

History, Authority, and Interpretation: A Theology of Scripture

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Introduction

For the Reformers and their predecessors, scripture was authoritative and cohesive in its depiction of history and doctrine. It was not an option for Luther or Calvin to separate the literal or figural meaning of a text from the historical events depicted there. To the pre-critical mind, the storied world of the bible was “real.” It was the real history of God and humanity, and it was a history that could be entered into. i[1] The pre-critical view of scripture as a “realistic story,” in which the literal sense of the text was identical with the historical references made there, had important implications for biblical interpretation.

For Luther and Calvin, biblical interpretation was a matter of making sense of their world in light of the “real” world depicted in the “realistic narrative” of the bible. The process of making sense of the present world was natural to the pre-critical mind because it involved an extension of the typological or figural sense of scripture.ii[2] Typology allowed the Reformers and their predecessors to view the bible as a cohesive and extended historical narrative. Important events in the Old Testament, events like the crossing of the Jordan River, were types or figures of New Testament events such as the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. In the same way, this figuration continues into the present. Thus, the ongoing baptism of believers is prefigured by both the original entry of the Hebrews into the Promised Land and the inauguration of God’s promised reign on earth in the baptism of Jesus. The realistic narrative of scripture gives meaning to our contemporary experience, and our history is prefigured by the history of God’s redemptive activity in the life of Israel and in Jesus.

According to Frei, the direction of biblical interpretation changed after the seventeenth-century, as scholars began to locate the meaning of the text in the world outside of the text.iii[3] For example, the rise of historical criticism meant that biblical scholars began interpreting the text in light of the history that it depicted. Thus, the religious significance or “meaning” of a story, like the post-exodus entry into Palestine, became dependent upon the historicity of the events in question. If the event was historically suspect, then the meaning was impacted and figural interpretation was often lost.iv[4] One of the primary concerns of Frei’s *Eclipse* was the fact that biblical scholars after the late eighteenth-century consistently failed to appreciate the significance of the “realistic narrative” character of scripture. This failure had a negative impact upon biblical scholarship and theology. Frei claims that “a realistic or history-like (though not necessarily history) element is a feature, as obvious as it is important, of many of the biblical narratives that went into the making of Christian belief.”v[5] The fact that much of the bible is depicted as “realistic narrative” cannot be ignored if scripture is to be interpreted properly.

Though Frei’s work has been highly influential, its aims were fairly modest. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* was intended simply to point out an important characteristic of scripture that was being overlooked.vi[6] However, Frei did not recommend a return to the pre-critical assumption that the literal sense of the realistic narrative is equal to historical reference. In fact, Frei admits that

in order to recognize the realistic narrative feature as a significant element in its own right . . . one would have . . . to distinguish sharply between literal sense and historical reference. And then one would have . . . to allow the literal sense to stand as the meaning, even if one believed that the story does not refer historically.vii[7]

In other words, there can be no going back to the days when the realistic narrative and the history were unified. The many insights of historical-critical investigation cannot be ignored, and this presents us with several problems not addressed in *The Eclipse*.

The purpose of this paper is to address three specific issues arising out of *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* that are not addressed there. The first two sections will focus on one fundamental problem. The problem, briefly stated, is that the Christian faith is dependent upon the notion that the God of Israel, who acts in history to redeem his chosen people and the world. If the proper interpretation of scripture requires the choosing of a story over and against a history then our faith is imperiled – redemption is a fiction. In the first section of this essay, I will explain how Frei and others came to resolve the problem of differentiating between story and history. Next, I will address the nature of scriptural authority in light of this resolution. Finally, I will discuss several implications from the conclusions reached in the first two sections relating to the interpretation of scripture.

The Identity of Jesus – The Convergence of Story and History

As mentioned previously, the pre-critical world was characterized by a view that history was consistent and unified. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the creatures living on the earth, and the humans to rule over the earth. Shortly thereafter the first humans fell from grace, and the history of salvation began to unfold. This history involved a consistent interaction between humans and God as a people were chosen, promises were made, and trust was betrayed. In the Christian scriptures, the center of this history is Jesus. For the reformers, and those who came before them, the history depicted in the Old Testament flows smoothly into the New Testament and then into the church. This is the history of God's redemptive activity, and to become a Christian is to join God (through the incarnation of Christ that continues in the church)viii[8] in this history that provides the witness according to which all history is ultimately judged.

