CHAPTER XVIII

EXPOUNDING THE NEW TESTAMENT

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"Exegesis", "exposition", and other words in this field are used in various ways. In this chapter, however, "exegesis" refers to elucidating a verse or passage's historical meaning in itself, "exposition" to perceiving its significance for today.[1] "Interpretation" and "hermeneutics" cover both these major aspects of the task of understanding the Bible.

All four words are sometimes used synonymously, however. In part this reflects the fact that these two major aspects of interpretation have often not been sharply distinguished. The "classic" evangelical treatments of Stibbs[2] or Berkhof[3] simply assume that if you can understand a passage's "meaning", the question of its "significance" will look after itself. Consequently, all that is required of the preacher is "to say again what St. Paul has already said". His message to us will then be self-evident. There is of course a realization that a literal application of a text will sometimes be illegitimate. On the one hand, social and cultural changes make anxiety about women's hats unnecessary today and our job in expounding 1 Corinthians 11 is not to dictate fashion to contemporary ladies but to see what principles underlie Paul's specific injunctions there. On the other hand, the change in theological era effected by Christ's coming complicates the application of the Old Testament to God's New Testament people. With such provisos, however, the application to today of the Bible's eternal message has not seemed difficult.

Earlier chapters of this book have shown how modern study of the Bible has raised major problems for this approach, and "the strange silence of the Bible in the church"[4] witnesses to it. The development of critical methods, even when most positive in its conclusions, has made interpreting the New Testament much more complicated. What if "John (has) written up the story (of Jesus and the Samaritan woman) in the manner he thought appropriate" which is thus "substantially the story of something that actually happened"[5] – but not entirely so? What about tradition- and redaction-criticism which, far from revealing "the historical Jesus", might seem to remove any possibility of knowing what his actual words were, let alone of saying them again? And, while the study of the New Testament's religious background may not seem threatening in the same way, to be told that to try to understand a particular passage "without a copy of the Book of

Enoch at your elbow is to condemn yourself to failure" [6] may be daunting.

Nor can we still assume that when the exegetical problems are solved, the application will look after itself. Modern study has striven to read the Bible in its historical context as a document (or an anthology) from a culture quite different from ours which thus speaks to quite different circumstances. [7] The situation of the church, the customs of society, the very nature of life were unique (as those of every culture are unique – they are not even uniform within the Bible itself). But the Bible's message relates to the particulars of that situation. There is thus a "hermeneutical gap" not only between the event and the account of it in the Bible, but also between the Bible and us, because of the chasm between its situation and ours; a gap which yawns widest when the Bible speaks of the supernatural realities which are the very heart of its concern but which are missing from "modern man's" world-view – hence the pressure to "demythologize" them. [8] Thus elucidating God's message to Timothy does not establish what is his word to us, to whom he might actually have something very different to say. Indeed, "simply to *repeat* the actual words of the New Testament today may well be, in effect, to say something different from what the text itself originally said", [9] and to contribute further to the "death of the Word". Our task is to stand first in the Bible's world, hearing its message in its terms, then in the world of those to whom we have to speak – as we see Jesus doing in the parables [10] – if we are to relate the two.

Paradoxically, however, we can in fact only rightly hear the Bible's message as we do bridge the gap between its world and ours. Appreciating its meaning in its own day, even "objectively", [11] cannot be a cool, "academic" (in the pejorative sense) exercise. We may only be able to do so in the act of working out and preaching the equivalent (which may well not mean the identical) message today. Thus exegesis and exposition are interwoven after all, and sometimes the exegete cannot resist nudging the preacher, [12] while the preacher finds himself having to come back with additional questions about exegesis.

So how does the expositor go about his task? In exposition "as with most other human activities . . . practice precedes theory". [13] Thus the pages that follow attempt to suggest answers to this question in connection with the passages exegeted in Chapter 14 above.

