

Developments in New Testament Study



Arthur Freeman
Moravian Theological Seminary
Bethlehem, PA

February 2, 1994

These materials may be reproduced as long as credit is given.

CONTENTS

I NEW PERSPECTIVES	1
The Intertestamental Period	2
Essenes	2
Pseudepigrapha	3
Nag Hammadi, etc.....	3
Wisdom	3
Apocalyptic	4
Gnosticism.....	5
The New Testament Apocrypha.....	6
The Research on the Historical Jesus.....	6
Authorship and Sources of the Gospels	10
Changing Attitudes about the Historical-Critical Method.	12
Hermeneutical Approaches	14
II AN APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE AS AUTHORITY.....	16
Spirit and Tradition	18
Creation and Science.....	19
Christian Faith and Other Religions.....	20
III A CASE STUDY: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SIN	22
IV AN APPROACH TO A METHODOLOGY FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE	27
How Scripture Speaks	27
Diagram of Interpretation:.....	29
Methods of Interpretation.....	29
System for Filing Biblical Interpretation	30
Method for using the Imagination (similar to Ignatian Exercises)	30
Benedictine Method - Lectio Divina.....	31
Flow Writing	32
Paul's Theory of Homiletics and Communication: I Corinthians 2	32
A Translation of I Corinthians 2:1-16.....	33
Observations On Communication	35
V RETHINKING SOME THINGS.....	36
Doing Theology.....	36
What If?? Some Hermeneutical Questions About Jesus.....	37

DEVELOPMENTS IN NEW TESTAMENT STUDY

There are a number of areas that one might touch upon when reviewing developments in New Testament study in the last 10-20 years. These are not only the concern of professional New Testament scholars, or seminary professors, but are important for our ministries as they in various ways affect our understanding of the Christian faith. Some of the following represent the trends of modern scholarship and some particularly represent the concern of the author, as will probably be self-evident.

I NEW PERSPECTIVES

First, there are what might be called "new perspectives" on the New Testament. A perspective is a way of seeing the material. *Source criticism* had its origins within the last century and has within this century developed into the commonly accepted "four source theory" of the Synoptic tradition. Then came *form criticism* in the first half of this century, focusing on the transmission of the oral tradition behind the sources, usually emphasizing the influence of the Christian communities on the tradition and in its German form holding a radical historical scepticism about what could be known regarding the historical Jesus. Then in the second half of this century we have *redaction criticism* which explores the evangelists as theologians, using as evidence the ways in which they select, organize and edit the traditions which come to them. More recently the *sociological context* of the early church has been explored. A typical study is Wayne Meeks' *The First Urban Christians* which examines the urban environment of Pauline Christianity, the social level of Pauline Christians, models from the environment for the formation of Christian communities, governance, rituals, and patterns of belief and life.¹ Without abandoning previous accomplishments in New Testament study, Meeks sees the focus of a sociological approach as: "to the limit that the sources and our abilities permit, we must try to discern the texture of life in particular times and particular places. After that, the task of a social historian of early Christianity is to describe the life of the ordinary Christian within that environment - not just the ideas or the self-understanding of the leaders and writers."²

In 1971 there appeared a collection of essays by James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, which called upon New Testament scholarship to adopt a dynamic rather than static paradigm. Rather than seeing individual books and writers in isolation, Robinson and Koester called for a perspective which saw New Testament literature as part of dynamic *trajectories* within the church and its world which continued into the post-New Testament period. As Robinson comments in the Introduction:

Thus one can trace a course from the subphilosophical cultural level of primitive Christianity, via the philosophical pretenses of the apologetes, to the philosophical ability of the Alexandrian theologians; or from Paul's theology to that of the gradually bifurcating Pauline school, with one stream moving via Ephesians to I Peter, Luke-Acts, the Pastorals and on to orthodoxy, the other via Colossians to Valentinus, Basilides, Marcion, and on to heresy; or from an "unworldly" antiinstitutionalism rooted in the apocalyptic ideology of imminent expectation, toward a bifurcation into a relatively "worldly" Christian establishment whose eschatological hope has lost its imminence or at least its existential urgency, and an "otherworldly" disestablished Christianity, whose ideology has become gnostic rather than apocalyptic.³

The Conclusion, written by Helmut Koester, discusses the direction in which the essays point:

1. There are "*New Standards for the Classification of Early Christian Literature*". For example, "The distinctions between canonical and noncanonical, orthodox and heretical are

¹. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, Yale U. Press, 1983.

². *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³. James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, Phila.: Fortress Press, 1971, p. 10.

obsolete." One can't merely deal with the classical "Introduction to the New Testament," but can only speak of a "History of Early Christian Literature."

The "gospel" as a form and the presentation of Jesus as a "divine man" must be seen in relationship to contemporary literature and ideas. Apocalyptic literature belongs to a trajectory originating in the prophets, expressed in Jewish Apocalyptic, continuing in the New Testament prophets and eventuating in Gnosticism, but Apocalyptic in Judaism and Christianity and then Gnosticism are also due to common cultural conditions.

2. The phenomena of the development of early Christianity should be seen in terms of *"Regional Christian Churches and the Diverse Cultural Conditions of the Roman Era."* It is not simply a matter of Jewish or Hellenistic cultural contexts, but various Jewish contexts differently Hellenized and various non-Jewish contexts.

3. *"Jesus of Nazareth and the Cultural Presuppositions of Late Antiquity."* "There is also no question that the cultural, religious, and ideological biases, inclinations, and prejudices of the Greco-Roman world, when they are shared by early Christian writers, are not thereby made normatively Christian, but must be tested critically." Thus the hermeneutical problem must be faced which deals with the "tension between Jesus' historical particularity and contingency, and the succession of language worlds in which it is brought to expression."⁴

The Intertestamental Period

One of the most significant developments is the awareness of the thought and literature of the Intertestamental Period as background for understanding Jesus and early Christianity. It seems strange to me now, but during my Seminary training and even graduate study I was led to understand the thought of the New Testament primarily against the background of the Old Testament, with only limited consideration of the 200 year gap between the two, during which the Jewish sects and Judaism of Jesus time came into being. Judaism was also treated in terms of Pharisaic or Rabbinic Judaism, which was the only Judaism to survive the wars with the Romans, to be expressed in the Mishnah and Midrash of the second century. I remember the question of whether documents of the second century, even though they included earlier tradition, could adequately represent the Judaism before 70 CE, the destruction of the Temple. It was also fashionable to distinguish between Greek and Hebraic thinking, Hebraic thinking characterized by the Old Testament and some of the Pharisaic interpretations of it. There was no recognition of the extent to which Persian and Hellenistic dualism had affected Judaism in the Intertestamental period, even to the extent that some Jews viewed the world dualistically and rejected the resurrection of the body. One of the reasons for this was the exclusion of the OT Apocrypha from Protestant Bibles, so that many Protestants were not even aware that many of these books were a part of the Greek Canon of the OT, the Septuagint.

From the time that I went to Seminary and the present, and particularly in the last twenty years, there have been significant discoveries which have enhanced our understanding of the period during which Jesus and Paul lived.

Essenes

Though the initial discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was in the late 40s, the largest scroll was not translated into English until 1983, and fragments still remain to be translated. With this discovery there became available to us not only knowledge of the Old Testament text much earlier than our previously available oldest Hebrew manuscript of about 1000 CE,⁵ but we became acquainted with the literature of a Jewish religious community of Jesus' day. Though this community was never larger than about three hundred, according to both Philo and Josephus about 4,000 Essenes lived in Palestine. This group then represented a significant religious movement which is not even mentioned by name in the New Testament

4. Ibid., pp. 269ff.

5. Some of Hebrew texts of the OT discovered at Qumran are closer to the Greek/Septuagint OT than the Masoretic text which was the standard recension of the Hebrew text by 600 CE. This means that in the form of the Hebrew text and in the books included in the "canon" there was probably greater variety in the first century than came to be the case after this period.

as it seems to have been destroyed in the Jewish war, after which the Gospels were written. Though some scholars have wrongly tried to indicate Jesus was an Essene, through this literature we gain precious information about the religious thought and practice of Jesus' time. We also find a community whose thought is similar to that of John the Baptist and whose organizational structure was similar to the mother church in Jerusalem and whose spiritual discipline seems to have a kinship with that of the community behind the Gospel of Matthew.

Pseudepigrapha

Then there is the Pseudepigrapha, largely defined as that literature of Judaism in the first centuries BCE and CE which was not included in the Greek or Hebrew OT canons. It was only in the 1980s that Doubleday published a modern edition edited by James Charlesworth containing 65 documents.⁶ The previous English edition of 1913 contained only 17 documents. This provided a quantum leap in the Intertestamental literature available for study.

Nag Hammadi, etc.

One perhaps should also mention the Nag Hammadi Coptic codices, among which is the Gospel of Thomas, a Gospel consisting primarily of sayings, rather than narrative material, somewhat like the hypothetical Q. Though the Gospel of Thomas is not first century, it does seem to provide us with some sayings of Jesus which sound authentic, though others are much affected by Gnostic perspective. Then there has been the discovery of a tenth century Arabic version of the testimony of Josephus about Jesus. The Greek text that we have of the Antiquities seems to have been Christianized, while this is absent from the Arabic translation. Besides this we have the new archaeological discoveries of remains of the Jewish city of Jerusalem, the actual discovery of the remains of one Jehohanan who was crucified, and significant remains of the city of Capernaum which was Jesus operative headquarters in Galilee.

The discoveries and making available of the literature of the Intertestamental period has given us an understanding of Judaism we did not have before. Rather than being viewed in terms of the Rabbinic Judaism that survived the Jewish war, it is now seen as consisting of varied and competing religious movements which are not adequately reflected in the literature of later Judaism. In fact, some of the perspectives of the Judaism of Jesus' day, particularly Apocalyptic, were probably intentionally rejected by Judaism after the Jewish wars of the first and second centuries CE because it fueled the wars and its expressed hopes were not realized. These varied movements were all rooted in the sacred literature of Judaism, particularly the Torah, but they handled this literature as differently as the different branches of Christianity handle the Bible today. To the Jewish sects especially active in Palestine (the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes) and Wisdom and Apocalyptic literatures (which cannot so easily be identified with special groups), one must also add Philo of Alexandria as an example of what might have been happening in Diaspora Judaism. Philo's concern to build a bridge between Judaism and the Hellenistic world in his extensive work on interpreting the Old Testament must have been repeated elsewhere. To all of this, and in the midst of all of this, must be seen nascent Christianity which during the public ministry of Jesus and for 30 years afterwards was in many ways a Jewish sect.

Wisdom

An examination of Wisdom Literature shows a tradition providing practical advice for living and reflecting on the problem of human suffering. Its earlier forms (Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs) sometimes show a kinship with earlier Egyptian and Babylonian literature, while Intertestamental literature shows both the influence of Hellenistic thought (Wisdom of Solomon) and Palestinian thought close to the time of Jesus (Wisdom of Sirach). Though originally independent of the Pentateuchal tradition about salvation history, Intertestamental literature then merges thought about Wisdom with Jewish saving-history. Particularly striking is the presentation of Wisdom as a personified extension of God, acting as God's agent in creation and, in the Intertestamental literature, God's agent in Old Testament history. It thus

⁶. James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols., NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1985.

becomes clear that some Christological developments in the NT are modeled after this understanding of Wisdom. John 1:1-18 (which reflects Sirach 24), Colossians 1:15ff (note Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26) and Heb. 1:3 speak of Christ's participation in creation; and such passages as I Cor. 10:1-5 speak of Christ's participation in OT history. The approach in Matthew to Christ views him as a teacher of wisdom or of the Law, diminishing the narrative materials used from Mark and using them primarily to reinforce Jesus as teacher. The hypothetical Q document may have been the product of an approach to Jesus as teacher, with no interest in events of his life -- similar to the later Gnostic Gospel of Thomas.

Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic literature is difficult to identify with any historical group and seems rather to represent a pattern of thought which had influenced much of Judaism, including Pharisaism, by the 1st century AD. Not only was Apocalyptic literature found in the Qumran library, but the ideas of the Essenes seem to have been affected by it. Apocalyptic viewed the world dualistically, seeing this age and the present world as pretty much run by Satan rather than God. "Flesh" was also seen as problematic, no good coming out of it, standing opposed to "spirit". The resurrection of the physical body, which had been the view of older Judaism, was now rejected in favor of the resurrection of a spiritual body, like that of the angels, or in favor of a disembodied existence. The place of the departed, Sheol, became a place with "habitations" (II Esdras 7) differentiated for the good and evil, the soul surviving after death in a disembodied state. History was moving on in its decline to a final confrontation between God and Satan, during which there would be a period of intense suffering for God's people (the time of the Great Tribulation). Though there might be a temporary kingdom of a Messiah, the culmination of God's plan for cosmic restoration involved a "heavenly agent" with superhuman powers who would conquer Satan and participate in the cosmic destruction of heavens and earth and creation of a new world. In II Esdras this person is the "Man from the Sea" who is God's "son" and whom God has been keeping in heaven through the ages. In the Apocalypse of Enoch he is called the "Son of Man". This figure probably developed on the basis of exegesis of Gen. 1-3. Philo saw the Adam of Gen. 1 as the ideal, heavenly "Man" (in Platonic fashion) after the pattern of which the earthly Adam of Gen. 2-3 was made. This would leave the Adam, "Man", of Gen. 1 as a potential redeemer.

It was also characteristic of Apocalyptic literature that it often "grew", i.e. that new additions were made to older pieces. The Apocalypse of II Esdras was originally a Jewish Apocalypse to which Christian additions were made in the first century CE. J. M. Ford in her commentary on Revelation in the Anchor series suggests that this book came into being through Christian additions being made to preserved teachings of John the Baptist, and that the first Christian modification of the Baptist materials happened during the Jewish War in the sixties, the second being made during the period of Domitian to which Revelation is usually assigned.⁷

The whole matter of the influence of Apocalyptic on the New Testament is not to be settled merely in terms of the book of Revelation. Its influence was in the air of the world into which Christianity was born. One can find its ideas in such passages as the "Little Apocalypse" (Mk. 13 and parallels), Luke 17:20ff, and in II Thessalonians, but more broadly it pervades much of the NT literature, except for the Gospel of John which seems to represent a rejection of it. By the second century and the tragic conclusion of the second Jewish revolt against the Romans, Judaism pretty well rejected Apocalyptic. The literature of Rabbinic Judaism was written in the second century. However, since the Christian literature originated within the first century there is "frozen" into the New Testament a type of Jewish thought which Judaism a century later rejected. One of the significant tasks in the interpretation of the New Testament is to decide what to do with the Apocalyptic milieu of early Christian thought when seeking to express the Gospel for our time.

⁷ J. Massynberde Ford, *Revelation, The Anchor Bible*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1975.

