Explaining the Role of Scripture in the Economy of Redemption as it Relates to the Theological and Hermeneutical Contributions of David Tracy, Hans Frei, Kevin Vanhoozer and Henri de Lubac

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AS IT RELATES TO THE THEOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL
CONTRIBUTIONS OF DAVID TRACY, HANS FREI, KEVIN VANHOOZER AND
HENRI DE LUBAC

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Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Kevin Storer

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ABSTRACT

EXPLAINING THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE ECONOMY OF REDEMPTION
AS IT RELATES TO THE THEOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL
CONTRIBUTIONS OF DAVID TRACY, HANS FREI, KEVIN VANHOOZER AND
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By
Kevin Storer
April 2012

Dissertation supervised by William M. Wright, IV., Ph.D.

This dissertation explores the hermeneutical impasses which have resulted from
the recent debates about the theological interpretation of Scripture between revisionist
theologian David Tracy and postliberal theologian Hans Frei and suggests that locating
the role of Scripture in the economy of redemption would ease many of these
methodological tensions. The works of Evangelical theologian Kevin Vanhoozer and
Ressourcement theologian Henri de Lubac, it is argued, provide helpful resources for
these discussions as these theologians explicitly seek to explain the role of Scripture in
mediating the relationship between Christ and the Church. The dissertation suggests that
examining the role of Scripture in the context of the economy does provide helpful
insights for hermeneutical method as it shows the intrinsic unity between the literal
reading of Scripture and Scripture’s spiritual interpretation, as well as the intrinsic unity
between Scripture and Church in receiving Scriptural mediation. It is concluded that these insights ease ongoing tensions between Frei and Tracy by showing that Frei’s insistence on the plain sense of Scripture is compatible with Tracy’s insistence on the transformative disclosure of Christ in Scripture.
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INTRODUCTION

I. The Debate between Revisionists and Postliberals

In the closing decades of the 20th century, theological dialogues in the United States were marked by a prominent debate between two major approaches to the methods and purposes of theology, as these two schools engaged in a significant discussion about the theological interpretation of Scripture for the Church. Both sides agreed on several major points: first, that interpretation of Scripture must be seen as a privileged and unique locus of the mediation of God; second, that the Scriptures are central of the life and practice of the Church; and third, that Scriptural interpretation must go beyond employment of higher critical methods in order to understand its subject matter. Yet the discussions were also marked by very different understandings about the methods and aims of theology, and these differences have led to a number of impasses in the discussion about the interpretation of Scripture in the Church. This introduction will acquaint readers with the main emphases of each side, so that the debate between David Tracy and Hans Frei, two major representatives of each school, can be more clearly explored.

Revisionist theology is a trajectory of theology committed to reforming Christian belief and practice in dialogue with contemporary culture and philosophy.¹ One of the

¹ See William C. Placher, "Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies and the Public Character of Theology," The Thomist 49, no. 3 (1985), 392. Placher (ibid), claims that Revisionist theology should probably be considered the most dominant theological trajectory in the United States in the last 50 years, and notes such names (besides Tracy) as “Catholics like…Leslie Dewart, Gregory Baum, and Michael Novak, and Protestants like Langdon Gilkey…Edward Farley…Schubert Ogden…Gordon Kaufman…[and] John Cobb.”
distinguishing emphases of this movement is a commitment to the public accessibility of theological discourse, which tends to assume a general mode of human understanding by which specific religious claims can be related to human reason. The various Liberation and Postcolonial theologies, which have redirected much recent theological conversation throughout the world, are related to this trajectory in their insistence that theological method continually reevaluate Christian symbols and dialogue based on some external norm of reason. Among revisionist theologians, a group of narrative theologians has recently arisen, who have used phenomenological hermeneutics as the starting point for critical correlation. This group includes Paul Ricoeur, David Tracy, and Sallie McFague, all of whom are “revisionist, hermeneutical, Gadamerian-inspired correlationists.” This revisionist focus on narrative is often associated with the university of Chicago, and is often called the “Chicago school.”

This “Chicago school” are also called narrative theologians because they suggest that stories have a unique role in the shaping of human beings. Yet they argue that all narrative, including the Scriptures, must be continually renewed and corrected through the disciplines applied to all texts. The “Chicago school” begins their reading of Scripture from a general hermeneutics, even though they admit that the very referent of Scripture is so reorienting that it stretches the general hermeneutic beyond the

2 Placher (ibid, 397), argues that revisionist theologians “seem to presuppose a universal human something-or-other which various religions, in their various ways, express.” Yet Tracy is insistent that he and other revisionists have incorporated a hermeneutical turn into their theology (See David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection," The Thomist 49 (1985), 463-65).


explanatory power of general rules. Among these revisionists narrative theologians, David Tracy’s work has had perhaps the most significant impact on contemporary theological method. Tracy insists on keeping theology public discourse by continually working to find some ground of commonality between Christian faith and those outside the Christian faith. Tracy grounds his Scriptural interpretation in the phenomenological hermeneutical methods of Ricoeur and Gadamer, insisting on a “method of correlation” which will keep Scriptural reading ‘public’ for all contemporary readers.\(^5\)

The revisionist project could perhaps be best described by three characteristics. First, while revisionists typically advance the basic insights of Schleiermacher and liberal Protestant theology, they differ from liberals in their partial acceptance of insights from classical theology which have found new expression in “neothomism” and “neo-orthodoxy.”\(^6\) Revisionists do not believe that the project of liberalism has been entirely successful, and they attempt to integrate the insights of modern culture with insights of the classical Christian faith in a critical way. Specifically, revisionists emphasize that entry into Christian faith occurs neither through a category of human reason, nor through

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\(^5\) See David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 12-55, and Tracy, *Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 59-62. For Tracy, revisionist method requires both a phenomenological and metaphysical analysis about God. Tracy (*Blessed Rage for Order*, 152), claims, “A metaphysical system is a construct of concepts designed to provide coherence for all ‘the facts’ on the basis of a theoretical model drawn from among the facts.” This is needed because, as Tracy (ibid, 136), claims “the objective ground or referent of all limit-experience and limit-language is that reality Christians name God.” This understanding of God requires some method of analysis that goes beyond simply phenomenological reflection.

\(^6\) James J. Buckley ("Revisionists and Liberals," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, ed. David and Rachel Muers Ford, The Great Theologians (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 214). Buckley (ibid), notes, “Today’s revisionaries aim to resolve problems left by the second stage [the reaffirmations of orthodoxy] precisely by creating a third stage which sublates the first two.” Theologians as diverse as Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, as well as most of the feminist and liberation theologies could be characterized as revisionist.
some philosophically demonstrable dimension of religious experience, but instead is first a gift of faith.\textsuperscript{7}

Second, contemporary revisionist theology has incorporated a hermeneutical turn occasioned by focusing on the linguistic constitution of the human being emphasized in recent philosophy.\textsuperscript{8} While the quest of contemporary revisionists is to show that theology is public dialogue which relates to the common sensibilities of modern human beings, revisionists do not necessarily assume that there is some universal pre-linguistic religious experience to which all persons are drawn.\textsuperscript{9} Instead, the group focuses on the relationship between the linguistic constitution of experience and the universal religious dimension of individuals.

Third, perhaps the most definitive characteristic of the revisionist project is the insistence to employ some criterion of correlation between orthodox Christian thought and contemporary modern society. Revisionist theology could be understood as a critical response to modernity which seeks to place Christian faith in mutually critical dialogue with postmodern philosophical thought. As revisionists think that the very understanding of God, Christ and human beings revealed in Christian faith requires critical engagement with the world, revisionists are interested in keeping theology in the public sphere in

\textsuperscript{7} See David Tracy, \textit{The Analogical Imagination}, 50.

\textsuperscript{8} See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," \textit{Union Seminary Quarterly Review} 34 (1979), 216, claims, “In one sense, therefore, texts do precede life. I can name God in my faith because the texts preached to me have already named him.”

\textsuperscript{9} Tracy (“Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: A Reflection,” \textit{The Thomist} 49, 1985, 461), claims, “The argument among explicitly hermeneutical theologians has been consistent: one can maintain the richer and broader understanding of ‘experience’ forged by the great liberals…only by dialectically relating it to recent understandings of ‘language’ (and thereby, inevitably, also to history and society.” Placher (“Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies,” 397), argues that revisionist theologians “seem to presuppose a universal human something-or-other which various religions, in their various ways, express.” This seems to be true, Placher argues, in spite of Tracy’s argument that he does not start from universal human experience.
mutual dialogue with secular fields of thought. Revisionists agree that the Christian faith makes truth claims which can be expressed in ways that are intelligible to modern secular society. Revisionists further agree that to make this language intelligible, the language of the God of classic theism must be continually corrected and refined through the various historical critical disciplines to be “related to human, religious, or specifically Christian experience.”

Traditional language must continually be revised in light of contemporary understanding. Revisionists emphasize that there are no pure or comprehensive texts or traditions, and hence critical revision and development must take place in both with the help of public criteria.

Postliberal theology is a recent trajectory of theology which is grounded in the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. The roots of the postliberal movement began at Yale in the 1970’s with the early work of Hans Frei and David Kelsey. According to George Hunsinger, the first significant use of the term “postliberal” occurred in Frei’s doctoral dissertation, where he compared Barth’s movement from liberal to “postliberal.” Yet the movement of “postliberal theology” became visible after the publication of George Lindbeck’s influential 1984 book, *The Nature of Doctrine*:

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10 Buckley, "Revisionists and Liberals," 217.


12 George Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 47. There, says Hunsinger (ibid), Frei noted three key emphases in Barth that will be significant for the new project of postliberal theology: “critical realism (dialectic and analogy), the primacy of God, and Christocentricity.” To over-generalize each movement, it could be said that while the chief theological influence is of the “revisionists” is Schleiermacher, the chief theological influence of “postliberals” is Karl Barth.
Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age.\textsuperscript{13} Among postliberal writers, Hans Frei has written the most influential material, specifically on the interpretation of Scripture. He continually emphasized the particularity of Jesus Christ as the center for the Christian faith and hence for all Scriptural reading.

Like revisionist theology, the postliberal trajectory also could be described by several distinct emphases. First, postliberals attempt to understand Christian reality primarily through a straight-forward reading of the Gospel narratives. Postliberals propose a model which allows the Scriptural texts to form the identity of the individual reader. Hans Frei’s hermeneutical project of realistic narrative is driven by a desire to allow a plain reading of Scripture render to the reader the unsubstitutable Person of Christ depicted in the Gospels. Frei’s goal is to eliminate those symbolic and mythical renderings of Christ presented by liberals and revisionists in order to allow Gospel-reading to render a straight-forward, orthodox Christology. Both Lindbeck and Frei emphasize that the Scriptural narratives are the indispensable place to understand the Christian God, as these narratives “render a character…offer an identity description of an agent,” who is the God of Christian faith.\textsuperscript{14} As Lindbeck puts it,

The narrative does this, not through accounts of what God is in and of himself, but through accounts of the interaction of his deeds and purposes with those of creatures in their ever-changing circumstances. These accounts reach their climax in what the gospels say about the risen, ascended, and ever-present Jesus Christ whose identity as the divine-human agent is unsubstitutably enacted in the stories


of Jesus of Nazareth. The climax, however, is logically inseparable from what precedes it.\textsuperscript{15}

The whole Christian canon must, for postliberals, be given priority in forming the experience of the individual reader, as it provides the language through which the reader can enter into religious experience. Postliberals insist on “the primacy of language as creating the possibility of fully human experience, instead of prior experience which could then be described in language.”\textsuperscript{16} Hence Lindbeck and Frei emphasize a return to an understanding of the storyline of the Bible to structure the experience of the reader as a Christian.

Second, postliberals propose that theology be developed through “intratextual” reflection rather than by critical correlation. Postliberals are worried that “the liberal tendency to redescribe religion in extrascriptural frameworks has once again become dominant,” after the movement of neo-orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{17} Postliberals insist that “religion is more like a cultural system that one linguistically inhabits, and within which one is shaped into a form of life, so that becoming religious is something like learning a language.”\textsuperscript{18} One of the focuses of Lindbeck’s “cultural-linguistic” program is to show that experience is formed by language rather than experience forming language. Postliberalism, then, “sees its primary task as descriptive rather than apologetic. Energies are concentrated more on explicating the internal structures and logic of Christian life

\textsuperscript{15} Lindbeck, “Toward a Postliberal Theology,” 95.


\textsuperscript{17} Lindbeck, “Toward a Postliberal Theology,” 99.

\textsuperscript{18} Hunsinger, “Postliberal Theology”, 54.
than on translating them into contemporary idioms through thought patterns.”¹⁹
Postliberals shun systematic correlation largely because they follow the trajectory
established by Karl Barth in emphasizing the priority of God and God’s self-revelation in
Jesus Christ over any other reality. ²⁰  Postliberalism’s focus on intratextuality does not
mean that theologians simply recite the biblical narrative.  Rather, as Lindbeck claims,
“inratextuality cannot be genuine, cannot be faithful, unless it is innovative.  A condition
for the vitality of these traditions is that they redescribe in their own distinctive idioms
the new social and intellectual worlds in which their adherents for the most part actually
live and into which humanity as a whole is now moving.” ²¹  The primary task of
theology, then, is to continually describe the mysteries of the Christian faith in such a
way that believers can describe their own existence in light of the Scriptures and self-
description of the Church.

Third, postliberals emphasize that apologetics must be undertaken in an *ad hoc*
fashion.  Fodor defines the term *ad hoc* as when “the occasion arises, in connection with
a particular issue, relative to a specific context, with respect to particular interlocutors.” ²²
This shift from systematic correlation to *ad hoc* correlation is intended to prevent a
particular method or philosophical description from overrunning the self-description of
the Church and its beliefs and practices.  This movement has led to a general tendency in

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¹⁹ James Fodor, "Postliberal Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to

²⁰ Hunsinger (“Postliberal Theology,” 52), shows that Frei emphasized in his doctoral
dissertation on Barth that “God’s priority” was a major reason for Barth’s rejection of liberalism.  See Frei,

²¹ Lindbeck, “Toward a Postliberal Theology,” 100.

²² Fodor, "Postliberal Theology," 231.
Lindbeck to understand “truth” as a matter of internal coherence, as doctrine is interpreted “in ‘cultural-linguistic’ or ‘regulative’ terms….as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action.”\textsuperscript{23} Yet other postliberals, such as Frei, display more of a method of critical realism in their \textit{ad hoc} correlation, continually emphasizing the need to implement conceptual schemes to relate the world of the text with the contemporary world, yet in such a way that Christianity is not redescribed in terms of contemporary experience.\textsuperscript{24}

The distinctive characteristics of these different trajectories have been seen most clearly in the debates between David Tracy and Hans Frei. Frei’s chief and ongoing complaint about Tracy’s model of theology is that it employs a systematic correlation between Christian tradition and human experience, which Frei feels grants authority to human experience over text and tradition. The consequences of Tracy’s model of systematic correlation, as Frei sees them, are the following: Tracy continually gives priority to a general philosophical scheme over specific Christian claims; he persistently gives priority to apologetics over the internal structure of the Christian faith; he fails to

\textsuperscript{23} Placher ("Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies," 397, citing Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 18), suggests that Lindbeck sees doctrinal “truths” as more a matter of internal coherence to the Christian system than “truths” based on some general form of logic.

\textsuperscript{24} Hunsinger ("Postliberal Theology," 46), distinguishes between Lindbeck and Frei, calling the former “neoliberal” and the latter “postliberal.” Hunsinger (ibid, 46), claims that Lindbeck’s “cultural-linguistic” program is so described because he promotes what Hunsinger calls a “pragmatist” theory of truth where “both ‘doctrine’ and ‘truth’ are so defined as to make them significantly non-cognitive” and “any conceivable propositional content in theological language is relativized.” Thus where liberal theology has described truth as “experiential-expressive,” and hence non-cognitive, Lindbeck’s proposal “relativizes doctrine’s propositional content…by redefinition (the ‘rule theory’) (47). Here Hunsinger emphasizes that postliberals have largely not been convinced by Lindbeck’s argument that doctrinal language does not refer beyond the community, and concludes that postliberals wish to claim that the Scriptural narratives really do render true (but analogical) claims about God, the referent of the text (46).
account adequately for the particularity of Christ. Tracy’s ongoing criticism of Frei, on the other hand, is that Frei’s exclusive focus on realistic narrative and the self-description of the Church will prohibit the Church from developing a truly public engagement with the world. For Tracy, the consequences of failing to establish a correlational criteria of intelligibility are the following: the Church may fail to make its message relevant to modern culture; the Church may fail to incorporate truth found outside itself into its own identity; and the Church’s failure to be self-critical may stifle the necessary pluralism within the Church rooted in Scripture itself. These disagreements about the relative the priority each accords to the relationship between Christian self-description and general systems of meaning have tended to overshadow the strong agreement both theologians for the primacy of the “plain sense” of Scripture, the need for narrative reading to render the particularity of Jesus Christ, and the need to move from the text itself to the disclosure of God in the Scriptures.

II. The Problem: Narrowing Hermeneutical Horizons to Text and Reader

The debate between Tracy and Frei about the relative priority of Christian self-description and general systems of meaning has caused their work on the interpretation of

25 I have adapted these three general criticisms from Mike A. Higton, "Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity," The Journal of Religion 79, no. 4 (1999), 566-91, esp. 577-86.


27 For these criticisms, see David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 113; Dialogue with the Other, the Inter-Religious Dialogue (Leuven and Grand Rapids: Peeters Press and Eerdmans, 1990), 114; and "On Reading the Scriptures Theologically," 43-57, respectively.
Scripture to focus heavily on method as they seek to show how the subject matter of Scripture is understood by readers. Tracy’s emphasis on the public nature of theology and his insistence that all religious texts are potentially disclosive of the divine cause him to adopt the phenomenological method of interpretation developed by Paul Ricoeur to show that the subject matter of the Bible confronts the reader in front of the text and creates a “new-mode-of-being-in-the-world,” or allows the reader to experience new existential possibilities. Frei’s emphasis on the particular identity of Jesus Christ rendered through a realistic reading of Scripture cause him to emphasize the literal sense of the Gospel narratives as normative for Christian reading and to extend that story throughout the whole Bible through the practice of figural reading. The debate has proven helpful in forcing theologians to more clearly articulate what is the subject matter of Scripture as well as how the texts render that subject matter to readers. Furthermore, the debate has forced theologians to reflect more precisely on the relative priority given to Christian self-description in relation to apologetic explanations of Christian faith to those outside the Church, as well as to gain a new appreciation for Scriptural narrative as the normative means by which the Christian faith is mediated to readers.

Yet while the discussion between Tracy and Frei has identified some important issues for the method of Scriptural interpretation, it has also drawn attention away from important aspects of a Christian interpretation of Scripture. While Tracy argues that the purpose of reading Scripture is the disclosure of the Divine who is always in radical proximity to the reader, and Frei insists that the purpose of reading Scripture is to

28 Tracy, The Blessed Rage for Order, 134.
recognize the identity of the Christ who is present to the reader, the narrowing of focus almost exclusively to the relationship between text and reader has caused considerations about the way in which the Triune God uses Scripture in the economy of redemption to be largely ignored. This attempt to treat the relationship of text and reader in biblical hermeneutics in isolation from the larger discussion of Scripture’s role in the economy of redemption has forced a number of polarities which have created certain impasses in the discussion about method. As a result, many important insights by both theologians have been overlooked by later theologians who tend to choose one author’s method over the other and likewise focus almost exclusively on the relationship between text and reader.

This narrowing of the discussion about Scriptural interpretation to the relationship between text and reader, ironically, has caused theologians to overlook the moment which is most central to Tracy and Frei’s understanding of Scriptural interpretation: the movement from the texts themselves to the spiritual reality disclosed by means of the texts. Central to the work of both Tracy and Frei is the goal of showing how Scripture is disclosive of the Triune God. Both Tracy and Frei would insist that “positive historical science is incapable of providing a complete interpretation of those spiritual realities.

30 The “economy of redemption” refers to the ordering of the various parts of God’s action in salvation history toward God’s final plan for creation. See here John J. and R.R. Reno O’Keefe, Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 37, where they give the examples of a “careful sequencing of events in historical narratives,” a well plotted story, and an outline of a text. They also use the examples of narrative sequencing which provides a pattern and demonstrates a predictive value about what will be next. Christ, rightly understood, was this interpretive principle which established the meaning of the Scriptures for the early Church. While the term “economy” often referred to the ordering of the Scriptures in light of Christ, it also referred to the organization of the various parts of God’s redemptive action among human beings. Not only did God call out a people and establish covenants with human beings in the Old Testament, but God continues to mediate salvation to human beings today through the New Covenant, the presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. According to Christian faith, God has established various realities to mediate the Mystery of Christ to human beings for salvation.
which are the ultimate subject matter of biblical texts.” Consequently, both agree that to read the Bible as Scripture, the reader must somehow make a move from text to spiritual reality. Yet when focus remains only on the relationship between text and reader, neither is able to articulate this movement. Not surprisingly, as their respective projects remain underdeveloped with regard to Scripture’s place in the economy of redemption (both in discussing the way in which the Triune God uses the Scriptural texts for self-mediation to readers and in articulating the unique capacity of the Church to receive Christ’s mediation in the Scriptural texts), Tracy and Frei disagree strongly about what it means to move from text to spiritual reality, how the reader makes such a move, and what exactly is rendered when the movement is made. For Tracy, the movement from letter to spirit occurs when the reader, through reading the text with the employment of a phenomenological system of general hermeneutics, encounters a reality so great that it leads the reader beyond what the hermeneutical system could render. Tracy most often describes this as limit-experiences, and he is at times unclear as to whether the ultimate referent of the text is human experience or God. For Frei, the referent of Scripture is

31 Marcellino G. D'Ambrosio, "Henri De Lubac and the Critique of Scientific Exegesis," Communio 19 (1992), 384. D’Ambrosio is speaking of Blondel and de Lubac, but the claim could describe a persistent emphasis in Tracy, Frei and Vanhoozer as well, as each attempts to go beyond general hermeneutics to account for the unique subject matter.

32 This movement may be variously described as the movement from reading the Bible to reading Scripture, as Joel B. Green, Siezed by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), or as the movement from the realm of nature to the realm of grace as William Abraham, Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). The four theologians in this dissertation are by no means unique in this emphasis, but it is this movement which will provide a lens for study since it is here that the crossroad between hermeneutical method and dogmatic description most urgently presents itself.

33 In this, Tracy follows Ricoeur’s argument in “Biblical Hermeneutics,” Semeia 4 (1975), 34. Ricoeur (ibid, 108), later claims, “These limit-experiences, redescribed by the limit-expressions of religious language, constitute the appropriate referent of this language.” For Tracy’s ambiguity about ultimate referent, see especially Hans W. Frei, Types of Christian Theology, ed. George and William Placher
the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ who cannot be thought of except as present to
the believer. Frei, then, emphasizes realistic reading (i.e. reading according to the plain
sense of the text) of the Gospel narratives as the means by which the movement from
letter to spiritual reality occurs as the risen, present Christ is mediated to readers.

While both authors disagree about this essential movement, it is difficult to know
how any further focus on only the relationship between texts and readers could advance
the discussion beyond its present impasse. It is only when the hermeneutical discussion
is broadened to include the way in which the Triune God uses Scripture for self-
mediation to the Church in the economy of redemption that it is possible to show how the
Scriptures disclose spiritual reality. Where the relationship between Christ, Scripture and
Church is left implicit, general principles of method are naturally appealed to in order
settle theological issues. Such methodological principles, while important for describing
the relationship between texts and readers, are insufficient to overcome theological
lacunas. Consequently, these result in impasses in hermeneutical discussions.

III. Proposal: Widening the Discussion to the Economy of Redemption

The impasses in method between Tracy and Frei can only be investigated and
advanced by first locating Scripture in the economy of redemption, thus allowing
discussions of hermeneutical method to flourish within the framework of explicit
dogmatic concerns. Locating Scripture in the economy of redemption means to develop

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Theology: A Conflict of Interpretations?” pp. 35-52.

34 See Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ. As Francis Watson (Text, Church, and World (Grand
“intratextual realism,” is “the irreducibly textual mediation of realities that nonetheless precede and
transcend their textual embodiment.”

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an explicitly theological articulation of the relationship between the Triune God, Scripture and Church to show how both Scripture and Church participate in the Mystery of Christ. To advance this discussion, I will explore the works of two other theologians, *Ressourcement* Catholic Henri de Lubac and Evangelical Protestant Kevin Vanhoozer. These two theologians have been chosen as dialogue partners to Tracy and Frei partly because each represents a significant theological trajectory in the past half century which is not frequently brought into dialogue with the revisionists and postliberals. Furthermore, both have been chosen because they begin their hermeneutical discussions with a theological description of the economy of redemption. This description explicitly considers God’s activity in Scripture and the responsive action of the reading community. Vanhoozer’s project is centered on his claim that God is the primary author of Scripture, who uses it as a covenant document to address the Church. The movement from text to spiritual reality, for Vanhoozer, takes place when the reader approaches the text with the correct theological presuppositions, thus treating the text respectfully and allowing the Spirit to apply God’s canonical speaking action to the reader. De Lubac’s project is centered on his claim that the literal sense sacramentally renders the spiritual sense of Scripture as Christ, who stands as active Subject of Scripture, uses the Scriptural texts to communicate with readers and incorporate them into the Church, the eschatological *totus*

35 The choice of a Catholic and a Protestant representing different theological trajectories is also significant, as a number of traditional relationships are being reinvestigated. Since the Reformation, it has been of great importance to Protestants to structure the Scripture/Church relationship in such a way that Scripture is able to stand apart from the Church and critique it. In Protestantism today this separation is being reevaluated, due in large part to new developments in hermeneutical theory. Ecumenically, Protestants are learning that interpretive communities play an indispensable role in interpretation, while Catholics, Evangelicals, and mainline Protestants are rediscovering the value of premodern exegesis. Debates about Scriptural hermeneutics, therefore, are being reformulated around theological issues such as the mediation of Christ to the Church, God’s self-communication to redeem believers, and the relationship between Scripture and ecclesiology.
Christus. The movement from text to spiritual reality, for de Lubac, takes place as the reader moves from encountering the events of salvation history recorded in the text to incorporation into the totus Christus, the eschatological body of Christ. For both theologians, then, reading Scripture correctly requires specific attention to the relationships between theological realities in the economy of redemption. By adding insights from Vanhoozer and de Lubac, it will be possible to see how the work of Tracy and Frei could be appropriated within the larger context of the economy of redemption in such a way that certain impasses between them are overcome.

IV. The Project: Sketching the Development of the Dissertation

This dissertation will seek to advance discussions for a theological interpretation of Scripture by describing Scripture’s relationship to Christ and the Church in the economy of redemption. Chapter one will examine the distinctive methods for Scriptural reading developed by Tracy and Frei in order to highlight both their unique contributions to hermeneutical method and certain impasses which have arisen through their debates. The chapter will discuss both constructions of method and ecclesiology to show that the discussion of text and reader in Scriptural hermeneutics cannot be accomplished in isolation from a discussion of the Church. This chapter will argue that these impasses have been caused by a narrowing of hermeneutical focus to the relationship between text and reader, and that such impasses could be overcome by placing Scripture in the broader context of the economy of redemption.

Chapter two will bring Vanhoozer into the discussion to show how an attempt to locate Scripture in the economy of redemption can expand hermeneutical discussion.
Vanhooker’s early work will be used to illustrate a failure in hermeneutical method because his singular concern to safeguard the authority of Scripture prevents him from locating Scripture’s place in the economy of redemption. This failure is corrected in Vanhooker’s later work, as Vanhooker specifically constructs a hermeneutical system based on God’s use of the biblical texts to lead the Church. Yet even in Vanhooker’s later project his lack of ecclesiological reflection leaves him with hermeneutical difficulties which significantly weaken his project.

Chapter three will examine the work of Henri De Lubac to show a different attempt to locate Scripture and Church in the economy of redemption. De Lubac’s insistence that Scripture must move from the literal sense to the spiritual senses of allegory, tropology, and anagogy will be examined within the context of his claim that Christ uses Scripture, as an incorporation of the Logos, to mediate Himself to His body the Church. Here it will be suggested that de Lubac’s articulation of Scripture’s place in the economy of redemption has allowed him to identify an essential moment in Christian reading, the movement from text to spiritual reality which de Lubac calls the “traditional hermeneutic.” Furthermore, it will be suggested that the integral unity that de Lubac finds between Christ, Scripture and Church will provide insights which could advance the hermeneutical discussion among all four authors.

Chapter four will place all four authors in dialogue to advance a more complete theological interpretation of Scripture within the context of the economy of redemption. The first section will examine the relationship between Christ, Scripture, and Logos to specify how Christ is both the subject matter of Scripture and the one who addresses the

Church by means of Scripture. Here de Lubac’s central claim that Christ is both Subject and Object of Scripture will serve as the hermeneutical lens by which all four authors will be evaluated and the dialogue advanced, as it shows the intrinsic connection between the Church’s traditional insistence on the plain sense of Scripture and the inevitable movement from text to spiritual reality that takes place in Christian reading. This section will show that when Scriptural interpretation is considered in this broader context, Frei’s emphasis on realistic reading and de Lubac’s emphasis on spiritual interpretation appear to be mutually complementary rather than in opposition to one another.

The second section will examine the relationship between the Scriptures and the Church to specify the unique capacity of the Church to receive the mediation of Christ in Scripture. Here de Lubac’s articulation of the relationship between Christ as the Incarnation of the Logos, Scripture, Church and Eucharist as incorporations of the Logos, and all persons as bearing an imprint of the Logos, will serve as the hermeneutical lens by which to illumine the varying degrees of participation in the Logos in the economy of redemption. This distinction will show the integral correspondence between Church and Scripture and will illumine the way in which the Church as a reading community stands in a unique location to receive and participate in the mediation of Christ. De Lubac’s articulation of the intrinsic connection between Scripture and Church will be used to show that the central concern of Vanhoozer and Frei to locate authority in either Scripture or the Church is largely a false dilemma, as both Scripture and Church bear authority through their participation in and mediation of the risen Christ. Having argued that the problem of authority could be largely overcome by showing the intrinsic relationship between Scripture and the experience of the Church, the chapter will return to the debate
between Tracy and Frei to argue that Tracy’s later work contains insights which could illumine the relationship between Scripture and the Church and advance the hermeneutical conversation.

Overall, then, the dissertation will seek to advance the discussion between Tracy and Frei in several ways. First, it will highlight the movement from text to spiritual reality, the illusive feature which both Tracy and Frei believe is central to a Christian interpretation of Scripture but which neither can adequately articulate because their projects narrow hermeneutical focus to the relationship between texts and readers. Second, it will show the validity of Frei’s project of realistic reading in fundamental agreement with, and not in opposition to, Tracy’s emphasis on transformative disclosure encountered in reading, since the same Jesus Christ who is rendered to the reader in the literal sense is the risen Christ who addresses readers by means of Scripture. Third, it will show the validity of Tracy’s emphasis on the experience of the reading community in fundamental agreement with Frei’s emphasis on the identity of Christ, as it demonstrates the intrinsic correspondence between the Scriptures and the Church in the economy of redemption. By examining hermeneutical debates within this broader context, the dissertation will show how these impasses between Tracy and Frei can be advanced to produce a more complete framework for the Christian interpretation of Scripture. Such a complete framework for Christian interpretation, it is hoped, can provide guidelines which apply to other theological trajectories beyond the immediate North American discussion.³⁷

³⁷It should be noted that this discussion about Frei and Tracy is predominantly a North American discussion about narrative theology. Yet the debate between Frei and Tracy, as well as the suggestions I propose to move beyond the impasse, do relate to a number of other theological trajectories.
Frei tirelessly insists that what is “behind the text” can never replace what is “in the text” as an adequate mediation of the particular Jesus Christ; he insists that a particular human ideal not replace the identity of the Person of Jesus Christ; and he insists that philosophical correlation be subordinated to the content that the texts render. Here I suggest points of contact between this debate and Latin American liberation theology, North American feminist revisionist theology, and theologies forged in inter-religious dialogue. First, Latin American liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino have emphasized the plain sense reading of Scripture and the disclosure of Christ to the Church in ways that are somewhat similar to the proposal presented here. Boff and Sobrino place considerable emphasis on the intrinsic relationship between the historical Jesus and the risen Christ experienced by the Church, as the historical Jesus provides not only the best model of one devoted to the poor and outcast, but is also the cosmic Christ who encounters those who seek liberation today (here Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), probably provides the most helpful model as it connects the historical person of Jesus Christ with the present cosmic Christ which the Church experiences. See also Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993). This insistence on the historical Jesus of the Gospels is admirable, and it keeps the Jesus Christ of history related to the Jesus Christ who addresses the Church today. Frei’s insistence on the identity of Jesus Christ as presented by the Gospel narratives would be largely in agreement with this impulse. Yet Frei, for example, would be critical of John Louis Segundo’s articulation of Scripture as divine pedagogy rather than divine inspiration (Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Dogma*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), argues God is the director of a long educational process, in which the Scriptures present a record of the ways in which God has caused the community to experience divine values. Segundo (ibid, 119-20), emphasizes that the community must go beyond the letter of the text, and uses the example of Jesus sending the Spirit to lead the disciples into all truth.). Frei would insist that the identity of the Person of Jesus Christ not be subordinated to the idea of liberation (however important is liberation). Frei would also insist that the texts themselves, rather than historical Jesus research, be considered primary in formulating the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ.

Second, Frei has provided a valid critique for feminist revisionists such as Elizabeth Johnson and Sallie McFague. The key challenge Frei sees for a post-liberal age is grounding the experience of the Church in the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. Frei would be concerned, for example, that Elizabeth Johnson often gives the theme of salvation priority over the identity of Christ as provider of that salvation, thus subordinating Christ to an idea of liberation (see, for example, Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 6). Furthermore, Frei would see in the work of Sallie McFague the worst of the liberal tradition, as she boldly constructs new paradigms for theology which are not related to the plain sense reading of the Gospel narratives (see, for example, see Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 199, for an account of the resurrection which is completely separated from Jesus’ historical life). Third, Frei’s work provides a critique for certain theologies developed in the context of inter-religious dialogue. For example, Frei would be wary of Raimon Panikkar’s strong distinction between the historical Jesus Christ and the risen, cosmic Jesus Christ which make it unnecessary to show that the historical Christ is necessary for an understanding of the cosmic Christ (for Panikkar, the particularity of Jesus Christ may be important for the Christian, but it is not necessary for those of other faiths, and even Buddha, Siva, Krishna, etc. could be Christ, not as many Christs, but as various expressions of Christ—see Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 121). Frei would agree with Peter Phan that the relationship between Jesus and other savior figures is “asymmetrical,” as Christ is the finality of revelation (see *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004, 67). Yet this asymmetry, Frei would argue, should lead to intertextual readings of Scripture which seek to make sense of all reality (including other religions) in light of Christ and His story. Overall, then, although this dissertation explores only an American hermeneutical discussion about the reading of Scripture, the conclusions which it will draw have relevance to other theological trajectories as well.
CHAPTER 1:
ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPASSES IN THE DEBATE BETWEEN HANS FREI AND DAVID TRACY

I. Introducing the Discussion Between Hans Frei and David Tracy

David Tracy and Hans Frei both began their publishing careers at about the same time, each proposing a very different trajectory for the project of theology. In 1974 Frei published his first (and best known) major work, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. By then Frei was already in his 50’s, and had been teaching at Yale University for over 15 years. This major work was followed up with another book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*, in 1975. Frei was concerned because he felt that the whole liberal tradition, and nearly all theology from the 18th century onward, had sought to employ hermeneutics in the service of apologetic defense of the Christian faith, and consequently hermeneutical method emphasized a combination of historical reconstruction and philosophical rationale grounded in general human experience. This Liberal approach was destined to failure, Frei argued, because it pressed the plain sense of the texts into the service of contemporary apologetics, thereby “eclipsing” the realism inherent in biblical narrative. Frei calls for a reassessment Christian theological method which would start from a return to the plain sense of the Gospel narratives. These two

38 This book had been published in the Presbyterian magazine *Crossroads* in 1967 as *The Mystery of the Presence of Jesus Christ*.

major works together argue that the only way to understand the meaning of Jesus Christ for readers today is to understand the particular identity of Jesus Christ as rendered in the plain sense of the Gospels.

As these two books were being published, David Tracy was finishing his first major work, *The Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*. At the time of its publication in 1975, Tracy was only 36 and had been teaching at the University of Chicago for five years. Tracy’s concern was to keep Christian theology relevant to the postmodern pluralistic situation, and in this book Tracy seeks to prepare theologians to engage pluralism by forming a method of critical correlation by which to relate Christian faith with contemporary meaning systems. Since Tracy had suggested that the two principle sources for the development of theology are common human experience (reflected upon best in language) and the Christian tradition (as preserved primarily in Christian symbols and texts), Tracy argued that phenomenological hermeneutics provided the best tools to carry out the task of mutually critical correlation. As a result, Tracy adopts the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer to engage this correlational task.

Tracy does not refer to Frei’s project until the publication of his second major work, *The Analogical Imagination* in 1981. In this work, Tracy suggests that Frei’s project is reconcilable with his own system of phenomenological hermeneutics, as he sees Frei’s project as a helpful examination of the genre of narrative among other

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genres. In this book, Tracy develops a model of the classic to show that the way in which texts and symbols in all cultures disclose truth to readers is analogous to the way in which Christian texts and symbols disclose the God of Christian faith to believers. Each genre in Scripture, Tracy argues, has disclosive potential as it is part of the whole religious text of Scripture. Tracy insists that the very Christian understanding of God requires discussion of God to be public, insisting that, “Any authentic speech on the reality of God which is really private or particularist is unworthy of that reality.” As a result, Tracy argues that the theologian is obligated to establish a method which correlates Christian theology with contemporary human experience.

For Frei, Tracy’s work represented exactly the ‘eclipsing’ of the identity of Jesus Christ that was so pervasive in the Liberal theological movement, as Tracy’s model seems to start with some presupposed idea about human understanding and then adapts the meaning of the biblical texts into that conceptual scheme. This method, Frei believed, would change the referent of the Gospel narratives from Jesus to the existential possibility of the reader, as the texts are said to envision a new “mode-of-being-in-the-world” for the receptive reader. In 1984, Frei’s colleague at Yale, George Lindbeck, wrote his influential work The Nature of Doctrine, accusing Tracy of being an “experiential-expressivist” (a theologian who understands doctrine to be simply a witness

41 See here David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, 251, 263, 288n.16, 291n.46, and 296-97n.81.

42 Ibid, 51.

43 Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ, 127.
to those common expressions of religious experience). Lindbeck’s book established postliberal theology as an identifiable theological trajectory in opposition to revisionist theology, and influenced Frei’s influential 1986 article entitled “The ‘Literal Reading’ of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break?,” which was directed squarely against the phenomenological hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and David Tracy. In this article, Frei criticized any attempt to start with a general hermeneutical method for Scriptural reading, suggesting that general method can only lead to a pre-conceived, general conclusion which will depreciate the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. To make this argument, Frei abandoned his earlier claim that ‘realistic reading’ is a necessary feature of the texts themselves and instead claims that the Gospels must be read realistically because the community has established this reading practice. To ground his own argument for a literal reading of Scripture in the structure of the texts themselves, Frei realized, would be to simply pose one general hermeneutical system against another. Consequently, Frei decided to ground his argument for plain sense reading in community consensus rather than in the features of the text itself.

Unfortunately, Frei’s unexpected death in 1988 prevented him from completing his anticipated work on the history of Christology since the Enlightenment. Some of Frei’s preparation for that work was published in 1992 as Types of Christian Theology, in which Frei compares the relative value accorded to philosophical reflection and Christian


45 Hans W. Frei, "Literal Reading," 36-77.

self-description by contemporary theologians in the construction of theological method.\footnote{Frei, \textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 28-56.} In that work, Frei characterized Tracy’s method as one in which “external description and self-description” are grounded in a “foundational philosophical scheme,” and finds it ultimately unhelpful to the development of Christian theology.\footnote{Frei (\textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 6), claims that Tracy “tries to have it both ways,” (i.e. allow for the particularity of revelation and determine it by a general philosophical schema) yet in the end “either reverts to” type one and allows philosophy to dictate the discussion, or it “simply ends in hermeneutical incoherence” of type two.} However, since it is not known exactly when Frei wrote this portion of his work, it is not possible to say with certainty how Frei viewed Tracy’s later work.\footnote{Hunsinger and Placher (“Editorial Introduction” in Hans Frei, \textit{Types of Christian Theology}, x), suggest that Frei may have tempered his criticism of Tracy as Tracy incorporated Frei’s insights during mid 1980’s. However, in the Edward Cadbury Lectures given at the University of Birmingham in 1987, Frei uses Tracy as representative of type 2 of his eventual \textit{Types of Christian Theology} (See Hans W. Frei, "The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith: Mediating Theology as a System," in \textit{The Edward Cadbury Lectures} (University of Birmingham: Yale Divinity School Library, 1987, noted by Mike A. Higton, \textit{Christ, Providence and History: Hans Frei's Public Theology} (London & New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 266). Any change in Frei’s perspective, then, would have come in the final year of Frei’s life.}

As early as 1981, Tracy had argued that there was no fundamental incompatibility between Frei’s project and his own correlational program. Throughout his career and especially after Frei’s death, Tracy has expressed appreciation for Frei’s insistence on realistic reading and has sought to incorporate Frei’s insights into his own work.\footnote{David Tracy, "On Reading the Scriptures Theologically," in \textit{Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck}, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 64, n. 51, has seen Frei’s insights as corrective to his own work. See also David Tracy, \textit{On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics and the Church} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).} Yet Tracy remains wary of any hermeneutical project which does not seek to make Christian theology public, and insists that the task of the systematic theologian is to show the
relevance of Christian faith to contemporary human experience. As a result, Tracy has never accepted Frei’s project as a “wholesale” program for theology, but sees it as yielding one important about narrative reading which can be integrated into his own larger correlational method.

