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THE "FULLER MEANING" OF SCRIPTURE: A HERMENEUTICAL QUESTION FOR EVANGELICALS

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A brief review of the sensus plenior *debate in Roman Catholic circles lays a foundation for understanding a similar debate among evangelicals and raises pertinent questions. The debate conducted among evangelicals focuses attention on the need for careful exegesis of Scripture passages (such as Dan 8:16, 19; 12:8; 1 Pet 1:10-12; and John 11:49-52) as well as the need to reexamine the NT use of the OT (e.g., the use to which Matthew puts Psalms 22 and 69). Furthermore, the evangelical debate points out the need to think through the implications of* sensus plenior *for such key doctrines as biblical infallibility and biblical inerrancy. A final issue raised by the debate concerns the reliability of the grammatical-historical method of hermeneutics as applied to the biblical text.*

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INTRODUCTION

EVANGELICAL scholars are aware of the hermeneutical debates that are taking place both without and within evangelicalism. Biblical interpretation is an essential field of study in theological science because it attempts to answer the question: "What did God and, for that matter, the human authors mean by what they said in the Bible?" One question of recent concern for evangelicals has been over the proposed *sensus plenior* or "fuller meaning" of certain Scriptures found in the OT. The purpose of this article is to discuss two alternative answers of evangelicals to the question, "Is there a fuller meaning to Scripture?" The one view is an affirmative response. The other view is a negative response to the question in that it affirms a single meaning for all the texts of Scripture. To prepare for the discussion of these two views, there will be a brief review of the background and the discussion of the idea of a fuller meaning to

Scripture in Roman Catholic thought, since the idea seems to have developed first within that theological tradition.

ROMAN CATHOLIC BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

The first use of the term *sensus plenior* as a label to classify a meaning of Scripture was by Father Andrea Fernandez in the late 1920s. His idea was not unheralded, for around the turn of this century there were Catholic scholars who suggested a sense to Scripture very close to the concept of *sensus plenior*.

Fernandez suggested that God had expressed through the words of Scripture a deeper meaning than that which the human writers understood and intended. This hidden meaning is a fuller development of the literal meaning of Scripture. It is found especially in OT prophecies, but there are also certain Christian doctrines insinuated in the OT which have their fuller meanings in the NT.[1]

The *sensus plenior* concept has received great attention in Catholic biblical periodicals since the end of the Second World War. Raymond Brown has been probably the leading spokesman for the idea in Catholic scholarship. His definition of *sensus plenior* is much like Fernandez's. He has defined it as

> the deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, that is seen to exist in the words of Scripture when they are studied in the light of further revelation or of development in the understanding of revelation.[2]

Brown considers the fuller meaning to be a part of the literal meaning of the words of Scripture and therefore distinct from any typical sense.[3] While the literal meaning is the meaning directly intended by the human author and conveyed by his words, this does not exclude any ramifications that his words may have taken on in the larger context of the Bible.[4] These later ramifications are the "plus-value" of the literal meaning of the author's words, which "plus-value" was unknown to the author.[5]

The use of grammatical-historical exegesis determines the meaning of an author's message for his time. But such exegesis does not exhaust

[1]Raymond E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of a Sensus Plenior," *CBQ* 15 (1953) 142.

[2]Raymond E. Brown, "Hermeneutics," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 161.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., 607.

[5]Raymond E. Brown, "The *Sensus Plenior* in the Last Ten Years," *CBQ* 25 (1963) 267.

the real and fuller meaning of certain texts, since God had intended something more, according to Brown.[6] The determination of the *sensus plenior* is either through further divine revelation in Scripture or through the development of the understanding of divine revelation by the Church.[7]

Discussions have taken place among Catholic theologians who adhere to the *sensus plenior*, but who do not agree on all points of the argument. The discussions on certain questions are pertinent to evangelicals, for these questions must also be treated in the evangelical debate. One question is whether or not a passage can possess a fuller sense if the human author was unaware of that fuller sense.[8] The issue here is, "can an author function truly as an author if he is unconscious of a fuller meaning of his words?" A second question is whether or not the *sensus plenior* is merely a literal sense to Scripture, or in actuality a second sense to the literal meaning.[9] A third question centers upon the distinction between a fuller meaning and the typical sense of a passage.[10] Is there a clear-cut difference between the two? A fourth question concerns the range of *sensus plenior*. Is *sensus plenior* limited to just the OT/NT relationship, or is there a real *sensus plenior* of OT texts discovered at a later state of the OT, as well as a real *sensus plenior* of NT texts discovered later by the church?[11]

