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Bridging the gap? On some suggestions towards solving the normative problem in ecclesial exegesis

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Abstract

It is often said that biblical exegesis by or on behalf of the Church is understandable – since the Church is concerned with Scripture and its interpretation – but suffers from a problem of 'dual loyalty': it lacks truly scholarly impartiality because it is bound by its credal statements. The article suggests that this problem is, in principle, no greater than that of any other scholar studying Scripture, and goes on to briefly assess some recent suggestions for developing a scholarly *and* ecclesial exegesis by N. T. Wright, K. Berger, P. Stuhlmacher and L. T. Johnson. It concludes that a combination of the approaches taken by these scholars could be said to adequately deal with the problem.

Biblical interpretation on behalf of or by the Church appears to be at once a most natural *and* a most problematic thing: natural, because both OT and NT are the Holy Scriptures of the faith community gathered as the Church, and thus their interpretation is in many ways a necessity without which the Church's very self-understanding and integrity is threatened.[1] On the other hand, and especially viewed from some of the basic assumptions behind modern academic scholarship, such interpretation seems ridden with an almost insurmountable difficulty. This is so because such interpretation is not and cannot be 'disinterested' given that it *per definitionem* involves what could be called a 'dual loyalty'. The term seeks to describe the dilemma

[1] For an excellent example of how the Scriptures (and biblical scholarship) can and must contribute to the Church's self-understanding and integrity see Medard Kehl *Die Kirche – Eine katholische Ekklesiologie* (3rd edn, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1994). See also Luke Johnson, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship – A Constructive Conversation* (with William Kurz SJ) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 278–80.

The general case for relating biblical interpretation and theology (*contra* much of the current climate) was also forcefully made by Frances Young and David Ford, programmatically in their *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: Biblical Foundations in Theology, SPCK, 1987), which sets out the case for doing so in the Introduction (pp. 1–7), and then goes on to develop ideas towards a suitable hermeneutics (pp. 139–65) – which bear some resemblance to the more systematic concept of Peter Stuhlmacher (with which we will deal in more detail below). Young and Ford (correctly) regarded themselves as in many ways pioneers of their cause at the time.

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that is caused by ecclesial exegesis being committed both to the lordship of the person of Christ as confessed in the creeds of the Church, and to the 'impartial' pursuit of knowledge and truth with regard to the Scriptures that it shares with (other) academic biblical interpretation.

In dealing with this problem, it is crucial to note at the outset that it is indeed inevitable and cannot be truly solved by simply opting for one of the two conflicting claims on the respective exegete's loyalty: without the first, the interpretation would by definition cease to be that of the Church, which is necessarily bound by its own creeds. Without the second, any interpretation on behalf of the Church would appear to possess too little epistemic integrity, and would thus cease to be *exegesis* at all, becoming instead mere *eisegesis* in the service of ulterior (apologetic) motives. Thus while it is indeed true that both in the past and today individual exegetes *have* opted for dropping one of the loyalties in question – today usually, it would seem, the one to the Church and her faith[2] – this itself does not contribute to solving the problem, unless one would wish to conclude from such instances that serious biblical interpretation with integrity by the Church is not only problematic, but *per se* impossible. Before doing so, it does, however, appear important to examine both the history of the problem and some recent responses to it from scholars who would consider themselves to hold both of the above loyalties.

Awareness of the problem is, of course, itself a fairly recent development: virtually all of what one could call 'premodern' biblical interpretation[3] would not, one suspects, have seen a problem at all. For them, all living and thinking was 'defined by the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus', and they consequently saw themselves naturally 'committed . . . to the Sacred Scriptures as a revelatory text that [speaks] truly . . . about this Lord Jesus [and to] enact these convictions . . . through participation in the liturgy and the practices of piety'.[4] Biblical interpretation, under these circumstances, was (just) one further area of Christian life, for which no fundamentally different norms existed than did for other areas. And since one of the premises of such premodern interpretation was that Scripture was not only a harmonious unity in itself, but was similarly harmonious with the Church's tradition,[5] it

[2] A prominent recent example being Gerd Lüdemann of Göttingen.

[3] For reasons that will become apparent below (especially in dealing with the proposals of Luke Johnson), I will use 'premodern' rather than 'precritical' to describe biblical interpretation 'pre-Strauß'.

[4] Thus Luke Johnson in *Future*, pp. 35f.

[5] An excellent summary of five central premises is contained in Johnson, *Future*, pp. 47–60; for the principle of harmony see especially pp. 47–55. See also below for a more detailed analysis.

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followed that all inquiry into Scripture – even where it was 'critical'[6] – was conducted 'within the context of a profound submission to the rule of faith and the authority of the text'.[7]

One of the places where this becomes most obvious is in medieval monastic interpretation, which seems to move naturally and with apparent ease between what we would now separate strictly into biblical interpretation on the one and liturgical, moral and spiritual application on the other hand.[8] Premodern biblical interpretation thus saw no problem because it did not, apparently, see its loyalty as 'dual' at all. Instead, these interpreters will have seen their scholarship as 'endeavour to worship God with their minds as well as with heart and soul', called to be 'fearless in following truth . . . so that Christ may be as fully presented as thought and word allow', each seeking 'to his ability to bring new thought and knowledge under the discipline of Christ, and to interpret it to a better understanding of the loving purposes of God'.[9] For them, apparently, the truth they were seeking in scholarship was

[6] And this it apparently was much more often than most would now think; see Johnson, *Future*, pp. 52–5 and pp. 79–84.

[7] Ibid., p. 59.

[8] See for example Jean Leclerq *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, translated by Catherine Misrashi (Fordham University Press, 3rd edn, 1982) on the specific concept of 'sacred learning' in medieval monasticism, in which spirituality and study are not separated (pp. 71–88). Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998) provides an account of the role of art in later parts of the Middle Ages (pp. 111–48).
It could be said that some of the finest premodern and medieval theology is preserved in liturgy, specifically in the plainchant settings of the Introits to the Offices and the Antiphons on the Magnificat. These are available in their English translation, for example in *The Offices, or Introits for Sundays and Festivals with the musical notation from the Sarum Graddale*, adapted by G. H. Palmer (Wantage: St. Mary's Convent, 3rd edn, 1935) and in *The Antiphons upon Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis from the Salisbury Antiphoner*, translated into English and adapted to the Original Musick-Note by G. H. Palmer (Wantage: St. Mary's Press, revised edn, 1972). Both the extensive use of symbolism and the concept of a living unity of Old and New Testament is especially apparent here; for example in the Introit for Corpus Christi: 'He fed them with the finest wheat-flour, alleluya, and with honey from the rock hath he satisfied them, alleluya, alleluya, alleluya' (*Introits*, p. 34), a quotation from Ps 81:16 read as a prophetic vision of the Eucharist via an identification of Christ as the rock of Nb 20:8, which – according to rabbinic teaching – 'followed Israel in the desert' (thus the footnote to 1 Cor 10: 1–4 in *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Standard Edition (Doubleday 1990), New Testament Section, p. 1901. The 'honey' echoes both the life-giving water of Nb 20: 1–11 and the blood of Jn 19: 31–6.

