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Unchanging 'truth' in Contextual Exegesis

Matthew A. Cook

AT THIS YEAR'S consultation of the WEA-TC,[1] I noted several papers being given on African Christologies. I am thankful that there are scholars tackling this very thorny and complex issue. My concern expressed in this paper on 'unchanging truth in contextual exegesis'[2] is not nearly so grand as that. At FATEAC[3] in Abidjan we are also concerned that students reflect on contextualization in every part of the exegetical and theological process.[4]

1 The World Evangelical Alliance—Theological Commission

2 I do not refer to cultural exegesis, that by which one understands a culture. Nor do I refer to contextual exegesis as used by David Watson in a church-planting movement seminar in Dakar, Senegal, August 14-18, 2006 as the process by which one should 'de-culturize the Gospel message and let the local people contextualize the message in their environment and culture' (as quoted by Stefan Hanger in personal communication, September 12, 2006). Rather, I refer to exegesis of the biblical text done to effect contextually sensitive communication.

3 La Faculté Evangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne is a university level program in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire offering a *matrise* in Theology, Religious Science, and Translation. We have trained theologians, Christian leaders, and translators working in 15 nations.

4 Hesselgrave indicates that what I am suggesting is not contextualization at all (p. 448). 'One might argue that in cases where the theologizer himself is a citizen of the third world (and the second and third horizons therefore coalesce) the case is completely different' (p. 454). Rather contextualization is when an exegete from one culture interprets a text for another culture. [David Hesselgrave, 'The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration And Communication' *JETS* 28/4 (December 1985), pp. 443-454.]

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This is not really a report on what we are doing at FATEAC, but a call to discuss how we, in general, can do contextual exegesis better.

Therefore, motivated by plenary inspiration and contextual exigencies, I urge retaining an interpretive summary as the final step in exegesis (and that which is handed on to either homiletics or theology). Typically a spiritual principle is retained after exegesis, but I suggest that this approaches a 'kernel-husk' dichotomy at the pericope level,[5] loses some of the meaning of the text, and implies—against reality—that a supracultural proposition can be stated. I believe that this interpretive summary well communicates the contextual understanding of a passage in the exegete's culture and yet maintains fidelity to the nature of the Bible and the meaning of the passage.

Scripture the authority

The easiest division in the Christian world is between the evangelical and the non-evangelical on the issue of the authority of scripture. This applies in hermeneutics and contextualization as well. Alan Thomson recently published an article in this journal in which he asserts that 'certain issues have come to dominate the missiological agenda, such as the Evangelical and Ecumenical divide on the authority of scripture,

and the relative merits of orthodoxy and orthopraxy'.[6]

In broadest terms, there are two fundamental approaches to contextual hermeneutics today. The first assigns the primary control of meaning to the contemporary context itself. Frequently the notion of 'praxis' serves as a kind of filter for interpreting Scripture. For example, some liberation theologians make the struggle against economic oppression a controlling grid which allows them then to redefine biblical concepts like 'salvation' in terms of liberation of the poor and 'sin' in terms of sociopolitical injustice. This context-driven model of contextualization is no doubt the dominant one in Asia and elsewhere in the Two Thirds World today. The product has often been a syncretistic version of the Christian message.[7] Those who advocate a broader understanding of the formation of theology (based on praxis or local sociopolitical realities) have jus-

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5 While it is impossible to comment on the whole of the kernel-husk debate in contextualization, I am using the larger debate (a gospel core stripped of its cultural husk in order to communicate the former elsewhere) as a model for what many exegetes do in the interpretation process.

6 Alan Thomson, 'Learning from the African Experience: Bediako and Critical Contextualisation', *ERT* 30:1 (2006): 31f. David Hesselgrave saw this distinction 20 years earlier: David Hesselgrave, 'The Three Horizons: Culture, Integration And Communication', *JETS* 28:4 (December 1985): 450.