The questions prompted by Catholic biblical interpreters who are opposed to the idea of a *sensus plenior* to Scripture are also very pertinent to the discussion among evangelicals, due to the issues raised. Rudolph Bierberg, for example, opposed the fuller meaning from the theological perspective of inspiration.[12] For Bierberg, what might go beyond the understanding and intention of the human author is not inspired. Both God and men are the true authors of Scripture, with God as the principal author and the human authors as God's instruments. When the Scriptures were written, God limited the expression of His thought to the character and capacities of the human agent. Therefore, what God intended, the human author intended. The literal meaning is the intended meaning of the divine and human authors. If the *sensus plenior* is the literal meaning of the text, then there is no reason to designate it fuller. If the *sensus plenior* is an extension of meaning beyond the intent of the human author, then it is a new

[6]Brown, "Hermeneutics," 618.

[7]Ibid., 616.

[8]Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of a Sensus Plenior," 145.

[9]Ibid., 147.

[10]Ibid., 153.

[11]Brown, "The *Sensus Plenior* in the Last Ten Years," 271-73.

[12]Rudolph Bierberg, "Does Sacred Scripture Have A *Sensus Plenior*?" *CBQ* 10 (1948) 185-88.

concept and a different meaning, rather than a fuller meaning, and not the effect of the inspiration of a text.

Bierberg also opposed the *sensus plenior* on the theological grounds of divine revelation.[13] When God revealed his truths, he intended them in their fullest sense which was the literal meaning of the words which the inspired writers used. The human author in any single passage was only quoting God and intended what God intended.

Catholic scholars opposed to *sensus plenior* argue that what interpreters are dealing with is actually fuller understanding rather than a fuller meaning of earlier texts. Bruce Vawter illustrated this by pointing out that one ought not to refer to the God of the NT as a fuller sense of the God who revealed himself to Amos or Isaiah. While men have more knowledge about him than those prophets, he is the same God. There is nothing inadequate in the meaning or sense of the words about God which come from the OT.[14]

Thus a glance at certain debates in Catholic hermeneutics suggests that there are lively differences regarding the idea of the *sensus plenior*. The historical development of the idea in the Catholic tradition along with the debate that has ensued provides a very important background, while raising questions pertinent to the evangelical discussion.

THE FULLER MEANING VIEW AS HELD BY EVANGELICALS

The hermeneutical idea of a *sensus plenior* to certain passages of Scripture is not the sole possession of the Catholic Church. Some evangelicals do see a meaning which is deeper or fuller in certain passages of the OT than the literal meaning. Their argument is basically that since God is ultimately the author of Scripture, it is his intention primarily that should be sought, and not the human author's. This is Philip Payne's point who has written that

> in spite of the crucial role the human authors' intention has for the meaning of a text his conscious intention does not necessarily *exhaust* the meaning of his statements, especially in more poetic and predictive writings. Ultimately God is the author of Scripture, and it is his intention alone that exhaustively restricts the meaning of the text to what he feels can be demonstrated to be the intention of the human author.[15]

God, therefore, could have revealed more through the words of a writer of Scripture than the writer fully understood. This appears to be the case in some passages.

[13]Ibid., 191.

[14]Bruce Vawter, "The Fuller Sense: Some Considerations," *CBQ* 26 (1964) 92.

[15]Philip B. Payne, "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention," *JETS* 20 (1977) 243.