[9] It is, perhaps, most interesting to note that this quotation, while expressing with utmost clarity what the spirit of premodern biblical interpretation is, actually comes from the Rule of Life of a modern religious society (from Note 4 of

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the same as the Truth they were serving as disciples in their daily lives, and worshipping in their liturgy and prayers. In this they would have considered themselves aided rather than constrained by that *regula fidei* which the creeds and tradition of the Church provided them with.[10]

It is only once, in the nineteenth century, studies like that of Strauß, Wrede or – within Anglicanism – Colenso appear, 'revealing the credibility gap that had by now opened up between the plain words of scripture . . . and what educated people in fact believed',[11] that the premodern premises of biblical scholarship are mostly abandoned. Now, indeed, Strauß can claim that most theologians dealing with exegetical questions lack the 'inner liberation of feeling and thought from certain religious and dogmatic presuppositions' which he himself claims to have achieved by previous philosophical studies (Hegelian, that is, as becomes apparent quite quickly).[12] Thus suddenly what hitherto was a virtue and premise of biblical scholarship is now said to be its enemy: adherence to a *regula fidei* with heart and mind has now become a hindrance to that kind of dispassionate and detached attitude that appears to be a prerequisite of serious and objective scholarship. The expectation that the truth of scholarship and Truth himself are one is turned on its head, the former 'hermeneutics of generosity or charity'[13] is replaced by a hermeneutics of critical distance, for which too close an affinity or too great a respect for the contents and claims of his or her study on the part of the exegete is suspect, precisely because it seems to threaten that neutral objectivity which is the mark of what is now considered genuine scholarship.

This way of putting the problem – albeit in a much more refined form – still provides the basic framework within which academic biblical scholarship is mainly construed and conducted, and it demands of those who disagree and advocate ecclesial biblical interpretation that they answer the question where and why, in their view, the modern paradigm is insufficient or even wrong. The remainder of this paper will deal with a variety of such answers,

The Seven Notes of the Anglican 'Oratory of the Good Shepherd' as contained on http://www.ogs.net/ogsrule.htm of 4.04.2003), and there deals more widely with what is called the brethren's vocation to 'Labour of the Mind' (thus the title of the Note).

[10] See note 7 above.

[11] Thus (about Colenso), Robert Morgan *et al.*, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 58.

[12] They lack 'die innere Befreiung des Gemüths oder Denkens von gewissen religiösen und dogmatischen Voraussetzungen, und diese ist dem Verfasser durch philosophische Studien früh zu Theil geworden' (thus David Strauß *Das Leben Jesu I* (p. VI) of 1835, quoted in Klaus Berger, *Sind die Berichte des Neuen Testaments wahr – Ein Weg zum Verstehen der Bibel* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), p. 13.

[13] Johnson, *Future*, p. 59.

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attempting to evaluate their success in bridging the (modern) gap between biblical scholarship and the Church's interpretation of Scripture.

The basis of all such attempts appears to be what Peter Stuhlmacher has called 'Kritik an der Kritik',[14] especially criticism of some of its fundamental assumptions. Such criticism usually begins by diagnosing the gap that indeed exists between the claims of modern scholarly method and the results of its use. Thus Stuhlmacher writes: 'Es gehört keine besondere Findigkeit dazu, heute zu jeder gewichtigeren Frage im Bereich der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft zwei oder drei einander diametral entgegengesetzte Antworten ausfindig zu machen, die sämtlich mit dem Anspruch auftreten, wissenschaftlich – und d.h. in diesem Falle: historisch-kritisch fundiert und dementsprechend auch wahr zu sein'.[15] Yet if these methods and their application were indeed as 'objective' as is sometimes claimed, then such a gap should not occur. Instead, a general scholarly consensus of some sort ought to have emerged over time, just as it has in other 'sciences'.[16]

In addition, it is said that the methodology of historical criticism appears to be very closely linked to a view of history and reality that cannot but yield only a certain type of result. Thus Troeltsch's understanding of the nature of criticism and its criteria of analogy and correlation – still the (often only implicit) basis of modern liberal hermeneutics – rules out that a text (any text) could credibly witness to events that are singular and not part of a chain of natural causation as understood in a quasi-deterministic sense.[17] It is therefore not only that the methodology appears to lack that kind of (scientific) quality which its self-understanding would lead one to expect, it is also that it is far less 'neutral' and objective in its ontological commitments – and consequently its results – than has traditionally been claimed.[18]

[14] 'Criticism of criticism'; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments – Eine Hermeneutik* (Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament Band 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2nd edn, 1986), p. 30; executed in more detail also ibid., pp. 143–205.

[15] Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, p. 31. Translatable as 'One does not need great ingenuity to find two or three mutually exclusive and contradictory answers to any important question of New Testament scholarship, each coming with a claim to being properly "scientific" i.e. the result of historical criticism and therefore with a claim to being true.' Thus also Johnson, *Future*, pp. 10–14.

[16] See also Berger, *Berichte*, pp. 13–43 and his *Wer war Jesus wirklich?* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 3rd edn, 1996), pp. 9–21.

[17] Berger, *Berichte*, 33ff. and Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, pp. 31f.

[18] This critical case is made in great detail by Hans-Joachim Schulz, *Historisch-kritische Evangelieninterpretation und formgeschichtliche Überlieferungskritik: Ökumenische Chance oder Rückfall in die Zeit der Aufklärung* (Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift, Heft 1 (1991) pp. 15–43 and Heft 4 (1991), pp. 323–49). As the title would lead one to expect, Schulz

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These criticisms appear to a large extent to reflect developments in the areas of the epistemology both of hermeneutics and science which have occurred over the last fifty years, and which are closely associated with the names of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Michael Polanyi. The former, especially in the concepts of 'Verstehen' (understanding) as 'Horizontverschmelzung' and in pointing out the importance of the 'Wirkungsgeschichte' of a text for its proper historical understanding[19] has reminded us of the necessary role of those (traditional) preconceptions ('Vorurteile') which alone enable understanding and which at the same time rule out any hermeneutical concept of pure neutrality ('Verstehen auf Abstand'), let alone 'suspicion':[20] instead, true understanding involves 'daß Verständigung nur auf dem Boden eines ursprünglichen Einverständnisses gelingen kann, und daß die Aufgabe des Verstehens und der Auslegung nicht so beschrieben werden darf, als hätte Hermeneutik die blanke Unverständlichkeit eines überlieferten Texts zu überwinden oder gar primär die Beirrung durch Mißverstand'.[21] Thus the basic trust and sympathy of premodern hermeneutics, while without doubt in need of also incorporating elements of modern historical criticism,

concentrates on the way in which (he claims) the view of natural science and history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has unduly influenced the critical methodology – and how it does so to this day. Not surprisingly, the article contains (p. 349) a recommendation of Peter Stuhlmacher's concept (see below). Similarly, Joseph Ratzinger *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit – Zur Frage nach Grundlagen und Weg der Exegese heute* (in the collection of the same name which he edited, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, Quaestiones Disputatae No. 117 (Freiburg: Herder, 1989); pp. 15–44, has pointed out such problems with the methodology – though in a way that appears more open to dialogue with 'conventional' academic scholarship than Schulz's; appropriately, Ratzinger's book also includes essays by George Lindbeck and Raymond Brown (pp. 45–97).

[19] Both – understanding as the melting of horizons and the importance of the 'effectual history' of a text – in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I - Wahrheit und Methode, Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 6th edn, 1990).

[20] I have attempted a more detailed analysis elsewhere (in my *Vernunft und Verstehen – Hans-Georg Gadamers anthropologische Hermeneutikkonzeption* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1995), especially pp. 41–57). Schulz's verdict spells out the insufficiency of 'suspicion' explicitly: 'Die *Skepsis* wie sie Bultmann und Käsemann als Ausgangspunkt wählten, ist kein hermeneutisches Prinzip. Sie ist nicht Kennzeichen der wahren wissenschaftlichen Haltung, sondern der ideologischen Voreingenommenheit' ('Scepticism as advocated by Bultmann and Käsemann is no hermeneutical principle. It is not the mark of a truly scientific and scholarly approach, but instead that of ideological bias'; Schulz, *Evangelieninterpretation*, p. 349).

