of place. Now we must remind ourselves of several things that suggest there should be a little *less* frowning on the Enlightenment side.

First, the Enlightenment is regularly treated in the TIS movement as a unified period characterized by philosophical naturalism, religious and theological skepticism, and the creation of an array of subject/object problems. All these points can be challenged. The Enlightenment had a different face in France than in England. In its early decades its was the playground of Christians as much as the playground of others. Philosophical naturalism rules widely today, but in the beginning of the Enlightenment it was not so. One should recall, for instance, that the influential Tübingen School is, after all, the product of the nineteenth century. There is a distinctly ahistorical feel to the way the Enlightenment is treated by TIS authors. It is more of a symbol for what they do not like than an accurate representation.

Second, insofar as rising naturalism and atomistic interpretations do increasingly prevail (especially in Western academic circles), and insofar as confessional Christians tried to engage these developments, they are often tarred by TIS supporters with the same dismissive brush as their more skeptical contemporaries on the ground that they too have been infected by "the Enlightenment." What is needed, we are told, is a return to pre-critical exegesis so as to take the Bible out of the academy and return it to the church.

Of course the Bible is the church's Bible, not the academy's Bible, if by that is meant that the Bible is for the people of God, not for people who constantly try to pull it apart in the framework of an unyielding naturalism. Yet the onslaught against the Bible has been so sustained and so rigorous that Christians—people in the church—serving in the academy (for the disjunction between the church and the academy cannot be made as absolute as TIS supporters seem to think) who stood up to these trends should surely be thanked and honored, not rebuked for being post-Enlightenment thinkers who fail to appreciate pre-critical exegesis. At the least, this smacks of ingratitude.

Third, are there not *some* interpretive gains generated by the Enlightenment, gains that contributed to more accurate interpretation and therefore to theology that was better grounded in the text of Scripture? Yes, one remembers all the destructive trajectories. Yet is it not the part of both courtesy and accuracy to remember substantial valuable contributions—in philology, for instance,

in text criticism as the finds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were explored, in biblical theology? Does one really want to write off, say, an Adolf Schlatter, suggesting that what the poor man really needed was some instruction from TIS proponents so that both his methods and his theology might be enriched?

Fourth, the approach of TIS to historical matters is complicated by two other factors. (a) TIS objects, as we have seen, to *historical*-critical methods of interpretation (especially insofar as those methods default to an assumed philosophical naturalism) and wants to leap back *in history* to earlier periods in order to lean on a more *theologically* orientated and less *historically* orientated approach to reading Scripture. Well and good. But sometimes today the expression "historical-criticism" refers to a grab bag of methods that have little to do with history and a great deal to do with naturalism. The older historical criticism—including source criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism, even social-scientific criticism—claimed to be unpacking history disclosed in the text as the text coughed up its secrets to these new "scientific" methods. The newer criticisms—for example, feminist criticism, postcolonial criticism, audience criticism—are simply not interested in the same sort of *historical* questions. In other words, TIS should more clearly warn against naturalism and against history grounded in naturalism, rather than against history per se. (b) On the basis of how the New Testament writers injected *historical* sensitivity into their reading of the Old Testament documents (discussed in Proposition One, above), one might ask how long such historical sensitivity persisted in the early church. With time this historically grounded typology gave way to a more thematically controlled typology: presbyters became priests, the eucharist became a sacrifice, the table an altar—all calling to mind Old Testament antecedents without the New Testament's assorted grids for establishing continuity and discontinuity. Some measure of the older historically grounded typology resurfaces in the Reformation. It receives a further boost in the rise of the biblical theology movement (whose origin is often pegged to Johann Philipp Gabler's inaugural address at the University of Altdorf in 1787). Sadly, the rising wave of naturalism gradually destroyed much of biblical theology as it pursued distinctions among biblical books and corpora while losing the big picture: biblical theology became thoroughly atomistic biblical theologies. Yet there were remarkable exceptions. The line through Johann C. K. von Hofmann in the nineteenth century (1810–1877) takes us directly to Adolf Schlatter and Geerhardus Vos in the twentieth century, and beyond—voices graced with responsible exegesis, theological confessionalism, historical awareness, sensitivity to the way the writers of the New Testament appealed to historical sequence to establish their conclusions regarding continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments, and much more. Today, however, we are drifting in Western culture toward a *reduced* appreciation of history, a reduced grasp of chronology, sequence, development. Even when we *do* seem to be

extolling the virtues of the past, it has more to do with nostalgia than historical rigor. As Gillis Harp observes (building on Christopher Lasch), there is an approach to history that wallows in nostalgia but does not really engage the past seriously. It "actually reflects a dismissive attitude to the past."[23] In more skeptical moments, I wonder if TIS falls into this nostalgic approach to history, rather than letting past and present seriously engage one another. In other words, I wonder if TIS owes something of its impetus to the ahistorical fads of the day.

