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ETHOS AND DISCIPLINE

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Biblical Studies for Ministry: Critical and Faithful Interpretation of Scripture in an Either/Or World

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Introduction

In ten years of teaching in an Episcopal theological seminary, I have adapted the most valuable tools and critical methods for studying the Bible that I acquired in my doctoral education in order to meet the needs of those being trained as leaders in Christian communities who interpret, preach and teach Scripture in the churches.[1] As essential as those tools are to my pedagogy, the seminary context of ministerial formation has raised significant questions left unaddressed in my doctoral training and has demanded a very different set of skills. In the course of developing with my colleagues a biblical studies curriculum for teaching ministers in a theological school, I discovered that hermeneutical freedom and pedagogical innovation prospered in a way that it could not or did not in the setting of the academy, either in university graduate studies or in the majority of scholarly discussions at annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. Theoretical questions that preoccupied SBL groups for years were being solved on the ground daily in classrooms and pulpits.

This essay reflects on the particular challenges of teaching biblical studies for ministry in a denominational seminary. I will describe the shift in perspective that the transition from graduate biblical studies to ministerial biblical studies required and the curriculum designed to integrate the historical and the hermeneutical with the practical arts of ministry, teaching and preaching. The experience of teaching in this context suggests areas for greater attention in programs of graduate biblical education to prepare those who will teach

1. Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas, 1999 to the present.

future leaders in communities of faith. As teachers and preachers of the Bible, these leaders will convene communities in which the Bible transforms people and institutions.

Discussion about teaching the Bible in a theological seminary takes place in the midst of considerable strife about the perceived conflicts between the church and the academy. In polemical style the tensions between their values are posed as oppositions. This debate is carried out on a wider scale in global political struggles about power and wealth, empire and democracy, and sectarianism and pluralism. In the narrower world of biblical studies, the extremes are articulated as "the Bible as cultural product" and "the Bible as scripture" or between "historical critical interpretation" and "theological interpretation." Feminist and liberationist critiques of the Bible are usually placed on the critical/cultural/historical side of the polarity. In a world that grows ever more divided and violent over these issues, one of the most important skills for biblical scholars and for pastors, preachers, and teachers is to be able to give a sympathetic account of the different positions and to be able to name and describe areas of hermeneutical or theological difference in order to carry on constructive conversations.

Doctoral biblical studies and ministerial biblical education have distinct but overlapping purposes. Although some theorists dramatically oppose "religious studies" and "theological studies," there are important common values. Doctoral studies prepare scholars and professors to teach and to do scholarship in a variety of educational, public, and professional settings among which are theological seminaries. A seminary prepares preachers and teachers of the Bible for communities of faith for whom the Bible is scripture, a source of tradition and teaching, and a force to shape its imagination and language. In one way then, teaching ministers is one of the things that a doctorally-trained biblical scholar might do. In addition, the aims of the two fields overlap in important ways. Both the professor of biblical studies and the Christian preacher are responsible to wider publics on whom their expert scholarship and authoritative proclamation has an impact. Both the ideals of learning the liberal arts in a university and the ideal of learned Christian ministry intend to form thoughtful, imaginative leaders who will use their education in concert with their faith or their ideals for the well-being of human society. Important critiques of the values of the university have been made from a Christian theological perspective, and their observations have merit. However, I stress here how their goals converge. Both graduate biblical studies and ministerial biblical education seek to teach ways to conduct these conversations responsibly and skillfully in order to make it possible to negotiate the conflict.