This chapter will provide an overview of the projects of Tracy and Frei and will focus on the basic disagreements between them as they articulate a method for reading Scripture in the Church. In the first section, I will examine the way in which each theologian understands the relationship between text and readers in which interpretation takes place. Then I will examine a key difficulty faced by each in articulating a model of textual interpretation. I will suggest that Frei’s greatest struggle is determining whether to ground authority for the plain sense in the text or in the reading community, and that Tracy’s greatest struggle is determining how to let the particular claims of Scripture be recognized in a way that is not muted by a general theory of interpretation. These difficulties are heightened, I will suggest, by a nearly exclusive focus on the text/reader relationship in the hermeneutical model. In the second section, I will examine the way in which each theologian describes the Church as reading community in the process of interpretation. I will suggest that the almost exclusive focus on textual method has caused both theologians to focus on the Church as a social reality instead of as a theological reality. I will conclude by showing how an overemphasis on the text/reader relationship has led to impasses in the theological discussion and will suggest that these

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51 Tracy ("On Reading the Scriptures Theologically," 36), claims that he insists on both a criteria of “appropriateness” (that which examines the coherence of the logic of Christian faith) and a criteria of “intelligibility or credibility” (that which relates Christian faith to the contemporary situation).

52 Ibid, 37.
impasses could be overcome, in part, by better accounting for God’s active mediation to the Church in the process of Scriptural interpretation.

II. Scriptural Interpretation: Emphasizing the Text/Reader Relationship

Tracy and Frei stand together in their insistence both that the Scriptures are authoritative for the Church, and that the Scriptures are sufficiently clear to be read plainly by all readers. Furthermore, both Tracy and Frei emphasize that the subject matter of Scripture is so unique that it is capable of reorienting the very identity of the reader who approaches these texts with an intention to understand it. Most significantly, these theologians agree that both Scripture’s authority and the way in which it renders its unique content to readers must be identified and safeguarded through a particular method of reading. Yet Tracy and Frei have disagreed sharply about the kind of method needed to safeguard both the unique content of the text and the ability of the text to reorient the reader. Early in his career Frei places emphasis on the text itself, arguing that the text “renders” or “depicts” the truth contained as the reader simply reads it plainly. Later in his career Frei continues to emphasize the straightforward reading of the plain sense, but seeks to ground the use of the plain sense in the authority of the early Christian community. Throughout his career, Tracy places most emphasis on the activity of the reader in relation to the text, constructing a phenomenological system of understanding in which the text discloses truth to the interpreter. Tracy makes it clear that his focus “principally relates to the tradition which focuses upon the reader’s response or the
reception of the work.” This disagreement on method between Tracy and Frei has resulted in a number of impasses in Scriptural interpretation and has deepened divisions between revisionists and postliberals.

This section will show the way in which each author focuses almost exclusively on the relationship between text and reader to construct his respective method. The tensions between the two theologians about method, I will argue throughout the dissertation, can be eased (though not entirely overcome) as the text/reader discussion is placed within a larger theological construct of the relationship between the Triune God and the Church, and God’s use of the biblical text for self-communication. Discussion of the economy of redemption will place biblical text, individual reader and Church in relationship to one another and understand all three as having a role in God’s plan of salvation. Placing the Frei/Tracy debate in this broader context will broaden the discussion of the relationship between texts and reading community.

A. The Focus on Method in Frei and Tracy: Aims and Influences

This section will examine the development of hermeneutical method by Frei and Tracy, providing an analysis of the greatest influences upon each theologian’s project. It

53 Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, 121.

54 See John J. and R.R. Reno O’Keefe, Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 37-44, 84-88, 107-113. See Mark Allen Bowald, Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 1-2, who claims that the decisive element in hermeneutical decisions is either text, reader, or author. I would suggest that historical circumstances have often caused one element to be given priority over another. Premodern exegesis placed much emphasis on the divine author. Since the Enlightenment the emphasis has shifted almost exclusively to the text and human author. Most recently, in postmodern discussions, emphasis has shifted to reader (and reading communities).
will seek to show the contribution they makes to Scriptural hermeneutics as they employ philosophical and literary resources to advance their central interpretive aims. As a result of this examination of method, it will be possible to more carefully locate the disagreements between Frei and Tracy.

1. Frei: Scripture Renders the Unsubstitutable Identity of Jesus Christ

_Aims:_ The primary emphasis of Frei’s hermeneutics is to show how the Gospel texts render the identity of Jesus Christ, and through that identity, His presence today. From the beginning of his career, Frei argued that primarily because of modern hermeneutical endeavors “anthropological and Christological apologetics” have become the primary concern of modern theology. The chief goal of contemporary theologians has been to try to fit the gospel stories into present-day criteria, focusing on historical categories, apologetics, and general categories of meaning. Frei feels that this preoccupation with explaining biblical events in terms of present experience has caused an “eclipse” of biblical narrative as it has posited the necessity for an external criteria of

55 Hans W. Frei, "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," in _Theology and Narrative_, ed. George and William Placher Hunsinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27. Frei (ibid), argues that the theological procedures have been the same throughout the Enlightenment and to the present. What has changed “has been the sensibility, the image men have of their humanity, that constitutes the raw data on which theological analysis of an anthropological kind goes to work.” Elsewhere Frei actually suggests that the problem of philosophical method overwhelming the plain sense actually precedes Enlightenment hermeneutics and goes back to the union of philosophy and theology in the medieval academies. Frei proposed that in the institutional structure of western culture as it developed, where theology was regarded “queen of the sciences,” “theology has a generally accessible subject matter,” and “theology and philosophy are bound to be closely if perhaps oddly related, especially when philosophy is regarded...as being the 'foundation’ discipline providing all-fields-encompassing arguments and criteria for meaning and certainty” (Hans W. Frei, "Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative: Some Hermeneutical Considerations," in _Theology and Narrative_, ed. George and William Placher Hunsinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 95). This entire structure is suspect to Frei, and he regards it as more of a historical accident than as a necessary feature of Christianity.
meaning to determine the validity of biblical stories, and hence has subordinated the plain ascriptive reading of the biblical narrative to philosophical schemas.\textsuperscript{56} To the modern interpreter, both dogmatics and metaphysics must be bracketed in order to attend to a critical reading of the biblical text. Yet Frei proposes that this bracketing has been largely responsible for an external meaning structure eclipsing the biblical texts. For Frei, modern theology must radically change its focus in order to return to a faithful rendering of the essence of Christianity.\textsuperscript{57}

Frei, then, resists a system where anthropological or philosophical concerns become the organizing or systematic principle for interpreting the Christian faith. Frei believes that systematic correlation always gives the general philosophical system priority over Christian self-description in determining meaning for Christianity, as it continues the eclipse. Ultimately, Frei is worried that “the story of the gospel by itself becomes an extended metaphor,” so that we again need “a correlation, a new disclosure of a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world that will fit with our contemporary limit experience.”\textsuperscript{58} To avoid this eclipse, Frei believes, modern theology must become more self-critical about allowing general philosophical meaning systems to determine the meaning of Christianity. Frei’s earliest paper reflects his lifelong appeal: “My plea here

\textsuperscript{56} Hans W. Frei, \textit{The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative}, 1-10. Frei (“Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,” 28), notes, “If the aim of the theological enterprise has been almost wholly apologetic, its organizing or \textit{systematic principle} largely anthropological, its \textit{doctrinal content} has been well-nigh exclusively Christological.” The result is that modern theology has focused on salvation, which has been oriented around a modernist notion of the human person in general, so that Christ’s saving action replaces his identity.

\textsuperscript{57} Frei’s proposed alternative, (ibid, 27), to this trajectory of modern theology is “either a nonapologetic and dogmatic, rather than systematic, theological procedure in which Christology continues to be the crucial ingredient or else a metaphysic or ontology in which Christology would play a peripheral role.”

\textsuperscript{58} Frei, \textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 62.
Frei’s goal in his first two books, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* and *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, is to restore a focus on the unsubstiututable identity of Jesus Christ as the center of the Christian faith through a plain reading of the Gospel narratives. In both, his constructive proposal is that the text itself renders an unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ in such a way that simply reading it plainly will lead the reader to acknowledge the unique identity of Jesus. This unsubstiututable identity has been eclipsed, Frei believes, by the modern quest for grounding all theological claims in categories of human meaningfulness. This extrinsic structure must be removed to allow the Gospels to speak for themselves. The Gospel narratives, he thinks, are quite plain in meaning, even if the interpreter struggles to fit them into a general framework of meaning. In Frei’s early work, then, all the emphasis is on the activity of the text—the text which “renders,” “deploys,” “articulates,” “depicts,” “instantiates” its meaning to the reader as the reader reads it plainly.

*Influences: Erich Auerbach, New Criticism, Gilbert Ryle:* Yet in order to show that extrinsic meaning systems ought to be removed to read Scripture, Frei must show how the texts really do render the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ plainly. Frei

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60 Frei (*Types of Christian Theology*, 86), claims, “We can understand more and communicate better concerning these texts (and others) than we’ll ever be able to understand how we understand, or what the conditions of the possibility of our understanding them might be…the usefulness of the theories we employ is discovered in the process of application, of actual exegesis; their use is indispensable, unsystematic, and subordinate to the text and its exegesis.”

uses a number of concepts not taken from contemporary literary theory and modern psychology to emphasize the plain sense of the narratives. It is clear, then, that Frei intends to bring in extrinsic formulations for his explanation of the identity of Jesus Christ, although he insists that they are less high-powered than full-blown systems of meaning. This section will focus on Frei’s use of three major influences: Erich Auerbach, the New Criticism, and Gilbert Ryle. 

Frei refers to the Gospels as “realistic narrative,” a category which he derives from Erich Auerbach. Frei proposes that this genre works this way:

Realistic narrative reading is based on one of the characteristics of the Gospel story, especially its later part, viz., that it is history-like…In other words, whether or not these stories report history (either reliably or unreliably), whether or not the Gospels are other things besides realistic stories, what they tell us is a fruit of the stories themselves. We cannot have what the stories are about (the ‘subject matter’) without the stories themselves. They are history-like precisely because like history-writing and the traditional novel and unlike myths and allegories they literally mean what they say. There is no gap between the representation and what is represented by it.

Frei uses Auerbach because Auerbach recognizes a quality in the biblical texts that began with Homer—a world is proposed into which the reader can enter, regardless of if that world is actually existing or not. The intensity of this realistic quality is much

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62 In the beginning of The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, vii-viii, Frei specifically mentions his debt to Erich Auerbach (especially Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature), Karl Barth (especially the “later volumes” of Church Dogmatics), and Gilbert Ryle (especially The Concept of Mind). The influence New Criticism also appears significant.

63 Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, vii, suggests that “no student of the Bible has ever denied the power and aptness of the analysis of biblical passages and early Christian biblical interpretations in the first three chapters of Mimesis.”

64 Hans W. Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ, xiii-xiv.

stronger in the biblical narratives, however, because they involve not only the proposal of a “realistic” world, but also the absolute belief claim that the world of this text is the absolute world. Auerbach writes that the biblical authors’ religious intent involves an absolute claim to historical truth…The Biblical narrator was obliged to write exactly what his belief in the truth of the tradition…demanded of him…What he produced, then, was not primarily oriented toward ‘realism’…it was oriented toward truth…The Bible’s claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer’s, it is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world…The Scripture stories do not, like Homer’s court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels. 66

This world of the text calls the reader to enter and adapt to its world, rather than allowing the reader to adapt it to his or her own situation. As a result, “Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history.”67 This willingness to fit oneself into the world of the text was quite “easy” until the Enlightenment when “through the awakening of a critical consciousness, this becomes impossible, the Biblical claim to absolute authority is jeopardized; the method of interpretation is scorned and rejected, the Biblical

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67 Ibid, 15.
stories become ancient legends, and the doctrine they had contained, now disassembled from them, becomes a disembodied image.”  

The Enlightenment, then, contributed to a reversal from the “text absorbing the world” to the “world absorbing the text.”  

This reversal itself must be reversed and realistic reading restored in order to reestablish the primacy of the person and work of Jesus Christ as presented in the Gospel narratives.  

The plain sense of the New Testament, for Frei, also includes figural readings. It must, because the entire Bible must be read as a unified whole. Reading the gospel narratives literally will mean that other parts of the Bible will have to be ordered toward the Christ event as part of the literal sense. As a result, Frei includes figural readings in the literal sense because it also is oriented toward the identity of Christ as the center of the Christian Scriptures.  

Figural readings simply are not foundational—they are able to arise only as they are grounded on the plain reading of the Gospel narratives. Frei appreciates Auerbach’s insight of the great change in the interpretation of the Old Testament by the New Testament community. Auerbach had written,  

“Paul and the Church Fathers reinterpreted the entire Jewish tradition as a succession of figures prognosticating the appearance of Christ, and assigned the Roman Empire its proper place in the divine plan of salvation. Thus while, on the one hand, the reality of the Old Testament presents itself as complete truth with a

68 Ibid, 16.  
69 George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 118.  
70 Frei disagrees with the Reformers who had rejected all other senses of Scripture to preserve the literal sense, insisting that as long as the literal sense is preserved, other senses, and indeed, a plurality of readings, may be incorporated. Examining this relationship as a historian, Frei notes, “In view of the centrality of the story of Jesus in the interpretive tradition from the earliest days forward and its crucial part in the rise of the sensus literalis to eventual predominance, one may well see a connection between this story and the fascinating blurring between allegorical and figural or typological interpretation that one soon observes in Christian scriptural reading, for typology is in fact a not easily specifiable and yet definite bridge between allegorical and literal reading.” Frei (“Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 111), notes that he has gotten this insight from Auerbach, Mimesis, chapters 2-3.
claim to sole authority, on the other hand that very claim forces it to a constant interpretative change in its own content; for a millennia it undergoes an incessant and active development with the life of man in Europe.”

Realistic narrative, or a plain sense reading, is oriented to the particular Jesus Christ, and all else, including our human situation today is read in that light. Frei would agree with Tracy that the interpreter must take the present situation of the reader into account. But Frei would insist that the present situation will be reinterpreted in light of the plain sense of the Gospel passion/resurrection accounts rather than the Gospel accounts being interpreted in light of a general, extrinsic understanding of the situation. This neglect of a realistic reading is the central concern of Frei’s most influential book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. There Frei agrees with Auerbach that a realistic reading is central to the Bible. Early in that book, Frei provides a definition for realistic narrative:

To state a thesis: a realistic or history-like (though not necessarily historical) element is a feature, as obvious as it is important, of many of the biblical narratives that went into the making of Christian belief. It is a feature that can be highlighted by the appropriate analytical procedure and by no other, even if it may be difficult to describe the procedure—in contrast to the element itself.

Frei argues that interpreters all agreed that this specific feature of realistic narrative existed, yet because they had no method to identify it, realistic narrative was ignored. It was this eclipse which forced interpreters to abandon the plain meaning of the text and search for some other criteria by which to understand the texts. Frei does not

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71 Auerbach, 16.


73 Ibid, 10-11.
dismiss other readings of Scripture such as allegorical, metaphorical or even mythological readings. Frei simply argues that they cannot be considered the plain sense of the text and hence cannot be considered the normative Christian reading which provides the identity of the Christian Church.\(^{74}\) Once the ascriptive identity of Christ through the Gospel narratives has been recognized, it is possible to incorporate many other readings, or to employ all kinds of schema of general meaning to help illumine the text.\(^{75}\)

Frei also makes a second hermeneutical move which is influenced by Erich Auerbach, extending the realistic narrative of the gospels to the whole canon by means of figural reading.\(^{76}\) Frei claims that the literal sense can be extended to the whole of the Scriptural canon, so that “Without loss to its own literal meaning or specific temporal

\(^{74}\) Hans W. Frei, "Conflicts in Interpretation: Resolution, Armistice, or Co-Existence?,” in *Theology and Narrative*, ed. George and William Placher Hunsinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 165. Interestingly, though, Frei does not automatically reject Sallie McFague’s use of Jesus as ‘parable of God.’ Instead, he claims that both approaches (his own and hers) are not to be placed in a state of “irresolvable conflict.” Thus “it becomes warfare only if it becomes systematized into a parody of two mutually exclusive approaches. Instead one has constantly to ask oneself which of these can more easily accommodate the other in a subordinate position, that is, keep on using it and not leave it behind the deployment of the more dominant procedure.”

\(^{75}\) Ibid, 166. In fact, Frei (ibid), argues that “if the literal ascriptive sense that has been the tradition of the Church is guarded, then why not a recrudescence of other internal textual devices? Why then cannot the critic and the ordinary reader accommodate himself to such purely textual modes as structuralism or post-structuralism, that is to say, those modern versions of the allegorical sense?”

\(^{76}\) Auerbach describes Origin as an early Christian exegete who dismisses the realistic nature of the Old Testament, subsuming those events into spiritual reality. For Frei, a key distinction exists between “figural” and “figurative,” where the former retains its historical significance while the latter loses its historical importance and is subsumed into the spiritual reality. According to Auerbach (“Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 39), Augustine, unlike Origen, developed a view of the Old Testament which was “pure phenomenal prophecy,” in which the reader must “believe what is read to have actually taken place as the reading narrates,” yet is fulfilled in the New. Ultimately Frei will disagree with Auerbach about the literal reading of the Gospels. Auerbach understands the narrative rendering of the Gospels to be the response of the disciples to the passion of Christ, while Frei insists that the Gospels are principally about the identity of Christ, which is rendered through His actions. (See here Frei, *Identity*, 116, and John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 158).
reference, an earlier story (or occurrence) was a figure of a later one.”

This means that the whole biblical canon is to be read as a unified “world of one temporal sequence” in which “there must in principle be one cumulative story to depict it.” Frei believes that figural reading preserves the historical reality of both type and antitype, as an Old Testament figure has a real and new meaning added by means of being incorporated into a broader story so that they are “not only preserved but enhanced.” Dawson claims, significantly, that

Frei frames the relation between the two testaments using the comprehensive category of story rather than meaning. The image, appropriate to narrative, is linear rather than vertical: a single story, like a novel in which only the first half is read, appears to be incomplete in itself and calls out of its own incompleteness for the remainder of the storyline (a ‘sense of ending’) that would complete it.

Frei, following Auerbach, strongly distinguishes figural reading from allegory, seeing the former as intratextual reading and the latter as extratextual reading. Allegory, for Frei and Auerbach, is a universal meaning not grounded in a historical event (and therefore abstract), which can be placed as a guiding structure to unify a story. Frei

77 Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 2.
78 Ibid.
79 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 143. Figural reading, as Frei (Eclipse, 2), understands it, is “literalism at the level of the whole biblical story and thus of the depiction of the whole historical reality.”
80 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 164.
81 Frei (“Karl Barth: Theologian,” in Theology and Narrative, ed. George and William Placher Hunsinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 168-69), claims, “Allegory, we know, is the literary personification of abstract qualities, usually personal attributes—virtue, reason, faith, courage. At the opposite end from allegory there is the description of personal, earthly existence, which is just what it is and neither is nor ‘means’ something else. And between them there is ‘figura,’ which is itself and yet points beyond itself to something else that it prefigures.” Here “figura” is a real historical person or event
thinks that Kant is the perhaps the best example of allegorical reading, as Kant develops “a description of a stage-by-stage process, in which the stages of the narrative are paralleled by similar stages in the real subject matter to which the narrative points, and which we know independently of the narrative.”

Furthermore, Frei thinks that allegory has often diminished appreciation for the Old Testament narrative and bordered on Marcionite interpretation. Frei’s goal, then, is to establish the literal sense as the only legitimate sense of Scripture and extend this unified story of the identity of Christ to both the “figura” before and the contemporary reader after Christ.

Frei suggests that the better way to articulate this relationship is as “promise” where there exists “the fulfillment of an earlier by a later historical event in a chronological sequence,” and “earlier and later are at the same time related as trope to true meaning.”

Frei insists, then, on respecting the temporal structure of the canon, reading patiently from figure to fulfillment to observe how the later fulfills the former. All figural reading must take place as the reader reads the story in narrative sequence. Frei claims, “Because interpretation is part of this flowing stream, meaning emerges only which can be incorporated into a larger history-like narrative sequence, where a further, enhanced meaning emerges in the antitype.

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83 Frei thinks that the strong opposition between Old and New Testaments established by a focus on allegory in the early Church borders on Marcionite interpretation (see Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 163). Frei (*Literal Reading*, 41), claims that wherever the “letter” (i.e. the Old Testament) was viewed in opposition to the “spirit” of the New Testament, “figural and allegorical” readings are considered the same thing, and the “Spiritual reading” which is achieved is done so by those within the Christian faith rather than those outside, and the reality disclosed is a “‘heavenly,’ spiritual or religious, rather than earthly…” reality.

84 Frei, *Literal Reading*, 41.
as a sequence is narrated from figure to fulfillment.”

Although the biblical reader knows how the narrative will end, “The task of interpretation is to garner the sense of the narrative, and not interfere with it by uniting historical and/or narrative sequence with a logically distinct meaning…” Frei, then, is wary of any attempt to read the Old Testament in light of the New in such a way that meaning is accessed in a way other than what the narrative itself renders on its own terms.

Figural reading extends the biblical narrative, as the “one and only real world,” to “embrace the experience of any present age and reader.” As the figural reading is extended to the reader, the reader finds his or her own identity in Christ. Christ’s “identity as this singular, continuing individual, Jesus of Nazareth, includes humankind in its singularity….To be ‘the first born among many brethren’ (and sisters) is his vocation and his very being.” Hence individuals find their own identity in extending the story of Jesus’ unsubstitutable identity to themselves. Frei realizes that the decision to read figuratively is not an inherent quality of the text itself, but is grounded in a theological

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85 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 156.

86 Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 36.

87 Frei, ibid, 3.

88 According to Frei, ("Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," in Theology and Narrative, ed. George and William Placher Hunsinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 86), readers must “identify themselves with the identity, not of a universal hero or savior figure, but of the particular person, Jesus of Nazareth, the manifest presence of God in their midst, who has identified himself with them.”

presupposition of God’s providential action in history. Both figure and fulfillment can be considered as such because both are part of a larger providential ordering of history by God. Hence in Christ all individuals find their own identity through incorporation into the story of God’s action in history.

Along with Auerbach’s concept of realistic narrative, Frei also gained insights from the literary development called New Criticism. New Criticism is not definable as a movement, but is better understood a “reading practice” in which the reader focuses on the “system of relationships” within the text rather than those between the text and the outside world. Thus the “literary text is a free-standing, autonomous object, containing meanings that are specific to the context provided by the text.” Meaning is contained

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90 Frei (Types of Christian Theology, 14), realizes that when Christians read the Old Testament figurally, they do not necessarily follow the realistic, history-like character of the text. Jews may legitimately charge Christians with wrong reading.

91 Dante is the best expression of this figural reading, for Auerbach. Auerbach (“Figura,” 71), claims that Dante “undertook ‘to conceive the whole earthly historical world…as already subjected to God’s final judgment and thus put in its proper place as decreed by the divine judgment,…in so doing, he does not destroy or weaken the earthly nature of his characters, but captures the fullest intensity of their individual earthly-historical being and identifies it with the ultimate state of things…” Mike A. Higton (Christ, Providence and History, 130), notes that, “For Augustine, the promise-fulfillment scheme is now threefold rather than a simple binary opposition: the new promise, the fulfillment of the old, still looks forward to a final, eschatological fulfillment.”

92 Stephen Matterson, "The New Criticism," in Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide, ed. Patricia Waugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 166-67. New Criticism is similar to formalism in that “Language functions in a different way in a work of literature than it does elsewhere, and the first job of the reader is to acknowledge and apprehend this special function and the role it plays in the formation of meaning.”

93 Ibid, 170. The language of the text is unique since, according to Mattison (ibid), “[L]iterary language is non-functional language, because the language is doing more than giving us straightforward information… it was through literature that we come to fullest knowledge of reality, since in it language is used in a way that reflects all of our human needs and resources, which are not only utilitarian…Being different from other uses of language, this system ensures that the literary artifact is autonomous…”

94 Mattison (ibid, 171), claims that because the text is autonomous, meaning is “context-specific, but is also part of the overall experience of the poem, how it sounds, how it appears on the page.”
completely within the bounds of the text, and is thus “intratextual.” The text must be
distanced from its original composition (the “intentional fallacy”) and tradition of
interpretation (the “affective fallacy”), in order to be freed to render its contents to the
reader.

One effect of this isolation of the text for a plain reading is a denial of the
authority of the author. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, there are two principal
reasons that the author is irrelevant to the judgment of the meaning of a literary text. The
first reason is that authorial intent is never quite clear and may always be disputed. The
second, and more important, reason is that “to invoke intention was to threaten the
integrity of the text by introducing the figure of the author. Once the text’s boundaries
were threatened, then the text could not be seen as a system of language operating with

95 See Frei, “Literal Reading,” 72. The term here is from Lindbeck (The Nature of Doctrine,
118), who claims, “Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than
translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world,
rather than the world the text.”

96 See W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of
Poetry (KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3-40. The “Intentional Fallacy is a confusion between
the poem and its origins…It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological
causes of the poem and ends in biography and relativism” (21). The “Affective Fallacy is a confusion
between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does)...It begins by trying to describe the standard
of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism.” The
result of both fallacies is that “the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to
disappear” (21).

97 Wimsatt and Beardsley (ibid, 10), argue because that internal evidence is “public” (part of
the work and available to all responsible readers), while external evidence is “private” (“not part of the
work as a linguistic fact”), only the first should be part of the study of the text. Even the author’s notes,
added to the text, are no longer “external indexes to the author’s intention;” rather, they are not “parts of the
poem.” The author must be kept at a distance if the poem is to be studied with integrity (16).
its own rules.”98 The author must be removed if the text was to operate as its own semiotic system.99

Frei claims his own use of realistic narrative is similar to “New Criticism” in that,

Both claim that the text is a normative and pure ‘meaning’ world of its own which, quite apart from any factual reference it may have, and apart from its author’s intention or its reader’s reception, stands on its own with the authority of self-evident intelligibility. The reader’s ‘interpretation’ can, and indeed has to be, minimal, reiterative, and formal, so that the very term ‘interpretation’ is already misleadingly high-powered. In the case of the ‘realistic’ novel these are devices such as temporal structuring, the irreducible interaction of character and plot, ordinary or ‘mixed’ rather than elevated style, and so forth. These devices are said to be of the very essence of the text and of its quality as a linguistic sacrament, inseparable from the world that it is (rather than merely represents), but also the means by which that world is rendered to the reader so that (s)he can understand it without any large-scale ‘creative’ contribution of his/her own.100

Frei appreciates New Criticism because it provides a model for reading plainly that is “less high-powered than hermeneutical theory.”101 The interpreter is freed from prolegomenal discussions of meaning and is able to simply interpret the text as it stands. One of the benefits Frei sees in New Criticism is that it separates meaning from truth and focuses only on meaning, since the text is a self-contained unit.102 Truth here refers to


99 It is crucial to notice the difference here between New Critics and Structuralists/ Poststructuralists on the distanciation of the author from the text. Matterson (“The New Criticism,” 171), notes that “For structuralists and poststructuralists, the removal of the author from critical consideration was an act of liberation which meant that the text could be scrutinized in the contexts supplied by historical and social discourses, languages outside the text. For the New Critics, removing authorial intentionality was part of a strategy of sealing off the boundaries of the text and ensuring that only the words on the page were the true focus of critical judgment.”

100 Hans W. Frei, "Literal Reading," 140.

101 Ibid, 141.

102 Ibid. Frei (ibid), claims that study of the text “is confined to ‘meaning’ as logically distinct from ‘truth’” and because “the formal features of realistic narrative about which it generalizes are as often
the actual occurrence of the referent of the text. Truth depends on the correspondence of a text to a referent. Meaning, on the other hand, refers to the sense rendered by the configuration of the text itself, irrespective of the referent. The reader can grasp the meaning of the text without knowing anything about the historical referent mentioned by the words. Because the text is a self-contained unit, it is irrelevant to the literary approach whether or not the referent actually exists. What is important is that the reader can understand the words of the text. As we have seen, Frei is suspicious of making meaning dependent upon truth because he feels that determining what is true depends on meaning structures that are extrinsic to the text, meaning structures that have often been imposed on the text with “eclipsing” consequences. During the reign of Enlightenment hermeneutics, Frei argues, the “literary or textual referent and the real or true, extratextual referent were thought to be logically one and the same.” 103 The result is that many well-intentioned interpreters were guilty of eclipsing the biblical narrative, from fundamentalists on the right to liberals on the left.

Frei notices that secular readers of the text notice the text as a text, while Christian interpreters tend, because of their very focus on apologetics, to gravitate from “text” to “truth,” thus, perhaps unknowingly, neglecting to attend to the “meaning.” Frei

103 Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 84. This happened, Frei (ibid), argues, “largely because people confused hermeneutics, theory of meaning and understanding, with epistemology, a theory of knowledge. As a result, you had two kinds of literalists now: fundamentalists who thought that the texts as they stood were an accurate rendition of the ‘real’ or ‘historical’ Jesus; and liberals who thought that you had to reconstruct a picture from the text in order to get an accurate impression of the literally ‘real’ or ‘historical’ Jesus…It cannot be said often and emphatically enough that liberals and fundamentalists are siblings under the skin of identifying or rather confusing ascriptive as well as descriptive literalism about Jesus as the level of understanding the text, with ascriptive and descriptive literalism at the level of knowing historical reality.”
writes, “I do want to suggest that what has distinguished most recent secular interpreters of the Bible from their Christian counterparts…is that the former want to emphasize the text itself and that they do not wish its interpretation to be governed by a criterion of meaning that is strongly connected to one of truth.” Thus for Christians, “There may be reasons…to exercise reticence about the transition [from text to truth]. The move from text to truth or from language to reality, which ever form it takes, is almost always premature and some of us have found the secular literary readers of the Bible very helpful in reminding us of the fact.” It seems possible, Frei observes, for readers (secular and Christian alike) to simply read the text and understand its subject matter (the identity of Jesus Christ) without employing any previous theory of meaning.

Proponents of reader-response theory have strongly criticized certain aspects of the New Criticism. They found two significant problems with locating meaning within the bounds of the text alone. First, the theory “devalues the power of literature to relate to a real world.” When all emphasis is placed on the meaning of the text irrespective of its referent, the text consequently cannot say anything about a referent. Second, the theory “is not ideologically innocent, and the claim to focus on the bounded space of the text was a gesture arising from a covertly held conservative position.” Frei’s own reticence toward New Criticism, seen clearly in his later career, appreciates both of these criticisms. With regard to the first, Frei has always understood the need to show that the

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104 Frei, “Conflicts in Interpretation,” 162. Frei (ibid), notes that, “Rather than risking that connection, they would drop the very notions of meaning and truth.”

105 Ibid, 163.

Christ rendered in the Gospels is the real, living, present Christ who is head of the Church. Frei emphasizes that at the resurrection, the story of Jesus does overflow the text and have implications for all of reality. In this sense, Frei has always emphasized that the implications of the Gospel narratives cannot simply remain immanent to their texts. With regard to the second, Frei does acknowledge that New Criticism, and his own use of it, is not value-neutral.107 As a result, Frei’s later work argues that a plain sense reading of the Gospels is grounded not in a particular literary category, but in “the context of a sociolinguistic community,”108 a point to which I will later return.

A final significant influence on Frei’s hermeneutical theory is Gilbert Ryle.109 Ryle’s great insight for Frei was in showing that there is no such thing as an “inner self” which grounds all the actions and intentions of a human being. There simply is no “Decartes’ myth,” or the “myth of the ghost in the machine” (as Ryle calls it), no discoverable “inner self” which can be accessed in its own rite.110 Ryle would insist that an action not consist of two actions, “an inner, mental act of will, and an external, bodily

107 At the end of Frei’s “Literal Reading,” 143, Frei notes his continued appreciation with New Criticism (namely that it is a “case-specific reading” which “governs, and bends to its own ends whatever general categories it shares…”), even as he criticizes the theory’s value-neutral claim.

108 Frei, Literal Reading, 143.

109 In the preface to The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, viii, Frei acknowledges his debt to Gilbert Ryle. In light of this, it is somewhat surprising that Frei only mentions Ryle once after the preface. In the preface Frei admits that Ryle’s book has been rightly criticized on a number of accounts and Frei appears to distance himself from Ryle’s system as a whole, only incorporating Ryle’s denial of an inner-self concurrent with outward actions.

act of moving."\textsuperscript{111} Ryle would say the action is one action, a deliberate action. Ryle claims,

What makes the action deliberate is that it is done in a particular way, under particular circumstances, perhaps as part of a particular pattern of action, not that it is accompanied by some second act, invisible but independent. Similarly, to do or say something intelligently is not to do two things—a physical act of speech or movement and a mental act of thought—but to perform one action in a particular way and context. It follows that the human self is not some unknowable inner entity, of whose nature may or may not be revealed by the words and body actions so mysteriously related to it. Rather, my words and actions constitute my identity.\textsuperscript{112}

This insight allows Frei to emphasize in \textit{Identity} that all we can know of Jesus’ identity is the sum of his actions in relation to others. We simply do not understand a person’s “identity” by looking for some interior intentional moment all by itself. Frei claims that “For descriptive purposes, a person’s uniqueness is not attributable to a super-added factor, an invisible agent residing inside and from there directing the body…An intention is an implicit action, an action is an explicit intention.”\textsuperscript{113} We simply do not discover the identity of ourselves or others by,

[Entering] a mysterious realm of being and meaning, or an equally mysterious private-subject world in order to discover what makes any intelligent action publicly or commonly intelligible. Especially in narrative, novelistic, or history-like form, where meaning is most nearly inseparable from the words—from the descriptive shape of the story as a pattern of enactment, there is neither need for nor use in looking for meaning in a more profound stratum underneath the

\textsuperscript{111} William C. Placher, "Introduction,” 11. According to the “Descartes’ myth” a movement of an arm is a twofold action.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Frei, \textit{The Identity of Jesus Christ}, 42. Frei does not exclude the possibility of such an inner moment—such a moment may, in fact, exist. According to Placher ( “Introduction,” 12), “There is a real or hypothetical ‘inside’ description of that transition, of which all of us are aware but of which it is not easy to give an account.” It is just that this inner self is not describable without the passage of intention to action.
structure (a separable ‘subject matter’) or in a separable author’s ‘intention,’ or in a combination of such behind-the-scenes projections.\textsuperscript{114}

The import here is that a general theory of human existence, the self, understanding, or meaning does not have to be developed before one can begin to understand the text. This has consequences in two different directions: First, an interpreter really can understand the text before a general theory of understanding is developed.\textsuperscript{115} Second, one can understand the identity of Jesus Christ only as the text renders the movement of his intentions to actions. Frei writes, “Identity is essentially the action and testimony of a personal being by which he lays true claim to being himself and the same at an important point as well as over a length of time.”\textsuperscript{116} Frei applies Ryle’s understanding of a human being to the narrative rendering of Jesus Christ:

What is a man?...A man—in this instance [i.e. in the New Testament depiction of Christ] the fully human savior who, by his action peculiar to himself, bestows a particular human identity upon the mythological savior figure—is what he \textit{does} uniquely, the way no one else does it. It may be that this is action over a lifetime, or at some climactic moment, or both. When we see the loyalty of a lifetime consummated at one particular point, but even if we see several hitherto ambiguous strands in his character pruned and ordered in a clear and decisive way at that point—then we are apt to say: ‘Here he was most of all himself.’\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} Frei, \textit{The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative}, 281. Here Ryle is invoked to show that “to perform intelligently is to do one thing and not two things.”

\textsuperscript{115} Frei, “Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,” 37. Frei (ibid), claims, “One can, I think, describe the passage of intention into action…and the unity and mutual dependence of intention and action, without appealing to the ontological ground of that unity, of which we have no direct or descriptive knowledge such as we have of the unity and passage from intention to action itself.” This calls into question the project of modern interpretation theory, and Frei singles out especially Bultmann and phenomenological hermeneutics for critique.


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 57.
Thus Frei, praising Karl Barth for bringing Jesus’ person and work closer together, argues, “Jesus was what he did and underwent, and not simply his understanding or self-understanding…The unity of Christology and soteriology is their unity in the narrative rather than a conceptual unity in which the two concepts ‘person’ and ‘work’ become perfectly integrated.”¹¹⁸ This identity is rendered through a plain reading of the Gospel narratives, as the identity of Jesus Christ could not be discoverable anywhere else.

Frei is unwilling to align himself closely with any theory of human personhood. Frei does not reject the possibility that something of an inner self exists. He only argues that at present such an entity cannot be known in itself.¹¹⁹ Frei’s goal is to show that interpreters are not required to begin with a particular understanding of the self in order to understand the plain sense of the text. In this light, Ryle proves a useful ad hoc ally in combating both phenomenological hermeneutics¹²⁰ and the New Quest for the historical


¹¹⁹ Frei (“Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection” 73), claims, “What then do we mean by a man’s identity? Until a supertheory comes along, we will be content to say that we know him when we can say of him over a period of time or in a crucial occurrence, ‘when he did and underwent this, he was most of all himself,’ and when we can say of him, ‘his self-manifestation was a rightful expression of who he was.’ A person’s identity is known to us in the inseparability of who he was and what he did.”

¹²⁰ Frei, (The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, viii), writes, “Ryle’s work (although not directly about hermeneutics and whether or not finally successful) is a marvelous antidote to the contorted and to my mind unsuccessful efforts of certain phenomenologists and philosophers of ‘Existence’ or ‘Being’ to tackle a similar dualism.”
Jesus. Only if identity is constituted as intentions become actions can the texts narrate who Jesus really is.

From the very beginning, then, Frei thinks that the Gospel narratives can plainly render their meaning to a responsible reader, provided that extrinsic meaning systems are kept at bay so that the interpreter can plainly read the text. To make space for the texts to render their plain meaning, Frei employs a number of low-level conceptual schemes as *ad hoc* allies which allow the text itself to render realistically the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. Authority for this rendering of identity is granted to the text itself, and readers are required to recognize what the text plainly presents.

2. David Tracy: Scripture Discloses the Present Christ to the Reader

*Aims: Public Theology and Disclosive Texts:* David Tracy’s theological project focuses on the public nature of the Church and its theological discourse. As a result, the primary emphasis of Tracy’s hermeneutics is to show in a publicly intelligible way how the biblical text discloses the existential significance of the Christ event for readers who

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121 It is significant that Frei writes an “Excurse” after “Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection,” 88, on the New Quest for the Historical Jesus, illustrating this problem. Here Frei argues that the chief problem of the New Quest is that it really never questions the “inherited scheme of existentiell understanding of the self,” and hence believes that “the true identity of a person lies in existentiell self-understanding” (90). Frei argues that this new quest has gained more significance than it deserves, primarily because it has become commonplace in “German Idealism and now Existentialism” to “take for granted two assumptions: (1) That the written word (especially in the case of the New Testament writers) represents not the proper expression but the frozen ‘objectification’ of the mind that lies behind it; (2) that the proper way to grasp one’s own intention, indeed identity, as well as that of others, is by entry into the basic self-reflective act of the self, into that which is never ’merely given’” (88). Ryle proves a useful *ad hoc* ally for Frei in showing how quests for the inner-consciousness of Jesus are fundamentally flawed, as they presuppose “the Decartes’ myth.” It is the text which renders Christ’s identity, and not a particular quest behind the text for the purpose of understanding Jesus’ inner consciousness.
encounter it today. Tracy frequently uses general explanatory schemes to articulate better the meaning of the Christian faith.

The key to Tracy’s argument about the publicness of the Church and its theological discourse is “the classic.” For Tracy, classics are public and grounded in a tradition. They become a primary source for the self-identity of the tradition which bears them. Classics arise in every culture, and since a classic is grounded in a particular tradition, it “will always be in need of further interpretation in view of its need for renewed application to a particular situation.” A theory of the classic nature of the Christian texts ensures that the Church, theology, and interpretation of the Scriptures will all remain public, because classics appeal to our common human experience.


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122 The “classic” is the central theme of Tracy’s most influential book, *The Analogical Imagination*. Here Tracy moves in progression from a description of the classic (99-153) to the religious classic (154-230) to the Christian classic (248-338).

123 David Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 115.

124 Tracy (*The Analogical Imagination*, 115), claims, “Whenever we actually experience even one classic work of art we are liberated from privateness into the genuine publicness of a disclosure of truth. It seems foolish, therefore, to develop theories of aesthetics which effectively deny the truth-character of the experience of art as a realized experience of the essential...Instead we need, I believe, a rehabilitation of the notions of the normative, the authoritative—in a word, the classical—now freed from the private domain of elitist classicists and welcomed again as the communal and public heritage of our common human experience of the truth of the work of art.”

125 This list of influences is by no means comprehensive. Much of Tracy’s appreciation for a “Manifestation” model of the divine is greatly influenced by Mircea Eliade (see Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 48-56. Much of Tracy’s attention to theological method was developed from Bernard Lonergan. Tracy’s first publication, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), shows the appreciation Tracy held for Lonergan’s focus on theological method. Tracy’s own project moves beyond Lonergan’s, though, in that Tracy thinks that Lonergan simply assumes the truth of Christian dogmatic claims rather than grounding them critically. Tracy argues that Scripture and dogmatic formulations must be subjected to a critical criteria which is developed from the Western historical consciousness (see Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, 214-17, and T. Howland Sanks, “David Tracy’s Theological Project: An Overview and Some Implications,”
Tracy explores the nature of three categories of classics: general classics (disclosive of some truth), religious classics (disclosive of a claim to the whole), and the Christian classic (disclosive of the person-event of Jesus Christ). It is by subject matter that Tracy categorizes classics into three groups. Each category of classic is specific in the kind of content which it reveals, yet all classics are similar in the manner in which they disclose that truth. A religious classic differs from a cultural classic in that while a cultural classic discloses a truth about a particular dimension of life, a religious classic discloses truth about the whole of reality. Tracy writes, those “explicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the evidence of a disclosure-concealment of the whole of reality by the power of the whole—as, in some sense, a radical and finally gracious mystery.”\textsuperscript{127} As such, a religious classic involves a “risk” that this classic “may prove genuinely disclosive of a reality that cannot be denied.”\textsuperscript{128} The Christian classic differs from the religious classic in that the truth it discloses is a particular one: the subject matter of the Christian classic is the event of Jesus Christ. Thus while the manner of disclosure is the same in all classics, the content of the disclosure is particular to the particular kind of classic.