Gnosticism

The discovery of Gnostic and Manichean manuscripts in this century, especially the Nag Hammadi finds of the 1940s, has given us a new understanding of the nature and origins of Gnosticism, until then regarded primarily as a second century CE phenomenon, known primarily in its Christian forms and known through the apologists who wrote against it. Whereas Harnack and others had seen Gnosticism primarily within the context of church history, thus minimizing the existence of pre-Christian and non-Christian forms, the work of Bousset and Reitzenstein in the early part of this century (the History of Religions School) helped to see its origin within a pre-Christian mixture of Babylonian and Iranian religion. The Nag Hammadi discoveries have now provided evidence for different schools and movements within Gnosticism, including some strongly and some less Christian; evidence for the contribution of Jewish traditions (particularly Apocalyptic and Wisdom) besides Iranian thought and Hellenism to Gnosticism's development; and evidence for Gnosticism being a part of the religious context in which Christianity developed rather than merely a transformation of Christianity in the second century. Some of New Testament Christianity must then be understood in the light of it and some of the New Testament then becomes first century evidence for Gnosticism: usually the Johannine and Pauline literature. The Johannine literature is, of course, the primary candidate since the struggle over the interpretation of the Gospel reflected in I John evidences largely Gnostic issues. A recent and valuable new work discussing the sources and beliefs of the Gnostics is Kurt Rudolph's *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*.⁸ The sources can be explored in Bentley Layton's *The Gnostic Scriptures*.⁹

Gnosticism essentially involved a myth of a redeemer from the world of a God unknown within this world and its powers. This redeemer came to bring knowledge, *Gnosis*, to all who had inherited a particle of the world of light and to help their souls escape this world of darkness (seen as evil and the creation of a lesser God: for Christian Gnostics, the God of the Old Testament) and journey through the heavens to the world of light. Because this world and the creator God are identified with darkness, misunderstanding, and actual opposition to the world of light, some interesting interpretation of Old Testament texts results, especially of the Genesis 2-3 creation narrative. Old Testament perceptions are now seen as the work of the lesser God who opposes the God of light. The woman and the serpent, to whom traditional interpretation assigns primary responsibility for the Fall, now become agents of light, seeking to bring to "man" the knowledge which the lesser creator God sought to keep from him. Because of Gnosticism's strong dualism, its Christian forms usually treated the divine Christ as in some way separate and not really united with the human Jesus.

Gnosticism must be seen as more than a heresy. Rather it was a religious movement which sought to wrestle with some significant life-issues. The times in which Gnosticism was born was filled with religious movements which had become pessimistic about this world but which still maintained the reality of the spiritual dimensions of life. The only way in which they were able to account for the duality of human experience was to see the universe in these terms. It is interesting to see the OT prophetic tradition, then Jewish Apocalyptic, and finally Gnosticism as having continuity in the Jewish (and Christian) attempt to come to terms with the experienced world. In the OT God is in charge and the world runs as God wishes. Tragedy is God's punishment and success and well-being are due to God's blessing. The problems of this world can be solved by the human agency of God's people, if faithful, within history, resulting in the restoration of the Kingdom of David. Both the religions that Judaism had contact with in the Intertestamental period and the tragedies of Jewish experience taught otherwise. Now in Apocalyptic pessimism reigns. History has no real purpose, except as it is the place where the final struggle between God and evil (which is in control of the world) will take place. God's representative is the "Man" from heaven, not earth (as was the Davidic Messiah). And in the end this world will be completely destroyed in favor of a new one. Gnosticism is the next step, perhaps influenced within Judaism by the failure of the Jewish revolution to realize the Apocalyptic hopes. Now salvation is not only *from* an upper world but

⁸ Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. by Robert McLachlan Wilson, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983.

⁹ *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* by Bentley Layton, Garden City: Doubleday, 1987.

also *to* an upper world. The children of light are rescued from the world of darkness to journey through the heavens to the true realm of their existence.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Gnosticism so flowered within second century Christianity was that Apocalyptic expectations which disappointed the Jews in the two Jewish revolts of the first and second century CE, and then were rejected by the Jews, were not rejected by the Christians because Apocalyptic was embedded in their literature and thought within the first century before it had been thoroughly discredited. (The written form of the Mishnah and Midrashim came into being in the second cent. CE while most of the Christian literature came into being in the first cent. CE.) Thus the flowering of Gnosticism within second century Christianity can be seen as a delayed reaction in trying to come to terms with the tragedy of human existence and yet the reality of the spiritual dimensions of life. The anticipation of this is in the Johannine tradition in which Apocalyptic ideas have been already transformed into contemporary mystical experience (eternal life in the present, abiding in Christ, etc.) and an abiding hostility to the world and its darkness. What is at issue here is theodicy.

The New Testament Apocrypha

New Testament Apocrypha is not a name for a specific body of literature which was once part of a canonical Testament, as is true of the Old Testament Apocrypha, but is a general term for writings of the early church which were not included in the New Testament canon, some of which fall in the above categories. Though not relating so much to the background of the New Testament, it helps one to understand early Christianity from the second century CE on and thus to follow out trajectories born out of tendencies already in the New Testament. It is also helpful in understanding Christianity at the time when the churches were struggling with the definition of the canon. For a long time the best collection of these materials in English was Montague R. James' *The Apocryphal New Testament*.¹⁰ Now we have a much more extensive two volume work on the *New Testament Apocrypha* edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher.¹¹

The Research on the Historical Jesus

Whereas the research on the historical Jesus in the latter part of the 19th century was expressed in the "liberal lives", by the early 20th century we became aware of myth as a mode of expression and the post-Easter focus of the Gospels. Schweitzer's emphasis on Jesus as a person of the first century, rather than ours, also contributed to preventing us from seeing Jesus through our glasses. This brought to an end what is often called "the old quest". Bultmann represented radical scepticism about what could be known historically, as well as expressing the Christian meaning in an existentialist form. The "new quest", which was started by Bultmann's followers, argued that certain historical information could be discovered about Jesus (and should) and saw the Christ of the Easter faith, though not identical with the historical Jesus, in continuity with him, thus inspiring new faith in the pre-Easter data preserved in the Gospels.

Scholars are now speaking of a new phase in the quest for the historical Jesus. In the light of what has been discovered about the Intertestamental period, the Gospels and Jesus can be seen against the background of a greatly expanded knowledge of the period of Jesus' life. Thus this new stage in the quest focuses more on Jesus' world rather than primarily on what he said and did, though it clearly has consequences for the understanding of this.¹² As a consequence many of the Gospel materials are

¹⁰ Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1924.

¹¹ Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, English translation by R. McL. Wilson, revised edition, *Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings*, James Clarke and Co., Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991; *Volume Two: Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, same publisher, 1992.

¹² A valuable book here is James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from exciting Archaeological Discoveries*, *The Anchor Bible Reference Library*, NY: Doubleday, 1988. Charlesworth does give a chapter to "Jesus' Concept of God" in the light of these discoveries, rejecting the old criterion of "dissimilarity" in judging the authenticity of Jesus's sayings: i.e., that only the sayings are authentic which are dissimilar to the perspectives of Judaism and the early church and

illuminated by these new discoveries and the historical figure of Jesus is more clearly seen against the horizon of his times. One intriguing approach is that of Kenneth Bailey in *The Poet and the Peasant*, who not only argues that we must pay attention to the character of the 1st century Palestinian culture as reflected in Mid-Eastern literature, which is the natural background for the teachings of Jesus, but then proceeds to what he calls "Oriental Exegesis": the exploration of the contemporary life of Middle-Eastern peasantry from which he gains significant cultural clues about the first century.¹³ To this he adds structuralism/rhetorical criticism of the Jesus' tradition, examining its oral and eventually written structures which derive from Jesus' Semitic context. This is similar to what has been done in the studies of Semitic poetic form found in New Testament parallelism, though Bailey believes this was not only poetic form, but a form of expression used more widely in materials that shade from prose to poetry and which Jewish scholarship calls "pause sentences": a sentence which states something in one phrase, pauses, then states it in another phrase which is synonymous, antithetical, climactic, etc., and then makes a longer pause. Such pause sentences are often arranged in an inverted pattern which locates the focus of the complex at the center. Believing that he has shown that Jesus' message in content and form has its context within the earliest stages of a Christianity in contact with Judaism, and indicating the care in transmission of oral tradition in the Mid-East in ancient and modern times, he then goes on to affirm that Jesus' message can be discovered within the tradition. Without rejecting the contributions of redaction criticism, he believes that much of the theology behind the message, especially within the parables, came from Jesus and that he must be taken seriously as a theologian. For him Jesus steps upon the scene of his public ministry, having debated the interpretation of the Law and Prophets for years in the male association for this purpose in his synagogue. Such reflection is to be found in his use and interpretation of the Old Testament in his parables and teachings. Jesus then enters his public ministry after years of reflection, as did Paul whose earliest letters date from 13-17 years into his ministry.¹⁴

This new information, plus the rising consciousness of what Christian anti-Semitism has done to the Jews, has also produced new attempts to see Jesus in the light of Judaism.. In an interesting conversation of James H. Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary with Hans Küng, author of *Judaism: Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, Charlesworth says:

We are contending that the standard English translations are occasionally inaccurate because they do not represent the social situation behind the documents. This is especially the case in the Gospel of John. Most importantly, there seems to be a gross insensitivity to how the term "Jew" might be read today when used as a cover term for any member of the religious community of Jesus' time. Individuals almost always read the New Testament differently than other documents like the Dead Sea Scrolls. Readers presume a kind of atemporal nature underlying the New Testament which cancels out the realization that an *ancient* document is being read. Far too often readers approach the New Testament as if it were today's newspaper. When they hear the word "Jew," they mistakenly think of Jews in their community.¹⁵

therefore only have basis for existence in Jesus. An important set of new tools is Westminster's *Library of Early Christianity*, ed. by Wayne A. Meeks, consisting of eight volumes dealing with the Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts of early Christianity.

¹³. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1976. This work presents extensive explanation of his method. This was later combined with another book and issued in paperback: *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983. Bailey is also the author of *The Cross and the Prodigal*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1973.

¹⁴. Many of the comments here were gleaned from a program on "Jesus As Theologian" presented by Kenneth Bailey for the Ecumenical Committee for Continuing Education at Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, May 23-25, 1989. Along with taking Jesus seriously as a theologian, Dr. Bailey believes that Jesus' action and his interpretation of the Old Testament not only reflect his message, but his understanding of himself. Regarding the self-understanding reflected in Jesus' use of the Old Testament he used the term "hermeneutical Christology."

¹⁵. Interview by James H. Charlesworth, "Discussing Anti-Judaism in the New Testament with Hans Küng," *Explorations*, Phila.: American Interfaith Institute, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1992, p. 1.

A very fine presentation of this perspective is E.P. Saunders' *Jesus and Judaism*,¹⁶ in which he portrays Jesus as a prophet of Jewish restoration eschatology. Of course, Jesus' Jewishness is not really in question, rather the issue is Jesus' relationship to the main streams of the Judaism of his time. Especially when one keeps in mind the variety of ideas and movements within the Judaism of his day, it seems much more possible that he may have alligned himself with some aspects of the rich Jewish tradition (more worthy of respect than that granted by many Christian evaluations). However, one must not neglect what the Gospels say about his conflicts with Jewish authorities and traditional religious and eschatological ideas. Both Matthew and John provide ambiguous evidence because though close to and influenced by Jewish tradition they represent communities strongly in conflict with Judaism. One must also be careful about seeing Jesus in the light of Matthew which both presents Jesus as an ultra Pharisee and seriously exaggerates his hostility to the Pharisees. The Gospel of John, though its language seems influenced by the Essenes and Palestinian Judaism, often regards the Jews in one lump as Jesus opponents and in the camp of the devil.

Two books have recently been published as major contributions, taking quite different approaches to reconstruction of the historical Jesus. One is John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew*.¹⁷ This American Catholic biblical scholar admits the title is designed primarily to catch the eye and seve as a *mashal*, a riddle to catch the mind.¹⁸ This is the first volume, titled *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*. The second volume will deal with Jesus' public ministry and his last days. This is a study of the historical Jesus or the Jesus of history, not an attempt to reconstruct the real Jesus (as he actually was).

... the historical Jesus is not the real Jesus, but only a fragmentary hypothetical reconstruction of him by modern means of research.¹⁹

There is no better source of information on the present understanding of the sources for the historical Jesus, the criteria for accepting various traditions as evidence, and a discussion of the birth and early life of Jesus in terms of our present knowledge of his world. Meier makes clear that the Jesus of history (of which many are described for us) cannot be the object of the Christian faith, but rather the living person of Jesus Christ:

Primarily, Christian faith affirms and adheres to this person - indeed, incarnate, crucified, and risen - and only secondarily to ideas and affirmations about him. In the realm of faith and theology, the "real Jesus," the only Jesus existing and living now, is this risen Lord, to whom access is given only through faith.²⁰

¹⁶ E. P. Saunders, *Jesus and Judaism*, Phila.: Fortress, 1985. The conclusion of this book can provide a quick review of Saunders' findings, pp. 319ff. I would like to provide a few quotations:

Jesus claimed that the end was at hand, that God was about to establish his kingdom, that those who responded to him would be included, and (at least by implication) that he would reign. His disciples, after the death and resurrection, continued to expect the restoration of Israel and the inauguration of the new age, and they continued to see Jesus as occupying first place in the kingdom. Also ... they continued to look for an otherworldly kingdom which would be established by an eschatological miracle, although its locale may have shifted from this world to the heavenly one. The person of Jesus himself was also progressively interpreted: he was no longer seen just as 'Messiah' or 'Viceroy', but as Lord. Some who were attracted to the movement began to win Gentiles to it. The work of the early apostles, which is so well reflected in Paul's letters, fits entirely into known expectations about the restoration of Israel. (p. 334)

Saunders' concluding words on p. 340 are:

He (Jesus) went to his death. His followers, by carrying through the logic of his own position in a transformed situation, created a movement which would grow and continue to alter in ways unforeseeable in Jesus' own time, but in progressive steps, each one explicable in its own historical context.

Saunders, in his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Phila.: Fortress, 1977, treats Paul in a similar fashion.

¹⁷ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Vol. One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library, NY: Doubleday, 1991.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 31.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 198.

Another major contribution is John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus, The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*.²¹ Crossan is more ambitious: he believes we can speak about the real or true Jesus and that he can reconstruct him from the sources. He even offers a reconstructed inventory of words that he believes actually go back to Jesus.²² At the end of the book he cautions those who think reconstruction invalid: "If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in."²³ In words oft-quoted, which give a sense of his writing style, his "Overture" to his books starts with:

In the beginning was the performance; not the word alone, not the deed alone, but both, each indelibly marked with the other forever. He comes as yet unknown into a hamlet of Lower Galilee. He is watched by the cold, hard eyes of peasants living long enough at subsistence level to know exactly where the line is drawn between poverty and destitution. He looks like a beggar, yet his eyes lack the proper cringe, his voice the proper whine, his walk the proper shuffle. He speaks about the rule of God, and they listen as much from curiosity as anything else. They know all about rule and power, about kingdom and empire, but they know it in terms of tax and debt, malnutrition and sickness, agrarian oppression and demonic possession. What, they really want to know, can this kingdom of God do for a lame child, a blind parent, a demented soul screaming its tortured isolation among the graves that mark the edges of the village?²⁴

Crossan's methodology includes "three triads": the anthropological, historical and literary (the texts); focus on the Jesus tradition through inventory, stratification of each text, multiple attestation; then methodological manipulation of the inventory of texts with concern for the sequence of the strata, the hierarchy of attestation, and the bracketing out of any units of tradition that have only single attestation.²⁵ His novel-like style and the rich resources for knowledge of the ancient world he cites make the book well worth reading.