[21] Gadamer, *Hermeneutik*, p. 529, pointing out that 'understanding can only succeed on the basis of a primary agreement, and that its task cannot be described as an attempt at overcoming a principal incomprehensibility or even confusion of a received text'.

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may *in principle* not have been as far off the (hermeneutical) mark as some modern scholarship would suggest.[22]

Similarly, Polanyi's work on scientific epistemology – especially in his *Personal Knowledge* of 1958 – has alerted both scientists themselves and other scholars (especially in the humanities) whose work attempts to incorporate scientific ideals to the fact that what scientists actually do is far from the popular (mis-)conception of that work:[23] 'The emphasis on the exercise of tacit skills of judgement, within a convivial community but employed with universal intent, is both consonant with what goes on in science (which, of course, Polanyi, unlike most philosophers of science, actually knew from the inside) and it has obvious affinities with the procedures of other disciplines – like theology, where it is even harder to tell what we know and why we know it'.[24] Even scientific understanding, it turns out, is both tradition-based and communal to an extent far beyond popular impressions, and possesses objectivity primarily in its claim to 'universal validity'[25] in the context of an – albeit critical – realism.[26] Epistemologically speaking therefore, true critical self-awareness of historical (critical) biblical scholarship as a form of rational enquiry in many ways akin to that of the sciences, and especially the humanities, should significantly modify its claims to objectivity in a direction that would decrease the difference to premodern models of biblical interpretation.

If, thus, the basis of attempts to provide answers to the problem of 'dual' loyalty in ecclesial biblical interpretation is to turn the tables on the modern paradigm of biblical scholarship, and to point out that this paradigm is – metaphorically speaking – sitting in the same epistemological boat as ecclesial

[22] Stuhlmacher (*Verstehen*, p. 32) therefore speaks approvingly of Werner Georg Kümmel's idea of approaching the biblical texts with 'critical sympathy' – which could be a heading for the kind of project that an application of Gadamer's principles would result in. For Stuhlmacher's own suggestion of a 'Hermeneutik des Einverständnisses mit den biblischen Texten" (a 'hermeneutics of consent with the biblical texts'), see below.

[23] One of the most important 'translators' of Polanyi into the humanities and 'social sciences' is Alasdair MacIntyre, especially in his essays on the nature of the social sciences in the 1970s. I have summarised and analysed these elsewhere, especially with regard to their influence on Moral Philosophy (in my *Alasdair MacIntyre's Tugendenlehre von* After Virtue *als Beitrag zum Disput über universalistische Erziehungsziele* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2002), especially chapter III.2.1 (pp. 154–62). Since theology resembles such philosophy to some extent, I consider the results of that study to be equally applicable to biblical interpretation.

[24] Thus John Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief – The Gifford Lectures for 1993–4* (London: SPCK, 3rd impression, 1997), p. 47.

[25] Thus Polanyi himself (*Personal Knowledge*, p. vii), quoted in Polkinghorne, *Science*, p. 47.

[26] See also my *Alasdair MacIntyre's Tugendenlehre von* After Virtue, pp. 273–96.

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interpretation is (even if modernity may – to its detriment – lack proper awareness of this), the routes that are taken *from* this basis vary. I suggest that (at least) three different projects can be distinguished under the headings of 'trusting history' (1), 'developing a new hermeneutics' (2) and 'recovering elements of premodern interpretation' (3), projects which can be linked with the names of N. T. Wright and Klaus Berger (1), Peter Stuhlmacher (2) and Luke Johnson (3). I will consider each of these in turn.

The approach of the first of these routes amounts, more or less, to the claim that if one were – in consequence of the criticism outlined above – to purge the historical method of its pro-Enlightenment bias, and then to apply what remains carefully, the result would reveal that there is no 'ghastly gap' at all between the Church's teaching and faith on the one and the results of impartial biblical scholarship on the other hand. Symptomatic is the claim of Ulrich Wilckens: 'Bei vorurteilsfreier Anwendung "historisch-kritischer" Methoden kommt man gar nicht darum herum, die Osterbotschaft des Neuen Testaments ernstzunehmen.'[27] Unbiased, open and careful scholarly biblical interpretation, using tested historiographical methods which are both critical and self-critical, is said to lead to results which are close enough to the Church's own traditional reading of Scripture to reveal that talk of a 'gap' is actually unwarranted. That this claim, even at first sight, is itself neither uncritical nor as unsubstantial as some (such as Lüdemann) would perhaps hold, is evident from the involvement of secular scholars in it: one of the more significant contributions – though here referring to the Old Testament – has been made by William Dever, a self-proclaimed 'secular humanist' rather than an orthodox Christian or Jew,[28] who nevertheless proves extremely critical of the kind of bias he detects in what he calls the 'Current School of Revisionists',[29] and who is convinced that the historical content available in

[27] 'An unbiased application of historical-critical methods cannot but result in taking seriously the Easter message of the New Testament'; thus on the cover of his *Hoffnung gegen den Tod – Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung Jesu* (Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1996), which is designed as a rebuttal of Gerd Lüdemann's highly critical claims in *Die Auferstehung Jesu. Historie – Erfahrung – Theologie* (Stuttgart: Radius, 1994).

[28] William Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know it? What Archeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001); his claim to secular humanism (as well as to a nominal Jewishness) is contained on p. x.

[29] Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?*, pp. 23–52. A less disinterested precursor was, perhaps, Hugo Staudinger (a historian and conservative Christian, whose 'legacy' in many ways lives on in the work of Carsten Peter Thiede, who used to work for Staudinger's 'Institut für wissenschaftstheoretische Grundlagenforschung' in Paderborn); an example of his work is *Die historische Glaubwürdigkeit der Evangelien* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 5th edn, 1988).

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and through the writings of the Old Testament is much higher than many critics assume.

In Wright's version of this project,[30] both its strengths and weaknesses are perhaps most obvious. Wright begins his treatment by defining his question ('So what did happen on Easter morning?') as 'historical'.[31] This means that especially in such a theologically vital question as that of the resurrection an 'appeal to history still matters and can still be made' which is neither 'apologetic colonising' of history by theologians, nor on the other hand 'theologically dictated indifference to history'.[32] Wright, while critical of what he considers the liberal consensus both in the Church and exegesis,[33] is well aware that 'in reaching historical conclusions about what happened at Easter, we cannot avoid the question of the historian's own worldview and theology'.[34] Although this must, of course, include his own attempts, Wright does not thereby wish to repudiate the value of study: 'There is no such thing as detached objectivity. . . . But this does not mean that all knowledge collapses into *mere* subjecttivity. There are ways of moving towards fair and true statements about the past'.[35]

Wright calls the underlying concept of his approach 'Critical Realism'[36] – an epistemological view which is 'realist' insofar as it asserts that 'wirkliches Seiendes unabhängig von unserem Bewußtsein "an sich" existiert und daß das Ziel unseres Erkennens diesem Seienden gegenüber ist, sich ihm anzugleichen, es zu erfassen, wie es an sich ist, und daß dieses Ziel, wenigstens in bestimmten Grenzen, auch erreichbar ist' and which is 'critical' insofar 'es sich über die Berechtigung der natürlichen Überzeugung von der Realität Rechenschaft ablegt'.[37] Application of such realism and

An excellent and balanced summary of this kind of position, complete with a helpful bibliography, is contained in Joel Green *et al.* (eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992) in the article *Gospels (Historical Reliability)*, pp. 291–97.

[30] Most recently in *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God Volume 3 (London: SPCK, 2003). I will concentrate on this for outlining Wright's views, occasionally referring to his earlier *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God Volume 1 (London: SPCK, 1992) and *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God Volume 1 (London: SPCK, 1996).

