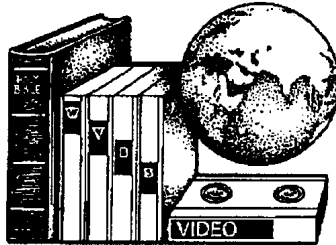


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THE “NEW HERMENEUTIC”



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THE

“NEW

HERMENEUTIC:”

A REVIEW AND RESPONSE

By Dave Miller, Ph.D

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THE “NEW HERMENEUTIC”: A REVIEW AND RESPONSE

by Dave Miller

Introduction

What is the “New Hermeneutic”? Its philosophical and theological roots lie deep within the soil of denominational theology, specifically “neo-orthodox” theology. Outside the context of churches of Christ, the term “New Hermeneutic” refers to an approach to biblical interpretation formulated largely by Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. Fuchs and Ebeling were extending the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer while building upon the ideas of Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann’s hermeneutical theories emerged out of the existentialism of Martin Heidegger and Soren Kierkegaard, the phenomenology of Wilhelm Dilthey, and the epistemology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹

The “new hermeneutic” as it exists within churches of Christ bears some affinity with the “New Hermeneutic” of Neo-orthodoxy, but more in terms of philosophical foundation than in actual particulars.²

Those at the forefront of the discussion within churches of Christ are extremely vague when it comes to identifying precisely the “new hermeneutic.” One proponent admitted that the “ramifications of this new model...have not been worked out systematically.”³

The primary concern of those clamoring for a “new hermeneutic” appears to be the dismantling of the “old hermeneutic.” Much of their effort has been spent criticizing what is deemed to be the shortcomings of the hermeneutical practices of the past, specifically the “command, example, necessary inference” triad. Little energy has been expended on their part in proposing a legitimate alternative (because there isn’t one).

¹For discussions of the “new hermeneutic” in scholarly circles outside churches of Christ, as well as the philosophical underpinnings, see Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson, eds., **Tensions in Contemporary Theology** (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 108-111; D. A. Carson, **Exegetical Fallacies** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 128-131; Henry A. Virkler, **Hermeneutics** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 70-72; A. C. Thiselton, “The New Hermeneutic,” in **New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods**, I. Howard Marshall, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 308-333; F. F. Bruce, “The History of New Testament Study,” in **New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods**, I. Howard Marshall, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 21-59; Rudolf Bultmann, **Jesus Christ and Mythology** (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), pp. 45-59; Bernard L. Ramm, et al., **Interpretation** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 130-139; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., **Toward An Exegetical Theology** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 23-36.

²These connections are noted in the Appendix.

³Thomas Olbricht, “Hermeneutics: The Beginning Point (Part 2),” **Image** 5 (Oct. 1989), 15. Cf., Michael Casey, “Scripture As Narrative and the Church A Story-Form Community: A proposal For A New Restoration Hermeneutic,” (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University, n.d.), p. 3--“Little, though, has been suggested for a new approach.”

The “new hermeneutic” is not the result of simple Bible study and a sincere search for truth. Rather, it is born out of a reactionary attempt to express dissatisfaction with the status quo and, thus, to undermine the past. If a new hermeneutic is needed today in order to understand the Bible and live the Christian life, then the members of the church who have preceded us have died without understanding the Bible. If, on the other hand, those using the “old hermeneutic” were able to understand the Bible enough to be saved, then what need do we have for a “new hermeneutic”? Are we being told that though the Bible has been around for 2000 years, we’re just now getting around to learning how to interpret it?

The Principles of the “New Hermeneutic”

Several specific concepts are seen to be common among those who are advocating a new hermeneutic. For the most part, these concepts address abuses of some practitioners of hermeneutics among churches of Christ and therefore do not actually discredit previous hermeneutical principles. What are they saying?

I. The “Form” of Scripture

They are saying the “old hermeneutic” has not been sensitive to the “form” of Scripture. Two things are meant by “form.” First, they say inadequate attention has been given to the genre, or type of literature, found in the Bible (e.g., poetry, epistle, parable, apocalyptic)⁴ with the accompanying assumption that this inattention has led to a misinterpretation of the Bible.

In response, it is significant that both Dungan and Lockhart, who wrote the definitive textbooks on hermeneutics within the Restoration Movement, both note the peculiarities and characteristics of literary genre in biblical literature.⁵ The criticism is, therefore, an overstatement of the case. Besides, the impact of genre upon interpretation can be minimal—depending upon the genre. For example, interpretation of the book of Revelation is certainly heavily dependent upon one’s acquaintance with the characteristics of apocalyptic material. However, the gospels and the epistles of the New Testament, from whence the common man derives an understanding of the specifics of Christianity, are easily comprehended without being familiar with the complex genre categories formulated by theologians.

⁴E. g., Olbricht, (“Part 2,” p. 16), associates this viewpoint with Leonard Allen. Cf., Leroy Garrett, “In What Way is the Bible Authoritative?” **Restoration Review** 29 (March 1987), p. 43--“there are various kinds of literature.”

⁵D. R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 226ff; Clinton Lockhart, **Principles of Interpretation** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 49-71, 191-221.

Secondly, “form” refers to the claim that our interpretation has been adversely affected by our insistence upon viewing the Bible as a blueprint, pattern, kingdom constitution, legal brief, law, or code book.⁶ They say we have misconstrued the nature of the Bible by treating it as “propositional.”⁷ They say we should have been conceiving of the Bible in an epistolary fashion as a “love letter.”⁸ In other words, the Bible is not so much the legislation of God as it is an expression of His love.

But to argue that the New Testament is to be interpreted as a “love letter” is misleading and disastrous. It is true that God is love. It is true that the written documents which He has provided are an expression of His love for us. However, these documents are not “love letters” in the sense set forth by those advocating the “new hermeneutic.” Whoever wrote a love letter to a girlfriend or boyfriend on such matters as circumcision, disfellowshipping a fornicator, or eating meats sacrificed to idols? Where the “love letter” metaphor breaks down is precisely in the area it is designed to undermine, i.e., that the New Testament is also, if not primarily, intended to be instructive by showing how human beings are to respond to God’s love. In this sense, the New Testament is **law** and **absolute** and **binding** in a way that a love letter can never be.