Classics for Tracy are not only texts, but can also be “events, images, persons, rituals and symbols which are assumed to disclose permanent possibilities or meaning

\textit{Theological Studies} 54 (1993), 700-02). Here I am only developing Tracy’s project with a view to Gadamer and Ricoeur, since Tracy’s disagreement with Frei is grounded in hermeneutical differences.


\textsuperscript{127} Tracy, \textit{The Analogical Imagination}, 83.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 716.
The Christian faith, then, is bearer of a number of different classics. All classics, are, by definition, disclosive of truth. Hence they have a certain authority within their tradition to disclose that truth. The normative “classic” for the Christian tradition is the “event and person of Jesus Christ.” The Christian Scriptures are a classic of the Christian community, but they do not replace the primary classic. Rather, they are a derivative classic, as they authoritatively witness to that primary classic.

The classic, “by definition, is assumed to be any text that always has the power to transform the horizon of the interpreter and thereby disclose new meaning and experiential possibilities” for Tracy. All classics disclose truth analogously to the way in which a work of art discloses truth. Following Gadamer, Tracy writes,

[W]hen I experience any classic work of art, I do not experience myself as an autonomous subject aesthetically appreciating the good qualities of an aesthetic

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129 Ibid, 68.

130 Ibid, 233. Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 241, n. 1), admits that there are other “responsible” candidates for the ‘Christian classic’ (“Spirit,” “God,” “human,” “church”) yet he argues that Christ has been the major “classic” since the New Testament, and that the other candidates can only be understood in light of the Christ event.

131 Ibid, 248. They are derivative because they “serve not as the object of the community’s worship…but as the normative, more relatively adequate expressions of the community’s past and present experience of the Risen Lord, the crucified one, Jesus Christ.” The Scriptures are the “original and normative responses to the Christ event are those expressions of the earliest communities codified in the texts named the New Testament.” As responses, they are “only a relatively adequate expression of the earliest Christian community’s experience” and “remain open to new experiences—new questions, new and sometimes more adequate responses for later generations who experience the same event in ever different situations” (The Analogical Imagination, 249).

132 Tracy, On Naming the Present, 115. Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 108), claims, “My thesis is that what we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons ‘classics’ is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality we cannot but name truth.” This disclosive power sets classics apart from other works which have not been recognized to paradigmatically disclose truth: “Only classic works of art, whatever their period, whatever their culture, can be counted on to allow, indeed to compel, that kind of experience and that kind of paradigmatic recognition” (113).

133 Ibid, xii.
object set over against me. Indeed, when I reflect after the experience upon the experience itself, shorn of prior theories of ‘aesthetics,’ I find that my subjectivity is never in control of the experience, nor is the work of art actually experienced as an object with certain qualities over against me. Rather the work of art encounters me with the surprise, impact, even shock of reality itself. In experiencing art, I recognize a truth I somehow know but know I did not really know except through the experience of recognition of the essential compelled by the work of art. I am transformed by its truth when I return to the everyday, to the whole of what I ordinarily call reality, and discover new affinities, new sensibilities for the everyday.  

Tracy claims that the disclosure in a work of art is an experience in which the interpreter finds herself to be passively caught up in moment of truth. He writes, “When anyone of us is caught unawares by a genuine work of art, we find ourselves in the trip of an event, a happening, a disclosure, a claim to truth which we cannot deny and can only eliminate by our later controlled reflection.”  

It is the classic that encounters the interpreter, and a genuine disclosure affects the interpreter. Gadamer has written, “In the experience of art we see a genuine experience induced by the work, which does not leave him who has it unchanged, and we enquire into the mode of being of that which is experienced in this way. So we hope to understand better what kind of truth it is that encounters us there.”  

The experience, then, is more disclosive than constructive, giving priority to the subject matter of the classic. It must be the subject-matter which controls the discussion between text and reader. As a result, Real conversation occurs only when the participants allow the question, the subject matter, to assume primacy...we are carried along, and sometimes away, by the subject matter itself into the rare event or happening named ‘thinking’ and ‘understanding.’ For understanding happens; it occurs not as the pure result of

134 Ibid, 111-12.
135 Ibid, 114.
136 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 89.
personal achievement but in the back-and-forth movement of the conversation itself.\textsuperscript{137}

This experience of disclosure, Tracy thinks, is much like the gracious, gifted moment of faith in Christian theology. In a footnote, Tracy specifically claims that his argument about the religious classic “is directly parallel to the earlier claim for the classic work of art,” and as a result, Tracy suggests, “The claims to truth in both art and religions, I believe, stand or fall together.”\textsuperscript{138} Consequently, Tracy argues that the faith encounter of Christians with the event of Jesus Christ occurs in much the same way all classics disclose truth:

The interpreter may of course, in a later reflective, distancing moment, question that original religious experience and reinterpret it as some ‘as-if’ experience produced by the human imagination. But in the moment of encounter-response itself, the moment Christians call ‘faith,’ there is no ‘imagine-reality-as-if-it-were-this-way’ experience. There is, rather, the realized experience of a recognition as that response of trust called faith to the reality of the whole disclosed in the religious classic: a reality experienced as liberating one to trust that how we ought to live and how things in reality are, are finally one.\textsuperscript{139}

Here the “moment of encounter-response itself” is described as precisely “the moment Christians call ‘faith.’” This moment takes place, Tracy believes, in all religious classics. The experience of disclosive truth in art is very much like the experience of disclosive truth in religious faith, and, more specifically, in the disclosure of the Christ event.

\textsuperscript{137} Tracy, \textit{Analogical Imagination}, 101.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 185, n. 37. This is a strong statement, since it could be taken to imply that Tracy may have built his Christology upon a framework of phenomenological hermeneutics of disclosure which may allow the truth of the Christ-event to “stand or fall” with the truth claims of art. However, it does not seem that this statement is central to Tracy’s project, since even within \textit{The Analogical Imagination} Tracy distances himself from putting too much stake in the classic, saying, “An appeal for a focus upon the classics is merely one strategy for clarifying some major paths through the conflict” (\textit{Analogical Imagination}, 372). I simply notice the inevitable tension here as Tracy tries to speak about the particularity of revelation through general categories.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 164.
Yet Tracy, following Ricoeur, does not believe that his use of general philosophical hermeneutics determines his reading of Scripture.\(^{140}\) In fact, Tracy believes that he and Frei are both simply using a general hermeneutic which can “inform without ‘taking over’ a theological analysis of scriptural texts.”\(^{141}\) Tracy insists that his explanation of the Scriptural texts as a religious classic does not limit their contents to that of a secular classic. Tracy specifies that his argument about the classic moves “from the abstract to the concrete, not, as too often interpreted, from the concrete (foundationalist) to the specific.”\(^{142}\) Tracy does not think that he bases his analysis in some general, identifiable human experience (i.e. foundationalism) and then arguing particular Christian claims. Rather, he believes that he has found in the classic an analogy for understanding how Christians experience disclosure in their Scriptures. I will later discuss how this general model of disclosure affects interpretations of the particularity of Jesus Christ. For now, it simply ought to be noticed that when Tracy


\(^{141}\) Tracy (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 59, n. 16). Here Tracy cites his work in *Analogical Imagination* 233-305. Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 376, further claims that “general method may guide but not control the specific demands of the particular theological point at issue in a particular instance of interpretation: the general method guides; particular interpretations rule.”

\(^{142}\) Tracy, “On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 59, n. 16. Higton (“Ordinary,” 581-82), also argues with Tracy that Frei has overstated his case. While the description of the general classic is dependent on Gadamer, in the second step to analysis of the religious classic, “the religious intensification transforms the hermeneutical frame” and adds “new material” not able to be gleaned from the general classic. The third step, in which “the focus on this particular religious tradition with its central classic, the man Jesus of Nazareth, transforms and even perhaps ‘subverts’ the more general hermeneutics” (582). Higton is correct that new information is added in each step. However, it is the subject matter of the disclosure, and never the manner of disclosure which changes. In this sense, Tracy does employ a general hermeneutical method to all texts, including Scripture.
appeals to special hermeneutics, his emphasis is on the unique subject matter disclosed in Scripture which may require a unique preunderstanding and a unique response, but not necessarily a unique manner of disclosure.

For Gadamer, tradition is the major constituting force behind any act of interpretation.¹⁴³ The interpreter engages in the interpretative work from within the stream of tradition, and the fusion of horizons likewise takes place within this stream. Tracy follows Gadamer in claiming,

Indeed, as Hans-Georg Gadamer...has argued on strictly philosophical grounds, ‘belonging to’ a tradition (presuming it is a major tradition which has produced classics) is unavoidable when one considers the intrinsic, indeed ontic and ontological historicity of our constitution as human selves. Moreover, tradition is an ambiguous but still enriching, not impoverishing reality. Any serious recognition of the radical finitude of any single thinker’s reflection and the wealth of experience, insight, judgment, taste and common sense which enculturation into a major tradition offers enriches all participants willing to be ‘formed’ by that tradition.¹⁴⁴

As a result, “the theologian, in risking faith in a particular religious tradition, has the right and responsibility to be ‘formed’ by that tradition and community.”¹⁴⁵ Tracy typically understands the Church in much the same way that Gadamer understands tradition. The Church, the tradition which bears the Christian classic, carries on the memory of Jesus, so that Jesus is “the Jesus remembered by the tradition which mediates


¹⁴⁴ Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, 66.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 67.
the event in the present through word, sacrament and action; the Jesus remembered as the Christ, the presence among us of God’s own self.”  

Where Tracy parts company with Gadamer is in Tracy’s emphasis on the need for critical readings of Scripture. Specifically, Tracy thinks Gadamer gives too much authority to the role of tradition in the interpretation of the biblical text. Tracy affirms a need, not only to be formed by tradition, but to be able to critique it. Although one’s preunderstanding is formed by the tradition, Tracy feels that Gadamer does not provide a self-critical moment in the interpretative process by which the interpreter can question the validity of a particular reading. Tracy worries that a “purely hermeneutical approach can too often serve simply to affirm a tradition, to disallow the emancipatory function of critical reason and eventually to capitulate to, not transform, the status quo.” Unless the interpreter can provide a critical moment in the interpretation process, tradition may hold a tyranny over the text itself. Consequently, Tracy shows an appreciation for the contributions of the “Masters of Suspicion” who have shown ideological totalizing to be the result of uncritical acceptance of text. Totalizing schemes are perhaps inherent to textual privileging, and hence narratives, even the Scriptural narratives, Tracy feels, are open to ideological critique. Tracy believes that Ricoeur’s appreciation for a

146 Ibid, 234.

147 Ibid, 136, n. 16. Tracy (ibid), disagrees with Gadamer on his “strained polemic against all ‘method’, and “some of his formulations for the necessary moment of ‘application’ in interpretation.”

148 Ibid, 73. Tracy appreciates Habermas’s critique of Gadamer. Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 74), worries that hermeneutical theologians will be “too content with a relatively unexamined trust that the rhetorical persuasiveness of those retrieved meanings will prove sufficient to transform individual and societal practice,” and hence Tracy sees value in liberation and political theologies to call continually into question the reformulation of Christian classics. The goal of all critical methods, for Tracy (ibid, 324), is to advance the “necessary reformatory impulse at the heart of gospel and the Christian tradition.”
hermeneutics of suspicion provides more resources for the continual self-critical role that theological hermeneutics must play. As a result, it will be helpful to summarize the key points of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics.

Paul Ricoeur starts his project from the presupposition of “distanciation,” the ability of the interpreter to create critical space between him/herself and the text or author. Ricoeur’s theory requires the distinction between the “event” of discourse and the “meaning” which results. Meaning, understood as the “propositional content” of the sentence, gives the original event permanence because it transcends the “utterer’s meaning” and becomes the “utterance meaning.” As this happens, Ricoeur and Gadamer agree, the interpreter’s quest to understand the meaning of the discourse shifts from trying to understand the author’s intention to understanding the meaning of the text. In written discourse, distanciation becomes more intense because it takes place on two levels: First, the author is distanced from the text (so that the text now means more than

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149 Distanciation occurs even in the act of discourse, but is intensified in the written text. Ricoeur (“The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” 130), claims, “For me the text is much more than a particular case of inherhuman communication, it is the paradigm of the distanciation in all communication…Now discourse, even in oral form, presents an elementary characteristic of distanciation.”

150 Paul Ricoeur (Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 12), claims, “If all discourse is actualized as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning.”

151 Ricoeur (ibid, 146), writes, “An act of discourse is not merely vanishing. It may be identified and reidentified as the same so that we may say it again or in other words. We may even say it in other language or translate it from one language to another. Through all these translations, the ‘propositional content’ preserves its identity: the ‘said as such.’

152 Ricoeur (ibid, 12-13), writes, “Meaning can be understood as the utterer’s meaning (what the speaker means, the noetic aspect), and utterance meaning (what the sentence means, the propositional content, the noematic aspect). Utterer’s meaning should not be reduced to mere psychological intention. It is given in the utterance meaning itself. The mental meaning can be found nowhere else than in discourse itself. The utterer’s meaning has its mark in the utterance meaning.”
the author meant—a ‘surplus of meaning’). Second, the text is distanced from the original audience so that the text now requires a reader response. As the reader understands the text, he finds that the text refers beyond itself to the world outside the text (here Ricoeur disagrees with the New Criticism, which argues that the text never refers beyond itself to the real world). This reference to the outside world is called a “split reference,” and includes both ostensive reference, a real event, thing, etc. to which the text refers, and non-ostensive reference, a manner of being in the world disclosed through the text. In poetry, fiction, etc. the non-ostensive reference replaces the ostensive reference, so that the reader can encounter a text which refers to existential possibilities.

This disclosure of a non-ostensive reference (a world in front of the text) must be engaged in a responsible manner. Ricoeur suggests a two-step process. The first step

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153 Ibid, 33. Ricoeur (ibid), claims that the text is now a “structured work,” characterized by composition, genre, and style so that “Thanks to writing, the works of language become as self-contained as sculptures.”


155 Ibid, 87.

156 Ibid, 36-37. Ricoeur (ibid), claims, “The effacement of the ostensive and descriptive reference liberates a power of reference to aspects of our being in the world that cannot be said in a direct descriptive way, but only alluded to, thanks to the referential value of metaphoric and, in general, symbolic expression” (37).

157 Ricoeur’s movement in Interpretation Theory (pp. 75-89), from guess to validation and from explanation to comprehension is somewhat different from his threefold Mimesis, prefiguration, configuration, refiguration (see Time and Narrative, vol. 1, pp. 52-87). I provide here only Ricoeur’s earlier construction of the hermeneutical arc, as that is the one used by Tracy in Analogical Imagination. For an excellent analysis of at least five tensions between the early hermeneutical arc and the later hermeneutical arc, see Dan R. Stiver, Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 56-78.
is the movement from what is essentially a naïve “guess” to validation of what the text means as a whole. Ricoeur’s second step is a movement from “explanation” to “comprehension,” as readers overcome the distanciation of the text in order to come to understanding. Through studying the internal structure and content of the text, the interpreter is led “from a surface semantics…to a depth semantics, that of the boundary situations, which constitute the ultimate ‘referent,’” as Ricoeur calls it. Explanation is the transition between the initial naïve guess and the moment of disclosure of the world in front of the text to the reader. Understanding is the appropriation of the world of the text to the individual. Hence the interpreter must move on from explanation to understanding or appropriation. To do so, the interpreter must encounter the sense of the text, the world in front of the text, which opens new possibilities for the interpreter. Ricoeur claims,

The sense of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse, but what points towards a possible world, thanks to the

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158 Ricoeur (Interpretation Theory, 76), writes, “The problem of correct understanding can no longer be solved by a simple return to the alleged situation of the author. The concept of guess has no other origin. To construe the meaning as the verbal meaning of the text is to make a guess.” Interpreters can only validate this guess in retrospect.

159 Ibid, 79. Ricoeur advocates that the criteria of both falsifiability and probability be used at this point to sort through the various interpretive possibilities: Ricoeur (ibid), claims, “If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. We always move between dogmatism and skepticism.”

160 Ibid, 87. Ricoeur (ibid 81), believes the options here are either structuralism (suspending the search for reference in the text), or proposing a “world in front of the text.” Hence Ricoeur, (ibid, 81), claims, “As readers, we may either remain in a kind of state of suspense as regards any kind of referred to reality, or we may imaginatively actualize the potential non-ostensive references of the text in a new situation, that of the reader.” Structural analysis (the component of interpretation emphasized by Structuralism), then, is not wrong, but may end the interpretive task too early.
non-ostensive reference of the text. Understanding…seeks to grasp the world-propositions opened up by the reference [i.e. sense] of the text.\textsuperscript{161}

The world in front of the text is not, according to Ricoeur, simple projection of meaning by the reader onto the text.\textsuperscript{162} Rather, it is the text which has the power to disclose “new modes of being” or “new forms of life.” The interpreter “is enlarged in his capacity of self-projection by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself…It is the text, with its universal power of world disclosure, which gives a self to the ego.”\textsuperscript{163} Ricoeur insists that priority in the interaction between text and reader be given to the text, so that, “Only the interpretation that complies with the injunction of the text, that follows the ‘arrow’ of the sense and that tries to think accordingly, initiates a new self-understanding.”\textsuperscript{164}

At this point it is possible to see how the concept of distanciation causes an essential difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur and why Tracy sides with Ricoeur. Where Gadamer understands interpretation as a game in which interpreters find themselves being played rather than controlling the action,\textsuperscript{165} Ricoeur inserts a moment of explanation on the way to understanding which allows the reader a critical moment in the interpretative process. As Gary Aylesworth notes,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{161} Ibid, 87.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Ricoeur (\textit{Interpretation Theory}, 94), states the objection in two ways: “If we must ‘believe’ in order to ‘understand,’ then there is no difference between preunderstanding and the mere projection of our prejudices,” and “Are we not putting the meaning of the text under the power of the subject who interprets it?”
\item \textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 94-95.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Ibid, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{165} For example, Gadamer (\textit{Truth and Method}, 420), claims, “The hermeneutical experience must take as a genuine experience everything that becomes present to it. It does not have prior freedom to select and discard.”
\end{itemize}
On Gadamer’s model, there is no distanciation of meaning from event. Rather, meaning itself is temporal and processive. As the subject-matter of the dialogue between text and reader, meaning is produced in an event of disclosure, not as something fixed by the text, i.e., not as an ideal object, but as a third moment that neither the reader nor the text already contains.\textsuperscript{166}

For Ricoeur, meaning is already codified in the text—it does not result, strictly speaking, from the action of the reader in dialogue with the text. Instead, that dialogue of interpretation “actualizes” a meaning that is already present.\textsuperscript{167} Meaning is a relatively stable feature of the text, and a relatively stable self is able to analyze and actualize such meaning.\textsuperscript{168}

Meaning is only relatively stable, however, because meaning emerges in dialogue with the reader as interpretation takes place. Gadamer, Ricoeur and Tracy all agree that understanding has not really taken place unless a fusion of horizons has occurred. This fusion of horizons will necessarily change both the original meaning of the text and the identity of the interpreter. Tracy claims,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid, 70. Aylesworth (ibid), notes the fundamental difference: “For Gadamer appropriation itself produces meaning, where for Ricoeur appropriation actualizes a meaning already produced.”
\textsuperscript{168} Aylesworth (ibid), argues, “On Ricoeur’s model, then, philosophical hermeneutics is a rehabilitation of the reflective tradition, and of Huserlian egology in particular. The ability to exercise a critical moment in interpretation does not, despite Frei’s contention of Ryle’s ‘ghost in the machine,’ propose a stable inner-self which is able to be analyzed on its own.” Paul Ricoeur claims, “The philosopher trained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not what they appear to be. But he never doubts that consciousness is as it appears to itself….Since Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, however, we doubt even this. After doubting the thing, we have begun to doubt consciousness” (\textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101). Ricoeur in this context highlights Husserl’s conception of the inner-self as a continuation of the problem which he is seeking to overcome. In his early writings, Tracy does not incorporate this tenet. David Tracy defines common human experience as “that immediate experience of the self-as-self which can be reflectively mediated through such disciplines as art, history, cultural analysis, human scientific analysis, and philosophical analysis” (\textit{Blessed Rage for Order}, 39). It is this which is to be correlated with the Christian tradition. Tracy, however, attempts to correct this in his later writings.
\end{quote}
It is worth noting that every good interpretation is a new interpretation involving
application to the situation…It is important to note even here, however, that both
text and reader (as well as their dialogical interaction) are realities-in-process,
ever purely static constants. All three realities (text-reader-interaction) include
the ambiguities intrinsic to the human situation. Interpretation is, by definition,
an ongoing process related to these realities-in-process. Even classic texts exist as
classics only when actually read; the reader exists as a good reader only by
allowing his or her present horizon to be provoked or vexed by the classic text
into dialogue.\footnote{Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, 90, n. 59.}

The difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur, then, is the degree to which the interpreter
is able to distance him/herself from the tradition and critique it through interpretation.

Gadamer believes that application constitutes meaning in the fusion of horizons,\footnote{Gadamer (Truth and Method, 275), claims, “The text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be
understood properly, ie according to the claim it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every
particular situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.”} while
Ricoeur and Tracy believe that texts contain a meaning that is actualized in the
interpreter.\footnote{Tracy’s disagreement with Gadamer is first with “his understandable but strained polemic
against all ‘method,’” and second with his “formulations for the necessary moment of ‘application’ in
interpretation.” Tracy argues that, while Gadamer has correctly described the role of application for the
judge and the preacher, Gadamer has made these instances normative for all interpretation. Tracy is
optimistic that the sense of a text can be gleaned (the moment of explanation) as a distinct step from
application. As a result, Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 136, nt. 8), appeals to “Ricoeur’s more
adequate paradigm…of ‘understanding-explanation-application.’”}

Ricoeur appreciates the insights of the “masters of suspicion,” Marx, Nietzsche
and Freud.\footnote{For example, Ricoeur ("Two Essays by Paul Ricoeur: The Critique of Religion and the
critique of ideology, a Nietzschean critique of resentment and a Freudian critique of infantile distress, are
hereafter the views through which any kind of mediation of faith must pass.” Richard R. Topping,
Revelation, Scripture and Church: Theological Hermeneutic Thought of James Barr, Paul Ricoeur, and
Hans Frei, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Burlington, VT:
Savage, The Dwight Harrington Terry Foundation Lectures on Religion in the Light of Science and
Philosophy (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 33), argues that these three moved
beyond “skepticism” to affirming a “more authentic word” through critical interpretation. They “triumph
of all interpretation, and hence they have demonstrated that all interpretation must be critical. There will never be absolute assurance of truth from now on—all interpretation will require a wager of hope.\textsuperscript{173} Christian readings of Scripture as well must always be subjected to suspicion, and this confrontation will necessarily change both parties.\textsuperscript{174} Thus Ricoeur is committed to an ongoing ideological critique in the Christian reading of Scripture.\textsuperscript{175} The primary benefit of suspicious readings is to allow a more fruitful reading of the text to take place, in which the text may become more disclosive to the interpreter. When idols are “destroyed”\textsuperscript{176} and the ideologies of the reader are chastened, the “matter of the text is allowed to emerge and present its fresh possibilities for the self.”\textsuperscript{177}

B. Hermeneutical Difficulties and Mutual Critiques

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over the doubt as to consciousness by an exegesis of meaning. Beginning with them, understanding is hermeneutics: henceforward, to seek meaning is no longer to spell out the consciousness of meaning, but to decipher its expressions.” Ricoeur (ibid, 34), claims, “All three begin with suspicion concerning the illusions of consciousness, and then proceed to employ the stratagem of deciphering; all three, however, far from being detractors of ‘consciousness,’ aim at extending it.” As a result, their skepticism, leading to self-critical readings, is beneficial for all readings, including (perhaps “especially”) readings of Scripture.

\textsuperscript{173} Stiver, \textit{Theology after Ricoeur}, 144.

\textsuperscript{174} Ricoeur (\textit{Freud and Philosophy}, 551), claims, “The faith of the believer cannot emerge intact from this confrontation, but neither can the Freudian conception of reality.” Hence the goal is to “separate[e] idols from symbols.”

\textsuperscript{175} This does not, however, mean that Ricoeur is holistically opposed to Gadamer’s portrayal of the relationship between text and tradition. In fact, Ricoeur (\textit{Phenomenology and Hermeneutics}, 110-11), writes that “distanciation is the dialectical counterpart to the notion of belonging, in that sense that we belong to an historical tradition through a relation of distance which oscillates between remoteness and proximity.”

\textsuperscript{176} Ricoeur, \textit{Freud and Philosophy}, 54, 551.

\textsuperscript{177} Topping, \textit{Revelation, Scripture and Church}, 179.
Having explored the aims and influences which have informed the projects of Frei and Tracy, this section will specify the central hermeneutical difficulty in the method of each theologian. The section will show the way in which Tracy and Frei have revised their hermeneutical projects in light of criticism from the other. The section will suggest that while each has developed significant revisions in method, impasses still remain which cannot be resolved until Scripture is located in the broader context of the economy of redemption.

1. Frei’s Difficulty: Locating Authority in Interpretation

During the early part of his career, Frei placed all authority for reading in the text itself, and called readers to be accountable to a realistic reading.\(^{178}\) In fact, for Frei, the very essence of Christianity is dependent on a realistic reading of the Gospel narratives. Frei writes,

> It seems to me that the crucial point about the authority of the New Testament—and the beginning, at least, of an answer to the question, What is Christianity?—is precisely that we must start at some point where meaning is firmly grounded in the text and nowhere else. This identity or unity of text and meaning does not of itself bestow authority, but without it there can be no authority.\(^{179}\)

If authority for defining the essence of Christianity lies in the assumption that “meaning is grounded in the text and nowhere else,” then Frei must explain exactly how

\(^{178}\) Frei’s early career could be characterized as the time from his first published book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* in 1973 until the late 1970’s. During this time Frei emphasized realistic narrative as a genre of Scripture, and felt that this genre would render plainly the unsubstitutable identity of Christ. From the late 1970’s onward, what I will call Frei’s later career, Frei seeks to ground realistic narrative in the Christian community which has insisted upon a literal reading of the Gospels. As a result, a shift of emphasis from text to readers takes place in his writings.

\(^{179}\) Frei, “Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,” 42.
this is so. The difficulty of establishing an authoritative reading of Scripture is more pronounced for Frei than it is for Tracy because, where Tracy develops a general theory of Scripture as a classic, continually preserved and renewed by a tradition in a plurality of readings, Frei desires to ground authority for Christian readings in a particular reading of the text itself. As Frei becomes more and more self-critical about pressing meaning into any external system, he moves from dependence on literary theories such as New Criticism to an analysis of the Church as a socio-linguistic community. Frei does not temper his insistence on the necessity of a plain reading of the Gospels, but he does attempt to provide a somewhat different account of why the Gospels must be read ascriptively.

Determining the relationship of the early Frei to the later Frei has proven notoriously difficult for all interpreters of Frei’s works. Does Frei abandon his literary category of ‘realistic narrative’ when he makes the cultural-linguistic turn?

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180 Determining the relationship of the early Frei to the later Frei on the issue of authority of the text has divided readers of Frei. In general, more recent scholarship has tended to observe a stronger continuity between Frei’s early work and his later writings. Mike A. Higton (Christ, Providence and History: Hans Frei's Public Theology (London & New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 178), calls it a “simplification” of his theoretical procedure (CPH, 178) and Mark Allen Bowald (Rendering the Word, 101), calls it a “greater chastening” of the agency of the reader.” This change is due, in large part, to the availability of the whole corpus of Frei’s written work. Older scholarship has tended to emphasize the discontinuity. For example, Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 174), asks, “[I]n turning from realistic narrative to cultural-linguistic description, has not Frei simply exchanged theories? Does not the claim that meaning and truth are context-dependent notions betray a general theory as much (if not more) than the earlier allegiance to the category realistic narrative? Is not Wittgenstein’s adage ‘Look not to the meaning but to the use’ itself a manifesto for a general theory of meaning?”

181 Under the influence of his college, George Lindbeck, Frei shifts his attention from literary theory to the self-description of the Church. Lindbeck (The Nature of Doctrine, pp. 30-41), contrasts his own “cultural-linguistic” understanding of theology to the “experiential-expressive” model which he thinks characterizes Tracy. While the “experiential-expressive” view, on Lindbeck’s account, sees religions as social organizations which reflect prior inner experiences, the “cultural-linguistic” view suggests that religions are social organisms which construct the grammar through which religious experience takes place. Religions are “comprehensive and interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myth or narratives and
simply move interpretive authority from a quality of the text to the decision of the
Church? Frei’s 1983 paper entitled “The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in
Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break?” is often seen as the turning-point in
Frei’s thought, due to his self-criticism of his conception of realistic narrative. In this
essay, Frei criticizes his previous work primarily because his attempt to hold meaning
and truth together in realistic narrative requires an explanatory model not found in the
text itself. Frei claims, “There may or may not be a class called ‘realistic narrative,’ but
to take it as a general category of which the synoptic Gospel narratives and their partial
second-order redescriptions in the doctrine of the Incarnation are a dependent instance is
first to put the cart before the horse and then cut the lines and claim that the vehicle is
self-propelled.” In other words, Frei believes it is problematic to force readers to
engage the text according to a general schema like realistic narrative and then expect to
them derive the particular claims of the Christian faith from that general method. In this
sense, Frei judges his previous proposal for realistic narrative to have been unsuccessful.
Yet throughout his career Frei insists on grounding the essence of the ‘Christian thing’ in
a plain reading of the Gospel narratives. But why must this be so, if the meaning of the
text is not based on a literary theory, and if not from the text itself? Frei realizes that he
needs to develop further the way in which the authority for literal sense is grounded in the

heavily ritualized, which structure human experience and understanding of self and world” (33). This
model places primary attention on the structure and rules of the Church as a foundation for Scriptural
reading. In his later work, Frei finds this to be a plausible model for grounding the authority of the literal
sense (see Frei, “Literal Reading,” 67).

182 Frei, Literal Reading, 64-66. Frei’s rejection of New Criticism seems to be based on two
criticisms. First, it also unconsciously places an external meaning system on the text, so that the reader
must make a prior commitment (by faith) to read the text in this way. Second, it “comes close to
enthroning verbal repetition as the highest form of understanding…” (64).
Christian community. In a 1984 letter to Gary Comstock, Frei spells out his revised understanding of meaning in Scripture:

For me ‘meaning’ in the gospel narratives is more and more a combination of 1) the communal-religious interpretive tradition and what it has seen as their primary meaning; 2) the fact that the tradition has given primacy to their realistic, ascriptive sense; 3) that outside of that tradition there is no reason to think of any single interpretive move or scheme as the meaning of these stories; 4) and even within it there is room for others, provided they do not conflict with the primary, realistic or literal sense; 5) that subordination of understanding to the text…is in no way the same as the elimination of interpretive understanding and of a possible multiplicity of interpretations. ¹⁸³

Frei insists that no external system of understanding ought to be allowed priority in determining what is the meaning of Scripture. The meaning of an amorphous text is relatively indeterminate. Meaning is not self-evident simply because of the literary structure of the Gospels. But it is bound up with the early Christian community’s reading practices. A text without a tradition cannot simply have a plain meaning. This decision moves Frei toward grounding authority for a literal reading in the reading community rather than in the text alone. ¹⁸⁴

Frei must still explain why the community chose such a reading, and how the Scriptures can critique the subsequent readings of the Church. According to Frei, the


¹⁸⁴ Certainly several influences have led to the change. First, different literary theories, especially deconstructionism, had begun to pose new questions for literary theory. Placher (“Introduction,” 18), suggests that “one could to some extent map changes in Frei’s account alongside changes of fashion in literary theory—from the New Critics and Auerbach at the time of his early work—with their careful attention to the formal structure of texts—to deconstructionists and Stanley Fish in the 1980’s—with their interests in the social context in which interpretations take place.” Second, the influence of George Lindbeck’s use of a “low-level theoretical…analysis of religions” as a “cultural linguistic approach” also influenced such a change (see Frei, Literal Reading, 71). Finally, Frei’s own studies in the history of modern Christianity changed throughout the later 1970’s from a history of Christianity in the academy “towards a more sociologically aware form of writing” (Higton, Christ, Providence, and History, 178).
“plain sense” (or “literal”) reading of Scripture was given primacy by the Church precisely because such a reading of the Gospel narratives adequately rendered the ascriptive identity of the unsubstitutable Person, Jesus Christ. Literal reading was not something of a historical accident, but it is an outworking of the community’s foundational belief in the risen Christ. For Frei, a Christian must at least say “that the subject matter of these stories is not something or someone else, and that the rest of the canon must in some way or ways, looser or tighter, be related to this subject matter or at least not in contradiction to it. This is the minimal agreement of how ‘literal’ reading has generally been understood in the Western Christian tradition.”¹⁸⁵ This plain reading, says Frei, can be studied fruitfully in its development. In the early Church, we find that the “narrative rendering of an intention-action sequence” became the orienting principle of the Scriptures:

“Thus, the parables of the Kingdom of God, whatever their original intent, were soon used as figurations of Jesus that substantiated his messianic identity as enacted in his story so that their point of signaling the ‘limit experience’ of the Kingdom of God, although very real, was not logically independent of that other theme. Jesus…was himself the subject of what he said in the use of the parables by the interpretive tradition. The identity of the messenger became the clue to the character of the message and this, in turn, was due to the priority of his identification in agency or enactment over his identification as speech act, linguistic performative or embodied, innovative metaphor.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 5. Frei has already clarified (Literal Reading, 72), “The reason why the intratextual universe of this Christian symbol system is a narrative one is that a specific set of texts, which happen to be narrative, has become primary, even within scripture, and has been assigned a literal reading as their primary or ‘plain’ sense. They have become the paradigm for the construal not only of what is inside that system but for all that is outside. They provide the interpretive pattern in terms of which all of reality is experienced and read in this religion.”

¹⁸⁶ Frei, “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 110-11.
Frei develops his thought on the relationship between the plain sense and the reading community in *Types of Christian Theology*. Frei gives three rules which govern the community’s use of the literal sense. The first rule appears to make the literal sense itself a function of community decision: “[T]he literal meaning of the text is precisely that meaning which finds the greatest degree of agreement in the use of the text in the religious community. If there is agreement in that use, then take that to be the literal sense.”

This rule seems to indicate a significant change from a self-evident genre of realistic narrative to community use. Frei’s next two rules serve to disarm the contemporary reader from claiming interpretive authority over the text today. The second rule states, “it is the fit enactment of the intention to say what comes to be in the text…you cannot…go behind the written text to ask separately about what the author meant or what he or she was really trying to say. You had better take it that the author said what he or she was trying to say.”

This rule solidly reestablishes the authority of the text by prohibiting the contemporary reading community from changing the decision of the early Church. Authority is granted to the early community for establishing the foundational reading, analogously to the way in which the early community authoritatively established the bounds of the canon. In both cases (the canon and the plain sense) the reading community exercises authority, but in neither case is the contemporary reading community allowed to change that foundational decision.

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188 Ibid, 15-16.

189 When Frei’s argument is viewed in this way, criticisms such as Vanhoozer’s can be overcome. Vanhoozer (*Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 174), writes, “In the end, Frei’s strongest argument seems to be that, as a matter of fact, the believing community decided to read the
third rule simply clarifies the first two, as it “has to do with the descriptive fit between the words and the subject matter” so that the plain sense establishes this “coincidence between sense and subject matter.”

The Church has reached such a consensus reading (first rule) and the contemporary reading community cannot go behind what is written (second rule) precisely because the words render the subject matter. Once again, the foundational decision for the plain sense is similar to the Church’s decision about the boundaries of the canon. Different words (different canonical texts) or a different reading (any other than the plain sense) would render a different subject matter (one that is not Christian).

What, then, is the role of the Church in biblical interpretation for Frei? It appears to be twofold: First, the early Church established the plain reading of Scripture as normative. This decision is foundational, and the Church today must read literally in continuity with the early Church. Second, however, the reading community today is to employ all kinds of redescriptive schemas on an ad hoc basis in order to better understand the ascriptive identity of Christ rendered in the plain sense.

Frei insists that explanatory models are always necessary for the Christian faith, yet those models must be severely subordinated to the text itself. Frei claims,

\[ \text{The text means what it says, and so the reader’s redescription is just that, a redescription and not the discovery of the text as symbolic representation of} \]

\[ \text{Gospels literally. But surely the centrality of the ascriptive subject Jesus Christ is a function more of the literal sense of the text than of the historical decision (accident?) of the believing community to read the Gospels literally? If this is so, then we must conclude that Frei’s earlier insistence that the Gospels are realistic narratives better preserves the indispensability of the unsubstitutable subject Jesus Christ.”} \]

Vanhoozer would not suggest that the early church community chose their canon by means of historical accident. In both cases, canon and plain sense, the community made their decision based on their fundamental belief in the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ.

\[ ^{190} \text{Frei,} \textit{Types,} \text{16.} \]
something else more profound. But in the process of redescription we can—and
indeed cannot do other than—employ our own thought structures, experiences,
conceptual schemes; there is neither an explicit mode for showing how to
correlate these things with the job of redescription, nor is there a fundamental
conflict between them…it is an article of faith that it can be done; it is done.191

Mark Allen Bowald concludes that Frei’s later model establishes a “greater chastening
of the agency of the reader in his hermeneutic insofar as he now is more cognizant of the
inescapability of reading from a stance which, as part of its creaturely limitations, must
employ both descriptive and explanatory schemes.”192 Bowald continues, “In his early
work the literal meaning was defined primarily in terms of a quality of the text itself
which impresses itself on the reader. Now, the agency for the literal meaning is shared
between text and tradition.”193 This new equation, in turn, means that the Church
(tradition) acts in “codetermining” the meaning of the text,194 in a primary sense by
establishing the literal reading of the narrative as the normative reading, and in a
secondary sense by using its intratextual language of faith while incorporating all kinds
of external conceptual schemes. The twofold role of the Church in interpretation, then,
shifts Frei’s focus from text alone to the interaction between reading, and text. If it is
truly an “article of faith,” as Frei claims, that there is no “fundamental conflict between”
what the text says and the contemporary Church’s redescription, then it is the duty of the
interpreter to read within the bounds established by the Church.

191 Ibid, 44.
192 Bowald, Rendering the Word, 101.
193 Ibid, 104.
194 Bowald (ibid, 106), claims the later Frei “adds an emphasis on the role of the Church’s
traditional reading in co-determining the meaning. Nevertheless, ‘truth’ is still not directly attributable to
human agency but to gracious divine action which may indirectly assert itself via text, tradition and
community.”
2. Tracy’s Difficulty: Articulating the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ

Tracy’s most acute hermeneutical challenge comes from Hans Frei. Frei’s sharpest critiques against Tracy fault him for failing to read Scripture in light of the identity (and hence particularity) of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{195} Frei levels two criticisms against Tracy in this regard. First, Frei thinks that when the general system of phenomenology is applied at the beginning of interpretation, the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ will always be reduced to a mode of consciousness. Frei thinks that within phenomenology, “What narratives present…is not in the first place ascriptive selves that are the subjects of their predicates…but the ‘mode-of-being-in-the-world’ which these selves exemplify and which is ‘re-presented’ by being ‘disclosed’ to ‘understanding.’”\textsuperscript{196} Consequently, Christ may present a new existential modes of being for human possibility, but his unique identity will be secondary. Frei harshly states that, “Tracy’s…intention is clear. What the story of Jesus is about is not Jesus storied or historical, but ‘existential possibility,’ which is not a temporal cumulative qualification of a specific character in his or her own story, but a successful or unsuccessful evocation of a mode of present consciousness.”\textsuperscript{197} The identity of Christ, Frei fears, will be considered important only insofar as it discloses

\textsuperscript{195} For example, Frei (\textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 64), argues that for Tracy, “the apparent literal sense of the New Testament, in which Jesus as ‘real’ or ‘historical’ seems to have an irreducibly unique and unsurpassable place in relation to salvation, is quite dispensable… Symbolic-experiential Christology thinks of Jesus or rather the story of Jesus (why not both?) as perhaps the highest representation of the authentic agapic mode, but certainly not unique or indispensable.”

\textsuperscript{196} Frei, \textit{Literal Reading}, 47. Frei (ibid, 48), is convinced that in Tracy’s account, “the ascription in the story is simply a temporary personal thickening within the free-flowing stream of a general class of describable dispositional attitudes. ‘Jesus’….names a meaning, namely (the disclosure of) a generalizable set of attitudes.”

\textsuperscript{197} Frei, \textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 62-63.
possibilities for human existence. Tracy is seen as a chief perpetrator of Ryle’s “the Descartes myth” because phenomenological method assumes an interior self which experiences and an outer self which conceptualizes, both of which are held together by meaning.\textsuperscript{198} Tracy is accused of perpetrating the Descartes myth as he tries to explain Christ in terms of existential meaning rather than through the narrative rendering of his identity.