Ethos and Aims of Graduate Biblical Studies

The ethos of biblical studies at the university divinity school where I did both my ministerial training and my doctoral study was historical-critical: its aim was to describe as accurately and objectively as possible the social and historical context of the biblical authors in order to ascertain the meaning of the text in its own time.[2] For students in the Master of Divinity program the primary tool of evaluation was the exegesis paper. Written on a short passage of text, the paper was to conclude with a one sentence statement paraphrasing the meaning of the text. Students were to read the Bible like any other text and employ the same statutes of narrative analysis and historical investigation as they would other contemporary or ancient literature. The focus of analysis were the human words in human history of people who sought to understand the purposes and character of God. Parallel Canaanite stories shed light on the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, and Greco-Roman genres and categories clarified the style and aims of the Gospels. From this perspective, the New Testament formed a diverse collection of distinctive understandings of Jesus and the Canon represented a selection of a wider body of early Christian literature. Disciplined study of the wide range of noncanonical literature advanced the understanding of the landscape of early Christianity and its canonical writings. Though the distinction between what the text meant and what the text means was maintained as a useful tool for analysis, the division of labor between exegete and theologian was a fact of life, whether intentional or not. Krister Stendahl's "Ten Commandments of Preaching" set out a rigorous program of "biblical preaching" that prohibited homogenizing Gospel portraits of Jesus or making facile "relevance." In short, the dominant ethos of the early to mid 1980's was shaped by faculty trained in the historical-critical perspective.

Historical criticism has been widely and justifiably criticized for its limitations. However, the attacks on pure historical criticism as antiquarian, ethically nearsighted, and dismissive of faith do not fairly characterize the way such methods were exercised and embodied by the faculty at Harvard Divinity School. On the contrary, when practiced by skilled teachers, many of whom were also priests, pastors, and preachers committed to church communities beyond the academy, these historical methods had ethical intentions: namely, to take seriously the experience of historical people, to aid in understanding the divisions between Judaism and Christianity, the debates around orthodoxy and heresy, and although it was not put this way, to read the biblical texts with integrity and faithfulness. Many ministerial students found this

2. Harvard Divinity School, 1981–1984, 1986–1988, 1989–1996.

way of studying the Bible, though very different from their backgrounds in biblical reading, to be intellectually challenging, thrilling and intriguing, and productive of fascinating questions for theology. There was an optimism and confidence that, while this method brought results that were in tension with church doctrine or piety, somehow these differences would get worked out, and that the Bible and those who identified with it would survive the challenges posed. These questions were loosely acknowledged, but left to those with more interest in them to answer.

The area of primary historical focus was the early first century. Most important was the author's meaning in the text itself and in the prehistory and sources of the text. Little attention was given to the interpretation of the texts by the early Church Fathers or those who collected the works at the time of canonization. As a result biblical studies was separated from church history and the history of interpretation. Scholarship on the Christian Old Testament was carried out in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. The theologians did their work without direct engagement with biblical studies, and biblical scholars were reluctant to enter into the territory of theological construction. Faculty did not engage their scholarship with questions of current politics; to do so would have been seen to interfere with scholarly objectivity.

For the most part, the doctoral programs in biblical studies bracketed pastoral and theological questions. An exception was the feminist hermeneutical model, introduced explicitly into the curriculum when Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza joined the faculty. The model of "remembrance, suspicion, reconstruction, evaluation, and proclamation" helped to integrate the pastoral and the theological in a way that historical methods did not. The model not only allowed for but required theological evaluation and critique as part of studying the Bible. The critical dimension that in the earlier era of historical criticism was applied to some of the claims about authorship, history, and unity of the text, was extended by the feminist hermeneutical model to the cultural perspective of the biblical text. The feminist lens allowed one to recognize and name the androcentric perspective of the text and to describe and grapple with the effect of these texts in shaping households and churches in Western culture. The perspective recognized and addressed questions brought to the Bible by those who had not historically been in the majority of biblical interpreters. When it was employed by some of us among the doctoral students, usually in concert with historical criticism, it significantly reshaped the academic discussion of various exegetical issues and had significant implications for ministerial practice.

The dominant historical-critical ethos of graduate biblical studies at Harvard Divinity School had aims that were not in themselves hostile to other

ways of reading the Bible, especially by historic communities of faith. But that ethos meant that a great deal was neglected—the history of interpretation by Christian communities, the current ways of reading the Bible in contemporary congregations, liturgical and artistic readings of the Bible, and most nonrational and nonlinear modes of thinking. Our training was occupied with producing a dissertation to demonstrate competence in our area of specialization; only voluntary peripheral programs and projects addressed issues of pedagogy. Practical questions such as who we would be teaching and how we would teach them were left for us to figure out on our own. That different skills and strengths might be required for the varied ethos of the university, the denominationally based college, or the theological seminary was not directly addressed.