Payne's argument is that it is impossible to know for sure how much of an author's intention was based upon a conscious choice of words, since subconscious thought and perception are characteristic of human language. In the case of the biblical writers, their intentions are accessible only in their texts that have survived their times. We do not have access to them to inquire of them what their thoughts may have been at the time of writing. Hence it is difficult if not impossible to ascertain exactly what the intentions of a biblical author were. Error comes when *intention* is defined as "the author's conscious understanding of the full meaning of his words at the time he wrote." An author may have written something that carried a meaning that he would later acknowledge and approve, even though that meaning had been only in his subconscious mind when he wrote. Since the Holy Spirit's influence was not something arising from the mental framework of the speaker, the Spirit's influence cannot be included necessarily as part of the author's intention. Consequently, at least in some prophecies the prophet was not cognizant of the import of his words. Thus for Payne, the full meaning of the prophecy was simply not part of the author's intention.[16]

An interpreter can know when God has intended a fuller meaning of the text of an OT passage through the further revelation of the NT, according to evangelical proponents of *sensus plenior*. To be aware of a fuller meaning is to realize that there is an additional sense to an OT passage than was consciously apparent to the human author himself, and more meaning than can be gained through grammatical-historical exegesis. The exegete can see this only in retrospect through the light of the NT. Donald Hagner has summarized this concept as follows:

> This phenomenon occurs frequently in the New Testament, and however one chooses to describe it, one is faced with the perception of a deeper, more significant meaning or a fuller sense contained within and alongside the primary or contemporary meaning. . . . It is this fuller sense that the New Testament writers are alive to as they produce their writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.[17]

The grammatical-historical method, therefore, does not yield the full meaning of certain OT texts where a *sensus plenior* is involved. William S. LaSor called attention to this apparent hermeneutical paradox when he wrote, "This grammatico-historical method, we have seen, has sometimes failed to yield a spiritual meaning. Where does this

[16]Ibid., 245-51.

[17]Donald A. Hagner, "When the Time Had Fully Come," in *Dreams, Visions and Oracles*, ed. Carl E. Armerding and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 91.

leave us in our quest for the meaning in the Word of God?"[18] LaSor explained further that the application of the fuller meaning principle to Scripture was not a substitute for grammatical-historical exegesis, but a development from such exegesis. It is not eisegesis but rather a reading from the text of the fullness of meaning required by the total context of divine revelation. While the human author did not intend to say all that can be found in the fuller meaning, yet the Holy Spirit led him to express God's Word in such ways that the fuller meaning was not lost.[19]

J. I. Packer also views the *sensus plenior* as something texts acquire from an extrapolation of the grammatical-historical method. For Packer, the first task is always to get into the writer's mind by grammatical-historical exegesis. What the author meant, God meant. But God's fuller meaning, which can be known through further revelation, is the extension, development, and application of what the writer was consciously expressing.[20]

There are several arguments used to support the *sensus plenior* idea in the interpretation of Scripture.[21] One argument is that the OT prophets did at times speak things which they did not understand, according to 1 Pet 1:10–12, where Peter wrote that the prophets searched diligently "what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." In the testimony of Daniel is another Scripture which seems to indicate that he did not understand the meaning of prophetic revelation which had been given to him when he said: "I heard, but I understood not" (Dan 12:8). A second argument is that there were occasions when prophecies were not understood by the contemporaries of the prophets. Daniel is again used as support for this in his statement in Dan 8:27 that not only was he astonished at the divine vision given to him, "but none understood it." A final argument is predicated on the case of Caiaphas who predicted the death of Jesus without being aware that his advice to the Jewish council that Jesus' death would be expedient carried prophetic force (John 11:49–52). The point is that when Caiaphas prophesied he spoke beyond what he knew or understood. This was probably true also in some instances of prophetic revelation in the OT.

[18]William Sanford LaSor, "The *Sensus Plenior* and Biblical Interpretation," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 267.

[19]Ibid., 275.

[20]J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 350.

[21]J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) 4–5; and Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 25–27.