One significant effect of the research into the Gospels, at the same time as Christianity is struggling over the nature of its message in the modern world in the context of renewed vitality in other world religions, is the role of Christ in salvation. Paul Knitter, in his landmark work *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Orbis, 1985, speaks of a Copernican revolution in theology, the possibility of a theocentric focus rather than Christocentric, basing this partially on the recognition that Jesus' message in the earliest Synoptics, his pre-Easter message, was theocentric rather than Christocentric. Thus he raises intriguing questions about the meaning and purpose of the progression in the theology of Jesus' disciples from a theocentric to a Christocentric focus.

Another significant book is one which explores the preexistence of Christ. Preexistence provided the basis for traditional Christology. Karl-Joseph Kuschel, in *Geboren vor aller Zeit? Der Streit um Christi Ursprung* (Born Before All Time? The Dispute Over Christ's Origin),²⁶ argues that conflicts over this existed in the New Testament, even in the material which takes this seriously, with which I would agree. Kuschel concludes that preexistence was not an important concept, even for Paul's own Christology.

What can we learn from this, and how does this affect our understanding of the role of Christ and Christology, and our contemporary proclamation?

²¹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus, The Life of A Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

²² Ibid., pp. xiii-xxvi.

²³ Ibid., p. 426.

²⁴ Ibid. p. xi.

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 28ff.

²⁶ Karl-Joseph Kuschel, *Geboren vor aller Zeit? Der Streit um Christi Ursprung*, München: Piper, 1990. To be published in English by Crossroad/Continuum in 1993 under the English title *Born Before All Time: The Dispute Over Christ's Origin*.

Authorship and Sources of the Gospels

Whereas the older approach to the Gospels was to think of them as the work of individuals, today at least two of them are commonly seen as related to early Christian communities.

The Gospel of Matthew is judged by many scholars to come from a religious community where there was a sense of equality (20:1-16). God gave all authority to Jesus (28:18) and Jesus gave authority to Peter (16:17-20) (and his successors ?), but all members were equal (20:1-16). Some gave up private property (19:16-30), were celibate (19:10-12), and all were called upon to commit themselves with singular devotion (6:19-34). There was a procedure for disciplining the brother who sinned (18:15-20). The cardinal aspects of Jewish piety were important: almsgiving, prayer and fasting (6:1-18). Scholars understand the Sermon on the Mount as representing the central discipline and way of life of this community (the material in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is scattered in various locations in Luke).

The Gospel of John is also seen as originating within a community. In fact the pronoun "we" appears several times within the Gospel, particularly in the Prologue and Epilogue. Raymond Brown's *Community of the Beloved Disciple* takes the reader through the history of the community as it struggles with Judaism as a Christian community initially Jewish, includes Samaritans and Gentiles, modifies its theological perspectives, and ultimately splits over issues described in I John.²⁷ The value of this "community" perspective on the Gospels is that it helps us to understand how they provide insight not only into individual faith but the life and struggles of a church, thus providing insight into contemporary church life.

Questions are beginning to be raised about the four source theory of the Synoptic Gospels origins (Mark as a narrative source; Q - a sayings source named from the German word for source, *Quelle*; M as Matthew's special source; L as Luke's special source). B.H. Streeter identified the sources with particular geographical locations. This resulted in:

	Mark -65 Rome	Q (Jesus' sayings)-50 Palestine
M (Special Matt. Source) Syria		L (Special Luke Source) Palestine
	Matthew -85 Antioch	Luke -80 Corinth
	(Mk+Q+M)	(Mk+Q+L)

The problem with the four source theory is that it assumes a great deal which does not always seem to be borne out when one examines the materials. For example, the material often assigned to Q (largely sayings material), when compared to the forms in which it exists in Matt. and Luke, seems as if it could not have come from the same source. One has only to examine the materials in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and the comparable Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49) to see that the materials which are in each Gospel have their peculiarities which are difficult to account for on the basis of the editorial work of the evangelist. It would seem more logical to assume that the tradition came to them in different forms. Regarding Matthew and Luke's use of Mark, it is apparent that Matthew and Luke must have used Mark differently (if both used it), and thus some have posited two editions of Mark, Matthew using one and Luke using the other. It can be argued with good evidence that Matthew used Mark, but can this be done with Luke? Where they have parallel accounts, Luke's account always has its own peculiarities (e.g. the Triumphal Entry and the Cleansing of the Temple) and Luke omits large sections of Markan material which would have supported his concept of Christ's universal mission (e.g. Mark 7-8 where Jesus takes his disciples to Gentile areas, called the "Great Omission"). Thus I would feel

²⁷. Raymond Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, NY: Paulist Press, 1979.

that the similarities of narrative material in Luke and Mark are a result of common elements within the early church's oral tradition, which Luke possesses in a form somewhat different than Mark. The similarities of sayings material between Matt. and Lk. (often assigned to Q) really are a result of common elements in the oral traditions which each Gospel has in its particular form. Thus Luke represents a line of tradition independent from that of Mark and Matt.. More than this, Luke also gives indications of a process of development which may make it, in its original form, the earliest Gospel (the Proto-Luke theory). Luke has natural beginning points at chpts. 1, 2, and 3. There are indications that it once existed without including the idea of the Virgin Birth. In 2:5 some MSS read "wife" or "betrothed wife" and it is difficult to understand how Joseph's betrothed could have accompanied him to Bethlehem for the census. Also, its companion volume, Acts, shows no knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem (70 C.E.), and no knowledge of the deaths of Peter and Paul (mid 60's C.E.). It argues that Christianity was never found offensive by the Romans, something that would make no sense after the deaths of Peter and Paul and the persecution of Christians under Nero (64 C.E.). Its view that Jerusalem is the home of the Christian church shows no recognition that Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E.. Thus the Gospel's date would be affected by the necessity to date Acts before these events. I would feel that the earliest form of the Gospel of Luke and Acts came into being to assist with Paul's defense at Rome. Luke was probably assembling this material while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea. The Gospel then went through later developments as it was applied to other uses (e.g. the addition of chapter 2 and then later the addition of chapter 1).

Interestingly enough, with some renewed confidence of the value of some of the earlier traditions contained in John (see John 21:24), we then have three independent lines of tradition in the four Gospels: the Markan/Matthaeian, the Lukan, and the Johannine. Besides this, Paul should gain more recognition as our earliest source of information about Jesus. The independence of these lines is very important in researching the historical Jesus.

Though Q has usually been described as a hypothetical source, sometimes understood to have been written and sometimes to have been oral, in recent years there has been interest among some biblical scholars in attempting to reconstruct it and to describe its historical context and the type of Christianity that it represented. Q is usually described as primarily a sayings source. The question then was why a segment of the early church would have been more interested in what Jesus said than in what he did. The discovery of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas in Egypt helped to support that there could have been such a document that was interested only in Jesus' sayings. Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew with its large collections of Jesus' sayings, especially the three chapter collection known as the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew's emphasis on Jesus sayings as "commandments" (28:20) and Jesus as teacher, further supported this.

What type of Christianity would have been interested primarily in Jesus' sayings? Some saw this in terms of Pharisaic Judaism, for the Gospel of Matthew seems to have been highly influenced by Pharisaic Judaism. Jesus was the true interpreter of the Law and of God. Some identified this with the Jewish Wisdom tradition which would have emphasized aphorisms and wise sayings. Others saw this in relationship to Gnosticism, especially with the model of the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas and the later Gnostic Gospels.

At the recent Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting extensive time was set apart for collaboration of those involved in Q research. The trend of this recent study is to see earliest, and therefore more original Christianity, as expressed in Q, and then later Christianity as having developed the significance of stories about Jesus, created a historical framework, and having given all of this redemptive significance. This recent Q research emphasizes that Jesus and his disciples were Galileans and not Judaeans and that in Galilee they came under the influence of Hellenistic movements much like the Cynics. Jesus then sounds somewhat like a Cynic sage with Hebrew prophetic overtones. Jesus' disciples saw themselves as agents of God's kingdom, wandered from town to town, practiced asceticism, and looked back to John the Baptist and Jesus as the heroes of their movement. They offered a type of resistance to the official truths,

standards, and virtues of their time as did the Cynics.²⁸ For those acquainted with the old largely 19th century liberal attempts to create a less theological and less apocalyptic Jesus, a teacher of morality, to which Albert Schweitzer's work (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*) called an end, this sounds strangely familiar.

Changing Attitudes about the Historical-Critical Method.

Walter Wink and Brevard Childs have been at the forefront of a movement that has recognized the limitations of historical-critical study. In Wink's landmark work on *The Bible In Human Transformation* he spoke of the "bankruptcy" of the historical-critical method.²⁹ He did not mean that this method which has been developing over the last two hundred years was of no value, but that by itself it is only a historical enterprise and does not nourish or transform the lives of individuals or Christian communities. For the sake of Christian faith, one cannot stop there. In many of my classes I now couple the historical-critical method with devotional and meditational interpretation to seek to balance the objectivity and scientific distancing from Scripture experienced characteristically through a merely historical approach. Two samples of such a method are included later in this paper.

Brevard Childs, in his work *The New Testament As Canon: An Introduction* argues for a canonical approach:³⁰

...the historical critical Introduction - whether in a liberal or conservative form is irrelevant - has not done justice in interpreting the New Testament in its function as authoritative, canonical literature of both an historical and a contemporary Christian community of faith and practice. A special dynamic issues from its canonical function which is not exhausted by either literary or historical analysis, but calls for a theological description of its shape and function. Crucial to the point is that the descriptive and hermeneutical task of interpretation cannot be held apart, as if to determine what a text meant and what it means could be neatly isolated.

Another way of stating the issue is to propose that what is needed is a new vision of the biblical text which does justice not only to the demands of a thoroughly post-Enlightenment age, but also to the confessional stance of the Christian faith for which the sacred scriptures provide a true and faithful vehicle for understanding the will of God. The theological issue turns on the Christian church's claim for the integrity of a special reading which interprets the Bible within an established theological context and toward a particular end, namely the discerning of the will of God, which is constitutive of the hermeneutical function of canon.³¹

This will be for many not only a way of allowing the New Testament to speak to the contemporary church, but a new way of looking at the New Testament. The books are seen not merely in their individuality, but in their being together. "By collecting and reordering of once independent writings into an authoritative corpus of scripture, a new dynamic was established which profoundly influenced the

²⁸. See such books as Leif E. Vaag, *Galilean Upstarts: Jesus First Followers According to Q*, Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994; Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. Mack even provides the text of Q, drawing upon recent scholarship, seeing Q¹ as the earliest stage of material, a collection of instructions on the sapiential or wisdom model; Q² as a document of judgment using apocalyptic and prophetic discourse, and Q³ as the final stage when material from Q¹ was incorporated into Q². For some seeing the apocalyptic sayings as later meant that Jesus was not apocalyptic, exactly the opposite of what Schweitzer had once said. As Mack says, "As for Christian origins, it suddenly became clear that the conventional scenario was deeply indebted to the apocalyptic hypothesis." Now within this revision of Christian origins the "apocalyptic imagination" was a secondary development in early Jesus circles. (p. 38)

²⁹. Walter Wink, *The Bible In Human Transformation*, Phila.: Fortress Press, 1973. See also his leader's guide in the use of his method: *Transforming Bible Study*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.

³⁰. Brevard Childs, *The New Testament As Canon: An Introduction*, Phila.: Fortress, 1985.

³¹. Childs, pp. 36-37

interpretation of the parts ..."³² The motivation of this construal of the books was to render "the tradition in such a way as for its message of the Gospel to be accessible to every succeeding generation of Christians." "Yet the canonical scriptures do not serve as a frozen deposit of tradition or doctrine, but a living vehicle through which the will of God is perceived. The hermeneutical task of interpreting scripture requires also an act of construal on the part of the reader. The interaction between text and reader comprises every true interpretation."³³

Another movement away from the historical-critical method, though incorporating its results, is a rebirth of literary criticism since the 1970's, well expressed in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode.³⁴ Their answer to the reasons for their approach is stated thus:

First of all, the Bible, considered as a book, achieves its effects by means no different from those generally employed by written language. This is true whatever our reasons for attributing value to it - as the report of God's action in history, as the founding text of a religion or religions, as a guide to ethics, as evidence about people and societies in the remote past, and so on. Indeed, literary analysis must come first, for unless we have a sound understanding of what the text is doing and saying, it will not be of much value in other respects. It has been said that the best reason for the serious study of the Bible - for learning how to read it well - is written across the history of Western culture: see what happens when people misread it, read it badly, or read it on false assumptions.

What has happened now is that the interpretation of the texts as they actually exist has been revalidated. This development has not been simple or single, and it has not been merely a reaction against the modern tradition of professional scholarship. It comes of a need, felt by clerical and secular students alike, to achieve a new accommodation with the Bible as it is, which is to say, as literature of high importance and power.³⁵

To glimpse the result of this approach I would like to quote the last paragraph of the treatment of Jonah:

The prayer sung in the belly of the great fish provides the key to the story's genre. What appears to be a supplication for help becomes a song of thanksgiving as it is sung by a man descending toward Sheol. When the song's piety becomes sickeningly sweet or unwittingly perceptive ("Salvation is of the Lord"), the prophet is vomited onto dry land just as he is about to hit the sea bottom. Such a scene is close to farce; since the story is also quite serious, however, I would argue that satire is a more appropriate designation of genre. There is no evidence of cultural contact between the writer and the classical satire that was probably evolving in other parts of the Mediterranean world at the time. But it does seem to give the modern reader the most useful handle on the story. In satire we find incongruous, distorted events; a mixture of literary genres; an image of violence at the heart of the story; journeys as typical settings; and relatively little emphasis on plot or character development. The author of Jonah has skillfully used irony in order to distance us from the hero while also keeping the story on its narrow path between invective and farce.³⁶

A type of literary criticism, developed in the last ten years in application to the Gospels, is *narrative criticism*.³⁷ Rather than dealing with the process by which the Gospels were composed (the oral forms and sources which were redacted by the writers), it focuses on the finished form of the Gospels and how

³². Childs, p. 38

³³. Childs, p. 40

³⁴. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard U. Press, 1987.

³⁵. Ibid., pp. 2 and 4.

³⁶. Ibid., p. 242.