Biblical Interpretation for Christian Ministers

When I began teaching students preparing for ordained ministry at Seminary of the Southwest, the ethos of the denominational seminary required a shift of perspective. Replicating the model of graduate biblical studies would not suit the educational needs and vocational goals of our students. My colleagues, who shared a similar doctoral education and who were also pastors and preachers, collaborated to revise the historical-critical model in which we had been trained.[3] For those being formed to interpret scripture for faith communities, the goal could not be the reconstruction of biblical history for its own sake, but to assist in the interpretation of the text. A one-sentence summary of "what the text meant" would not suffice for leaders who would be convincingly proclaiming this text as gospel. Daily worship in the community constantly raised questions about the use and interpretation of scripture in the daily office, the Eucharistic lectionary, and in preaching. Historical study of the formation of this canonical literature would have to make a meaningful contribution among the evident multiple ways of reading and using scripture in the Christian community.[4]

Limited time for instruction, competing expectations and demands on students, and high stakes for interpreting the Bible are complications of our

3. Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas: Michael H. Floyd, Raymond W. Pickett, and R. Steven Bishop have taught during the period from 1999 to the present.

4. For helpful perspectives on the theological interpretation of scripture, see Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). For a recent treatment of practical theology as an integrating discipline in theological education, see Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

situation that have influenced how we teach the Bible for ministry. Like most mainline theological schools in North America, the seminary where I teach is accountable to many constituencies. Teaching the most up-to-date literature in biblical studies is only one among many expectations. Local churches, dioceses, and church adjudicatories pressure seminaries for practically oriented pastors, with leadership skills drawn from professional literature in business, congregational studies, church growth, and evangelism. Church officials may share some of the general cultural suspicion about the antagonism of scholarship to faith. Congregations and examining boards expect students to hold views of biblical authority consonant with their traditions and ordination vows, be able to preach forcefully and with conviction, make the Bible come alive, and to teach the Bible as the canon of the church. All of these pressures complicate the teaching of biblical studies.[5]

Students come to biblical studies with various backgrounds, some from fundamentalist traditions, others from little or no familiarity with biblical narratives, language, or sensibility. Teachers are confronted with the challenge of immersing postmodern students in the literature of the Bible and introducing methods of critical interpretation. They represent a range of academic ability from those who have recent professional degrees in law and medicine to those who have not been in school for many years. Theological students in seminaries bring many gifts for ministry but do not always possess the linear, verbal, "left brain" skills rewarded by schools and required by doctoral programs in biblical studies.

The current political and cultural theological environment affects our students' biblical education—most particularly the "Jesus wars" played out in the media, the fundamentalist-liberal polemics in the church and popular press, and most urgently and with the apparently highest stakes, the disputes around the role of gays and lesbians in church leadership. These controversies are closely intertwined with questions of biblical authority, critical theological evaluation of the Bible and tradition and its symbolic universe. These controversies effect denominational examinations and sometimes employment and placement. The polarized environment is a fraught one for biblical studies. Traditionalists portray the conflict as a battle about revelation, the essentials of the faith and eternal salvation. Our students must either take sides in

5. For analysis and reflection on the challenges of changing contexts for theological education, see Malcolm L. Warford, ed., *Practical Wisdom: On Theological Teaching and Learning* (New York: Lang, 2005). See also Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Goleman, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, eds., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

this way of phrasing the debate or be able to articulate an alternative way of describing the issues.

To address the need for pastors to negotiate this complex climate for biblical interpretation, our Bible faculty developed a series of three required courses that places historical study of the biblical text into a larger interpretive process. Biblical interpretation is focused around two ministerial practices, teaching and preaching. The goal of teaching and preaching the Bible is critical and faithful appropriation of scripture in a particular, historical Christian community. Attention to pedagogy is implicit throughout and explicit in the final required course. The emphases on the importance of particular contexts for interpretation, attention to issues of power in interpretation, and interest in the character of the community formed to interpret owe a great deal to the perspectives of feminist and liberation theology, but the model draws eclectically from a range of biblical scholarship. Practicing the model shows many of the oppositions set by the academy or in the culture wars to present false choices. Its goal is to empower teachers and preachers to be both critical of tradition and self-critical, to proclaim and make vivid the visions of scripture, and to engage communities of biblical interpretation with the world beyond the church.