I. *Matthew 8:5–13*

(1) What is the point of this story about the centurion's servant? The subject is *faith* – but this is too broad a definition to be satisfying. Quantitatively, most of the passage is an example of the nature of faith, which casts itself without qualification on Jesus (verses 5–10); but this cannot be *the* point of the whole, because it does not cover verses 11–13. The Lukan parallel does have such a purport; the difference between the two shows how one has to treat each version in its own right as bearing a distinctive message. Often we have been so concerned with harmonizing parallel

passages that we have failed to listen to them in their distinctiveness. It is significant that Tatian's *Diatessaron* is not in the canon! Matthew gives the story an eschatological orientation by introducing the saying about the messianic banquet (verses 11–12). He thus turns a story about the nature of faith into one about the cruciality of faith: "the central importance of faith not only for healing but for salvation, for inclusion in the true people of God for whom his eschatological blessings are reserved". [14] This summary also indicates how the parts relate to the whole: verses 5–10 describe the *nature of faith*, verses 11–13 *the cruciality of faith* both *in this life* (verse 13) and *with regard to the kingdom* (verses 11–12). At least, this is the logical order, and it corresponds to the material's critical history (that is, it reflects the awareness that verses 11–12 are Matthew's addition). In the passage itself the eschatological blessing precedes the physical one. I think this is Matthew's way of making the former his climax after the dramatic tension established by verses 5–10; the final verse is now only a coda.

(2) The exposition of the first section will concentrate on the main point of *the nature of faith*. Although the passage illustrates Jesus' positive attitude to soldiers and a soldier's consideration for his "boy", it is not *about* the ethics of war or about how to be a good employer, any more than John 4 is about how to win people for Christ. [15] The passages may have implications in these areas – but "the crucial problem in the theory and practice of interpretation is to distinguish between possible implications that do belong to the meaning of a text and those that do not belong". [16] One check on this, in the case of the Bible, is to ask whether what is claimed to be implicit is elsewhere explicit. Thus since Jesus is elsewhere set forth as an example of ministry and Paul in his ministry exemplifies many of the features of pastoral care described in John 4, we might infer that the chapter by implication offers a model for ministry even though we cannot ask John whether he intended it that way (and even if, in fact, we could, and the idea proved not even to have been at the back of his mind). We can use the passage thus; though by imposing our questions on a passage we may miss the questions it intended to raise.

What then is faith, according to this first section of Mt. 8:5–13? And also, what does the word suggest to the minds of our congregation? Matthew does not mean "believing things that are not true" or "mental assent"; nor by the attitude of faith does he mean "we expect well of life", refusing to yield to scepticism or despair; [17] nor, however, is this Paul's "saving faith". It is a practical confidence in Jesus' power to heal, based on a conviction of his supreme authority, [18] the praying faith that the believer is called to exercise in his Lord when he is in need, [19] the faith that lays hold of the Lord's power to act.

Jesus has not found such faith *inside* God's people, now he finds it outside. Within the context of Jesus' ministry, this means among Jews as opposed to Gentiles, but to expound the text in such terms would be exactly to repeat its words and thereby to convey a very different meaning. The church would no doubt enjoy a sermon warning the Jews of the possibility of losing

their places in the kingdom. But now it is the church itself that is in danger of being of little faith (cf. the challenge of Rom. 11:17–21). Thus it is offered the example of an outsider with the warning "Make sure that Jesus does not have to say of you 'With no-one in the church have I found such faith' ". Quite consistently the significance of the Jews as we expound the gospels is that they warn us of what the church may become; we are not the sinner in the parable but the Pharisee.

(3) Similarly, the passage's climax (verses 11–12) goes on to give the church a warning on *the cruciality of faith for salvation:* "Many will sit at table with Paul, Augustine, and Calvin, while the members of the church are missing". And we must beware of identifying the missing members with the obviously nominal or those who do not share our particular orthodoxy (or non-orthodoxy). Part of the point of the passage is that the axe falls on those who least expect it, and the sermon must confront those present with the danger they may be in themselves, not bolster their false security by lamenting the fate of those absent.

But how are we to understand the picture of the eschatological banquet and its alternative of outer darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth? Jesus takes up what were customary ideas (cf. Lk. 14:15) which also however appear elsewhere in the Bible (Is. 25; Rev. 3:20; 19:9, 17) in contexts which indicate their symbolic significance. Behm[20] describes the picture of the eschatological banquet as "a meaningful expression for perfect fellowship with God and with Christ in the consummation". This, however, is a colourless abstraction until we have re-expressed it in contemporary symbolism. Think of the best party you've ever been to – when things have gone well, people have enjoyed themselves, made new friends; think of the wedding that makes the reunion of old friends possible; or the gathering together of the scattered family at Christmas, or even the more intimate wedding anniversary meal out for two. Recall the feel of such occasions; and then imagine being left out of the in-crowd, the black sheep of the family, the rejected lover. *That* is how heaven and hell will feel.[21]