Unhappily, the historical-critical method has called this continuity into question. Frei's suggestion in *The Eclipse* appears to be that exegetes must ignore the lack of historical reference in order to appreciate the "realistic narrative" or "history like" quality of a large portion of scripture. Frei's concern is that the typological dimension of scripture is only comprehensible if the stories are interpreted as history-like. In the absence of a typological reading, the story has no ability to incorporate "extra-biblical thought, experience, and reality into the one real world detailed and made accessible by the biblical story." ix[9]

The problem with Frei's recommendation in *The Eclipse* is that it has never been the ultimate goal of Christian redemption to draw people into a mere story. Rather, redemption involves, as the Reformers rightly understood, a historical reality. To be redeemed is to be incorporated as a recipient of grace into God's *Heilsgeschichte*. The matter of historicity cannot be put-aside for the sake of proper interpretation. Though Frei does not address this problem in *The Eclipse*, he does in an earlier work republished in 1975: *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.x[10]

In that work, Frei takes up the issue of the relationship between story and history. What we learn in *The Identity of Jesus Christ* is that Frei's insistence that interpreters take seriously the literal sense of biblical stories, even when historical reference is in doubt, does not preclude the reality of *Heilsgeschichte*. On the contrary, though he does not use this terminology, what we can deduce from Frei's argument is that the essence of *Heilsgeschichte* is best communicated in a fiction-like, narrative form. He makes this point clear in his discussion of the identity of Jesus as depicted in the gospels. He explains that

With regard to the Gospels, we are actually in a fortunate position that so much of what we know about Jesus, beginning at the crucial initiatory point of the climactic, unbroken sequence, is more nearly fictional than historical in narration. Yet the story is about an individual who lived; and, by common agreement, it is within the passion-resurrection sequence that we come closest to historical events in his life (specifically in the trial and crucifixion). But also, in that most nearly biographical sequence, the form of the narration is more nearly like that of fiction It is precisely the fiction-like quality of the whole narrative, from upper room to resurrection

appearances, that serves to bring the identity of Jesus sharply before us and to make him accessible to us.xi[11]

Frei argues cogently that fiction writers are better able to provide insight into the essence of a person's identity than are biographer-historians.xii[12] For this reason, we should be grateful that the gospel writers chose to give us insight into the identity of Jesus, a real person, through fiction-like narratives.xiii[13] We should therefore be wary of historical-critical attempts to uncover the identity of Jesus through his sayings, or by using any method that ignores the literal sense of the gospel narratives – particularly those parts describing Jesus' passion and resurrection. The identity of Jesus is best communicated in realistic narrative form.

In *The identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei does not urge interpreters to concentrate on the realistic narrative over and against history. Rather, he argues that the best way to understand and enter into God's redemptive activity in history is through the story. The nature of salvation-history is such that it cannot be grasped through the kind of presentation that would be characteristic of a historical-biography or through some other kind of events chronicle. This is because, at the center of salvation-history is a person – Jesus; and as mentioned above, personal identities are best communicated in the form of narrative. George Lindbeck explains that,

The stories in their narrative function unsubstitutably identify and characterize a particular person as the summation of Israel's history and as the unsurpassable and irreplaceable clue to who and what the God of Israel and the universe is. They interpret the Hebrew Bible in terms of Christological anticipation, preparations, and promissory types. Jesus' story fulfills and transforms the overall biblical narratives of creation, election, and redemption, and thereby specifies the meanings of such concepts and images as Messianism, Suffering Servanthood, Logos, and divine Sonship. He is the subject, everything else is predication. Some New Testament writings may not clearly exhibit this pattern . . . but insofar as they are treated as parts of a narrationally and christologically unified canon, they are submitted to the same hermeneutical rule.xiv[14]

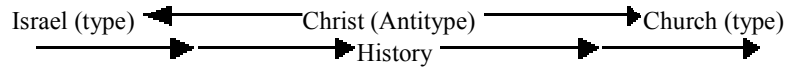
Just as the personal identity of Jesus is best communicated through realistic narrative, so is the communal identity of Israel. According to Joseph Blenkinsopp, the historicity of the exodus event, as depicted in the Old Testament, is highly suspicious. For one thing, "we have no knowledge of an Israelite sojourn in Egypt or an exodus from Egypt apart from the biblical record."xv[15] Also, the logistical impossibility of sustaining thousands of people in the desert for generations is problematic. Nevertheless, Gerhard Lohfink assures us that we should not be concerned with the issue of historicity. He writes, "The Exodus texts became a *figura*, an enduring figure to support memory, the original image for all generations. In this very and only in this way, they were enabled to summarize within themselves all Israel's later exodus experiences."xvi[16]