The *sensus plenior* can be applied both to certain straightforwardly predictive passages, as well as to typological passages. Hagner sees the tracing or typological correspondences as a special instance of detecting the *sensus plenior* of the OT.[22]

Some examples of predictive prophecies are the fulfillment of several statements from Psalms 22 and 69 at the crucifixion of Christ. The cry of "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" in Ps 22:1 had its fulfillment in Christ's words from the cross (Matt 27:46). The words of scorn and the shaking of heads in Ps 22:7 had their fulfillment in the hurling of abuse and the wagging of the heads of those who passed by Christ's crucifixion (Matt 27:39). The dividing up of garments and the casting of lots for clothing in Ps 22:18 were also fulfilled at the scene of Christ's humiliation (Matt 27:35). The prediction of gall for food and vinegar for drink in Ps 69:21 was fulfilled in the offer of those items to Christ as he suffered on the cross (Matt 27:34, 48). The fuller-meaning interpretation of the passages from these two Psalms is that both have their own historical context and referent. Both described the experience of an Israelite centuries before Christ came. But with *sensus plenior* in view, God so superintended the writing of the words of the Psalms in such a way that they have their fullest meaning in the crucifixion narrative of Jesus Christ.[23]

Another example of predictive prophecy is the first promise of Messianic redemption in Gen 3:15. To suggest that the "seed" of the "woman" who would bruise the head of the serpent was a prophecy of Mary, the Virgin Birth, and the redemptive work of Jesus, is to get more from the text than can be obtained through grammatical-historical exegesis. On the other hand, as LaSor has explained, to see a fullness in the promise that can be understood when, and only when, that fullness is revealed later in the text of Scripture, seems only reasonable hermeneutically. Scripture is like a seed in which are all the elements that will ultimately develop into the tree, its leaves, and its fruit. Yet when that seed is analyzed under the highest-powered microscope, those elements are not revealed.[24]

An example in Matt 2:15 of typological fulfillment is the return of Jesus from Egypt to Israel while an infant in fulfillment of the statement in Hos 11:1: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Another example is the slaughter of children two years and younger in Bethlehem and its vicinity (Matt 2:17) as a typological fulfillment of Jer 31:15 which describes the lamenting and weeping that took place at Ramah when Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

[22]Donald A. Hagner, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, ed. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch (Chicago: Moody, 1976) 94.

[23]Ibid., 97.

[24]LaSor, "The *Sensus Plenior* and Biblical Interpretation," 273.

Matthew saw a fuller sense in those OT passages than was intended by their original authors. This was due to divine revelation given to Matthew by which he saw the correspondence between the OT materials and events in his day.[25]

To be open to a *sensus plenior* to Scripture is to consider that there is possibly additional meaning to certain OT passages, prophetic and poetic, than was consciously apparent to the original author, and more than can be gained through grammatical-historical exegesis. Such is the nature of divine inspiration that the authors of Scripture themselves were often not conscious of the fullest meaning of the words which they wrote. This fuller meaning can be seen only in retrospect through the light of fulfillment in the NT.

THE SINGLE MEANING VIEW AS HELD BY EVANGELICALS

An alternative view within evangelicalism to the idea of a *sensus plenior* to Scripture is the contention that both authors (God and the human penmen) said exactly what they meant to say in any passage of Scripture. Prophecy has only one meaning and not two in some instances, i.e., the prophet's understanding and God's later meaning. The fuller meaning view is antithetical to the claim of Scripture, so that if pressed consistently would lead to an outright departure from the concept of an intelligible revelation from God, according to Walter Kaiser, who is currently the leading advocate of the single meaning view.[26] Kaiser asserts that while God was the principal author of Scripture and used the vocabularies, idioms, circumstances, and personalities of each of the human authors, yet there was such a unity between God and those authors that the latter did understand the meaning of the words of their written texts. The argument is based upon Paul's statement that his words were not merely the result of his own human intelligence, but the result of that "which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Cor 2:13). Kaiser's explanation of Paul's statement is as follows:

> It is the organic unity between the words of the writer and the work of the Holy Spirit that is the key point of the I Corinthians 2:13 reference. There the Holy Spirit *teaches* the apostle in words. Consequently, the writer was not oblivious to the import or verbal meaning of his terms: he himself was taught by the Holy Spirit. Such a claim can only mean there was a living assimilation of God's intended truth into the verbalization

[25]Hagner, "When the Time Had Fully Come," 92.

[26]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *Evangelical Roots*, ed. Kenneth Kantzer (Nashville: Nelson, 1978) 123-24.