Pedagogy and Process

The three courses mentioned above were designed and taught by teams of two or three of us from among our small faculty of three biblical studies professors. Developing, revising, and teaching these courses in different configurations has required our cooperation, effort, and trust. This collaborative approach has had advantages for us as teachers and as learners and for our students. The energy generated from teaching together and interacting with each others' hermeneutical perspectives and expertise has been professionally formative. From the beginning students witness a diversity of temperaments, ways of reading, and styles of teaching. They see us asking each other questions, admitting when we do not know the answers, and teaching and learning more together than we could separately. Our interaction in all the sections and topics of the courses undercuts the strict separation of the disciplines of New Testament and Old Testament.

History and Hermeneutics: The Hermeneutical Circle

To incorporate the values of historical study of the Bible into a theological setting, our biblical studies courses put historical study into a larger process. The two-semester introductory Bible course presents history and hermeneu-

tics together while it covers Second Temple Judaism, the Deuteronomistic History, the Pentateuch, and Christian origins. History and hermeneutics are treated not as independent, sequential steps in which "history" is determined and interpretation follows, but as mutually interdependent steps in an ongoing hermeneutical circle. Students begin by completing Norman Gottwald's "Self-Inventory on Biblical Hermeneutics."[6] Our name for the model is "the hermeneutical circle," and the expressions "world of the text," "world behind the text," and "world in front of the text" convey interlocking steps of the circle. The world of the text includes observation of the text itself, description, and formal analysis. The world behind the text includes historical reconstruction, exploration of the sources and prehistory of the text. The world in front of the text includes the centuries of interpretation through which we read the text in the present, as well as our own cultural-philosophical temperamental lenses and perspectives. From the outset, the course stresses that each of these movements is dependent upon the others; our cultural biases affect our historical reconstructions which therefore are provisional, open to correction and modification. Readings of the text for ministry, preaching and teaching will always explore each of the three "worlds" in the hermeneutical circle in order for the scriptural text to have meaning in the present.

We stress the importance of each related step in the process. The text alone is not self-interpreting but requires a community of readers. To stay in the world behind the text risks losing both the text and its power to speak. Staying in the world in front of the text with one's own associations, preoccupations, and expectations of "relevance" is to avoid the challenge of the text's cultural and historical otherness, as well as its possibility to speak as God's word. Exploring the world in front of the text will take into account modern canons of evidence and reason and critiques of the Bible, feminist analyses of the gender constructions in the text, and interpretations of the text in Christian doctrine in different periods. In our courses, the world in front of the text is distinguished from the other moments, but not excluded.

Adequate interpretation must take account of all three elements in the circle. This scheme gives students a way to sort out the variety of methods and arguments about interpretation that they encounter in scholarly literature and in their communities. For example, a partition theory for Philippians is a source theory, a "world behind the text" argument, based on observation of the stylistic features of the letter (world of the text) and conforming to contemporary views of how a unified letter would look (world in front of the text). Arguments about the historical Jesus are "behind the text" arguments that are sometimes contrasted with a Gospel portrayal of Jesus.

6. Norman Gottwald, "Framing Biblical Interpretation at New York Theological Seminary: A Student Self-Inventory on Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (ed. Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1:251–61.

By keeping historical reconstruction in the circle, we are able to demonstrate and insist on the value of historical study, the way it helps to clarify what the text "meant" in a different historical setting, de-familiarizes the material, distinguishes the diverse portraits of Jesus and stands in some tension with the orthodox interpreters and creators of the canon. At the same time the circular nature of the process makes us aware that the way we write history is shaped by perspectives and interests of the present.

Second Temple Judaism: Teaching the Testaments Together

The most important period for the reconstruction of the immediate "world behind the text" is the period from the restoration under Ezra to the late Second Temple period, the time when scripture emerged as the focus for Jewish piety and the matrix of both the Jewish Bible and the Christian New Testament. To understand the changing forms of religious life throughout this period and the shifts in interpretation of temple and Torah, we must see how these forms changed in response to different forms of political organization under sequential empires: Persian, Greek, and Roman. The variety of Jewish texts from the Second Temple period creates a concrete picture of the range of piety and visions of God's justice in sectarian Jewish life at the time of Jesus. These diverse approaches to the question of law observance, Jewish identity, the Temple, prayer, and sacrifice in this period were sorted out differently as orthodox Christianity and rabbinic Judaism began their slow, intense, conflicted process of mutual self-definition after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.