Blenkinsopp's views are similar to Lohfink's. He argues that after the period of Babylonian captivity the Hebrews had to struggle for survival. As a part of this struggle "the new commonwealth . . . had to shape an identity and therefore construct a past by a selective incorporation of memories on which their own self-understanding could be patterned. The results of these efforts are inscribed in the Hebrew Bible and especially in the Pentateuch."xvii[17] Interestingly, in the case of the Old Testament, the past may have been constructed in order to make sense of Israel's present and future. The gospels were arguably written for the same purpose – to make sense of the present and future of the growing *evkkhlsi,a*. The difference between the gospel stories and many of the stories from the Old Testament is that the gospels were written to communicate the identity of a person who most certainly lived.

The relationship between story and history in the Old Testament is relevant to this essay because of the issue of typology. It has been argued that the ultimate goal of Christian redemption is not to draw people into a mere story. To be redeemed is to be incorporated, as a recipient of grace, into God's *Heilsgeschichte*. But what direction does *Heilsgeschichte* flow in? As mentioned previously, the Hebrew crossing of the Jordan River is a figure for Jesus' baptism, and the baptisms of present believers are prefigured by both events. But what if there was no original crossing? Is the meaning of Jesus' baptism and ours then diminished? According to George Lindbeck, it is not. He explains that

the relation of Israel's history to that of the church in the New Testament is not one of shadow to reality, or promise to fulfillment, or type to antitype. Rather, the kingdom already present in Christ alone is the antitype, and both Israel and the church are types. The people of God existing in both the old and new ages are typologically related to Jesus Christ, and through Christ, Israel is prototypical for the church in much the same way that the exodus story, for example, is seen as prototypical for all later Israelite history.xviii[18]

The point that Lindbeck is making may be illustrated visually as follows.



From this perspective, although history continues to flow in one direction, the baptism of Jesus is not dependent for its meaning on the historical reliability of the original crossing of the Jordan River. Rather, the original entry into the Promised Land gains its significance from Jesus' baptism as told in narrative form in the gospels. The center of the history of salvation is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Because of Jesus, the past, present, and future are redeemed, and believers are able, through grace, to join in God's redemptive history. The function of realistic narrative in relation to salvation-history is to communicate the identity of Jesus, the center of salvation-history. There is no need therefore, to think that suspicions over the historicity of biblical stories preclude the possibility of a real salvation-history.

The Authority of Scripture

The essay thus far has argued that interpreters need not choose realistic narrative over and against history. On the contrary the identity of Jesus, a historical person, is best communicated in those portions of the gospels that are most like fiction.xix[19] Likewise, the realistic narratives from the Old Testament were written to clarify and preserve the identity of the people of Israel in relationship with their God. Thus, in both the Old and New Testaments, the story is intended to communicate the identity of either a historical person or people. In both cases, story communicates real history or at least, historical identity. The thesis of this section is that the authority of scripture is also related to the issue of the effective communication of Jesus' identity.

One of Frei's most important insights in *The Eclipse* is that the direction of biblical interpretation changed as the historical-critical method became the standard tool of biblical exegetes. Whereas the pre-critical Christians located the meaning of the text in its literal sense, the historical-critical method led scholars to search for meaning outside of the text.xx[20] As a result, the authority of scripture came to be connected with its ability to convey external religious truths.xxi[21] In this context, the theological concept of revelation became "the central technical concept in theology."xxii[22]

