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From 'Grammatical-historical Exegesis' to 'Theological Exegesis': Five Essential Practices

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If I know myself I am first and foremost a theological exegete.

*J. I. Packer*¹

The kind of questions serious young theologians put to us are: How can I learn to pray? How can I learn to read the Bible? Either we can help them to do this, or we can't help them at all. Nothing of all this can be taken for granted.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a 1936 letter to Karl Barth*²

Introduction: Theological Exegesis—a Divine or a Devilish Illocution?

Theological exegesis is not a light matter; it is a dangerous thing to hear the voice of God. One seventeenth-century English writer is reported to have said, 'I had rather see coming toward me a whole regiment with drawn swords, than one lone Calvinist convinced that he is doing the will of God.'³ For the sincere exegete, the danger is twofold: obedience to the voice of God proved costly for the twelve disciples, but even graver danger lies in failing to discern whether one is hearing God's voice or another's. Perhaps the most famous example of a devilish use of 'God's voice' is attributed, not surprisingly, to the Devil himself. In Matthew 4:6 the Devil quotes Psalm 91:11-12

1 'In Quest of Canonical Interpretation', in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. Robert Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 47; cf. 45.

2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, trans. Gracie David McI. (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986), 22.

3 Cited in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace: The Kuyper Lectures for 1981 Delivered at the Free University of Amsterdam* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 9.

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in an attempt to persuade Jesus to do something that neither the human nor the divine author of Psalm 91 intended.

In a 1984 article in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, F. F. Bruce claimed that grammatical-historical exegesis (GHE), by itself, is an inadequate reading strategy for the church; something more, 'theological exegesis' (TE), is needed.⁴ Since that article was written some thirty years ago, much has been written by evangelicals regarding the theological interpretation of Scripture. Many of these more recent discussions help us to build on Bruce's insight in order to more explicitly define an evangelical practice of theological exegesis. Kevin Vanhoozer is a leader in this discussion among evangelicals. He has authored a significant monograph, edited a dictionary, and written numerous essays on the topic.⁵ He understands theological exegesis to be an ecclesial reading practice which listens for the divine voice speaking in scripture by attending to the canon's Text/s, Author/s, and Reader/s.⁶

While there has been much discussion of what theological exegesis is, there has been far less discussion on *how* it works in practice. Thus this article addresses the question, '*How* do global theological educators equip

leaders in the church to practise theological exegesis?' More specifically, how do we balance an emphasis on human and divine authorship—which has tended to be an evangelical strength—while paying greater attention to a traditional evangelical weakness: readers, their contexts, and their interpretative communities? How are teachers of the church to equip the people of God to hear the divine voice in Scripture? What basic reading practices are necessary for Christian faithfulness when the church is facing massive and rapid growth, especially the type of growth described as 'church plant movements'.⁷ Toward an answer to these pressing questions, this article proposes five practices for evangelical theological exegesis:

1. Theological Exegesis Approaches Scripture with *Faith Seeking Understanding* (*fides quaerens intellectum*).
2. Theological Exegesis Is *Faithful* to the Original Contexts (*grammatical-historical exegesis*).
3. Theological Exegesis Reads Scripture with the Analogy of *Faith* (*analogia fidei*).
4. Theological Exegesis Reads Scripture with the Rule of *Faith* (*regula fidei*).
5. Theological Exegesis Reads Scripture within the Community of *Faith* (*intra ecclesiam*).

Note that the first and last of these practices are especially attuned to the *reader* of the text. Emphasis on the reader draws attention to practices, not simply method. Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that 'practices' require

4 F. F. Bruce, 'Interpretation of the Bible', in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 565–68.

5 See for example, Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

6 See especially: Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

7 David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

us to attend not only to methods, but also to the ends of the community in which the practice is located.⁸ Methods can be didactically helpful,⁹ but only when they are situated within these larger practices.¹⁰ The unique nature of the church's being and calling requires reading strategies distinct from the culture in which it dwells. As Yeago notes, 'Renewal of the church requires not only new ideas about the church, but renewed *practices* of being the church, and chief among these are *practices* of understanding and applying the Scriptures.'¹¹