A unit on the Deuteronomistic History completes the first introductory semester course. Through the Deuteronomistic History we introduce questions of historiography, the purposes for which one tells the people's history, the modern theories about sources and perspective of the Deuteronomistic historians on Israel's history of conquest, judgeship, monarchy, and exile. A study of the Pentateuch begins the second semester. The Pentateuch preserves a conversation about God, history, leadership, and worship that despite its final editing leaves many of these questions open ended. By the time we reach the unit on Christian origins and introduction to the New Testament literature, the ideas of scripture, law, and story are categories the students have begun to internalize and know how to use. The Gospels read the story of Jesus and Jewish practice from a post-70 C.E. perspective, updating and revising the story in light of contemporary events and issues.

The historical framework is the structure into which students place whatever biblical texts they study and in which they ask what the text in Genesis, Judges, or Matthew might have "meant," what it was reflecting on, in the time it was written. We emphasize that Israel, the writers of scripture, were restlessly asking how God was involved in current political circumstances and what God was demanding of faithful people in that situation. Organizing the courses so the Old Testament and New Testament are studied together rather than sequentially and putting the canonical order into a historical framework, undercuts the commonly held supercessionist notions of the relationship between the Testaments and holds up the Old Testament texts as lively sources for Christian theological reflection. The historical framework allows the students to develop another narrative concerning the relationship of Jesus to the law, the Gospel writers to Jewish story and practice, and Christianity to Judaism, than the highly anti-Jewish account that is well-known and much repeated in churches, preaching, and Sunday school curricula. Questions about the way the biblical text portrays gender, race, violence, and justice arise inevitably as students read the texts and reflect on their own location and perspectives that they have tried to identify in the hermeneutics inventory.

As we study history, questions of hermeneutics are raised at every point. History itself is understood to be an imaginative construct, based on literary and material evidence, but inevitably shaped by features of the world in front of the text, the lenses of those telling the story. The question of the historical Jesus is treated as a valid and important question, but its "results" provisional. Within the hermeneutical circle, one picture of the historical Jesus is not the criterion for interpretation of a text. Rather, the reconstructions of Jesus are themselves subject to analysis and theological critique.[7] This methodological self-criticism is a much stronger feature of our seminary teaching than it was in my graduate biblical education.

Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching

Using the hermeneutical circle, students are expected to be able to evaluate arguments and their implications of others and be aware of the choices they are making. The purpose of the careful, sometimes laborious, exercise of the interpretive process is to be able to say something meaningful about what the biblical text "means" in the present. To press this point, the two other required courses emphasize the practices of ministry—preaching and teaching.

7. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

Several questions raised here encourage students to bring the text from its past into the world of the present: Who are you? What are you going to do with this scripture in the community of faith? What are you going to say is true about it? How is it good news? The result of interpretation here is not an exegesis paper (although exegesis itself is required) but a sermon, a lesson plan, or presentation for a public setting. Just as the biblical writers did in their times, preachers engage the word of God with their communities in a particular historical and political context. Thus scripture is conceptualized as "an open-ended prototype rather than the Bible as an archetype that has to be repeated in every generation."[8] By preaching a sermon, interpreting a text for preaching in the presence of peers, we begin to build a community of interpretation in which individual readings of a text are subjected to testing among others in a community. Although the content of the interpretation for preaching course varies, as in the first year, we always teach the Old and New Testaments in the same course, referring back to the historical framework. Readings of the Pentateuch or the prophetic books in the New Testament are part of the world in front of the Old Testament text. Readings of the Old Testament text in its own time and diverse interpretations in the first century are distinguished from Paul or a Gospel writer's reading of the same text. The historical approach problematizes typical ways of viewing the Old Testament/New Testament relationship, often encouraged by the lectionary: law/gospel, prediction/fulfillment, harsh/lenient, problem/solution, or inadequate/complete.