To denigrate the notion that the Bible consists of “propositional” truth is equally unfortunate. To hold that the Bible is “propositional” is to say that the explicit statements of the Bible affirm that something either is or is not the case.⁹ The reality of this contention is self-evident. One need only open the Bible and point to any statement to

⁶Gary D. Collier, “Bringing the Word to Life: An Assessment of the Hermeneutical Impasse in Churches of Christ; Part I: The Rationalist/Inductive School,” A paper presented to the Christian Scholars Conference (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University, July 1987), p. 28; Gregg Hood, “Establishing Biblical Authority: A Fresh Look at A Familiar Issue (Part 1),” **Image** 6 (March/April 1990), p. 9; Randy Fenter, “Do Not Go Beyond What Is Written (Part 3),” **Image** 5 (Oct. 1989), p. 9-10; Olbricht, “Part 2,” p. 15; Larry James, “The Crisis of Change: Rediscovering ‘The Story,’” **Image** 6 (March/April 1990), p. 27; Michael Casey, “Narrative,” pp. 6,10; C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, and Michael R. Weed, **The Worldly Church** (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1988), pp. 40, 58-59.

⁷Collier, “Part I,” pp. 19,28; Gary D. Collier, “Bringing the Word To Life: An Assessment of the Hermeneutical Impasse in Churches of Christ; Part II: The Scholarship Movement,” A paper presented to the Christian Scholars Conference (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University, July 1987), p. 7; Bill Swetmon, “The Historical Method in Hermeneutics,” **Image** 5 (July 1989), p. 23; Russ Dudley, “Restorationist Hermeneutics Among Churches of Christ: Why Are We at an Impasse?” **Restoration Quarterly** 30/1 (1988), pp. 36, 41; Thomas Olbricht, “The Rationalism of the Restoration,” **Restoration Quarterly** 11/2 (1968), p. 88.

⁸Olbricht, “Part 2,” p. 15; Max Lucado in “Minister Teaches Simplicity in Faith,” by Carolyn Jenkins, **Tulsa World**, March 12, 1989. Cf., Bernard Ramm, **Protestant Biblical Interpretation** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 75, who associates the reading of the Bible as a “love letter” with Kierkegaard’s existential principle of interpretation.

⁹E. g., Thomas B. Warren, **Logic and the Bible** (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1982), p. 9.

see that this is the case. If the Bible does not consist of propositional truth, then it says nothing to anyone at all.

Where does one suppose the emphasis within churches of Christ upon the Bible as the law of a kingdom arose? Obviously, from the Bible itself! How many New Testament books depict relationship to God and fellow Christians in terms of the kingdom/king/law metaphor? All but three of the twenty-seven books!¹⁰ Indeed, the New Testament is replete with allusions to reigning, ruling, and judging as well as the authority, majesty, throne, law, and lordship of Christ. It is clear that God intended for readers of the New Testament to get the idea that Christianity is to be conceived of as the relationship between a king and His kingdom!

To resist an emphasis upon the Bible as a “pattern” is likewise inappropriate. All that brethren have meant by the use of the word “pattern” is that human beings are obligated to go to the Bible and learn what God wants them to know and practice. If the Bible is not a “pattern” in this sense, then the Bible is completely irrelevant when it comes to how people choose to live life. Accordingly, no one should question anyone else regardless of what anyone believes or practices.

II. Logic, Human Reasoning, and Implication

They are saying that the “old hermeneutic” is “rationalistic,” “forensic,” and too dependent upon logic, human reason, and inference.¹¹ To quote one writer: “I believe it is extremely dangerous to elevate human reasoning to the level of God’s command”

¹⁰The Gospels are literally riddled with references to Christ as king and the impending establishment of His kingdom. Acts continues this emphasis. In fact, “the kingdom” was what Paul went around preaching (20:25; 28:23,31). Surely such teaching impacted his writings! Indeed, Romans (14:17), 1 Corinthians (4:20), Galatians (5:21), Ephesians (5:5), Colossians (1:13), 1 Thessalonians (2:12), 2 Thessalonians (1:5), 2 Timothy (4:1), all explicitly speak of the kingdom. Kingdom terminology is seen in 2 Corinthians (5:10--“the judgement seat of Christ”), Philippians (2:9-10--“every knee should bow”), and 1 Timothy (6:15--“the King of kings” and 1:8--“law”). Only Philemon and Titus contain no such immediate allusions. In extra-Pauline material, “kingdom” is mentioned in James (2:5), 2 Peter (1:11), Hebrews (12:28), and Revelation (1:9). 1 Peter speaks of the kingdom activity of “judging” and “judgement” (1:17; 2:23; 4:5,17). 1 John refers to “law” (3:4), 2 John refers to Christ’s “commands” (vs. 6), and Jude speaks of “judgment” vs. 6, 15) as well as the “glory, majesty, dominion, and power” that belong to God (vs. 25). That leaves only 3 John with no apparent allusion to kingdom concepts. Yet John’s four other writings are heavily weighted with the kingdom metaphor. The nature and circumstances of Philemon, Titus, and 3 John account for their omissions.

¹¹Olbricht, “Rationalism,” p. 77; Michael Casey, “The Origins of the Hermeneutics of the Churches of Christ; Part Two: The Philosophical Background,” **Restoration Quarterly** 31/4 (1989), 195; Olbricht, “Part 2,” p. 17; Randy Fenter, “A Hermeneutical Firestorm,” **Image** 6 (March/April 1990), 22; Casey, “Narrative,” pp. 1,11; Dudrey, p. 29.

and “There is no doctrine more potentially dangerous...than elevating necessary inference and approved examples to the status of God’s commands.”¹²

Is this conclusion one that its author arrived at by means of human reasoning? Is this a necessary inference which he has drawn from the Bible? Where is the biblical command which sanctions his viewpoint? In fact, all of the writing and speaking which is done in behalf of the “new hermeneutic” is the product of human reasoning. These fellows do what they condemn! Their entire case rests upon what they conceive to be logical argumentation, deduction, and implication. Yet these are the very qualities which they say cause the “old hermeneutic” to be irreparably flawed.