Proposition Four: TIS aims to be God-centered as opposed to human-centered (including human-hermeneutical-rules-centered).

Yes: Potentially there is something both lovely and healthy about this emphasis. Reading the Bible primarily to uncover what the mighty *I* can get out of it is certainly skewing the biblical focus on the glory of God. Moreover, if hermeneutical rules somehow function so as to box God in, to domesticate God, one wants to applaud TIS. Readers should be approaching the text not as its master but as its servant;[24] one should not so much seek to master Scripture as be mastered by it, and especially be mastered by the God whose Word it is. There is a sense in which such reading partakes of a bold "I am not ashamed of the gospel," instead of hiding behind a panoply of scholarly conventions while projecting an impression of objective scholarly distance.

But . . . An array of caveats springs to mind.

(1) The flight from rules that merely domesticate God is a good thing, but surely one must beware of the pressure from the many in this twenty-first century world who want faith to be purely subjective, all in the name of making God so "big."

(2) It would be good if more TIS supporters recognized how many others from confessional evangelicalism write much of their material entirely within this same confessional world that TIS is advocating. These believers might interact with some critical thought on the Bible while playing the "game" and keeping in line with the hermeneutical stances of some secularists in order to make some useful points about, say, source criticism in John or Isaiah. Their heart, however, is disclosed in their more usual contributions. In my own small world, all the contributors to New Studies in Biblical Theology and in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series are expected to write in conscious submission to the text, in joyful conformity to confessional Christianity, as a believer to believers. If others want to

[23] Gillis Harp, "Taking History Seriously in an Ahistorical Age," *Modern Reformation* 17/5 (Sept/Oct 2005), 35.

[24] Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (eds, A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 92.

listen in, well and good—but the writers are certainly not pretending to be neutral masters of the text. On many fronts, TIS supporters would do well to sound a little less as if they are singing a chorus from Elijah: "And we, we only, are left."

(3) While the refusal to allow hermeneutical rules to box God in is salutary, suspicion of all hermeneutical rules or principles is shortsighted, and even stands over against the bias in TIS toward the church fathers. Augustine, after all, lists an array of interpretive rules that mirror not a few contemporary rules—and of course he simultaneously insists that Bible readers be reverent and confessionally informed.[25] Principles that emerge from the reading of *any* text (e.g., syntax of the language) need to be learned; numerous other interpretive principles will emerge *from the text itself.* If they emerge from the text, and if the interpreter does not insist that these interpretive rules are exhaustive, it is hard to imagine why anyone would think they might box God in. Surely, rather, they honor the God who has chosen to communicate with us precisely through such human texts.

(4) The concern to be God-centered cannot be faulted. It is then deployed to warrant that biblical interpretation take place in the church and for the church, which alone maintains this God-centeredness, not the academy. We have already considered that interpreting the Bible within the church might simply mean moving within the contours of the *analogia fidei,* and tried to think through what this should and should not look like. But some TIS writers understand clauses such as "biblical interpretation [must] take place *in the church and for the church*" to mean something like "among Christian believers" and "for Christian believers." At one level this is exactly right. The Bible is for Christians, and Christians are the ones who, precisely because they want to hear the voice of God, should be reading it and interpreting it.

Nevertheless: (a) Christians interact with non-Christians. Anyone who has been in ministry near a major university with a biblical or religious studies department will have stories to tell about students who are facing complicated questions about the Bible that do not arise from the believing community but ultimately from the academic world. Not to engage with them and respond to them thoughtfully and carefully is a terrible mistake. When TIS supporters write in antithetical terms about interpreting the Bible in the church and not in the academy, they sometimes begin to sound as if they are advocating a hermetically sealed-off huddle.