7 Dean Flemming, 'The Third Horizon: A Wesleyan Contribution to the Contextualization Debate,' http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/26-30/30-2-07.htm, consulted July 8, 2006 on the Wesley Center Online: Wesley Center for Applied Theology. Cf. K. E. Eitel, 'Contextualization: Contrasting African Voices', *Criswell Theological Review* 2:2 (Spring 1988): 324, as seen in Robert L. Thomas, 'Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?', *The Master's Journal*, http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj1g.pdf, p.153, consulted August 12, 2006.

tified it on the basis of the transformation of linguistic use of the Bible, or of a broader reading of the Bible. They, too, would say that they have based their conclusions on the Bible.

A second approach (although this oversimplifies the case), often advocated by evangelical contextualizers, gives principal control over the theological meaning to a grammatico-historical interpretation of the biblical text. This is not the place to argue that conclusion in full, but the presuppositions of the grammatico-historical method as opposed to those of the other methods (historico-critical, liberation, etc.) place the exegete under the authority of scripture rather than over the text, and they are in accordance with the historic use of the text and the evangelical perspective today.[8]

The argument for the authority of scripture may be sketched as follows: God is his own authority. This authority of which we speak is 'the right or power to command obedience or belief'.[9] God's authoritative communi-

cation is multiform, but definitively set forth in the Bible. 'We demonstrate our concern for biblical authority…by careful biblical interpretation…' and obedience.[10]

The first article in World Evangelical Alliance statement of faith reads: 'We believe…in the **Holy Scriptures** as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct….'[11] David Dockery maintains this confession for the following reasons: '(1) The Scriptures are the result of divine inspiration. (2) They proclaim the saving acts of God. (3) They are historically proximate to the saving acts of God. (4) They are based on the prophetic-apostolic authority.'[12] Interestingly enough, this very understanding of the authority of scripture leads Dockery to look for the supracultural principles, which are normative and applicable for the church in every age.[13] It is this same authority of scripture which motivates me to avoid supracultural principles in the place of a supracultural authority.[14]

A supracultural norm

Scripture can communicate with cul-

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8 For one evangelical perspective, cf. the three Chicago statements on the Bible: Inerrancy, http://www.reformation.net/COR/cordocs/inerrancy.pdf#search=%22chicago%20statement%20on%20theology%22, consulted September 12, 2006; Hermeneutics, http://www.origins.org/articles/00site_chicago.html, consulted September 12, 2006; and Application, http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086%7CCHID750054%7CCIID2094578,00.html, consulted September 12, 2006. They are a little dated, but present a coherent whole from the not-too-distant past.

9 David Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority, and Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman. 1995), p. 70.

10 Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, p. 72.

11 The WEA statement of faith. http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/wea/statement.htm, consulted August 4, 2006 (emphasis theirs).

12 Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, p. 62.

13 Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, pp. 62f.

14 It is not supracultural principles of hermeneutics which I wish to avoid. Rather the supracultural propositional summary of the text which I think is impossible.

tures far removed from its own. It was even intended to do so.[15] But scripture, and how we learn from it, has been over-simplified, over-distilled.

In the 1980s there was a great deal of discussion about the nature of scripture and revelation. At that point, Nash made a distinction between the propositions which are revealed and the sentences which carry them. Although he did not say that it was the case for him, it was clear that 'theoretically, a person could accept propositional revelation but reject verbal inspiration'.[16] Verbal inspiration makes explicit 'the extent to which God's revelation is conveyed in words, notably the written words of the Bible'.[17] Those who hold propositional revelation without verbal inspiration lean toward a quasi-Barthian view of scripture. 'By insisting that sentences convey propositions, they locate revelation outside the actual biblical texts, creating a log-

ical gap between revelation and the Bible.'[18]

To avoid the position that the text is a witness to revelation, we need to shy away from the idea that any particular text can be effectively communicated through a single proposition or principle. Unfortunately, the goal of exegesis normally continues all the way to shaving off the valuable depth and detail of a text and arriving at a mere 'kernel' or principle or proposition taught by the text. In their exegetical method, George Guthrie and J. Scott Duvall[19] teach an exegetical process which includes step 10.2, involving the instruction to write an extended paraphrase of the passage in order

> to expand your translation and emphasize explicitly what you see as significant in the text…[to provide] your own condensed commentary….[to] capture the passage's meaning in a way that connects with your audience. We predict that you will enjoy this as much as any

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15 2 Tim. 3:16, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'; 1 Cor. 10:11, 'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come'; etc. cf. George Knight III, 'The Scriptures were Written for our Instruction', *JETS* 39:1 (March 1996): pp. 3-13.