In the years just before and after Hans Frei published *The Eclipse*, a number of scholars were ready to abandon the concept of revelation altogether. In 1963, James Barr wrote an article in which he pointed out a number of problems with the "revelation as history" movement.xxiii[23] In the following year, Gerald Downing wrote a book that took Barr's argument much further. Downing's goal was to show that in scripture, the concept of "revelation" as it is used in modern theology simply does not exist.xxiv[24] Barr and Downing were followed in the 1970s and 1980s with an influential book by David Kelsey (1975) and another by Charles Wood (1981).xxv[25] Both argued against the modern doctrine of revelation on hermeneutical grounds. They disagreed primarily with the notion that scripture's authority rests in its ability to convey external religious truths. Scripture, it was argued by Kelsey, is authoritative because it functions authoritatively for the church.xxvi[26] In Kelsey's view, "the biblical writings are authoritative for theology only in the context of Christian *praxis*."xxvii[27] If scripture is put to normative use within Christian communities, then it has *de facto* authority. The work of Kelsey and others signaled the demise of the concept of revelation as the central theological theme and the rise of hermeneutics to fill the void. The increasing interest in theological hermeneutics came as scholars began to pay closer attention to the fact that the meanings of biblical texts are inseparably linked to the communities interpreting/using them. This

is the hermeneutical circle in which the meaning and authority of scripture is found both in the text and in the interpretive community.

Though the insights of hermeneutists are helpful in understanding the issue of authority in light of the interaction between text and interpretive community, they do not do justice to the traditional notion that Scripture is the Word of God. James McClendon makes the point well when he writes,

full authority is assigned to God alone, the result is the subordination of every human locus of authority. The disciple whose soul is competent, the book whose word is divine, the church whose fellowship is spiritual can make their claims only as proximate authorities, each beneath the sovereign authority of God. And as God is one, these varied proximate authorities rightly hold sway only as they draw together, the book giving light to the soul's experience, the fellowship interpreting the book in its ancient and present setting, the redeemed soul together with other redeemed souls constituting the structured fellowship.xxviii[28]

If indeed God is the only real authority, how do we "draw together" the "varied proximate authorities" in order to affirm scripture as Word of God?

It is here that we return to the issue of identity. Hans Frei and George Lindbeck are in agreement that "the primary function of the canonical narrative is to render an identity description of God as an active Agent, centered on Jesus Christ."xxix[29] The issue of the identity of Jesus thus becomes the primary reason that biblical interpretation must not overlook the "realistic narrative" character of scripture. It has already been pointed out that the identity of Jesus, best communicated in the passion and resurrection narratives, is the hermeneutical lens through which all of the rest of scripture must be viewed. Thus, the authority of scripture as Word of God rests in its ability to communicate the identity of Jesus.

According to Stanley Hauerwas, "the authority of Scripture derives its intelligibility from the community that knows its life depends on faithful remembering of God's care of his creation through the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus."xxx[30] Implicit in this statement is an incarnational ecclesiology. The community's "life depends on faithful remembering"xxxi[31] because the church's identity is wholly dependent upon Jesus' identity. *o` Cristo.j kefalh. th/j evkklhsi,aj(auvto.j swth.r tou/ sw,matoj*, "Jesus is the head of the church, the savior of the body (Eph. 5:2)." The church is the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou/*.

The incarnation of God in Jesus continues in the church as long as the church is able to maintain its true identity. It can be argued that the maintenance of the church's incarnational identity was the primary motivation for the authoring of the gospels and other New Testament writings. It can be argued further that as the early Christian communities of the first few centuries sought to persevere in the spirit as incarnational communities, they were naturally attracted to those texts that provided them with the best grasp of the identity of Jesus – their own true identity. Arland Hultgren argues in *The Rise of Normative Christianity* that an "appropriate analysis of early Christianity requires attention to both the confession of faith and the ethos of each of the various Christian communities."xxxii[32] In his analysis of early Christianity Hultgren concludes that the behavior of the early communities, more than any other factor, is what led to their success or demise. Furthermore, the desire to live or behave in certain ways was highly influential in the selection of authoritative texts to be read before the community as it gathered together for worship and sacrament.xxxiii[33] Both the original authorship of the biblical texts and the ultimate inclusion of those texts in a canonical list, were dependent upon the text's usefulness in helping the church maintain its identity as *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou*. According to Hultgren, one can confidently say

that the canonical writings were produced by exponents of normative Christianity; that these writings continued to have a major authoritative influence in communities of faith beyond the times and places for which they were written; and that, over time, they were adopted by orthodox communities of faith as canonical.xxxiv[34]