Frei repeatedly accuses Tracy of making the reading of Scripture a regional application of a general model, fearing that the emphasis on the manner of disclosure will determine the subject matter that is studied. Frei argues that for Tracy, “finally the correlation is a matter of subsuming the specifically Christian under the general, experiential religious, as one ‘regional’ aspect.”\textsuperscript{199} Tracy’s insists that the subject matter,\textsuperscript{200} not a method, must be allowed to control the discussion.\textsuperscript{201} Yet Frei would ask, if the manner of disclosure is the same in all classics, how can the subject matter possibly

\textsuperscript{198} Frei, ibid, 33. This means that “there is no cutting difference between external description and Christian self-description, largely because the context for both is the ‘meaning’ structure supplied by the notion of the self as consciousness and by the phenomenological procedure that analyzes it. Meaning, as the internal experience of selves, and religious experience in particular, is the glue that allows external and internal description to be one, and Christian description or self-description is one instance of the general class ‘religious meaningfulness.’”

\textsuperscript{199} Frei, ibid, 34.

\textsuperscript{200} Tracy, \textit{The Analogical Imagination}, 136, n. 8 defines “Subject matter” as “the common subject matter expressed through the form in the text which provokes the questions for the preunderstanding of the interpreter. It is not a synonym for ‘the text’” (Tracy here refers to Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," \textit{Philosophy Today} 17, no. 2 (1972), pp. 128-29).

\textsuperscript{201} Cf. David Tracy and Robert Grant, \textit{A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible}, Second edition ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 170. Tracy (ibid), argues, “The phrase ‘mutually critical correlations’ also explicates what otherwise remains merely implicit: the fact that there is no general model which can be allowed to determine any particular interpretation.” This simply means that one always interprets for a particular situation, and hence one cannot add the rules before beginning the process. Tracy (171), goes on to claim that “a correlation logically allows a full spectrum of possible interpretations ranging from confrontation…through a similarity-in-difference…to an identity.”
control the text/reader interaction? Frei claims, “For the Christian theologian adoption of this view of the description of religious phenomena will finally amount to a commitment that theology must be grounded in a, or more specifically, this foundational philosophical theory in order to be intelligible; and that the interpretation of Christian self-description will never be more than a ‘regional’ embodiment of this more comprehensive undertaking.”

Second, Frei thinks that phenomenological hermeneutics will tend to turn the un substitutable person of Jesus Christ into a symbol. Frei claims, “For Professor Tracy, the fruit of New Testament interpretation is that Jesus Christ is a most powerful symbol; his reality, an idealization of the represencing, through the expressive and evocative language of the story, of his life-stance.” As Frei (rather ungraciously) constructs the argument, Christ for Tracy is reduced to a symbol, because it is easier to incorporate the conceptualization a symbol into a phenomenological system then to incorporate the ascriptive identity of a person realistically rendered. Frei suggests two hypothetical but devastating consequences which could result from this reduction. First, Frei suggests that if symbols can become outdated and die (as Tracy has argued), then it is hypothetically possible that the symbol of Jesus Christ could die in the Christian community, and Christ Himself could become expendible to the Christian faith. Second, Frei argues that in Tracy’s system the historical Jesus could have never existed, so long as the existential

202 Frei “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 100.

203 Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 63 Frei seems to see phenomenology as continuing (in a tempered form) the basic thrust of Bultmann’s existential theology.

204 Frei, Literal Reading, 64.
story and the response remain. Though Frei does not see Tracy employing either reduction in practice, Frei believes Tracy’s phenomenological method implicitly tends toward these errors.

Both the charge of reducing Christ to a mode of conscience and the charge of reducing Christ to a symbol are closely related. The second may be overstated, but it may hold weight insofar as it is related to the first. Tracy has never specifically said that Christ is a symbol. Yet his language does approach making those events which are most important to Christ’s identity, His crucifixion, resurrection and incarnation, into symbols. Identifying these as symbols is a dangerous move, Frei would claim, because all three constitute the identity of an unsubstitutable Person and identity is constituted through the character’s interaction with other events, characters, etc. These events are not symbols of general meaningfulness in their own right, but only as they emphasize the identity of Jesus Christ. Requiring that existential significance be the criteria for good reading can make Christ’s identity a means to an end—in so far as it discloses possibilities for human meaningfulness.

The true enemy of the plain sense (and the cause of the eclipse of biblical narrative), Frei believes, is any extrinsic principle of interpretation which is given power

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205 Frei, ibid.

206 Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 234), does write that, “One need not be a believer in that event to accord the Christ symbol a major role in Western and other classics. That symbol clearly functions as at least a cultural classic. One need not be a believer in Christianity to accord it authentically religious status: a manifestation from the whole by the power of the whole.”

207 Tracy (ibid, 249), writes, “The classic event for the Christian is the religious event of God’s self-manifestation in the person Jesus the Christ: an event that happened, happens, and will happen…The classic images for the Christian are those related to that event and that person: the dialectics of the symbols of cross-resurrection-incarnation.”

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to orient all interpretation around itself. Such a principle will necessarily usurp and replace the plain meaning of the text. One influential usurper today, Frei argues, is the phenomenological tradition, which, Frei believes, cannot, of its very nature, allow for the primacy of the literal, ascriptive sense of the text. Holistic employment of this general method (as any general method) will result, Frei thinks, in the loss of the particularity of Jesus Christ. Frei specifically criticizes Tracy for deciding before even engaging in interpretation that there must be “compatibility between two apparently autonomous factors” (i.e. Christian tradition and the situation).\textsuperscript{208} As a result, good theology for Tracy is seen to be largely a matter of showing the two to be compatible. Because Tracy has chosen phenomenological hermeneutics as his philosophical system, Frei feels he will always frame the distinctiveness of the Christian fact in terms of phenomenology, thus limiting the message to those elements accessible to phenomenology’s categories of meaning. Frei argues that theologians as diverse as Schleiermacher and Barth understood the need for ad hoc correlation,\textsuperscript{209} but Tracy’s project of systematic correlation ends

\textsuperscript{208} Frei, \textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 31.

\textsuperscript{209} Frei attempts to make Schleiermacher and Barth the champions of his concept of \textit{ad hoc} correlation. In \textit{Types of Christian Theology}, Schleiermacher is contrasted to Tracy. For example, Frei notes that for Schleiermacher, “Phenomenology and doctrinal content are correlated, but to talk of their identity would be inappropriate. This is a far cry from David Tracy, for whom it seems to be the case that Christian ‘meanings’ may be fairly represented as one specific mode of general religious consciousness” (\textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 37). (See also \textit{Types of Christian Theology}, 71, where Frei promotes his own project of “ad hoc correlation” by claiming it has the same meaning as Schleiermacher’s phrase, “A little introspection”; “‘A little introspection,’ rather like common sense—nothing high-powered here! It’s as though the principle of correlation \textit{could} have been something else if he hadn’t lived in Prussia when he did and experienced the philosophical possibilities of his time. General criteria for meaning on the one side, the specificity of Christian faith and language on the other, and an ad hoc conceptual instrument for bringing them together—distinctiveness and reciprocity together.”)
either in the sublimating of Christianity by employing a general system of philosophy or in “hermeneutical incoherence.”

Overall, Tracy appreciates Frei’s criticism. Tracy realizes he has not adequately emphasized the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ in its narrative rendering, and attempts to overcome this weakness. Tracy notes that Frei has clarified for him just why the Gospel narratives are the key to understanding the Scriptures. Gospel is, Tracy claims, “that peculiar, perhaps unique, compositional mode that unites Word-as-proclamation and disclosive Word rendered present through written narrative,” and serves as “the major genre for the original Christian communities’ self-interpretation.”

Thus, Tracy continues, the “passion narratives are the principle stories by which the Christian community first rendered in written form its understanding of who this singular Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed as the Christ is.” Gospel narrative is foundational because only Gospel narrative can render the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. Appreciating Frei’s critique, Tracy claims,

The confessional genre and the kerygmatic categories state but fail to show what can only be shown in explicitly narrative terms...just how and why the identity and presence of Jesus as Jesus the Christ is indeed confessed in the common Christian confession, but is rendered in its fullness only in and through the details of the interaction of the unsubstitutable character of Jesus and the specific circumstances of his passion and resurrection...This, for me at least, is Frei’s

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210 Frei (ibid, 6), claims Tracy “tries to have it both ways,” (i.e. allow for the particularity of revelation and determine it by a general philosophical schema) yet in the end “either reverts to” type one and allows philosophy to dictate the discussion, or it “simply ends in hermeneutical incoherence” of type two. Frei’s appropriation of Tracy in type two seems to reflect Tracy’s *Analogical Imagination*, because his first book, *Blessed Rage for Order* is noted by Frei as “returning to Kant,” and therefore would best fit in type one.


212 Ibid, 390.
great contribution: to show, in narrative terms, how the Christian confesses not merely through the genre of confession but through affirming the passion narrative as the full meaning of that confession. The passion narrative shows us how and why the Christian community ‘believes in Jesus Christ with the apostles’...only the narrative can show, and not merely state (confess), who this Jesus Christ, present to us in word and sacrament, really is for the Christian.  

Tracy says that while he always stressed the “proclamatory aspect of these narratives as gospel,” he failed to “engage in the further task: an analysis of how the highly particular narrative interactions of the passion accounts actually render the identity and presence of Jesus Christ in order further to clarify my affirmation (then and now) of the ecclesial ‘plain sense’ of these narratives.” Thus Tracy believes that Frei has uniquely demonstrated both the necessity of this hermeneutical task and has shown why it provides an essential foundation for understanding the meaning of the Christian faith.

Tracy remains concerned that Frei’s insistence on realistic narrative will restrict legitimate readings of the Gospel narratives. Yet Frei’s understanding of the literal sense may not be nearly as restrictive as Tracy seems to think. Frei’s insistence is that

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214 Ibid, 39.

215 See Tracy (“Dialogue with the Other,” 104-14), where Tracy calls Frei’s “Literal Reading” a “narrow” and “peremptory” reading of Scripture for its emphasis on the plain sense as realistic narrative, and “On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 43-51. Tracy’s own critique of Frei (and Lindbeck) suggests that although their emphasis on the plain sense is extremely valuable and fundamentally correct, their emphasis has become one-sided and results in a reductionistic articulation of Scripture. Tracy claims, “The centrality of the plain sense of the passion narratives, moreover, should reopen rather than close Christian theological attention to many other theological readings. As long as the plain sense reading of the passion narratives is understood as the fullest rendering of the common Christian confession, then a diversity of readings of both confession and narrative will inevitably occur” (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 42). Specifically, Tracy thinks that the New Testament itself is quite pluralistic, even if it is normatively oriented toward the ascriptive identity of Christ. “If one grants the importance of the plain sense of the passion narratives, then a further question occurs. Should a theologian also affirm: first, all the differences in the individual passion narratives; second, all the differences in all the other parts of the gospels (the ministry and sayings); third, all the differences in all the other genres of the New Testament?” (Ibid, 43). Hence Tracy claims, “A resting in ‘realistic narrative’ alone may occasion a refusal to take those other ways [namely non Anglo-Saxon readings] with full theological seriousness” (Ibid, 38). Under the guise of ‘realistic narrative,’ Scripture could, in fact, be muted.
part of the Gospel texts, the passion-resurrection sequence, be read as realistic narrative.\textsuperscript{216} These texts must be read plainly as a foundation for other readings of Scripture, because they plainly render the identity of the unsubstitutable Person for the Christian faith. Where Tracy is worried that realistic narrative may stifle the surplus of meaning and hence the legitimate diversity of readings of the text, Frei would only insist that the interpreter first attend to what is plainly written as foundational to the Christian faith (the literal, ascriptive sense of the Gospels), and then he or she may add a wide range of subordinate and secondary interpretations ordered to the plain, literal sense of the text. Hence Frei would not see the plain/literal/realistic sense of the Gospels as restricting interpretation—only establishing the ground of the Christian faith upon which all subsequent interpretation may take place and must be continually ordered.

Tracy is convinced that he can incorporate Frei’s insights into his own correlational project without much amendment to his earlier works.\textsuperscript{217} Tracy emphasizes here that Frei has developed “‘fuller’ not ‘different’ criteria of appropriateness than

\textsuperscript{216} Hans W. Frei, "Theological Reflections on the Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," in \textit{Theology and Narrative}, ed. George and William Placher Hunsinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).113, claims, “I am speaking only of an aspect of the passion-resurrection sequence. Obviously there are also other elements, e.g., tragic and epic motifs, about the Gospel story as a whole and the passion narrative in particular…it is difficult and even undesirable to reduce the gospel story by formal analysis to any one type of literature…” Furthermore, Frei (ibid), realizes that other kinds of biblical genres will require different methods of interpretation: “Understanding texts may differ in accordance with different texts and their differing contexts. Didactic letters may demand different skills from realistic narratives, and parables may differ from both. This does not necessarily mean that ‘to understand’ is many things, but simply that it may not be of the sort for the unity of which an explanatory theory is available.”

\textsuperscript{217} Tracy thinks that he has specifically incorporated Frei’s critique into his model of theology without changing his phenomenological model of interpretation. Tracy (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 35-36), argues that while he remains an “unrepentant correlational theologian,” he has “learned from the incomparable Hans Frei just how central that ‘plain sense’ should be for all Christian theology,” and how it orients the Christian confession to the unsubstitutable Person of Christ.
those” previously employed by Tracy himself. Frei’s project provides “fuller” criteria for Tracy because he had previously made two “valuable but incomplete genre moves”: first by emphasizing the “‘event and person’ (not only the ‘event’) of Jesus Christ,” and second, by “reflect[ing] on the implications of the common Christian confession that ‘I (we) believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles.’” These two criteria of adequacy, Tracy believes, are capable of allowing for pluralism in Scriptural readings while still retaining the essence of Christianity. Tracy claims that the “limitation” of his earlier work (which Frei has helped him to see), is that even in his description of narrative, “‘event’ and ‘person’ remain merely implicit.” “[T]hanks to Frei’s work,” Tracy claims, “I would not change the basic categories and genres of my own attempt at an analysis of the New Testament. But I would reorder them so that the ‘realistic narratives’ played a yet more central role.”

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219 Ibid, 39. Tracy (A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible, 176), claims the Scriptures “are nothing less than the authoritative witness to that event—a witness to which all later Christian communities hold themselves accountable.” This criteria of appropriateness gives Scripture authority to critique the Church and its subsequent interpretations. Tracy (ibid), continues, “To believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles means, for the Christian, that every present personal and communal Christian belief in Jesus Christ is in fundamental continuity with” the Scriptures. Such criteria are necessary because, Tracy (ibid), says, “Criteria of appropriateness insist that all later theologies in Christian theology are obliged to show why they are not in radical disharmony with the central Christian witness expressed in the Scriptures. In that restricted sense, scripture…norms but is not normed…by later witnesses.”


221 Ibid, 59-60, n. 20. See also Tracy, Dialogue with the Other, 104, where Tracy gives additional praise to Frei and shows where he still disagrees with him. Tracy finds “persuasive” Frei’s description of the loss of realistic narrative, and admits that among religions, Christianity has a unique appreciation for narrative because their gospels are the foundation of their faith. Gospel, Tracy claims, is that “peculiar genre which unites proclamation, witness, and narrative…If one wants to know who Jesus Christ is for Christians, the passion narratives are the first place to look. For there we find in realistic and history-like fashion the central Christian construal of who this Jesus confessed to be the Christ is and even why he and he alone is thus construed…Through the rendering of the singular identity of Jesus Christ in the passion narratives, Christians also discover their principle clues to who God is and who human beings as free agents are empowered to become” (114).
As a result of Frei’s critique, Tracy has seemingly added a second criteria of appropriateness to his theological project, while still insisting that a responsible theological program must include an overarching criterion of intelligibility (i.e. a general system of correlation). Throughout his career, Tracy’s chief criteria of appropriateness was his insistence on theological continuity with the confessional formula, “I believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles.” Tracy maintains that this remains a proper criterion, but he now supplements it with Frei’s criterion of realistic narrative. In his 1994 book, *On Naming the Present*, Tracy suggests that it is “possible that these two…theological candidates for unity-amidst-diversity: the common Christian confession and the common Christian passion narrative…*together* may function to show a pervasive unity of Christian theological understanding of the scriptures without in any way denying the need for great variety.” Both the common Christian confession and a realistic reading of the passion narratives are indispensable criteria of appropriateness. As a result, Tracy writes,

> In sum, any Christian theology which confesses its faith in the presence of Jesus Christ (and the Spirit released by Christ) ‘with the apostles’ will always theologically need the plain ecclesial (apostolic) sense of these narratives to achieve what neither symbol *alone*, nor doctrine *alone*, nor historical-critical

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222 Tracy (ibid, 112), restates his insistence that Christians continue to use the confession, “We believe in Jesus the Christ with the apostles.” This, in fact, will safeguard the Identity of Jesus Christ in the way Frei envisioned doing so through realistic narrative. Tracy (ibid, 112-13), claims, “To eliminate any element of this central confession is to change (sometimes radically, sometimes subtly) the Christian understanding of all reality.” Three cautions follow from this: First, Tracy (ibid), claims “the confession is not ‘We believe in Christ’ so that the Sophia-Logos tradition unrelated to the ministry, teaching, death and resurrection of this Jesus of Nazareth confessed to be the Christ can suffice.” Second, Tracy (ibid, 113), claims “the confession is also not ‘We believe in Jesus’ so that a Jesusology or an alternative portrait of Jesus (e.g., the various quests for the ‘historical Jesus’ can replace the ecclesial Christian confession ‘We believe in Jesus Christ.’” Third, Tracy (ibid), claims “the preposition ‘with’…cannot be allowed to be replaced by the preposition ‘in,’” for if the Church believed in the apostles, “the tradition or doctrine or church or apostolic office or text would replace Jesus Christ as that divine reality which the Christian ultimately believes in.”

223 Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 121.
reconstruction of the original apostolic witness alone, nor conceptual theology alone, nor confession alone, can achieve: a theological clarification of how the reality of Christ’s presence is manifested through the identity of that Jesus rendered in the realistic, history-like narrative of the passion and resurrection: a narrative-confession of this one unsubstitutable Jesus of Nazareth who is the Christ of God.\textsuperscript{224}

As long as both the confession, “I believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles,” and the plain rendering of the passion narratives are emphasized (the two criteria of adequacy), the theologian may proceed boldly in adding a criteria of intelligibility (systematic correlation) to the interpretative project without eclipsing the identity of Christ.

Tracy also realizes, as a result of Frei’s critique, that his specific interpretation of individual parables in the Gospels must be reformulated to better emphasize the priority of the identity of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{225} Significantly, Ricoeur also changes his emphasis on the role of parables, although he does not specifically credit Frei’s critique.\textsuperscript{226} Frei has argued that Tracy’s interpretation of parables shifts focus away from realistic narrative

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid, 125.

\textsuperscript{225} Tracy (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 59, n. 16), specifically admits that some of his interpretations of parables in Blessed Rage for Order were “not specifically enough related to the passion narratives.” Tracy cites Blessed Rage for Order, 124-46, as example of this, but insists that he has not made such an error in the Analogical Imagination (see “On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 64, n. 51).

\textsuperscript{226} It is significant to note that Frei’s 1982 essay, “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 94-116, was presented in a joint-presentation with Ricoeur, responding to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics. Hence they were, by that time, familiar with each other’s arguments, and it is quite possible that Ricoeur’s perspective changed in dialogue with Frei. Later in his career, Ricoeur also admitted he has failed to adequately appreciate “that the narrative-parables are narratives within a narrative, more precisely narratives recounted by the principle personage of an encompassing narrative” (Paul Ricoeur, “The Bible and the Imagination,” in The Bible as a Document of the University, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 55). Ricoeur (“Biblical Hermeneutics,” Semeia 4 (1975), 105), goes on to emphasize, “The hero of the Gospel narrative, who is also the ‘donor’ of the parables as secondary narratives tends to become the indirect referent of the parable as metaphor.” It is clear, then, that Ricoeur wishes to understand the individual narratives in light of the realistic narrative, and not the other way around. Yet Ricoeur does not, as William Placher (“Introduction,” 45), claims, “go on to give a systematic account of how to interpret that overarching narrative.”
and hence the plain rendering of the identity of Jesus Christ. Frei thinks Tracy’s interpretation of parables tends to predominate because parables better fit Tracy’s phenomenological description of religious language. Ricoeur has explained religious language as having a referent grounded primarily in religious experience: “What religious language does is to redescribe; what it redescribes is human experience. In this sense we must say that the ultimate referent of the parables, proverbs, and eschatological sayings is not the Kingdom of God, but human reality in its wholeness.” Frei worries that human experience has shifted emphasis from the identity of Christ to the situation of the contemporary reader. Tracy, however, thinks that through Frei’s work he is able to explain how parables can be subordinated to the identity of Christ. As long as

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227 Frei (Types of Christian Theology, 65), argues that Tracy naturally focuses his work away from realistic narrative and onto parables which “disorient” and “re-describe” and disclose a world for the reader, since these are better suited to bring out existential significance. Naturally, says Frei (ibid), this linguistic “limit” situation is most likely to be found in “proverbs, eschatological sayings, and parables…” and hence the realistic narrative is usurped.

228 Tracy, Blessed Rage for Order, 134. Tracy continually stresses the parables as disclosive of limit. Tracy (ibid), writes, “In the peculiar limit-use of narrative and metaphor in the parables these fictions redescribe the extraordinary in the ordinary in such a manner that the ordinary is transgressed and a new and extraordinary, but possible mode-of-being-in-the-world is disclosed.” As a result, Tracy (ibid), writes, “Religious language in general re-presents that basic confidence and trust in existence which is our fundamental faith, our basic authentic mode of being in the world.” The reason parables are essential for Tracy is because, as fiction, they disclose the “disorienting” and “reorienting” of a claim to the whole, which is the basic thrust of the religious dimension.

229 Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 127. Furthermore, Ricoeur (ibid, 34), notes, “the ultimate referent of parabolic (proverbial, proclamatory) language is human experience centered around the limit-experiences which would correspond to the limit-expressions of religious discourse.”

230 Frei believes that phenomenology will move toward something like Gnosticism in its focus on teachings and sayings as the center of the text rather than the identity of Jesus Christ. It is worth noting, however, that Frei is not against existential readings of parables, provided that they are directed toward and grounded in the identity of Jesus Christ. Frei (“Conflicts in Interpretation,” 166), simply claims that in parables “one moves better from the self-identification of Jesus through the Passion and Resurrection stories toward the parables rather than the other way around.”
interpretations of parables are grounded in the two criteria of appropriateness they should be considered Christian readings of the text. Tracy claims,

[I]f the parables of Jesus are not explicitly related to the passion narratives (as they are in the plain sense of Scripture), then it is true that the parables may begin to play too solitary and too prominent a theological role for Christian self-understanding. For the full theological meaning of Jesus’ parables of the Reign of God is only clarified when the interpreter, through careful readings of the passion narrative, shows how Jesus is fully manifested in the passion narratives, and not earlier, as the enacted parable of God.

So what of Frei’s argument that phenomenological hermeneutics will “break” rather than “stretch” the literal reading of Scripture? Will simply adding a further criterion of appropriateness without eliminating phenomenological hermeneutics restore a foundational focus on the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ as an orienting principle for Christian identity? Frei would say no. Frei is bothered that Tracy (following Ricoeur) posits a “split reference” for the Scriptures which places “meaning” in the world in front of the text, hence making the existential significance of the passage for the reader the ultimate referent of the text. The interpreter simply cannot give priority to both an extrinsic system of meaning and the unique claims of the Christian texts. As a result, when a systematic correlation becomes a requirement for theology,

231 Tracy, “On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 64, n. 51. Tracy (ibid), insists “that if the parables are to play their full theological role they should be related to the common confession and to the diversity of genres (as in The Analogical Imagination) or the common narrative (as in Frei).”

232 Ibid, 47.

233 See Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 46-65, who claims that Tracy must “indicate that the straightforward literal description or reference to the ordinary world is not what is at stake in the New Testament.” To do this, Tracy follows Ricoeur in using a “double or split reference…in which the real meaning is the innovative linguistic thrust from the first to a second level, to a newly created linguistic world, and it is this second rather than the first referent that gives us the true referent or meaning of the language.”
[E]ither you provide an allegorical interpretation of the New Testament, in which the predicate exemplified by Jesus overpowers the ascriptive subject himself and then you return to Kant, as does David Tracy in _Blessed Rage for Order_, or your interpretation ends up having two meanings or referents at the same time, Jesus and some general experience, as Tracy does in a later book, _The Analogical Imagination_.

Frei explains that having two “meanings” is not a problem as long as one is allowed to order them (as the four senses were used in premodern exegesis). The problem with Tracy’s later account, for Frei, is that a “systematic correlation of the two meanings” (i.e. the incorporation of two ordering principles at the same time) forces him into “hermeneutical incoherence.” In other words, Tracy may have to break his hermeneutical rules to put the identity of Christ as rendered in the text ahead of the existential mode-of-being-in-the-world rendered in front of the text. Within the world in front of the text, will the meaning of the words or the meaning disclosed in a fusion or horizons be granted priority? The claims of Scripture, he feels, are relatively clear, even if a criteria for understanding is not clear. Frei insists, There may well be an affinity, structural, moral, aesthetic, between reader and text. On the other hand there may not be. The conditions for a proper reading of biblical narratives may be quite accessible, even if one fails to discover such a general type of affinity, especially a structural affinity…the specificity of the narrative text, its literal sense if you will, is not to be ignored, no matter in what way the reader may find (s)he adjusts to it.

It seems that Frei is still concerned that Tracy’s willingness to incorporate a realistic reading of the Gospels has come about precisely because it is able to fit into

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234 Ibid, 82.

235 Ibid, 82.

236 Frei, “‘Narrative’ in Christian and Modern Reading.” 160.
Tracy’s already established correlational model, and not because Tracy is now committed to a plain reading of the biblical narrative. When tension does arise (as Frei believes it does in the case of the particularity of Jesus Christ), Tracy has two options: either he can give hermeneutical priority to the unique claim of Scripture (and hence break his own correlational model), or he can incorporate the unique claim to the extent that it fits (and hence reduce the claim to what can be articulated coherently in a philosophical model). Either choice, Frei believes, will demonstrate the inadequacy of systematic correlation and the need for an ad hoc alternative.

C. Scripture’s Role in the Economy

In this dissertation I suggest that the way to ease the impasse of method between Tracy and Frei is to locate Scripture in the economy of redemption, showing how the Triune God uses Scripture to communicate to the Church. Despite their nearly exclusive emphasis on method, I wish to argue that both Tracy and Frei see the movement from text to spiritual reality as the central problematic governing their hermeneutical projects. Frei insists on the plain sense reading of Scripture precisely because he desires to show that the Jesus Christ rendered in the Gospels is the Christ who is present to the reader. Tracy also develops his system of phenomenological hermeneutics because he wants to show that Scriptural reading involves more than simply the interaction between texts and readers, but leads to the very disclosure of the living, present Christ to readers. However, because neither Frei nor Tracy examines this broader context of the divine economy, the relationship between Christ, Scripture and Church is left undeveloped, resulting in an
impasse in method. This section will show the implicit suggestions each makes about God’s use of Scripture and the movement from text to spiritual reality in a Christian reading of Scripture in order to highlight essential hermeneutical discussions that need to be developed.

1. God’s Use of Scripture

Neither Tracy nor Frei says anything explicit about God’s use of the Scriptural texts in the economy of redemption. Throughout his work, Tracy’s focus remains on the reader’s reorienting experience of disclosure in the text, and hence does not articulate the way in which God uses the texts. Yet Tracy insists that the disclosure is always a gift. Consequently, although Tracy never develops this idea, the reorienting of the reader in encounter with the text must depend somehow on the action of God rather than being simply a function of the interaction between text and reader. In his later work, Tracy does suggest that the Logos is somehow uniquely present in the Scriptural texts, but he never explains how this presence is linked to God’s possible use of the texts for self-communication to readers.

Frei’s later writings at times seem to presume an ontology of God’s action in the text, although Frei makes only a few tentative suggestions about God’s use of the text. In a 1986 lecture, Frei makes an interesting comment that moves beyond the text/reader relationship to a discussion of God’s activity in the text. Frei writes, “The textual world


238 Tracy, “Writing,” 390.
as witness to the Word of God is not identical with the latter, and yet, by the Spirit’s
grace, it is ‘sufficient’ for the witnessing.” Frei notes later that he has a
fundamental trust for the language of Scripture because God has caused this language to
be adequate. The only confidence the interpreter could have that God is indeed
sufficiently depicted in the text is if God caused that fit depiction to occur. Frei
concludes that this is the reason readers must trust in the adequacy of the literal sense:

I plead then for the primacy of the literal sense then and, it seems to me, its
puzzling but firm relationship to a truth toward which we cannot thrust. The
modus significandi will never allow us to say what the res significata is.
Nonetheless, we can affirm that in the Christian confession of divine grace, the
truth is such that the text is sufficient. There is a fit due to the mystery of grace
between truth and text…The Reformers saw the place where that fit was realized
in the constant reconstitution of the Church where the word is rightly
preached and where the sacraments are rightly administered.

239 Frei, “Conflicts in Interpretation,” 164. This text, published in Theology and Narrative,
153-66, was originally delivered as the Alexander Thompson Memorial Lecture at Princeton Theological
Seminary in 1986 and a transcript was made from a surviving tape by Richard Burnett (see Theology and

240 Ibid, 165.

241 Frei (“Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 110), claims, “Language is, for
Christians, a created good and not in principle fallen, and therefore it is not ‘absent’ from the
truth…Language is not fallen, not absent from truth or meaning…We have language and that is all we
have, and to intercalate ‘meaning’ into it is the very temptation we must resist. We have texts and
intertextuality and no other realm.”

242 Frei, “Conflicts in Interpretation,” 166.
Essentially Frei’s cumulative argument is that the text of Scripture can be considered sufficient in its plain sense because God has determined that Scripture will be adequate as a witness to Christ. Scripture is adequate because God has somehow caused it to be sufficient. The sufficiency of the text is constituted and preserved by “divine grace.” This claim shifts the emphasis from the Christian community to God’s action. It appears that Frei is focused on God’s providential action, seeing to it that these texts were adequate and preserved, yet Frei never develops this aspect. Thus neither Tracy nor Frei really explain God’s use of the text, although the logic of each seems, at times, to press them to say more about how God may use Scripture.

2. The Movement from Text to Spiritual Reality

Given their lack of explicit reflection on God’s use of the Scriptural texts, it is significant that Frei and Tracy both develop their respective projects with the goal of showing that Scriptural reading leads to spiritual encounter with the referent of the text. In fact, I suggest that although articulation of this movement remains implicit for each, it is the central problematic in each of their projects. For Tracy, Scripture is significant precisely because it can lead to disclosure with the divine, while, for Frei, Scripture is significant precisely because it renders to readers the Christ who is present. Here it appears to be the nearly exclusive focus on the relationship between text and reader prevents each from describing this movement.

In his early work, Tracy’s implicit movement from text to divine reality occurs at the level of dialogical encounter between text and reader which occurs in any religious classic. Hence Tracy’s central claim is that “The Christ event, in sum, is re-presentative
of the same ‘that-it-happens-now’ event from the whole disclosed in every religious classic.”

The subject matter disclosed in the Christian classic texts is unique, but the manner of disclosure is common to all classics. Each genre, in its own way, discloses possibilities for human existence as it discloses a claim to the whole, which finds its greatest instantiation in the event of Christ. The reader, in encounter with the text, is brought by the text’s unique subject matter to a moment of disclosure, in which a new mode of being in the world is opened up. The subject matter disclosure is a dual referent, simultaneously God as the ground of all reality, and a claim to the whole, expressed in Christian faith as the “dangerous memory” of the person/event of Jesus Christ. As the reader encounters this unique subject matter, he or she is brought by the text to an experience of limit, in which the world of the reader is reoriented by the subject matter.

Later in his career Tracy also provides a deeper description of the movement from text to spiritual reality. In a little essay entitled “Writing,” Tracy argues that all writing is always fragmented, always constituted in absence. Consequently, “In Christian self-understanding, except for the unique status of Christ-as-Logos, there is no claim to full or simple self-presence in either manifesting Word-as-Logos or proclaimed word as rendering present the Word in distance (Bultmann) or sacrament. There is some presencing, to be sure, but mediated in and through writing/scripture. Presence is never full, simple, or whole.”

Because there is no full presence of either author or reader to writing, the interpreter must always be self-critical, lest a particular ideology drive his/her

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243 Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, 235.

244 Tracy, “Writing,” 390. There Tracy appreciates the critiques of Barthes and Derrida about the tendency toward “presence” in writing and argues that presence is always partial when mediated through texts.
This articulation on the need for suspicious readings of Scripture positively supplements Tracy’s previous articulations of this subject, because he now explicitly links Scripture to a theory of the presence of the divine Word. The promise of presence allows the Church to understand their Scriptures as unique: “This decisive Word-event of divine self-manifestation is understood among Christians as the divine self-presencing in the currently enacted Word and Eucharistic sacrament and in the written words of Scripture.” Yet Tracy struggles to show, in general terms of textual interpretation, exactly how these texts are unique in their rendering of Christ. Locating Scripture’s role in the relationship between Christ and Church may allow Tracy to explain the unique presence of the Logos in Scripture in a more complete way.

Early in his career, Frei makes an equally provocative statement about the presence of God in Scripture. In *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei claims,

> The center of the Christian message is a mystery—the presence of God…the feeble, often naïve and simple word of written Scripture…becomes a true witness, yet more than a witness. The Word does indeed witness to that which it is not, the presence of God in Jesus Christ. But far more important is the fact that indirectly (rather than directly, as in the case of Jesus Christ) God witnesses to it, that he makes himself present to it so that the Word may become the temporal basis of the Spirit who is the presence of God in Jesus Christ. The witness of Scripture to

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245 Tracy (ibid, 391), claims, “Scripture and writing does not simply participate in presence but can indeed function paradoxically as the warning of the idolatrous Christian temptation to illusions of full self-presence or divine presence to the Christian.”

246 The Word is both present and absent in these texts, and hence there is need for both trust and criticism. Tracy (ibid, 389), notes the “originating Christian dialectic of revelation-as-Word: Jesus the Christ understood as both self-presencing Logos and self-distancing Kerygma.” This “dual function” of “proximity and distance, presence and absence, similarity and difference, participation and interruption” of the self-understanding of Christ in writing demonstrates that “the Word, Jesus Christ, is for Christians testified to and rendered present in written words, that is, Scripture.”

247 Ibid, 387.
God is sure, not by itself, but because the witness of God to Scripture is faithful and constant.\(^{248}\)

Here Frei seems to claim that the Scriptures are “faithful and constant” because God “makes himself present to it.” Carter Aikin argues that implicitly in Frei’s thought, “[T]he reason that we can orient our own identity in that which is given in the Bible is because God gives God’s self as present in scripture.”\(^{249}\)

Frei insists that this movement from text to the (indirect) presence of God takes place in realistic reading of the Gospel narratives, where the unsubstitutable identity of a Christ is rendered to the reader in such a way that the reader cannot think of Christ as not present today. Realistic reading, for Frei, finds its climax in the crucifixion and resurrection accounts in such a way that one who grasps the identity of Christ through Scripture cannot but understand Christ to be resurrected and present today.\(^{250}\) As Cowdell says,

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\(^{248}\) Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 165.

\(^{249}\) See Wm. Carter Aikin, "Narrative Icon and Linguistic Idol: Reexamining the Narrative Turn in Theological Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 28, no. 1 (2008), 93. Aikin (ibid, 88), notes two trends in narrative theology, one which “speaks of the scriptural narrative itself as the core of Christian community, identity, convictions, and so on, and the adherence to this narrative in and of itself is the source of Christian moral transformation” (Hauerwas is the chief example). The second trend “speaks of the scriptural narrative as that which renders God present to the Christian individual and community. This mode of God’s presence through scriptural narrative, then, constitutes the core of Christian community, identity, convictions, and so on” (Frei is the chief example). Aikin suggests that Hauerwas’s approach comes close to making the text into an idol rather than an icon (using Marion’s categories) because it reflects the interpreter’s own image rather than pointing beyond itself to God.

\(^{250}\) Summarily Frei (*The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 149), gives the “identity of Jesus Christ” as rendered in the Gospels: “He is the man from Nazareth who redeemed men by his helplessness, in perfect obedience enacting their good in their behalf. As that same one, he was raised from the dead and manifested to be the redeemer. As that same one, Jesus the redeemer, he cannot not live, and to conceive of him as not living is to misunderstand who he is.” Thus in reading the resurrection accounts literally, Frei (ibid, 145), claims, “To know who he is in connection with what took place is to know that he is…What the accounts are saying, in effect, is that the being and identity of Jesus in the resurrection are such that his nonresurrection becomes inconceivable…however impossible it may be to grasp the nature of the resurrection, it remains inconceivable that it should not have taken place.”
[B]y giving a purely aesthetic (arguably) description of the text, [Frei] has made the transition from text to reality claim. Thus the revelatory claim of the text does not lie, as with Ricoeur, in the establishment of a moment of understanding in the reader, but it remains an intra-textual event. Here the reader understands who Jesus is and this understanding is identical with another understanding: that Jesus is.

Frei claims that this move from text to divine reality takes place entirely at the level of the literal sense, as the reader recognizes the unique subject matter of Scripture rendered in a fitting way. Frei claims, “The primacy of the sensus literalis is in effect an assertion of the fitness and congruence of the ‘letter’ to be the channel of the spirit. It is the assertion that the text is more nearly perspicuous than not….For the Protestant Reformers, governance by the sensus literalis in the reading of Scripture as well as its perspicuity entailed that in principle there is no interpretive outsider.”

Using the exegesis of Calvin, Frei claims, “Calvin has it that our hearts and minds may need illumination, the text does not. It is plain for all to read.” Yet while this realistic rendering is open to all readers, Frei admits that belief in the resurrection is a passage to a different realm. Although “there is a kind of logic in a Christian’s faith that forces him to say that disbelief in the resurrection of Jesus is rationally impossible,” Frei says, “whether one actually believes the resurrection is, of course, a wholly different matter…no matter what the logic of the Christian faith, actual belief in the resurrection is

251 Scott Cowdell, Is Jesus Unique? A Study of Recent Christology (New York & Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 208. For Frei (The Identity of Jesus Christ, 146), this “argument holds good only in this one and absolutely unique case, where the described entity (who or what he is, i.e., Jesus Christ, the presence of God) is totally identical with his factual existence. He is the resurrection and the life. How can he be conceived as not resurrected?” Frei (ibid, 148), adds, “To think of him dead is the equivalent of not thinking of him at all.”

252 Frei, “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 108.

253 Ibid.
a matter of faith and not of arguments from possibility or evidence." Thus Frei implies that while a straight-forward reading of the Gospels renders belief in this Christ logically necessary, the logic of coming to believe is a gift given by God to which human beings can only respond when given. Hence for the reader to move from reading realistically to believing the implications of the realistic narrative is the passage to a different realm of reality. A paradox, then, is present within Frei’s work: The letter of the text realistically renders the divine reality, but does not mechanistically lead the reader to an encounter with that reality. Spiritual understanding is a movement beyond realistic reading. As we will see, this claim brings Frei’s realistic reading very close to de Lubac’s move from history to allegory, where the text is a reliable guide to and necessary sign of the spiritual reality, yet it is the action of the Spirit which occasions the movement from one to the other.

Frei also appears to articulate a movement from text to spiritual reality in a second way which is dependent on the plain sense of the Gospel narratives. Here a move to figural reading takes place which must be grounded in theological presuppositions about God’s providence and the meaning of history. It is here where Frei explicitly speaks of a “spiritual understanding” of Scripture. For Frei, following Auerbach, spiritual understanding appears to be the ability to recognize, through the lens of God’s ordering providential actions in history, the connection between figure and fulfillment. Dawson shows that Frei, following Auerbach,

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254 Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ, 151-52.

255 Frei (The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 28, citing Auerbach, Mimesis, 73), claims, “Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies
restricts the scope of the ‘spiritual’ by distinguishing it from the historical reality of figure and fulfillment….Only the mental process by which a figural reader ‘comprehends’ their ‘interdependence’ can be called spiritual….Like meaning, spirit denotes a divinely enacted relation between two persons or events, a relation altogether different from the causal connections of science or scientific historiography.256

Hence spiritual understanding is the grasping of the relationship between figure and fulfillment which can only be understood in light of the theological presupposition that God has ordered history into a unified whole. For Frei, “The only spiritual act is that of comprehension—an act of mimesis, following the way things really are—rather than of creation, if it is to be faithful interpretation.”257 The movement from text to divine reality, then, is first a realistic reading of the Gospels which render the unique identity of the present Christ, and second a comprehension, through the use of theological presuppositions, how the reader fits into the figural unity of the Scriptural world.

For both Tracy and Frei, then, these texts are unique precisely because they lead the responsive reader to an encounter with God and they enable the responsive reader to see all reality in the way God intends it to be understood. The Scriptural texts go far beyond imparting information about God; they lead the reader to the self-disclosure of God. For both, the theological interpretation of Scripture is intended to facilitate the mediation of the same spiritual reality, yet because they both focus only on the way in

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, and only the comprehension, the intellectus spiritualis, of their interdependence is a spiritual act.”

256 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 153.

257 Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 36.
which the reader encounters the text, and not on God’s use of the texts for self-revelation to readers, this discussion has reached an impasse.