> of the writers of Scripture, rather than a mere mechanical printout of semi-understandable verbiage.[27]

Therefore God's meaning and revelatory intention in any particular passage of Scripture can be accurately and confidently ascertained by studying the verbal meaning of the inspired text of the human authors. The single verbal meaning of the text can be ascertained by using the grammatical-historical method of exegesis. God imparted to the writers of Scripture just as much as they needed to make their messages effective for that moment in history and for the contribution to progressive revelation. What God meant they meant, and what they meant God meant. He did not make them omniscient.[28] But this is to argue for authorial control, both God's and the human authors', with God's authority the ultimate control. Both said what they intended to say.[29]

The equation that the single verbal meaning equals authorial intention has been advocated by E. D. Hirsch who wrote, "Verbal meaning is, by definition that aspect of a speaker's 'intention' (in a phenomenological sense) which, under linguistic conventions, may be shared by others."[30]

The importance of the application of this equation in biblical hermeneutics has been cited by Norman Geisler:

> The locus of meaning (and truth) is not in the author's mind behind the text of Scripture. What the author meant is expressed *in* the text. The writings (γραφή) are inspired, not the thoughts in the author's mind.[31]

He further explained that "all we know of the author's intention is what the author did express in the text, not what he planned to say but did not express. Our knowledge of the author's plan (intention) is limited to the inspired text itself."[32]

If individual writers are not sovereign over the use of their own words, and if meaning is not a return to how they intended their own words to be regarded, then biblical hermeneutics is in a most difficult situation, according to the single meaning view. In this situation communication would have been given, but there is uncertainty with regard to some passages of the OT as to whether or not the message

[27]Ibid., 137.

[28]Ibid., 127–28.

[29]Ibid., 141.

[30]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967) 218.

[31]Norman L. Geisler, "The Relation of Purpose and Meaning In Interpreting Scripture," *GTJ* 5 (1984) 230.

[32]Ibid.

has been fully received. When the normal rules of exegesis are applied to the words of these texts, the exegete fails to yield as adequate a meaning as when he digs into the fuller sense meaning of those texts given later in the progress of revelation. It is recognized that the interpreter is not able to gather all the special nuances that a writer may have had in his mind, nor is he able to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the total subject dealt with in a text through an exegesis of that text itself. But there must be adequate knowledge of what the author intended to say if communication is to be a reality. This demands authorial intent as meaning.[33]

Earl Radmacher suggests that to separate word meaning from the author's intent can result in multiple meanings and thus no meaning and thereby hermeneutical nihilism.[34] He also claims that to render the author without control and ignorant of the meaning of his words makes the Bible something less than a truly human document.[35]

Vern Poythress gives support to this idea that the single meaning of a text is located solely in the author's intention as expressed in his own usage of his words:

> Does 'meaning' have to do with 'what is going on in the speaker's mind at the time?' But 'what is going on in his mind' may include feelings of hunger or sleepiness, reminiscences about events of the day, and other material only vaguely related to the subject of his discourse. Let us therefore try again. Is the 'meaning' what the speaker thought about the discourse? This is close to what is wanted. But how do we find out about what he thought, except from the discourse itself?[36]

Grammatical-historical interpretation will therefore produce the meaning of the words of a Scripture and thereby the intent of both the divine and human authors. Grammatical-historical interpretation brings out of the text all that it contains of the thoughts, attitudes, and assumptions of the author. It will include the same depth of meaning as the writer himself included when, in the words of Kaiser,

> the interpretation is controlled by the words the writer uses, by the range of meaning he gives to those words as judged by his usage elsewhere, by the total context of his thought, and by the preceding revealed theology

[33]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 47.

[34]Earl D. Radmacher, "A Response to Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 433.

[35]Ibid., 436.

[36]Vern S. Poythress, "Analyzing a Biblical Text: Some Important Linguistic Distinctions," *SJT* 32 (1979) 123.