He goes on to write that

The message of the saving effects of Jesus' death and resurrection became the central affirmation of the earliest creedal formulas, the basis for proclamation, and the motive and framework for the production of the narratives, presented in the canonical Gospels. Moreover, the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection was the basis not only for literary production, but also for the creation of communities of faith, each having an ethos shaped by the rendition of such proclamation and by teaching related to it. The combination of what was to be believed and how a community was to live in conformity with that belief – both sound belief and sound ethos – led to the rise of normative Christianity. In all this it can be said that normative Christianity continued and furthered the legacy of Jesus as represented by his earliest interpreters.xxxv[35]

What Hultgren's analysis illustrates is that, even in the earliest Christian communities, the authority of a text was dependent upon its use. It remains to be seen however, how the authority of scripture is derived from God. How can we be justified in calling scripture Word of God when it was authored and placed in a canonical list by communities of persons? Hultgren's analysis provides a clue in its conclusion that "normative Christianity continued and furthered the legacy of Jesus." We may just as easily say that Jesus furthered the legacy of normative Christian communities. By authoring, using, and preserving those texts that supported the early communities in their mission to be the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou*, the church was in reality *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou*.xxxvi[36] If indeed the early Christian communities succeeded in their mission to continue the incarnation of God in Jesus through the Spirit, then *God* was the author, user, and preserver of scripture. The communities were mere participants with God in the unfolding history of salvation. To repeat a phrase from Jim McClendon, "authority is assigned to God alone; the result is the subordination of every human locus of authority."xxxvii[37] [\[BCH1\]](#)

Comment [BCH1]:

The Exegesis of God's Word

Discussions in theological hermeneutics often deal with the interplay between text and community as though it were a problem in need of resolution. On the contrary, it is precisely in this interplay that scripture becomes Word of God. To borrow from Jim McClendon once again, "as God is one, these varied proximate authorities rightly hold sway only as they draw together."xxxviii[38] If scripture is to be Word of God, then there must be an organic unity between authorship, use, preservation, and continued use. Furthermore, and this is an important point, although the narratives of scripture may not always refer historically, scripture's historical veracity is based upon the fact that it is organically related to the God who became incarnate in Jesus and continues to dwell in spirit and flesh among communities of Christians.

To use an analogy, the bible is to the church what memory is to the mind. Without memory, persons have no sense of self.xxxix[39] Likewise, without the bible, the church would be incapable of knowing itself. Christian scripture is the final authority in the preservation of the church's identity because it holds the memories of Christ in the stories that it tells. According to Joseph Blenkinsopp, "remembering is a condition sine qua non of survival." xl[40]

Moreover, the memories of Christ contained in the stories of scripture are recalled most powerfully in the corporate practices of the community – practices such as proclamation, worship, communion, and baptism. The same was true in ancient Israel where "social memory [was] shaped, sustained, and transmitted to a great extent by non-inscribed practices including rituals of re-enactment, commemorative ceremonies, bodily gestures, and the like."xli[41] For Christians, it is precisely in the context of reading scripture during the communal practices of the church – those mentioned above as well as others – that scripture becomes Word of God.xlii[42] Our identity as the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou* is shaped as our memory is activated through participation in the communal, biblical practices of the church. In Luke 22:19 Jesus broke bread and gave it to his disciples saying, *tou/to, evstin to. sw/ma, mou to. u`pe.r u`mw/n dido,menon\ tou/to poiei/te eivj th.n evmh.n avna,mnhsin*, "this is my body, which is entrusted to you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In this way, believers are drawn in mind and body into the history of God's salvation. One might ask at this point, what has this discussion to do with exegesis? Though it is not a purpose of this essay to discuss in any detail the pros and cons of specific exegetical methods, it should be apparent that the nature of the Word of God creates certain parameters within which faithful exegesis takes place. Hans Frei has argued

convincingly that proper biblical interpretation cannot take place if the realistic narrative character of the canon is overlooked. Additionally, one can argue that proper biblical interpretation must have an ultimate goal that is worthy of the authoritative nature of scripture as Word of God. Namely, the goal of biblical interpretation should always be to support the church in its struggle to maintain its identity as the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou*. Biblical exegesis, if done properly, serves the church by continually recovering, sharpening, and preserving the memories of Christ that enable the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou* to know itself and live to the future. Accordingly, it is essential to remember that the identity of Christ, the memory without which the church cannot live, has been preserved in a narrative form that the traditional historical critical-methods have failed to appreciate. According to Blenkinsopp,

it could be maintained, in fact, that the science of historiography is essentially disconnected from or even hostile to memory, since it tends to objectify the event *wie es eigentlich geworden ist* (as it actually came about) and to move along a different groove from that of the tradition within which a particular society transmits its collective memories.xliii[43]