3. Conclusion and Remaining Challenges

Observing the absence of discussion about the place of Scripture in the economy of redemption reveals why certain methodological impasses remain between Tracy and Frei. Frei’s difficulty with locating authority and Tracy’s difficulty in naming the referent of the text, I will suggest, can only be resolved through explicit theological reflection on the place of Scripture in the divine economy. Frei’s attempt to establish a realistic reading of the Gospels is an honorable attempt to preserve the text from manipulation by human readers through engagement with contemporary literary theory. Frei provides a strong argument that the Gospels, if read realistically, render a picture of Christ that is relatively clear and determinate. Yet Frei’s concern about the location of authority for the realistic reading of the Gospel narratives, whether it arises from the texts themselves or from the consensus of the Church, simply cannot be resolved until Frei has articulated the relationship between Christ, Scripture and Church. Both Frei and Tracy agree that only a plain reading of the Gospel narrative shows “just how and why the identity and presence of Jesus as Jesus the Christ is indeed confessed in the common Christian confession, but is rendered in its fullness only in and through the details of the interaction of the unsubstitutable character of Jesus and the specific circumstances of his passion and resurrection.”

Yet the extent to which this realistic rendering of Christ can

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be correlated to other philosophical disciplines can only be decided when Scripture is examined in the broader context of the economy of redemption. The next section will turn to an examination of the ecclesiology of each author to show how the understanding of the Church influences the hermeneutics of each.

III. Ecclesiology: Describing the Church as a Theological and Social Reality

Both Tracy and Frei seek to ground interpretive authority for Scripture in the reading community. Consequently, a thorough description of the Church as a reading community would seem to produce significant implications for hermeneutical procedure. Yet here again the emphasis of each on method, along with the insistence of each that Scripture can be plainly read by all readers, prevents Tracy and Frei from adequately articulating the way in which the Church uniquely receives the mediation of Christ in the Scriptures.

While Tracy and Frei argue that the Church must be described both as a theological reality and as a sociological reality, their ongoing debate about correlation appears to shift the emphasis of each to a one-sided description of the Church as a social reality. This description of the Church which emphasizes the social dimension of the

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259 Because the Scripture is the Church’s book, a more explicit articulation of ecclesiology should seemingly produce a better understanding of the Scriptures. To decline attention to the character of the Church in order to get a more “objective” reading of Scripture by the individual interpreter has been a chief fault of modern readings, and both Tracy and Frei agree it must be overcome. For Frei (especially the later Frei), the literal sense is to be taken as foundational to Christianity precisely because the Church has decided to read their Scriptures in that way. Frei spends the later part of his career studying the continuous identity and self-description of the Church throughout the ever-changing philosophical models of the modern period. For Tracy, Scripture is the Church’s book, the Church is the bearer of the Christian classic texts, and the interpreter must not say anything that is in discontinuity with the confession, “I believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles.” Both theologians believe it is necessary to ground Scriptural interpretation in the Church.
Church almost to the exclusion of the theological dimension has led to impasse between
the two theologians, as each uses a different model of social description to support
implicit dogmatic assumptions. Tracy typically describes the Church as a “tradition” in
the philosophical sense used by Gadamer and Ricoeur. Thus the Church can be fruitfully
described in terms of a general philosophical system of meaningful interaction between
text (Scripture) and tradition (Church). Consequently Tracy critiques Frei’s
understanding of the “plain sense” of Scripture as being too Protestant\(^{260}\) and too limited
\(^{261}\) to explain how the Scripture is the Church’s book. Frei, on the other hand, typically
describes the Church as a “socio-linguistic community,” using the work of Wittgenstein
and Geertz.\(^{262}\) The Church can be fruitfully described in terms of its self-description:
those practices, rules, customs, etc. which are internal to its existence. Consequently Frei
accuses Tracy of not developing his model with reference to the self-understanding of the
Church, replacing the unique, self-description of the Church with the general category of

\(^{260}\) Tracy (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 37), claims that his own emphasis on
the plain sense (which he feels includes a broader range of readings than Frei’s construal) “clarifies the
Catholic sense of how the Scripture is the church’s book.”

\(^{261}\) Tracy (Dialogue with the Other, 108), writes, “Personally I remain persuaded (de Lubac, et al.) of the value of the patristic and medieval allegorical readings…The contemporary emphasis on ‘literal’
readings, although clearly fruitful for the reasons cited in the text (and distinctively emphasized by Aquinas
and Luther), seems both too narrow in focus and too peremptory in their discussions of ‘allegorical,’ or
‘mystical’ or even ‘general hermeneutical’ readings and concerns.”

\(^{262}\) Lindbeck has been influential in Frei’s development of ecclesiology. The Church, for
Lindbeck (The Nature of Doctrine, 33), is that community which provides a “comprehensive interpretive
scheme” which “structure[s] human experience and understanding of self and world.” Frei wishes to give a
“thick description” of the Church (a term used by Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New
York: Basic Books, 1973)), in order to understand why the literal sense is so essential (see Frei, “Literal
Reading,” 71).
human experience. Each theologian accuses the other of failing to address the Church adequately in reading the Scriptures theologically. Yet both are committed to descriptive schemas of the Church that focus on the Church more as a social reality rather than as a distinctively theological reality.

So long as focus remains almost exclusively on the relationship between Scriptural texts and individual readers, it will be almost impossible to decide whether Tracy or Frei has more adequately described the reading community. It remains unclear why describing the Church’s identity as a socio-linguistic community (as Frei does) is methodologically advantageous to describing it philosophically as a tradition (as Tracy does). Both approaches illumine certain important aspects of the Church’s identity. Yet both fail to provide a thorough enough theological description of the Church to show how it is unique in its reception of Christ by means of the Scriptures. In this section I will show that Tracy and Frei’s lack of theological description of the Church has prevented them from placing Scriptural interpretation in the broader context of the economy of redemption, as they do not adequately show the normative purpose of the Church’s reading of Scripture. Explicitly placing the text/reader relationship in its larger context of God’s self-mediation to the Church, I suggest, will lead to a better description

263 Frei (Types of Christian Theology, 33), writes, “It is interesting that the Church as the necessary context for the use of Christian concepts and language plays no part at all in Tracy’s layout of his method. Experience is its substitute.”

264 Tracy’s implicit critique in Dialogue with the Other, 109, seems to be that philosophical descriptions are not inherently worse than literary theories or social-scientific descriptions of the Church. Tracy (ibid), thus notes, “In Frei’s reading, therefore, the only hope of recovering Christian identity is to recover a ‘plain sense’ reading of the biblical narratives again. For Frei, this demands abandoning the futile hope of ‘correlating’ this narrative to some more general notions of ‘narrativity’ or ‘religion’ (or both). This also demands reading the narratives more like literary critics read them (at least certain kinds of critics like Cleanth Brooks or Eric Auerbach).” Tracy remains unconvinced that either the abandonment of correlation or the use of literary critics or social scientists will, in the end, prove decisive to “recovering Christian identity.”
of the receptive activity of readers and hence will allow for a more complete explanation of Scriptural reading.

A. Frei’s Ecclesiology: The Church as a Socio-linguistic Community

Frei appears to have developed two strands of ecclesiology, one relating to his early focus on the identity of Jesus Christ and the other relating to his later “cultural-linguistic turn.” In Frei’s early model, the Church is constituted in response to the identity of Jesus Christ and thus has its own identity in relation to Christ its head and in relation to the world. Furthermore, Frei suggests that the Church is the indirect presence of Christ. In Frei’s later model, an additional step takes place (additional, because it does not nullify the former model, but largely presupposes it). Since the Church has its own identity (dependent on and in relation to the identity of Jesus Christ), the identity of the Church must be allowed its own self-description in order to show how Scripture must be normatively read. Throughout both ecclesiological strands Frei insists that general hermeneutical method does not determine the Church’s reading of Scripture, nor should ecclesiology be suspended in order to improve Scriptural reading.²⁶⁵

1. Frei’s Early Ecclesiology

²⁶⁵ Topping (Revelation, Scripture, and Church, 195), notes that “on Frei’s depiction of the hermeneutic field…One does not suspend church doctrine and practice (ecclesiology) in order to submit Bible reading to a methodologically and institutionally independent analysis; rather, one suspends historical-critical discussion (of meaning and reference) in order to attend to either the literary features of the Bible (in his early work) or follow the church’s ruled use of the Bible (in his later work), particularly those which govern Gospel reading in relation to the rest of the Bible and, indeed, to the rest of reality.”
Frei’s early ecclesiology, developed in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, sketches an identity of the Church that analogously follows the identity of Christ. Using the same intention-action schema he had applied to the Christ depicted in the Gospels, Frei argues that the identity of the Church is constituted as a follower of the identity of Christ.\(^{266}\) In the same way Jesus’ identity in the Gospels is rendered in His relation to others, so the identity of the Church is constituted as it acts in relation to Christ and to the world.\(^{267}\) Just as “Jesus’ identity was the intention-action sequence in which he came to be who he was,” and just as Jesus “was constituted by the interaction of his character and circumstances…So also is the church. Like Jesus, like the people of Israel, the church is its history, its passage from event to event…”\(^{268}\) As a result, Frei can claim that “the church has a history, indeed it is nothing other than its as yet unfinished history transpiring from event to event.”\(^{269}\) This identity is understood by paying attention to the relationships between Christ, the Church, and the world.

The Church is constituted both as follower of Christ and as indirect presence of Christ. As a witness to the identity of Christ, the Church is faithful to the extent that it

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\(^{266}\) Mike Higton ("‘A Carefully Circumscribed Progressive Politics:’ Hans Frei's Political Theology," *Modern Theology* 15, no. 1 (1999), 63), notes three traits of Frei’s early ecclesiology: The Church “is the place where the accessible identity of Jesus is re-presented,…it has its own identity as an unsubstitutable corporate follower of an unsubstitutable Lord, and it witnesses to the fact that the one whom it follows is present beyond the church to the whole of history.”

\(^{267}\) Because the identity of a person is the action of the person in relation to others, the Church could be said to be constituted in such action as well.

\(^{268}\) Frei, *Identity*, 160. Frei (ibid 159), proposes, “The identity description that we applied to Jesus in the Gospels must, to a lesser extent and in merely analogous fashion, be applied to the church as his people.” The identity must remain “merely analogous,” because “no community or institution is a ‘subject’ in the same way in which the term applies to an individual.”

\(^{269}\) Ibid, 159.
reflects the Christ depicted in the Gospels.\footnote{Ibid, 159. The Church’s identity is one of witness to the Christ who is at the center of history. Frei (ibid), claims, “The church is simply the witness to the fact that it is Jesus Christ and none other who is the ultimate presence in and to the world in its mysterious passage from event to event in public history.”} The Church “must be a follower rather than a complete reiteration of its Lord…The church has no need to play the role of ‘Christ figure.’ Rather, it is called upon to be a collective disciple, to follow at a distance the pattern of exchange…”\footnote{Frei (Ibid, 160), claims, “First, …In the church’s case, that neighbor is the human world at large, to which the church must be open in gratitude without forsaking its own mission and testimony. (It is surely difficult—seemingly impossible—to claim that the church is even unambiguously true to this discipleship.)”} At the same time, however, the Church is more than simply a partially obedient follower. The Church is the locus of the indirect presence of the unsubstitutable person of Jesus Christ. The Church is “both the witness to that presence and the public and communal form the indirect presence of Christ now takes…”\footnote{Ibid, 157. It is, in fact, the indirect presence of Christ in the Church that gives the Church its identity. Frei (ibid, 159), claims, “The given and instituted, spatial and temporal bases for the indirect presence of Christ allow the church that relatively permanent institutional structure without which no community can exist or be self-identical…” This indirect presence of Christ is also mediated to the Church by the Holy Spirit, yet the Spirit is not the \textit{direct} presence of Jesus—Jesus’ identity is that of an unsubstitutable individual.} Significantly, Frei states that the Church is constituted by both Word and Sacrament, and claims that eliminating one or the other of these would make Sacrament into “religious ritual” and Word into “humane ideology.”\footnote{Ibid, 158.} However strongly Frei claims the Church is constituted on the identity of Jesus Christ, the Church is also constituted by sacrament as well.

Although the identity of the Church is primarily constituted in relation to Christ, it is only recognizable in relation to the world. Frei claims, “History is public history—the intention-action pattern formed by the interaction of the church with mankind at large;
and it is this history which forms the mysterious pattern of meaning to be disclosed by the presence of God in Jesus Christ in the future mode.\textsuperscript{274} This means that, in some way, the identity of both the Church and Christ become apparent as the Church interacts with the world. God is at work in secular history in a way that the Church may not be able to recognize, but must trust in faith.\textsuperscript{275} Frei claims,

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[The] providential presence of God in Jesus Christ” [happens in] “history that takes place in the interaction of the church with humanity at large. In a sense, that means that the really significant events may well transpire among the ‘Gentiles’ from whom the church (‘Israel’) receives the enrichment of her own humanity. Humanity at large is the neighbor given to the church, through whom Christ is present to the Church.\textsuperscript{276}

While Christ’s indirect presence has “spatial, temporal bases” in the Church (through Word, Sacrament and the Holy Spirit), Christ is clearly working beyond the Church in history.\textsuperscript{277} Just as the indirect presence of Christ is seen in the Church by the world, so it is also seen in the world by the Church. The Church learns to recognize

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\textsuperscript{274} Ibid, 161.

\textsuperscript{275} Ibid, 161. Thus, for the Christian, Frei (ibid), claims that “history is neither chaotic nor fated, but providentially ordered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is Lord of the past, the present, and the future.” Frei (ibid, 163), claims further that, “The parabolic application of Christ’s passion and resurrection is limited. It does not light up all history…This is the clue it provides: There will be a summing up of history, a summing up of the history of the church together with the world…This is the Christian’s hope in the future mode of the presence of Jesus Christ, of which the interaction of life in the church and world is for him a token and a pledge.” This means that “not even the event of Jesus Christ can be…an absolute clue” to the future. Frei (ibid, 164), claims, “That is why Christians, precisely because they believe in providence, know far less than certain ideological groups about the shape of the future, e.g., the Marxists.”

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid, 162.

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid, 157-58. Thus Frei (ibid), insightfully notes, “The church is constituted by the one (his presence, which must be spatially and temporally based—even though these bases are not identical with his presence) as well as by the other (his presence to the course of human history) and by their unity.”
Christ in the world, although it cannot ever claim it knows the meaning of history.  

Clearly Frei wishes to take seriously the identity of the Church in relation to the identity of Christ and world.

For Frei, understanding the place of the Church in relation to Christ and world is a product of figural reading. Frei claims that figural reading depends “on the conviction that the narrative renders temporal reality in such a way that the interpretive thought can and need only comprehend the meaning that is, or emerges from, the cumulative sequence and its teleological pattern, because the interpreter himself is part of that real sequence.” Frei’s project of figural reading attempts to establish the reader between Christ’s first and second coming, and hence to show, in de Lubac’s language, the allegorical and anagogical dimensions of Christian understanding. Dawson claims that for Frei, figural reading is “a patient ‘working through’ the spiritual dynamics of the disciple’s movement from his or her state of figure to one of fulfillment, a working forward in light of the assurances of Christ’s first coming but also of the uncertainties of his not-yet-realized second coming.” Finding the Church’s identity between the poles of Christ’s first and final advents establishes a certain agnosticism about the meaning of

278 Ibid, 161. Frei is reticent to say too much about the Church’s understanding of the future from examining the world. Frei (ibid, 161), claims, “In our endeavor to narrate the as-yet-unfinished pattern of history, we reach for parables that might serve to set forth a kind of pattern, though not to confine history and the mysterious providence of God to these symbolic meanings. Sequences of events differ from each other sufficiently widely and always take place in a sufficiently unexpected manner so that we cannot claim that any set of images or parables can give us the clue to the pattern of history.”

279 Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 37.

280 Frei’s figural reading, Higton (Christ, Providence and History, 166), claims, contains “a willingness to wait upon the particularity of the world rather than digging beneath the particularity in search of some stabilizing religious bedrock.”

281 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 212.
history apart from Christ. In a 1986 paper, Frei insists that “to believe that God’s
kingdom holds the human future [is] not to know how it will supersede the present, in fact
to know very little about the future for sure...”\textsuperscript{282} Higton claims that “The secular,
skeptical sensibility of which Frei speaks is, we might say, a commitment to an unending
learning of the world which does not know in advance what it will find, and which is not
simply recalling or confirming general truths already known.”\textsuperscript{283} The one presupposition
that one must carry, for Frei, in order to do justice to the particularity of Christ, is that no
stable meaning pattern can be found apart from Christ. Hence the systematic theologian
has no need to look for one, and all such looking will result in failure. The Church, then,
forms its identity as it follows what Scripture reveals about Christ and remains patiently
agnostic beyond what is revealed through the narrative structure of the text extended in
figural reading.

At this point, a few tentative suggestions can be made about the import of this
early ecclesiology on Frei’s hermeneutical project. First, for Frei, priority must be given
to self-description of the Church over any extrinsic philosophical system of meaning.
Because Frei’s focus is on identity rather than existential experience (as Tracy), Frei will
practically favor a self-referential description of the Church rather than a description
based on a particular philosophical model. Second, because the Church gains its identity
by following the identity of Christ, Frei struggles to show the implications of the

\textsuperscript{282} Higton, \textit{Christ, Providence and History}, 170, citing Frei, “Comments” (YD S 18-268, 11-
173), emphasis his. Frei apparently wrote this draft of this conference paper overnight in reaction to the
optimism toward understanding history that Frei had sensed at the conference the previous day (see Higton,
ibid, 164-65). Frei says later in the paper that Christians should be “uneasy about thinking that the
crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are the clue to the shape of the political future. The limits of time and
space remain, and yet we have the promise of God” (Frei, “Comments,” cited in Higton, 170).

\textsuperscript{283} Higton, ibid, 166.
presence of the living Christ in the community. Frei will tend to give priority to the unique identity of Christ to such an extent that he never really explains what the indirect presence of Christ in the Church means for this reading community. Third, Frei sees the Church as a “public” (to use Tracy’s term) because it exists in relation to the world. Frei does not wish to explain the Church only as a self-referential community, engaged only in reading its own texts without the possibility of external critique. In fact, such a communitarian description of the Church would be quite incompatible with Frei’s ecclesiology. The Church can only be understood as it interacts with the world. Fourth, Frei’s figural reading is heavily balanced toward explaining how identity is shaped rather than how transformation occurs. Frei is so interested in safeguarding the unique identity of Christ that he does not say much about the way the Church encounters Christ. We will see that this is a key difference between Frei’s figural reading and de Lubac’s allegorical reading, and that Frei leaves undeveloped much theological reflection about Christ’s mediation to the Church by means of Scripture. In the end, Frei’s focus on method, unattended by a complete theological description of the nature of the Church or of God’s use of Scripture in mediating Christ to the Church prevents him from developing the full dimensions of his figural reading.

2. Frei’s Later Ecclesiology

Much of Frei’s ecclesiology is developed as a product of his project of ad hoc correlation. The priority, for Frei, is to subordinate philosophical models to Christian
self-description while allowing each to influence the other. Ad hoc correlation will always be necessary for adequate self-description of the Christian faith (Christianity cannot adequately understand itself without it), while systematic correlation always risks imposing an extrinsic structure on the Christian faith, and through that, to reduce the faith to philosophy. The interpreter must always maintain vigilance against allowing philosophy to overtake Christian self-description. Frei realizes that ad hoc correlation will be more ambiguous and more difficult to employ than a system of systematic correlation. Necessarily, Frei states, this new program for theology will “obviously mean a humbler hermeneutics for rather low-level guidance in interpretation than we have become accustomed to. It will raise doubts about a theory or the possibility that is logically prior to the actuality of interpretation, and it will be a theory of descriptive

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284 In a 1984 letter to Gary Comstock, (unpublished letter, cited in Higton, Christ, History, and Providence, 84), 1-2, Frei claims, “Christian theologians will have to make use of philosophy…I’m saying two things simultaneously: First, Christian theology is quite distinct from philosophy…Second, despite their mutual distinctness, theology as a second-order discipline cannot dispense with philosophy, and their relation remains complex and has constantly to be worked out, rather than being of one invariable shape.”

285 Higton (Christ, History and Providence, 197), points out that Frei has three problems with systems of theology which claim to be independent of philosophical constructs. First, such a theology would make repetition the highest theological expression. Second, such a theology is, in fact, determined by philosophical constructs (see Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 4). This model includes both “Wittgensteinian fideists” and evangelicals, thus being “a chameleon that can wear either conservative or liberal theological colors.” Interestingly, Frei notes that this model is just as determined by philosophy as is types 1 or 2, since “its sharp rejection of the other types is a purely philosophical rather than theological argument—namely, the rejection of universal, transcendental Wissenschaftstheorie and the appeal instead to the metaphor grammar” (ibid, 4). Third, as a logical consequence, it limits the Christian faith by imposing an external structure which will not let the faith speak provide a true self-description.

286 Frei (Types of Christian Theology, 86), cites Karl Barth: “We must be clear that every scheme of thought which we bring with us is different from that of the scriptural word which we have to interpret, for the object of the latter is God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, it is the testimony of this revelation inspired by the Holy Ghost, and it can become luminous for us only through the same Holy Ghost” (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I.2, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 730). Frei (ibid, 86), then adds, ‘To that we might well reply, ‘That’s all very well, but now tell us how to apply these rules.’ But there’s the rub, and the rub is the point. If he could tell us how, the rule would no longer be a rule but a method, a systematic and general theory for how to read. ‘Subordination’ of a scheme to the scriptural text means inescapably taking a real risk…”
elements that *go into* but do not *constitute* a unified description of ‘understanding.’”²⁸⁷

Yet such a program, Frei thinks, will be more faithful to the Christian faith, because “the language of a Church is always community-specific and can never be dissolved…into a more general culture or, for that matter, a philosophical-technical vocabulary.”²⁸⁸

Yet despite Frei’s insistence that the identity of the Church not be forced into a general schema of meaning, Frei’s later turn to grounding authority of the plain sense in the decision of the early Church community actually pushes Frei to describe the Church less as a theological reality (as in his early ecclesiology) and more as a social reality. In his later works Frei focuses on the Church in largely social categories:

Christi*anity* is a religion, a social organism. Its self-description marks it typically as a religion in ways similar to those given by sociologists of religion or cultural anthropologists. It is a community held together by constantly changing yet enduring structures, practices, and institutions, the way religious communities are: e.g. a sacred text; regulated relations between an elite…and a more general body of adherents; and by a set of rituals—preaching, baptism, the celebration of communion; common beliefs and attitudes; all of these linked…with a set of narratives connected with each other in the sacred text and its interpretive tradition. All of these are, for social scientist and theologian…not the *signs* or *manifestations* of religion; rather they *constitute* it, in complex and changing coherence.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Frei, “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 113.


²⁸⁹ Frei, “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 96-97. Note that social scientists can go wrong here just as phenomenologists do. Frei is quite critical of social scientists who posit an “essence” of the religion and then study the religion in light of its “essence.” This is just as bad as the phenomenologists who begin with a structure of meaning and read Christianity in light of that. Here again Frei attacks the phenomenological tradition in its description of religion. The problem with this group is that it “mistakes some secondary phenomena of religion for its essence. The essence that social scientists cannot capture is indelibly bound to its self-expression in adherents’ experience and description…that uniqueness is a function of linguistic as well as prelinguistic experience, and understanding them is conditional upon understanding the circular relationship between the experience and its meaning-referent, the essence of religion” (99).
Frei’s primary appreciation for the arguments of philosophers such as Wittgenstein and anthropologists such as Geertz seem to be that they clear a space for the Church to read its own Scripture without being required to conform to an external meaning system. Frei praises this interpretive tradition for refusing to incorporate general meaning systems wholesale:

They [followers of Wittgenstein] believe that ‘understanding’ a text is more nearly an ability to use it appropriately in specific contexts (and the appropriate skill of judgment about whether or not to activate that capacity) than to know the rules for proper ‘interpretation.’ To construe the text properly is part of learning the requisite conceptual skills. To understand concepts is to have the ability both to explicate and to apply them, without necessarily resorting to a theory that would indicate how to couple the two. In the case of the Bible, this finally cannot be done without learning how to use the Bible, including its narratives, within the church and as its canon, i.e., as authoritative ‘in the coincidence of letter and spirit.’

Biblical interpretation must be accountable, first of all, to the Church, and the chief criteria for determining a good reading of Scripture is its coherence to the established language of the Church. This language is only able to be understood in its use, as the Church practices its faith. Because the Church is the location where the indirect presence of Christ is located, it would be illegitimate to begin with general theories of human understanding and apply them to the Church’s reading of Scripture before describing the rules and practices of the Church. This would, in effect, eclipse the reality of the Church in the same way that Biblical narrative was eclipsed. Ecclesiology has, in a sense, become the foundation of Frei’s hermeneutical work, since the Christian

290 Frei, “‘Narrative’ in Christian and Modern Reading,” 160.

291 Frei, “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 100.
tradition establishes the “language” through which the Scriptures can be read and adequately interpreted.

Frei, then, is making a (necessarily) circular claim: Scripture’s ability to norm the tradition is established precisely because Scripture’s reading is grounded by the tradition. Frei’s proposal is not a *sola scriptura* of the Gospel narratives. Although the Church is sustained by reading the plain sense of the Gospels, the plain sense is not determined or understood apart from the self-reflection of the Church. This includes both a constant attention to the past tradition of the Church, as well as a continual wariness that a philosophical system may eclipse the Christian language. When Frei speaks of the Church, he necessarily speaks of Scripture, and in his later work, he rarely speaks of Scripture without the Church. While Frei recognizes that Scripture is grounded in the community, he still wishes to give the Scriptures primacy over the Church to critique it. Frei makes this priority clear by claiming, “In the self-description of the Christian community, the function ‘scripture’ as a concept—it does not contain a ‘meaning’ apart from the interpretation or use in the Church—is to shape and constrain the reader, so that he or she discovers the very capacity to subordinate himself to it.”

292 Frei, “Narrative” in Christian and Modern Reading.” 160. Hence Frei (ibid), insists that, “No Christian reflection on the biblical narratives, no matter how technical, is apt to ignore the connections between those narratives and the focus of Christian identity they helped shape over the centuries.”

293 Frei, “Theology and the Interpretation of Narrative,” 100. Frei (ibid), claims, “No theologian here speaks for himself without first speaking for the community, and his first task is, therefore, to give a normative description rather than positioning himself to set forth or argue Christian truth claims.” Description of the Christian language is top priority, Frei (ibid), claims, because “Christianity, precisely as a community, is language forming, not purely, of course, but sufficiently so that language as embodied in its institutions, practices, doctrines, and so on, is a distinctive and irreducible social fact. The language is religion-specific, and theology is the constant testing of the way it is used in a given era…”

294 Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 86.
One indication that Frei has not simply transferred authority from text to Church is his critique of any narrative theology which places emphasis first on the narrative rendering of the human being and then looks for coincidences with the narrative of the text. Frei’s own narrative theology is always “text-bound,” so that the narrative of the text constitutes the identity of the Church. Consequently, Frei would be critical of any narrative theology which gives the narrative identity of the reader or community priority over the narrative identity of the text. No self description of the Church can replace the plain sense of the text. Frei writes,

The difference between a textually focused inquiry, working with the specificity of the narratives, and a more generally focused one, for which the biblical narratives are an illustration or illumination of ‘narrativity’ as an elemental aspect of being human and of human experience, is not absolute. But it is important. The ‘hermeneutical’ (or anti- or non-hermeneutical) instruments we have looked at have been shaped toward the text, even in the case of phenomenological theory. Consequently, if they make a contribution toward the definition of the shape(s) of Christian identity, it will be derivative, i.e., ‘text-bound.’ Frei judges these narrative theologies to be no better than phenomenological hermeneutics because they also impose an extrinsic meaning system on the text and on Christian identity. In fact, much of Frei’s response to Lindbeck’s book, *The Nature of Doctrine*, seeks to curtail those who would use it to promote “Wittgensteinian fideism.” “The cultural-linguist theory,” Frei notes, “is there solely for the service it can render to

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295 Frei, “‘Narrative’ in Christian and Modern Reading,” 161.

296 Ibid.

297 Frei, ibid, 160-61. This kind of narrative theology, Frei (ibid), claims, is much different from his own, in that it “proceeds from a conviction and analysis of human nature in general and/or religion in general…the ‘recital’ [of “our personal history or autobiography, or a more general, perhaps archetypal story”] of it constitutes (a) the condition for the meaningfulness of biblical narrative, and (b) the description of the coincidence between divine influence (Spirit?) and human/Christian identity.”
the ongoing description or self-description of the Christian community.”

Even narrative theologies must continually practice vigilance against allowing an external meaning system to usurp the text, even if it is the self-description of the Church.

3. Relationship between Ecclesiology and Scriptural Interpretation

The consistent weakness of Frei’s ecclesiology is that it never explicitly develops how Christ’s indirect presence in the Church constitutes and sustains the Church through Word, Sacrament, etc. The texts are a witness to the identity of Christ and render that identity, yet Frei never explains exactly how the Scriptures are used by the Triune God for self-communication to the Church. This underdevelopment of theological explanation has several consequences. First, and most noticeable, is Frei’s ongoing problem of grounding authority for a plain sense reading of the text. All of the burden is placed on the text in his early work, and nearly all of the burden is shifted to the community in his later work. Explaining how both text and readers are integral parts in a much larger reality would relieve both from bearing the hermeneutical burden of authority.

Second, studying only the social nature of the Church does, in practice, tend


299 According to Topping (Revelation, Scripture and Church, 205), Frei’s model “leans too heavily upon the positivity of interpretative-ecclesial and not divine action with respect to the critical use of Scripture in the church. The methodological space gained both by Frei’s deployment of poetic and social-scientific categories in order to protect the priority of Christocentric figural interpretation requires theological rooting in the doctrine of God in order to gain interpretative integrity.” Frei may be correct in his proposals, but he will always place too much burden on either text or Church without placing them in the larger context of God’s action.
toward communitarianism. To describe the Church as only a social reality tends to make the reason for literal reading a function of community consensus, rather than a result of the ongoing activity of the universal God who constitutes and sustains the Church. Tracy is rightly worried that an explanation of the Church as a social reality would lapse into a kind of relativism that is not consistent with the Triune God named by the Church. Frei may be correct about the priority of Christian self-description over philosophical correlation, but he must use more theological terminology to develop his argument. Frei must show why the Church was theologically compelled to read Scripture realistically in order to show that authority is not grounded in community consensus. For example, Frei claims that “There is no a priori reason why the ‘plain’ reason could not have been ‘spiritual’ in contrast to ‘literal’….The identification of the plain with the literal sense was not a logically necessary development…” While Frei is correct that this move may not have been “logically” necessary, but it is, in Christian description, theologically necessary, and could be more effectively described if Frei had focused on

300 Tracy reads Frei well enough to realize that Frei’s project does not revert to the “obvious charges of ‘relativism,’ ‘confessionalism,’ and even ‘fideism’” that Tracy fears Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic model is susceptible to (see David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology, 461). Tracy appreciates the willingness of Frei to not reduce his theology to a self-description of the Christian community, praising “Hans Frei’s reluctance to call his position a ‘narrative theology’” (Tracy, “On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 62, n. 32). Yet Tracy has reason to worry that Frei’s program for theology could be easily used to justify such an approach.

301 Topping (Revelation, Scripture and Church, 205), claims, “Moreover, by grounding his proposal for the critical interpretation of the Bible on embedded church practice, Frei potentially brackets out, not critical interpretation by the church, but critical interpretation of the church by the One who accosts, creates and sustains the church by means of the witness of Holy Scripture.”

302 For example, David Tracy (“The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity,” Theological Studies 50 (1989), 568), argues that “Apologetics must always be an intrinsic aspect of all Christian theology” This is shown on “intratextual…grounds” based on “the logic of the claims of the reality of God” (586, n. 79).

303 Frei, Literal Reading, 41.
the role of Scripture in the economy of redemption instead of simply the relationship between texts and readers.\textsuperscript{304}

B. Tracy’s Ecclesiology: The Church as a Tradition

A driving focus of Tracy’s work is affirming the public nature of the Church and theology. Tracy insists that all authentic theology is “discourse available (\textit{in principle}) to all persons and explicated by appeals to one’s experience, intelligence, rationality, and responsibility, and formulated in arguments where claims are stated with appropriate warrants, backings, and rebuttal procedures.”\textsuperscript{305} The Church is a public among two other publics, the academy and the society, and as such, the Church must establish a system of correlation (a criterion of intelligibility or credibility) which will allow for dialogue between the Church and other public realities. For Tracy, the Church must be a public reality, and theology must be a public discipline primarily because the God referred to by both is universal. The “God as understood by the Jewish, Christian and Muslim believer is either universal in actuality or sheer delusion….Any authentic speech on the reality of God which is really private or particularist is unworthy of that reality.”\textsuperscript{306} Christians, then, have a responsibility to formulate a criterion of intelligibility because of the universal nature of the God to whom they refer.

\textsuperscript{304} Frei (ibid, 41-42), does make some hints in this direction, claiming that the “rule of faith” guided the Church’s decision to emphasize the “primacy of their literal sense,” and that the identity of Jesus as “subject, the agent, and patient of these stories” formed this understanding, but he does not focus on why the Scriptures play such a role.

\textsuperscript{305} Tracy, \textit{The Analogical Imagination}, 57.

\textsuperscript{306} Ibid, 51. Tracy (\textit{The Analogical Imagination}, 13), is also bothered that religion has become so privatized that it has become a matter of personal taste.
1. Church as a Tradition and a Public Reality

The Church, as the tradition that mediates its classic, provides the possibility for an intensification of the general human dimension of religious experience which is disclosed in its religious classic. Tracy’s description of religious experience in the Church is again articulated in general categories, focusing on the common religious dimension found in all human beings through the concept of “limit experiences.” Tracy writes,

In more secularized human beings, this limit-experience of a religious dimension to one’s everyday existence sometimes serves as the sole clue to the character of religious experience and thereby to all personal appropriation to the languages of revelation…for those who possess any genuine lived-experience of an authentically living religious traditio grounded in a revelation, the possibilities for experiential religion are wider, deeper, and far more intense than the earlier shared experience of a religious-as-limit dimension to the everyday…for Christians, revelatory limit-experiences of both manifestation and proclamation are available in the authentic lived-experience of church. [The] originating revelatory experience of Jesus Christ…is present more immediately through the proclamation and the manifestations of an authentic sacramental, ecclesial life, including the struggle for justice in church and world.\(^{307}\)

Those within a religious tradition will experience disclosure from the religious dimension in a quantitatively greater way. Because tradition is the bearer of any classic, it consistent to expect that immersion of an individual into that tradition will allow a greater disclosure of the classic. It is only natural, then, that the disclosure of the Christ

\(^{307}\) Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 113-14. Tracy (ibid), claims further, “That same experience is present in more mediated forms through the critical reflection present in the second-order discourse of theologians. It is further intensified by the continuing presence of authentic witnesses to the reality of revelation in the community…Yet these experiential resources for rethinking the doctrine of revelation are best rendered theologically (as distinct from religiously) available, once a theory of the hermeneutics of first-order discourse has been united with a theory of tradition that includes a sociocritical dimension.”
event will be greater for the believer than for one outside the Church. One could rightfully conclude that in the Christian faith,

The church tradition is and remains the major mediator of the Christ-event to the church community today... The strangeness of the 'strange, new world of the Bible' is experienced most concretely within the believing community itself. For there—when a conversation with the subject-matter event witnessed to by these texts is genuinely risked—there the disorienting power of these scriptural texts is felt with fullest force.  

Tracy emphasizes the need for a “heightened consciousness of the tradition’s mediating role for the memory of Jesus in interpreting the event of Jesus Christ as analogous to the role of tradition in the interpretation of every classic.” Tracy would even argue that the individual cannot as deeply understand the Christ event without the aid of the Christian tradition. Tracy claims, “If we are to know Jesus as he was and is, we must know him through the mediation of the whole tradition as witness to him and immediately as we have ourselves experienced him either individually or communally in our experience of the Christ event as from God and happening now.” Yet within Tracy’s model, disclosure is intensified in the tradition, not specifically for theological reasons, but for philosophical reasons. Immersion of the interpreter into the tradition is necessary for greater disclosure for several reasons: First, the “preunderstanding” of the interpreter “must involve at least a horizon open to the religious dimension of existence,” (i.e. a willingness to ask “religious questions”). This basic step allows for a second, as


310 Ibid, 236.

311 Ibid, 199, n. 7.
the interpreter must “recognize some claim to serious attention in the event under interpretation.” Third, the interpreter will experience the Christ-event as meaningful by recognizing the continuity of the original event with the Church today. Christian tradition, then, has the role of developing within the individual interpreter a horizon of preunderstanding, an openness to the subject matter of the text, and a recognition of the continuity of event from past witness to present tradition. So far, these are qualities present in all traditions.

If Tracy emphasizes that the Christian tradition heightens the disclosure of the classic, then what is it about Tracy’s methodology that allows Frei to claim that “the Church as the necessary context for the use of Christian concepts and language plays no part at all in Tracy’s layout of his method?” At first this appears to be a curious claim, since we have seen that Tracy emphatically supports both a sociological and theological description of the reality of the Church and argues that greater immersion into the Christian tradition will allow for greater disclosure of the Christ event. Yet it could be

312 Ibid, 199, n. 7.

313 Certainly the Church, as a tradition is essential to the understanding of the Christ event today. Tracy (ibid, 237), claims, “The tradition is the major constitutive mediating reality of the event of Jesus Christ. For the immediate personal response to the Christ event becomes a communal response as soon as the Christ event is recognized as the event of Jesus Christ—the Jesus remembered as the Christ by the tradition and its fidelity to the original apostolic witness.” It is the tradition which safeguards the apostolic witness to the particular Christ, and through that mediates the present experience of Christ today. “In so recognizing and naming the Christ event as the event of Jesus Christ, Christians also affirm that the event itself is mediated to them principally through the tradition, community and church which remembers this Jesus and keeps alive his dangerous memory. Why that memory is kept alive in the event is a question primarily for the tradition and community mediating it to answer…The Christ event is represented as the event of Jesus Christ because the tradition itself has witnessed that this man Jesus is the Christ, this Jesus Christ is God’s own self present among us—decisively present in Jesus himself, mediately present through word, sacrament, action in every later classic Christian expression where the Christ event happens” (The Analogical Imagination, 235-6).

314 Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 33. (It may be significant to note that Frei here only refers to BRO, where, by Tracy’s own admission, a less “hermeneutical” approach is developed.)
asked what the Church does, in Tracy’s model, beyond what a “tradition” does for Gadamer and Ricoeur. In fact, for Tracy, the Church does very little that is unique to its theological description. The manner in which the Christian tradition mediates their classic is essentially the same as the way in which any tradition mediates their own classic. Almost completely absent from Tracy’s work is a discussion of how particular theological claims might be capable of destabilizing hermeneutical method.315 Frei’s legitimate and persistent question to Tracy seems to be, “What is the Church that no other ‘tradition’ can be, and how does that practically affect the process of Scriptural interpretation?”

2. Church as a Theological Reality

While Tracy insists that the Church must be described as both a theological reality and a social reality, Tracy claims that adequate theological description is beyond the scope of his own project, and chooses to focus on the Church only as a social reality.316 Tracy thinks that at his present time there is an imbalance in ecclesiology favoring

315 Tracy, (The Analogical Imagination, 41, n. 75), finds the “theological character of the Church” of particular need of explanation, and promises to spell out the relationship later in AI (esp. in the Introduction to Part II and chaps. 6, 7, and 10). Yet it is interesting that what is emphasized in those chapters is specifically how the Christ event ought to be understood as phenomenological disclosure by contemporary readers. We see the distinct philosophical description of the tradition when we move to AI ch. 6-7 and see how it is that tradition mediates the continuity of the apostolic witness of Christ to the present Christ today. Christ is mediated as meaningful to human experience today, through Ricoeur’s phenomenological model.

316 Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 21), claims, “our present interest is not in an adequate theology of the church but in the church as a sociological phenomenon, i.e., as one of the three publics of every theology.” Yet Tracy (ibid, 21), agrees that the theologian must develop an ecclesiology in order to do systematic theology, since “on inner-theological terms all Christian theology is, in some meaningful sense, church theology.” Tracy, (ibid, 42, n. 76), even admits that this is an area where both “Barthians” and Schleiermacher agree, and quotes Schleiermacher: “Since Dogmatics is a theological discipline, and thus pertains solely to the Christian Church, we can only explain what it is when we have become clear as to the conception of the Christian Church.”
theological description over social description, so that theologians often do not appreciate
the nature of the Church as a social reality. Thus Tracy claims,

As a generalization, it seems fair to observe that in theology the more usual
temptation is to understand society and academy primarily as social realities and
only peripherally as theological...The problem with understanding the third
public, church, is usually the exact opposite. A theological understanding is
almost overwhelmingly operative. A sociological understanding may be implicit
but is rarely explicit...The church is primarily considered, in Christian self-
understanding, a theological reality...The key concept here is reductionism.
Indeed, so frightened by this reductionist prospect do some ecclesioists seem
that they are incapable of undertaking, or even appreciating, strictly sociological
understandings of the reality of the church. For this reason, they become trapped
in their own form of reductionism. 317

Tracy proposes that the theologian develop both a mutually critical correlation
between Christian tradition and common human experience, and between the Church as a
theological reality and the Church as a social reality. This will keep the theologian from
falling into a reductionism about the nature of the Church. 318

As a result, Tracy spends far more time describing the interpretive method of the
reader than he does describing the theological nature of the reading community. Other
than a few comments (most of them in footnotes) about the Church as a theological
reality, Tracy is rather silent about a theological description of the Church. 319


318 Tracy (Ibid, 24), argues that “the theologian should in principle use a correlation model for
relating sociological and theological understandings of the reality of the church in the same way one uses a
correlation model for the more familiar relationship between philosophy and theology.” A correlation
model will allow the theologian “To account theologically for the full spectrum of possible relationships
between church as a theological and as a sociological reality.”