³⁷. See Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* GBS, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. A good example of this is Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2nd ed., Phila.: Fortress Press, 1988.

they function as literary compositions with their implied authors and recipients. Though historical concerns are not completely rejected, it is felt that the Gospels stand on their own as literary products. The way each Gospel is composed implies an author with certain intent and readers who are addressed, whatever their relationship to historical figures or circumstances. The text has a poetic function which creates meaning and can only be fully understood when received and experienced. This has the merit of calling those who hear and read to receive the text without getting lost in historical analysis and takes the Gospels seriously as literary compositions, rather than sources which someone pieced together.

The difficulty of literary criticism is that it may become only literary criticism. It reminds me of Bultmann's pessimism about the possibility of historical knowledge, with the consequence that he located the value of the text in its being the place where God meets us to deliver us to authentic existence (using the paradigm of existentialist philosophy). Whatever the difficulties of historical investigation, we can never desert a concern for the persons, events, and historical context to which the text refers.

Hermeneutical Approaches

I would like to deal with the issue of hermeneutics, differing approaches to interpretation and what this means for our understanding and use of Scripture.

This is touched on at the end of the section "An Approach to Scripture As Authority". Here are mentioned several books of recent significance: Robert Schreier's *Constructing Local Theologies*, Robert M. Brown's *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes*, and Letty Russell's *Changing Contexts of Our Faith*. What all of these works have in common is the recognition of the influence of context on interpretation. This recognition is nothing new. The Apostle Paul said:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews ... To those outside the law I became as one outside the law - not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ - that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak. that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.³⁸

It is important to recognize that this was not purely an accommodation to the difficulties of understanding between cultures, but an attempt to allow the Gospel to address each culture, and those who lived within it, on their own terms. That the "weak" are also included means that Paul considered in his style of presentation not only cultural differences, but those "with limited understanding about the full implications of the Gospel," which is what he meant by the "weak." The very variety embodied within the New Testament testifies to this multi-contextual expressing of the Gospel, though few were as self-conscious about this as Paul.

Contextualization should then be expected to occur in every context where it has permission, and surreptitiously in those contexts where it does not. In our day the historical understanding of Scripture has helped to facilitate this by making us aware of Scripture's contexts and ours, though in some sense contextualization is always a "reading into" Scripture. The primary question is whether the reading into, and selection of certain Scripture passages over others, is drawing upon the richness of the text and what it symbolizes or whether it is the introduction of something completely foreign into the text. However, the introduction of something foreign into the text is nothing new either. It has been happening since the early church. One only has to examine Matthew's handling of Jesus' sayings compared to the way these sayings appear in Luke. The Beatitudes social concern in Luke 6 is spiritualized in Matt. 5, and the petition for the Kingdom in the Luke 11 version of the Lord's Prayer is explained by the synonymous parallelism "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven". The prophetic voice has disappeared from Jesus' sayings as they were used in Matthew towards the end of the first century.³⁹

³⁸. I Cor. 9:20-23.

³⁹. Granted, we can't be sure of the forms in which the sayings came to the Matthaean community nor can we be absolutely sure that Luke's form of similar sayings is closer to the original intent, which is what is presumed here.

What this leads to is the recognition that the hermeneutic which we take to Scripture becomes an important element in its interpretation and that the variety of hermeneutics which have arisen today should not surprise us, but enrich us.

I usually tell students that they should not graduate from seminary without familiarizing themselves, in some detail, with at least one other world religion. They must have something to see their perspectives "over against" to understand them and to have their own perspectives qualified. I think that this is also true of hermeneutics. We need the recognition that we come to Scripture with our biases, which it is important to identify for ourselves, and then we need to explore several other approaches to appreciate the value and biases of our own, and to broaden our understanding of what Scripture can mean -- and even "what in Scripture is injurious to your health".⁴⁰

Most of us are acquainted with the "pietistic" interpretation of Scripture which focused on individual salvation. Many today have come to accept that hermeneutic which now sees in the Bible the basis for social action. We have gone through the period of the existentialist hermeneutic, largely based in the later or earlier philosophy of Heidegger (Bultmann for example), we have become conscious of black theology and hermeneutic and the feminine hermeneutic. Liberation theology, both in such forms as the works of Moltmann and the Latin American theologians, has made us aware of the varieties of liberation hermeneutic.⁴¹ For some time we have been aware of a psychological hermeneutic, particularly among those who follow the paradigm of Carl Jung. John Sanford's works are an important source of this, but it is interesting to look at Jung's own interpretation of the Biblical materials in his *Answer to Job*.⁴²

Recently I had been involved in a study on AIDS in the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches. Within our study group we had persons from the Metropolitan Community Church, a church ministering especially to the homosexual community, and one person who was living with AIDS. It is very clear that there is also a homosexual hermeneutic and a hermeneutic for those communities struggling with AIDS.

What has come out of the theological hermeneutic of the church,⁴³ before the development of historical criticism and then later the historical-critical hermeneutic, has been the feeling that somehow the right interpretations could be arrived at and then protected from error when attained. When one observes the variety of theological traditions and the variety of interpretation in commentaries espousing the historical-critical method, it becomes clear that such never happened, except as various schools and churches held to the view that they had the correct understanding. It is true, however, that historical studies and discoveries have contributed greatly to our understanding of Scripture, though not drawing scholars into a consensus.

What should come out of the recognition of many hermeneutics and many answers in our day is a recognition that although truth is embodied in Scripture, we may profit more from the struggle for truth and the journey towards truth than thinking we have arrived at our goal. What this means is that since understanding correctly is not the attainable goal in any absolute sense, we are freed to explore Scripture

⁴⁰. A phrase used by Letty Russell in a conversation in a Faith and Order Commission, NCCC, meeting; a phrase which I have come to value. This presumes the same sort of selective hermeneutic which Jesus used when he chose some perspectives and rejected others in the Old Testament, or the selectivity which the Gospel writers used as they chose what to include in their Gospels from the Jesus tradition.

⁴¹. I want to call attention to Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Phila.: Westminster Press, 1985; the works of Phyllis Trible, especially *Texts of Terror*, Phila.: Fortress, 1984, Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, Crossroad, 1983. Robert M. Brown's *Unexpected News* is helpful for the third world perspective. One can pick up the various works of black or liberation theologians to appreciate their perspective. Daniel Migliore, in *Called To Freedom*, Phil.: Westminster, 1980, has a helpful chapter on "Scripture As Liberating Word". A study of African American biblical interpretation is Cape Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

⁴². See John Sanford, *The Kingdom Within: The Inner Meaning of Jesus' Sayings*, NY: Paulist Press, 1970; also Carl G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, transl. by R.F.C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1973, see especially pp. 73ff.

⁴³. Though there was a historical critique of sorts in the early church and there were the critical methods of rhetorics in the ancient world, by and large the critical principles used before the 18th century were theological.

and do not need always to understand correctly. Zinzendorf within the Moravian tradition had the helpful view that matters of salvation were clear in Scripture and available to all, while there were those matters that required knowledge and the expert. Here there were differences of opinion, though solutions to understanding might be arrived at. Then there were the "mysteries", materials and ideas which were not treated in Scripture in such a way to have adequate definition. The "mysteries" one might interpret privately, but should not publically push one's interpretations. Also, the essence of Scripture was not conceptual, but the person of the Saviour; and ultimately Scripture was not a place to gain correct ideas, but the sacristry in which to meet the Saviour.⁴⁴

This also means that Scripture belongs to the non-expert as well as the expert. The problem with historical-critical study is that it became another elitism, taking Scripture away from the people in the name of scholarship. Certainly the people will misunderstand, but so do the scholars. This is not saying that there is not an important place for scholarship, but it must not take the Bible out of the lives of the people. Letty Russell's book *Changing Contexts of Our Faith* includes a section on Bible study for laity. Walter Wink has done much to provide a method which includes, but goes beyond, historical criticism. Amazing things have happened in the Latin American base communities as people with a limited education have studied Scripture.

Lastly, this means that if we do not hear the varieties of understanding raised by the many hermeneutics used with Scripture, our vision of Scripture's possibilities is too narrow, and we must be careful that our narrowness does not become a means of oppression.

II AN APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE AS AUTHORITY

It is now being said by some that the traditional authority of Scripture has collapsed. This is an overstatement, but well expresses the consequences of historical study which now lead us to explore new models for Scripture's authority. There is an excellent treatment of this by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza in "The Crisis of Scriptural Authority."⁴⁵

To change the paradigm of our approach to Scripture is difficult because of the weight of our traditions and our personal needs for an authoritative and clear revelation, besides the integration of our paradigm with our way of doing things. To change our paradigm is also threatening because those whom we serve and the religious communities to which we are responsible frequently hold different paradigms.⁴⁶

⁴⁴. For a discussion of Zinzendorf's understanding of Scripture see chapter on "Scripture" in my unpublished manuscript, "A Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf."

⁴⁵. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Crisis of Scriptural Authority," *Interpretation*, Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary, October 1990, Vol, XLIV, No. 4, p. 353.

⁴⁶. The Scripture is our primal authority and we believe that God has participated in its origin, though we may have difficulty in agreeing as to the nature of its "in-spiration". Though the scholar or clergyperson may find themselves in agreement with what is being said here, it has to be recognized that in some contexts the authority of the "BOOK" is crucial. This may be experienced in dealing with other religions which also claim a written revelation or in contexts within the United States affected by fundamentalism or biblical literalism. Though such perspectives are difficult to change, as are all our valued perspectives, it may be helpful to use an "incarnational" approach to the Bible, seeing it after the analogy of the "Word" in John 1:1-18 which became incarnate in an historical form. Thus God chooses to use human, historical, culturally conditioned expression as a way of communicating to peoples in the concrete realities of their context. One may also speak of the Canon, and not just the text of books, as inspired. If God participated in the development of the Canon, then God intended individual books and their teachings to have a different meaning in relationship to other books than they would have individually. Thus, for example, the message of Revelation and of the Pastorals must be seen in relationship to other perspectives. Revelation then adds an emphasis within the canon, but its canonical message is different from its message if it stood alone. The theology behind the selection and arrangement of the biblical books is somewhat difficult to attain because it is more implied than expressed. In dealing with Revelation, one must ask why it is placed last and why the Gospels are placed first within the New Testament. One must also explore its difficulty in being included within the Canon. The meaning of the Old Testament must be explored within the early church's struggle over its meaning and inclusion. In dealing with the formation of the Canon it may

The Christian faith is beset by the problems inherent in being a historical religion. It claims *eternal* truths and values, yet affirms its *historical* nature by confessing a history which became embodied in Holy Scriptures (salvation history from Abraham to Christ, the life of Christ, and the history of the Spirit in the early church). The church's confession of history is complicated by the variety of responses and traditions which arose out of that history so that the church's experience with variety and its inclusion within the canon ultimately made it impossible to identify eternal truth and values with any singular expression of it. *The development of historical criticism has reconfronted the church with the variety it originally embraced in the development of the canon.*

The church in its on-going proclamation and application of its truth and values then has to contend not only with the variety in its present context, but the variety of its tradition. It needs then to find some way of sorting out and affirming that which is eternal, formulating faith statements in a variety of contemporary contexts, and working on ethical issues complicated by lack of unambiguous guidance from its tradition.

One solution to the sorting out of the eternal from the contingent is to listen seriously to what the Bible says about God as "person". Person transcends all actions and expressions and remains a constant entity behind one's experience of him/her. Consistency is to be found in the person experienced and in the covenants and commitments which the person promises. Changing historical contexts do not change the presence and commitments of the person. Thus God enters into relationship within the framework of covenants with Abraham and Moses and redefines and clarifies the nature of relationship/covenant in Christ. The name "Yahweh", given in the Exodus experience, emphasizes God's consistent presence ("I am" or "I will be") and the name revealed in the New Testament ("Abba", "Father") emphasizes the caring and dependable nature of God's relationship. The giving of the Spirit clarifies that the relationship with God is not distant (a relationship with a God "up there"), but present in human experience. The first and second commandments of the Decalogue then affirm the uniqueness of God and that God must be recognized to transcend all images, attempts to explain and describe. Only God is God.

In the practical process of formulating faith and ethical decisions, one needs to find a way of proceeding. It seems to me that there are two primary foci that are helpful, and another that becomes especially important as the church relates to the world in which it lives and bears witness. The first is to analyze the dialogical relationship of Spirit (the active presence of God) and tradition (the deposits from previous experience of God and reflection upon such experience). The second is to examine creation (or "general revelation") as a source of knowledge. Creation has long been felt to disclose information supportive of and supplementary to "special revelation". As tradition is in a dialogical relationship with Spirit, so the religious traditions about creation need to be in dialogue with new scientific studies, which also disclose the nature of creation, and with God as God leads us to understand creation in the light of this. The third is to be in dialogue with other religious traditions in which God has evidently also been active. Here it is important to remember that Eastern and Western religious traditions may approach spiritual reality from differing perspectives, so one should not too quickly say God has not been active within them because they do not use our perspective.

be helpful to see Christ as the center to which the canonical literature is drawn, and thus the Gospels are placed at the center in the total Canon.

Though it is important to be sensitive to those who need an authority in a "book", it is important to recognize the significant role of historical criticism in the formation of contemporarily relevant theological positions. Women, particularly, have much at stake in the critical appraisal of the patriarchal bias of many of the biblical materials.

An interesting treatment of the struggle over inerrancy in American Evangelicalism is given in Fuller Seminary's new publication *In Trust: "Fuller's Battle for the Bible: Bidding Farewell to Inerrancy,"* by George Marsden, adapted from the final chapter of his *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* published in 1987. See *In Trust*, Easter 1989, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 8-15.

Spirit and Tradition

The role of the Spirit, affirmed in most of the New Testament traditions, has implications that are often neglected. Usually the Spirit is relegated to the role of inspirer and interpreter of tradition already established -- or the creative impulse of early Christianity which is thought not to be active in the same way since the days of the apostles or the early councils. In this way all authority is always placed within the tradition. On the other hand, if taken seriously, the Spirit means that things are never settled and the church is continuously engaged in rethinking in the light of God's engagement with the present age. One must respect the tradition, but cannot idolize it in any form. *Only God is God and God keeps on being God by not abdicating to the tradition.*

The biblical tradition may be seen as follows: The divergent traditions of Judaism which bear witness to God and God's relationship to life are converged, clarified and evaluated in terms of a unique action of God in history in Christ. However, this self-disclosure of God is itself rendered ambiguous and multiform by the humanly and culturally-conditioned perceptions of those who witnessed it, bore witness, and transmitted this witness. *Though God in Christ is an unambiguous reality, its perception is not.* It was then left to the church, under the guidance of the ongoing activity of God (the Spirit), to do two things:

- 1) to clarify the misconceptions by distinguishing, in the light of ongoing history, where the God-in-Christ-event had not been adequately understood or had been actually misunderstood in the light of cultural and religious presuppositions;
- 2) to be open to the speaking of God to newly developing issues and circumstances not adequately anticipated or treated in the tradition.

In the light of both, the first century Christians and churches that produced the New Testament literature reflected a variety of views, while seeking to remain faithful to God's intention, and they struggled with the diversity both within and between Christian communities.