In actuality, everyone reasons from the Bible. The solution is not to condemn human reasoning. The solution is to promote correct human reasoning. The Bible itself repeatedly exhorts readers to use sound reasoning and rational thought in handling its contents (Is. 1:18; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1; Acts 17:3; 18:26; 26:25).¹³ Jesus, Himself, expected readers to heed the implications of God’s explicit statements.¹⁴

There is no less confusion in the religious world over what the Bible says implicitly than over what it says explicitly. Even if one could consistently ignore what the Bible teaches by implication, Christendom would still be hopelessly divided on what the Bible teaches explicitly. After all, there are many other reasons for belief and practice than hermeneutical principles. The Campbells recognized this point. Their warnings against “necessary inference” were not directed against the proper discernment of what the explicit statements of the Bible imply. Rather, they were decrying the unwarranted and prejudicial inferences characteristic of the denominational religions of the day. Parallel to this situation would be Jesus’ denunciation of the Pharisees’ practice of “extending” scripture to fit their own inclinations and propensity for binding strictures upon others (e.g., Matt. 15:1-9).

Some are saying that we are victims of “rationalism” and that our heavy reliance upon logic is due to our Restoration roots. They say the Campbells were heavily

¹²Fenter, “Firestorm,” p. 22; Randy Fenter, “Part 3,” pp. 9-10. Cf., Denny Boultinghouse, “The ‘New’ Hermeneutic,” **Image** 6 (March/April 1990), p. 29--“We just shouldn’t make human inferences as binding as Scripture;” Michael Casey, “The Origins of the Hermeneutics of the Churches of Christ; Part One: The Reformed Tradition,” **Restoration Quarterly** 31/2 (1989), p. 203; Casey, “Part One,” pp. 87ff.

¹³For a discussion of the role of logic in a correct interpretation of the Bible, see Warren, Logic and Dave Miller, “Logic?” **The Restorer** 8 (Oct. 1988), 6-7.

¹⁴This is precisely what Jesus did in His interchange with the Sadducees (Matt. 22:23-33). Cf., Dave Miller, “Jesus’ Own Hermeneutic,” in Terry Hightower, ed. **Rightly Dividing The Word**, Vol I (San Antonio, TX: Shenandoah church of Christ, 1990), pp. 204-205; Dave Miller, “Command, Example, and Necessary Inference,” A paper presented to the Christian Scholars Conference (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University, July 1990).

influenced by the British Empiricists and the “common sense” realists. They say our stress on logic hails back to Locke and Bacon.¹⁵

The issue is not whether any link exists between Locke, Campbell, and ourselves. The issue is to what extent any of us accurately reflect the Bible’s own requirements pertaining to the use of reason. We are to reason correctly about the explicit statements of the Bible--not because of what Aristotle, Locke, or Campbell said--but because of what God Himself said in Scripture. If Campbell and Locke stressed the need for proper reasoning in studying the Bible, then they were in tune with God on that point. The “new hermeneutic” advocates assume that if a link exists between Locke and Campbell, it automatically follows that a hermeneutic which stresses reason and induction is wrong. Such is a false assumption. Jesus’ own hermeneutic relied heavily on induction. Is it possible that the parallels between Locke and Campbell or between the Westminster Confession and the Campbells’ beliefs were due to their mutual assessment of Scripture rather than due to the dependence of one upon the other?¹⁶

The advocates of the “new hermeneutic” possess the same presupposition as the Darwinian evolutionist.¹⁷ The evolutionist draws clever tangents and links between the species and fossils in order to argue for the influence of the past upon the present and to say that current biological forms owe their origins to previous forms (e.g., mammals came from reptiles who came from fish who came from slime). So these “new hermeneutic” historicists¹⁸ presume to identify the sources of present religious beliefs in the 18th and 19th centuries in order to say we ought to abandon those beliefs. But like the evolutionist, their assumption is wrong. The links are irrelevant.

What does matter is can human beings in any historical period go to Scripture and, without a lot of “scholarly expertise,” ascertain how God would have them to conduct themselves? Are our historical circumstances and conditioning really so strong that a simple man’s honest appraisal of Scripture will inevitably be skewed? The Bible was given by God to mankind for the very purpose of revealing to sincere, honest hearts how to be saved and stay saved. God expects each individual to use the reasoning powers of his divinely-created mind to comprehend the Bible. The fact that Locke or Campbell stressed rationality hardly nullifies that truth.

¹⁵Olbricht, “Rationalism,” p. 85; Casey, “Part Two”; Dudrey, pp. 21ff.

¹⁶Further response to this line of reasoning may be found in Dave Miller, “A Review of **The Worldly Church**,” *Restorer* 8 (August 1988), 6-12; Dave Miller, “A Review of **The Worldly Church**,” *The Spiritual Sword*, 20 (October 1988), pp. 41-43.

¹⁷Cf., Douglas A. Downs, “The Future of Rationist Hermeneutics,” A paper presented to the Christian Scholars Conference (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University, 1988), p. 2--“...the evolutionary development of the present church” and Ramm, **Protestant**, p. 66.

¹⁸Note Ramm’s discussion of Liberalism’s practice of interpreting historically--“with a vengeance” (**Protestant**, p. 68).

From whence does this logophobia (fear of logic) arise? Aversion to logic throughout history has been closely associated with a desire to be relieved of the confining nature of God's word. The "new hermeneutic" is rooted in subjectivity and relativism in its approach to Scripture. It seeks to give man more say in his religious pursuits, while attributing such subjective inclination to the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

It is not coincidental that the "new hermeneutic" advocates frequently speak of "freedom" and "unity." They speak of the need for dispensing with the old wineskins to make room for the new wine.²⁰ They speak of the need for a hermeneutic that will cause Scripture to be "more relevant," help "in getting closer to God and each other," be "more palatable to an age that denigrates authoritarianism," and be able to "relate to people where they live" without being "insensitive and impersonal."²¹

They say we need a hermeneutic that starts with God not Scripture, that focuses on the actions of God rather than the rules of logic and results, and that seeks the "heart of God" and "God's desires"--not just the "instructions of God."²² They say we should focus on content, not outer forms, and emphasize meaning and motive rather than "doing acts correctly."²³ They say we should approach interpretation, not as "rational animals," but as "story-telling animals."²⁴