319 When Tracy does describe the Church theologically, he usually refers to it as a sacrament.
The Church is constituted in “its engifted participatory reality in the event of Jesus Christ” (The Analogical
Imagination, 44, n. 90), and thus is “sacrament of Christ and eschatological sacrament of the world”
(following Rahner and Schillebeekx (see ibid, 43, n. 90). This theological description works comfortably
with Tracy’s emphasis on “The always-already reality of a graced world is made present again decisively,
typically describes the Church as that tradition which keeps alive the memory of the person/event of Jesus Christ (as the primary Christian classic) and mediates that same present Christ today. Not surprisingly, Tracy explains this mediation of the Christ event analogous to the disclosure of all religious classics: “The Christ event, in sum, is representative of the same ‘that-it-happens-now’ event from the whole disclosed in every religious classic.” Later Tracy claims, “For here, as in all religious classics, the truth of one’s existence may be at stake; here a disclosure and concealment from and by the power of the whole may be present…” This disclosure of the Christian classic is accorded the same dynamic working as all religious classics, and hence the religious tradition mediating the Christian classic (the Christ event) has already been determined to work much like other religious traditions mediate their religious classics.

Tracy does provide elements of a theological description of the Church. Tracy claims, “In Christian self-understanding, to repeat, the church participates in, as primary mediator of, the gift of God in Jesus Christ. The church is a theological reality. As such, the church is an object of faith, of trust in and loyalty to its reality.” Tracy is aware that the interpretation of the Scriptures by the Church is unique inasmuch as the disclosure of the Christ event requires faith. Tracy insists that a response of faith is paradigmatically, classically as event in Jesus Christ. The event, as re-presentative of the reality always already present to us as human beings, is present again as the decisive that it happens” (ibid, 234). The Church, then, as sacrament of Christ, mediates the living, present Christ to the present moment.

320 Ibid, 235. And yet, for Tracy (ibid), this is not a general event of human experience, but one grounded in a particular Person: “The Christ event is also the event of Jesus Christ” and thus the tradition which mediates that event, “remembers this Jesus and keeps alive his dangerous memory.” Tracy is insistent here on the particularity of Jesus Christ, even if this event is mediated through general categories of meaning.

321 Ibid, 250.

322 Tracy, The Analogical Imagination, 50.
essential for a true disclosure of the text, and that faith is a gift, and hence a response to, God’s prior gracious action. Tracy wishes to make clear that all “disclosure” in Scripture is a gift, and not simply a product of human construction. Furthermore, Tracy claims that the Church itself is a gift. Yet this unique characteristic of both disclosure and Church goes largely underdeveloped because of Tracy’s formal categories. Speaking of the unique disclosure of Christ in Scripture, Tracy writes, “Hermeneutically, the category event (Ereignis) is applicable even to Word-as-Word-event (Sprach-Ereignis)—as a happening of language itself and, therefore, not under the control of the modern subject.” This statement appears to capture a central ambiguity in Tracy’s work.

3. Relationship Between Ecclesiology and Scriptural Interpretation

Tracy’s project lacks developed description of the relationship between Church and Scripture in the economy of redemption. While God’s gracious action to the world is the backdrop for Tracy’s discussion, it remains largely a formal explanation, and there is very little explanation of how God’s acts by and through the texts of Scripture to communicate to the Church. On the other hand, there is very little theological description of the Church which would provide it any ability to read Scripture which other communities do not possess. Tracy’s insistence on establishing a general correlation

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323 Tracy (“Writing,” 386), is explicit that the “event” of Scriptural disclosure should be understood as “the purely gratuitous or ‘gracious’ character of divine revelation.”

324 Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 23), claims, “in most Christian theologies, the church is understood as ‘gift,’ more exactly, as participating in the grace of God disclosed in the divine self-manifestation in Jesus Christ.”

325 Tracy, “Writing,” 386.
between text and reader keeps him from explaining how Scripture’s disclosure is *qualitatively* different within the Church than outside it. It remains unclear whether the disclosure of Christ to the Church is *qualitatively* different from or simply a *quantitatively* heightened expression of what occurs in religious texts elsewhere. For the Christian, the *subject matter* of revelation, Jesus Christ, is no doubt distinct (qualitatively and quantitatively unique) from what is disclosed in the other religious texts, but the *manner* of disclosure of this event is in continuity with disclosure as a religious dimension in the secular person or a person with another religious identity. Both in Tracy’s ecclesiology and in his Scriptural interpretation, then, the same difficulty in moving from general categories to theological description is seen. The insistence on beginning with general categories both for Scripture and for Church make it difficult to say anything distinctive about the reading of Scripture within the Church.

Tracy does say that the Scriptures are the Church’s book, and that the experience of the Christian community must be in continuity with the realistic rendering of the identity of Jesus Christ. This insight, I will argue, has tremendous potential to further the discussion between Tracy and Frei. Yet Tracy’s own ecclesiology does not provide the tools to show why and how this intrinsic unity must exist between Scripture and the Church, and only after the deeper ecclesiological reflection of Henri de Lubac is incorporated into the discussion will it be possible to use Tracy’s insight.

**IV. Beyond the Impasse: Locating Scripture in the Divine Economy**
The debates between Frei and Tracy have yielded a number of important insights for developing a theological interpretation of Scripture. Yet the debate has also narrowed the hermeneutical emphasis to simply the relationship between texts and readers, thus leading to impasses and preventing certain of their insights from being used. This section will summarize the most important achievements and impasses and will suggest that certain achievements could be advanced and certain difficulties could be resolved if Scripture were examined within the context of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Frei’s insistence that the plain sense reading of Scripture is the normative means by which the Christian community understands the particular identity of Christ is an essential insight for all Christian readings of Scripture. Furthermore, Frei’s retrieval of the normative practice of figural reading to show that the whole Scriptures must be read as one story unified in Jesus Christ, has provided a number of resources for developing hermeneutical method regulated by plain sense reading. It is this plain sense reading which renders the unique identity of Christ and forms the identity of the Church.

Yet Frei’s nearly exclusive focus on the relationship between text and reader has also produced some hermeneutical difficulties which cannot be overcome without broadening the context to the economy of redemption. On the one hand, Frei’s reluctance to explain God’s use of Scripture makes the location of Scriptural authority nearly impossible to determine. Frei has insisted that authority be given to plain sense readings, but without discussing God’s use of the text it is difficult to show whether that authority grounded in the consensus of the Church or in the literary qualities of the texts themselves. In the next chapter, we will investigate how Vanhoozer’s proposal that God
uses Scripture to speak to readers provides a different option which could strengthen Frei’s argument. On the other hand, Frei’s description of the Church as a socio-linguistic community which responds to the identity of Christ has led to two difficulties, the first ecclesiological and communal, and the second soteriological and individual. First, Frei’s preservation of the identity of Christ makes him wary of showing how Christ is related to the Church as head to body. Frei suggests that the Church is the locus of the indirect presence of Christ through the Spirit, yet Frei never really explains how the risen Christ acts as head of the Church, guiding and transforming the through its realistic reading of Scripture. Second, Frei never adequately explains how the individual believer is transformed by the unique identity, and hence presence, of Christ. This seems to be John Milbank’s criticism when he asks, “What difference does the mere fact—however astounding—of God’s identifying with us through incarnation make to our lives?”

Frei’s attempt to preserve the unique identity of Christ needs to be supplemented with a theological description of incorporation into that identity through the Church, and hence how the Church participates in the economy of redemption. In the fourth chapter, we will investigate how de Lubac’s proposal of a more complete ecclesiology could show how Christ uses Scripture to build His Church.

Tracy’s insistence on the disclosure of the present, risen Christ in Scriptural reading, as well as his creative use of Ricoeur to show the disclosive potential of all genres of Scripture have likewise produced essential insights for Christian interpretation of Scripture. Tracy shows that the consistent witness of the Church has insisted that

Scriptural reading brings the reader into contact with a subject matter so great and unique that the reader can experience a reorienting power occasioning a new-mode-of-being-in-the-world. Thus Tracy has rightly insisted that readers approach the text with expectation to encounter a subject matter whom they name God.

Yet, like Frei, Tracy’s nearly exclusive focus on the relationship between text and reader makes it difficult for him to incorporate phenomenological hermeneutics with a plain reading of the Gospels. At times Tracy appears to say that the existential situation of modernity sets the agenda for Scripture, so that Christ is the type who best fits the potential existential disclosure as antitype. Here the world in front of the text creates the economy by which the world of the text is fit together. Yet at other times Tracy emphasizes the centrality of the identity of Christ to the Christian story and insists that the reader’s own story be reoriented by His particular identity. This remains a genuine ambiguity in Tracy, and further emphasis on method will not bring resolution. Instead, what is needed is a thorough theological account of the role of Scripture in mediating the present Christ to the Church and transforming readers through just these texts. In the fourth chapter de Lubac’s insistence on a spiritual sense of Scripture will be examined in order to show that it is possible to emphasize the particular identity of Christ while also showing how that Christ transforms and reorients readers in disclosive Scriptural readings.

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327 See here John J. and R.R. Reno O'Keefe, Sanctified Vision, 86, who argue that all contemporary interpretive schemes need an “economy” to relate different parts of the economy of Scripture to one another. They conclude that “For most modern theological readers the logos of the economy is something much more abstract” than Christ (87). Yet, “The economy of Christ was as real and as totalizing form them as various modern economies of historical or spiritual experience are for us” (87). In Tracy’s work, the absence of figural interpretation as an extension of the literal story of Jesus is striking. In place of figural reading is a theory of the disclosure of existential possibility of the One beyond knowing who is revealed through encounter with the text.
In the next two chapters, I will examine the hermeneutical projects of Kevin Vanhoozer and Henri de Lubac, who seek to articulate the unique place of Scripture as God’s self-communication to the Church in the economy of redemption. In those chapters it will become more apparent how the relationship between Christ and Church provides a broader context for exploring the relationship between texts and readers. Adding these new voices to the discussion will allow for new insights to emerge which could help to advance the impasses between Frei and Tracy.
CHAPTER 2:
KEVIN VANHOOZER: SCRIPTURE AS GOD’S SPEAKING ACTION

I. Placing Vanhoozer in Discussion with Frei and Tracy

In the last chapter I suggested that much of the impasse between Frei and Tracy was due to an almost exclusive emphasis on the relationship between text and reader. This impasse, I suggested, has occurred in part because issues of method have dominated discussions of Scriptural interpretation to the neglect of theological reflection about the place of Scripture in the divine economy. In this chapter I will consider the work of Kevin Vanhoozer, who, throughout his career, has specifically attempted to move beyond the impasse between Frei and Tracy.

Vanhoozer has attempted to advance the discussion in two distinct ways, the first by proposing a new method which will safeguard the literal sense, and the second by grounding all methodological discussions in the theological matrix of the economy of redemption. Vanhoozer’s overall project is instructive both in its failure and in its success, as I will argue that his early proposal of an alternative method fails to advance the discussion, while his later proposal, by locating Scripture in the economy, has great potential for advancing the interpretation of Scripture.

328 Vanhoozer’s doctoral dissertation is a study of Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, and it devotes a chapter to the debate between Tracy and Frei. Vanhoozer’s first articles make suggestions about how to move past the impasse between the two. See Vanhoozer, Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, pp. 148-89 and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding: Special Revelation and General Hermeneutics," in First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 207-35.
In his early work, Vanhoozer tries to advance the discussion of Tracy and Frei by proposing a new general method for reading which will establish the authority of Scriptural meaning. Vanhoozer’s suggestion to move beyond them is to broaden the discussion of text and reader to also include a return to authorial intent, thus showing that the text must be read as a purposeful act of communication by an author to an audience. If readers agree to seek the intention of the author, Vanhoozer feels, they can reach relative consensus on the meaning of the text. Yet this early proposal is notable for its almost complete absence of any discussion about the place of Scripture in the economy of redemption. While focus on the literal sense may help readers grasp the meaning of the human authors, it does not articulate how God uses just these texts to speak to readers.

After the publication of his first book, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, Vanhoozer realizes that this approach does not really do justice to the Christian Scriptures as a theological reality. In his later work, then, Vanhoozer abandons much his early proposal and seeks instead to articulate the way God communicates to the Church by means of Scripture. While not abandoning his quest for authorial intent, Vanhoozer suggests that Scripture’s primary author is God rather than the human author. Yet as Vanhoozer focuses on God’s authorship of Scripture, he is forced to broaden his methodology from what is primarily a discussion of literary theory defending the importance of authorial intent to a discussion of ontology and the economy of redemption. Vanhoozer’s two major later works could be described as substantial responses to postliberal theology (*Drama of Doctrine*) and revisionist theology.
In them Vanhoozer suggests that the cure for revisionist and postliberal ailments alike is to understand the unique and authoritative role of Scripture in God’s Trinitarian self-communicative action.

*Relationship to Frei:* Vanhoozer appreciates Frei’s insistence on reading Scripture in such a way that the particularity of Christ is proclaimed without incorporating some pre-determined criteria of meaningfulness. Vanhoozer likewise appreciates the early Frei’s category of “realistic narrative,” yet insists that ostensive reference should not be dismissed as unnecessary to establishing meaning.

Vanhoozer’s greatest complaint against Frei concerns Frei’s later decision to invest authority in the community rather than in the text itself. Vanhoozer complains that Frei has “exchanged his hermeneutical birthright for a mess of pottage, or rather Fish-stew?...It is the community, ultimately, that enjoys interpretive authority…”

Vanhoozer is worried that the later Frei seems to propose a “certain optimism with regard to the believing community. Interpretive might makes right.” Frei’s later work is, for Vanhoozer, perhaps the clearest example of the troubling trend of abandoning authority in the text in order to grant authority to the community.

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330 Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 154. Vanhoozer (ibid 178), appreciates that Frei is not a “pure narrativist...Rather, Frei is an Anselmian theologian who is seeking to understand the Christian faith, particularly its central narrative expression, on its own terms.”

331 Vanhoozer (ibid, 225), argues that the whole reason one should take the realistic narrative of Scripture seriously is grounded in the assumption that it is, in fact, true. God did enter human history and act.


333 Ibid.
As its title implies, Vanhoozer’s book, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*, offers a critical appropriation of George Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* for Evangelical readers. In it, Vanhoozer argues that postliberals (the chosen dialogue partners of this book) have obscured the nature of doctrine by shifting authority from canon to community. In response to the postliberal project, Vanhoozer suggests, “The present book sets forth a postconservative, canonical-linguistic theology and a directive theory of doctrine that roots theology more firmly in Scripture while preserving Lindbeck’s emphasis on practice.” The answer to the postmodern shift of authority to the Church is to reinvest authority in Scripture.

In order to show the obligation which the Church has to respect the meaning of Scripture, Vanhoozer distinguishes between “ecclesial performance interpretation” (in which “the church’s habitual use/performance of Scripture is seen to be constitutive of the literal sense”), and “canonical-linguistic” interpretation (in which “[t]he grammar of

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334 George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984). As the title of Vanhoozer’s book suggests, Lindbeck’s “nature” of doctrine will be changed to a description of doctrine as “drama,” and the determining factor of “culture” is replaced by “canon” as the constituting feature of the Church. (See here especially Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 133-41, in the section entitled, “How Scripture Constitutes the Church,” 133-41). Vanhoozer (ibid, 3), suggests that doctrine is strangely absent in the Church today for several reasons: “sound doctrine is suffering from confusion about its nature, from disagreement concerning the locus of its authority, and above all from its captivity to a debilitating dichotomy between theory and practice.” As the book progresses, it becomes quickly apparent that the first problem (confusion about doctrine’s nature) finds its roots in the second (disagreement about doctrine’s authority). Vanhoozer suggests that the Church will continue to be confused about the nature of doctrine until it understands that its authority comes from the Scriptural canon, not the Church.

335 Vanhoozer (ibid, 10), notes, “Though Lindbeck’s postliberal proposal initially appears to swing the pendulum of authority back to the biblical text, a closer inspection shows that he relocates authority in the church, that singular ‘culture’ within which, and only within which, the Bible is used to shape Christian identity.”

336 Ibid, xiii. Emphasis Vanhoozer’s. Vanhoozer italicizes many points in his books, and all italicized quotes in this chapter are his.
Christian faith is embedded in the use of language in the canon”). By distinguishing between these two kinds of interpretation, Vanhoozer establishes two trajectories: Frei, Lindbeck, Fish, Kelsey and Childs are all said to be located on the (wrong) trajectory toward ecclesial performance interpretation, while Vanhoozer, Barth, and Wolterstorff are located on the (right) trajectory of canonical-linguistic interpretation.

**Relationship to Tracy:** Vanhoozer appreciates Ricoeur and Tracy’s emphasis on the importance of the “plurality of biblical genres” (form) to communicate the text’s message (content), as well as Ricoeur’s explanation of how the biblical text, as a text, is disclosive of transformative truth. Yet Vanhoozer complains that Ricoeur and Tracy, despite their stated appreciation for the various genres of Scripture, are guilty of imposing a single, phenomenological schema of interpretation which prohibits full appreciation of certain genres, such as Gospel. Furthermore, Vanhoozer believes that Ricoeur and Tracy’s method for biblical hermeneutics ultimately collapses into general hermeneutics.

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337 Ibid, 167. Vanhoozer (ibid, 184), calls the latter “performance” because interpreters must see “canonical discourse as itself an instance of triune performance” and must see “the canon as a script that requires not merely information processing but ecclesial response.”

338 See Vanhoozer, “The Spirit of Understanding,” 216 and Remythologizing Theology, xv. Vanhoozer (“The Spirit of Understanding,” 218), sides with Tracy, claiming that “Frei’s emphasis on a unified coherent narrative overlooks the plurality and ambiguity within the canon itself. What theology needs is the full spectrum of forms in the Bible itself, with Jesus Christ as the supreme ‘form’ that informs all Christian understanding of God.”

339 *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 150. Vanhoozer (ibid, 158), feels that this reduction of Scripture to one schema has its most negative consequences in Tracy’s early work, where Tracy’s analogy between religious classics and art, cause “[t]he claims to truth in both art and religion” to “stand or fall together.”
Beginning as it does with the reorienting power of all texts, their method cannot articulate any significant distinction between Scripture and other texts.  

Ricoeur’s great weakness, as Vanhoozer sees it, is that, “By attributing to the poetic word the sacramental function of manifesting transcendence, Ricoeur erases the very distinction between nature and grace that was so important to Barth…. For Ricoeur… revelation is not so much an ‘impossible possibility’ as a natural possibility shared by sacred and secular narratives alike.” The root of this problem, Vanhoozer believes, is that Ricoeur and Tracy privilege a manifestation model over a proclamation model of revelation. Vanhoozer agrees with Tracy that the proclamation/manifestation distinction is the primary distinction in hermeneutical trajectories, but argues against Tracy that the manifestation model is an entirely inadequate model for showing the radical newness of the Gospel. For Vanhoozer, the manifestation model is ultimately inadequate because,

First and foremost is the consequence that the truth disclosed by the Gospels refers to an always-already state of affairs. The story of Jesus discloses a way of being in the world that is always-already open to human beings by virtue of the always-already graced nature of the world… The Gospels manifest universal truths about humanity. The contrast between manifestation and proclamation, in which the Gospels say something new, particular and unique, could not be sharper: do the Gospels disclose a universal truth, or do they announce something new and unprecedented?

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340 Ibid, 225. Vanhoozer (ibid, 155), claims, “Ricoeur has not shown us that theological hermeneutics is significantly different from his philosophical hermeneutics, only that his philosophical hermeneutics receives its most fruitful development when applied to the Biblical texts.”

341 Ibid, 180.

342 Vanhoozer (ibid, 167), claims, “The goodness of Being which Ricoeur presupposes finds its decisive manifestation in the event of Jesus Christ. But the point is that without reflection on art or classic texts, this truth of the trustworthiness of existence could not be had.”

343 Ibid, 168.
Vanhuoozer makes a very close connection between revelation and grace.

“Universal truths about humanity” are, for Vanhoozer, something in the realm of nature, while “something new and unprecedented” is ultimately a disclosure from the realm of grace. Any system which tends away from the proclamation model, ultimately misunderstands both the uniqueness of revelation and the relationship between nature and grace. Beginning with the manifestation model, Vanhoozer believes, will place the emphasis (and hence authority) on universal experience (nature) instead of the particularity of Christ and the particularity of the biblical text (grace). Vanhoozer claims that ultimately, “For Ricoeur [and Tracy], the referent of the Gospels is the Kingdom of God as it qualifies human experience…For Frei, the referent of the Gospels is Jesus Christ.” For Vanhoozer, as for Frei, one cannot have it both ways. It is the manifestation model which wrongly understands and “erases” the distinction between nature and grace, and consequently is unable to safeguard the uniqueness of Christian revelation. As a response to this perceived mistake, Vanhoozer will develop a program

344 Vanhoozer (“The Spirit of Understanding,” 220), is disturbed by Tracy’s claim that he can give primacy to the literal sense while being a pluralist. Vanhoozer (Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, 168-69), is chiefly worried that all religious traditions can be smoothed over by assuming a manifestation model—persons of every religious tradition can “experience similar manifestations of the whole by the power of the whole” through their own particular faiths. This, Vanhoozer believes, destroys the very notion of particularity.

345 Ibid, 171.

346 Ibid, 170. Vanhoozer’s claim that Ricoeur is a manifestation theologian shows just how strongly Vanhoozer favors the proclamation model. While Tracy has claimed that Ricoeur stands more on the side of proclamation, Vanhoozer (ibid., 169), argues that for Ricoeur the moment of “critical distanciation” is more properly a proclamation moment, but the surrounding moments of “understanding” and “appropriation” are manifestation moments. Vanhoozer claims that “for Ricoeur, the poetic word functions sacramentally,” and hence both “Ricoeur and Tracy, though they try to incorporate both proclamation and manifestation in their theologies, ultimately privilege the manifestation pole…Ricoeur’s whole hermeneutical arch is slightly off-balance, tilted slightly but decisively towards the manifestation model (170).”
which operates distinctly from the proclamation model, giving clear priority to the biblical text over experience or the modern sensibility.

Vanhoozer’s latest book, *Remythologizing Theology*, seeks to establish a clear trajectory beginning from a proclamation model and privileging the authority of Scripture over any other source. Vanhoozer suggests,

The real dividing line [between theologians] is between those who view theology only as talk about God-talk and those who believe in the possibility of true talk about God…Among the latter, there is a further distinction between those who seek to speak of God on the basis of nature (including human nature) and those who believe that speaking well of God is ultimately possible only on the basis of God’s own communication.\(^{347}\)

The first division separates some postliberals (Lindbeck) and revisionists alike, while the second division further separates off virtually all other correlational approaches to theology.\(^{348}\) For Vanhoozer, contemporary revisionist theology provides a wrong direction for theology because theologians begin from human experience and use Scripture as a foundational expression of religious consciousness. In some ways, Vanhoozer’s project of remythologizing theology is intended to provide as sweeping and radical a challenge to contemporary systematic theological method as Frei’s “great reversal” provided to post-enlightenment Christology.\(^{349}\) Vanhoozer notes that his primary goal “is to complete Paul Ricoeur’s ‘second Copernican Revolution’ that

\(^{347}\) Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 182.

\(^{348}\) Vanhoozer names George Lindbeck and Sallie McFague as the chief referents of the first distinction, while in the second distinction Vanhoozer includes nearly everyone else on the revisionist trajectory, including Elizabeth Johnson, David Tracy, Jurgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Robert Jensen.

\(^{349}\) Vanhoozer (*Remythologizing Theology*, 29, thesis 5), argues that to “remythologize theology is to reverse what Hans Frei called the ‘great reversal’. “
dethrones the autonomous knowing subject in order to hearken to the one whose creative word forms, informs, and transforms us.” Vanhoozer thinks that Ricoeur could not accomplish this task because his project has started from a general theory of texts rather than a Triune First Theology. Remythologizing must reverse this direction and emphasize that the Scriptures are first God’s action to which doctrine is a response. Reevaluating the action of God in the economy of redemption, Vanhoozer feels, will reestablish Scripture as the authoritative foundation for the Church’s life and practice.

II. Scriptural Interpretation: The Literal Sense as God’s Speaking Action

Vanhoozer’s primary emphasis throughout his career is to allow establish a method of Scriptural interpretation wherein readers understand and submit to the plain meaning of the text. Vanhoozer argues that because meaning is encoded in texts by authors, the meaning of a text can only be grasped as readers seek to understand the speech act of the author. Meaning is encoded in the text by the author to be discovered by the reader. The Scriptures are understood, then, by readers rightly grasping what the author communicated in the text.

350 Ibid, xv.

351 Vanhoozer (ibid, xv), feels that “neither Ricoeur nor those who stand on his shoulders have given much attention to the doctrine of God, either to the question of divine action in general or to the doctrine of the Trinity in particular.”

352 For example, Vanhoozer (ibid, 272), argues, “Whereas Christian doctrines are for Schleiermacher descriptions of human passions (e.g., the feeling of absolute dependence)—‘accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech’—the remythologizer conceives doctrine as the conceptual elaboration of divine action. Better: doctrines are accounts of triune communicative action set forth in speech.”
Vanhoozer’s career, much like Tracy and Frei’s, can be divided into a class of early writings and a class of later writings, between which certain key emphases have changed across a generally continuous project. Vanhoozer’s early works span from 1989, with the publication of his dissertation on Ricoeur, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* to 1998 with his publication of his first major book on biblical hermeneutics, *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*. This stage is marked by an almost exclusive focus on a theological general hermeneutics in which authorial intent is restored as basis for understanding the meaning of the text. In his early work, Vanhoozer sought to protect biblical interpretation from postmodern “undoers” of meaning, such as literary theorists as diverse as Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish. In response to these writers, Vanhoozer proposes a theological general hermeneutics, a program for reading all texts as one must read the Bible. A return to authorial intent is necessary in all texts, just as it is paradigmatically in Scripture. Vanhoozer’s later works run from 1998 to the present, and include the significant works *The Drama of Doctrine* (2005) and *Remythologizing Theology* (2010). This stage is marked by a shift from human authorial intent to divine authorial intent, so that Scripture is now located within the economy of redemption as a unique and integral part of God’s self-communicative action. In dialogue with postliberal and revisionist theology, Vanhoozer realizes that the reason Scripture provides a unique authority for the Church is because Scripture is a unique set of documents which can be identified as God’s communicative action. Proper reading of

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Scripture, then, can only start with a right First Theology, a stance of faith and response toward God.

Two factors seem to account for Vanhoozer’s change of focus from defending the authority of Scripture in terms of secular literary theory to an explanation of the role of Scripture in the economy of redemption. First, many of the changes in Vanhoozer’s writing can be traced to his social context. Vanhoozer’s early work begins in discussion with secular literary theorists at the University of Edinburgh, where one of his primary concerns became the safeguarding of meaning in any text. Vanhoozer’s later work takes place in dialogue with fellow Evangelicals at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and subsequently in discussion with the North American postliberalism and various forms of revisionist theology. Thus while Vanhoozer’s early work proposes a challenge to the current secular postmodern tendency to disregard the authority of any text, Vanhoozer’s later work proposes a challenge to the Christian postmodern tendency to grant authority to experience or community over Scripture. Vanhoozer feels that the secular literary mistake is best challenged by defending the role of authorial intent, while the Christian doctrinal mistake is best challenged by reevaluating God’s use of Scripture in the economy of redemption.

Second, Vanhoozer’s change of location in 1998 takes place at the same time as the publication of his first major work, Is There a Meaning in This Text? While the 2009

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354 Vanhoozer’s early works were forged in dialogue with secular literary theory at the University of Edinburgh, where he taught on Paul Ricoeur in the Department of Comparative Literature. Vanhoozer (Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 2), admits that he struggled to get students to seriously consider Ricoeur’s claim that the text carries a meaning to which the reader must respond. Vanhoozer’s research and writing reflected his desire to set forth a response to deconstructionists and reader-response theorists. Vanhoozer’s move to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1998 allowed his later work to develop in dialogue with American Evangelical thought at Trinity Seminary in Chicago.
“Tenth Anniversary Edition” testifies to the popularity of the book, the primary criticism of it has been its lack of attention to the uniqueness of Scripture and lack of focus on God’s agency in precisely these texts. These criticisms have forced Vanhoozer focus more on the uniqueness of Scripture as God’s communicative action and to draw out the implications of God as triune communicative Being. This change of focus presses Vanhoozer to develop a distinctly Christian approach to understanding the role of God as author and the place of Scripture in the divine economy.

Despite these significant changes in Vanhoozer’s approach, much of his project remains the same. Vanhoozer’s clearest hermeneutical emphasis throughout his career is to respect the author of any text as a communicative agent. When applied to human authors, the reader must respect the meaning encoded in the text. When God is viewed as author of Scripture, the reader will be forced to work out the implications of God’s self-communicative action. Consequently, the reader must understand who this God is (God as Triune self-communicative Act), what this text is (God’s covenant document to the Church), and where this text fits in the economy of redemption (Scripture constitutes the Church). Throughout his work, then, Vanhoozer will seek to articulate the relationship between God, Scripture, and Church in a way that will establish the priority of God, through Scripture, to the Church in the economy of redemption. Theological themes, such as sola scriptura and covenant, and philosophical tools such as speech-act theory, authorial intent, and the distinction between meaning and significance, all remain

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355 Vanhoozer (ibid, 6), notes, “Much of my academic life subsequent to Is There a Meaning? has been spent doing penance for its sins of omission.”

356 Vanhoozer has not changed his claim that a fixed meaning is encoded in a text for readers to discover and understand. Vanhoozer (Ibid, 1), claims, “I still think the substance of the argument—a proposal about textual meaning—is essentially correct.”
important parts of Vanhoozer’s project as they promote the authority of Scripture over Church in the economy of redemption.

A. Vanhoozer’s early Work: Theological General Hermeneutics

Vanhoozer’s early works are written primarily to safeguard biblical meaning from postmodern “undoers” (esp. deconstructionists and reader response theorists), who claim that the biblical texts, like other all other texts, have no determinate meaning. In response, Vanhoozer seeks to develop an apologetic for reading which will not dismiss the author or reduce the content of the text to the reader’s own interpretive aims. Vanhoozer’s first major hermeneutical work, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, sets the agenda for his early career by attempting to develop a “theological general hermeneutic” in which “the Bible should be read like any other book, and…every other book should be read like the Bible.”357 Because all human communication is a gift grounded in the communicative action of God, all reading is a necessarily a moral and theological activity. Rules for a proper reading of all texts, Vanhoozer argues, should be modeled on a proper reading of Scripture. As a result, a certain morality of reading exists which obligates readers to respect the author of any text. I will argue that this approach has resulted in failure both because it cannot overcome inherent hermeneutical difficulties, and because it does not accomplish Vanhoozer’s desired result of establishing the authority of God’s communicative action in Scripture.

357 Vanhoozer (“The Spirit of Understanding:”, 208), follows Barth and Ricoeur, who have made suggestions that reading the Bible has implications for the reading of all texts.
1. Theological Presuppositions of a Theological General Hermeneutics

In the beginning of his career, Vanhoozer proposes an ontology of reading which assumes that the triune God is the ground of all communicative action. God somehow ‘underwrites’ all language, and it is the understanding this reality which grounds rules for reading, both in Scripture and in all texts. Vanhoozer proposes that all reading is ultimately a theological activity because all reading is a generally moral activity. This argument includes several key elements, which will be discussed below: all reading must be open to transcendence, the author of the text must be respected, all language must be understood to be covenantal, and the reader must assume a stance of critical realism.

*Hermeneutical Openness to Transcendence:* Vanhoozer’s general hermeneutic has a theological center. Vanhoozer claims that since language is a gift given by God to allow persons to interact morally with one another, “All hermeneutics, not simply the special hermeneutics of Scripture, is ‘theological.’” The argument for a theological, general hermeneutic rests on a “certain methodological analogy between theology and literary theory, based on their shared concern to speak of transcendence: of that which transcends the world (God) and of that which transcends language (meaning).” The grounding assumption is that both author and the content communicated by the author

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358 Vanhoozer (ibid, 231), specifically claims that he is “advocating a Trinitarian hermeneutic for all interpretation.”

359 Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?,* 456.

360 Vanhoozer, “The Spirit of Understanding,” 231. Vanhoozer (*Is There a Meaning in This Text?,* 205), claims all use of language has moral implications because, “Language is a God-given capacity that enables human beings to relate to God, to the world, and to one another.”

361 Ibid, 161.
transcend the text, and hence the author can indeed say something to someone by means of a written text.\textsuperscript{362} Hence, Vanhoozer writes, “Interpretation is theological if it is based on the belief that there is something that ‘transcends’ the play of language in writing.”\textsuperscript{363}

The ground of such transcendence is ultimately God, and Vanhoozer thus argues that hermeneutical decisions are ultimately rooted in theological presuppositions:

All textual understanding is a theological matter—an encounter with something that transcends us and has the capacity to transform us, provided that we approach it in the right spirit. Such is the fundamental thesis of my argument. The interpretive virtues are in reality spiritual virtues: without faith—an openness to transcendence—we would never find something in the text that is not our own creation, or our own reflection. Hence the struggle with the text is ultimately a spiritual struggle—with the text and with ourselves.\textsuperscript{364}

Interpretation is moral, Vanhoozer argues, if it is “open to transcendence,” and it becomes immoral when transcendence is disregarded. Interpreters act morally as they respect both the communicator and the communicative intent which transcends the text, and they act immorally when they suggest there is nothing outside the text.\textsuperscript{365} In the end, Vanhoozer argues that only Christian theology provides adequate resources for a general hermeneutics, because, “Only from the vantage point of Christian faith, perhaps, does

\begin{itemize}
  \item Vanhoozer (ibid, 395), argues that a communicative act is ultimately “a verbal work whereby an author says something about something to someone.” Vanhoozer (ibid, 214), claims, “Discourse has a sense (something said), a reference (about something), and a destination (to someone).”
  \item Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding," 211.
  \item \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text?}, 381.
  \item Consequently, the methods of Deconstructionism and Structuralism are inherently immoral ways of reading (See \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text?}, 369-74). Vanhoozer ("The Spirit of Understanding," 211), suggests that the moral reader of the text is one who is a follower of the text while those who are “users” and “critics” are immoral readers. As a result, “Barthes and Jacques Derrida are countertheologians: there is nothing outside the play of writing, nothing that guarantees that our worlds refer to the world. The loss of a transcendent signifier—Logos—thus follows hard upon the death of the author.”
\end{itemize}

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language appear not as a system of differences that reflects political power but as a form of divinely instituted communicative action that can be performed responsibly or irresponsibly, to the glory of God or to the undoing of humanity.”

Since God has established communication as the structure within which human morality takes place, the reader’s decision about how to interpret a text is always a moral decision.

Vanhoozer’s project, then, seeks to identify the proper moral virtues that one must nurture and develop in order to be a moral reader of all texts. The development of certain interpretive practices place one on a trajectory toward moral reading, while the denial of those same practices place one on a trajectory toward immoral reading. Vanhoozer understands his moral grounding of all reading in theological virtues to apply to all texts, not just Scripture. Vanhoozer writes,

My contribution to the epistemology of meaning is to stress the extent to which literary criticism is not simply a problem of the morality of knowledge, but a problem that ultimately demands theological resources—specifically the virtues of faith, hope, obedience, and love: faith, that there is a real presence in the text that demands a response; hope, that the community of interpreters can reach, at least ideally, a reasoned agreement; obedience, that the interpreter will observe the context of the text itself and follow the literary sense where it leads; love, that the interpreter will indwell the text and attend to it on its own terms.

In the end, for Vanhoozer, it seems that the Holy Spirit turns all general hermeneutics to theological hermeneutics. By respecting transcendence in the text or denying it, the interpreter is really participating in or resisting the mission of the Holy Spirit. Hence Vanhoozer argues that “[t]he interpretive values…are none other than the

366 Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 369.

367 Ibid, 283.
fruit of the Spirit.” Vanhoozer carries this insight through to its logical conclusion. Vanhoozer claims, “If I am right that genuine interpretation affirms transcendence…that all hermeneutics is ultimately theological hermeneutics,” then it follows that “the Spirit plays a role in general hermeneutics as well” as in a hermeneutics of Scripture. Since right reading is always a moral activity which requires certain distinctly theological presuppositions, and since all moral action requires the activity of the Holy Spirit, Vanhoozer logically concludes that responsible reading of all texts requires the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit, then, has an underlying role in all human understanding by making communication effective. The Spirit works within all language to move readers from self-centered interpretations to other-centered interpretation. Vanhoozer claims,

[I]t is the Spirit’s unique role to bridge distances that impede understanding…The Spirit enables us to avoid falling prey to self-deception, not by working a miracle or our rational faculties, but by shedding grace abroad in our hearts…The Holy Spirit aids understanding in general, not least by cultivating the interpretive virtues in individuals and in believing community.

While Vanhoozer realizes that his claim that the Spirit works in all language may be difficult to prove, he argues that it is nonetheless reasonable. While the fallen human tendency is to distort texts rather than to respect them, it is reasonable to think that

368 Ibid, 379-80.

369 Ibid, 407. Vanhoozer (ibid, 414), seems to base this whole pneumatology of general hermeneutics on Ricoeur’s claim that a text “both ‘reveals’ and ‘transforms,’” and on Barth’s claim that “those schooled in biblical interpretation are best able to appreciate what it is to do justice to textual otherness.”

370 Ibid, 415. Vanhoozer (ibid), appeals to the “renewing of your minds” (Rom. 12:2), as the Spirit’s help to “receiving textual meaning.”

371 Vanhoozer (ibid, 428), is quite aware of the strong nature of his claim, “The Spirit enables understanding” in all texts.
the Spirit may influence understanding without human knowledge. As we will see, this insistence on the Spirit’s work in all reading will come at a high price, because it will stand in tension with Vanhoozer’s overall pneumatology.

*Meaning as Authorial Intent*: If moral reading is open to the transcendence of both author and message, Vanhoozer must rehabilitate the quest for authorial intent as a legitimate interpretive goal. Vanhoozer’s argument for authorial intent centers on answering the question, “What is an author?” rather than the questions, “Who was the author?” or “What was the psychological intent of the author?” Vanhoozer claims, “Any theory of interpretation that misunderstands what an author is cannot hope to understand what a text is and how it conveys…meaning.” Vanhoozer’s foundational analogy is that the author is best viewed as a creator. Drawing a parallel from God’s creation *ex nihilo*, Vanhoozer asks, “Why is there something rather than nothing in texts?

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372 Vanhoozer (ibid, 428), suggests, “Distortion is a real possibility whenever readers are faced with texts that require behavioral change…Interpretation never takes place in a cognitively and spiritually clean environment.” Vanhoozer (“The Spirit of Understanding,” 229), argues that the “Spirit of understanding” enables ethical interpretation as he “progressively convicts us of our biases and conforms us to reality,” even without the interpreter’s knowledge. Vanhoozer (ibid), calls this the “bias principle,” namely that “we never know the world apart from biases that influence our perception of reality.” Just as interpreters naturally have a distorting bias toward texts, so the Spirit can affect a bias toward morally respecting the other without the interpreter being aware of it.

373 Vanhoozer (*Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 5), is clear that he is not trying to rehabilitate a notion of authorial intent that depends on “conscious awareness.” Instead, Vanhoozer (ibid), claims that authorial intent is an “aspect of action. Specifically, authorial intention is a form of agential intention...By authorial intention, then, I have in mind not what authors wanted to do (too psychological) but what they did.” Because “to be human is to be always having to interpret what other people are doing” (no human can avoid such action), interpreters must interpret the speech acts of authors. This means interpreting what persons are saying by “counting their sentences as promises, questions, commands, assertions, and the like.” Interpretation for authorial intent means understanding the correct illocutions inscribed by the locutions. Because this is encoded in the text, the search for authorial intent is not a speculation about the consciousness of the author.

374 Ibid, 228.
Because someone has said something about something to someone.”\(^{375}\) The author “is responsible both for the existence of the text (that it is) and for its specific nature (what it is).”\(^{376}\) The text’s “what it is,” for Vanhoozer, includes the text’s determinate meaning, codified by the configuration in a particular genre. Hence the author “is the one whose action determines the meaning of the text—its subject matter, its literary form, and its communicative energy.”\(^{377}\)

The author’s creative work of codifying a determinate meaning (i.e. content) in a text in a particular manner (i.e. form) allows Vanhoozer to move beyond the analogy of creation to another theological analogy. Drawing on a Christological analogy, Vanhoozer suggests that the author’s meaning in the text is the incarnation of the author’s intent. Vanhoozer explains, a “text is an extension of one’s self into the world, through communicative action.”\(^{378}\) On this account of authorship, it becomes clear why meaning must be so closely connected to the author. If all human communicative acts are analogously modeled after the triune God’s extension of the divine Word as a communicative act, there are definite reasons for respecting and attending to the speech act of the human author. God is the paradigmatic author because of God’s paradigmatic communicative act. As Christians respect God by attending to God’s self-communicative act, so they respect human authors by attending to the author’s self-communicative acts.

\(^{375}\) Ibid, 218.

\(^{376}\) Ibid, 228.

\(^{377}\) Ibid, 230.

\(^{378}\) Vanhoozer, (Ibid, 229), claims that analogous to the manner in which “[t]he divine author embodied his message in human flesh,” the “text is... a kind of ‘body’ of the author. It is this body, this medium of authorial agency, that I have sought to resurrect.” Vanhoozer claims to have gotten this analogy from Anthony C. Thistelton, \textit{New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 75.
Relying heavily on speech-act theory, Vanhoozer does not differentiate greatly between speech and writing. Vanhoozer follows Ricoeur’s claim that writing is, at bottom, a form of discourse, yet he feels he must give more priority to the author than Ricoeur does. Vanhoozer strengthens Ricoeur’s thesis that a text is “any discourse fixed by writing” to the stronger thesis that all “language as ‘discourse,’” whether speaking or writing, consists of “something said to someone about something.”