The explosion of Christianity among the urban poor and in the global south gives rise to perhaps the most exciting stories of the twentieth century. The five practices of TE identified above are especially significant for those regional theatres. David Garrison has done the global church an invaluable (although widely ignored) service in documenting twenty-five emerging 'church planting movements'.¹² He records stories

like those of Sharif who launched 'the largest Church Planting Movement in the history of Christian missions to Muslims'.¹³ Between 1991 and 2001 Sharif's movement has seen 4000 churches planted among Muslims and 'more than 150,000 Muslims come to faith in Christ'.¹⁴ The five practices for theological exegesis proposed here aim to stimulate reflection on the types of theological education needed to serve pastors like Sharif or those currently being equipped at the institution where I serve, *The Urban Ministry Institute*.¹⁵ The thesis advanced is that an evangelical version of TE provides the best way forward for these pastors and for the theological educators whose vocation is to serve them.

I Faith Seeking Understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*)

Anselm's (d. 1109) motto of faith seeking understanding is the starting point for the theological exegete. TE is a practice for those who have already made a volitional decision to respond to the command, 'You follow me!' (John 21:22). Their aim in reading Scripture is to know the mind of Christ.¹⁶ They

8 *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187.

9 See for example Jack Kuhatschek, *Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Robert Traina, *Methodological Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

10 Richard Hays, 'Reading the Bible with Eyes of Faith: The Practice of Theological Exegesis', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1:1 (2007): 11–12.

11 'The Bible: The Spirit, Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited', in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James Joseph Buckley and David Yeago (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 93; emphasis added.

12 David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*.

13 Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 36, 120.

14 Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 115.

15 The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI) has launched over 100 satellite campuses around the world since 2001. The vision of the institute is to provide formal theological education for church leaders serving among the urban poor. See further: www.tumi.org.

16 Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Reconciliation of Mind: A Theological Meditation upon the Teaching of St. Paul', in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, ed. Wallace M. Alston, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 200–201.

receive in faith Scripture's claim of divine authorship, and approach the text of scripture differently from the texts of other respected authors (Teresa of Ávila, Shakespeare, Endo) or even other texts which claim divine authorship (Koran, the Book of Mormon). For evangelical theological exegetes, the triune discourse of Scripture is unique, and they approach scripture aiming for a greater love and a deeper knowledge of the triune God.

Anselm's motto, 'I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand' did not represent a new interpretive practice. More than a thousand years before, others had confessed a similar 'motto'.¹⁷ A humble acknowledgement of God was deemed the starting point for knowledge (Prov. 1:7) and wisdom (Ps. 111:10). Those who wish to have understanding (Ps. 111:10) into the work (and word) of God, must begin with the fear of the Lord. The translators of the LXX were so sure of this fact that they added to the MT of Proverbs 1:7 an explanatory phrase, 'and piety toward God is the beginning of perception [*aisthêsis*]', (NETS).

For theological exegetes, 'the fear of the Lord' calls for a radical dependency upon the Holy Spirit, a dependency with at least two implications. First, the theological interpreter approaches Scripture with sin as an epistemological category. Without a favourable answer to the continual prayer of 'Lord,

Jesus, have mercy on me', he is aware of his notorious tendency to suppress unsavoury truths (Rom. 1:19–19; Ps. 119:9,11).

Secondly, dependency means that theological interpreters must be willing to turn 'common hermeneutical agendas upon their heads' by making the life of prayer 'utterly basic' to their practice of theological interpretation.¹⁸ Jeroslav Pelikan has famously pointed out that for the first 1500 years of the church, nearly all the theologians of the church (i.e. theological exegetes) were either bishops or monks. The vast majority of these would have followed some form of the Benedictine rule or a liturgy of the hours which would have them praying through the Psalter, including Psalm 119, every week.