These contrasts are unbiblical. They are similar to the false bifurcations of grace vs. works, Christ vs. the church, and "the man vs. the plan." The Bible teaches that we

¹⁹Collier, "Part I," p. 27--"a battle...between the objective and the subjective"; Casey, "Narrative," pp. 16-17, 20--"the help of the Holy Spirit"; Thomas Olbricht, "Hermeneutics: The Beginning Point (Part 1)," **Image** 5 (Oct. 1989), p. 15--"a greater focus on God, his Son, his Spirit," Allen, Hughes, and Weed, pp. 56-57, 74-77, 92; Bill Swetmon, A speech delivered at the "Nashville Meeting," (Nashville, TN, Dec. 1988). Referring to the "scholarship movement," Swetmon said, "This movement emphasizes the subjectivity of the process of interpreting the biblical text." Yet, in his insistence upon interpreting Christologically, he recommends "the spirit of Christ" as a criteria for ascertaining meaning. Cf., Leroy Garrett, "The Basic Principle: The Spirit of Christ," **Restoration Review** 29 (Jan. 1987), pp. 2-6. Ramm rightly equates such subjectivism with classic Liberalism and a relaxed view of inspiration in **Protestant**, p. 65.

²⁰Collier, "Part II," p. 16; James, p. 5. Cf., **Wineskins Magazine** edited by Rubel Shelly and Mike Cope.

²¹Casey, "Narrative," p. 1; Olbricht, "Part 2," p. 15; Collier, "Part I," p. 29; Downs, p. 11. Cf., Joseph Fletcher's notion of "personalism" in **Moral Responsibility** (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1967), p. 33.

²²Casey, "Part One," p. 83; Olbricht, "Part 2," p. 17; Collier, "Part II," pp. 23-24. Again, such thinking is dangerously reminiscent of the situation ethic of Joseph Fletcher. E.g., p. 239-- "Christians...are commanded to love people, not principles."

²³Casey, "Narrative," p. 24; Boultinghouse, p. 29; Collier, "Part II," p. 13. Cf., Fletcher's equivalent emphasis. E.g., "...it is the **motives** of sex behavior that are the most important facts"(p. 87).

²⁴Casey, "Narrative," p. 15.

get close to God with rules and through rules. We can't love Jesus without His law (John 14:15). We must give attention to content and forms, meaning/motive and actions. We come to know God through proper logic, reasoning, and interpretation. If the "story-telling" is not rational, who will comprehend what is being taught?

The spirit of the "new hermeneutic" is right in step with the mood that has prevailed in our society at least since the 60s--a "do your own thing," "believe what you want," "don't condemn anyone else," "what's right for you may not be right for me" mentality. Such an attitude finds it easy to brand previous hermeneutical practices as a "legalistic" and "cognitive approach to scripture" in which "obedience to the commands of scripture became the dominant metaphor or way of seeing Christianity."²⁵

But the same attitude was exhibited by Saul when he scrimped on complete compliance with God's instructions. His motives were noble: to sacrifice to God while getting along with the people. Yet Samuel declared God's view for all generations: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). The wise, insightful Solomon pronounced obedience to be "the whole of man" (Ecc. 12:13). Paul said there are only two directions in life: "sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness" (Rom. 6:16). Jesus is, in fact, the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

God has always required essentially two facets of response to His will: the right action with the right attitude. Notice the following chart of scriptures:

PASSAGE	ATTITUDE	ACTION
John 4:24	spirit	truth
Josh. 24:14	sincerity	truth
Ecc. 12:13	fear God	keep commands
Acts 10:35	fear Him	work righteous
James 2:17	faith	works
1 John 3:18	word & tongue	deed & truth
Deut. 10:12-13	fear/love--heart	walk in His ways
Rom. 1:9	with my spirit	in the gospel

To emphasize one dimension of obedience over the other is to hamper one's acceptance by God. Bible history is replete with instances of those who possessed one without the other and were unacceptable to God. The Pharisees (Matt. 23:3). Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:2-4), and the people of Amos' day (Amos 5:21-24) engaged in the external forms, but were unacceptable because of their insincerity. Paul (Acts 22:3; 23:1), Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2), and Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6) all demonstrated genuine motives, but were unacceptable to God because of their failure to observe the right

²⁵Casey, "Narrative," p. 12. Cf., Casey, "Part One," p. 81--"legalistic restitutionism." As an alternative to his ethical relativism, Fletcher repeatedly identifies ethical absolutism as "legalism" (e.g., p. 25). Cf., Dave Miller, "Legalism?" The Restorer 9 (Feb. 1989), 2-3.

forms. The “new hermeneutic” seeks to minimize external forms in deference to internal mind set. Significantly, the disdain for logic is accompanied by a call for more emotion in religious practice.²⁶

III. Historical Context

They say previous hermeneutical principles have failed to take into account historical context in the interpretation of Scripture. They describe the “old hermeneutic” as “rationalistic, inductive, formal” and the “new hermeneutic” as “grammatical/historical/contextual.”²⁷

This charge is equally false and unfounded. Members of churches of Christ in general have approached their study of each book of the Bible with a “who, what, where, when, to whom, why” methodology. Dungan and Lockhart,²⁸ as well as standard commentaries affiliated with churches of Christ, stress the importance of context--whether historical, lexical, syntactical, contextual, or analogical.²⁹ The fact that some writers may have missed a point on a passage here or there is hardly adequate justification for (1) abandoning the only legitimate hermeneutical principles in exchange for what is now being advocated or (2) proposing contextual analysis as a “new hermeneutic,” when our brethren have been engaging in historical/contextual interpretation all along.

²⁶Olbricht, “Rationalism,” pp. 82ff; Collier, “Part 2,” p. 8; Casey, “Narrative,” p. 12; Casey, “Part 2,” p. 194. Compare the previously cited reviews of **The Worldly Church** in **The Restorer**.