(b) When some TIS supporters speak of interpretation in the church and not in the academy, they overlook the fact that all or almost all of them work

[25] *De Doctrina Christiana,* book II.

in the academy. Of course, they might protest that they also belong to the church. But that is the point: church and academy are not completely disjunctive. Certainly these scholars are writing *for* the academy: TIS as a movement has not, by and large, so far penetrated the church. But if the fundamental antithesis is not between the academy and the church, what is it? That brings us to the next observation:

(c) The TIS movement is far from united theologically. Its supporters can be found among at least four groups: Roman Catholics, confessional evangelicals, Barthians, and chastened liberals. Although on some matters they share common theological commitments—Trinitarianism, for instance, to which I will return in a moment—on many matters fundamental to TIS they actually mean something quite different from group to group. Earlier I showed how an appeal to the *analogia fidei* looks quite different for Catholics than it does for confessional evangelicals. It would be easy to show that the Christian's or the church's understanding of the authority and truthfulness of Scripture is rather different for chastened liberals and for confessional evangelicals and traditional Catholics. On the point now at hand, what it means to appeal to God over against hermeneutical rules will at some point be rather different for confessional evangelicals and for Barthians.[26] Madueme goes so far as to hint that Barth is a source of many of the present problems in TIS: Barth's "greatest weakness as a resource for theological interpretation is a consistent ambivalence on the relationship between history and theology. To the extent that Scripture is not only a theological but also a historical entity, this gives rise to a related ambivalence between theology and Scripture."[27] In any case, TIS is a frustratingly disparate movement—frustrating not simply because it is disparate, but because its proponents tend to stand shoulder to shoulder as they confront that which is not TIS, while failing to acknowledge and wrestle with the very substantial disparity within their own ranks and which is sending off its proponents in different directions.

Proposition Five: TIS commonly insists we ought to read Scripture through Trinitarian lenses.

Yes: As a response to bland theism, this is a welcome relief. It is articulated in a variety of ways. Here is Vanhoozer: "The nature and function of the Bible

[26] Even to begin to justify this last point would immediately double the length of this paper. Despite the arguments of some Barthians to the contrary, Barth's understanding of the nature of Scripture is a long way removed from that of traditional confessionalism. On the latter, cf. John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982). On Barth's views, one of his most informed and attractive representatives is John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), with which I attempted to interact in D. A. Carson, "Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review," *Trinity Journal* 27 (2006), 1–62. I am indebted to the honoree of this volume for some private communications that have clarified my thinking on some of these matters.

[27] Hans Madueme, "Review Article: Theological Interpretation after Barth," *JTI* 3 (2009), 155.

are insufficiently grasped unless and until we see the Bible as an element in the economy of triune discourse. Those who approach the Bible as Scripture must not abstract it from the Father who ultimately authors it, the Son to whom it witnesses, and the Spirit who inspired and illumines it."[28] Of course, all sides will (or at least should) concur that one ought not read the exact formulations of fourth-century Trinitarianism, with their careful distinctions between substance and person, back into the biblical documents: that would be anachronistic. But most scholars in the secular academy make this true observation about the danger of anachronism, and then fail to find *any* Trinitarianism in Scripture. Still less do they integrate Trinitarian thought into a doctrine of Scripture, with implications for its interpretation.

But. . . . Recent years have witnessed an explosion of books and papers on the doctrine of the Trinity. Much of this is salutary, though a case could be made that some writers are trying to squeeze too much theological freight into the doctrine, as judged by the extent to which they fly beyond anything attested by or hinted at within Scripture. (Thus we have returned to the question of which TIS supporters are nurtured by the finality of Scripture's magisterial authority.)

But one should not fail to ask, "Why the Trinity as a, or even the, lens through which to read Scripture? Why not something else?" It may be because the doctrine of the Trinity was central to debates in the patristic period, and we have already observed how much stress TIS supporters place on the church fathers. Still, one cannot help but ask, why not read the Bible in the light of Jesus' resurrection, as Hays engagingly suggests?[29] Or in the light of the gospel, easily warranted by studying the contexts of all the uses of the εὐαγγέλιον word-group? Or in the light of the consummation, as Steinmetz argues, since when we have read the end of the story, we cannot, indeed we should not, reread it as if we do not know[30] the end? Or, more comprehensively, in the light of Christ, the ultimate Word?

In short, one detects undigested proposals running through TIS.