> in existence when he wrote and to which he explicitly refers or clearly alludes by his use of phrases, concepts, or terms that were then generally known and accepted.[37]

Kaiser's concept of the theology that precedes the text under hermeneutical consideration is the accumulated and antecedent theology that "informs" that text. Such theology forms the backdrop against which the writer cast his own message. The interpreter is alerted to this important theological data through the direct citations and obvious allusions of the biblical writer. The theological conclusions drawn from a text would then be the objective data, including the "antecedent theology" within the text, which would be exegeted therefrom.[38]

Once the exegetical work has been completed, then the interpreter can proceed to set the doctrinal content of a particular passage in its total biblical context by way of gathering together what God has said on the topic. This is the analogy of faith of the whole of Scripture. But the analogy of faith should not be used to extricate meaning from or import meaning to texts that appeared earlier than the passage where the teaching is set forth either most clearly or perhaps for the first time. Such an exercise is eisegesis, not exegesis.[39]

It is recognized that there are passages of Scripture which do have a fuller significance or later ramification than what was realized by the writers. But such significance derives its legitimacy from an author's single meaning in the text.[40] The argument of Hirsch is drawn on heavily at this point in the distinction which he made between meaning and significance. Hirsch has proposed that,

> *meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable. . . . Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means.[41]

Applying Hirsch's distinction to biblical hermeneutics, the meaning of the text is the single truth intent of the author, which meaning is constant. The significance of a text is the relationship that the text

[37]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 127.

[38]Kaiser, "The Single Intent of Scripture," 139.

[39]Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 82.

[40]Kaiser, "Legitimate Hermeneutics," 135.

[41]Hirsch, 8.

meaning bears to other passages of Scripture which appear later in the progress of revelation. The key is whether or not the objective basis for the later ramification of a text is contained actually in the text itself. Such a determination is derived through grammatical-historical exegesis. If the implication of the text is a different concept or idea from that which the normal rules of grammatical interpretation would yield from the text, then the *sensus plenior* is really a different sense rather than a fuller sense.[42]

Kaiser's response to one who would plead that the fuller sense is a biblical meaning which can be shown from another passage to be scriptural is:

> Then let us go to that passage for that teaching rather than transporting it to odd locations in earlier parts of the canon. The unity of Scripture (an important truth of Scripture) must not be traded for the uniformity of all Scriptures on any topic any of them touches.[43]

John Goldingay sees an ambivalence in the fuller sense interpretation that is similar to the allegorical approach to Scripture in which meaning is brought to the text. NT interpretation of the OT, such as Matthew's in Matt 2:15, is not an inspired re-application of the meaning of the original text, but rather a utilization of the OT text's own meaning in later Scriptures.[44]

Added to this is the observation of D. L. Baker that in the case of typology, the NT antitype is not an elucidation of the meaning of an OT text, but rather the description of a pattern of God's activity in history, of which the OT author may well have been aware.[45]

When the single meaning advocate turns to the several biblical arguments which appear to support the idea of a *sensus plenior*, he considers the passage in question to teach otherwise. The 1 Pet 1:10–12 passage is interpreted as a prophetic inquiry into the temporal aspects of the subject about which the prophets wrote instead of a search for the exact meaning of what they wrote. While the subject is invariably larger than the verbal meaning communicated on the subject in a single passage of Scripture, nevertheless, a writer can have adequate knowl-

[42]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "A Response to Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 442.

[43]Ibid., 445.

[44]John Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981) 108–9.

[45]D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976) 264.

edge of the subject at that point, even if he does not have a comprehensive and total knowledge of all parts of the subject.[46]

The disputed Greek phrase is εἰς τίνα ἢ ποῖον καιρὸν / 'to what or what manner of time' (1 Pet 1:11). Should both τίνα / 'what', and ποῖον / 'what manner of' modify καιρόν / 'time', with the resulting translation that the prophets searched "to what time or for what manner of time?" The Greek grammar of A. T. Robertson supports the idea of time.[47] This translation is reflected in the *KJV*, *NEB*, Goodspeed, and Williams translations. Consequently, the translation of the phrase to read "what person or time," found in the *RSV*, *NASB*, and the Berkeley translations is rejected.

Daniel's question "what shall be the end of these things?" in Dan 12:8 is interpreted as a request for additional information about the final outcome of the prophetic revelation given to him. He understood the meaning of the words which he heard but desired additional details. The exhortation which followed in v 9 indicated that no further revelation would be given and that the prophecy had been completed and "sealed" indicating its certainty and not its hiddenness.[48]

A similar explanation is given to Daniel's statement in Dan 8:27. The lack of understanding was on Daniel's part and not on the part of his hearers. But the lack of understanding was not that the words or symbols of the vision were in themselves unintelligible, especially since the angel Gabriel had been commanded to explain the vision to Daniel (Dan 8:16, 19). Rather, in the words of Moses Stuart,

> the explanation, like the symbols and the words, is *generic* and not specific. Events are merely sketched; and with the exception of the *terminus ad quem*, time, place, and persons, are not particularized. Daniel was astonished at the destiny which hung over his people.[49]

Daniel was interested in more details than the Lord intended to reveal.