[31] Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 4.

[32] Thus (quoting Williams) Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 5.

[33] Ibid., pp. 4, 7.

[34] Ibid., p. 6.

[35] Ibid., p. 29.

[36] Ibid., p. 32.

[37] Translatable as: 'real being exists "as such" independent of our consciousness, and the aim of our understanding in relation to it is to become adequate to it and grasp

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its historical methodology to the question of the resurrection[38] yields, he argues, the conclusion that the most plausible explanation of what happened at Easter and is claimed in the New Testament is that Christ's tomb was indeed empty, that he appeared to his disciples and was thus bodily resurrected.[39] Central to this conclusion is that in the light of the evidence there exists an insurmountable 'difficulty of accounting for those beliefs except on the hypothesis that they were true'.[40] Instead, Christ's bodily resurrection – as believed and taught by the Church – turns out to be both the *sufficient* and *necessary* condition[41] of the data available to the historian *as historian*; it is indeed the 'best explanation' available historically.[42]

Despite the huge value (and great detail) of Wright's work, showing that critical and searching historical and theological enquiry by no means need result in diagnosing a 'gap' between ecclesial doctrine and scriptural evidence, his claim to *necessity* is highly problematic and rather overstates – and thereby actually weakens – his case. He reaches it in two steps: (1) that *only* the 'combination of [empty] tomb plus appearances'[43] could possibly have caused the 'rise of early Christian belief',[44] and (2) that in turn, tomb and appearances absolutely demand Christ's bodily resurrection, that 'no other explanation could or would do'.[45] This is admirably clear – but hardly critical epistemologically. Especially in the light of what biblical scholarship could and should learn from Gadamer or Polanyi – but even in that of what Wright himself claimed[46] – such a statement is extraordinary: neither enquiries in the sciences, nor in the humanities, are likely to yield the kind of certainties (let alone strict necessities in the proper, philosophical sense

it as it is as such, and that this aim – within certain limitations – is attainable' being critical insofar as 'it gives account of why it considers the natural conviction of external reality as justified'. The concept is thus classically defined in Walter Brugger *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg: Herder, 21st edn, 1992), p. 317.

[38] Wright has similarly explained and applied the concept in his *New Testament* (pp. 29–144 for the explanation, and pp. 145–464 for the application and its results) and in *Jesus* (pp. 145–653).

[39] Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 683–738 contains the conclusion of the preceding (detailed) analysis throughout the book.

[40] Thus the programmatic statement in Wright, *Resurrection*, p. 6 – which the main section of the book claims to have vindicated.

[41] Ibid., pp. 686–718 sets out the case for this.

[42] Ibid., p. 716.

[43] Ibid., p. 696.

[44] Ibid., p. 696.

[45] Ibid., p. 717.

[46] See note 35 above.

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of the term)[47] that Wright claims to have unearthed. Instead, truly critical realism should result in more balanced assessments of probabilities and likelihood, even where – like Wright – their authors are convinced by the evidence in one direction rather than another. In the absence of such balance, Wright's claims will sound to many just like the kind of instrumentalisation of historical research which he himself condemned – and will thus tend to undermine the real value that his study contains.[48]

The limits of Wright's project of simply 'trusting history' in response to the criticism of ecclesial exegesis thus appear to mirror those of what it intends to overcome: the 'Enlightenment bias' of former historical-critical method (of the Bultmann and Marxsen variety) appears often just to be replaced by a different kind of bias, equally strong and equally uncritical, but this time more 'conservative'. And unless this is curbed and contained, it will tend to reinforce either (1) the suspicion of those it set out to criticise, in turn hardening their resolve, or – more seriously – (2) the 'post-modern' conviction that at least in the field of biblical scholarship, all knowledge does, after all (*contra* Wright[49]) collapse into mere subjectivity of one sort or another.

Someone who, while sharing many of the basic principles of Wright's project, appears much more aware of the problems – and on the whole much more balanced – is Klaus Berger.[50] Like Wright, he criticises that criteria for distinguishing 'legend' from history in liberal critical exegesis

[47] See – once more – Brugger, *Wörterbuch*, pp. 271f.: 'Notwendig . . . ist, was nicht anders sein kann, oder das, dessen kontradiktorisches Gegenteil unmöglich ist' ('Necessary is that which could not be other, or the contradictory opposite of which is impossible'). Historians – even biblical historians and scholars – should not, I think, attempt to deal in such things, for historical scholarship (as Wright himself demonstrates throughout his detailed study) is a question of the assessment of probabilities based on the evaluation of data that itself is far from complete. The contingencies involved in such study effectively rule out any reference to strict necessity – Wright's 'historical necessity' is thus no more than a contradictio in adiecto.

[48] It is thus to be hoped, precisely by those who – like the present author – in broad terms agree with the assessment of the impressive evidence collected by Wright, that he will modify his aspirations and language in future editions of the book. Its value may otherwise be lost – to scholarship, at least – and instead encourage only those whose conservative (probably evangelical) leanings usually prompt them to 'apologetic colonising' anyway (s.a.).

[49] See note 35 above.

[50] The following account will rely especially on his recent *Sind die Berichte des Neuen Testaments wahr? Ein Weg zum Verstehen der Bibel* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2002), which has made explicit an approach that was already at work in his earlier books, for example on Jesus (*Wer war Jesus wirklich?* (Stuttgart: Quell, 3rd edn, 1996) and on miracles (*Darf man an Wunder glauben?* (Stuttgart: Quell, 1996)).

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often boil down to no more than the 'normale Alltagserfahrung'[51] of the respective exegete, and he is no less critical of Troeltsch's criteria in particular than either Wright or Stuhlmacher.[52] Yet in addition, Berger seems more obviously aware of the value of liberal critical scholarship and its results, being especially indebted to it for justifying honest, searching and critical enquiry and for making theology a 'diskussionsfähig[e]' discipline in the wider academic context.[53] Thus for him, the real question is not whether to abandon such study altogether, but more precisely 'die Frage der Grenzen des Sich-Einlassens';[54] that of how far to comply with some of the fundamental presuppositions of modern academia in the service of maintaining these achievements.

Specifically, Berger – on the basis of this critique of the principles of liberal exegesis – proposes a serious revision of the criteria of historical plausibility, since these, in their current form, depend 'dogmatically'[55] upon a (rationalistic) basis which is now no longer credible. He therefore argues: '[ich] halte die Alternative *echt/unecht* bzw. die Unterscheidung *vorösterlich/nachösterlich* für unbeantwortbar und *deshalb* für unergiebig und irrelevant'.[56] In other words: because we are unable to rationally justify making these distinctions, we should no longer do so. To be truly critical in precisely the same spirit (but not the same method) as liberal exegesis was, would now mean first of all to acknowledge this inability, and then consequently to use an appropriate new principle of interpretation that is 'mit den Umrißen eines Mosaiks zufrieden . . . für das gerade nicht Stimmigkeit entscheident ist, sondern die Bewahrung der am weitesten auseinander liegenden Eckpunkte'.[57] This concept would thus embody a principle of

[51] 'Ordinary, everyday-experience'; Berger, *Berichte*, p. 22; most of the first part of his book (pp. 13–36) is devoted to criticism of liberal exegesis not unlike that of Wright (and no less polemical, either).

[52] On Troeltsch see Berger, *Berichte*, pp. 33–6.

[53] Berger, *Berichte*, p. 29; paraphrased 'making theology a serious academic field' capable of serious dialogue with other academic disciplines.

[54] Ibid., p. 30; 'the question about where the limits of complying' with basic modern academic assumptions lie.

[55] Ibid., p. 52.