²⁷Casey (“Narrative,” p. 12) and Collier (“Part I,” p. 25) both deem past attention to historical considerations in interpretation among churches of Christ as mere “lip service.” Cf., Collier, “Part II,” p. 8 and Dudley, p. 37; Swetmon (“Nashville”) gives his solution, or alternative, to past hermeneutical practice by saying we should interpret historically, contextually, grammatically and Christologically. Where have he and these other critics been? These recommendations are not new. Perhaps these recommendations are more of an indication of their own hermeneutical failings which they have naively assumed to be characteristic of the brotherhood at large.

²⁸Dungan, pp. 31-32, 156-171; Lockhart, pp. 33, 91-101, 229-245.

²⁹E. g., Warren, Logic, p. 72.

IV. “Atomistic” Interpretation and a “Flat” Bible

They say the “old hermeneutic” approaches the Bible “atomistically”³⁰ and treats the Scriptures as if they were “flat.”³¹ By “atomistic” they mean we have failed to treat each biblical document separately on its own merits by introducing passages from other books and contexts into the book we are trying to interpret. They say we must not piece Scriptures together from all over the Bible in order to make an argument. To do so is to be guilty of the “unpardonable sin” of “prooftexting.”³² Consider the following statement:

Part of my problem with the way we use our hermeneutic to establish examples is we’re demanding that the New Testament Christians read the Bible and argue when they didn’t have a collected canon to use. They couldn’t have pulled Acts 16:2 [sic] and Acts 20:7 together. They didn’t have a collected canon. But we do that and say we’re restoring New Testament Christianity using an argument they couldn’t have put together...this is not the way the early Christian even could have argued from Scripture.³³

Critical of what he calls “hard-line patternistic formalism,” one speaker centers his attention on the question of the canon:

We have approached the area of hermeneutics with the idea that the early church had a complete set of documents which we know as the New Testament and that they searched those scriptures to determine God’s pattern in church organization, structure and practice. I submit to you that is an incorrect assumption.³⁴

³⁰ Collier, “Part I,” p. 23; Collier, “Part II,” pp. 8, 20; Downs, p. 10; Olbricht, “Rationalism,” p. 86; Allen, Hughes, and Weed, p. 58. Cf., Allan J. McNicol, “Theological Method On the Bible Among Churches of Christ: A Proposal,” A paper presented to the Christian Scholars Conference (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University, 1989). McNicol takes issue with conceiving of Scripture as “a seamless body of doctrine” (p. 4).

³¹ Dudrey, pp. 26,32ff; Allen, Hughes and Weed, pp. 59,72; Garrett, “Spirit,” p. 4. Cf., Thiselton, p. 320.

³² For example, Downs, pp. 7,15; Collier, “Part I,”p. 23.

³³ Rick Atchley in Monroe Hawley, “Acts As A Pattern for the Church Today (Part 3),” Audio Cassette (Searcy, AR: Harding University Lectures, 1989). Cf., Gregg Hood, “Establishing Biblical Authority: A Fresh Look At A Familiar Issue (Part 2),” **Image** 6 (May/June 1990), pp. 14-15.

³⁴ Bill Swetmon, “Nashville.” This “canon” quibble is common among those who take issue with traditional hermeneutical procedure. E.g., Roy B. Ward, “‘The Restoration Principle’: A Critical Analysis,” **Restoration Quarterly** 4 (1965), pp. 203ff; Cf., Collier, “Part II,” p. 5.

His point is that since the canon was not completed until circa 400A.D., early Christians could not have made use of written scripture as we do, drawing scriptures together from different books to form conclusions.

Yet such a position misconstrues the nature of canonization.³⁵ Canonization was based upon and dependent upon widespread recognition and use of the New Testament books. The criteria by which some books were later questioned are evidence that those books were generally accessible to the churches across the empire. The scriptures were copied and circulated among the churches long before formal canonization. In fact, impetus for the multiplication of copies of the New Testament documents existed virtually from the moment they came from the pen of the inspired writer.³⁶

Even in the first century, within the New Testament itself, evidence suggests that accessibility to New Testament truth in written form was well underway. Paul specifically told the Colossians to see that the epistle written to them was circulated (Col. 4:16). When Peter wrote his second epistle, “epistles” (plural) of Paul were already being referred to as among the “scriptures” which were available for the “unlearned” to twist (2 Pet. 3:16). When Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy, the gospel of Luke was already “scripture” (1 Tim. 5:18). Dating questions aside, very few years separated the writing of the two books.

Consider the parallel situation that exists with the Old Testament. Early Jews did not have access to all the Old Testament. Yet Jesus and the writers of the New Testament gleaned passages from various locations in the Old Testament canon in precisely the same fashion that we do from the New Testament. Jesus treated the Old Testament canon as a totality--a complete body of scripture. He was guilty of the same charge being leveled against the church today.³⁷ He “atomized” Scripture as did virtually all of the writers of the New Testament!

Surely we recognize that the church was in a state of infancy for the very reason that New Testament truth was in the process of being revealed (1 Cor. 13:8-12; Eph.

³⁵Useful discussions of biblical canonization include F. F. Bruce, **The Canon of Scripture** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988); Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament,” in **The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible** (rpt. Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 411-416; R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957).

³⁶Consider, for example, Bruce M. Metzger, **The Text of the New Testament**, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 14--“Because the number of Christians increased rapidly during the first centuries, many additional copies of the Scriptures were sought by new converts and new churches. As a result, speed of production sometimes outran accuracy of execution.” Notice that this stimulus for the proliferation of copies of New Testament documents easily applies to the first century itself. Cf., Warfield’s conclusion: “we must not mistake the historical evidences of the slow circulation and authentication of these books over the widely-extended church, for evidence of slowness of ‘canonization’ of books by the authority of the taste of the church itself” (p. 416).

³⁷See the discussion of Jesus’ use of Scripture in Miller, “Jesus’ Own” and Miller, “Command.”

4:13-16). The early Christians had access to a sufficient amount of God's will through oral sources. The apostles would have been able to convey massive amounts of New Testament truth in light of all the teaching which we are told they did (e.g., Acts 2:40,42; 5:42; 20:20,27,31). Early Christians would have pieced together oral teaching as authority for faith and practice in the same way that we draw together written passages.