Both the Johannine and Pauline traditions affirm the following:

- 1) *The role of the Spirit must be recognized.* One cannot make the error of Pharisaic Judaism in tying God's activity and revelation to the written word, the Law. (I Cor. 14, John 16:12-15)
- 2) *One must stand within the available tradition of the Christ event, recognizing Jesus as Lord and listening to what he taught.* There seems to be some recognition that the tradition on Jesus himself was varied so that some "critical" decisions were probably necessary to know what Jesus wished, taught and did (e.g. the handling of the tradition about Jesus in the Gospels). The Old Testament seems to have been largely seen as prophesying the action of God in Christ and the witness of the early church and not to have been used as witness independent of or parallel to the Christ event. (for example I Peter 1:10ff, II Cor. 3:12ff. II Tim. 3:16-17 is an exception) In some cases Christ, or the Spirit of Christ, was seen as operative in the Old Testament history (similar to the way Jews viewed personified "Wisdom"). To stand within the Christ event was then also to stand within the streams of Old Testament history and their fulfillment.
- 3) *A quality of life (particularly "love") should be manifested* if one claimed one was expressing knowledge of God. (I Cor. 13, I John 4:7ff)
- 4) *Community discernment of perceptions of God's will and truth were important.* (I Cor. 14:26ff)
- 5) Especially in the authentic Pauline materials there is *a recognition of the limited nature of all human perception and the ego-centered use of knowledge* (note particularly I Cor. 8:1-3 and I Cor. 13).

It is true that from the later first century on the developing church in various ways becomes sociologically and theologically less tolerant, but this must be understood as related to its internal and external struggles. One must listen to its solutions without surrender of the freedom to be faithful to both tradition and Spirit.

If the Christian of today opts to stand within tradition and yet be responsible to God's contemporary action (the Spirit), one is in the uncertain situation of driving a road with many markers, but with the destination

unclear. The analogy of a road takes seriously the long span of history through which the church has lived. The biblical analogy of the church as the Temple inhabited by the Spirit was appropriate when the church was seen not so much in terms of extended history. There is no other foundation than Christ, but one does not stand still on the foundation. Life flows out as a ribbon or highway through varied landscapes, and one must follow. One may protest that if the future is opened to the Spirit there are no absolutes, but that is not true. There is the absolute of God Godself, expressed in the Christ-event and active in on-going history. *In this way God remains God and all witness and interpretation remains just that.* The first two commandments have been taken seriously. The answers formulated by the church(es) over the centuries must be listened to seriously, but not taken ultimately. In the best sense, the traditions always lead us beyond themselves to the God who is beyond them.

Creation and Science

In the history of Christianity the doctrine of creation has played a significant role. This has been used to explore creation's predicament, and its intention which is to be restored by God's saving action. Up to the development of modern science, creation has been interpreted primarily mythologically, expressing experienced phenomena and the projections of the human psyche. Views on creation were varied, witness the diverse Old Testament creation accounts -- especially the two in Genesis 1-3. There are also several New Testament creation accounts (e.g. John 1:1-18, Col. 1: 15-20, and Hebrews 1-2) which are reinterpretations of Old Testament and Intertestamental traditions. It is very important for Christians to reflect on what it means that the New Testament should bring Christ into its creation stories. This would indicate that the meaning of creation is not to be found in its state or condition, but in the "salvation/Christ event", for the Saviour is the Creator. Thus the true being of creation becomes eschatological as does salvation: only in the end will we see what it shall be in Christ, as indicated in a "re-creation" story in Romans 8:18ff. *It would seem that as God is continuously interpreted by the Spirit, so creation should be by the discoveries of science, God's continuing revelations about creation and the meaning of the Christ-event for creation.* Thus our myths and descriptions of creation should continuously be changing so as to contribute to our understanding of God's intention for creation and creation's evolution and devolution. Our perception of what is so "by nature" then cannot be determined merely by the ancient myths which in themselves bear no more uniform witness than other biblical traditions.

It is also intriguing to speculate about the relationship of history and development to creation. The natural world changes. History brings new conditions into being and the human environment developmentally "creates" persons and societies in certain directions. Though history and developmental processes produce what may be regarded as neutral, good or evil from value perspectives, at what point does "what has developed" become part of our understanding as to what exists "by nature" or by "the continuing activity of God." In application to the individual, to what extent is introjected culture and life experience part of the nature of the person and to what extent can that "nature" be modified or changed if that is deemed important. With this in mind, "creation" may not be the same for everyone.

There are several valuable contemporary reformulations of a Christian perspective on creation. One is the "creation spirituality" advocated by Matthew Fox which he finds expressed in the 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart.⁴⁷ Another is the work of the monk Thomas Berry, recently reviewed in *Newsweek*. Berry argues that the sacred texts of world religions are the wrong place to discover what God thinks about nature. The universe itself is God's "primary revelation," telling the story of its evolution and providing the context of the understanding of the place of humanity in creation. In a volume published by the Sierra Club, *The Dream of the Earth*, Berry writes, "The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we all belong. We bear the universe in our being even as the universe bears us in its being." Evolution is spiritual as well as material. "From its beginning in the galactic system to its earthly expression in human consciousness, the universe carries within itself a psychic as well as a physical

⁴⁷ Fox, Matthew, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1980; *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Bear and Company, 1983; *Western Spirituality, Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes*, Bear and Company, 1981; *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Harper, 1988

dimension. Otherwise, human consciousness emerges out of nowhere and finds no real place in the cosmic story." Thus the cosmos is not fixed, but "self-transcending."

Berry believes that a global age of environmental consciousness is aborning, which requires a new myth of cosmic origins to give it cultural cohesion. His next goal is to elaborate "the new story of the universe," in such a way that it will provide an empirically based and religiously inspiring creation story which people of every and no religion can recognize and accept. In this story, the evolving cosmos is teacher: its destiny is our destiny, its values our values as the consciousness of the earth.⁴⁸

There is no desire either to depreciate the insights of ancient myth or to lay claim to false objectivity on the part of modern science or ecological philosophy/theology. It is merely to affirm that our understanding of creation, from which we might formulate positions on issues, is constantly in process and that it is legitimate that this be so.

Viewed this way, the dialectic of Spirit and tradition, and that of modern science and the creation myths, provide two foci from which to approach the church's concerns in ways responsible to the past, yet open and committed to God's disclosures in history's continually unfolding process.

Christian Faith and Other Religions

We are used to thinking of a historical continuity between Christianity and Judaism, though the meaning of this has been highly debated.⁴⁹ If there is this historical continuity from Judaism to Christianity, can there be other continuities than historical between Christianity and other ancient religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and can there be continuities between Christianity and Islam which started later. Is the only continuity one of historical connection, or can there be a continuity through the common spiritual reality which is coming to expression in various ways.

The recognition of such continuities ought not deny what Christians believe is the uniqueness of God's action in Christ, but Christ's uniqueness can be defined in such a way as not to be exclusive. Even Paul in Rom. 3:21-26, here in reference to Judaism, says that God sets forth publically in Christ what God had been previously doing.

Because of the resurgence of other world religions and their entrance into the American scene, besides honest responsibility to the Truth, Christians need to find ways of relating and should find ways to dialogue, which means both sharing their Gospel and learning from others. This then becomes another source of "truth."

⁴⁸. Kenneth Woodward, "A New Story of Creation", *Newsweek*, NY: Newsweek Inc., June 5, 1989, pp. 70-72. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, 1988. An American Monk, Berry seems to have expanded upon the cosmic philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin.

⁴⁹. Does Judaism continue its own legitimate existence as a people covenanted with God or has it lost this relationship and now must come to God only through Christ? This can variously be argued from the New Testament. The perspective of the Johannine community, expressed in the Gospel, forged in extreme conflict with Judaism, affirms that there is no way but through Christ and that "Jews" who reject Christ are opposed to God. Paul's treatment of this issue in Rom. 9-11 is interesting, but indicates that Israel will be saved only as it responds to the Gospel, though they are the natural olive tree into which the Gentiles were grafted. Paul argues for the continuity of the church with Israel, but not the separate existence of Israel as a covenant people. This continuity was also recognized by the early church's inclusion of the Old Testament within the Christian canon, though the role of the Old Testament and its creator God was much debated in Christian Gnosticism. For me the solution to the proper Christian attitude towards Israel will come not from debating the New Testament texts which reflect the ancient struggle between Christians and Jews, as is also true of Jewish literature, but in exploring the full meaning of the Gospel and the theocentric focus of Jesus in Mark and Luke along with Paul's attempt to maintain his monotheism (yet the significance of Christ) in such places as I Cor. 1 and 15. There God is the *source* of all and the *end* to which all returns. (e.g. I Cor. 1:30 and I Cor. 15:28) Christ is the *means* in the Messianic Age which precedes the end.

Hans Kung in his *Theology for the Third Millennium* well expresses this at the end of his chapter on "Is There One True Religion?":

For me as a believer, for us as a community of faith, Christianity, so far as it attests to God in Christ, is certainly the true religion. But no religion has the whole truth, only God alone has the whole truth - Lessing was right about that. Only God himself - as we have always mentioned - is the truth.

And for that reason one final point here: Christians cannot claim to comprehend him, the incomprehensible One, to have grasped him, the unsearchable One. Even in Christian faith, according to Paul, we recognize the truth itself, which is God, only as in a mirror, in puzzling outlines, fragmentarily, in certain aspects, always dependent upon our quite specific standpoint and place in time. Yes, Christianity too is "in via," on the way: *Ecclesia peregrinans, homines viatores*. And we are not on the way alone, but with millions upon millions of other human beings from every possible religion and denomination, who are going their own way, but with whom the longer we travel together the more we will be in a process of communication

As far as the future goes, only one thing is certain: At the end both of human life and the course of the world Buddhism and Hinduism will no longer be there, nor will Islam nor Judaism. Indeed, in the end Christianity will not be there either. In the end no religion will be left standing, but the one Inexpressible, to whom all religions are oriented, whom Christians will only then completely recognize ... the truth face to face. And in the end there will no longer be standing between the religions a figure that separates them, no more prophet or enlightened one, not Muhammad and not the Buddha. Indeed even Christ Jesus, whom Christians believe in, will no longer stand here as a figure of separation. But he, to whom, Paul says, all powers (including death) are subjected, "subjects himself, then, to God" so that God himself (ho theos) - or however he may be called in the East - may truly be not just in all things but "everything to everyone" (I Cor. 15:28).⁵⁰

The three dialectics mentioned above occur always within a *context* which shapes concerns and becomes the situation to which God would address a word. This has been significantly explored on a technical level in Robert Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies* and in a more popular vein in such books as Robert McAfee Brown's *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* and Letty Russell's *Changing Contexts of Our Faith*.⁵¹ Though some of these dialectics will happen on the individual level, they should also happen in relationship to community. Sometimes individuals will have truth, functioning prophetically, but at other times shared insight and discernment brings one closer to Truth. Moreover, the community holds one to responsibility. Here both Christian and other communities are meant, such as those of science and other religions.

Besides the questions of continuity between Christian truth and other religions, there is the issue of a larger continuity: the *continuity in all Truth* within all of the dialectics which occur in the search for Truth. Continuity may be viewed in several ways. Some see continuity as a matter of discovering some truths and then adding others in a system which never denies what has been previously understood. Religion has often been guilty of this. However, in religion as well as science it seems clear that the discovery of new insight may disprove old assumptions about Truth. I would like to speak of *continuity in the mystery of Truth, in the mystery of Being and the Transcendent, in the mystery of God and cosmos*, as disclosed and discovered.

⁵⁰. Hans Kung, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, transl. by Peter Heinegg, NY: Doubleday, 1988, pp. 254-256.

⁵¹. Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis, 1985. Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes*, Westminster Press, 1985. Letty Russell, ed., *Changing Contexts of Our Faith*, Fortress Press, 1985.

The Johannine Prologue, 1:1-18, and John 16:12-15 seem to support this even though the Johannine community itself could not see Truth as broadly as implied here. In the Prologue the *Word*, described in the language of Jewish Wisdom, the personified extension of God, was with God before creation, God's agent in creation, and the bringer of God's life and light throughout history, ultimately "tabernacling" in the person of Jesus. In John 16:12ff Jesus indicates that he could not speak all truth when with his disciples. The Spirit, regarded by the Johannine community as its "teacher", will guide into all truth, giving expression to what is Jesus' reality who gives expression to the Father's reality. In the language of the Johannine community this is discovered by "abiding" in the One who bears the reality.

The process described above might look something like a triangle, each corner being significant, with a two-fold inner operative reality and dynamic, perceived and disclosed within *contexts*:

JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN SALVATION TRADITION

(Scripture, the Christ-event,
Churchly, theological traditions)

THE TRANSCENDENT DIMENSION - SPIRIT

(especially the present action and person of God)

CREATION/COSMOS/HUMAN EXISTENCE

CREATION TRADITIONS AND SCIENCE

OTHER RELIGIONS

What is expressed here is part of the emergence of a new paradigm for Christian theology. The emergence of a "postmodern paradigm" is extensively discussed in Hans Kung's *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, necessary reading for those who wish to pursue this issue further.⁵² He discusses some of the same issues from his own perspective, helpfully providing a model in the mapping of paradigm changes in science, Christianity and other religions, together with a discussion of the nature and difficulties of paradigm change. That a new paradigm must emerge seems clear to the writer of this paper.

III A CASE STUDY: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SIN

If one takes seriously the impact of the Jewish perspective on earliest Christianity, interesting questions are raised for our attempts to understand the meaning of the form of the early church's message for today. If one takes seriously the NT role of the Spirit as the active presence of God leading the church to the application and clarification of old truth and the discovery of new, then the rethinking of the first century form of the Gospel becomes imperative. The idea of "sin" in early Christianity provides such an opportunity.

"Sin" portrays a certain understanding of human existence. Though there has been a strong emphasis on "sin" in the Judaeo-Christian tradition (and hence in much of Western thought), the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and much of modern psychology have raised questions about the legitimacy of this emphasis. Yet the treatment of "sin" in the Judaeo-Christian tradition does represent part of the human experience of existence and therefore needs to be adequately heard as well as qualified by new insight into the nature of life. In doing this one always encounters the issue of the authority of biblical views.

⁵². Hans Kung, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, transl. by Peter Heinegg, NY: Doubleday, 1988.

Thus it is helpful to adequately probe the biblical materials themselves for variety of view and interpretation.

In the biblical interpretation of sin there are several dimensions:

- Sin describes the problem that one has with oneself (one struggles with oneself and is not able to do what one intends)
- Sin also enters into the nature of one's relationship with others, relating to failure in relationship and harm of others. There are communal aspects to sin as well as interpersonal.
- Sin describes failures or rebellion in one's relationship with God. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition not only is the relationship with God affected by one's relationship with oneself and others, but all life and actions are in God's presence. Moreover rejection of God is the primary Sin and the source of all others.

The understanding of sin in Intertestamental Judaism, which is the background of earliest Christianity, is decidedly affected by Post-Exilic developments and particularly developments which occur within the two centuries just prior to the origin of Christianity. Though the Law and the Prophets is Judaism's primary sacred text, the Old Testament materials are frequently understood in new or expanded ways.