[56] Ibid., p. 60; 'I consider it to be rationally impossible to decide between the alternatives *authentic/inauthentic* and *pre- and post Easter*, and *therefore* consider making this distinction both unfruitful and irrelevant.' The case is argued in more detail on pp. 40–106.

[57] Ibid., p. 82; here (as in his *Jesus*, pp. 10–41) specifically argued with regard to the quest for the historical Jesus; 'content with the contours of a mosaic, for which absolute consistency is not the deciding criterion, but instead the joint preservation of those points that appear furthest apart is'. The same case is made in his *Wunder*, pp. 11–59.

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width/generosity and integration, constructing from the Scriptures, for example, a picture of Jesus that actively tries to integrate all those often very different things that these sources contain[58] that could *possibly* have existed in one extraordinary person.[59] To obtain this, we would need to apply a 'schonendes Prüfverfahren' which is 'ein methodisch konsequentes Beurteilen der Texte, das viel stärker von den Texten und ihrem Erhalt ausgeht, als von der doch recht sachfremden Naturwissenschaft',[60] the end result of which would be the 'verstandene Fremdheit'[61] of the Scriptures.

By thus being much more careful than Wright and arguing for an open and inclusive approach as a result of the criticism of liberal exegesis, Berger achieves three main things: (1) he retains some continuity with what is criticised, arguing in effect for an approach to biblical interpretation that is self-critical enough to be much more measured and restrained in its approach to the Scriptures than liberal exegesis has tended to be. In effect, he says, that the exegetes need to be *more* critical – though in a different direction. This not only is more credible than Wright's straightforward self-assurance, it also allows Berger to continue constructive dialogue with liberal exegesis far more easily. At the same time (2) he still makes a substantial attempt at 'bridging the gap', since one of the important results of his concept of the 'mosaic' for our own question is undoubtedly that the Church's (credal) reading of Scripture is rationally justifiable and possible – if not the only possible one as in Wright.[62] This again also encourages dialogue with other approaches to the interpretation both of reality on the whole, and the Bible in particular.[63] The result is that (3) his concept is neither heavily biased nor open to the charge of subjectivism in the same way that both liberal

[58] And also those *apocrypha* and even *agrapha* that could possibly contain historical material (Berger, *Berichte*, pp. 45–51).

[59] Which is precisely what Berger's book on Jesus does, with fascinating if controversial results.

[60] Berger, *Berichte*, p. 34; literally a 'gentle testing procedure, a methodologically consistent evaluation of the texts, which proceeds much more from those texts and their conservation than from the here irrelevant natural sciences'. The argument is summarised and the proposal repeated on pp. 205f.

[61] Ibid., p. 206; 'understood foreign-ness/strangeness' of the world of the Bible.

[62] In all three books, especially within the many detailed examples of Berger's own exegesis contained in them (for example *Berichte*, pp. 43f., 45–50, 57–62) the results, on the whole, tend to favour a credal reading. The nature of Berger's individual results thus justify treating him under the same heading as Wright: he, too, obviously attempts to justify an ecclesial reading and interpretation of the Scriptures which is rationally justifiable and 'faithful'.

[63] Berger, *Berichte*, p. 118 calls for a recovery of the complementarity of different approaches to reality in general.

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exegesis and Wright's approach are.[64] By suggesting a careful and balanced procedure, Berger's own version of 'trusting history' – chosen mainly because the alternative of mistrusting it until proven innocent[65] has failed – is much more successful than Wright's.

At the same time, Berger's insisting on a new 'Prüfverfahren' provides a connection between this first route of arguing for the legitimacy of ecclesial exegesis and a second, explicitly 'hermeneutical' one of scholars such as Stuhlmacher.[66] In many ways Stuhlmacher may be the most 'mainstream' of the scholars looked at in the course of this paper;[67] his project can be summarised as advocating an approach to and understanding of the Bible 'das die Liebe zur Schrift mit den Anforderungen des neuzeitlichen Wahrheitsbewußtseins vereint'.[68] Thus while he, too, is critical of much

[64] A characteristic example is the way in which he treats the discussion of authenticity with regard to the sayings of Jesus: because of the failure of the present approach (recorded Berger, *Berichte*, pp. 52–60) he concludes 'Ich möchte von diesen Beobachtungen her dafür plädieren, in Zukunft für jedes Jesuswort eine Liste von Gründen für Bestreitbarkeit sekundärer Herkunft zu erstellen' but continues 'Dass das Geforderte etwas anderes is als Beweise für die Echtheit, liegt auf der Hand' (translated: 'Because of these observations [of pp. 52ff] I want to argue for in future compiling a list of reasons *against* secondary authorship for every word of Jesus. That this is something entirely different from proving their authenticity should be clear enough.'). In other words: like Wright, Berger criticises the bias of liberal exegesis, but unlike him concludes not that *therefore* the opposite of the 'liberal results' is true, but that a more balanced openness is required. It is this character of Berger's project that protects him from charges of bias.

[65] Which is arguably the approach that much of liberal exegesis has both taken and encouraged. See also the following discussion of Stuhlmacher.

[66] The difference is, of course, slightly artificial: Berger himself is – at least implicitly – as concerned with hermeneutics as Stuhlmacher is. Yet his own, explicit attempts (for example Berger, *Berichte*, pp. 87–106) on the whole do no more than sketch what such a hermeneutic could look like, and do not engage explicitly with the hermeneutical debate at all. Since this is even more true of Wright, who mostly makes but passing comments on the question, the distinction between the first and second 'route' still appears to convey something of importance. One could, of course, argue, that the second approach is to be understood as in effect providing the first with a methodologically thought-through hermeneutic; both do share the same aim.

[67] Partly, one suspects, because he is also the least polemical, expressing genuine disappointment (in the preface to the second edition, p. 7) that both his fellow academics and more conservative, evangelical groups in his Church (the EKD) have criticised his project severely (as either too pietist or too critical). Stuhlmacher, more than Wright or Berger, anyway, is perhaps more of a (failed) bridge-builder than an academic partisan.

[68] Thus on the cover of his book (Stuhlmacher, Verstehen); 'which unites the love of Scripture with the demands of the modern understanding of truth'; similarly p. 34.

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in the present exegetical approach,[69] he explicitly intends to initiate a conversation aiming at a use of Scripture which is *both* ecclesial *and* academic.[70] What he suggests, in essence, is a 'hermeneutic of consent with the biblical texts',[71] which he seeks to (re)gain in conversation with earlier (especially protestant) biblical interpretation.[72]

To do so, Stuhlmacher begins by outlining the state of the current conflict about biblical interpretation, setting out the case for both the current practice of criticism and that of its fiercest opponents.[73] The first principle for his own concept of providing something that in many ways aims to lie 'between' these two options is then gained from an analysis of the history and principles behind the canon of the New Testament[74] and an attempt at understanding authority, inspiration and interpretation of Scripture as it is both (a) contained implicitly within these principles, and (b) in the actual interpretative practice of Jesus and the early Christians as evident in the writings of the New Testament authors themselves.[75] What results from this study is precisely that 'hermeneutische Geviert von Schrift, Schriftauslegung, Glaubenstradition und Kirche (in Gestalt von ordinierten Amtsträgern) . . . von dem die Alte Kirche ausgeht und das bis heute in der römisch-katholischen und der orthodoxen Kirche bestimmend geblieben ist'.[76] Its chief intention lies in providing for a biblical interpretation that is conducted

[69] For example Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, pp. 24–35 or pp. 123–69 and 225–36.

[70] Ibid., pp. 7–8, 18.

[71] Ibid., p. 222; the 'Hermeneutik des Einverständnisses mit den biblischen Texten'.