Beyond the need for such "desymbolizing" of these verses there arises also the question of demythologizing them. Inside the imagery of the banquet is the "myth" of historical consummation, of final fulfilment and loss. That this "myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically or, better still, existentially" [22] is unlikely, since the first century expression of the faith had open to it a non-eschatological form such as was maintained by the Sadducees, but this was rejected and the eschatological form chosen. Admittedly men today do not think in eschatological terms (except for the "doomwatch" syndrome?), but then they are not often despairing existentialists either;[23] the call to decision is also strange to them. But neither the call to decision nor its eschatological motivation seem to be merely part of the first century expression of the faith. They *are* part of "the stumbling-block of the Gospel".[24]

(4) The closing verse of the pericope asserts the *cruciality of faith* in its other aspect, *in this life*. The verse's meaning is clear – the boy was healed.

But various answers are given to the question of its significance for us.

(a) As the sick experienced healing in Jesus' day, so they may now; the passage encourages expectant prayer for healing. This is the simple, obvious interpretation. It is also the approach that leads to prescribing ladies' headgear. Further, it is often belied by experience. This must make us consider possible alternatives – without letting experience have the final word either way, lest we become confined within the limitations of what we currently experience.

(b) Miraculous healings were a sign that God's Kingdom had come in Jesus, but as such they were confined to his (and his apostles') earthly ministry and do not occur today; the passage encourages faith in Christ as the one who proved himself by these signs. This interpretation matches the church's general (though not universal) experience; but the theological justification for connecting miracle exclusively with the time of Jesus and the apostles is at best an argument from silence, at worst contradicted by such passages as 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 (which implies that spiritual gifts, apparently including healing, have a place in the church until Christ's coming).

(c) Physical healing is part of the total wholeness which Christ brought, whose more important aspects are the non-physical; the passage thus encourages us to seek spiritual wholeness (forgiveness, renewal) in Christ. Again, this fits experience, though it is in danger of being an argument not from silence, but from invisibility – there aren't miracles you can see but there are miracles that you can't see (or are there?[25])! And there is no evidence that physical healing, which certainly *can* symbolize spiritual healing, always does so.[26]

(d) Christ's healing miracles are part of his restoring creation's unspoilt state, which is continued by the efforts of science; the passage encourages us to seek physical healing from Christ through medicine. This approach is even more congenial to the modern mind – too much so for comfort. Can we really imagine that Matthew would acknowledge this as a valid expression of his message for a later age?

We must, in fact, if we are to expound the passage aright, return first to exegesis. General approaches to the problem of interpreting the significance of miracles must give way to looking at particulars. Matthew surely indicates how he understood the incident's significance by his insertion of the eschatological passage, which moved the emphasis from faith's physical consequences onto (not the spiritual in a general sense but) the eschatological. He was certainly challenging the church to manifest an expectant, praying faith in the face of whatever crises threatened (these would include, but not be confined to, illness);[27] but his emphasis is on the fact that the question whether or not the church manifests such faith is of importance beyond the challenge of coping with earthly crises.

The final verse of this passage thus exemplifies a most difficult aspect of exposition: how may we decide between different opinions as to the application of a passage whose historical-critical meaning may be agreed? The answer lies in going back to exegesis: an even more rigorous approach to the

question "What was the author saying?" provides guidelines for interpreting the passage now. The story was in applied form when it reached Matthew – it was a "pronouncement story", one less interested in the miracle than in the words which accompanied it;[28] Matthew has further applied it. The Gospel itself thus suggests the area of application of the story within which we may work out more precisely how it applies to us.[29]

(5) The insights of source-, form-, and redaction-criticism thus clarify the expositor's task. But they also add to his problems, for they show that the narrative is by no means a straightforward account of an event and its significance in Jesus' actual ministry. It is a redactor's rewriting of oral tradition's recasting of any actual event: can it still retain its authority for us?

The gospels do not simply describe "history as it actually happened" (that will o' the wisp); they preach the significance of Jesus to the church of their day. But if this was the evangelist's aim, then we believe that the Holy Spirit who is the inspirer of Scripture inspired them to do this well. We have gained a daughter, and not lost a son – for the disciplines of criticism can also take us back behind this preaching, into the meaning of Jesus' teaching and ministry in its original historical context. We are enriched rather than deprived as we can see what the Spirit was saying in several different situations.