16 Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 50, from Kevin Vanhoozer, 'The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms', in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 57.

17 Vanhoozer, 'Semantics of Biblical Literature', p. 57.

18 Vanhoozer, 'Semantics of Biblical Literature', p. 58f.

19 For other examples, see Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), p. 37; 'take the point (or the several points) of the passage'; Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (3rd ed.) (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002) p. 28; 'decide what [the text's] central issues are'; and the source from which I learned this technique, Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) which lists 'principlization' in the index as being discussed on pages 92, 121, 150-163, 194, 197-98, 205, 206, 231, and 236.

part of the exegetical process.[20]

In this step, it is not a translation which is sought nor a paraphrase (I would differ with the label offered by the authors), but an interpretive summary. The exegete is enjoined to produce something that is faithful to the text (with all of its depth) and yet connects to his culture. Unfortunately, the authors continue, eventually arriving at step 11.2 which instructs the exegete to list the general principles communicated by the passage ('boiling down the truth'). In that section the following steps indicate that the nuances (depth) in the text are left out:

(1) Does the author state a general principle?… (2) Does the broader context reveal a general principle?… (3) Why was this specific command or instruction given?[21]

This extension is possible by assuming that there is a cultural carrier of meaning which can and should be discarded when the kernel is visible. While I will deal with the loss of meaning later, we turn now to the implications for our theology of scripture that is implied in this practice.

Plenary Inspiration and the whole text

The concept of plenary inspiration means that all the words are inspired, not just a distilled meaning that is derived from the words. This 'approach is careful to see the Spirit's influence…extending to all…portions of Holy Scripture, even beyond the direction of thoughts to the selection of words'.[22] The extensiveness of inspiration applies down to the very words, the tense of verbs, the form of pronouns.[23] While I do not want to swing the pendulum to the other side and say that we do not have the right or the responsibility to interpret and apply the text but only to retain the form given through inspiration,[24] I do want us to be careful not to abdicate the responsibility which we have been given to listen to the whole of the inspired text, to understand the depth, power, and complex character of each text.

A listing of the supracultural principles taught in the text or a propositional replacement for the text is not sufficient to communicate that which is inspired. Any bifurcation of the supracultural minimalist kernel (proposition) and the cultural (read, 'disposable') husk discards too much of the text at hand.[25] This desire to

20 George H. Guthrie and J. Scott Duvall, *Biblical Greek Exegesis: A Graded Approach to Learning Intermediate and Advanced Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p. 152.

21 Guthrie and Duvall, *Biblical Greek Exegesis*, pp. 155f.

22 Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, p. 55; cf. Donald Carson, 'Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture', in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 35.

23 Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1998), p. 238.

24 This would imply a dictation theory akin to that held by Muslims who insist that the Qu'ran is untranslated and untranslatable.

25 'Constant biblical theological message' vs. its 'contextual expression' is the way that Dean Flemming put it in his *The Third Horizon*, consulted September 1, 2006.

maintain the whole of the Bible together should be sufficient to encourage us toward another model.

Of course, the debate over the kernel-husk dichotomy is not over: On the one hand, a supracultural kernel is necessary to support 'a careful definition of "Christianity". And there is no way, in cross-cultural communication, to achieve any kind of a working definition without carefully distinguishing between its cultural, relative forms and expressions and its absolute, supracultural core—the elements of Christianity that are non-negotiable.'[26] On the other hand, Donald Carson asserts that

> there is no core of gospel truth in the sense presupposed by von Allmen, no 'supracultural truth' in the sense demanded by Kraft…..[This core] reduces the locus of non-negotiable truth to one or two propositions such as 'Jesus is Lord' or 'Christ died and rose again', when in fact the corpus of non-negotiable truth embraces all of Scripture.[27]

Exegetes have not been failing in their work all these years to communicate a meaning of the text. Rather, they have been missing the last bit (perhaps 25% or 2.5%, depending on the amount of nuance unaccounted for). Vanhoozer's concerns for a 'whole person' response are certainly valid and should

be incorporated.[28] I care that we also complete the cognitive communication.