[72] Explicitly in his *Schriftauslegung in der Confessio Augustana. Überlegungen zu einem erst noch zu führenden Gespräch* and *Adolf Schlatter als Bibelausleger* (both in his *Versöhnung, Gesetz und Gerechtigkeit – Aufsätze zur biblischen Theologie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981, pp. 246–70, 271–301). More generally (in *Verstehen* pp. 76–123) he both traces and intends to learn from, the history of biblical interpretation up to and in the Reformation era. These conversations then form the basis of his own hermeneutics.

[73] Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, pp. 19–35. Despite being mainly centred on Protestantism, this includes ecumenical perspectives (pp. 19f., pp. 26–28). The extremes in this conflict are represented by Troeltsch on the one, and Gerhard Mayer's suggestion of a new (basically non-critical and pietist) 'historisch-biblische Methode' (biblical historical method) on the other hand.

[74] Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, pp. 35–47.

[75] Ibid., pp. 47–76. For the latter, Stuhlmacher concentrates on Jesus, St Paul and the gospels of Matthew and John (pp. 64–76).

[76] Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, p. 76; being that 'hermeneutical quadrangle of scripture, interpretation, faith tradition and church (in the form of its ordained ministers), which is the starting point of the Old (= patristic) Church and which has remained normative for the roman-catholic and orthodox church.'

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in the same spirit of faith in Christ in which the Scriptures (of the NT) were themselves written and collected.[77]

After tracing the fate of this principle through its history from the patristic age through to Reformation and Counter-Reformation,[78] Stuhlmacher then introduces what later turns out to be the second main strand of his concept, namely the history of critical exegesis since the eighteenth century.[79] What it contributes – despite all the mistakes made through often being wedded to rationalistic principles – is that vital addition to the 'Geviert' which interpreters like Mayer lack, namely the 'seit Beginn des 3. Jh.s feststehenden Verpflichtung der kirchlichen Schriftauslegung, ihre Verfahrensweise und ihre Ergebnisse nicht nur vor der Schrift allein, sondern auch vor der kirchlichen Glaubenstradtition und dem der Kirche in der Geschichte jeweils neu begegnenden kritischen Wahrheitsbewußtsein einer Epoche zu verantworten'.[80] After analysing the most recent debate about critical biblical scholarship (especially that about Bultmann)[81] and recent developments in hermeneutics (especially of Fuchs and Ebeling in theology and Gadamer and Ricoeur in philosophy),[82] Stuhlmacher is ready to present his own hermeneutical method as a concept combining both strands. This he considers justified since one of the chief results of recent developments in hermeneutics is that through them 'haben wir wieder Raum gewonnen für eine theologisch engagierte, textbezogene und dogmatisch reflektierte Schriftauslegung'[83] which is both academic and ecclesial.

After reviewing a variety of possible comments and additions to the project from various sources and directions (ecumenical, liberationist, feminist, contextual, neo-pietist and the viewpoint of the humanities in general and psychology in particular),[84] the resulting hermeneutics follows a pattern characterised by three connected but distinctive stages: in the first, the canonical text of Scripture is established and analysed with the help of historical-critical methods, which are used conscious of their limitations and

[77] Ibid., p. 76.
[78] Ibid., pp. 76–123.
[79] Ibid., pp. 123–98.
[80] Ibid., p. 34; the 'duty of ecclesial interpretation of scripture since the 3rd century to measure and defend its methodology and results not only before Scripture alone, but also before the tradition of the church and the historically ever new critical criteria and standards of truth that the respective period in which it lives holds.'
[81] Ibid., pp. 198–205.
[82] Ibid., pp. 206–21.
[83] Ibid., p. 221, summarising the results of pp. 198–221; 'we have once more gained room for a theologically committed, text-orientated and dogmatically reflective interpretation of Scripture'.
[84] Ibid., pp. 222–40.

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in an attitude of listening that is open to those intrinsic demands of Scripture on us that originate with its nature of being *the* witness to our redemption in Christ, an attitude both of critical sympathy (Kümmel) and 'Vernehmen' (Buber).[85] The aim of this first stage is to provide all relevant knowledge for understanding and interpreting the texts both synchronically and diachronically, but (crucially) is not itself that interpretation. Interpretation itself – undertaken in the same spirit as the preceding analysis – then takes place in a second stage and is conducted on three levels, that of (1) the original situation and background of the text, (2) its canonical place and role, and (3) its 'Wirkungs- und Auslegungsgeschichte in Hinsicht auf das maßgebliche kirchliche Dogma'.[86] The whole process finally concludes in the 'Bewährung der Auslegung in der Praxis des Glaubens',[87] especially in and through the individual and communal meditation of Scripture, in preaching and witness, and more generally in furthering lives lived in the biblical context of reconciliation.[88] Crucially, only fruitfulness and reliability *in all three stages* constitutes a successful application of the hermeneutics of consent.

The strongest point of Stuhlmacher's concept with regard to the question before us appears to be the way in which he integrates the mainly historiographical concerns of Wright (and to some extent Berger) into an overarching hermeneutical framework. Specifically, their project of 'trusting history' could very well find a place both within the first stage of Stuhlmacher's hermeneutics and on the first level of the second stage. In establishing the text and its meaning and interpretation within the original situation and background, a place exists for applying the revised methods and especially attitudes of the kind of historical analysis and criticism that both Wright and Berger have argued for. At the same time it would become more transparent that the theological concerns of all three scholars should not – as they appear to be in Wright – be expressed only or even chiefly in terms of historical method; because in Stuhlmacher canonical and doctrinal matters – as well as those of actual spiritual practice and Christian living – have a distinctive contribution to make on the later but equally vital levels of stage two (and also in stage three), the actual historical and critical work

[85] Sketched by Stuhlmacher in *Verstehen* (chiefly pp. 240–6); the reference to Buber's concept of 'listening to the sacred texts', p. 244, that to Kümmel's principle of 'kritischer Sympathie', p. 247.

[86] Ibid., p. 246; 'the history of its effect and interpretation in relation to the relevant Church dogma'. The process is outlined in more detail on pp. 246–53.

[87] Ibid., p. 253 (sketched pp. 253–6); 'interpretation proving itself in the practice of faith'.

[88] Ibid., pp. 253–6.

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of stage one seems less encumbered with them than in Wright. Because Stuhlmacher, in a sense, has a specific place for these concerns in a later stage of his concept, they do not need to bear too strongly on his purely 'analytical' work – which is why Stuhlmacher's understanding of historical criticism is so much less biased than Wright's is.[89] In addition, this more open – though by no means uncritical – appreciation of current academic biblical scholarship, which sees itself very much in the tradition of Martin Kähler, Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling,[90] is at least in principle likely to maintain constructive dialogue more easily even with those within academic scholarship who otherwise disagree with Stuhlmacher.[91]

On the other hand, Stuhlmacher could be accused of making the theological, practical and doctrinal concerns a kind of 'add-on' by transferring them to a separate and later stage of interpretation. This, it could be argued, actually makes them into little more than an 'optional' extra: could not the academic maintain that he, *qua* academic, can only be concerned with the work of stage one (and level one of stage two), freely acknowledging that there may be others who then go on to 'interpret' in a variety of different ways? In other words: how does Stuhlmacher guard the unity of his concept, without which it will actually fail to solve the problem?[92] Two comments spring to mind: it is (1) essential to stress how much Stuhlmacher's hermeneutic owes to that of Gadamer,[93] who, of course, was adamant that the kind of 'application' and incorporation into tradition which especially the later stages of Stuhlmacher's concept embody is as much an essential part of understanding and interpretation as historical enquiries are.[94] In this sense, the problem does not arise: those who restrict themselves

[89] Something that is obvious from the much more balanced and careful language Stuhlmacher uses throughout his work, especially in the sections in which he is critical of the earlier 'radical' critics (Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, especially pp. 123–61). One cannot, for example, imagine Stuhlmacher ever talking about 'sufficient and necessary' theses in the way that Wright does.