(6) The evangelist, then, is the model expositor, in that he adapts and transforms the story so that it may speak to his congregation's situation. But does this mean that we too are free to do what we like with the tradition as we receive it – to adapt and transform it with the creativity that the Spirit inspires in us? Does historical-critical exegesis matter after all – does not Matthew's example (or John's, or other New Testament writers' in their use of the Old Testament) encourage us to ignore his meaning and let the words mean today whatever we feel needs to be said?

The Spirit may indeed in this way cause new light to break out of God's word; "charismatic exegesis"[30] may still be a spiritual gift. Many have had the experience of being blessed by some word from Scripture taken in a sense which they now realize was strictly invalid, though in keeping with the general tenor of the Bible. At least it spoke relevantly to us, and was not the mere dead word from the past which historical-critical exegesis has often turned the Bible into. Nevertheless such exegesis should be the starting-point of exposition, because:

(a) While it is not clear that the Bible's exegetical practice is meant to be normative for us,[31] historical-critical exegesis is an expression of our elemental awareness of history as modern men, which seeks to understand other ages in their own terms before asking what insights they have for us. "Charismatic" exegesis is an anachronism.

(b) Historical-critical exegesis establishes what God was saying at one point, and that the crucial point for the faith. It enables us then to move from the known to the unknown, from the general area of application to the specific, and gives us the former as a check on the latter. While we may be

sure that the evangelists were inspired, modern charismatic exegesis cannot be checked!

Exposition is *both* a cerebral *and* a pneumatic exercise. The mind is involved in extrapolating from what we know God was saying then to what he is saying now, though we see the Spirit's activity in this process too. The Spirit will give flashes of insight but is active also as these are examined, tested, and followed up by the mind. Surely we need this combination (1 Cor. 14:15).

II. *1 Peter 3:18–22*

(1) If exposition involves starting from a passage's central idea which is developed in its various parts, then this will seem a passage as difficult to expound as to exegete if there is no real train of thought running through it – as many commentators have concluded. The exegesis, however, has suggested that the unity of the passage lies in what it says "to those facing fierce hostility in the name of Christ",[32] in its attempt to answer the question: "Why should a Christian be prepared to die?" Because:

18a	Jesus set you an example
18b	He is worth suffering for
18c	Death is followed by resurrection
19–20a	He is Lord of the evil powers
20b	Judgement on sinners is only being delayed
20c	Minorities have been saved in the end before
21	Your baptism is the guarantee of your salvation
22	He is Lord of all.

Presumably this will be a sermon with eight points!

This passage exemplifies the occasional nature of the Bible, which was produced in response to specific historical situations. What are we to do with a passage that answers this particular question, in a day when martyrdom is not a threat?

(a) There will be times when its message is awefully relevant, and such times need preparing for. If we have not formulated our attitude to persecution (like that to dying generally) before it happens, the moment itself may be too late. So the passage can be preached as part of educating the people in the whole counsel of God.

(b) In less sharp ways than was the case for Peter's readers, all Christians face hostility. The powers of evil which stood behind their persecution assail us too, finding embodiment in more petty (perhaps only verbal) attacks, which *a fortiori* Peter's argument covers.

(c) We all have to be prepared to die (Mk. 8:34), and that daily (Lk. 9:23). Jesus himself has, perhaps, by anticipation provided the area of application of Peter's message.

We must beware however of the besetting sins, the occupational hazards of the expositor who worships the god "relevance": blunting the edge of Peter's message and losing the pointedness of the specific by generalizing or

trivializing or spiritualizing it away. We must somehow feel this bite in our exegesis and communicate it in our exposition.

(2) Jesus "died on behalf of the unjust . . . His death was an effective, once-for-all sacrifice to make atonement for (your?) sins, so that you might be restored to fellowship with God" – so verse 18, which "is steeped in Old Testament sacrificial ideas".[33] And so, often, are our sermons. Peter uses this terminology (as well as ideas from contemporary post-biblical Jewish writings – verses 19–20) because it speaks to his readers, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, who know about cult and sacrifice. But we do not move in that world. And therefore while, to understand the Bible, we must learn to think in that world's terms, we must also learn to speak *of the same realities* in our own world's terms. This is not just for the sake of outsiders (it is not to such, in fact, that the New Testament expounds the technical working of the atonement), not even just for the sake of younger Christians who have not yet got into the Biblical world, but for our own sakes, so that we ourselves may more effectively hear the gospel. It is not enough to *explain* what atonement, sacrifice, substitution are; a metaphor that needs explaining is thereby shown to have lost its force. And in this particular case explaining it does not solve the problem. For the idea of sacrifices to propitiate God is so foreign that people may still find it objectionable when they understand it. They cannot help evaluating it from within the terms of our attitudes – which are also culturally determined, of course, but that is less easy to appreciate! We need to go on further in exegesis to find out what is expressed by the metaphor, and then to find a new metaphor which says as much as the old.