Testimony to the influence of this practice on medieval exegetes is legion: 'whilst you were singing the psalms, did it not sometimes come about that you were illuminated by the brilliance of the spiritual sense?'; or 'when fixed in a fervor quite new, I began to love singing the Psalms for God's sake, many things in the divine Scripture began to be unlocked for me in silence as I was Psalm singing that I had been unable previously to track down by reading'.¹⁹ This prayerful approach to exegesis is at odds with much western exegetical practices, where the primacy of the life of prayer is rarely

¹⁷ For Blocher (and for Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin), 'the fear of the LORD is the principle of exegetical and theological wisdom' (Henri Blocher, 'The Fear of the Lord as the "Principle" of Wisdom', *Tyndale Bulletin* 28 [1977]: 4, 15, 28).

¹⁸ Bartholomew and Holt, 'Prayer in/and the Drama of Redemption in Luke: Prayer and Exegetical Performance', 367.

¹⁹ Cited in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, vol. 3: The Four Senses of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 626, n.305; 658, n. 184, cf. n.182; 724, n.182.

discussed.²⁰ Is it really surprising that earlier theological exegetes so often heard the divine voice in places where we find silence?

When the Christian exegete approaches the text with the prayer, 'Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law' (Ps. 119:18),²¹ she is positioned between the discredited positivism of 'objective' historical criticism and the despair of the derridian-deconstructionist playground. In faith she approaches scripture with neither blind optimism nor despairing playfulness—rather she comes seeking the mind of Christ, an understanding of the divine voice, and a proper response of obedient love. Exegetical handbooks for the global church in the twenty-first century can no longer ignore this basic posture of the ecclesial reader.

II Faithful to the Original Contexts (*Grammatical-historical Exegesis*)

The human authors of Scripture are not excluded from the golden rule. We do our best to listen to them as we ourselves would want to be heard—not the least because we believe each to have been individually shaped, chosen, and

empowered by the Holy Spirit to write the Holy Scriptures. While the church has sometimes become distracted from the 'literal' sense of Scripture, it has almost always agreed that the literal sense was the most important. Origen himself built the spiritual sense upon the literal. Sensitivity and care (even love) for the original grammatical, historical, and literary contexts of the text remain a central practice of TE. Richard Hays has argued along similar lines:

History therefore cannot be either inimical or irrelevant to theology's affirmations of truth. The more accurately we understand the historical setting of 1st-century Palestine, the more precise and faithful will be our understanding of what the incarnate Word taught, did, and suffered.²²

Clarity on this point makes it worth repeating. Attention to the divine illocution of a text does not replace attentiveness to the human authors whom God divinely prepared and equipped to speak his own words. Tolerance for interpretive sloth and pride are not to be condoned. GHE seeks to attend carefully to the human authors' voices as individuals within a particular book, corpus, or testament.²³ It is

²⁰ For exceptions see: Patrick Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms* (Conciliar, 2000); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Prayerbook of the Bible* (Life Together; Prayerbook of the Bible, ed. Geoffrey Kelly, trans. Daniel Bloesch and James Burtneiss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

²¹ Psalm 119 (Bonhoeffer's favorite Psalm) is the prayer of the Christian Exegete (note the I-thou language throughout the Psalm). Reinhard Hütter is writing an entire commentary on the Psalm for the Brazos Theological Commentary Series.

²² 'Reading the Bible with Eyes of Faith: The Practice of Theological Exegesis', 12.

²³ Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 91, 440; Vern Poythress, 'Divine Meaning of Scripture', *Westminster Theological Journal* 48:2 (1986): 277; Vanhooser, *Is There a Meaning in the Text?*, 265.

easier to hear clearly one voice, than many speaking at the same time. By carefully listening to each human author, theological interpreters are more accurately able to hear the divine voice speaking through the canon as a whole.²⁴ Thus evangelical TE does not denigrate GHE, but seeks to recover alongside of it the historic emphasis of the church on the divine voice speaking in Scripture as a whole.²⁵

III The Analogy of Faith (*analogia fidei*)

The analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) has always played an essential role in ecclesial exegesis, but it moved to even greater prominence as a reading strategy during the Reformation due to the movement's motto of *sola scriptura*. This practice eventually came to mean that more difficult-to-understand passages in Scripture should be interpreted by the clearer ones. Henri Blocher helpfully traces four versions of the practice in the Protestant tradition.²⁶ He calls the first version the 'traditional' view and it corresponds to what I have called 'the rule of faith' in the next section (the term 'rule of faith' does not appear in the article). Blocher's fourth use, endorsed by the Second Helvetic Confession, refers to what I mean by

analogia fidei, but he calls it the *analogia totius Scripturae*, and explains that it means