Vanhoozer believes that much modern literary theory has fundamentally misunderstood how cultures use texts. While modern literary theory emphasizes the distance between text and author (and thus the separation between author and meaning), Vanhoozer feels that cultures have always used texts precisely to preserve meaning. Since both writing and speaking are discourse, “Texts are able to communicate at a distance because writing preserves discourse. Writing…does not alienate authors from readers but makes shared meaning possible. Indeed, it is humanity’s chief resource for overcoming spatial, temporal, and cultural distance.”

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379 Vanhoozer (ibid, 328), uses Ricoeur’s phrase, “If all discourse is actualized as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning,” to ground all writing in discourse. See Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 12. Yet where Ricoeur goes on to discuss the difference between writing and discourse, Vanhoozer (ibid, 328), emphasizes the similarities, noting that, “Communication is the unifying act that orders all the other acts” both in writing and in speaking.

380 See D. Christopher Spinks, The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning: Debates on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 87 (cf. Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 214.) Vanhoozer claims, “Often overlooked is Ricoeur’s acknowledgement that discourse fixes not only the locutionary but the illocutionary act…Ricoeur knows that one cannot cancel out this main characteristic of discourse—“said by someone”—without reducing texts to natural (nonintentional) objects like pebbles in the sand” (“From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of the Covenant,” in First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 190). As a result, Vanhoozer has moved from Ricoeur’s claim that meaning remains in the text to an insistence that such meaning remain attached to an author.

381 Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 214.
meaning in a text undermines one of the fundamental reasons that societies use writing for communication.

Since author and meaning remain intrinsically connected in the text, Vanhoozer understands the failure to respect meaning in the text as a failure to respect the author as a legitimate ‘other.’ In all texts, Vanhoozer writes, “The voice of the communicative agent confronts us with a moral demand: ‘Heed me. Hear me. Understand. Do not bear false witness.’” Vanhoozer calls this the “hermeneutical imperative,” the moral demand on the reader to “respect the author’s intended act.” This insistence on respecting the author as ‘other’ draws a characteristically postmodern response to a characteristically postmodern tendency. Francis Watson observes that in much postmodern literary theory “the text must be dragged before a tribunal and subjected to interrogation about its own ideological tendencies, its tacit support for an unjust status quo, its stereotyping of marginalized groups.” For Vanhoozer, Watson continues, this “inquisitorial practice” is “unethical because in dealing with texts we are dealing with persons whose

382 Ibid, 401. Vanhoozer (ibid, 368, 375), etc. claims that “in reading we encounter an other that calls us to respond.” Vanhoozer (ibid, 185), agrees that deconstructionism may be good insofar as it chastens the reader and brings interpretive humility, yet, (ibid, 187), rejects “the postmodern contention that suspicion—the critical moment—is all there is to the ethics of interpretation…Fortunately, there is an alternative between the absolutely knowable and the absolutely undecidable. A proper fear of the other, of the author, is the real beginning of literary knowledge.”

383 Vanhoozer (ibid, 401), makes it clear that this does not mean that interpreters cannot look for other things in texts as well: “‘Seek ye first understanding’ may be the interpretive norm, but it need not exhaust the reader’s interpretive aims. The hermeneutical imperative—to respect the author’s intended act—is nevertheless a sieve through which all interpretive aims must pass.” What Vanhoozer is really doing here is to rank interpretive aims, showing that one stands out as an underlying priority over all the others. There are many different legitimate interpretive aims, yet the only morally acceptable starting-point is to respect the intention of the author. To disregard this interpretive aim in principle would be immoral.

communicative actions the texts embody.”\textsuperscript{385} Since “[a]ll texts…invoke a certain debt that readers owe authors,”\textsuperscript{386} Vanhoozer responds to Barthes’s declaration of the “death of the author” by suggesting that interpretive “understanding” leads to the “death of the reader.”\textsuperscript{387} The chief goal of interpretation is not to decipher the text’s oppressive ideology, nor to impose one’s own meaning on the text, but “to gain literary knowledge, to discover what an author is doing in tending to words as well as what those words are about.”\textsuperscript{388} Since the “undoing of interpretation rests on a theological mistake,” namely the immoral treatment of the author, Vanhoozer claims that “Christian theology, not deconstruction, is the better response to the ethical challenge of the ‘other.’”\textsuperscript{389} The way to reverse the immoral trend of disconnecting author and textual meaning is to turn to the distinctly Christian understanding of discipleship as respecting the communicative act of God. As a result, a respectful interpretation of the Bible provides the foundation for interpreting all other books. Vanhoozer claims, “I prefer to say, not that we should read the Bible like any other book, but that we should read every other book as we have learned to read the Bible, namely, in a spirit of understanding that lets the text be what it is and do what it intends.”\textsuperscript{390}

\textsuperscript{385} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{386} Vanhoozer, \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text?}, 228-29.
\textsuperscript{387} Ibid, 405. Just as the essence of Christian discipleship is to understand the author of the Biblical text and die to self, so all interpretive understanding seeks to respect the intentions of the author. To disregard the author (i.e. to make oneself author of the text), is fundamentally immoral.
\textsuperscript{388} Ibid, 328.
\textsuperscript{389} Ibid, 199.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid, 379.
All Language as Covenantal: In Vanhoozer’s early work, human language is the medium by which readers and authors enter into a kind of “covenant” with one another to act morally toward one another.\(^3\) Vanhoozer claims that all “texts are ‘covenants’ of discourse,”\(^2\) since through language authors take a public stance, establishing moral obligations on themselves and others. Thus Vanhoozer puts forth his thesis that “the design plan of language is to serve as the medium of covenantal relations with God, with others, with the world.”\(^3\) Vanhoozer calls his claim that all language is covenantal the “presumption of covenantal relation,” suggesting that “implied in every speech act is a certain covenantal relation—a tacit plea, or demand, to understand.”\(^4\) Language is a gift given by God with a specific “design plan” to produce understanding.\(^5\) In written discourse, then, “Covenant faithfulness to what is written is the necessary condition for receiving the covenant blessing: understanding. Understanding is a covenantal agreement between competent authors and competent readers about the rule-governedness of every kind of text.”\(^6\) Seeking to understand the meaning communicated by the author “is a proper response to the text as a communicative act, for

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3\(^1\) Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” 201. Language is only the medium of such moral action, and only when transcendence is presupposed humans use language analogously to God’s use of language. Vanhoozer (ibid, 201), clarifies, “Language itself cannot make this demand on us” because language “has no rights.”

3\(^2\) Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 4.

3\(^3\) Ibid, 206.


3\(^5\) Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 205.

3\(^6\) Ibid, 374.
it respects the design plan of language (and literature) and increases my self-understanding precisely by giving me knowledge about something other than myself.”  

This claim that all language is covenantal is grounded in God’s own covenantal communication, so that, 

From a Christian perspective, God is first and foremost a communicative agent, one who relates to humankind through words and the Word. Indeed, God’s very being is a self-communicative act that both constitutes and enacts the covenant of discourse: speaker (Father), Word (Son), and reception (Spirit) are all interrelated. Human communication is a similarly covenantal affair…

The Bible operates as the paradigm for all communication as it uniquely testifies to the paradigmatic communicative action of God and as it is the covenantal document par excellence. Learning to read Scripture appropriately, then, is the best way to learn how to enter the covenantal structure of language in general and hence to respect morally the author, who has also entered this structure of communication.

Vanhoozer emphasizes not only that texts have determinate meaning, but also that there is ultimately only one right interpretation of a speech act. In opposition to Frei’s distinction between “meaning” and “truth,” Vanhoozer proposes an opposite position: meaning and truth are ultimately united in God, and thus all interpretations are oriented toward, though will never completely reach, the fullness of meaning/truth. Vanhoozer

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397 Ibid, 328.
398 Ibid, 456.
399 Vanhoozer (Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 302), suggests that ultimately, “There is one determinate meaning in light of which the many interpretations must be judged inadequate or incorrect.”
400 Vanhoozer (”The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms,” in Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon, ed. D.A. and John Woodbridge Carson (Grand Rapids: Zonderban, 1986), 85), claims, “Because God is all-knowing and omnipresent…Truth must be comprehensive and unified (at least for God, if not always for us).”
assumes that if interpreters abandon the presupposition that there is only one correct interpretation, they will also abandon the quest to do justice to the author. While interpreters can never have complete confidence that they have attained the one right interpretation, Vanhoozer argues that it is a faulty conclusion to abandon the search for determinate meaning. Since the author has entered into the covenant of communication, the text must have some determinate and intelligible meaning.

2. Use of Speech-Act Theory to Defend the Role of the Author

It is the connection between author and determinate textual meaning allows Vanhoozer to show that all communication is a moral activity and ultimately grounded in God. Speech-act theory provides Vanhoozer with the conceptual tools to locate determinate meaning in a text and connect it to the author. In the case of Scripture, speech-act theory will allow Vanhoozer to suggest that God is involved in both authoring and reading.

*Meaning and the Parts of a Speech Act:* Speech-act theory proposes that all speech acts have three parts: locutions (the words themselves), illocutions (the stance taken by the author, i.e. commanding, requesting, etc.) and perlocutions (the effect produced by the author’s communication) in a speech act. Following this structure, Vanhoozer defines a text as a written “complex communicative act with matter (propositional content), energy (illocutionary force) and purpose (perlocutionary

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401 Against the deconstructionists, Vanhoozer (*Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 334), writes, “The argument, ‘If no absolutes, then skepticism,’ is fallacious. Between ‘all’ and ‘nothing’ stands ‘some.’ Hermeneutic rationality yields *some* literary knowledge.”
Yet while each component of the speech act is necessary to a text, Vanhoozer locates the meaning of the text in the locutions and illocations only. Meaning is determinate in texts because the author encodes that meaning in the text by means of locutions and illocations.

Interpretation, then, is the art of grasping this meaning, not creating meaning in dialogue with the author. Since meaning is bound to the illocations and locutions of a text, perlocutionary effect does not add to the meaning of the text. Vanhoozer articulates this distinction between meaning and perlocutionary effect in various ways, at times distinguishing between “meaning” (the product of the illocations and locutions of the author) and “significance” (the “effects that the text produces in its community of readers”), and at other times between the “literal sense” (“what it meant to the author and the original audience”) and the “ecclesiastical sense” (“what it means to us today in the community guided by tradition or by the Spirit”). In Scripture, while “perlocutionary effect,” “significance” and “ecclesial sense” may continually change based on the response of the Church, the determinate meaning of the text remains unaffected.

To associate perlocutionary effect with meaning would be to make both a philosophical mistake and a theological mistake. Philosophically, to allow for “confusion” between illocutionary efficacy and perlocutionary efficacy would be a “confusion of text and commentary,” and hence would be just “another version of the

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402 Ibid, 228.
403 Ibid, 408-09.
Meaning must be set (i.e. determinate) before perlocutionary effect is able to occur.\textsuperscript{405} Theologically, it is immoral to confuse “textual meaning with its [perlocutionary] effects,”\textsuperscript{406} because this would prohibit the interpreter from genuinely being confronted by the voice of the other in the text. Vanhoozer argues, “The task of an ethics of interpretation, I submit, is to guard the otherness of the text: to preserve its ability to say something to and affect the reader, thus creating the possibility of self-transcendence.”\textsuperscript{407} For Vanhoozer, assuming that determinate meaning exists is a necessary prerequisite for any communication. To enter the process of communication, interpreters must trust that the “illocutionary intent is usually recognizable” in all texts.\textsuperscript{408} As a result, the isolation of meaning from perlocutionary effect is necessary to preserve moral reading.

Vanhoozer grounds his distinction between locutions, illocutions and perlocutions in God’s self-communicative action. Vanhoozer finds an analogy between the Trinity and speech-act theory that allows him to relate persons of the Trinity to specific parts of a communicative act. Vanhoozer suggests,

\textsuperscript{404} Ibid, 386 (cf. 409). For a description of the affective fallacy, see Frei’s use of the New Criticism in chapter one.

\textsuperscript{405} Vanhoozer (ibid, 427), clarifies that there exists both an illocutionary efficacy and a perlocutionary efficacy in Scripture. The “illocutionary efficacy,” intended by the author, (which “is a matter of meaning”), and perlocutionary efficacy, the effect the text has on the reader, (which does not affect that meaning).

\textsuperscript{406} Ibid, 386.

\textsuperscript{407} Ibid, 383.

\textsuperscript{408} Ibid, 427. Vanhoozer (ibid), argues that the “external clarity” of Scripture is similar to the “external clarity” of all texts. Notice that all textual meaning is placed on an equal playing field here: “The suggestion that either the church \textit{magisterium} or the Spirit’s illumination is a prerequisite for understanding would call this presumption into question.”
Speech act theory serves as handmaiden to a Trinitarian theology of communication. If the Father is the locutor, the Son is his preeminent illocution. Christ is God’s definitive Word, the substantive content of his message. And the Holy Spirit—the condition and power of receiving the sender’s message—is God the perlocutor, the reason that his words do not return to him empty (Isa. 55:11). The triune God is therefore the epitome of communicative agency: the speech agent who utters, embodies, and keeps his Word. Human speakers, created in God’s image, enjoy the dignity of communicative agency, though as sinners their speech acts (and interpretations) are subject to imperfections and distortions.409

In this schema, the Father and Son are most appropriately related to locutions and illocutions respectively, and the Spirit is most appropriately related to perlocutionary effect. If the divine Persons can be analogously associated with the parts of a speech act in this way, then “the Trinitarian language of ‘procession’ is apt: as the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, so the literary act proceeds from the author, and so too does the perlocution (persuading, convincing) proceed from the illocution (claiming, asserting).410

Both the Son and Spirit cannot be responsible for meaning, Vanhoozer suggests, because attributing meaning to the Spirit would make the Spirit a “rival author” setting “Spirit against Word.”411 The Spirit does not contribute to illocutionary meaning, but instead “renders the Word effective.”412 Vanhoozer applies his axiomatic statement: “the Spirit is tied to the written Word as significance is tied to meaning,” in order to show that “the role of the Spirit is to serve as the Spirit of significance and thus to apply meaning,

409 Ibid, 457.

410 Ibid, 410. This analogy is used repeatedly by Vanhoozer. See, for example, Vanhoozer, "The Spirit of Understanding,” 227; Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 457, 429, etc.

411 Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 427.

412 Ibid.
not to change it." Since Scripture is complete in meaning (locutions and "illocutionary success"), but indeterminate in bringing about the appropriate response in the reader ("perlocutionary success"), it is naturally the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the meaning determined by the Father and Son. The Spirit has a specific role in the literary act, just as the Spirit has a specific role in relation to Father and Son: "The Spirit’s role in bringing about understanding is to witness to what is other than himself (meaning accomplished) and to bring its significance to bear on the reader (meaning applied)."

Practically, this means that the Spirit "ensures that [the illocutinary acts] are recognized for what they are," by means of "conviction," "illumination," and "sanctification." Vanhoozer’s association of perlocutionary effect with the work of the Spirit should be seen in light of his pneumatology. Vanhoozer wishes to develop a pneumatology that will tie Spirit and Scripture closer together than either Tracy or postliberals are willing to do. On the one hand, Vanhoozer criticizes Tracy and Ricoeur...
for associating the work of the Spirit more with the universal work of creation than with Christology, believing that such a model will de-emphasize the particularity of Christianity. On the other hand, Vanhoozer criticizes postliberals for their tendency to “confine the Spirit to the church by making the Spirit’s work a function of community reading practices,” believing that this will de-emphasize the authority of Scripture. Vanhoozer’s own proposal ties the work of the Spirit to the Scriptures, for it suggests a model in which the Spirit primarily works in Scripture rather than the practices of the Church or in the created order at large. This model seeks to call revisionists and postliberals alike to respect the ways in which the literal sense of Scripture establishes the bounds for the Christian faith.

Establishing the Literal Sense: The literal sense is the combination of locutions and illocutions intended by the author within the context of the whole communicative act. It is the illocutions, however, which are finally decisive for determining the literal sense. Interpretation takes place when a reader moves from discerning the locutions to “inferring illocutionary intent from the evidence, which includes both the primary data (the text) and secondary considerations (context).” Vanhoozer’s paradigmatic example

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417 Vanhoozer, “The Spirit of Understanding,” 227. The claim is developed fully in Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, ch. 9, esp. 248-57.)


419 Vanhoozer ("From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 178), defines the literal sense as “the sum total of those illocutionary acts performed by the author intentionally and with self-awareness.” Yet he also insists, “The literal sense, I maintain, is not a matter of locutions alone; every utterance has an illocutionary force as well (e.g., assertive, directive, expressive, etc.)…To ignore the role of illocutions is to succumb to ‘letterism,’ or to what could also be called ‘locutionism’” (Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 310-11).

420 Vanhoozer, ("From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," 183). It is important to note the stress on illocutionary acts for establishing the literal sense—locutions alone are not sufficient (182). For
here is the interpretation of legal documents (a will, for example) where the thought process of the author must be reconstructed in order to understand the communicative act intentionally preserved by writing.\textsuperscript{421} The reader must use the locutions in order to move to the illocutions, and hence the meaning, of a text.\textsuperscript{422}

Vanhoozer further shows the importance of illocutions by likening interpretation to translation. Good translation, Vanhoozer claims, occurs when the illocutions and perlocutions are preserved as the locutions are changed. This produces “an ‘equivalent response’ in a new context.”\textsuperscript{423} While something is always added and lost in translation, “Moral interpretation respects and responds to the illocutions of the text in the way intended by the author.”\textsuperscript{424} Through this explanation, it is possible to see how closely tied authorial intent remains to meaning. The very ability to grasp meaning depends on one’s ability to grasp the illocutionary efficacy of the text while using different locutions. In the structure of language, “illocutions ‘supervene’ on locutions,” so that, “One can perform an illocutionary act only on the basis of locutions—words, sentences—though

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\textsuperscript{421} Vanhoozer, \textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text?}, 332.
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\textsuperscript{422} Vanhoozer provides a pivotal analogy for Vanhoozer’s understanding of the literal sense. Vanhoozer (\textit{Is There a Meaning in This Text?}, 357, n. 143), claims, “One cannot read divine revelation off of the body of Jesus. It is only in other contexts, on higher descriptive levels, that we can see Jesus as the Christ and as the Son of God. ‘Christ’ supervenes on ‘Jesus.’ His divinity cannot be reduced to his humanity, but it cannot be discussed apart from it either.” In the same way, one must move from locutions to supervening illocutions to understand the literal sense.
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\textsuperscript{423} Vanhoozer (ibid, 387), claims, “In order to preserve the nature and content (proposition and illocution) of the message, however, it is often necessary to change the form (locution).”
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\textsuperscript{424} Vanhoozer (ibid, 335), claims, “What we are after as readers is not an interpretation that perfectly corresponds to the text (whatever that might mean), but rather an interpretation that adequately responds to it. In responding to the text we allow the text to complete the purpose for which it was sent.”
\end{flushright}
illocutions cannot be reduced to locutions." The literal sense is understood by moving from the words of the text to the authorial intent which created those words and supervened on them in an illocutionary stance.

Up to this point, Vanhoozer has only given a general description of the literal sense which would apply to all texts. As he transitions to an explanation of the literal sense of Scripture, some sharp tensions arise. In the next section, I will show that attempting to employ general hermeneutical rules to Scripture, even if those rules are grounded in the notion of God’s communicative acts, fails to provide an adequate framework for understanding dual authorship, the unity of the canon, progressive revelation, and reading all Scripture in light of Christ.

C. Persistent Tensions in Vanhoozer’s Early Work

While Vanhoozer’s early work articulates a philosophically interesting, theologically grounded argument for reading Scripture and consequently all other texts with respect for their authors and messages, this early work suffers from a number of difficulties in establishing rules for reading Scripture. Specifically, Vanhoozer’s early project lacks adequate articulation of the uniqueness of Scripture and the activity of God in communicating the Scriptural texts. Too often, Scripture appears to be governed by all

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426 Vanhoozer (ibid, 178), claims that the Bible is unique because of its “pedagogical nature and function”—its status is “canon” and its “nature” is as a “guidebook for the believing community.” Vanhoozer, (ibid, 103), further demonstrates the uniqueness of Scripture in that the literal sense of Scripture means “taking it as testimony to Jesus Christ,” and thus the literal sense must regard Christ as the center of Scripture.
the same rules that govern the reading of other texts, and God appears to be little more than a necessary presupposition for moral reading.

In this regard, Vanhoozer’s early work may be more instructive in its failure than it is in its success. Vanhoozer criticizes both Tracy and Frei for focusing on general hermeneutics to the exclusion of special hermeneutics, yet Vanhoozer’s own early approach exhibits many of the same problems. These difficulties in Vanhoozer’s work show the importance of developing rules for reading within the context of the whole economy of redemption rather than trying to move beyond the impasse by simply imposing a different literary method. This section will highlight several key difficulties in Vanhoozer’s early work in order to show that the discussion must be broadened further to include a discussion of the divine Author as well as the place of Scripture in the economy of redemption.

*The Movement From Human Authorship to Divine Authorship*: While most of Vanhoozer’s early works focuses on the speech acts of the human author, Vanhoozer knows that ultimately he must move from a theological general hermeneutics to a special hermeneutics of Scripture as he deals with dual authorship. Vanhoozer’s move to special hermeneutics is made by claiming that God brings canonical meaning to completion by supervening God’s own divine illocutions on human speech acts. Since God acts upon the biblical texts in this way, the whole canon can be considered a unified speech act, of which God is the primary author. Vanhoozer calls this supervening action, which becomes apparent at the level of the whole canon, either the canonical sense or the *sensus*
plenior. Ultimately, Vanhoozer suggests, the literal sense is the canonical sense as the canon provides the full context for understanding God’s communicative act.

For Vanhoozer, determining textual meaning is a function of understanding both the locutions and the illocutionary stance of the author. Understanding the full meaning of the author can best occur as one examines the speech act in its whole context; e.g., an author’s whole text in the context of its genre, with the cultural situation of the author, etc. Vanhoozer applies this same logic to Scripture as he moves from human authorship to divine authorship to determine Scripture’s divine canonical sense. While individual authors wrote the individual texts of Scripture as speech acts, the fullest meaning of Scripture emerges only at the level of the canon where the whole of Scripture can best be understood as God’s unified speech act. Thus the “canon as a whole becomes the unified act for which the divine intention serves as the unifying principle.” Vanhoozer explains that the whole completed canon is the context within which God’s speech act can be determined:

A text must be read in light of its intentional context, that is, against the background that best allows us to answer the question of what the author is doing.

427 The term sensus plenior is associated with Raymond Brown, who defines the term as “additional meaning…in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development” (Raymond Brown, The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture (Baltimore: St. Mary’s University, 1955), 92, cited in David M. Williams, Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004)). Vanhoozer (Is There a Meaning in this Text, 313), suggests that the “fuller sense is in fact the literal sense, taken at the level of its thickest description.” Thus the sensus plenior, for Vanhoozer, ends with the closure of the canon. Vanhoozer’s chief aim is to protect the codified meaning of the Biblical text from human detractors at all costs; hence his articulation of Scripture as God’s speech act is only a secondary emphasis.

428 Ibid, 265. This position does not deny that God was influential (providentially, communicatively, etc.) in the production of the individual texts of Scripture; rather, it only claims that God’s speech act is best understood within the whole canonical context and should be discerned by using that whole context—i.e. that all Scripture testifies to Christ.
For it is in relation to its intentional context that a text yields its maximal sense, its fullest meaning. If we are reading the Bible as the Word of God, therefore, I suggest that the context that yields this maximal sense is the canon taken as a unified communicative act. The books of Scripture, taken individually, may anticipate the whole, but the canon alone is its instantiation.429

Since this “fuller meaning…emerges only at the level of the whole canon,” Vanhoozer argues that the ‘fuller sense,’ the ‘literal sense’ and the ‘canonical sense’ are all ways of referring to the same unified, divine speech act of God.430

This movement from human authors to divine authorship proves an extreme challenge for Vanhoozer’s theological general hermeneutics. Up to this point Vanhoozer’s whole argument has rested on the ‘hermeneutical imperative,’ the claim that readers have a moral obligation to respect the speech acts of human authors. Now, Vanhoozer must show how God can supervene God’s own speech act on human speech acts in such a way that God does not do interpretive violence to the human authors. In order to show that “[t]he divine intention does not contravene the intention of the human author but rather supervenes on it,” Vanhoozer suggests that textual meaning in Scripture was indeterminate until the closure of the canon, at which time it became determinate.431 Using Brevard Childs’s canonical approach, Vanhoozer claims that “a

429 Ibid.

430 Ibid, 264, 313. The “fuller sense,” for Vanhoozer (ibid, 313), is “the literal sense, taken at the level of its thickest description.” Using this argument, Vanhoozer will argue that the literal sense is the canonical sense. Carrying this argument through in his later work, Vanhoozer writes, “If one takes divine authorship of Scripture seriously, then literal interpretation must have recourse to the canonical context, for the meaning of the parts is related to the whole of Scripture. The literal sense of Scripture as intended by God is the sense of the canonical act (the communicative act when seen in the context of the canon)” (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Body Piercing, the Natural Sense and the Task of Theological Interpretation," in First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), in First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 292).

431 Ibid, 265.
work’s potential is its capacity to function in future circumstances, a capacity that for Childs is precisely the canonical function.”

On this account, the individual texts which were originally indeterminate in meaning opened beyond themselves so that future generations could “provide the descriptive framework within which to understand new events.” Yet, with the closure of the canon, the indeterminacy of just these texts ended as God’s speech act supervened on them and established the meaning. Vanhoozer explains,

What this means is that the literal sense—the sense of the literary act—may, at times, be indeterminate or open-ended. However—and this is crucial—the indeterminacy we are considering is intended; moreover, it is a definite feature of the meaning of the text...If there is a sensus plenior, then, it is on the level of God’s gathering together the various partial and progressive communicative acts and purposes of the human authors into one ‘great canonical Design.’

The argument seems to be that God providentially caused the indeterminacy of the human speech acts of the texts so that God could establish determinate meaning in them with the completion of the canon. As the canon was closed, those providentially indeterminate texts could be recognized as a unified speech act of God, closed with regard to meaning.

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433 *Is There a Meaning in This Text?,* 313.

434 Ibid, 314.

435 Here a distinction again appears between reading Scripture and reading other texts. Unfortunately, Vanhoozer provides no distinguishing criteria for reading the Bible differently, except that all the books must be read as a canonical whole.

436 Ibid, 313. Vanhoozer (ibid), has just used Bakhtin to show that the interpreter must not “enclose” the work ‘within the epoch,’” yet he appears to do precisely that once the canon itself is closed.
This argument seems incompatible with Vanhoozer’s project for two reasons. First, if God was involved providentially in the text in this unique way, then the biblical texts simply cannot be read with the same rules as other texts. Readers must read for divine authorial intent often instead of human authorial intent. In Scripture, God is uniquely responsible both for the indeterminacy and the final determinacy of textual meaning, and the individual texts must be read in that light. The previous decision about whether one reads to understand God’s speech acts or the human speech acts in Scripture will affect the subsequent method of reading more than Vanhoozer’s method can account for, especially when explaining the use of the Old Testament in the New.437 For example, Vanhoozer claims that “New Testament testimony does not ‘spiritualize’ but ‘specifies’” the Old Testament reference, so that “Jesus Christ…is the literal referent of biblical testimony.” Vanhoozer argues that the “meaning” of the Old Testament is not changed in the New, but that God has “rather rendered its referent—God’s gracious provision for Israel and the world—more specific.”438 It seems Vanhoozer can make this claim only by understanding “meaning” and “referent” in a very general sense.439 It is quite difficult to preserve the radical newness of Christ while saying that the New Testament is simply a

437 Spinks (The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning, 92), notes that Vanhoozer’s safeguarding of the term “meaning” becomes very difficult to defend as it is extended “from sentence to text to canon while all the while maintaining authorial intention, both human and divine. In other words, Vanhoozer’s term ‘meaning’ seems to have to bear a good deal of weight as it moves to incorporate the whole of Scripture.”

438 Ibid, 423.

439 And Vanhoozer does exactly that. Vanhoozer (ibid, 423), claims, “What is of continuing relevance across the two Testaments is God’s promise to create a people for himself and the divine action that fulfills that promise.” It is the covenantal structure, it seems, that is constant, and the final covenant specifies the previous. Of course this is true, but surely the matter is not that simple. It is doubtful that Vanhoozer will be satisfied with this general a concept of meaning when attending carefully to the particular genres of Scripture as parts of a speech act.
specifying of the textual indeterminacy of the Old Testament. As we will see in the next chapter, de Lubac argues that this is not really a Christian reading of Scripture at all.

Second, this description of the movement from human to divine authorship causes Vanhoozer to land remarkably close to Tracy and Frei in precisely his disregard for the significance of the human author. For Tracy, investigating authorial intent would simply be a part of excavating the world behind the text in order to move on to the meaning in front of the text. For Frei, investigating authorial intent is unnecessary because the text is sufficiently plain. By claiming that Scripture is ultimately God’s speech act, constituted as such by God’s supervening illocutions on the human speech acts, it appears that Vanhoozer must say that the speech act of the human author is a means to God’s speech act. God, the primary author, is able to supervene additional illocutions on the locutions of the human author, thus making the text mean something different than the original intention of the human author. It is unclear, then, why interpreters must maintain a quest for human authorial intent at all.

440 Drawing the now familiar distinction between meaning and significance, Vanhoozer (ibid, 423), claims, “Significance just is ‘recontextualized meaning.’ Just as Jesus Christ recontextualizes the meaning of the Old Testament, so the church is called to recontextualize the meaning of Jesus Christ.” I am not sure how this can possibly escape blurring the distinction between progressive revelation and interpretation of encoded meaning that Vanhoozer has set up his argument precisely to preserve.

441 Interestingly, Adonis Vidu notes precisely this difficulty even without adding a quest for the divine author. Vidu argues that if authorial intent means the speech act of the author which is sufficiently plain in the text, it is unclear why we must call it authorial intent? Vidu (Adonis Vidu, "Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge," Trinity Journal 21, no. 2 (2000). 211), writes, “The question which remains to be asked, by way of criticism, is whether Vanhoozer doesn’t too easily collapse the author back into the text…But if the act (the text) tells us all we need to know, why bother with the author? While Vanhoozer succeeds in avoiding to describe authorial intention in terms of the psychology of the author, it is not clear whether the author is not merely a postulate, perhaps a useless one.” I would suggest that the tension is greatly heightened when interpreters concede that meaning is not located in the human speech acts at all, but in the supervening divine speech acts.
A Distinctly General Hermeneutic: After arguing that general hermeneutics overshadowed and effectively nullified Ricoeur’s special hermeneutics, it is somewhat surprising that Vanhoozer starts his own Scriptural hermeneutics from a general morality of reading. Besides Vanhoozer’s occasional emphasis on the uniqueness of Scripture’s subject matter, there appears to be very little difference between Scripture and other books. This ambiguity about the place of special hermeneutics can be illustrated at the end of Vanhoozer’s book, where he summarily claims,

On the one hand, we should read the Bible like any other text, though due consideration must be given to those factors that set it apart (e.g., its divine-human authorship, its canonical shape, its function as Scripture). On the other hand, we should read every other text with the same theological presuppositions that we bring to, and discover through, our study of the Bible.\(^{442}\)

While the first sentence of this statement highlights some key differences between Scripture and other books (namely, uniqueness of authorship, canon, and use in the Church), it is Vanhoozer’s lack of attention to these issues which is most striking throughout his early work.\(^{443}\) The second sentence of this quote provides a manifesto for Vanhoozer’s theological general hermeneutics, yet it must be asked whether the very thesis may be flawed. Do not Christians turn to Scripture precisely because they bring different theological presuppositions to this text?\(^{444}\) Overall, the very argument for a

\(^{442}\) Ibid, 455-56.

\(^{443}\) In fact, Vanhoozer (ibid, 4), claims in his 10 year anniversary edition, “To be sure, biblical interpretation is a special case (hence the term ‘special hermeneutics’), not least because God is uniquely involved in the process of composition, canonization, and interpretation.” These are precisely the issues that Vanhoozer has noted but left undeveloped in his early career. In his later career, Vanhoozer will start from these issues and develop them thoroughly.

\(^{444}\) At the very least, these presuppositions would include a conviction that the illocutions of the Author deserve to be heard and responded to in a qualitatively greater way, that the locutions of this
theological general hermeneutic appears to be both philosophically and theologically problematic. The attempt is philosophically problematic because writing does not summon the ethical response of a reader in quite the way speaking does. The distanciation between author and reader does allow the reader to first decide if she wishes to enter the covenant of communication at all. The covenant of communication operates, then, in most written texts, on a previous decision by the reader to enter into that covenant. Further, the attempt is theologically problematic because its attempt to establish authority in all texts based on a general moral obligation toward human authors actually detracts from the special importance of reading Scripture because it is God’s word. While it is true that language establishes a structure in which human beings are able to interact morally or immorally with one another, Vanhoozer seems to realize that it does not necessarily follow that readers are morally obligated to investigate the meaning proposals of all authors equally. In his later work, Vanhoozer will soften his claim to a text were somehow uniquely attended to by the Holy Spirit, and that the perlocutionary efficacy of this text is capable of producing different results than other texts.

445 In this sense, writing does appear to be a different kind of communicative act than speaking. In writing, the author is distanced from the reader so that no direct summons by a speaker to a hearer occurs (with the exception of legal documents, which provide the basis for Vanhoozer’s argument—see Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 332). This difficulty may be seen more clearly by putting Vanhoozer and Tracy in discussion about other potentially disclosive religious texts, say, the Koran. Tracy would say that the Koran is disclosive in the same way as is the Bible, because each, as a religious text, makes a ‘claim to the whole.’ Vanhoozer would agree with Tracy that treating the author/text as an ‘other’ would force readers to genuinely seek understanding (in Vanhoozer’s case, the locutions and illocutions of the author). Yet Vanhoozer would likely not yield to the claim to the whole in the Koran in the same way he yields to the Bible. Would Vanhoozer, then, be an immoral reader on his own account? The answer seems clear: Vanhoozer does not think the author of the Koran deserves to be understood or responded to in quite the same manner as does the primary author of the Christian Scriptures. This example clarifies Vanhoozer’s difficulty. The hermeneutical imperative only works if one first decides that it is important to read the author. Human authors do deserve the respect of readers to adequately identify their locutions and illocutions if readers decide to enter that covenant (i.e. if readers choose to say, “The author meant…”, they are obligated to correctly identify what the author, in fact, meant). However, it seems clear that readers read for understanding to the level that they believe such understanding matters. Such a decision of worth is not an inherently immoral action toward the author. Rather, it is the necessarily prior decision to any act of interpretation.
covenant of communication and propose that language is only “quasi-covenantal,” and that what is needed in reading Scripture is a “first theology” which will establish the moral demands on readers to read for understanding.

_Pneumatology of all Reading:_ One of the most apparent tensions in Vanhoozer’s early work is his insistence that moral reading of all texts is grounded in the activity of the Spirit. This insistence appears incompatible with Vanhoozer’s project in several ways. First, it works against Vanhoozer’s overall pneumatology, which seeks to associate the work of the Spirit more closely to the biblical text. Vanhoozer’s intent has been to show how the Spirit’s activity is tied distinctly to Scripture. Yet now it appears that Vanhoozer must associate the Spirit’s work with the reading of all texts in qualitatively the same way as the Spirit works in Scripture. It is quite unclear how Vanhoozer can simultaneously maintain both the uniqueness of the Spirit’s work in Scripture and the presupposition of the Spirit’s work in all texts.

Second, Vanhoozer’s claim that pneumatology is a grounding presupposition for all reading may blur the very distinction between nature and grace that Vanhoozer so strongly wishes to maintain. On this general argument, it remains unclear whether Vanhoozer intends the moral reading of any text to be ultimately a matter of nature or of grace. At some points Vanhoozer appears to simply be claiming that Christians have better _resources_ for reading general texts which will allow them to read morally (namely,

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446 One telling sign of Vanhoozer’s struggle here is to observe how quickly Vanhoozer retreats from a general theory of the Spirit’s work in all texts back to a discussion of the Spirit’s perlocutionary efficacy in Scripture, leaving his explanation of the Spirit’s work in all other texts undeveloped. For example, Vanhoozer (ibid, 415), appeals to the “renewing of your minds” (Rom. 12:2), as the Spirit’s help to “receiving textual meaning.” Vanhoozer cannot (morally!) appeal to the authorial intent of Paul to apply this transformation to all textual interpretation. And, in fact, Vanhoozer does not, for his argument simply switches back to the transformation brought about by the Spirit’s perlocutionary effect in Scripture alone.
the grounding presupposition that God stands behind all communication). On this account, moral reading is in the realm of nature, although Christians are better prepared for moral reading because they presuppose a framework of transcendence. At other points, however, by suggesting that the Spirit grounds all reading, Vanhoozer appears to be claiming that all moral reading ultimately participates in the realm of grace. When the reader develops interpretive virtues for reading Homer, he or she is participating in the fruit of the Spirit. It is one thing to say that all texts should be read with the same general rules of interpretation as the biblical text. But it is quite another to say that the Spirit’s effective action operates in all texts as it does in the perlocutionary efficacy of the biblical texts. The latter dismisses the very uniqueness Vanhoozer is attempting to establish.

Third, Vanhoozer’s early work fails to associate the work of the Spirit with the Church in any qualitatively different way than in other institutions. Vanhoozer claims,

[T]he Bible is best read in the context of community of disciplined readers…not because there is no meaning in the Bible apart from its reception of the Spirit-led community, but because the Church is the place where the Spirit cultivates righteousness and the willingness to hear the one who leads the community into the single correct interpretation: the literal sense.

The Church provides the best context for reading Scripture primarily because it is the best context for developing the proper response to Scripture. This conclusion appears

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447 Ibid, 415. Vanhoozer (ibid, 430), does give several reasons in favor of interpreting Scripture in the Church: 1. “What reading Scripture in the church does is to provide a context for cultivating the interpretive virtues and a conducive environment in which to discern and to do the Word.” 2. “The church is the community dedicated to discovering the Bible’s meaning and to attesting its continuing significance.” 3. “It is, above all, the significance of Scripture that cannot be discerned apart from the receiving, believing community.” Vanhoozer’s insistence that the plain sense of all texts can be determined sufficiently outside the Church and that all reading is grounded in the influence of the Holy Spirit, makes it quite difficult for him to locate the Spirit’s activity in the Church in any distinct way.
to give Vanhoozer the same difficulty that Tracy has faced in explaining the difference between reading Scripture within the Church and outside it. The encounter with the text does not appear to be qualitatively different inside and outside the Church—it only provides the community of a group of persons who are like-minded and able to formulate the correct virtues for reading. This awkward result appears an inescapable conclusion to the claim that meaning is determinate in all texts and that the Spirit underlies the moral reading of all texts.

God’s Activity in Scripture: Perhaps the greatest difficulty in Vanhoozer’s early work is in articulating God’s action in Scripture. Vanhoozer proposes that the Triune God is the backdrop to all human communication, as human communication analogously models the action of the Triune God. Vanhoozer claims, “The thesis underlying the present work takes God’s trinitarian communicative action as the paradigm, not merely the illustration, of all genuine message-sending and receiving…The triune God is therefore the epitome of communicative agency.” It is clear that Vanhoozer wants readers to understand that the Triune God is the ground of all communicative action, and that the reality of the Trinity establishes the very rules for reading. Vanhoozer insists, therefore, that he is building a truly “theological general hermeneutics” which starts from

448 Vanhoozer (“The Spirit of Understanding,” 231), specifically claims, “I am advocating a Trinitarian hermeneutic for all interpretation.” Vanhoozer (Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 161), explains that self-communicative action is an attribute both of the immanent Trinity (God is “essentially the one who communicates himself to others in trinitarian fashion…In the beginning was the communicative act…”) and of the economic Trinity (“The incarnation…grounds the possibility of human communication by demonstrating that it is indeed possible to enter into the life of another so as to achieve understanding”).

449 Ibid, 457.
a theology of God and moves to hermeneutical theory, rather than a “general hermeneutics” which presupposes God as a ground.\footnote{For example, Vanhoozer (ibid, 456), argues, “I have been at pains not to use the Trinity merely as an illustration of a point obtained elsewhere…God somehow ‘underwrites’ language and [I] have attempted to clarify it from an explicitly Christian point of view.” Vanhoozer (ibid), argues even more insistently that “[t]he Trinity is not merely an illustration of a general intellectual process. I am not beginning with a philosophical framework and saying, ‘The Trinity is like that.’ Nor am I using the Trinity to justify a particular interpretive approach…”}

Despite this persistence, however, it is far from clear that Vanhoozer has actually accomplished such a project. When Vanhoozer explains the role of the Trinity in interpretation, he suggests that “The Trinity thus serves the role of what Kant calls a ‘transcendental condition’: a necessary condition for the possibility of something humans experience but cannot otherwise explain, namely, the experience of meaningful communication.”\footnote{Ibid, 456, (emphasis his).} While God is a “transcendental condition” of communication, it is not apparent what the Triune God actually does apart from establishing a (covenantal) ground of morality and influencing all readers to read morally. Vanhoozer’s early work has focused one-sidedly on the necessity of Trinity as a backdrop to human communication, neglecting the ongoing economic action of the Trinity in Scripture.\footnote{Indeed, the thesis of Bowald’s book may be justified in this statement by Vanhoozer. Bowald (Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics, 1-23), has argued that the post-Enlightenment tendency in biblical hermeneutics is to understand God’s action in Scripture in much the same way Kant has defined a “notional judgment”: a piece of knowledge we need to conduct investigations, but which does not affect the process of investigation. Hence while terms like “inspiration,” “infallibility,” “inerrancy” may be necessary backdrops for Biblical studies, they do not affect the process of “operational judgments”—those which influence the process of reasoning. Vanhoozer appears here to use the communicative action of “Trinity” in the same way—it is a necessary backdrop for human communication, but does not affect the process of humans communicating.}

While God may have providentially brought together the different books of Scripture and
supervened illocutions on them at the level of the canon, it is still unclear what special consequence God’s authorship of Scripture may have on the process of reading today.\footnote{Bowald (ibid, 65), claims that with regard to Scripture, “There is still no clear indication for how the actual influence or participation of God’s speech action occurs with human speech action.”}

**Conclusion:** The early Vanhoozer’s contribution to the debate between Tracy and Frei appears to be one of instructive failure rather than providing a helpful alternative. The tensions mentioned above appear to be the inevitable result of attempting to ground a reading of all texts and a reading of Scripture on the same theological presuppositions. Simply changing the philosophical tools from theories such as the New Criticism (as Frei) or phenomenology (as Tracy) to speech-act theory (as Vanhoozer) does not ease the tensions in Scriptural hermeneutics when only the relationship between text and reader is developed. Instead, the whole discussion of Scriptural interpretation must be placed in a broader context which includes God’s use of Scripture to the Church, as well as the role of the Church in receiving Scripture. Fortunately for Vanhoozer, the difficulties inherent in his early approach will cause him to develop this broader context during his later work.