However, the fact that they lived during a period when the New Testament was incomplete in no way disproves the need for us to approach the New Testament as a completed body of truth. Such reasoning is analogous to those who say they do not have to be baptized since the thief on the cross was not baptized. Our situation does not compare with those who lived in a premature spiritual state. We do not live during a period of progressive revelation. We have the completed corpus of inspired material from God and are required to take the whole and interpret it accordingly.

It would seem that the advocates of the "new hermeneutic" have not grasped the implications of their position as it relates to the doctrine of inspiration.³⁸ They are adamant in their insistence that each book of the Bible is to be examined on its own merits with no intrusion of material from any other book. They speak of the New Testament being "a collection of letters" as if the books of the Bible were just casually and haphazardly thrown together into a single volume.³⁹ They speak as if they do not consider the sixty-six books of the Bible to be interrelated or intentionally bound together as a single body of truth--God's complete and total revelation to man.⁴⁰

Yet the biblical view of inspiration necessitates that, though the biblical documents were written by some forty individuals over a period of about 1600 years, the Bible actually has only one author--the Holy Spirit. The Bible, therefore, is intended by God to be taken as a single entity in order to grasp His will for humanity. Likewise, God

³⁸Ramm stated: "The divine inspiration of the Bible is the foundation of historic Protestant hermeneutics and exegesis" (**Protestant**, p. 93).

³⁹Randy Fenter, "Do Not Go Beyond What Is Written (Part 2)," **Image** 5 (Sept. 1989), p. 9, speaks of the New Testament as "a collection of letters" and quotes Michael Armour's allusion to Scripture as "a letter dashed off by an apostle to a church that he has some specific concerns about."

⁴⁰Downs speaks disapprovingly of the way churches of Christ have sought "to homogenize Scripture into a systematic whole" by means of a "harmonizing approach to the text" (p. 10). McNicol opposes "a view of Scripture as the seamless depository of Revelation" and insists that this view of Scripture is "at the heart of our problem" (p. 4); Dudrey agrees that Scripture does not lend itself to this model of a complete, self-consistent and symmetrical system of doctrine and identifies it with "the dictation model of inspiration" (p. 38). It has long been a ploy of theological liberals to castigate and misrepresent the conservative (i.e., biblical) view of inspiration with such labels as "dictation," "literalism," and "biblicism" (e.g., Dudrey, p. 24). Cf., Harris, p. 20; Ramm, p. 126; Benjamin B. Warfield, "Inspiration and Criticism," in **The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible** (rpt. Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), p. 421; J. I. Packer, **"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 78-79, 178-181; J. W. McGarvey, **Evidences of Christianity** (1886, 1890; rpt. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1974), pp. 212-214.

intends for us to perceive the Scriptures as verbally inspired. This standard, classic view of inspiration was largely unquestioned until theological Liberalism, and its progeny Neo-orthodoxy, exerted their influence.⁴¹

To see where the “new hermeneutic” viewpoint is logically headed in this regard, consider the following statements of one who still considers himself to be a member of churches of Christ:

We cannot equate the authority of the Bible with the authority of God as we can the authority of Christ and God, for the Bible is an earthen vessel. God is perfect, infallible, and infinite. The Bible as a human product is not. ...If the Bible was brought to us by an angel directly from heaven, having been dictated word-for-word by God himself, so that its contents would be nothing less and nothing more than the actual words of God, then we could equate the authority of the Bible and the authority of God. But the Bible is clearly not that kind of book.⁴²

When we are told our hermeneutic presupposes a “flat” Bible, they mean we should recognize that not all facts or truths presented in the Bible are of equal importance. For example, whether you use an instrument in worship or partake of the Lord’s Supper every Sunday is far less important than whether you evangelize or pray.⁴³

It is certainly possible for some within churches of Christ to overemphasize one truth to the neglect of a truth of greater significance. The Pharisees did so. However, the clear teaching of Jesus on the matter is “these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matt. 23:23). In other words, there is no excuse for “straining out the gnat” while “swallowing the camel.” But neither is it acceptable to God to strain out the camel while swallowing the gnat. If we love God and our fellow man, we will give meticulous attention to all that God desires us to do (Cf., Acts 20:27).

Besides, what we humans sometimes consider to be an insignificant matter, God considers to be of paramount importance (Lk. 16:15; Cf., Jer. 10:23; 1 Cor. 1:20). Adam and Eve were expelled permanently from Eden for eating the fruit from one tree (Gen. 3). Nadab and Abihu were destroyed for incorporating foreign fire in their incense offering (Lev. 10:1-2). Moses was excluded from entrance into Canaan because of his

⁴¹Helpful discussions of the nature of Scripture and inspiration and their correlation with interpretation include the previously cited works by Packer, Harris, McGarvey (pp. 171-223) and Warfield as well as; Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, **Inspiration** (1881; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979). Packer writes: “The literary historian sees the Bible as a library: a miscellaneous set of more or less occasional writings.... But it is more than a library of books by human authors; it is a single book with a single author” (p. 84).

⁴²Garrett, “Authoritative,” p. 43.

⁴³Randy Mayeux, “Letter to the Editor,” Christian Chronicle (June 1989).

one mistake at Kadesh (Numb. 20:7-12). Saul was deposed as king for sparing the lives of one man and a few animals out of an entire nation (1 Sam. 15). Uzzah was struck dead for merely reaching out and steadying the ark (2 Sam. 6:6-7). Uzziah was rejected by God because he entered the temple to burn incense (2 Chron. 26).

These incidents are no more “technical” nor “trivial” than New Testament regulations pertaining to vocal, verbal music in worship (Eph. 5:19), bread and fruit of the vine at the Lord’s Table every Sunday (Matt. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7), and kingdom initiation by immersion in water (John 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21). We would be wise to be extremely cautious in dispensing with certain biblical stipulations under the pretense of stressing supposed “weighty” matters.