This, of course, does not mean that proper biblical interpretation should be unconcerned with history. On the contrary, it is the very purpose of the biblical writings to allow Christian communities to “plunge into history,” into the only history that matters.xliv[44] But this plunge is made only if the church remembers Christ and itself as it uses scripture in the context of the various church practices. No formulaic proposal is offered here to guide the work of biblical exegetes – only a reminder that proper interpretation is faithful to the text as Word of God and memory of the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou*.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to address several issues that arise out of Hans Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* but are not addressed there. The issues all revolve loosely around the problem of distinguishing between story and history. As mentioned previously, the Christian faith is based upon the notion that the God of Israel, who *sa.rx evge,neto kai. evskh,nwsen evn h`mi/n*, acts in history to redeem his chosen people and the world. If the proper interpretation of scripture requires the choosing of a story over and against a history then our faith is imperiled – redemption is a fiction. I have argued in this essay that no such choice is required. On the contrary, the stories of the bible are written in order to communicate, in an appropriate manner, the identity of Jesus, which is the key to the hope and identity of Israel, the church, and the world.

Furthermore, the authority of scripture is grounded in its organic unity with the historical incarnation of God in Jesus that continues in the church. Scripture is the Word of God because its authors, users, and preservers are the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou*. And biblical exegetes, if they are faithful, will support the church in its struggle to live in history as the body of Christ by recovering, sharpening, and preserving the memories of Christ found in scripture.

Endnotes

xlvi[1] Frei explains that “the text fitly rendered what it talked about in two ways for Calvin. It was in the first place a proper (literal or figurative) rather than allegorical depiction of the world or reality it narrated. But in the second place it rendered reality itself to the reader, making the reality accessible to him through its narrative web. He could therefore both comprehend it and shape his life in accordance with it,” *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pg. 25.

xlvi[2] Eric Auerbach explains that “Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life.” Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 73. The Apostle Paul actually refers to Old Testament events as types, written down to provide an example for followers of Jesus. For example, he writes in 1 Cor. 10:11 that *tau/ta de. tupikw/j sune,bainen evkei,noij(evgra,fh de. pro.j nouqesi,an h`mw/n(*

ειν ου]j ta. te,lh tw/n aivw,wnw kath,nthken A more lucid example of typology can be seen in Matt. 2:15, *evx Aivgu,ptou evka,lesa to.n ui`o,n mou*. Here, Jesus' coming out of Egypt is said to be the fulfillment of an Old Testament event.

xlvi[3] According to Frei, the method of "modern biblical-historical criticism and its slightly younger cousin, historical-critical theology. . . owes much to the seventeenth century, for instance to Spinoza's reflections in the first twelve chapters of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, to the conviction of the Socinians that the veracity of scripture would and should be attested by independent rational judgment rather than dogmatic authority, and to the pioneering critical exegesis of men like Hugo Grotius and Richard Simon. But there is no doubt that as concerted practice, building into a continuing tradition and literature, it started in the second half of the eighteenth century, chiefly among German scholars," pg. 17.

xlvi[4] Robert Jenson remarks that "any reader of pre-Enlightenment writings is struck by the way in which the stretch of time is experienced as continuity. . . . In the eighteenth century, the intellectual policy of "critique" broke this continuity and transformed experience of the stretch of time into experience of separation. The space of time ceased to be the space in which we live together and became distance, despite which we struggle toward each other." "On the Problems of Scriptural Authority," *Interpretation* 31 no. 3 (July 1977): 245-46.

xlix[5] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 10.

l[6] Ibid.

li[7] Ibid., 11.

lii[8] For an excellent treatment of incarnational ecclesiology, see Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 137-302.

liii[9] Frei, 3.

liv[10] Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

lv[11] Ibid., 144-145.

lvi[12] Ibid.

lvii[13] The gospels resemble fiction in the way that their authors arranged freely the characters, events, settings, etc. in the service of the overall plot.

lviii[14] George Lindbeck, "Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 164.