Unpacking this particular metaphor reveals various layers:

(a) At its heart is the experience – perhaps a universal human one, certainly one we share with the biblical world – of estrangement and reconciliation, and the cost involved in this.

(b) This experience suggests a metaphor for understanding relationships between God and man: things come between these parties too.

(c) Sacrificial systems provide a way of effecting reconciliation as the cost is symbolically paid by the offending party and symbolically accepted by the other side.

(d) The Old Testament describes one particular version of this. Note that God himself prescribes the system and thus takes the initiative in reconciliation.

(e) The New Testament takes up aspects of the Old Testament sacrificial system as a metaphor for understanding the cross: Christ was bearing the cost by offering himself.

(f) His achievement breaks the bounds of the metaphor, however, in that he was as much on the side of the offended party as on the offender's: God was in Christ reconciling . . .

Having analysed the biblical metaphor, we need, in re-expressing it, to remove its cultic aspect, which is strange to our world, without losing the atonement's objective side (what it means for God), as well as the subjective

side (the need to win man back to God). We might recall how, when we are attacked, instinct tells us to put up our weapons and return the blow – like for like, eye for eye, abuse for abuse. It's as if hostility has a force which must be dissipated, and we have to ensure its deflection away from us back to the other person, so that it can be absorbed there. Alternatively, however, we can let that force strike us, affect us, hurt us, be absorbed by us. Man's rebellion against God (which admittedly does not lie near the surface of his consciousness but is the theological significance of his general self-seeking aggressiveness, his hostility to other men, made in God's image, and his self-destructiveness) is also a hostility which must be absorbed somewhere – it can't just disappear into thin air. The cross is in history the concretizing of God's acceptance of man's hostility, his refusal to return it. God copes with the sin which prevents fellowship between himself and man by absorbing its force in himself and thus dissolving it.[34]

(3) Jesus "went to the fallen angels awaiting judgement in their place of confinement, and proclaimed to them the victory won by his redeeming death . . . These were those spirits who rebelled against God in the days of Noah, while God in his mercy was still withholding the punishment of the flood".[35] Here is a different world of thought which again raises the question of demythologizing.

Demythologizing the "spirits in prison" might mean

(a) Shedding the particular *imagery* of personal, supernatural evil as it is conceptualized here, while still maintaining that "there is about (Evil) . . . the subtlety of a malevolent personality rather than the crudity of a blind, irrational force . . . (A) degree of perverted ingenuity is required to make the world go quite so wrong".[36] The sin that led to the flood did not just have its origin in man.[37]

(b) Shedding not merely this particular imagery but also the *personal nature* of supernatural evil itself, seeing it as powers, forces, laws of an impersonal kind, but still recognizing that there is more to evil than the sinful acts of sinful men.

(c) Shedding any idea of the *supernatural nature* of evil, stressing that Peter is not here arguing the existence of spirits and of angels, authorities and powers (verse 22), but asserting the risen Christ's lordship over these entities which were only too real to people. The demythologized equivalents for us are the driving forces of love, power, knowledge, success and failure, present and future, death and life – all with the peculiar ambiguity of the spirits in that they are sometimes good, sometimes tragic and deadly.[38]

The Creator's restraint of, and now Christ's lordship over these demythologized powers must indeed be preached because they *are* the powers we are aware of. But we should also realise that the powers of evil are greater than we are aware of. Paul does explicitly indicate that there is in the activity of evil another level than the merely human: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities . . ." (Eph. 6:12). The conceptualization may need updating, but there is something ontological to re-express.

And what of the way the experience and achievement of Christ is described?

(a) He was made alive in the spirit (verse 18): even if the conceptualization is mythical on the surface, the claim here made of Jesus is that he rose from death in history.

(b) He went to preach to the spirits, went to heaven (verses 19, 22 – πορευθείς each time): here is language that presupposes a three-dimensional heaven, but the reality is one that we may seek to re-express, perhaps in terms of *other* dimensions than those of time and space.