[90] Stuhlmacher treats these (pointing out their own links), ibid., pp. 159–60, 206–10.

[91] Though it is important to keep in mind that, in fact, Stuhlmacher's academic critics accused the first edition of his *Verstehen* as promoting 'in höchst unerfreulicher und befremdlicher Weise einem wissenschaftsfeindlichem Pietismus' (ibid., p. 7; 'anti-scholarly pietism in a highly unpleasant and alienating way').

[92] It may, of course, actually have been awareness of this type of problem that prompted Wright (and to a lesser extent Berger) not to differentiate interpretation into 'stages' at all, at least not in the way Stuhlmacher does (s.a.).

[93] Which he discusses (in more detail than that of either Fuchs or Ebeling!), *Verstehen*, pp. 210–15.

[94] See, for example, my *Vernunft und Verstehen*, pp. 41–57.

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to parts of the process only, actually fail to do their (academic) job of understanding and interpretation properly.

The criticism does, on the other hand, point to an important omission: by at least in principle remaining within the existing academic conventions and practices,[95] Stuhlmacher may have underestimated the degree to which these themselves may require transformation if the project is to succeed. This is especially true of the kind of dialogue with premodern exegesis that Berger has called for;[96] while Stuhlmacher is far from unaware of the benefits to be had here,[97] it may well be that – despite his ecumenical leanings[98] – his own protestantism genuinely limits his appreciation of precisely how much could be gained from such a dialogue.[99] And it is here that the third route of dealing with our problem, that associated with Luke Johnson, comes into its own.[100]

The aim of Johnson's[101] most recent contribution to this discussion is summarised thus in the preface to *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*: 'We would like to find a way to think about biblical interpretation within the church that is not totally defined by academic conventions yet truly has

[95] Something that is, perhaps, most apparent in his actual exegetical work, for example his commentary on Romans (Peter Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief and die Römer*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch Band 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989)).

[96] Berger, *Berichte*, pp. 128, 206, mentioning especially monastic theology (a suggestion with which he has also – and more generally – recently dealt elsewhere, in his *Was ist biblische Spiritualität?* Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2000).

[97] Which is why he deals with the question in his historical section, Stuhlmacher, *Verstehen*, pp. 76–93.

[98] Ibid., pp. 19f, 26f., 225–27.

[99] Both his ecumenical leanings and his dedicated protestantism are evident in his commentary on Romans; see especially the Introduction (pp. 7–16); the latter even more so in his essays on Paul which form the central part of *Versöhnung* (pp. 87–223).

[100] It will be evident from this way of introducing Johnson's project that I consider it in many ways an extension of the previous ones, which has important connections both to that of Berger and that of Stuhlmacher. And I will – unsurprisingly – argue that it is their combination that promises to significantly contribute to the resolution of our problem, a combination in which in many ways Johnson's project could provide the overarching framework.

[101] With regard to which it would, of course, be more accurate to speak of 'Johnson's & Kurz's' aim (as the following quotation will make clear). I have abbreviated this to 'Johnson' since most of the other references in this section will focus on his project as (also) contained in the form of a 'practical exercise' of the kind of exegesis he argues for in his *The Writings of the New Testament – An Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 1990; especially pp. 1–19, 595–632) and his commentaries in the *Sacra Pagina* series (vol. 3, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 1991); and vol. 5, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 1992)).

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a scholarly quality.'[102] The way to do this, he claims, is by recovering for biblical interpretation the very spirit of catholicity, that of 'both/and' rather than 'either/or';[103] Scripture needs to work on and in the Church both through its traditional mediation of liturgy, practice and (dogmatic) theology, and – as only this ensures that Scripture in its very 'otherness' is not simply subsumed but truly heard (especially where it is critical of the Church) – also through academic biblical scholarship.[104] Johnson, for whom academic (historical-critical) scholarship on its own has severe limitations,[105] thus argues that the imbalance resulting from these limitations especially for Catholic biblical interpretation needs addressing through a Catholic perspective that would 'make a difference historiographically, theologically, and literarilly'.[106]

And it is the way in which Johnson seeks to provide the balancing needed[107] that is of primary interest here; we need to enable the recovery or creation of 'the conversation between so-called precritical and critical scholarship, or, to use more appropriate terms, between premodern biblical scholarship and that of modernity',[108] as well as a similarly recovered 'sense of how Scripture might play a role in theology'.[109] This would include, as a precondition, a renewal of the sense in which biblical interpretation is both about *scientia* and *sapientia*'[110] – something which is only likely to happen

[102] Johnson, *The Future*, p. vii.
[103] Ibid., p. 5.
[104] Ibid., pp. 5–10.
[105] His criticism to some extent mirrors that of the other scholars discussed above: (1) contrary to expectation, the method yields no scholarly consensus and in its (increasingly) 'religious-studies'-guided approach actually estranges from both the Church and theology (Johnson, *The Future*, pp. 10–14). In addition (2) it encourages use of the texts as 'sources' rather than interpreting them (ibid., p. 14) and (3) is incapable of feeding 'the life of faith in a positive fashion' (ibid., p. 15). Furthermore, it is (4) not 'theologically neutral' (ibid., p. 15) but actually for the most part (liberal) Protestant. Despite these obvious limitations, it nevertheless (5) makes 'hegemonic' claims to being the only legitimate way of interpreting Scripture (ibid., p. 15).
[106] Ibid., p. 19.
[107] The balancing itself would involve three things: (a) replacing the (ideological) interpretative model of 'pure' (biblical) origins of the faith quickly declining into 'early catholicism' by that of 'organic growth' of and within Christianity (ibid., pp. 19–24); (b) replacing exclusive loyalty of the interpreter to academia and its norms with 'the both/and of loyalty to the Tradition and criticism' (ibid., p. 27); and (c) embracing once more 'both the literal sense of Scripture and figurative senses' (ibid., p. 30).
[108] Ibid., p. 33.
[109] Ibid., p. 34.
[110] Ibid., p. 36.

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through the sustained engagement with patristic and medieval interpretation as contained in liturgy, sermons, antiphons and art[111] by those who share their basic worldview in our own time.[112] It would then require the dialogue especially with some of the most fundamental premises of premodern interpretation:[113] they are that (1) Old and New Testament form a unity 'grounded in the singleness of divine authorship';[114] that this unity – in all its acknowledged diversity[115] – (2) 'speaks harmoniously'[116] in itself and with tradition; that (3) as the Bible as 'the Word of God' requires a kind of study that assumes its superior wisdom and demonstrates a willingness to be taught and corrected by it;[117] and that (4) for biblical interpretation a wide variety of readings and levels of meaning (such as literal/historical, allegorical, moral, typological and spiritual) need to be employed.[118] What could and should result from this dialogue is a renewed 'hermeneutics of generosity or charity'[119] which can be summed up as implying 'critical inquiry . . . within the context of a profound submission to the rule of faith and the authority of the text'.[120]

If practised,[121] Johnson claims, this dialogue yields a number of interpretative principles that if applied together[122] may 'recover the soul of biblical scholarship'[123] by providing it with a number of challenges which would transform both the aims and approach to exegesis.[124] Scripture should thus be read and studied engaging with a truth that aims at our 'transformation

[111] Ibid., pp. 41–7.

[112] That view was already quoted above; see note 4.