lix[15] Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Memory, Tradition, and the Construction of the Past in Ancient Israel," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, (Fall 1997): 80.

lx[16] Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?: Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. by Linda M. Maloney, (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999)

lxi[17] Blenkinsopp, 80. Neither Lohfink nor Blenkinsopp think that the major events of the Old Testament are pure imaginative constructions. Rather, it is likely that the biblical stories are loosely based on events from the ancient past. Lohfink has an interesting discussion of the origination of the Exodus story on pages 52-59. Lohfink argues that the stories of the Patriarchs in Genesis also serve as a way to sustain the identity of the people of Israel. The stories of Abraham and his descendants show that a people's identity does not stem from simple physical procreation. Rather, the identity of a people comes from God. Abraham and

Isaac, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben – in each case God intervenes to change the expected outcome. The theological point is that God is in control of history, 61-63.

lxii[18] Lindbeck, 166.

lxiii[19] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus*, 150.

lxiv[20] Against this tendency, Frei wrote “We start from the text: that is the language pattern, the meaning-and-reference to which we are bound, and which is sufficient for us. We cannot and do not need to ‘transcend’ it into ‘limit’ language and ‘limit’ experience. The truth to which we refer we cannot state apart from the biblical language which we employ to do so. And belief in the divine authority of Scripture is for me simply that we do not need more.” *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 152.

lxv[21] *Ibid.*, 44.

lxvi[22] *Ibid.*, 52.

lxvii[23] James Barr, “Revelation Through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology,” *Interpretation* xvii, no. 2, (April 1963): 193-205. The “revelation as history” movement was spearheaded by Wolfhart Pannenberg and several other German theologians. Like many theologians before them, Pannenberg and his associates considered revelation the most important theological issue. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou, (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969).

lxviii[24] Gerald Downing, *Has Christianity a Revelation?* (London: SCM Press, 1964). See especially chapters 1-3 and 7.

lxix[25] David Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press). Charles Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding: An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

lxx[26] Kelsey argues that “To call certain texts ‘scripture’ is, in part, to say that they ought to be used in the common life of the church in normative ways such that they decisively rule its form of life and forms of speech. Thus part of what it means to call certain texts ‘scripture’ is that they are authoritative for the common life of the church. It is to say of them that they *ought* to be used in certain ways to certain ends in that life,” 97-98.

lxxi[27] David Kelsey, “The Bible and Christian Theology,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLVIII no. 3 (Summer 1980): 385.

lxxii[28] James Wm McClendon Jr., *Systematic Theology: Doctrine*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 481.

lxxiii[29] Jeffrey C.K. Goh, *Christian Tradition Today: A Postliberal Vision of Church and World*, (Leuven, Belgium: Peters Press, 2000), 228.

lxxiv[30] Stanley Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture,” *Interpretation* 34 no. 4 (October 1980): 356-57.

lxxv[31] Emphasis mine.

lxxvi[32] Arland J. Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 21.

lxxvii[33] *Ibid.*, 22ff.

lxxviii[34] *Ibid.*, 105.

lxxxix[35] Ibid., 112.

lxxx[36] I do not mean to imply a perfect identification between believing communities and Christ. However, Christian tradition does maintain that in corporate worship, baptism, communion, and service, the incarnation of God in Jesus is mysteriously continued. In this way, the *evkkhlsi,a* is the *sw,matoj tou/ Cristou* and a *kainh. ktj,sij*.

lxxxix[37] McClendon, 481.

lxxxix[38] Ibid.

lxxxix[39] Blenkinsopp writes that “Damaged short-term memory as a result of physical trauma or alcohol intake can result in serious behavioral disorders. Much more important, however, is the complex of long-term autobiographical memories without which we would have no sense of self or context for meaningful action. We live by necessity out of the past,” 78.

lxxxix[40] Ibid., 82. Blenkinsopp also writes that “memories are, however, communicable and, once communicated, can become part of the collective unconscious of a society, an ingredient, no doubt the central ingredient, of the tradition by which it understands itself and expresses its identity,” 77.

lxxxix[41] Ibid., 78.

lxxxix[42] Maurice Blondel echoes this sentiment when he writes, “nothing is more reliable than the light shed by the orderly and repeated performance of Christian practices.” “History and Dogma” in *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. by Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), 277.

lxxxix[43] Ibid., 76.

lxxxix[44] Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 154.

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