[T]he comparison of all relevant passages on any topic, under the methodical duty to avoid substantial contradictions. It implies a systematic character in biblical interpretation, the totality of a coherent Scripture being the norm.²⁷

This rule is an essential component of Protestant interpretation and is also commonly referred to by the Latin phrase: *scriptura ipsius interpret* (Scripture is its own interpreter). In short, the analogy of faith requires theological exegetes to take the whole canon of Scripture into consideration when interpreting a biblical passage. Vanhoozer calls this idea of the divine voice speaking through the canon as a whole a 'canonical illocution', and he defines it as 'what God is doing by means of the human discourse in the biblical texts at the level of the canon'.²⁸

We find a compelling example of the *analogia fidei* in Jesus' reading strategy in Matthew 22:29–32. When challenged by the Sadducees about his belief in the doctrine of the resurrection (a belief that had developed more clearly during post-exilic Judaism and thus was not acceptable to the Sadducees who accepted only the Pentateuch as canonical), Jesus 'proves' the doctrine from Exodus 3:6. Grammatical-historical or historical critical study

²⁴ Examples of evangelicals who have offered helpful proposals of what this could look like on a larger scale include Paul House, Charles Scobie, and Chris Wright.

²⁵ Daniel Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 187–205.

²⁶ Henri Blocher, 'The Analogy of Faith in the Study of Scripture', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 5 (1987): 18–24.

²⁷ Blocher, 'The Analogy of Faith in the Study of Scripture,' 20.

²⁸ *Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 179, emphasis original.

might not find the doctrine of the resurrection in Exodus 3:6, but Jesus' teaching in Matt 22:29–32 reveals that the idea of resurrection is part of the divine illocution.²⁹

Jesus' final words to the Sadducees in Mark's version, '*polu planasthe*' ('You are quite wrong', ESV), continues to warn theological exegetes of the danger of failing to attend to the divine voice found in the canon as a whole. As Craig Blomberg notes: 'Contemporary objections to Jesus' logic here perhaps reveal an unnecessary rigidity in our modern historical/grammatical hermeneutics rather than any fallacy with Jesus' interpretation.'³⁰ Vern Poythress, while not discussing the *analogia fidei* in particular, makes a similar point, 'We must attend to God's meaning. And God's meaning is not boxed in. Rather, it will become evident in the subsequent events and in the subsequent words of explanation.'³¹

While the value of the analogy of faith has repeatedly proven itself throughout church history, its importance can also be illustrated from recent western evangelical theology, biblical studies, and biblical theology. In theology, Kevin Vanhoozer's proposal for a 'canonical-linguistic approach' to Christian theology presents a powerful appeal for the recovery of the analogy

of faith as a component of TE.³² Within biblical studies, the recent explosion of interest in the use of the Old Testament in the New, intertextuality, and intracanonical criticism illustrates its increasing importance.³³ A third example can be seen in evangelicals' continued commitment to a form of biblical theology which displays many of the qualifications of TE.³⁴

To these western examples must be added the testimony of pastors serving among the world's more than one billion urban poor. Many of these leaders will never be able to afford more than three or four books beyond their Bible.³⁵ The exegetical fruits of these teachers of the church, who almost always rely upon the canon for their 'commentary' on a pericope, is not to be quickly despised.³⁶

32 'A theological exegesis will therefore pay as much, if not more, attention to the canonical context as the historical in order to discern the communicative intent of the divine playwright' (Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 249).

33 See articles on 'Intertextuality' and 'Scripture, Unity of', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 332–34; 731–34.

34 See T. Desmond Alexander et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); and the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* Series edited by D. A. Carson.

35 *The Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge* (a 'precritical' Bible study aid with some 300,000 intratextual references), or some similar tool, should be one of those few books.