Proposition Six: TIS tends to see Scripture less as a set of propositions disclosing God than as the story of God and his saving plan of redemption.

Yes: Once again the best side of TIS is a great deal less creative than it claims. The best proponents of biblical theology have been making much the

[28] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Ten Theses on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Modern Reformation* 19/4 (July/Aug 2010), 17. See further his "Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks," in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship* (eds, David Lauber and Daniel J. Treier.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 25–78.

[29] Richard B. Hays, "Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (eds, Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 203), 216–238.

[30] David C. Steinmetz, "Uncovering the Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 54–67.

same appeal for a long time. Today the only voices that will seriously doubt this claim are the most secular ones. These voices deny that there is but one story of God, one saving plan of redemption, that runs through the Bible. So it is doubtless helpful to be reminded of the unity of the Bible's storyline, what Bauckham is not afraid to call its metanarrative.[31]

But. . . . Two caveats suggest themselves. *First,* one tires of the endless swipes at propositions. *Of course* the Bible has more than propositions: riddles, narratives, commands, letters (which of course hold many propositions), proverbs, lament, and so forth. But anyone can see that the Bible is not lacking in propositions. Even behind other forms—say, lament—assorted propositions lurk, just as behind many of the Bible's propositions, other things may lurk—for example, praise, denunciation, warning, and so forth.

Second, and more importantly, if one rightly concludes that there is a central storyline to the Bible and tries to use it in ways that enrich our theological understanding of Scripture, it does not necessarily follow that one is reading that storyline richly and well. Moreover, failure to do so will have deleterious effects on the theology we construct as a result of our (flawed) understanding of that storyline. To take an easy and common example, several recent attempts at summarizing the Old Testament's storyline ably depict God graciously pursuing his rebellious image-bearers across the turning points in redemptive history, climaxing in the sending of his Son. Yet not a word is spoken of the six hundred times, mostly in narrative context, in which God is said to be angry with his covenant people, threatening them with judgment. In other words, the storyline itself depicts God as simultaneously standing over against his people in wrath and standing over against them in love and mercy. Failure to track out these intertwining themes results in a radically different reading of Jesus, his cross and resurrection, the consummation, and ultimately what we think the gospel achieves. In short, observing the storyline does not guarantee accurate reading of it.

Concluding Reflections

A colleague and friend, Graham Cole, has written a paper[32] developing a model he has used in the classroom. He speaks of four levels of interpreting biblical texts. At the first level, the Bible itself must be understood exegetically, within its literary and historical contexts, with appropriate attention devoted to literary genre, attempting to unfold authorial intent so far as it is disclosed in the text. At level 2, the text must be understood within the whole of biblical

[31] Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," *The Art of Reading Scripture,* edited by Richard Hags and Hellen Dau. Grand Rapids: Earchmas, 2003, pp. 38–53.

[32] Forthcoming.

theology, including where it fits into and what it contributes to the unfolding storyline and its theology. At level 3, the theological structures found in the text are brought to bear upon, and understood in concert with, other major theological emphases derived from Scripture. At level 4, all teachings derived (or ostensibly derived) from the biblical text are subjected to and modified by a larger hermeneutical proposal (e.g., Trinitarian action, God's love and freedom, or something vague such as "what was disclosed in Jesus"). Traditional interpreters of Scripture who hold the Bible as the Word of God tend to operate at levels 1 and 2, with the strongest of them making excursions now and then into level 3.

So far, many if not most supporters of TIS operate at levels 3 and 4. One suspects that one of the reasons why the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible has, in several of its volumes, proved so unsatisfying is that its writers were operating at levels 3 and 4 while trying to give the impression they were operating at levels 1 and 2. Because readers could not forge the actual connections between text and theology ostensibly derived from a *commentary* on the text, they balked—and rightly so. For what is really needed is work that shows how levels 1, 2, and 3 *should* be tied together. One should indulge in level 4 only with the greatest caution, and only after the writer has done a lot of work on the first three levels.

As I am writing this, I have not, of course, read the contributions to this volume that focus on the interpretation of specific sample biblical passages. Perhaps some of them will be the breakthrough essays that achieve genuine historical and theological integration under the authority of Scripture. At this moment, however, I am inclined to think that what is most valuable in TIS (and much is), is not new; what is new in TIS varies from ambiguous to mistaken, depending in part on the theological location of the interpreter.