First there is the mythology of the Fall of humankind. Adam(man) and Eve(mother of the living) whose "original sin" was to seek the knowledge of good and evil so that they might be "like God". Thus was sin introduced into the world. Jewish thought did not see the descendants of Adam as guilty for Adam's sin (a view of later Christian theology), but that Adam's sin introduced sin into the world. All now sinned, but they sinned their own sins so that in II Esdras 7:48 ff one finds the lament "O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants." This is very much like Rom 5:12, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned..." Jewish thought also speculated about the distortions introduced into human nature and existence by the Fall.

It is interesting to note that there is no story of the Fall in the Genesis 1 creation narrative. It is difficult to know how much this was perceived in Judaism. Philo of Alexandria does identify Gen. 1 as the story of the creation of the heavenly Man, while Gen. 2 is the story of earthly Man. Psalm 8, which is a Midrash (commentary) on Genesis 1, does not include any inkling of the Fall. The Midrash in John 1:1-18 also does not use the Fall to describe the human predicament, but rather draws upon the themes of light and darkness inherent in Genesis 1. There is between Gen. 1 and Gen. 2-3 a deep chasm in their understanding of the role of humanity in the world. Both describe humans as created to care for the world, but the similarity stops there. In Gen. 1 "Man" is created male and female in the image of God ... woman is not an afterthought. In Genesis 2 woman is created from man, the primary creation. She is created after the animals ... and upon her rests the primary responsibility for the Fall.. Also, whereas in Gen. 1 "Man" is created to represent God in the world as an ancient king placed an image of himself in a city to represent his authority and is to have dominion, Gen. 2-3 describes a Man and Woman created for dependency, punished because they sought maturity, i.e. to know good and evil. The implications of Gen. 2-3 have done great disservice to humanity, frequently interpreted in antifeminine directions, such as in I Timothy 2: 13-15. Genesis 2-3 needs careful examination so that we might be aware of its value and distortions.

Besides the Fall of humanity, there was understood to have been a Fall of angelic beings, based on the story in Gen. 6 of the Fall of angels. The Genesis account was much expanded in later Jewish mythology, particularly Apocalyptic, and is reflected several places in the New Testament (I Cor. 11:10, I Peter 3:19-20). The story of the Fall of Satan in Rev. 12 is also a part of this tradition, as is the emphasis on demons as sources of human suffering in the Gospels. Then there were neutral powers in the cosmos which were frequently ignorant of God's purposes (e.g. I Cor. 2:6ff). Consequently, the cosmos was subjected to futility, according to Paul, by God who subjected it in hope (Rom. 8:20). To understand the world in this way meant that when one dealt with sin one was dealing with more than how to handle one's own impulses and actions. If one keeps in mind Carl Jung's view that mythology about cosmic forces is in some sense a projection of the psyche, one has the interesting possibility of exploring the functioning and healing of the psyche in these views. For early Christianity Christ became the integrator of the cosmos

(e.g. Phil. 2:5ff and Col. 1:15ff), while for Jung Christ is the archetype of the Self, the interior dynamic for integrating the psyche.

While the Hellenistic world frequently dealt with moral awareness in terms of "conscience", an inner awareness of right and wrong (such as in the inner "logos"[reason] of Stoicism), Judaism by and large dealt with it in terms of covenants and covenantal conditions provided by God. Post-Exilic Judaism moved away from a religion and morality related to inner experience to one rooted in traditions and the Mosaic Law. Thus sin primarily became the breaking of God's Law. Judaism then developed an extensive system for atoning for sin intentional and unintentional, ceremonial and moral. Repentance was important. Sacrifices should be offered. If there were offenses to others restitution should be made. The Day of Atonement was particularly important in atoning for intentional sin as was one's own death. Everything from mistakes in the Temple Liturgy to serious moral offenses needed atonement. Though there are examples of Rabbis who had a strong inner sense of sin, this approach to sin enabled one to deal with sin in terms of what one did and did not do as required by the Law. Thus Paul in Phil. 3:6 describes himself as a Pharisee "as to righteousness under the Law blameless".

Judaism's deep concern for sin was born out of her confidence in God's promise of deliverance and the tragedies of her history, producing the conclusion that if she were only more pure and righteous history would be different and God's punishments would cease. Yet the legalistic approach which she chose enabled her to avoid the serious psychological consequences which would have come with applying her awareness of sinfulness to her own internal life. The external objectivity of the Law kept guilt from being psychologically distorted, though some of the developments in Jewish interpretation of morality, particularly as regards sexuality, the "lustful glance", may be seen as attempts to control difficult aspects of the psyche. Many scholars see Romans 7 as the consequence of Paul's interiorization of morality under the impact of the moral teachings of Jesus, representing his Post-Jewish understanding of sin. Then sin could no longer be defined in terms of external obedience to the Law. When Paul began to deal with his inner life he found himself "captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members." He was led to exclaim "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Paul then begins to deal with an "inner Law", "conscience", as a way of discussing moral responsibility in the Gentile world (Rom. 1-3).

In the light of Genesis 2-3 Judaism also interpreted death's entrance into human existence and the harshness of life as due to sin and Apocalyptic Judaism, with its dualism, came to understand flesh itself as sinful.

While Jews saw sin as the primary problem of human existence, this was not so in the Greco-Roman world. Though Greco-Roman religion frequently provided for cleansings and called to moral responsibility, the basic life issues for the Greco-Roman were death and the power of Fate/Fortune. One has only to examine the Mystery religions to discover that the overcoming of death is a central theme, and such a work as the *Metamorphoses* of Lucius Apuleius well describes escaping blind Fortune and the havoc she wreaks. The priest of Isis says to Lucius:

But nonetheless Fortune in her blindness, by the very enormity of the ordeals to which she subjected thee, succeeded only in bringing thee to thy present religious felicity -- so improvident was she in her malice. Let her go now, let her give free reign to her utter fury, let her find another victim on which to exercise her cruelty. ... Now thou art safe under the protection of another Fortune, but of one that is not blind: by the splendor with which she shines she gives light even to the other gods.⁵³

As one examines the New Testament without presuppositions as to what it says, one finds interestingly enough that it reflects these different perceptions of the problems of human existence. Those pieces of literature which have been strongly affected by the Jewish background of early Christianity reflect the

⁵³. (XI,15,1-4) quoted in Andre-Jean Festugiere, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*, Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1954, pp. 74-75.

focus on sin and those affected by the Greco-Roman background reflect a focus on the problems of death and Fortune. An interesting example is the different emphasis of Paul and his companion Luke. It has long been noted that even in the Pauline sermons in Acts there is a conspicuous absence of emphasis on the sinfulness of humanity and need for the atonement. In Acts the focus is on the Resurrection of Jesus and the action of the Spirit. Luke evidently differed from Paul in the religious foci determined by his background. The same understanding, or misunderstanding from Paul's perspective, existed in the Corinthian community where Paul had to reaffirm the centrality of the cross in the face of a distorted emphasis on the Resurrection and the Spirit (see I Cor. 1,12,15).

Of special interest is the Pauline correspondence, since Paul (raised in both Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds) believes that the Gospel must be expressed in cultural terms (I Cor. 9:19ff) relevant to both Jew and Greek. Thus in Galatians 3 Paul discussed the death of Jesus in terms of the problem of sin, Jesus accepting on himself the curse pronounced on those who disobey the Law.⁵⁴ In Col. 2:13-15, while preserving the idea that in the cross God forgives us our trespasses, he sees the cross also as an emancipation from cosmic powers... a perception particularly significant to the Greco-Roman world.

The history of the Johannine community is helpful in exploring the struggle of a Christian community with the issue of sin. In the Gospel of John as we now have it, which is the product of a development related to the history of the Johannine community,⁵⁵ one finds a movement away from the humanity of Jesus (Jesus comes from heaven and is going back) and away from the need of those who receive his life to participate in continuing ordinary human existence. This results in a segment of the community interpreting its tradition in a Proto-Gnostic direction. Consequently, a portion of the community breaks away, denying the fleshliness of Jesus and the significance of Jesus' death/atonement. This situation is portrayed in I John where the author denies the validity of these Gnostic views. He affirms the reality of Jesus' life and death, the continuing reality of human sin for the Christian, and the need for the atonement. We even make God a liar if we deny our sin and need for atonement (see I John 1:5-10). The struggles of the Johannine community with the need to retain an understanding of sin cautions us against a too easy dismissal of it.

There is need within Christianity for an intentional attempt to be more than biblical with regard to sin, to listen to the further guidance of God's Spirit as we try better to understand the nature of the human situation. We must be responsible to the biblical tradition, but not merely literally repeat its varied opinions which were in themselves conditioned by the traditions and perceptions of the writers. Sin represents a perception of the problem of human existence. God's revelation is not to be found in the perception of the nature of the human problem, but in God's seeking to respond to the nature of the human predicament by a process of involvement and action, especially in the Christ-event, which is rich enough to provide answers to the varied perceptions of the human problem.

One might suggest an approach to sin along the following lines:

1. The question of sin must be approached from the perspective of grace, not introspection. We know what we are and what we need *from what God had to do for us, not from what we observe when we naval-gaze*. Adrian Van Kaam, has called this "transcendent reflection", we reflect on ourselves in the light of the transcendent, not in the light of ourselves. This avoids the sort of unhealthy, masochistic approach which has often been characteristic of Christianity.⁵⁶

2. To speak of sin is to gain a perspective on human nature. We are capable of deceiving ourselves and doing harm, even with the best of intentions. The primary issue then is Sin,

⁵⁴. It is interesting to explore the various ways in which Christ's death is seen as dealing with sin... e.g. curse, sin offering, Paschal lamb, etc..

⁵⁵. See Raymond Brown, *Community of the Beloved Disciple*, NY: Paulist Press, 1979.

⁵⁶. Adrian Van Kaam, *In Search of Spiritual Identity*, Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1975, pp. 172ff.

singular with a capital S, and not so much sins. All sins come from Sin. This produces a realism, but not a pessimism.

3. Sin is a psychic sign. Sins are not to be seen merely as individual acts, but as signs of what is going on with us and is within us. We need to be concerned about what they point to and less concerned about the acts of sin ... unless harm results to someone. Sins may indicate material within the psyche that has not been raised into consciousness and integrated into the Self, especially if the sin is not premeditated. Sin also indicates that we have not subjected our lives to the more creative dynamics of life, particularly God. Although sin may be dealt with as an individual act, the human predicament is not dealt with this way. It is important to deal with the origins and dynamics of our behavior.

4. We need to be careful about ranking sins as of more or less importance. There is some validity in this in terms of the harm that sin does to the sinner or to others. However, we have frequently erred in this, especially in regard to sexual sin. Jesus welcoming the prostitutes into the Kingdom of God should make us cautious. In a sense, our abhorrence of sexual sin is part of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but when examined psychologically, sexuality is an aspect of the person through which he or she expresses their psychological and biological struggles. Ranking of sins is really a diminishment of the value of the person, and what Jesus affirmed is that persons have value far beyond any judgments which we make about their sins.

5. Sin is also a symbol for what is wrong with our lives, as part of our past. It is that from which we seek escape in forgiveness. Forgiveness is then a way of being freed from our past in order to engage in growth and become new. Whether our past sin is real or imagined, it needs to be dealt with as we perceive it and thus the forgiveness provided by God's concrete act in Christ becomes very important. We need forgiveness for what we have done and been and what we have not done and been. This is somewhat the same as saying that we need God's love as a basis on which to build life, but many have difficulty appropriating love as a way of gaining freedom from the past. Forgiveness is not even a matter of discovering in our past what needs to be forgiven ... existentially we need One to accept our past, love it and forgive it, whatever it may have been.

6. We need to be sensitive to wherever awareness of sin and a sense of guilt has been imposed upon a person in his/her developmental process or is due to psychological distortion. However, one needs to deal with sin and guilt as perceived by the person, since what may not be real historically is very real as an element of the psyche.

7. We need to hear what Jungian psychology says about the "shadow" within the psyche. The elements of the psyche which are unintegrated and function autonomously and destructively can have great potential for good if their powers are in the service of the Self. Thus what makes us to sin in most cases must not be rejected in itself as sinful and refused admission into consciousness. for it will then continue to function autonomously and destructively. There is nothing more dangerous than the righteous people who claim elimination of their "sinful selves", only to drive them underground from where they can attack all those on whom they may legitimately vent their fury. Thus it becomes imperative to learn to love that which produces our "sins", as God does.

8. Christians have often struggled with the role of discipline and law in the handling of sin. Paul's portrayal of the history of human development, from Abraham to Christ, is helpful here (see Gal. 3:1-4:7). He sees the Mosaic Law and the cosmic structures provided by the elemental spirits as giving humans a restraining and disciplining structure until God's grace (promised in Abraham) was able to provide for a believable identity in Christ and new dynamics (the Spirit) which would allow the inner life of the person to be recreated and humans to assume a new maturity within the world. When this is applied to the development of the individual, discipline is then seen to have a role until other dynamics can become effective ... much as in mystical experience the ego is at first more active and then as the dynamics of

the activity of God become more perceptible the ego becomes more passive (e.g. note the stages represented by the various dwellings in Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle, the person becoming more passive and God more active from the fourth dwelling on).⁵⁷

9. One needs to attempt to see the issues of human existence more broadly than merely in terms of sin and to deal with all of these issues in ministry to persons.

IV AN APPROACH TO A METHODOLOGY FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

How Scripture Speaks

How is it that Scriptures authored centuries ago can speak a message to us today and that this message may become the word of God for us?

To answer this it is important to keep in mind that the meanings embodied in Scripture are far more complex than "what some author said to some persons in ancient times." When one recognizes the complexity of the possible meanings of Scripture, one's mind (and heart) may then be more receptive to what may happen in interpretation. Scripture may contain all of the following:

1. There is something that the author intends to communicate to an audience, involving considerations of both the intended communication and the audience and their context which would enable communication. A good communicator would need to adjust language and presentations of issues to the audience. This communication may be more or less related to the author's understanding of God, faith and life, depending on how the issues are related to these central matters. The author will not always deal with central matters, but at times the peripheral matters necessitated by the situation. The author also expresses concerns and gives advice within the cultural context and in terms of its issues. Thus the specifics of a passage may or may not be resonant with the needs and issues of contemporary life faced by the interpreter and may not be God's word to the present. Though much of the material is written to a specific historical context, some truths and situations are much the same at any historical period. Thus the intended meaning of some words may speak to one's life and needs quite directly, while others may sound foreign to our time and interests.
2. The author who intends something in the text and who expresses here something of God or life is an author who has a life history and personal experience beyond what was said in a concrete moment in history in the text, and often we know something of the author's life and experience. The text may lead to an encounter with the person of the author, or the broader history behind the text, beyond the particular text. This may be true wherever Scripture has provided us with extended information about a person or period of history so that an individual passage becomes catalyst to insights and information contained elsewhere. Who could read a letter by Paul without calling to mind knowledge of his life, his conversion, his mission, and his presentation of the Gospel.
3. The text, in a more symbolic and mystical way, may become portal to the experience it expresses. Language is always borrowed from the current fund of language available to express experience and to communicate something for which the language is convenient, symbolic, but not precise.