(c) He is at God's right hand (verse 22): the three-dimensional heaven may be presupposed here, but more likely writer and readers understood this particular expression as a metaphor drawn from earthly life (cf. Ps. 110); we must not be over prosaic in interpreting the Bible, and treat the writers as too unsophisticated.

(4) The picture in mythical terms of the evil powers that threaten the Christian (verses 19, 22) brackets a linking in historical terms of the days of Noah and of the readers (verses 20–1): a "typical" relationship is ascribed to the latter. Is typology arbitrary?[39] How does it work?[40]

(a) Typology is (here anyway) not a method of exegesis but one of exposition. It does not aspire to be a guide to the original meaning of the flood story but starts from the historical reality (this is not allegory) and uses typology as a means of suggesting its significance for a new day, in the light of Christ's coming.

(b) Near the heart of the answer to the question "What holds the two Testaments together?" is the fact that both deal with the same people, through whom the God of Israel who is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is working out his purpose in the world. This link is implicit here, indeed explicit if ἀντίτυπον does go with ὑμᾶς, though it is assumed rather than argued. But it provides part of the rationale for trying to relate what God did with his people in Old Testament times to what he is doing with them now.

(c) Very probably the significance of baptism as a symbolic undergoing of death/judgement as the gateway to new life/salvation is in the author's mind. This theological significance of baptism is thus similar to that of the flood.

(d) There is no clear evidence to indicate whether or not Peter meant to extend the parallel as far as asserting that Noah was saved by means of water – rather than simply that water was involved on both occasions.[41]

It seems to me to be unreasonable to accuse Peter of being "arbitrary" in his use of typology here. Indeed, I doubt if this really is what is usually meant by typology; he is not suggesting that in Christian baptism you find the real meaning or fulfilment of the flood, but that the former performs an equivalent function to the latter (cf. RSV rather than NEB or JB), that there is a relationship of analogy between them.[42]

(5) Can we ourselves use this expository method, then? Can we suggest other analogies to the flood? And if so, how can we safeguard ourselves

from being arbitrary?

(a) The Old Testament regards the sea as an embodiment of the powers of chaos which assert themselves against God and threaten his people; the flood is an example of the sea at work in this way, though only under God's control. "The Lord sits enthroned over the flood" and thus protects his people (Ps. 29:10–11). This idea might be further applied by taking the flood as a type of danger that threatens the church, perhaps by God's own hand but under his control (an understanding perhaps implicit in the New Testament[43]). On the other hand, to take the wood of the ark as a type of the cross[44] is to move into a wholly new area of parallelism and to take a chance point of contact (the use of wood) as of intrinsic significance, thus making a "form-mistake".[45]

(b) In that the flood story is about God's judgement, it can be used as a way of picturing the final judgement (cf. 2 Peter 3), and it seems reasonable to claim that the writer of Genesis would not have regarded this application of his story as inconsistent with his original intention. On the other hand, to take Noah in his humiliation as a type of Christ[46] seems to go against the way the author presents him, even if it fits in with modern work on such myth as may underlie the narrative.[47]

The fact that the New Testament uses typology does not bind us to do so;[48] but some application of a principle of analogy such as is illustrated here enables us to work on biblical passages, not as a substitute for but on the basis of historical-critical exegesis. But two criteria which set boundaries to the validity of the exercise are that we move within areas of application and development of ideas suggested by the Bible itself,[49] and we apply the passage in the spirit of the original writer.

III. *The Expositor's Method*

There are no rules that guarantee effective fulfilment of the task of interpretation, but it may be helpful to summarize some guidelines in the light of the exercise above – not that these can be neatly separated or put in strict sequence; they rather tend in practice to interact, and insight on a later point will throw corrective light on conclusions reached earlier.

– Base your understanding of the text's significance for us on its original meaning (rather than treating the text as a mere jumping-off ground for your own thoughts).

– Be open to and expectant of finding in the text something fresh, even contradictory of what you thought (rather than letting your theological tradition constrict you to finding only what you knew already).

– Keep listening to what the text says, hearing it through on the questions it raises (rather than cutting it off in mid-sentence because it has answered the questions we are interested in).[50]

– Work persistently at a precise understanding of the specific central point of the passage, so that you can express in a phrase what it is that holds the passage together; and also at how the parts relate to it and to each other

(rather than being satisfied with an understanding only of individual words and verses, or with a general impression which misses the author's particular purpose here, or with too narrow a definition which leaves one or two aspects of the passage unembraced).

– Identify the particular circumstances, issues, questions, problems, and mistakes which the writer was dealing with, and consider how far these were peculiar to his situation (rather than assuming that what he says is without context).