Proposition not able to represent a text

When I say that a proposition is not capable of representing a passage, it does not matter whether the text in question is an epistolary, narrative, or poetic text. A text cannot be boiled down to a single proposition or principle that may be used in the process of application. There is a depth about a text that cannot be whittled down to this extent. It may be described; it may be put in another context; it may be paraphrased (though with difficulty).

That a single proposition is not capable of summarizing a passage is clear from the semantic parallel.

> The linguistic problem is the easiest to formulate. We know that exact synonyms do not exist between languages; idioms are even more challenging to the translator and a literal word-for-word translation will often convey virtually nothing of the originally intended meaning.[29]

The problem is not limited to curses, puns, and rhymes. Linguists have long taught that there are no exact synonyms. Writers have experi-

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26 James O. Buswell, III, 'Review Article: Conn on Functionalism and Presupposition in Missionary Anthropology', *Trinity Journal* 7 NS (1986): 90.

27 Donald Carson, 'Church and Mission: Contextualization and Third Horizon', in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 248.

28 Vanhoozer uses speech-act theory to approach the text's illocutionary and perlocutionary forces as well as the locutionary, 'Semantics of Biblical Literature', pp. 86-92.

29 Dick Davis, 'On Not Translating Hafez', http://cat.middlebury.edu/~nereview/Davis.html, consulted September 5, 2006.

enced the frustration of trying to paraphrase another author's work without changing the meaning.[30] It is often more faithful to the original text to merely cite the author. In our case, we do not want merely to cite the Bible, nor offer a paraphrase, nor, certainly, a proposition in an attempt to convey the text, but an interpretive summary—one that does not alter the cognitive meaning nor illocutionary force but alters both the genre in which it is written (if necessary) and certainly the target audience who will read it.

That a proposition is not capable of summarising a passage is clear from a mathematical analogy. Although language is not maths,[31] let us think about a set of independent equations that contain an equally large number of unknowns. Using all these equations, one can completely define this system and know the value of all of the variables. If one does not use all the equations, the value of the variables remains unknown. In the case of a text, if one looks not just to a final principle of the text, but to the nuances and force as well, then one is more likely to understand the meaning of the text.

Unfortunately, what is sometimes taught at the end of the exegetical process is to eliminate equation after equation (nuances, influences from the literary context, structural or semantic repetition, etc.) that seem to be insignificant in order to have a single (or few) principle(s). Even though that gives a single meaning, it is not the same meaning as that which is in the text.[32] We need more information at the end of the exegetical process: we need an interpretive summary.

The interpretive summary

This interpretive summary is not an innovation. Before detailing what it is, I want to be explicit about that which it is not. An interpretive summary is not a translation of the text. I agree that translation of the biblical text is very important. We train translators at FATEAC with the help of SIL.[33] It is an indispensable task for contextualization, but it is not the end of exegesis, merely a step. An interpretive summary is not dynamic equivalence in Nida's sense:

> The three steps are reduction of the source text to its structurally simplest and most semantically evident kernels, transference of the meaning from the source language to the receptor language on a structurally simple level, and generation of the stylistically and semantically equivalent expression in the recep-

30 Miguel Roig, Ph.D., 'Avoiding plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and other questionable writing practices: A guide to ethical writing', http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~roigm/plagiarism/Paraphrasing%20highly%20technical.html, consulted September 5, 2006

31 Ludwig Wittgenstein tried that once in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* only to reverse his position later in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

32 Meaning is certainly not found in a simplistic manner, but it is there. Cf. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in this Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

33 The Summer Institute of Linguistics.

tor language.[34]

There is too much interpretive loss in such a method for it to serve as the interpretive summary. Nor are we discussing dynamic equivalence according to Kraft which demands dropping the text down into its equivalent cultural function.[35] It is not a paraphrase of the text in the traditional sense. Nor is it a commentary. Nor is it merely what the text meant.

An interpretive summary is a way to communicate the full meaning of the text (with its depth, power, and beauty) in its context (both literary and historical) with all that is comprehended by the exegete at that time. There may be more depth that has yet to be understood, using the hermeneutical spiral.[36]

This formulation offered at the end of the exegetical process must connect with the readers participating in the context of the exegete. There is no noncultural step in the exegetical process.