V. Presuppositions and Cultural Conditioning

They say the “old hermeneutic” fails to take into consideration that the interpreter is “shaped” by his own presuppositions. They say the interpreter has been inevitably, if not invariably, influenced by cultural, historical, social, and religious conditioning.⁴⁴

Have the advocates of the “new hermeneutic” been similarly affected? What makes their interpretations of the Bible immune to such conditioning? What gives them the ability to rise above their presuppositions while leaving the rest of the brotherhood doomed to conditioned interpretation? What cultural, historical, social, and religious conditioning informs their thinking? What are their “philosophic assumptions” which have shaped them?⁴⁵

Of course, this claim comes directly from the advocates of the “new hermeneutic” in denominational theology. Rudolf Bultmann and others⁴⁶ make much of this point, leaving the impression that knowledge of objective truth is unattainable. As Liefeld noted:

⁴⁴Fenter, “Part 2,” pp. 8, 10; Swetmon, “Historical,” p. 23; Downs, p. 2 (who says we have been “blinded by our own historical limitations and unable to read Scripture with the freshness that genuine discipleship demands”); McNicol, pp. 1,2,5; Casey, “Part One,” p. 91; Olbricht, “Rationalism,” p. 85; Allen, Hughes, and Weed, p. 56. Carson (p. 128) describes the approach of the “New Hermeneutic.” “The interpreter who approaches a text, it is argued, already brings along a certain amount of cultural, linguistic and ethical baggage. Even the questions the interpreter tries to ask (or fails to ask) of the text reflect the limitations imposed by that baggage; they will in some measure shape the kind of ‘responses’ that come back from the text and the interpreter’s understanding of them.”

⁴⁵Casey’s terminology in “Part One,” p. 91.

⁴⁶E.g., Bultmann, pp. 48ff; Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling’s views in Thiselton, pp. 308ff; Cf., Carson, pp. 128ff; Hans-George Gadamer, **Truth and Method** (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975); A. C. Thiselton, **The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

Underneath much of the discussion is the idea that we cannot ever arrive at the true meaning of a text because our own “horizon” prevents us from achieving an undistorted perception of the “horizon” of the biblical writer.⁴⁷

Not only is such an assumption in direct conflict with Jesus’ own assessment of the situation (e.g., John 8:32), the position is self-contradictory and therefore false.⁴⁸ Certainly, we should be aware of our own personal biases and limitations when we approach the text. But God clearly communicated with us in such a way that we can come to a knowledge of what He would have us to believe and do (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24; 12:48). Carson is correct when he stated: “such absolute relativism is not only unnecessary, but also self-contradictory; for the authors of such views expect us to understand the meaning of their articles!”⁴⁹

Strikingly, advocates of the “new hermeneutic” take issue with the approach to the biblical texts that perceives the purpose of the Bible and biblical interpretation to inform humans how to please God.⁵⁰ Yet the biblical writers themselves (including Jesus) repeatedly speak of man’s entire earthly responsibility to consist of ascertaining God’s will for their lives from His revelation in order to then do what His will requires! (E.g., Ecc. 12:13; Jn. 8:32; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jn. 12:48; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21; Matt. 22:34-40; Deut. 30; Mic. 6:8; et al.). It would no doubt be enlightening for one of the “new hermeneutic” spokesmen to tell us precisely what they conceive to be the purpose of Scripture.

Situated throughout the writings of those who promote the “new hermeneutic” is evidence that they view truth to be relative, subjective, and unattainable. They appear to be infected with the presuppositions of Liberal and Neo-orthodox theology as well as Existentialist and Romantic philosophy.⁵¹

Concerning religious knowledge, we are told that “proof for such knowledge is beyond the borders of human proof tools” and that our “command/obedience metaphor”

⁴⁷Walter L. Liefeld, **New Testament Exposition** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 23.

⁴⁸Self-contradiction is discussed in Warren, **Logic**, pp. 23-26.

⁴⁹Carson, *Exegetical*, p. 129.

⁵⁰Dudrey (p. 38) is critical of previous hermeneutical methods which “assume a literary model in which the Bible contains answers to every question necessary to life and godliness.” Collier (“Part II,” p. 18) disparages studying the Scriptures from the perspective of “What does the Bible require of us?”

⁵¹Swetmon (“Nashville”) tells us we are in need of “acquaintances with schools of criticism, such as historical criticism, form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism and Midrash criticism.” Casey (“Narrative,” p. 15) quotes Neo-orthodox theologian H. Richard Niebuhr in support of his position. Downs (p. 15) chides us for ignoring the disciplines of form and redaction criticism in our analysis of biblical texts.

has created “a false sense of epistemological certainty.”⁵² I suppose when Jesus said, “You shall know the truth” (Jn. 8:32), he was guilty of creating in his disciples “a false sense of epistemological certainty”! Such religious agnosticism is further seen in the continual assertion that “replication” or “restoration” of the New Testament church is an “illusion.”⁵³

They speak disparagingly of the assumption that all reasonable people can see the Bible alike.⁵⁴ They say we must be content to live with “merely provisional answers”.⁵⁵ They speak of the need for any “system of hermeneutics” to be “temporary and not permanent” and that we have reached a point where “interpretation of the Scripture must be repositioned so as to provide more help” for personal and social concerns.⁵⁶

Numerous biblical texts affirm, however, that truth is objective, absolute, and attainable (e.g., Prov. 23:23; Jn. 3:2; 8:32; Acts 2:22; 1 Jn. 2:3). Knowledge must precede faith (Rom. 10:17; 4:20-21; Jn. 10:24,25,38).⁵⁷ Faith is accepting and acting upon what one knows to be God’s will (Heb. 11:6). Paul declared that God desires “all men” to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). If some fail to do so, it is not because truth is relative or unattainable. Others factors are at fault including the absence of “an honest and good heart” (Lk. 8:15) and “love of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:10).⁵⁸ ⁵³

Neither truth nor man’s fundamental ability to apprehend truth change. Alternative approaches to interpretation are superfluous. When God said, “Do not steal,” our interpretation of the meaning of that statement is the same as the interpretation by those who originally received the statement. The only need for a “new hermeneutic” lies in man’s unwillingness to accept the one authentic meaning intended by God. We don’t need a “new” interpretation of God’s words. We simply need to reinstate a devoted determination to comply with what we already understand the Bible to teach.

⁵²Casey, “Narrative,” pp. 7, 12.