⁵⁷. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, transl. by K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez, Classics of Western Spirituality, NY: Paulist Press, 1979.

4. The text reflects more than the subject matter the author intends and more than the specifics the author tries to communicate. It reflects his/her experience of God, of him/herself, of human existence, of others, of the world, of history --- and all of these as interacting elements of a process of which the author may not be completely conscious.

5. Beyond what the text meant historically is what the text comes to mean as it is taken seriously and responded to. In part this relates to what the text has come to mean in the biblical canon as part of a larger body of meaning, though it also expresses what happens in the history of the interpretation of the text. Though one cannot confuse this with the historical meaning of the text, what the text gives birth to does become part of the meaning of the text. Theologically one can understand this as the ongoing activity of the Spirit in the "creative remembrance" of the text, a process which Jesus's words in John 16:12-15 define and which is explicitly referred to in John 2:22 and 12:16.

There is also a creative remembrance process occurring within many of the texts where earlier tradition is utilized and reinterpreted. This is clearly done in the process by which the Gospels and Acts originated, but it also happens in the traditioning of creedal, ethical/catechetical and worship materials within the epistles.

6. As modern students of language have pointed out, language preexists the person who uses it and to some extent brings with it a wealth of previous experience about, or symbolic embodiment of, the subjects of its concern. Thus it may bring to us perceptions of existence beyond its user's intention.

7. Then there is that mysterious phenomenon of hearing or reading words and suddenly some of them leap to life because what has been going on in one's life longs to be named, to be given words by which to be understood. Here the text has little to do with the author's reality, but gives expression to our own. Thus the words of the author become words naming what is within our psyche and life, having nothing at all to do with their historical intent. This may happen as a purely human and gratuitous process, but God may also be in it.

8. Lastly, there is the fact that God seeks to relate to us and may use any of the above for God's purposes. When this happens, then the meanings which arise out of Scripture become God's present "**Word**" *to us* in the best Reformation sense. Our faith in the reality of the Spirit, witnessed to in the biblical traditions, calls upon us to look for God's contemporary involvement in our lives and messages to us.

Diagram of Interpretation:

GOD-SPIRIT-CHRIST

who are always above Scripture and contemporary, not ancient

God as source of life and direction, to whose world we also belong

Christ as the embodiment of God's life and realm, intention, and person (thus the clue/key to all) and Lord of the church

Spirit as the contemporary action of God and of Christ who rose to become contemporary

ALL IN CREATIVE TENSION AND DIALOGUE IN A SPIRAL OF INTERPRETATION

TEXT and its CONTEXT

and its historical context and its "mystery": individual books, but canon as whole.

It needs to be kept in mind that both the individual texts and the canon are communications to someone, and often expressions of community tradition and faith, and not merely the expression of someone's intentions.

INTERPRETER and

her/his **CONTEXT**, Context is not only where understanding occurs, but also is context for life and responsibility (where faith is lived) and where preaching/teaching takes place. This is complex because it involves many individuals and a community who seek to hear something from the text and live by it.

Methods of Interpretation

The above means that there are many methods or techniques which open to us the multi-faceted meanings of Scripture. What has been known as the historical critical method is foundational, but should never be utilized alone. Each interpreter will need to explore those methods which work best for her/him.

1. Historical Interpretation

A primary concern is to understand as well as possible the historical meaning of Scripture, in terms of:

- a. the *intent of the author to communicate to intended recipients within their context.*
- b. the way traditions and sources within the text have been subjected to *reinterpretation* (e.g. Gospels, but also epistles)
- c. the text *in interrelationship with other texts* (e.g. the Synoptic Gospels, the Corinthian correspondence, Romans and Galatians)
- d. the meaning of the text within the *canon*, alongside literature of differing perspectives (e.g. what does it mean that four differing Gospels are included)
- e. the *accrued meaning* of the text, the meaning which texts have come to have as they are faithfully interpreted in response to the life needs of individuals and communities. This is also the historical meaning of the text in terms of *what the text has come to mean*, rather than what it meant to the author.
- f. Within the community of the church historical meaning must be communicated to contemporaries with needs and issues, unless one is approaching the text purely as a historian. The interpreter then approaches the text in certain ways dependent upon how the text is to be used. The concern with Scripture then involves more than just understanding about the text. *Communication affects interpretation.*

2. *Devotional Methods* - How do I respond personally to the text when I bring my life, or the lives of those I know, to the text? Two devotional approaches are suggested in the materials which follows: using the imagination in a method similar to the Ignatian Exercises and the Benedictine Method. If you regularly engage in the study of biblical books as wholes, it is helpful to keep a devotional diary of your personal responses to the text besides your exegetical records.

3. *Flow writing* (a way of creating a non-analytical interpretive process and drawing on parts of mind of which are not conscious). After reading the text, take five minutes to write a flow of free associations (see description below)

4. *Creative embodiment* - Allow the text to express itself through you in some way through the plastic arts, poetry, music, etc.

5. *Living with a text* - Reflect continuously on a text for a week or two, jot down ideas, and let possibilities of the text naturally develop. If a sermon on a text is given a process of natural development, it will take less time and create less anxiety than a sermon which must be forced the last few days before it is preached. This is often a type of devotional method, but here it is intended as a way of also coming to terms with the historical meaning of the text. One advantage of living with a text is that it takes advantage of the way one's daily experiences and unconscious processes may contribute to understanding.

6. *Communal* - Community is valuable because then there is shared wisdom and shared gifts of the Spirit. Each person and each interpreter has different gifts, backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences to bring to the text. It is particularly important to remember that one who is expert in the text itself may not be expert in the issues which the text needs to address. We do communal interpretation by using commentaries and resources, but we often neglect the insight of the religious non-professional and the community to which we would preach a "Word of God."

More subjective processes should always be held in responsible tension with more objective processes. All processes should feed into interpretation and the preparation of sermons or lessons. When the more subjective findings are in conflict with the discerned historical meanings of the text, one may wish to preach on the subjective findings but must always be honest about what one is doing and be sure this is in harmony with good theology. The boundaries for interpretation should always be set by good theology, though one has to be careful about preventing oneself from discovering anything new by a rigid theology.

System for Filing Biblical Interpretation

It is always important for those responsible for biblical interpretation to develop a system for filing the results of interpretation for later use. I have found that a file with 5 X 8 cards is the best.⁵⁸ It allows for the recording of a fair amount of information on a single card. A card can be assigned to a single verse or a small logical grouping of verses. It might be good to use one card for historical and linguistic information, another for devotional response to the text, another for flow writing. etc., including after the last verse of the passage concerned a card (or several) dealing with how the passage might be developed in preaching or other usage. Cards dealing with the same verses can be located next to each other. Such information filed can provide a basis for any future work to be done with the passage.

Several of methods listed above will now be treated in more detail.

Method for using the Imagination (similar to Ignatian Exercises)

1. Have paper and pencil or your journal at hand so that you can note any significant elements of your experience after the meditation is over.

⁵⁸. It is very simple to create 5 x 8 cards by folding in half an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of paper and trimming it.

2. Take a moment to become aware of yourself and of your needs. You might wish to write down one or two elements of your present situation which come to mind.
3. Read over the passage slowly to familiarize yourself with it. Think for a few moments about what this passage means according to your knowledge of the life of Jesus and the Gospels. Then allow this information to move to the periphery of your mind.
4. Place yourself in a comfortable position for meditation so that you can be comfortable and relaxed, but yet maintain attention. In a brief prayer offer this time of meditation to God for his/her using.
5. Close your eyes and "enter" your time of meditation. This will involve allowing your body to relax and your mind to slow its activity. Even though you have thought of some elements of your present situation and have thought of the historical meaning of the text, place this at the periphery of your mental vision and try to allow a space to "clear" in your mind in which the meditation can develop. It is sometimes helpful to focus attention on your breathing for a while so that your mind has something to give attention to. The rate of your breathing is also a good indication of relaxation, so that you will have some clue to your relaxation as your breathing slows.
6. Recall briefly the main features of the story in the text. **Then stop your active role and allow the setting of the scene and its story to develop in your imagination.** Do not create the story, but allow your mind and God to create the story for you. You will need to develop your inner senses of observation. PAY ATTENTION to what you see, hear, smell. You may even want to touch objects in the scene. Your relationship to the story as it develops may be one of OBSERVER or PARTICIPANT. You will need to decide whether you want to watch, or be there in the scene and perhaps experience the role of one of the characters in the story.
7. When the story has run its course, find some place at the edge of the scene in your imagination where you can sit down and discuss your experience with Jesus. Do not create the conversation, but allow it to develop around what you have "seen" or experienced.
8. Conclude your dialogue with Jesus and remain for a time in silence with him, enjoying and experiencing the relationship.
9. Gradually return from the biblical scene to the present and open your eyes. It may be helpful to tell yourself that you will do this and that you will come out of your meditation refreshed, remembering the insights you have gained.
10. Jot down any insights gained.

Benedictine Method - Lectio Divina

This devotional approach to Scripture has been associated with St. Benedict and Benedictine spirituality, though it really is earlier. It uses a "ladder" of four steps which provide it with a broad appeal. It may be used with the Bible or with other devotional literature.

Lectio (Reading)

Read the passage, paying special attention to words and phrases to which you intuitively respond. I would suggest first reading the passage through rapidly and then going back and reading very slowly, stopping with phrases or words which "draw" you.

Meditatio (Meditation)

Here welcome the words that have drawn you into your life and "chew" upon them as a cow chews a cud, i.e. mentally say them over and over again until your mind becomes saturated with them. Another method might be to mentally focus upon them and hold them in the center of the mind for a while.

Oratio (Prayer)

This prayer is in the form of a spontaneous dialogue with God or Jesus about these words and what they might mean to you, and how they might be incorporated into your heart.

Contemplatio (Contemplation)

Contemplation means directly turning one's attention to God, without the use of words and images, in silence: a loving silence before God. Relationship with God is the ultimate purpose of all devotional exercises.

If portions of the passage still remain after the words on which the Meditation was made, then one might go back and continue in the passage to the next words that attracted one, repeating the above process. It is also helpful to keep the results of this process in a diary or journal.

Flow Writing

For the process of "flow writing" I am indebted to Christina Baldwin who uses it as a journaling process.⁵⁹

This method takes as the point of departure your text and then moves from this by free association, jotting down phrases or sentences which come to mind as one moves in the associative process. After reading the biblical text carefully, spend just five minutes in free association, moving from the memory of the text and any of your responses to it, writing down all the thoughts which come to you. You may wish to write merely in words or phrases, or in more extended sentences. I would suggest phrases. If you use just words they will function as symbols whose content you may later forget. Sentences often take too long and you may get lost in trying to express yourself in complete thoughts and sentences.

When you have written for five minutes, stop. You may want to set a timer or your watch. You now want to try to gather something from what you have done. There are several approaches which you can utilize to develop the meaning of your flow writing, as time is available. With limited time you will perhaps want to use only the first two or three. You can also explore these as to what works best for you.

1. Circle the key words or phrases which seem to have special meaning and then make a list of them.
2. Complete the statement: "I am really thinking about.....in this passage."
3. List ten questions you should answer regarding what you were thinking about in your flow writing. Let them come to mind rather than seeking to formulate them.
4. Unsent letter: Write a letter to yourself about what the passage says to you.
- 5.. Write a dialogue with the writer of the text, asking him to explain the meaning of the key phrases you have marked or the meaning of the text.
6. Draw on a piece of paper, allowing what you have written to be expressed in spontaneously drawn images. You should do at least the number 1 above before drawing to get in touch with the possible meanings and direction of your writing.

Paul's Theory of Homiletics and Communication: I Corinthians 2

Against the background of his discussion of the difficulty of communicating the Christian message to a world holding different presuppositions in chapter 1, Paul treats his approach to communicating the Gospel. Some scholars have felt that Paul adopted his approach because he was not able to be eloquent, to effectively utilize the methods of the rhetorician. This is far from true. Paul's approach to communication is based upon his reflection upon the nature of that which is to be communicated (the Gospel and perhaps God, God's self), the historical situation in which the communication is to take place, and the way in

⁵⁹ Flow journaling is a technique she used in a workshop I attended. I am modifying this in various ways. The reader may wish to examine: Christina Baldwin, *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest*, NY: Bantam Books, 1991.

which humans can receive a communication. Particularly important to note is that the message of the cross has its own reality and the manner of its communication must not hide this reality. I Corinthians 2 provides a unique opportunity to explore the theory which determined the nature of Paul's preaching. There is nowhere else in the New Testament where homiletical theory is so explicitly treated. This is included in this paper on "Developments in New Testament Study" because communication is part of the process of interpretation. Below I have provided my own translation of I Corinthians since, in some ways, it is a difficult passage to translate because of decisions one has to make about what Paul meant. This is followed by some observations on how his theory impacts our understanding of communication.

A Translation of I Corinthians 2:1-16

Translation

Notes

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| 1. | When I came to you, brother & sisters, I came proclaiming to you the witness to God, not as one superior in speech or wisdom. | -Chpts. 1-4 are a unit in which Paul explains his understanding of the church, the Gospel, and of his role.
-some ancient manuscripts read "mystery of God" instead of "witness to God." |
| 2. | For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. | -In 1:22-24 Paul indicates that the cross was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. It meant that only God was the source of their life and that no human could boast-1:26ff. |
| 3-5 | And I was present among you with much weakness, fear and trembling, and my speech and preaching were not in words persuasive by their wisdom but with proof of the Spirit and power so that your faith might not be in human wisdom but in the power of God. | -Paul adopts a method of preaching which allows God to work through him, rather than calling attention to himself or using rhetorical persuasion and eloquence. |
| 6. | But we do speak a wisdom among the "initiates;" however it is not a wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age who are in the process of being rendered ineffective. | -Many of the religious terms which follow were used in the Greek Mystery Religions and Paul uses them because they are familiar. "Initiate" indicates one initiated into religion and told its secrets. |
| 7-8 | Rather do we speak the wisdom of God in terms of a "mystery" which has been hidden, which God decreed before the ages | -Glory-"man" had a glory which God gave by creating "him" in his image. This was lost and |

for our glory; which none of the rulers of this age knew-- for if they had known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

is now being restored.
-Mystery- God's plan revealed in the Gospel - see Col. 1:26.