36 I think of conversations on 'suffering' with leaders of persecuted house churches in China, or on 'citizenship' (Acts 22:38; Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20) with pastors whose congregations consist of undocumented workers in the United States.

29 Although see J. Gerald Janzen, 'Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3:6 in Mark 12:26', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*: 23 (1985): 56.

30 Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 334.

31 Vern Poythress, 'The Presence of God Qualifying Our Notions of Grammatical-Historical Interpretation: Genesis 3:15 as a Test Case', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:1 (2007): 99.

IV The Rule of Faith (*regula fidei*)

Evangelical interpreters are becoming increasingly aware of a fourth ecclesial interpretive practice; Scripture must be read according to the Rule of Faith. This rule cannot be neglected if an interpretation is to be considered 'Christian'—at least this has been the unanimous opinion of the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' (Nicene Creed) since the fourth century. Although Thomas Aquinas identified the rule of faith as *sola canonica scriptura est regulae fidei* (canonical Scripture alone is the rule of faith)—which would make it analogous to the Protestant version of the analogy of faith (*scriptura ipsius interpres*), the rule is better thought of as an authoritative summary of Scripture's message—a trustworthy map to Scripture.³⁷

The rule of faith is referred to by both Ignatius (d. c. 107) and Polycarp (d. 156), although it receives its first significant development with Irenaeus (d. c. 185) and Tertullian (d. c. 225).³⁸ Its content was perhaps most clearly articulated by Vincent of Leréns (d. c. 445), who described it as that which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.³⁹ While the exact form of this

rule is debated, its essence is threefold: Scripture narrates the story of the mission of God (His-story), Scripture leads us to Christ, and, the God who created the world is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who together with the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped as Yahweh. The three elements of this rule are most authoritatively summarized in the Nicene Creed—the 'pledge of allegiance' for the one (holy, catholic, apostolic) nation under God (1 Pet. 2:9).⁴⁰

1. The Rule of Faith Reads Scripture as a Single Story

The first element of the rule of faith is a commitment to reading Scripture as a single story in which we as readers are participants. N. T. Wright points out that the unity of the first Christians was to be found in the story they shared:

Their strong centre, strong enough to be recognizable in works as diverse as those of Jude and Ignatius, James and Justin Martyr, was not a theory or a new ethic, not an abstract dogma nor rote-learning teaching, but a particular story told and lived.⁴¹

³⁷ Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 208; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.9.14, ed. John Thomas McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian classics v. 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1165.

³⁸ Kathryn Greene-McCreight, 'Rule of Faith', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 703; Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 57–68.

³⁹ Vincent of Leréns, *Commonitory*, 2.6–7. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim 'assemblies of

Jehovah' in some 230 countries, adding current weight to St. Vincent's concern. See also James Kombo, *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought*, 21–22.

⁴⁰ James K. A. Smith calls the Nicene Creed the 'pledge of allegiance' for the church (*Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 190).

⁴¹ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 456.

Paul Blowers, in a seminal article on the Rule of Faith, has built on Wright's observation to show that the heart of the church's rule of faith is a shared story. He writes:

My premise here is that at bottom, the Rule of Faith (which was always associated with Scripture itself) served the primitive Christian hope of articulating and authenticating a world encompassing story or metanarrative of creation, incarnation, redemption, and consummation.⁴²

An increasing number of biblical scholars and theologians recognize that Christian interpretation of Scripture must be done within the interpretive framework of the cosmic drama of salvation in which we participate.⁴³ Although the embrace of a participatory exegesis within Scripture's metanarrative is celebrated under labels such as 'Salvation History' and 'Missional Hermeneutics' these movements are simply rediscovering the ancient Rule of Faith's emphasis on the mission of God in the canonical biblical narrative.