⁵³Richard T. Hughes and Leonard Allen, **Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875** (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 121; Casey, “Narrative,” pp. 2, 13; Casey, “Part One,” p. 81; Dudrey, pp. 27ff. Cf., Dave Miller, “The Restoration of Judah Under King Hezekiah” in **The Validity of the Restoration Principle**, Eddie Whitten, ed. (Mesquite, TX: Biblical Bookshelf, 1989), pp. 54-63.

⁵⁴Casey, “Narrative,” p. 11; Casey, “Part Two,” p. 199; Olbricht, “Part 1,” p. 15.

⁵⁵Collier’s quotation of Allen in “Part II,” p. 27.

⁵⁶Casey, “Narrative,” p. 14; Olbricht, “Part 2,” p. 15.

⁵⁷Cf., Dave Miller, “Blind Faith,” **The Restorer** 8 (Sept. 1988), pp. 10-11; Thomas B. Warren, **When Is An ‘Example’ Binding?** (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1975), pp. 33ff.

⁵⁸Cf., Dungan’s discussion of things that hinder a correct interpretation of Scripture (pp. 36-47).

Conclusion

Our desire for a “new hermeneutic” reveals far more about the condition of our hearts than it does about our ability to grasp God’s originally intended meanings. The “new hermeneutic” is part and parcel of the spiritual temperament which has permeated our society and the church. It is an attempt to provide sophisticated sanction to the perennial human inclination to restructure and redesign religious belief and practice to suit self (Gen. 3:6; Ex. 17:2; Numb. 21:5; Judges 21:25; 1 Sam. 8:19-20; 1 Sam. 13:12; Jer. 6:16; et al.). It is an attempt to do what one wants to do while maintaining a sense of religiosity (Gen. 4:3; Lev. 10:1; 1 Sam. 15:13,20; 2 Chron. 26:16).

The “hermeneutic” which has been operative generally among churches of Christ, as well as the “theological foundation” which undergirds this “hermeneutic,” are neither erroneous nor out-dated. Both are deeply embedded in the Scriptures themselves. Churches of Christ in general have perceived accurately God’s will from God’s book. Some Christians choose to follow that will while others do not choose to do so. So it has been throughout human history. All efforts to originate some “new truth” or some alternative approach to simple Bible teaching have ultimately fallen by the way and been buried beneath the innovations of later generations. Concerning the “new hermeneutic” of our day: “this too will pass.”

If the interpretive enterprise is as elusive, enigmatic, and entangled as the so-called “scholars” represent it to be, then the average member of the church, let alone nonmember, does not have a ghost of a chance to understand God’s word and make it to heaven. We seem to have reached a point in the history of the church where some have been “educated beyond their intelligence.”

Is ascertaining and obeying God’s will really that difficult? Moses’ answer to that question is as easily understood and relevant today as when spoken over 3,000 years ago:

For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?” But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it (Deut. 30:11-14).

Appendix

Comparisons Between the “New Hermeneutic” (NH) of Neo-orthodoxy and the “new hermeneutic” (nh) Within Churches of Christ

(1) Impact of Presuppositions:

- “nh” Fenter, “Part 2,” pp. 8,10; Swetmon, “Historical,” p. 23; Downs, p. 2; McNicol, pp. 1,2,5; Casey, “Part One,” p. 91; Olbricht, “Rationalism,” p. 85; Allen, Hughes, and Weed, p. 56.
- “NH” Bultmann, pp. 48ff; Thiselton, *Essays*, pp. 308ff; Carson, p. 128; Liefeld, p. 23; F. F. Bruce, “The History of New Testament Study,” in **New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods**, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 51.

(2) Theory/Function of Language:

- “nh” Casey, “Narrative,” pp. 6ff; Dudrey, pp. 32,34,35,39,41.
- “NH” Thiselton, p. 320; Thor Hall, **The Future Shape of Preaching** (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 61; Gundry and Johnson, p. 110; Virkler, p. 72; Bruce, p. 52.

(3) Nature of Truth:

- “nh” Ability to see Bible alike: Casey, “Narrative,” p. 11; Casey, “Part 2,” p. 199; Olbricht, “Part 1,” p. 15.
- “a” temporary system of hermeneutics: Casey, “Narrative,” p. 14; Olbricht, “Part 2,” p. 15.
- subjective experience of the interpreter in “feeling” the message: McNicol, p. 24: “levels of meaning...which take place somewhere between the text itself and the reader.”
- positivism: Casey, “Narrative,” p. 6; Casey, “Part Two,” p. 206; Collier, “Part I,” p. 7; Thomas Olbricht, “The Bible as Revelation,” **Restoration Quarterly** 8 (1965), p. 213.
- “NH” Carson, p. 128-131; Liefeld, p. 24; Kaiser, p. 31-32; Ramm, **Protestant**, pp. 88-91; Thiselton, pp. 308ff.

(4) "Hermeneutical Circle" and "Horizon"

"nh" Collier, "Part II," p. 22.

"NH" Kaiser, p. 31; Thiselton, p. 317.

A good summary statement of the status of homiletics as it relates to hermeneutics and the current confusion in and out of churches of Christ is Richard L. Eslinger, **A New Hearing** (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987) and David L. Larsen, **The Anatomy of Preaching** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989). Eslinger, though favorable himself to the new trends, shows the links which exist between the "New Hermeneutic" of denominationalism and the "new hermeneutic" of churches of Christ. Though reviewing the work of five different homileticians, common themes connect them all: logic, deduction and rationality are out of vogue; viewing truth as objective and propositional is outdated; and the subjective, "existential" experience of the interpreter is central to hermeneutics and homiletics.

Fred Craddock is specifically linked with the "New Hermeneutic" of Ernst Fuchs and the existentialism of Martin Heidegger (pp. 100-106). Yet he is clearly championed by the "new hermeneutic" proponents in our midst (Cf., allusions to Craddock in Olbricht, "Part 2," p. 16 and Fenter, "Part 2," p. 10).

Larsen notes that the "new homiletic has risen from the new hermeneutic" and identifies their association with aversion to propositional revelation, the noncognitive, existential theology, radical pluralism, objective meaning in Scripture, the positioning of authority in human experience and subjectivity, the crisis of language, and disparagement of the rational (pp. 144-147).