Since the interpretive summary will be written in the exegete's own words and, perhaps, mother tongue, it will make the crucial first step in contextualization by locating the understanding of the text in the exegete's own conceptual framework. The interpreter has no choice but to use her own social location in formulating her understanding of the text.[37]

My own students have found the production of an interpretive summary in their mother tongue to be a very helpful process. Many of them reflect theologically only in French (as, indeed, their submitted work must be in French) instead of doing this reflection in their mother tongue. There are expressions, words, and ideas that do not yet have a convenient way of being communicated. By preparing the interpretive summary in their mother tongue, they are raising the level of available theological interaction in that context, squeezing all of their exegetical reflection on this passage into that language, and shaping the language itself to express the truths of God for their people.

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34 Robert L. Thomas, 'Dynamic Equivalence'. This article also makes a significant case for justifying my decision to include dynamic equivalence in this section on exegesis. In fact, dynamic equivalence is more about hermeneutics and exegesis than Nida would have proposed.

35 Vern Poythress, 'Presentation on Translation Techniques'. http://www.frame-poythress.org/Poythress_courses/WivesWeekendSeminary/W13Types.ppt, consulted September 5, 2006. Kraft's own explanation appears excellent at times (even if a bit overwhelming). His version can be seen at C.H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 135.

36 I agree with Grant Osborne that there is a spiralling toward the meaning that is to be communicated from the text. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991).

37 While I do not advocate the New Hermeneutic with its strong view of social location, I think that Carson is right when he says that 'We human beings cannot escape either our sinfulness or our finiteness; and both are guaranteed to make the matrix out of which our questions emerge different from the matrix of every other human being....Pushed too far, of course, the new hermeneutic must result in the unqualified subjectivity of all knowledge.' Donald Carson, 'Church and Mission: Contextualization and Third Horizons', in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. Donald Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 217.

The end which I advocate would allow the text to draw us into its world (through exegesis) and still communicate that meaning fully in our language, using our concepts. There is no point where the naked supracultural proposition(s) are viewed in themselves. They are always clothed by some culture. The New Hermeneutic has taught us that these supracultural propositions are not even thought because each reading is done from a social location.[38] 'From God's point of view, of course, truth may be supracultural....[but] it cannot be communicated supraculturally....We would inevitably couch the principle we thus 'discovered' in some other cultural garb—ours!'[39]

> [T]his summary may look different in each context, i.e. now or a year from now for the same translator and interpreter...as he faces a new context and it will look differently for another interpreter at the same time of the first exegete. So, we will never have two summaries that will be identical. Therefore, in order to come to the depth and width of the meaning of a biblical text we need one another in interpreting it.[40]

But that which is known is set forth in a form that is well understood by the receiving culture, using metaphors that may communicate not just the truth but the power as well of that passage. Metaphors must be used with caution because they often carry connotations in the culture that far surpass the sense in the text at hand. For example, a student wished to discuss 'kephale' from 1 Corinthians 11: 3-13 but did so using the term 'chef' (en français).[41] That might not have been a bad idea if we had not been in the African context where 'chef' carries an enormous load of social, relational, and judicial connotations.

The difference this socially located presentation offers from reader response criticism is that the exegetical process can and should be discussed, understood, and justified across cultures or readers.[42] The end results are verifiable in conversation with other exegetes from other cultures.[43] The proposed result would not be something that is incommensurable

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38 Of course, Wittgenstein was onto this idea long ago by denying the possibility of non-linguistic thoughts.

39 Donald Carson, 'Church and Mission', pp. 249f.

40 Stefan Hanger, Dakar, Senegal, in personal communication, September 12, 2006.

41 Thomas Traoré, 'L'Homme et la Femme devant Dieu d'après 1 Cor 11.2-16. Une étude exégétique et ses implications théologique pour l'égalité entre l'Homme et la Femme dans le contexte africain aujourd'hui', Memoire presented before the FATEAC on July 1, 2006.