2. The Rule of Faith Finds Christ at the Centre of Scripture's Story

If the first component of the rule of faith has to do with interpretive practice beginning and ending within the story of God, the second component of the rule makes clear the goal of all TE: to know Christ, for he is the *telos* of both

Scripture and the Christian life.⁴⁴ It listens in Scripture for the voice of the Spirit who leads us to Christ.⁴⁵ It seeks to know Christ in all of Scripture, for Christ through the Spirit reveals the Father (Matt 11:27). The exact way in which Christ is met in the canon is not specified by the rule of faith, but it does agree that he is its *res*.⁴⁶

Debates rage as to what it means to read Scripture with a Christological lens (e.g., Is such reading christocentric, christo-ecclesiological, christomonic or christotelic?). Whatever methodological lens is used, the rule of faith requires us to read all of Scripture in a manner informed and normed by an orthodox Christology.⁴⁷ However, we must keep in mind Kevin Vanhoozer's warning, 'Spiritual formation can be the aim, but not the norm, of biblical interpretation. The norm must remain the author's illocutionary intent.'⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Mt. 5:17; Lk. 24:27, 44; Jn. 5:39; Heb. 10:7; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:13.

⁴⁵ Typology thus becomes a vital interpretive skill in TE. See discussion in: Daniel J. Treier, 'Typology,' in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 823–27.

⁴⁶ 'The implication is that exegesis does not confine itself to registering only the verbal sense of the text, but presses forward through the text to the subject matter (*res*) to which it points.' Brevard Childs, 'Toward Recovering Theological Exegesis', *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997): 19.

⁴⁷ For a well-developed example of Augustine's practice of Christological reading, see Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 70–77.

⁴⁸ 'From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of the Covenant', in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and et. al., vol. 2, SHS (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 42.

⁴² Paul Blowers, 'The *regula fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith', *Pro Ecclesia* 6 (1997): 202.

⁴³ For example, Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

3. The Rule of Faith is Trinitarian

The third component of the Rule of Faith exegetes Yahweh. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is to be identified with the Father, Son, and Spirit of the NT documents. C. Kavin Rowe has shown how the canonical texts exerted pressure on the early church to 'conclude that there is a necessary and essential connection between the Old Testament and, at least, economic Trinitarian doctrine'.⁴⁹ The Rule of Faith does not require the ecclesial exegete to find the Trinity in every pericope, but it does require the exegete to face the canonical 'pressure' of relating the Creator God of Genesis 1:26 with what the Spirit has revealed about God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The earliest form of the Rule of Faith is difficult to confirm, but its threefold emphasis was reliably embodied in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed of 385.⁵⁰ The Nicene Creed thus serves as a foundational guide for the theological exegete. S. Mark Heim remarks:

The [Nicene] creed is not only one of the unifying factors of past ecclesiastical history, it is the most traditionally authoritative expression of the Christian faith. If we are interested in other forms of unity, we can bypass the creed, but a unity in faith

has no other focus or basis.⁵¹

Has Heim overstated the case? Perhaps, but if so he is correct at least to insist that the Nicene Creed cannot be bypassed by the evangelical theological exegete. The creed captures the cosmic story of redemption and the Christological and Trinitarian rules of the ancient church.⁵² It provides an essential map, reliably laying out the land in which TE is done.⁵³ It serves theological exegetes as a 'fence', helping them recognize when a certain reading of Scripture lies beyond the bounds of orthodoxy.⁵⁴ The creed is 'the touchstone and guarantee of orthodox, biblical faith'; it is the pledge of allegiance for evangelical theological exegetes.⁵⁵

V Within the Community of Faith (*catholica regula*)

We have so far laid out four essential

⁴⁹ He bases his claim on exegetical studies of: 1) Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13; Acts 2:21; 2) Jn. 20:28; 3) 2 Cor. 3:17a; 4) Gal. 4:4–6; 5) Rom. 8:9–11 (C. Kavin Rowe, 'Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics', *Pro Ecclesia* 11:3 [2002]: 306).

⁵⁰ While the Roman Catholic and most Orthodox communions recognize all seven ecumenical councils, the Protestant churches have generally acknowledged only the first four (thus accepting the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds).

⁵¹ S. Mark Heim, 'Introduction', in *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century: Papers of the Faith to Creed Consultation*, Commission on Faith and Order, ed. S. Mark Heim, Faith and Order Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 19.

⁵² My introduction to theological exegesis and the importance of Nicene orthodoxy came from Don Davis. Most recently, see his *Sacred Roots: A Primer on Retrieving the Great Tradition* (Wichita, KS: The Urban Ministry Institute, 2010).