– Consider in the light of this understanding what was his specific aim here and what exactly he says to the situation (rather than presuming that his statements and imperatives are necessarily general and universalizable). "In order to find out (a man's) meaning you must . . . know what the question was".[51]

– Note the particular connotations with which he uses theological or other words or concepts, such as faith, salvation, election (rather than reading into such words what they may not mean in this particular context).

– Distinguish symbol, metaphor, and myth from literal presentation, e.g. by parallel usage in the Bible or elsewhere, though realizing that the ancient mind may not have made the distinction which is inevitable for us (rather than being woodenly "literalist").

– Get the feel of such images so that they may have the impact on you that they had on the original readers (rather than being exclusively cerebral in approach to interpretation).

– Elucidate what such language is referring to (rather than assuming either that the medium is the message[52] or that we know the meaning of familiar images such as the good shepherd or being in Christ).

– Establish how concepts present develop within the Bible (e.g. within the Old Testament, between the Testaments, between Jesus, the tradition, Mark, and the other evangelists, between Jesus and Paul) as a means to seeing pointers as to their significance for us.

– In these tasks use the resources available: a synopsis, commentaries – more than one[53] – and if possible reference works such as TDNT, NIDNTT and other wordbooks; listen to such authorities as witnesses whose testimony can help *you* make an informed decision as to where the evidence leads (rather than assuming that scripture's perspicuity means that I can rely on my own uninformed intuition, or that its obscurity means that I must turn scholarly books into paper popes).

– Use tools such as source-, form-, and redaction-criticism as creative hermeneutical aids, with discernment but openness (rather than reverting to a precritical approach on the assumption that they can never be of constructive help or can only be used by experts).

– Identify the particularities of your situation today when set over against those of the Bible: differences in culture, in the church's situation, and so on (rather than failing to locate the exposition's target).

– Ask what angles of the biblical message especially apply here, without failing to preach the whole counsel of God, or to ask whether it is the

passage that is irrelevant or rather whether we are[54] (rather than assuming that because all Scripture is equally inspired it is all always equally applicable).

– Know your congregation, know the connotations that words and concepts (e.g. flesh, soul) have for them, know where they are, know their hangups (rather than forgetting that you are trying to communicate with a specific audience).

– Discern how the attitudes, assumptions, and challenges, implicit and explicit in the passage differ from yours and your congregation's and confront them (rather than finding only false comfort in what confirms us in our present position).

– Apply without trivializing, and reinterpret where necessary without losing the principles expressed in the original word (rather than assuming either that this specific expression of God's will necessarily relates directly to a different age, or that it is so time-conditioned that it can be of no help to us now).[55]

– Resymbolize and remythologize so that the significance of the original may be felt anew (rather than only reusing biblical symbols just because they are biblical ones).

– Let the dynamic of the passage's own development, as you understand it, determine the dynamic of your presentation – e.g. the sermon's structure or the Bible study outline (rather than assimilating it to some preconceived sermon pattern or set of Bible study questions).

– Avoid flaunting critical data in the pulpit, but where it is relevant be open with your congregation about how you understand the origin of the Bible (rather than maintaining a double standard whereby the simple believer is left in blissful ignorance of the truth of the Bible's origin[56] – something less defensible now than it was in the days when criticism was carried on without a thought for its implications for the doctrine or the preaching of Scripture).

– Seek to lead your congregation into the same position of being confronted by the text as you have occupied in your preparation.

– Remember that the next time you approach this passage you are a different person and may find new light there[57] (rather than assuming that you have now understood it once and for all). Freshness of approach – not inventiveness, but openness and expectancy – is of key importance in the preacher (or any Bible student).

> So here I am . . .
> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start . . .

These words from "East Coker" express T. S. Eliot's hopelessness about ever being able to say adequately what needs to be said. The expositor too will recognise the impossibility of ever speaking adequately of God and his ways with men, but by the same God's grace may be less despairing, and may make the aim expressed here his own.