42 Inherent in this assertion is the rejection of cultural incommensurability which is advocated by some in the New Hermeneutic and in Postmodernism. The most trenchant of these is Richard Rorty. On commensurability, see my other presentation at this meeting: 'Fundamentalism as voluntary Incommensurability'. Cultural incommensurability is seen in Africa as well in those who say that westerners cannot criticize African Theology because they don't understand the context.

43 '[T]here is no intrinsic reason why these two Christians should not sit down and, with patient probing, not only learn from each other but be corrected by each other.' Carson, 'Church and Mission', p. 256.

with other cultures or social locations nor a lowest common denominator of meaning. Instead, it would provide a locus for discussing the interaction of words, images, and sentence structures that communicate the meaning of the text. It would also provide the locus for discussing the cultural fit for the reader. Either in the interpretive summary or the subsequent explanation, the exegete could indicate how the images and depth of the text would be effectively communicated to the target audience for which the exegete is doing this interpretation.[44]

Some may argue that this is really just another bifurcation of the text into a supracultural kernel and a cultural husk. Buswell's point is well taken; 'But, just because the supracultural core gospel must always be expressed on the human scene in cultural terms and in cultural forms should not necessitate any doubt of its existence or its reality.'[45] However, I have to respond with the question, 'If one can never formulate an expression of it, where or in what sense does this supracultural core exist?'[46] This is the case for the

meaning of the text. I would rather refer to understandings (represented in the interpretive summary) that are more or less faithful to the details of the text than to the meaning of the text. There will be variations in the expression but other cultures and contexts will be able to understand (after due explanation) how and why the interpreter has chosen those modes of expression (vocabulary, models, and metaphors).

There are certainly disadvantages to an interpretive summary: First, it is too much information. An interpretive summary is not easily packaged like a proposition or principle. It is not conveniently preached in western-modernist propositional preaching style. There is not a neat transfer of the exegetical data to the homiletic gristmill. Second, it is not enough information. This is not sufficient for a contextual theology. Of course, this is *only* the exegesis. More work with other texts will be necessary. But this will allow a good exegetical basis for contextual theology; a lacuna in some theological proposals.

Exegetes have been making extended paraphrases for years. Why are we suggesting something so similar? Because exegetes, preachers, and theologians typically leave the interpretive summary on the cutting room floor in order to progress to the principle—thereby over-distilling scripture.

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44 The literature on the fusion of the two horizons is now immense following the ground breaking work of Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

45 James O. Buswell, III, 'Review Article: Conn on Functionalism', p. 90.

46 This interchange reminds me of Kant's noumenon (in this case, equal to 'the meaning in itself') and the phenomenon (here taken as 'the cultural expression of that meaning'). To complete the analogy: what we are referring to is one phenomenon representing another phenomenon without any access to the noumenon—should it exist at all.

An example: Matthew 3:13-17

In order to demonstrate that about which I have been writing, allow me to offer an interpretive summary of

Matthew 3:13-17, the baptism of Jesus. I will not, at this point, justify my conclusions because that would require an exegetical analysis. The point here is to give simply the summary that can convey the meaning with some hoped-for depth. I propose the following:

> Many Christians obey when they can or if it seems appropriate to their level of dignity. John was not qualified to baptize Jesus and they both knew it. Nonetheless, Jesus obeyed in having John baptize him in order to prepare himself. It is in that preparation that the Father was pleased in the Son. This delight of the father (εὐδοκέω) is mostly seen through salvation passages. This son was willing to become man in order to bring salvation to all. The Father was not just happy that Jesus was simply baptized but that Jesus obeyed in fulfilling all that God had asked and was, thereby, prepared with

the presence of the Holy Spirit, first, to face overwhelming temptation and, second, to accomplish the salvation of the world. We understand more of the willing love of the son, the difficulty of his time on earth, purposeful obedience, as well as an example for us to follow in order to prepare for the mission of the father in our lives.

Knowing that no interpretive summary is perfect, the point is that an interpretive summary can offer a place for (1) broader explanations of the text than is possible in the supracultural principle, (2) more rapid summary than a full exegetical analysis, (3) incorporation of some theological and contextual insights, and (4) set the stage for the transition for further theological or homiletical reflection.

Let us not boil down the text too far. Let us seek contextual formulation at every stage of the exegetical and theological process for more faithful results.