Caiaphas did say what he wanted to say and meant to say as the High Priest in John 11:49–52, it is argued. He advised the Sanhedrin that it was expedient for them that one man die a vicarious death and thereby keep the nation alive. Kaiser sees John's words that Christ's death had universal redemptive implications as a corrective to Caiaphas's wicked political counsel. For this reason Caiaphas had not

[46]Kaiser, "The Single Intent of Scripture," 125–26.

[47]A. T. Robertson, *The General Epistles and the Apocalypse. Word Pictures in the New Testament* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1933) 6. 85.

[48]Kaiser, "The Single Intent of Scripture," 127.

[49]Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1850) 249.

prophesied in the ordinary sense of the word. He did not belong to the class of prophets who received revelation from God.[50]

This alternative view to the *sensus plenior* in evangelicalism is that there is a single meaning for all of Scripture, which meaning is the literal meaning intended by both God and the human authors. There are passages of Scripture which have later implications in the progress of revelation. Such later implications are the developments of objectively given data in the earlier texts, and consequently, they are not some sort of *superadditum* or *sensus plenior* to the human authors' understanding and intent as expressed in their own words.

CONCLUSION

Is there a fuller meaning to certain texts of Scripture? This question must continue to be addressed by evangelicals. The several implications of the question are of vital importance to both general hermeneutics as well as the special hermeneutics of biblical predictions. Since it is a question of biblical interpretation, the issue of the authority of Scripture also comes into play.

As evangelicals continue to address the question, they must examine scriptural texts that seem to point to the biblical writers' alleged ignorance, passivity, or mundane apprehension of the messages which they received and delivered. Do such texts really show that they were unaware of the full import of the words of their texts? Could it be that those texts teach otherwise, and that coupled with the inference drawn from certain texts that the writers were taught of God, the Scriptures teach that the human authors did understand the full meaning of their words?

A review of the biblical ideas of revelation and inspiration is also called for in the debate. If the human writers wrote beyond what they knew, then has not divine revelation ceased to be a disclosure or unveiling? What should the author and the first readers of their texts have known and believed by the words of those texts? If the meanings of those texts were somehow incomplete due to the need for the revelation of later fuller meanings, did the author and his contemporaries hold to erroneous ideas foisted upon them by divine revelation given in their day? If NT quotations of the OT do reinterpret or supercede the original meaning of the OT writer, does this not break the doctrinal continuity between the testaments in the progress of God's revelation? Does not the doctrine of inspiration guarantee that God and the human authors meant exactly what texts said? If more was meant than what was said, is there not the danger that this "more"

[50]Kaiser, "The Single Intent of Scripture," 130-31.

that needed to be said might turn out to be a corrective to the earlier revelation? What are the implications of this for inerrancy?

In discussing the authorship of the Bible, one must not lose sight of the truth that God is the primary and ultimate author. But the Bible is also a truly human book since God by condescension did accommodate himself to use human personalities and languages. Should not the same rules that are used to unlock the meaning of the words of the authors of other ancient documents be used to determine the meaning of the words of Scripture? Or is inspiration reduced to the idea of a theory that God placed ready-made phrases in the uncomprehending minds of the writers of Scripture?

The legitimacy of grammatical-historical interpretation may also be at stake. If the use of the grammatical-historical method does not produce the full meaning of certain texts, how can one be sure that the fuller meaning is in fact discovered by the application of that same method to later texts supposedly revealing the fuller meaning of the earlier texts? If grammatical-historical exegesis is suspect at one point, should it not be suspect at all other points of its application?

The questions are not easily answered. The task of resolving the issue will be strenuous. But the ultimate goal is the accurate interpretation of God's Word for the edification of his people and his ultimate glory.