⁵³ Philip Turner, 'Introduction', in *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher D. Seitz (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 11; cf. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 204, 449–50.

⁵⁴ 'Those who are not of the truth take themselves out of the game by their refusal to play by the rules (viz. the Scriptures, the Rule of Faith)' (Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 426).

⁵⁵ Bray, *Creeds, Councils, and Christ*, 118.

practices of TE. Although all are inter-related, they have been presented in a dogmatic order. Faith in Christ is the door through which one approaches Scripture in order to do TE (practice one). After believing, one listens first to individual scriptural soloists (practice two), and then to the canonical choir (practice three) in order to hear what the Spirit is singing in the Word. If the song that is heard does not resonate with the rule of faith, it must be tuned into harmony (practice four). Finally, the theological exegete recognizes that what he has heard in a given text must now be sung in a local theatre (practice five).⁵⁶ But should this final stage be a solo or ensemble performance?

Rene Decartes (d. 1650) is well known for his basic premise, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). One of my professors was fond of pointing out that it was the 'I' not the 'think' which was revolutionary and thus foundational for the Enlightenment. Three hundred years later, most western exegetes have deeply imbibed the principle of individualism from the Father of modern philosophy. But emphasizing 'my thought', 'my interpretation', 'my song' is a theological danger for the ecclesial exegete. According to Paul it is 'we' who 'have the mind of Christ' (2 Cor. 2:16), but who are we? Vanhoozer offers helpful insight on this point:

A canonically-centered catholic tradition that includes voices from past and present, North and South, East and West, thus corresponds to the nature of the Bible itself. To affirm a 'Pentecostal plurality' is to acknowledge that it takes many interpretive communities spanning many times, places and cultures in order fully to appreciate the rich, thick

meaning of Scripture.⁵⁷

The 'Pentecostal plurality' of which Vanhoozer speaks includes those pastors and teachers living among the world's one billion urban poor.

Theological exegetes must be humble enough to hear what the Spirit is saying to the whole body. It is not only the meritocratic elite, 'qualified by guild certification', who have been given ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.⁵⁸ Wise ecclesial exegetes from across the ages warn us to pay careful attention to the *cognito per modum connaturalitatis* (Aquinas),⁵⁹ to 'the spiritual instinct of the children of God',⁶⁰ and to those formally untrained who have a 'theological instinct' attuned to the mind of Christ.⁶¹ Theological exegesis requires a type of 'corporate discernment of spirits',⁶² a

56 Since the individual comes to faith in a local community, there is also a circular dimension to the process.

57 Kevin Vanhoozer, 'Theological Method', in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness et al. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 896. See also *The Drama of Doctrine*, 27.

58 Yeago, 'The Spirit, Church, and the Scriptures', 50.

59 Discussed in Johannes Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx, eds., 'The Teaching Authority of All—A Reflection about the Structure of the New Testament', in *The Teaching Authority of Believers* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1985), 19.

60 Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 26.

61 Torrance, 'The Reconciliation of Mind: A Theological Meditation upon the Teaching of St. Paul', 303.

62 Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded Ed. (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 2002), 18.

process which John Powell explains is called 'connaturality':

As the life of Christ is deepened in us by the Holy Spirit, there is created in the Christian a 'sense of Christ,' a taste and instinctual judgment for the things of God, a deeper perception of God's truth, an increased understanding of God's dispositions and love toward us. This is what Christians must strive to attain individually and corporately; theologians call it Christian *connaturality*. It is like a natural instinct or intuition, but is not natural, since it results from the supernatural realities of the Divine Indwelling and the impulses of grace. No account of dialectical or analytical facility, which is purely human, can provide this connatural instinct. It is increased only by the continual nourishment of the life of God that vivifies the Christian.⁶³

Theological exegetes recognize that they are members of the body of Christ, and their interpretations of Scripture are offered with interdependence upon the perspectives of other members of the body. The body has a variety of ways of knowing: ears (hearing), eyes (sight), hands (touch), nose (smell), tongue (taste). No one member of the body (e.g. a seminary trained exegetical 'eye') understands a text of Scripture as well as the whole body who together share in the 'mind of Christ'.⁶⁴

63 John Powell, *The Mystery of the Church* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967), 8. Cited in Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 19.