[113] Johnson, *The Future*, pp. 47–60. This dialogue should concentrate on the patristic authors especially, because in many ways our 'post-modern' society resembles their own world to some degree (Johnson, *The Future*, pp. 60–3).

[114] Johnson, *The Future*, p. 47.

[115] Ibid., pp. 52–5, 79–84 uses premodern examples to point out why this concept of unity did not and does not encourage an 'uncritical' reading of scripture.

[116] Ibid., p. 52.

[117] Ibid., pp. 55–7.

[118] Ibid., pp. 57–9, since 'Scripture speaks in many ways and at many levels' (p. 57).

[119] Ibid., p. 59.

[120] Ibid., p. 59.

[121] Ibid., pp. 64–118 goes on to provide two such dialogues, one with Origen (pp. 64–90) and one with Augustine (pp. 91–118).

[122] Examples of such application – mostly to the exegesis of some passages of St. John's Gospel – is provided by William Kurz in the second part of the book, especially pp. 159–81 and 203–48.

[123] Johnson, *The Future*, p. 91.

[124] Kurz (Johnson, *The Future*, pp. 143–55, 159ff.) then goes on to claim that much of this approach is already preserved in Vatican II's constitution on Scripture (*Dei Verbum*), and in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

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into the image of Christ'.[125] As such, its 'true home' would be 'the church as the gathering of God's people'[126] that attempts to 'put on the imaginative world of Scripture'[127] in order to practice such biblical interpretation. This approach should not, however, hinder the study of and critical wrestling with difficult or contentious passages of Scripture,[128] but it *would* transform the way such critical study is conducted; we are to 'shake this passage until it spoke to us a wisdom that is worthy of the God who shapes our lives and inspired this writing'[129] – an instruction indeed a world away from Troeltsch's criteria.

Johnson's case for a constructive conversation with – and learning from – premodern biblical interpretation certainly provides a coherent and logical framework to the whole project of a renewed ecclesial biblical interpretation: if (a) the loss of ecclesial biblical interpretation is a consequence of modernity and its embodiment in Troeltsch's 'criteria',[130] and (b) the epistemological and hermeneutical premises and principles of modernity thus embodied in modern academic biblical scholarship are now in a crisis concerning their rational justification,[131] then (c) a recovery of premodern principles via such a conversation would both repair the damage and be rationally defensible. If equipped with the kind of principles of historical enquiry and criticism – critical both towards current academic practice and the text – which projects like that of Berger could supply, and the detailed hermeneutical principles and tools of Stuhlmacher, Johnson's comprehensive project could indeed become *the* over-arching frame within which the Church could develop its biblical interpretation afresh in a way both theologically and rationally appropriate and defensible.[132]

[125] Johnson, *The Future*, p. 84.

[126] Ibid., p. 118.

[127] Ibid., p. 117; see also 122ff., which uses the analogy of imaginatively recreating and inhabiting the 'lost city' of the Scriptural world as opposed to merely studying that world like an archaeologist (which we cannot do, anyway – since we necessarily lack the 'neutrality' to do so; s.a.) (pp. 123–42).

[128] Johnson's example is 1Tim 2: 11-15; Johnson, *The Future*, pp. 88–90.

[129] Johnson, *The Future*, p. 90.

[130] This is not, of course, the only place where it is, yet I take those criteria to be a paradigm of what is criticised – something borne out by the fact that both Berger and Stuhlmacher single them out, too.

[131] Through the work of thinkers like Polanyi and MacIntyre in philosophy, and Gadamer and Ricoeur in hermeneutics, s.a.

[132] It will thus be obvious that I regard the three 'routes' of the project as complementary in precisely the way just outlined – even if (for example) Johnson and Wright have been highly critical of one another's way of approaching the question of the 'historical Jesus' (Johnson, *Writings*, pp. 627–32 and Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 13f and 209f.; it

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However, since the rational case for doing so relies on and applies the findings of people like Polanyi or MacIntyre,[133] certain consequences for its conduct follow, the most important of which is the continuation of real dialogue and critical engagement with those whose project of biblical interpretation is different from that of the Church – but not therefore *a priori* illegitimate or indefensible. Johnson is right, it is because 'all reading of texts is always in substantial measure shaped by the premises and practices of a specific reading community'[134] that not only contemporary academia's reading is justifiable, but *also* that of the Church. Yet it is crucial to realise that this state of affairs can be read in two very different ways: (a) the consequent postmodernist[135] will conclude that the value of each of these variant readings is equally plausible (or implausible) and that they and the communities which hold them can thus co-exist without rational competition, while (b) those following MacIntyre would draw a different conclusion, namely that of the concept of 'constrained disagreement' and 'imposed participation in conflict'.[136]

According to this concept[137] – the basic epistemological principle of which, too, could be described as critical realism[138] – what follows from the existence of more than one community with conflicting but at first sight

is worth noting that in this respect Berger would probably have to be counted with Johnson, despite other similarities with Wright's project of 'trusting history'; see Berger, *Jesus*, pp. 9–21). If there is, indeed, an 'odd one out' among the scholars examined here whose project is least compatible with that of the others, it is probably Wright. It is likely that this has to do with the curiously rationalistic and over-ambitious claims of Wright, who alone appears to be almost criminally naive about the proper scope and aims of historical enquiry, expecting it to yield the kind of absolute knowledge that few serious thinkers would now claim lies within our grasp even in more rigorous and exact sciences than history.

[133] The claim here is not that explicit reference is made to the work of Polanyi or MacIntyre. But I suspect that works such as those of Johnson are now only possible *as academic works* because of such earlier projects in the epistemology of both science and the humanities – even if they contain no explicit reference to these foundations.

[134] Johnson, *The Future*, p. 27.

[135] If that is not too self-contradictory even for a postmodernist.

[136] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry – Encyclopedia, Genealogy, Tradition* (London: Duckworth,1990), pp. 230–1.

[137] I have set out the principles and consequences of this in my *Alasdair MacIntyre's Tugendenlehre* with regard to ethics and the dispute about rationally defensible (moral) aims in education (pp. 309–46). Something similar would appear to follow for biblical interpretation if the case for a change in this field does (as I would maintain) indeed owe a significant deal to MacIntyre's project. What follows in this paragraph is an application of these findings to the project of Johnson *et al*.

[138] Like that of Wright and Berger; for a definition see above.

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equally defensible projects in any field of enquiry is that all of these incur a duty of engaging in conflict and debate in order to allow for the possible solution of existing differences. Consequently, what is of vital importance for the rationality and 'health' of projects like those examined in this paper is that they do not withdraw from the forum in which such rational debate can occur, namely academia. While they will rightly see themselves as partisans on a field the very outlines of which they dispute, those who follow the project of ecclesial exegesis are obliged by their own rational foundation not to withdraw from it.

Given the strength of their case as outlined in this paper, they also should have no need to do so;[139] the normative problem in ecclesial exegesis is no greater than that involved in all biblical interpretation, the chief difference being that its protagonists on the whole seem to be far more aware of it than other interpreters of the Bible usually are – especially, perhaps, those who usually take most pride in being 'critical'. If this is indeed so, then the degree of reflection and critical self-awareness involved in the project of ecclesial exegesis of scholars like Johnson is itself exemplary for other players in this game.

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[139] And in fact – in the case of Wright, Berger, Stuhlmacher and Johnson, do not: both Berger and Stuhlmacher hold and have held chairs within the mainstream of high-quality German institutions of academic theology (the universities of Tübingen and Heidelberg), and the same is true of Johnson with regard to the USA (for Johnson's and Kurz's commitment to continuing dialogue see also *The Future*, pp. 267–74). The same is, of course, true for Wright in this country – even if his project appears to be the least self-critical and realistic in its aspirations (s.a.).

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