NOTES

1. For the distinction between meaning and significance, cf. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven/London 1967), pp. 8, 62–63.
2. A. M. Stibbs, *Understanding God's Word* (London 1950); *Expounding God's Word* (London 1960; revised ed. 1976).
3. L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids 1950).
4. The title of a book by J. D. Smart (London 1970).
5. Above, p. 12f.
6. Above, p. 265.
7. Above, p. 345.
8. Above, pp. 294–300.
9. Above, p. 309.
10. Above, p. 320.
11. Cf. above, p. 252f.
12. E.g. above p. 259.
13. R. Mackenzie, *Concilium* 10:7 (1971), p. 11.
14. Above, p. 263f.
15. Cf. above, p. 14.
16. Hirsch, p. 62. Note that "implications" denotes what is implicit in the inherent meaning of the text itself, and is to be distinguished from the "significance-for-us" of the text's total (explicit and implicit) "meaning-in-itself".
17. So G. A. Buttrick in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York and Nashville 1951), Vol. VII, p. 341.
18. Above, p. 260.
19. See the treatment of faith in Matthew by H. J. Held, op. cit. on p. 278, n.7 above, pp. 275–299.
20. TDNT II, p. 34.
21. In *The Becomers* (London 1973), pp. 89–106, Keith Miller suggests in some detail how heaven's reality will need to be presented in many different ways as a man's needs and growth as a person develop.
22. Bultmann; cf. above, p. 295.
23. Cf. A. Kee, *The Way of Transcendence* (Harmondsworth 1971), pp. 49–51.
24. Cf. above, pp. 298–300.
25. Cf. J. V. Taylor's doubts as to whether Christians often manifest such renewal in *The Go-Between God* (London 1972), p. 124.
26. The exposition is parallel to Strauss's interpretation of the miracles as Jesus himself appeals to them, as indicating the moral effects of his doctrine (see p. 304, n.37 above)!
27. Cf. again Held, loc. cit.
28. Cf. above, p. 254.
29. On the evangelists' fixing areas of application of material that comes to them, see (with explicit reference to the parables) A. C. Thiselton in SJT 23 (1970), especially pp. 458–461, 466–8.
30. See G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids 1975), pp. 110ff., and Ellis pp. 000 above.
31. Cf. R.N. Longenecker in Tyn.B 21 (1970), p. 38; also J. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (London 1966), p. 131.
32. Above, p. 265f.
33. Above, p. 267.
34. Of course this analogy does not say all that needs to be said about the atonement (no more than any one biblical metaphor does); but it does re-express in non-cultic terms the idea of reconciliation, substitution, and the price being paid by God himself.
35. Above, p. 277.

36. Colin Morris, *The Hammer of the Lord* (London 1973), p. 54.
37. Cf. B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (London 1962²), pp. 50–9 on Gen. 6:1–4.
38. Cf. Paul Tillich's sermon on "Principalities and Powers" in *The New Being* (London 1956), pp. 50–9 (reprinted in *The Boundaries of Our Being* (London 1973), pp. 189–97); also R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London 1952), § 21.3, 26.3. There is also a fascinating sermon of Tillich's on "Heal the Sick; Cast out the Demons" in *The Eternal Now* (London 1963), pp. 47–53 (*The Boundaries of Our Being*, pp. 49–55) in which he seems to rejoice in using the "mythological" language!
39. So Beare in his commentary, in loc.
40. Cf. above, 273f.; but note the critique of James Barr, op. cit., chapter 4.
41. Cf. above, p. 272f.
42. I wonder in fact whether ἀντίτυπον here does not have its more usual meaning of "copy" (the flood being the "original"), rather than the unusual meaning "fulfilment" (the flood then being the "foreshadowing") as is generally assumed.
43. Cf. G. Bornkamm in Bornkamm, Barth, and Held, op. cit., p. 57.
44. So Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, – 138.
45. Cf. Barr, op. cit., p. 117.
46. Examples in Helen Gardner, *The Business of Criticism* (London 1966), pp. 90ff.
47. Cf. Gardner, pp. 96–7.
48. Cf. n. 31 above.
49. Cf. n. 29 above.
50. Cf. W. W. Johnson, *Interpretation* 20:4 (1966), pp. 423–4.
51. R. G. Collingwood, quoted in the Tillich Festschrift *Religion and Culture*, edited by W. Leibrecht (London 1958), p. 147.
52. Cf. A. C. Thiselton, *The Churchman* 87:2 (1973) p. 96, on the necessity for statements such as "Jesus is Lord" to have ontological as well as existential content.
53. Cf. above, p. 264.
54. Cf. Smart, op. cit., p. 164.
55. Cf. O. M. T. O'Donovan in TSFB 67, pp. 15–23.
56. Cf. Smart, op. cit., pp. 68–76.
57. Cf. Barr, op. cit., p. 197.