64 Consider the insights offered by 'untrained' exegetes such as Vinoth Ramachandra, Mother Teresa, Jean Vanier, Paul Brand, Paul Tournier, Dorothy Sawyers, Frank Lau-

Secondly, if the one Spirit (Eph. 4:3–4) who speaks in Scripture is speaking to all Christians, in all places and at all times, then wisdom dictates that theological exegetes carefully consider how members of the body in other times and places have heard the Spirit's voice. Our confession of a 'catholic' or universal church is of great weight for TE, since no one contemporary culture has a complete understanding of Scripture.⁶⁵ The ecclesially attuned exegete seeks to avoid the blind spots of our age and the chronological snobbery of most historical critical exegesis by listening to the communion of saints across the ages. He also seeks to avoid the western academic captivity of the Bible by dialoguing with global exegetes whose location outside of the West allows new insights to emerge.

In Conclusion: Siblings and Neighbours

'And now the end has come. So listen to my last piece of advice: exegesis, exegesis, and yet more exegesis! Keep to the Word, to the scripture that has been given to us',⁶⁶ said Karl Barth. But

bach, Sadhu Sundar Singh, or 'uneducated' pastors like A. W. Tozer or John Bunyan. See further: Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God*, 117–18.

65 For well-developed thinking on this dimension of catholicity see: Jonathan R. Wilson, *Why Church Matters: Worship, Ministry, and Mission in Practice* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 125.

66 Karl Barth in a farewell sermon from Psalm 119 to his Bonn students in 1935 after being forced from his university post. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 259.

what kind of exegesis is it to be? In this essay I have argued that theological exegesis (TE), rather than grammatical historical exegesis (GHE) alone, will best serve the global church. Evangelical theological exegesis requires five ecclesial practices, and GHE is only one of the practices necessary for pastors and church teachers to be adequately equipped (2 Tim. 3:17) to interpret the Word of God.⁶⁷ A 'distinctive ecclesial enterprise of scriptural interpretation' requires wisdom and a balance of these five practices; this is where future research on evangelical TE needs to focus.⁶⁸

Finally, what about our non-Christian neighbours? For Jesus and his disciples, there were only two types of reading: reading with siblings (Luke 8:21) and reading with neighbours (Lk. 10:26, 33, 36–37). Our eyes are often opened when we read Scripture with neighbours, and we learn invaluable lessons. If one thinks theological exegesis provides an excuse to ignore Adler's art, Sternberg's poetry, or an agnostic's critical commentary, one has

missed the point of the theological interpretation movement.⁶⁹ Rather, theological exegesis is a reading strategy for the community of readers who have decided to follow Jesus as Rabbi. It is not something to be forced upon those who have not made a faith commitment to Jesus, nor does it imply that evangelical theological exegetes have no need to learn from others.

Theological exegesis is analogous to that old Mennonite slogan, 'A humble proposal for world peace: Let all Christians agree to stop killing each other.' The point is not to exclude non-believers from the proposal, the point is rather to say that one must start somewhere. Theological exegesis is a reading strategy for teachers of the church, *intra ecclesiam*; it is for those who claim to follow the way of Jesus, and who are called to teach (Matt. 28:19–20) other disciples how to read the Scriptures that testify to Christ (Luke 24:27). The practices of theological exegesis provide the kind of help 'serious young theologians' and pastors need. I hope Bonhoeffer would be pleased, and that Sharif will be helped.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ In a longer version of this paper I describe the neglect of these five practices as the *Relational Fallacy*, *Exegetical Fallacy*, *Canonical Fallacy*, *Theological Fallacy*, and the *Ecclesial Fallacy*.

⁶⁸ See for example, Daniel Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁶⁹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Indiana University Press, 1987); William Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

⁷⁰ Thanks to Ryan Peterson, Timothy Larson, Dan Treier, and John Walton for feedback on previous versions of this paper; remaining errors are my own.