The final required course, Biblical Interpretation for Teaching, focuses around the task of teaching the Bible in a community of faith. The biblical texts may be New Testament epistolary literature, prophetic literature, wisdom writings or psalms. The course puts into dialogue the text, the historical communities "behind the texts," and the contemporary community reading the text. Students discuss the rationale for teaching the range of authors in the canon and the implications of teaching literature outside the canon. They analyze the variety of understanding of biblical authority in their parish cultures and the wider church and clarify and articulate their own. Reading a variety of articles on critical pedagogy, they conceptualize what creating a community of teachers and learners requires and what model of leadership to employ. Meaning(s) emerge from reflection and study in the faith community, and call for response, repentance, and action. In teaching presentations they practice engaging the whole person in learning using multiple media and points of access. Their own seminary learning is a subject for methodological reflection.

8. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 265.

Students wrestle with these questions with their peers: How should I treat biblical authorship in their teaching? What are the minefields around those questions, and what are the spiritual, social, and theological implications for people in my care? How might these differences be negotiated in a parish community? What language will I use for this process of interpretation: Word of God, the activity of the Holy Spirit, revelation? What outcome will teaching this biblical text have? How will it matter? In the community of the class, students reflect on how they conceive of and exercise their authority as teachers of the Bible.[9]

Pastors and Scripture in Public Life

While teaching and preaching are mainly inner-community activities, the biblical studies courses attend to the ways in which the biblical interpretation of pastors and preachers is accountable to a wider public. Media presentations of the Jesus wars—as evidenced by the annual Easter issue of *Time* or *Newsweek*—are subject to analysis and evaluation based on what students have studied in the introductory course. Students' teaching presentations relate the prophet or epistle being taught with current cultural issues and debates. Some elective courses require the preparation of a public presentation at an ecumenical event—in which Christian readings of a text or texts are put into dialogue with those of other faiths or at a public meeting. In these ways, students get practice imagining those for whom the Bible is not authoritative and learn to be in discussion with them.

Art and Proclamation

Feminist and liberation theologians have been explicit about the role of the imagination in interpretation, teaching, and preaching.[10] In Schüssler Fiorenza's model, one important step is "the hermeneutics of creative imagination."[11] Imagination is broader than intellect or rationality; it is a spiritual and theological faculty. Although imagination was, as far as I recall, never recommended as a desirable characteristic of biblical interpretation ("Fantasy!" "Eisegesis!")

9. For a discussion of pedagogy closely akin to the values of this course, see Rebecca S. Chopp, "A Rhetorical Paradigm for Pedagogy," in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (ed. Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998), 299–309.

10. Chopp speaks of imagination as a pedagogical value in "Rhetorical Paradigm for Pedagogy," 307.

11. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001), 179–83.

and never taught as part of a method, I have found that engaging the imagination of ministerial students in their biblical preaching and teaching is one of the most valuable aspects of our teaching. As in the hermeneutical circle, the imagination is employed in concert with the intellect. For example, studying Jewish apocalyptic texts and reading anthropological and sociological studies of "apocalyptic" prepare for imaginative engagement with Mark 13. Many courses have assignments that interpret scripture using media other than the word processor—dance, movement, paint, and music. In these modes of expression, our diverse students easily surpass their faculty, who are trained to excel in a narrow range of argument and analysis. Aspects of the interpretation of texts in the arts are drawn upon as a rich part of the world in front of the text. Incorporating art and imagination into biblical studies has the effect of valuing the varied gifts of all students and not just rewarding the ones confident of their scholarly skills. It pushes many to grow into areas of inexperience or fear. In my experience, the expansion into the area of artistic interpretation is the farthest stretch from graduate biblical training which was so rigorously restricted to historical, anthropological methods and rules. But this emphasis on the art of biblical interpretation has made sense of ministerial training in a way that pure academic, rational methods/approaches do not.