9. But, as it stands written:
"The things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and has not entered the human heart, such God has prepared for those who love him."
- The quote in vs. 9 does not precisely correspond to any version of any Old Test. text, but probably comes from a form of Is. 52:15, which would also account for I Cor. 2:8
10. For to us God has made revelation through the Spirit, for the Spirit interprets all things, even the depths of God.
- "all things" in this context refers to spiritual things, particularly-the Gospel.
11. For who among humans knows the things of a human except the human spirit which is in one? Likewise no one has knowledge of the things of God except the Spirit of God
- The Spirit, God's inmost self, God's "mind" (see vs. 16), gives us knowledge of what God has given us, to restore our "glory."
- 12-13 And we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God in order that we might understand those things given us by God; which things we speak about not in words which can be taught by human wisdom, but in words that can (only) be taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people.
- What we have been given by God is only understandable and communicable by the Spirit of God. The emphasis is that only the one who has an experience of what God gives and God's help in understanding it may arrive at a comprehension. Natural human cannot understand because there is no basis for understand-
14. The natural person doesn't receive the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness to such and he/she cannot understand them because they are discerned spiritually.
- ing, no experience of what it (the Gospel) is about.
15. But the spiritual person both discerns all (such) things and is understood (discerned, examined) by no one (who does not have the Spirit).
- Material in parentheses are alternative translations of Greek words or phrases which need to be added to understand what Paul is saying. As with us, some elements of Paul's sentences were to

be understood from
previous sentences.

16. For "who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" We have the mind of Christ.

-The quotation is from Is. 40:13 where in the Hebrew text we find "Spirit" where Paul here has "mind." Though the term "Lord" is frequently used of Jesus, in the O.T. it was used of God. The question raised is, "Who can really know God's mind, his thoughts and plans?" The answer is that "we have the mind of Christ." No human being can claim to figure God out. Christ brings us the mind of God.

Observations On Communication

From what Paul writes, one might conclude the following about communication:

1. The purpose of communication and preaching of the Gospel is to speak the wisdom of God, the plan of God determined before the ages and now disclosed in Christ, that is, the restoration of the "glory," the "image" of God in humankind. This is found especially in the mystery of the crucifixion.
2. The way we communicate this must never get in the way of what we wish to communicate and its inherent "power."
3. God must be working both in us and in the person to whom we communicate the Gospel for it to be understood. We must be open to God's working in us and be sensitive to God's working in others, helping to interpret God's presence and relationship with persons. Thus one cannot force communication. One can only be at the service of God.
4. A primary responsibility one has is to be a person in whom God's Spirit dwells and to be open to a relationship with "the inner self of God." This means that we are not only ready to be used, but always serve as a "presence" of the realities of which we speak.
5. Our communication can't merely speak of the "power" of God in human life, the transformation of human problems. It also must include the meaning of the cross. The cross is a demonstration of God's love, but it also speaks of a pattern of human existence. The presence of the power of God does not magically take us out of the realities of life, but joins us within life. What Paul says in II Cor. 4:7ff is very striking:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

6. There seems to be more to the role of the Spirit here than to be merely a term for God's action in life or a common element of Christian experience. In Gal. 3-4 Paul speaks of the receiving of the Spirit as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, the completion of God's hopes for humanity. In the language of Judaism, where "Spirit" was a way of speaking of the presence of God in history, Spirit is the actual presence and gift of God's self. In this gift, and in putting on Christ (the true seed and son of Abraham), we become truly God's children and

the Spirit of God's Son (the Resurrected Jesus) helps us to say Abba, Father, (to give utterance to the relationship), as he did historically. Luke 11 is similar. Here, after teaching his disciples to pray to the Father, Jesus tells them a parable about how the heavenly Father does not just give good things, but the Spirit (God's self). With this in mind, communication is speaking out of relationship with God (the Spirit) to those seeking in their lives to discern the relationship with God. The ultimate communication is that of God God's self as expressed particularly in the cross. Thus for Paul (Rom. 1:16-17) the Gospel is the "power" (presence and action) of God in which persons are really encountered by God.

In the light of item 6, both communication and interpretation are for the ultimate purpose of facilitating encounter with God.

V RETHINKING SOME THINGS

Because of our discoveries about Scripture, the history of early Christianity, and the explorations of new paradigms of interpretation, we have been called upon to rethink some things. Within my life-time I have found myself frequently rethinking some things. It is good intentionally to examine one's understandings and presuppositions, but often rethinking is forced upon one by new insights or life experiences. The two pieces included here represent such rethinking. Of course they are not the result of sudden changes in perspective, but rather a gradual growth in awareness with a consequent movement in the direction of new convictions and paradigms.

Doing Theology

One of the tasks of theological education is to provide students with the knowledge related to various fields and the professional skills which will enable them to function as religious professionals and enablers of the rest of the religious community. The "theological" of theological education may be understood as one of the central disciplines, called "theology" or "systematic theology". However, systematic theology, as valuable as it is (for how can we neglect the minds hunger for understanding and coherence), is an activity on a secondary level, seeking to make sense of and refine the initial, imprecise language borrowed from the culture to reflect experience of the Transcendent. Theology in a primary sense is best viewed as related to what is done in the whole of the theological education to stay close to the religious experience embodied in the initial language and all of its refinements and applications. I would like to use "doing theology" here in the latter sense.

Literally "theology" means a "logos" of God, something that speaks God and communicates God. For the Christian this "logos" has its origin in the Gospel, the "good news" of Jesus Christ, although behind this "good news" there are the powerful streams of Old Testament tradition. This good news is understood not as merely a complex of descriptive words, but as embodying a reality: it *is* "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith", (Rom. 1:16). Its primary value lies not in the details of what it says, but in what it mediates. When it is given the freedom to be, it is hope-full, life-ful, joy-full, and God-full. If we forget that theology *speaks God* and conclude that it is only descriptive, i.e. that it speaks to us only *about* God, we have lost the heart and mystery of theology. It then lies dead before us as something to be analyzed and dissected, something to be understood rather than experienced. It no longer exercises its power over us. The construction of theological systems has often been done upon the remains of theology with little thought as to how it functions as a living organism.

In the light of the Synoptic description of the historical Jesus, the Johannine affirmation of the "Word" as incarnate (John 1:14), and of Paul's attempts to express theology in two cultures (I Cor. 9:19ff), we become aware that theological expression is always bound up with history and culture. Thus our attempts to describe, though hopefully faithful to God, will also in some ways conceal God because they are situationally and culturally bound. Actually, there is no other way this can be, for we exist within history and culture. But it also is no tragedy because God prefers to be "relevant" in this fashion.

It is important not to let God as Godself be "bound" by our language, be limited to our words and descriptions, nor to make idols out of our language (against the first two commandments). We need to know that we now know only in part and that it is only in the end time that we will know God as God now knows us (I Cor. 13:12). We must also avoid an approach to knowledge which allows it to inflate our egos, to "puff us up," rather than opting for love which builds up (I Cor. 8:1). Even when we have developed our theologies, it is important to remind ourselves of what Paul says at the end of his grand schema of salvation history in Rom. 9-11:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

Theology is only rightfully done, according to much of the New Testament, when the traditions, the words, thoughts and creeds of former generations, are subjected to the re-interpretation and re-forming activity of God's Spirit in the living context of the present. God never abdicated God's sovereignty to words once spoken and thoughts once expressed. God still speaks in a living voice to those who will hear and God still communicates Godself. Theology then is never finished as long as time exists and history, culture and personal experience change. Moreover, it is the re-forming of tradition and listening to the God of the present which integrates theology into the fibre of our existence.

Ultimately, theology is devotional. Its words reflect and introduce us to the God and life realities which they re-present. They are God-mediating and life-producing. They are a sanctuary in which we may meet God and respond in faith, hope and love, and from which we may move into life. If they do not do this they are only a historical and philosophical exercise. Theology then goes hand in hand with mysticism and ethics. The devotional nature of theology calls for the maintaining of a "free and holy space" where God may act and we may respond, surrounded by our theological traditions but not bound by them. The integrity of this free space must be preserved, for it is at the heart of religious life.

Lastly, theology is not the task of a professional elite, but that of every Christian, and every Pastor, who must struggle with understanding life and God and make sense of their own existence. It is the task of every person who would meet God in the words of our tradition and allow their lives to be transformed. To be too concerned about theology being "right" makes it the preserve of the expert and deprives the laity of its life-giving qualities. *It is not as important that it be right as that it be done, for its purpose is fulfilled not as much in its rightness as in its drawing us closer to the God from whom life comes.* There are always consequences of theological views, and sometimes bad consequences of some bad theology, but these are risks worth taking. If theology is also understood as always in process, misunderstandings may be fruitfully worked out as one lives with one's theology and everyone does not have to understand everything at once. Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf said that the problem with the theologians of his time was that they wanted to understand everything at once. He believed that God will disclose to us what we need to understand when we need to understand it, and God only asks of us what God has given us.

Theology done by experts, as much as it is needed, when handed to us as finished, merely to be understood, may neither belong to us nor affect our lives. As religious professionals, it is our responsibility to help laity to understand that in their reflection on life and God they are certainly doing theology and that God encourages this. Certainly a God compared to the Father of the two uncomprehending sons in the Parable of the Prodigal (Luke 15) can tolerate a little errant theology in our journey home to God. And the purpose of theology, like the purpose of the parable, *is* to bring us home to God.

What If?? Some Hermeneutical Questions About Jesus

It is the function of historical criticism as applied to the biblical materials to make us responsible to their original meaning, to seek to understand them in terms of the intent of the author and the context in and to which they were addressed. Yet our model of historical criticism is affected by certain paradigms and presuppositions which are a part of our culture. In the West we are greatly affected by the heritage of the

Greco-Roman world and its philosophical methodologies. Especially since the Enlightenment we have been affected not only by a revival of interest in ancient philosophical questions, but the presuppositions of Rationalism, Empiricism, and the development of the historical and natural sciences. In more recent times our paradigms have frequently become existential and psychological, a procedure which does raise both the questions of the historical meaning and the meaning of the text for today. Bultmann's interpretation of the New Testament is a primary example of existential interpretation while John Sanford, or Carl Jung himself, are examples of Jungian psychological interpretation (see Jung's *Answer to Job* and Sanford's *The Kingdom Within*).⁶⁰

In Western Christian mentality since the 18th century our paradigm has often emphasized finding the truth, expressing it in concepts and systems, arguing as to the value of something by its historical and rational validity and provability. We have believed that truth can be expressed conceptually and refined until it is conceptually correct. To believe is to know and understand the truth. These presuppositions have often fitted well with the Protestant understanding that truth is to be found embodied in the inspired words of Scripture.

The fundamental question posed by the following "what ifs?" is: how would the biblical materials be understood if we accepted that Jesus and the earliest church, before it acclimated itself to the Roman world, operated with an Eastern rather than a Western paradigm? This paradigm can be found today in Mid-Eastern areas where the Eastern paradigm of teaching is preserved much like it was in the first century.⁶¹ It can also be found in the mystical traditions of Eastern religions which, when read, seem to shed interesting light on many of the biblical sayings. It can also, to some extent, be found within the different approach to the Christian faith embodied within the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Whether you would agree with the implication of the following questions or not, it might be helpful to use them as a foil over against which to clarify your own paradigm for the Gospel materials.

1. What if Jesus thought in Eastern rather than in Western ways?
2. What if Jesus' life was a life lived to be pondered, an incarnation of the inexpressible, raising questions to keep us from all idolatries which could make ultimate anything but God and God's concern for humanity?
3. What if Jesus' parables and stories were riddles to puzzle and engage, birthing various answers for those who struggled with their meaning rather than making expressing particular conceptual truths?
4. What if Jesus used hyperbole to shock and told some sayings as "koans", to catch and puzzle the mind, to stop it from thinking thoughts so that it might meet God? ⁶²

⁶⁰. C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, translated by R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series, Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1973. John Sanford, *The Kingdom Within: The Inner Meaning of Jesus' Sayings*, NY: Paulist Press, 1970.

⁶¹. See Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976.

⁶². One of the most famous Koans in Buddhism is:

A monk in all seriousness asked Joshu: "Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?" Joshu retorted "Mu!" [Buddha-nature is that nature which underlies all things and which enables all sentient beings to become Buddha.]

Philip Kapleau in , Boston: Beacon Press, 1965, says:

Every koan is a unique expression of the living, indivisible Buddha-nature which cannot be grasped by the bifurcating intellect. Koans appear bewildering to people who cherish the letter above the spirit. Those who grasp their spirit know that koans, despite the incongruity of their various elements, are profoundly meaningful. All point to man's Face before his parents were born, to his real Self.

Koans take as their subjects tangible, down-to-earth objects such as a dog, a tree, a face, a finger to make us see, on the one hand, that each object has absolute value and, on the other, to arrest the tendency of the intellect to anchor itself in abstract

5. What if Jesus called us to meet God and live from God rather than understand God?
6. What if Jesus spoke many ways to different people in many contexts? What if Jesus used paradox to reflect life's nature? What if we can't systematize his teachings?
7. What if we take seriously that Jesus did not write and that he left his disciples only some parables, stories, and assorted sayings (later collected)? Why didn't he leave us more if the central concern was to know just what he said and to follow his teachings rather than to "meet his truth"? Why didn't he order his teachings into a system of truth?
8. What if Jesus calls everyone, like his disciples, to engage in their personal spiritual journey with him rather than to find in his teachings ready-made answers?
9. What if God intends us to live from the ambiguity and variety contained in the New Testament, to live and grow from it, and to be drawn by it, beyond it, to relationship with God?

If we had more, Jesus' very words in his Aramaic language ready for our translation, teachings coherent, without difference and paradox, would we have more than we do now? How would the more change the nature of the Christian faith and life? Would we need God and Jesus when it was all there in writing? Would we even talk about the contemporary Spirit of God? How would having all the answers affect our relationships with and openness to others? Would we then be able to say that it is only the Lord we can boast of, only the Lord God who is the source of our life (I Cor. 1:30-31)? Would we then forget love and be puffed up in our knowledge? Would we think that salvation is within our control?

concepts. But the import of every koan is the same: that the world is one interdependent Whole and that each separate one of us is that Whole.

The complete solution of a koan involves the movement of the mind from a state of Ignorance (delusion) to the vibrant inner awareness of living Truth. This implies the emergence into the field of consciousness of the immaculate Bodhi-mind, which is the reverse of the mind of delusion. The determination to struggle with a koan in the first place is generated by faith in the reality of the Bodhi-mind, the struggle itself being the effort of this Mind to case off the shackles of Ignorance and come to its own Self-knowledge. (pp. 64-65)

Yasutani-Roshi, in his commentary on the koan "Mu", says:

You must melt down your delusions with the red-hot iron ball of Mu stuck in your throat. The opinions you hold and your worldly knowledge are your delusions. Included also are philosophical and moral concepts, no matter how lofty, as well as religious beliefs and dogmas, not to mention innocent commonplace thoughts. In short, all conceivable ideas are embraced within the term "delusions" and as such are a hindrance to the realization of your Essential-nature. So dissolve them with the fireball of Mu! (Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, pp. 79-80.)

It is interesting that in Mark 4 where Jesus' parable about the sower is recorded and other parables of the Kingdom (Jesus presentation of ultimate reality) are given, the early church felt it necessary to include an interpretation of the parable of the sower so that Jesus parable would be "understood" and most modern translators translate Mark 4:11 as "To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God" instead of "the mystery of the Kingdom of God."