By teaching the interrelated steps of a complex interpretive process, the biblical studies courses put emphasis on the "outcome" of interpretation, which is its proclamation. At the same time, they help students to analyze controversies and disagreements over interpretation. Historical study is essential, but is not allowed to become an unquestioned objective fact against which to hold the biblical text. Criticism of toxic, hurtful readings of the text, and the recognition of the limitations of its perspectives is an essential necessary piece of the interpretive process. Neither is criticism an end in itself, but rather it is a step toward rearticulation, proclamation, and construction. By teaching the broad spiral of biblical interpretation, we attempt to equip students to enter into and intervene positively in the current highly conflicted, sometimes violent arguments in churches and in culture over biblical authority. Learning to state the problem, its issues and assumptions and to enumerate the stakes is a step toward diffusing the destructive outcome and moving toward common goals.

The skill of distinguishing and naming differences is very different than the polemical rhetoric that characterizes many of these controversies. Such rhetoric poses dichotomous choices, such as either acknowledging the authority of the Bible or using historical, literary, anthropological methods to understand it. In this view, reading the Bible as scripture is opposed to reading historically or critically. Practice with the hermeneutical circle, especially in communities teaching the Bible, can show such choices to be false ones. Those

who have read it, studied it, preached and taught it, played with it, and asked hard questions of it can speak of the authority of scripture in an authentic way. Confronting the limitations of the perspectives of the biblical writers in their vision of societal organization, sexuality, gender, leadership, and marriage leads to a strong affirmation of the vision of inclusion and mutuality held by larger scriptural witness. Christian leaders, preachers and teachers of the community's sacred texts can negotiate these questions with confidence both within their communities and in the wider, pluralistic context.

Experiencing the challenges, frustrations, and successes of teaching biblical interpretation in a denominational seminary raises questions about how graduate biblical studies might prepare one for teaching in such a setting. It has highlighted for me the tremendous value of the humanistic and liberal learning of the university, the freedom of thinking, the fearlessness of applying tools of reason to sacred ideas and institutions, and the confidence in human good will and cooperation. The dominant method of historical criticism is an essential tool for understanding the Bible. At the same time those who will be leaders of faith communities and themselves give influential readings of scripture through teaching and preaching must be able to take into account the wider world of communities of memory, faith, and ritual and the history of their reading of scripture.

The emphasis on the role of pastoral leaders as teachers of scripture in our seminary curriculum suggests that attention to and practice in pedagogy in graduate biblical studies is more crucial than I knew it to be in my doctoral program. If they are trained to be self-reflective about their own methods and observant of the values and ethos of their teaching context, graduate students will be able to creatively shape their teaching to address the particular challenges of the community where they teach. They will be prepared to draw on a wide range of traditional, artistic, theological readings of scripture in the history of interpretation and be able to analyze and compare them with historical-critical readings. Focus on the many dimensions of pedagogy would equip those who teach in seminaries to deploy the insights and methods of the range of academic approaches to the Bible in order to form pastoral leaders as preachers and teachers of scripture in their communities.

Placing Meaning-Making at the Center of New Testament Studies

Hal Taussig with Brigitte Kahl

At the end of the long and rich afternoon in Washington, D.C., wherein a number of us had made relatively brief presentations on our respective Ph.D. programs in Bible, Hebrew Bible, and/or New Testament, I found myself in front of a gentle and erudite gentleman, surprised and perhaps a bit frustrated by what I had said in my presentation. In the presentation I had explained—ever so briefly—how our New Testament studies program at Union Theological Seminary in New York was committed to the integration of theological inquiry and New Testament studies.[1] This gentleman, whom I had never met before but who represented a leading biblical studies program of an important evangelical institution, blurted out how his institution had finally accepted the validity of historical-critical methods. Just in time, he added with a gracious smile, to hear that an institution at the center of the establishment of the paradigm of historical-critical studies of the Bible—namely, Union—now placed theological inquiry near the heart of New Testament studies and saw historical-critical work as an occasional hindrance to authentic theological inquiry.

There was, I sensed, a melancholy note in his observation. It is not clear to me that it would be possible to find much common ground between an evangelical version of doctoral-level biblical studies and Union's New Testament program, simply by virtue of both having a commitment to theological inquiry. On the other hand, I do think that conversation about theological inquiry and New Testament studies between liberal and evangelical traditions

1. This essay is written only in relationship to doctoral studies in New Testament at Union. Union has an exemplary doctoral program in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament under the leadership of Professor David Carr. But that program in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament has distinctly different emphases than the New Testament program addressed here.