**B. Vanhoozer’s Later Work: Starting from God as Self-Communicative Act**

In his later work, Vanhoozer specifically claims that his first work failed to adequately appreciate the uniqueness of Scripture since he did not adequately show that “God is involved in the production and reception of the Bible in a way that is so qualitatively different that it makes of biblical interpretation a special case.”\footnote{Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 4.}

Vanhoozer’s 2001 book, *First Theology*, marks a distinctly new trajectory in his
Vanhoozer has taken the idea of First Theology from David Kelsey, and summarizes it in this way:

[T]he way Scripture functions authoritatively in theology is inseparable from a view of God, an inseparability that I call ‘first theology’; [and] one’s first theology invariably involves an ‘imaginative construal,’ a decision to take the Bible as something or other based on our discernment of how God relates to the community of readers via Scripture.

Vanhoozer argues that an “imaginary construal” about what Scripture is will determine how Scripture is to be read. This “first theology” now forms a starting point for all Vanhoozer’s hermeneutics, and allows Vanhoozer to locate Scripture more precisely in the economy of redemption. Rather than focusing almost exclusively on epistemological concerns like meaning and literary theory, Vanhoozer now focuses on the way in which the triune God has graciously used Scripture to call and sanctify a people in covenant relationship. Whereas Vanhoozer previously explained interpretation as a morally responsible quest for the (human) author’s meaning, he now claims that “the interpretation of Scripture is the means by which human discourse participates in the ‘strange new world of the Bible’—the divine discourse of the blessed Trinity.”

Interpretation, then, is a response to and participation in the triune God.

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455 Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002). This book is composed mostly of articles which range throughout the 1990’s, and hence are of little use in illustrating Vanhoozer’s new focus. Vanhoozer’s introduction to the book, pp. 15-44 is the most helpful in showing his new trajectory in thought.

456 Vanhoozer, "The Apostolic Discourse and Its Development," 192. See David H. Kelsey (The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 159), who claims that prior to the theologian’s use of Scripture stands “a decision a theologian must make about the point of engaging in the activity of doing theology, a decision about what is the subject matter of theology. And that is determined…by the way in which he tries to catch up what Christianity is basically all about in a single, synoptic, imaginative judgment.”

This First Theology helps press Vanhoozer to broaden the discussion of hermeneutics to include an articulation of the relationship between God, Scripture, and the Church. Vanhoozer’s most recent book, *Remythologizing Theology*, sets forth an ontology of the economy of redemption. There Vanhoozer writes,

[Remythologizing theology] is a way of viewing God, Scripture, and hermeneutics in terms of their mutual implications, all coordinated by the notion of communicative action: the triune God is the ultimate communicative agent of Scripture; Scripture is an element in the triune God’s communicative action; interpretation is the way the church demonstrates her understanding of what God is saying and doing in and through Scripture by right theodramatic participation.458

This refocusing of the discussion specifically on the economy of redemption allows Vanhoozer to make a substantive contribution to Scriptural hermeneutics which will move beyond the debate between Frei and Tracy. God will now be understood not simply as the necessary ground for all human communicative acts, but as Pure, Triune self-communicative Act who extends communication to human beings uniquely through Christ and Scripture. It is now specifically the doctrine of God which establishes the roles that Scripture and the interpretive community have in the divine economy.

As a doctrine of God now uniquely grounds his hermeneutics of Scripture, Vanhoozer simultaneously softens his use of speech-act theory so that it is clear he is beginning with the Trinitarian theology rather than speech-act theory to build an argument that God, both in essence and in Personal relations, is communicative. Vanhoozer’s later claim is that,

458 Ibid, 30.
God is the communicator, communication, and communicatedness. The triune God is the agent, act, and effect of his own self-communication. As Voice, the Father is the speaking subject who initiates the process of communication. As Word, the Son is what the Father speaks, the content of the communicative act. As the Breath that accompanies and conveys the Father’s Word, the Spirit is the channel or medium of the communicative act as well as its efficacy.  

Vanhoozer now begins his hermeneutical project specifically from an understanding of the Trinity and attempts to work out the implications of the doctrine of God for hermeneutics, rather than starting with rules for reading and grounding them in the doctrine of the Trinity. Speech-act theory is still the philosophical tool of choice, but the priority of Trinitarian doctrine over philosophical concepts has been established. Vanhoozer’s later project is characterized by two moves: the attempt to develop an ontology of God as Pure Communicative Action, and an attempt to demonstrate that God should be considered Author of Scripture. Both steps will require a discussion of God’s use of the Scriptural texts and the role of these texts in the Church.

1. Developing an Ontology of Communicative Action

In *Remythologizing Theology*, Vanhoozer moves beyond hermeneutics to a theological explanation of God which will advance theology proper. Observing that

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*459* Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 261. Bowald, 67, nt. 79, suggests that Vanhoozer gradually moves from a strict dependence on speech act theory to an ancillary use of this philosophical method in describing God.

*460* Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*. (The basis for this book appears in a 2001 article by Vanhoozer, entitled, “The Love of God: Its Place, Meaning and Function in Systematic Theology,” in *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 71-95.) Vanhoozer realizes that theological hermeneutics will never be an extremely helpful movement for Christian theology until it can enhance articulation of the nature of God as well as God’s relation to Scripture. Vanhoozer, (*Remythologizing Theology*, xiv), claims, “The recent interest in theological hermeneutics, together with the church’s recovery of the practice of interpreting the Bible in the context of...
recent theologians have said much about God’s self-communication, Vanhoozer finds it surprising that very few have actually explained what self-communication means.\textsuperscript{461} To fill this theological void, Vanhoozer attempts to set forth a “communicative ontology (i.e., a set of concepts with which to speak of God-in-communicative-action).”\textsuperscript{462} This program of communicative ontology has several emphases: First, while Vanhoozer argues that Christian theology cannot abandon a holistic system for understanding reality, he is insistent that such a holistic quest must start from God’s self-revelation in Christ and Scripture rather than from some predetermined system of truth.\textsuperscript{463} Second, Vanhoozer insists that metaphysics should not begin with a system of causality but by understanding God as Pure communicative action.\textsuperscript{464} Vanhoozer’s unique contribution is to unite these insights into a constructive proposal.

\textit{Post-Barthian Thomism:} Describing himself as a “post-Barthian Thomist,” Vanhoozer suggests that Aquinas’s metaphysical system can best be employed today

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\item Vanhoozer (ibid, xiii), claims, “Western theologians as diverse as Thomas Aquinas, John Owen, Karl Rahner, and Karl Barth freely employ the notions of communication and self-communication in the contexts of divine revelation and/or redemption, yet usually without explicit analysis. Finally, few theologians have made use of the available linguistic, philosophical, literary, and rhetorical resources conceptually to elaborate the nature of God’s communicative action.”
\item Ibid, xv.
\item Vanhoozer (\textit{Remythologizing Theology}, 199), believes Barth was correct in his emphasis that any ontology of God must be based (\textit{a posteriori}) on God’s own self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and only from there move to philosophy. Yet Vanhoozer (ibid, 217), suggests that “faith that stops its search for understanding short of ontology risks falling back into mere mythologizing. By contrast, remythologizing renews and revitalizes…by letting Scripture serve as our primary interpretative framework.”
\item Vanhoozer (ibid, 217), believes Aquinas was correct in his emphasis that “being is not a static substance but a dynamic, existential act,” and that this revised ontology will call for a more modest metaphysics of God as Being-as-self-communicative-action which starts from God’s self-revelation rather than God as First Cause which starts from a system of philosophical logic.
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after it has been chastened by Barth’s priority of revelation over reason. The most important “Barthian anxiety” is Barth’s insistence on Christology as the starting point for God’s self-communication. Vanhoozer will develop his program using Aquinas’s conception of God as Pure Act, and Barth’s focus on God’s self-communication.

Vanhoozer agrees with Aquinas’s description of God’s Being as Pure Act. However, Vanhoozer wishes to emphasize that communication instead of causality is the proper starting point for metaphysics. In shifting emphasis from communication to causality, Vanhoozer intends to “bring out a communicative sense to which the church has not sufficiently attended.” Vanhoozer begins by agreeing with Aquinas’s claim that to be is to act, as well as W. Norris Clarke’s claim that “Action is the self-revelation of being; every being, insofar as it is in act, is self-communicative.” This brings Barth and Aquinas very close, since Barth attempted to overcome an idea of God as perfect being by beginning with God as act. This initial correlation of God’s being with God’s action allows Vanhoozer to move from God’s action to God’s self-communication. To be is to act and to act is to communicate. Following Clarke, Vanhoozer claims that “it is...

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465 Vanhoozer (ibid, 222), claims that remythologizing “has Thomistic ambitions yet is tempered by Barthian anxieties: we begin with faith in revealed truth and proceed to reason, sometimes with the aid of philosophical concepts.” Vanhoozer will follow a form of Aquinas’s metaphysics and Barth’s Christology. Vanhoozer’s claim to be a “post-Barthian Thomist” has taken its cue from Ricoeur’s claim to be a “post-Hegelian Kantian” (See Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” Semeia 4 1975).

466 As Vanhoozer sees it (Remythologizing Theology, 222), the key difference between Aquinas and Barth is that “Aquinas asks what God the creator must be given the existence of creation while Barth asks what God must be given the history of Jesus Christ.” The other noted difference is that “Aquinas employs a single conceptual scheme, that of Aristotle, while Barth is more eclectic” (222).

467 Ibid, 28 (see thesis 4 and n. 109, respectively). Vanhoozer stresses that he does not wish to entirely dismiss the notion of God as cause; rather, he wants to personalize the notion.

the very nature of real being…to pour over into action that is *self-revealing* and *self-communicative.*”⁴⁶⁹ Vanhoozer further follows Clarke’s suggestion that “All action is communication, and all communication is action.”⁴⁷⁰ In other words, Being-in-action always is Being-in-communication.⁴⁷¹ As a result, for Vanhoozer, ‘Being-as-Pure-Act’ is ‘Being-as-Pure-Communicative-Act.’

Vanhoozer sees his own project as an advancement of “Barth’s unfinished task of rethinking God’s being on the basis of his revelation in ‘word’ and ‘act.’⁴⁷² The way to finish Barth’s project, Vanhoozer feels, is to “includ[e] other instances of divine speaking and acting alongside the Incarnation.”⁴⁷³ Practically, this means Scripture must be included in the economy of God’s speaking and acting. The contents of the biblical texts, as well as the diverse forms in which they are recorded, ought to be seen as “part of a


⁴⁷¹ Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 225. Human persons are the best example of this, because persons are most authentically ‘being’ as they are self-communicative. Humans only analogously reflect the personhood of God. Thus Vanhoozer (ibid, 207), claims, “God is God in large part because his communicative capacity far outstrips that of humans. In particular, God has the ability to ‘communicate’ his own life to others, through Word and Spirit, thereby establishing communion and fulfilling his word…”


⁴⁷³ Ibid, 207. Vanhoozer (ibid, 207), feels that “Barth unnecessarily delimits the set of divine communicative acts by making divine ontology a function of the incarnate life of Jesus alone.” On Barth’s account, since God is God’s self-revelation, Scripture cannot be considered God’s self-communication, lest God be identified with Scripture (Bibliolatry). Vanhoozer (ibid, 211), responds that Barth, in equating revelation only with the event of Jesus Christ, may “overlook other things that speakers do with their words…It is not clear on Barth’s account how God can do the things the Bible depicts him as doing (i.e., commanding, warning, promising) if he is not the agent of properly verbal communicative acts as well as of the revelatory act of incarnation.” Speech act theory, then, provides Vanhoozer with resources to describe God as a properly speaking agent, and one who is able to speak in Scripture.
prior economy of divine self-projection.” As a result, to remythologize theology is “to put our discourse of what is under the discipline of the biblical accounts of God’s speaking and acting.” Remythologizing means “rendering explicit the implicit ‘metaphysics’ of the biblical mythos. Its aim is to let the biblical texts govern one’s understanding of being, not to deploy an independently derived concept of being to govern one’s reading of the biblical texts.” Thus Vanhoozer’s goal in remythologizing is to “deploy metaphysical categories…for the sake of a project that is ultimately governed by the biblical accounts of God’s self-presentation in speech and act.”

Remythologizing from Scripture: The project of remythologizing theology can be best understood in contrast to the post-Enlightenment tendency to demythologize God’s communicative acts. Demythologizing is generally defined by Vanhoozer as “a strategy for translating biblical statements about God into existential statements about human being.” This action does not respect the covenant of communication, but looks behind the particular genre to find the kernel of truth. It is this quality of projection

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474 Ibid, 197.
475 Ibid, 182.
476 Ibid, 183.
477 Ibid, 223. Vanhoozer (ibid, 220), describes the choice before theologians in his familiar either/or construal: “Should theologians derive their understanding of actus from God’s communicative action or should they understand God’s communicative action against the background of an independently derived general conception of being-in-act? Put differently: is theology merely a regional instance of a general metaphysic?”
478 Vanhoozer (ibid, 30), claims that “remythologizing is best defined in contrast to demythologizing as a type of first theology.”
479 Ibid, 15.
480 Vanhoozer (ibid, 16-20), uses Bultmann and Feuerbach as interlocutors in order to contrast his own project of remythologizing with their project of demythologizing. Bultmann is described as a
(allowing existential concerns to dictate language about God), which remythologizing seeks to challenge.481

Remythologizing Scripture means articulating an ontology that proceeds from God’s self-communicative action in Scripture rather than first configuring a metaphysics into which God and Scripture are placed. Vanhoozer suggests that the goal of his project is “not ontotheology but theo-ontology, not general but special (remythologized, biblically governed) metaphysics.”482 Ontotheology (a “unified system of thought that employs concepts such as Supreme Being or Unmoved Mover as conceptual stopgaps to prevent infinite metaphysical regress”)483 must be expelled and replaced by “theo-ontology” (“A ‘theodramatic’ metaphysics [which] provides a systematic account of the categories needed to describe what God has said and done to renew all things in Jesus

481 Interpreters should not read Vanhoozer’s project in Remythologizing Theology as a referendum on most of contemporary theology any more than Drama of Doctrine was designed to be a referendum on all aspects of postliberal theology, or Is There a Meaning in this Text? was designed to be a referendum on the whole of postmodern interpretive method. In all three books, Vanhoozer is simply pointing out a feature of contemporary method that he feels is leading theology in a harmful direction. Vanhoozer’s use of Feuerbach as paradigmatic demythologizer is not to associate contemporary revisionist theologians with Feuerbach as much as it is to apply a lesson learned from Feuerbach to contemporary theology: any speech about God that starts from our own experience rather than God’s self-communication has the potential to lead us away from what God has, in fact, communicated about Godself. Vanhoozer is, then, highlighting the difference between two trajectories, the trajectory of demythologizing (represented by Feuerbach and Bultmann), and the trajectory of remythologizing (uncompleted by Barth, approached by Ricoeur, and advanced by Vanhoozer).

482 Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, 222.

483 Ibid, 8. Ontotheology is also defined by Vanhoozer (ibid, 8), as a “unified system” developed “from below” which projects God as the greatest Being in our conceptual schema. Ontotheology arises from “totalizing” metaphysics, the “underlying assumption that there is one set of categories, accessible to unaided human reason, which applies both to the world and to God, created and uncreated reality.”
Ontotheology is “bad” metaphysics because it “imposes a system of categories on God without attending to God’s own self-communication,” and must be replaced by a “good” metaphysics of theo-ontology, which is a “descriptive metaphysics,” which “derives its system of categories from the train of God’s own communicative action (i.e., theodrama).”  The goal, then, is to allow Scripture to form the foundation for understanding all reality by understanding Scripture as God’s “communicative agency.”

Because Scripture is the self-communication of God, all literary forms are used by God for self-communication. Vanhoozer claims,

If God’s activity is best construed in terms of triune communicative agency, then it behooves us to attend to the concrete manner in which God ‘projects’ his own story. Hence my thesis: the mythos of the Bible—the Christological content and canonical form—is the written means of God’s triune self-presentation. In a word, the mythos is the medium (and the message).

Remythologizing means respecting the communicative act as it appears in a particular genre, because in doing so one is respecting the God who exists as Pure Communicative Act. From God’s own “rainbow of divine communicative acts” given in

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484 Ibid, 222.
485 Ibid, 8, n. 27.
487 Ibid, 11. Vanhoozer’s use of mythos is central to the argument of the book. Mythos, originally Aristotle’s term for dramatic plot, is defined by Vanhoozer (ibid, 5-6), as a “unified course of action that includes a beginning, middle, and end,” a “mode of discourse that configures human action so as to create a form of wholeness (i.e., a unified action) out of a multiplicity of incidents.” Mythos is the narrative figuring of events into a whole system of meaning. By beginning with mythos, Vanhoozer places himself in the narrative tradition and claims he is in continuity with both Frei’s “realistic narrative” and Ricoeur’s “configuring mimesis.” Yet Vanhoozer (ibid, 7), extends mythos beyond Ricoeur’s use (and Frei’s narrative) by using it to “refer to all the ways in which diverse forms of biblical literature represent, and render, the divine drama.” As a result, all of Scripture will be God’s self-revealing mimesis.
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the various genres of Scripture, Vanhoozer proposes that readers should read Scripture with the presupposition of God as pure self-communicative Act. As a result, Vanhoozer believes that God’s revelation in Scripture can itself be the basis for a holistic system of understanding the Christian life in such a way that critical correlation is not needed.

2. Establishing Divine Authorship of Scripture

The foundation for Vanhoozer’s understanding of Scripture is what he calls the “Scripture Principle,” the Christian preunderstanding that the Bible is, in fact, the Word of God. This Scripture Principle seems grounded in the phenomenological and traditional observation that the Church does, in fact, recognize Scripture as the Word of God. As we have seen, in Vanhoozer’s early writings, he struggled to move from human authorship of Scripture to divine authorship. In his later work, Vanhoozer builds an argument for divine authorship as he seeks to clarify just how God is the primary speaker/author in these unique texts. Vanhoozer’s argument for divine authorship can be systematized into several steps.

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489 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 63-68), claims, “Theology’s first principle is God in communicative action,” and the “Scripture principle maintains that the Bible itself is ultimately a species of divine discourse.” This is said to be held by the early Church, and is grounded theologically in the concept of God’s covenant communication.

490 Vanhoozer (ibid, 205), claims, “The church has traditionally acknowledged the Bible’s self-attestation as the word of God. It follows that the various biblical texts are forms of divine discourse and should thus be counted as figuring among the divine repertoire of communicative action.” Vanhoozer (”The Apostolic Discourse and Its Development,” 197), argues that the practice of the Church is the primary reason Scripture should be understood as God’s word. There he claims, “Suffice it to say that the church has taken the apostolic discourse as authoritative precisely because it communicates the word of God.”
God Can and Did Speak in Scripture: The first step in articulating how God is author of Scripture is to emphasize that God can and does communicate with human beings. For Vanhoozer, affirming that God can speak is part of the essence of the Christian faith. God’s communicative acts, of course, are analogous to human speech acts, although for communication to take place God must use symbols which are able to truly communicate. In contrast to those who think that symbols about God are merely human symbols, Vanhoozer feels that the Christian faith depends on God’s actually taking up human symbols and using them for communicative purposes. For God to act in the public sphere (i.e. in the economy of redemption), God must be able to perform speech acts, i.e. to communicate himself and take up illocutionary stances in the public realm. Hence Vanhoozer suggests that, “A great deal of God’s communicative work, perhaps more than has hitherto been appreciated, involves language, the most sophisticated medium of discourse.” If God truly desired to communicate to human

491 Vanhoozer (Ibid, 206), claims, “From the fact that God dialogues with human beings we may infer at the very least that he has the capacity to communicate. From the incarnation of the Word we may further conclude that God has the capacity to communicate himself. God’s presence is thus in the first instance personal, agential, and communicative rather than merely spatial, substantive, or metaphysical.”

492 Vanhoozer (ibid, 212), defines communication as “interaction by means of mutually recognized signals,” and “manipulation of symbols by one person to stimulate meaning in another person,” or “social interaction through messages.” Vanhoozer (ibid, 210), specifies, “It is not self-evident that ‘employing vocal cords’ is an essential element in acting… it is entirely possible that God could achieve fundamentally the same result by other means.” Vanhoozer introduces the distinction between “mode of action” and the “action done” to show that God can perform the same action, although in a different way. Vanhoozer (ibid, 210-11), notes, “It is therefore legitimate to say ‘God (literally) speaks’ (because he performs communicative acts via words, which is what ‘speaking’ ordinarily means) even though ‘speaks’ is not being used univocally with regard to God and human beings (because the mode of God’s speaking may be extraordinary).”

493 Vanhoozer (Remythologizing Theology, 210), heightens the intensity of this claim by arguing, “The stakes could not be higher: to the extent that one refuses to ascribe specific (communicative) acts to God’s personal agency, one revises what the Bible and Christian faith are primarily about.”

494 Ibid, 277.
beings, and yet failed to perform the most fundamental of all communicative acts, i.e.
speaking, humans could hardly assume that God had desired to communicate.

Yet even if God is able to communicate through human symbols, Vanhoozer must
go further to show why the Church should think that God did, in fact, speak in Scripture.
Vanhoozer’s next argument is that God’s revelatory action in the world must be backed
up by explanatory communication or else it would remain too ambiguous to be useful.
Vanhoozer argues that, “Without an event of divine speaking, we are unable to say either
who is acting or what this person is up to: ‘behavior unaccompanied by speech remains
inherently ambiguous.’”

Apparently, for Vanhoozer, all “revelatory” acts performed
by God require God’s speech acts to accompany them. When God acts in a decisive
(revelatory) way, God will also provide a speech act (Scripture) to explain the action.
The Church, in turn, has recognized the Scriptures as just this adequate and authoritative
explanation of God’s interaction in the human sphere.

God as Author of Scripture: At this point, having moved from a defense that God
can speak to an argument that God must have spoken in Scripture, Vanhoozer can move
to his crucial argument that God should be considered author of Scripture. For
Vanhoozer, the claim that God is author of Scripture and the claim that Scripture is
authoritative over the Church stand or fall together. Vanhoozer defines authorship as

495 Ibid, 209. Here Vanhoozer is citing Basil Mitchell, ‘Revelation Revisited,’ in Sarah
Coakley and David A. Palin (eds.), The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of
Maurice Wiles (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 182. See also Vanhoozer’s claim,
(Remythologizing Theology, 213), “Only speech disambiguates behavior. Only God’s word disambiguates
God’s deed.”

496 Vanhoozer, (The Drama of Doctrine, 64), writes that “the Bible is Scripture—the
authoritative Word of God—precisely because it is a word for which God assumes the rights and
responsibilities of authorship. The church’s script is ultimately a matter of divine discourse.”
“a convenient shorthand for the notion of verbal communicative action” in general, although the term “verbal” is much broader than simply human words. When applied to God, “‘Authoring’ covers what God does as creator, reconciler, redeemer, and perfecter, and so serves as a metaphor for the economic Trinity as well: the Father ‘authors’ in Christ through the Spirit.” God is even the “author” of God’s own Being. At this point, the role which the concept of authorship plays in Vanhoozer’s system becomes clear: authorship is a broad description for God’s self-communicating action. The advantage of attributing authorship to God is that it provides a way of explaining “God’s relation to the world, and to Scripture, in terms of an ‘economy of communication,’” which, in turn, “enables us to better conceive…the absolute distinction between Creator and creation.”

The economy of redemption is best called an economy of communication, as Vanhoozer feels many theologians have implicitly suggested.

Since “redemption entails revelation,” and hence self-communication, “The canon is a rule and criterion…precisely because of its place in the divine economy of

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Vanhoozer, (ibid, 179): “In sum: it is the divine illocutions—God’s use—that constitute biblical authority” and Vanhoozer, (ibid, 63): “It is not enough to begin simply with the sensus literalis (the Bible read like any other book), nor with a sensus divinitatis, nor with a sensus fidelium. No; the first principle we require is a sensus scripturalis; the sense that the Bible is ‘of God’ and hence authoritative for the Church.”

497 Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, xiii.


499 Ibid, 206.


501 Vanhoozer (ibid, xiii), refers especially to Aquinas, Rahner, and Barth.
Here it becomes clear that Vanhoozer’s argument about authorship is really an explanation of God’s action and the role of Scripture in the divine economy.

**Scripture as Covenant Document:** In the end, though, it is the theological concept of covenant which does most of the heavy lifting in establishing an argument that God is author of Scripture. Vanhoozer’s basic claim is that “the Bible is a divine communicative act that exists for the sake of covenantal relations.” When establishing covenant, God always “takes the communicative initiative to enter into covenantal relation,” and “this covenant-making involves both oral and written communicative acts on God’s part.” This is the final step in showing that God is author of Scripture, because Vanhoozer can now show what kind of speech act Scripture ultimately is. Now Vanhoozer can summarily say, “Scripture is triune discourse: something (covenantal) someone (Father, Son and Spirit) says to someone (the church) about something (life with God).”

As covenant document, the text, as a canonical whole, must be understood to be a unified speech act of God. The Christian must enter the interpretive process understanding that “inspired Scripture” is “the discourse therefore of one single

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503 While Vanhoozer uses speech act theory to show how God can be considered a speaker, and hence an author, Vanhoozer realizes that he needs a theological argument, not simply a philosophical construct, to show that the Scriptures should be granted authority as God’s speech act. Vanhoozer unites the theological concept of covenant with speech act theory to show that covenant is a kind of speech act. Vanhoozer (ibid, 64), appeals to J.L. Austin, who “listed ‘making a covenant’ as one of the things we do with words: ‘Our word is our bond.’” (See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 10.)

504 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 68.

505 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 263.

506 Ibid, 64.
speaker...a single body of discourse, which serves the consistent purpose of a single authoritative agent.”

If Scripture is a document of covenant, God must be the primary speaker, and the words must be considered to be God’s own communication.

Vanhoozer, in opposition to Barth, argues that because God enters into real obligation to humanity through Scripture, Scripture must be equated with revelation.

The real obligation between God and human beings occurs because “[t]o covenant is to enter into a personal relationship structured by divine promises to behave in certain ways and to do certain things.” In every covenant recorded in Scripture, Vanhoozer claims, “The words...were the communicative medium by which the people approached God and vice versa, so much so that to engage the words of Scripture is to engage God in communicative action.”

Understanding Scripture God’s covenantal stance in the public sphere is qualitatively different from understanding Scripture as a witness to God’s


508 Vanhoozer’s discussion of the canon as God’s communicative covenant document takes place in dialogue with Barth, who had argued that Scripture cannot be God’s word because God’s freedom cannot be tied to human language. Vanhoozer responds that if Barth had started from the assumption that the Bible is the document preserving God’s covenant with human beings, Barth would likely not have difficulty accepting that God could, in freedom, enter into obligation with human beings by extending God’s self-communication to the Bible. Vanhoozer’s argument (ibid, 136-40) against Barth runs like this: First, God can enter a covenant only by communicative action (136). Second, the canon is the documentation of these covenantal initiatives, it “documents’ our covenantal privileges and responsibilities” (137). Third, the canon was completed because the new covenant needed a written, binding witness (138). Fourth, God still ministers the covenant today through the Scriptures (139). Fifth, the canon constitutes the community with whom God has committed Godself to covenant relationship (140). These five points together build a strong case that God indeed could bind his freedom to human communicative acts in Scripture.


510 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 263. Vanhoozer ("Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks (Part 2)," in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. and David Lauber Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 65), claims, “The Bible is the God-ordained means of communicating the terms and the reality of the covenant whose content is Jesus Christ. The Son is both the promise of God and the obedient response of humanity.”
actions in history. Scripture, then, cannot be considered simply a witness to revelation, but must, in fact, be revelation.

Vanhoozer’s use of covenant in his later work is significantly different from his earlier construction. In his early work, Vanhoozer argued that precisely because all language is covenantal, Scripture imposes a demand on its readers to read to understand the intentions of its human authors. Now, Vanhoozer significantly softens this argument, claiming, “While discourse in general creates a quasi-covenantal situation inasmuch as speakers and hearers assume certain obligations in the process of communicating, this is particularly the case when the discourse is explicitly covenantal.”511 While language does create a structure of rights and obligations, it is precisely because God has authored Scripture for use as the covenant document in the economy of redemption that Scripture has authority in the Church. This change from all language as covenantal to God’s unique use of Scripture as a covenant document, in turn, establishes the authority of text over the Church.512 Since Scripture is a document of covenant, Scripture can even be said to constitute the Church, just as in all covenants God called and constituted a people for relationship.513

511 Ibid, 67.

512 Thus Vanhoozer (ibid, 133), claims, “The most important reason for doing theology in accord with the canon, then, is that Scripture is a divine covenant document before it is an ecclesial constitution.” The concept of covenant provides, for Vanhoozer, the single greatest reason why divine authorial intent in Scripture must not be dismissed. Vanhoozer (ibid, 139), claims, “The origin (and hence the authority) of the canonical Scriptures is thus far removed from that of human constitutions. Constitutions can be amended; not so the canonical covenant.”

513 Vanhoozer, (ibid, 135), claims, “It is the divine drama—the communicative action of the triune God creating and covenanting with what is other than God—that gives rise to the church, and not vice versa…”
Scripture as God’s Unified Speech-Act: Genres are, for Vanhoozer, the key to proposing determinate meaning in the text, as they provide the form in which the ‘covenant of communication’ takes place. Genres are the common literary structure by which communication is possible, and God enters into precisely this human structure to extend covenant to human beings. Literary forms, for Vanhoozer, “are the indispensable means of conforming our minds to the ‘divine genius’ of Scripture. For the way God communicates, and the point of view that gets communicated, ‘is as much part of the story as the events it tells.’” Both form and content are essential “elements in the divine drama of revelation and redemption,” as God has used just these forms (genres) to communicate just this message (Christ) to just this covenant people (the Church).

Ultimately, God’s communicative action in Scripture is that of “offering a theologically thick description of Jesus Christ” and bringing believers to be covenantally incorporated into him. Yet this “thick description” requires God’s use of many genres, as each genre provides an aspect of God’s testimony about Christ. The theological concept of

514 Adonis Vidu ("Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge," *Trinity Journal* 21, no. 2 (2000), 211-12), claims that for Vanhoozer, “Genres are essential to Vanhoozer’s hermeneutics because they provide the key to the illocutionary aspect of the literary act. One of Derrida’s charges against determinate meaning is that each text becomes decontextualized by its being fixed in writing. The text therefore floats from one context to another, missing any anchor for its meaning. However, if Vanhoozer is right, genre creates a shared literary context, the context of a practice with its history and virtues. What writing pulls asunder, genre joins together.”

515 Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 190.


517 Vanhoozer (ibid, 68), adds, “It is precisely by responding to the various illocutions in Scripture—by believing its assertions, by trusting its promises, by obeying its commands, by singing its songs—that we become ‘thickly,’ which is to say covenantally, related to Christ.”

518 Vanhoozer (ibid, 287), argues, “Each literary form in the canon...renders true testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ...‘What God is doing in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world’ is Scripture’s ultimate propositional content, though Scripture proposes this content for our consideration in many ways,
covenant, for Vanhoozer, includes “not only promise but other aspects of the covenant—stories, stipulations, sanctions—that together constitute the relationship between God and his people.”519 As a result, the content of the covenant could not be adequately communicated without precisely the many genres represented in the canon.

Speech acts operate, for Vanhoozer, at the level of genre, since authors choose a particular genre in order to establish a particular illocutionary stance. Vanhoozer argues that illocutionary stances can be offered within a particular genre at the level of the whole text. For example, “In choosing to write in the narrative genre, authors choose to take up a stance...an ideology, a ‘worldview.’”520 The same would be true for any genre. Vanhoozer uses the phrase “generic illocution” to describe “what an author is doing at the level of the whole text,” and claims that “every genre in Scripture...performs its distinct illocutionary act (or acts).”521 Vanhoozer suggests, then, that “genre...describes the illocutionary act at the level of the whole, placing the parts within an overall unity that serves a meaningful purpose. It follows that genre is the key to interpreting communicative action.”522

Since the Bible has many different genres, many different illocutionary stances (generic illocutions) are taken in Scripture. Yet these are not where God’s supervening through diverse forms.” Yet it is important to remember that this communicative act is not simply a description about Jesus, but it is Christ’s active work toward the Church: “In the context of the divine drama, the canon is the external means by which Christ exercises his authority over the Church” (The Drama of Doctrine, 114).

519 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 137. This causes Vanhoozer (ibid, 273), to agree with Ricoeur and Tracy’s concern to not allow narrative to overrun other genres.

520 Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 341.

521 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 283.

522 Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 341.
speech-act comes to light. Rather, the whole canon should be understood as its own unique genre, with its own divine illocutionary stance. Vanhoozer suggests in his later work that the whole canon operates something like a “super-genre.”523 The “various literary forms” may be “taken together” at the level of canon where they yield a larger illocutionary stance.524 Vanhoozer proposes the phrase “canonical illocution” to show “what God is doing by means of the human discourse in the biblical texts at the level of the canon.”525 This overarching stance, as a canonical illocution, is “something that comes to light only on the canonical level, when the divine playwright speaks in and through the various human authorial voices.”526 Identifying this supervening illocutionary stance provides the key to articulating what the Bible finally is, and thus allows the theologian to formulate a theology of Scripture. Vanhoozer identifies this unique “macrogenre” as “divine address” or “theodrama,” descriptions which allow for the existence of other genres within them.

The meaning of the human authors, then, is unified by the supervening illocution of God at the canonical whole. Brevard Childs has objected that the possibility of supervening illocutions would mean that, “By performing an illocutionary act with the noematic content of the human discourse, God can say something entirely different” than

523 Spinks, The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning, 100.

524 Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 342. This supervening illocution is variously suggested to be: 'confessing faith' (349), 'proclaiming God’s salvation' (342), 'testifying to Christ' (342), “bearing witness” (349), or “providing guidance for future generations” (380).

525 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 179.

526 Ibid, 287.
what the human authors wrote. Vanhoozer can escape Childs’s critique because Vanhoozer’s own model proposes that God’s supervening illocutions ceased with the closure of the canon. Since recognizing God’s supervening illocutions in Scripture is a matter of deciding which full context rightly encompasses the whole communicative act, Vanhoozer feels God’s intention becomes clear at the level of the whole canon. Vanhoozer, then, refers to the “plain canonical sense” as the literal sense, the whole in which God’s speech acts come to light.

Vanhoozer knows that his own proposal for identifying the essence of Scripture is a single, philosophical formulation placed upon Scripture. Yet while Vanhoozer responds that while this articulation of God’s supervening action through the use of speech-act theory is indeed new, it simply provides a new way to illumine the lasting claim that God speaks in Scripture. Furthermore, Vanhoozer knows that the construction of a single, overarching construct for Scripture often reduces Scripture one

527 Brevard S. Childs, "Speech-Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 4 (2005), 387. Childs’s concern is directed specifically against Wolterstorff, who proposes that God can today provide illocutions which supervene on the original speech acts. Wolterstorff, in distinguishing between a first hermeneutic (understanding the locutions and illocutions of the human author) and a second hermeneutic (understanding the locutions and illocutions of the divine author), claims that some common sense presuppositions about who God is and what he is doing allow one to move from the first hermeneutic to the second hermeneutic today. God might be saying something today using the canonical context that he did not say in the canon itself (see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) esp. 183-222). Childs’s difficulty with Wolterstorff’s construal, ("Speech-Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," 387), is that “There is no privileged canonical context, but the context for interpretation is the critical stance of modernity.” As we have seen, Vanhoozer will privilege precisely the canonical context and will work to keep interpreters from adding anything to what is already enclosed in it.


529 Vanhoozer, "The Apostolic Discourse and Its Development," 202. Vanhoozer’s argument is in response to Brevard Childs ("Speech-Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 4 (2005), 380), who argues that this understanding of God’s supervening speech acts is simply an imaginary construct placed on Scripture which ignores “the role of the church in collecting, shaping and interpreting the Bible, which is the issue of canon.”
kind of literary text. Yet Vanhoozer feels that his own proposal does not succumb to such reductionistic tendencies because his own construal works requires respect for all the genres of Scripture as indispensable elements of the single, supervening illocutionary stance which unites all the other individual illocutionary stances.

C. Scripture’s Role in the Economy

Vanhoozer’s later work is a sustained attempt to locate Scripture in the economy of redemption which opens a number of interpretive options beyond those suggested by Tracy and Frei. Vanhoozer’s theological project advances the hermeneutical discussion, not by providing a superior method for reading through the employment of more useful philosophical resources, but by showing that Christian interpretation of Scripture can never be confined to the relationship of text and reader. As Scripture is a species of God’s communicative action to the Church, Scriptural reading must always attend to theological presuppositions which will influence interpretive outcomes.

1. God’s Use of Scripture

Vanhoozer’s most significant contribution to a theological interpretation of Scripture is his insistence that the Scriptures are an extension of the Triune missions of God and are God’s communicative action by which salvation history is mediated to

\[530\] Vanhoozer (ibid, 200), agrees with Kelsey that systematic theologians regularly construe the entirety of Scripture as a singular genre “so that everything becomes apocalyptic (Pannenberg), or wisdom (Bultmann), or narrative (Barth), or doctrine (Hodge).” Yet Vanhoozer believes that his own proposal that Scripture is one genre, discourse, avoids imposing a reductionistic structure on Scripture, and instead opens it to a greater appreciation of its literary forms.
readers. Vanhoozer’s early work is unsuccessful insofar as it attempts to locate the authority of Scripture in the literal sense without showing how the literal sense is God’s communicative action. Vanhoozer’s later work advances the discussion between Frei and Tracy as it suggests that the authority of Scripture is grounded not in experience or in community consensus, but in the communicative action of God who extends salvation to the Church. Vanhoozer’s later model, consequently, advances Tracy’s appeal to appreciate all the genres of Scripture, as Vanhoozer shows that God uses the various literary styles to communicate to readers. At the same time, Vanhoozer’s model appreciates Frei’s insistence on the plain reading of Scriptural narrative by showing that the whole Scriptures is a unified story of salvation history communicated to the Church. Vanhoozer’s ontology of communicative action places Scriptural hermeneutics within the broader context of the divine economy and hence prevents readers from handing authority over to either the exegete or the community consensus, but to show that correct Scriptural reading can only take place when believers understand that these texts are a species of God’s speaking action.

2. The Movement from Text to Spiritual Reality

Vanhoozer puts forward two proposals for moving from text to divine reality, one based in figural reading and one based in speech-act theory. These two proposals, although quite different, are complementary. In the first proposal, Vanhoozer adopts Frei’s understanding of figural reading and emphasizes the participatory aspect of such interpretive practice. Figural reading is “the rule for present-day Christians to make sense of their stories as Jesus did of his, precisely by reading their own lives in light of
the life of Jesus.” Vanhoozer concludes that through figural reading, “The canon thus teaches us to see, trains us in crucial epistemic practices that, in conjunction with the Spirit’s work, are necessary for the renewing of our minds and for perceiving ‘the whole in Christ.’” Vanhoozer’s whole subsequent project of theodrama is intended to show how the reader is formed by Scripture to a new understanding of the world. Vanhoozer, like Frei, understands that figural reading is not necessitated by a literal reading of texts, but is based on prior theological presuppositions. Vanhoozer’s primary concern, like Frei’s, is showing why this kind of reading is authoritative for the Church. Because Vanhoozer places figural reading within the larger context of the economy of redemption, he is able to provide resources to advance the discussion. While Frei’s nearly exclusive focus on the text/reader relationship causes him to struggle to decide whether authority resides in the text itself or community practice, Vanhoozer’s articulation of the divine economy allows him to show that authority resides in God’s sending of Scripture to the community of faith. Here overtly theological concerns ground issues of method, so that once the theological presupposition of God’s authoring work is established behind the text, Vanhoozer proposes a fairly intratextual approach to Scriptural reading.

Vanhoozer’s second proposal for explaining the movement from text to divine reality relies on speech-act theory. Vanhoozer explains both the unity of Scripture and the incorporation of the present reader at the level of the canonical whole, as God’s illocutionary stance supervenes upon the many locutions and illocutions of the human writers, making the Scriptures God’s speaking action. The authority of Scripture, then, is

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531 Vanhoozer, DD, 222.
532 Vanhoozer, DD, 224.
based on the unique movement from human communication to divine communication, and this is completed with the final form of the Christian canon. In this sense, the movement from text to divine reality takes place more in the theological prerequisites for reading Scripture uniquely than in an encounter with the text itself. Whereas both Frei and Tracy emphasized the reader’s encounter with the text, Vanhoozer focuses on the preunderstanding of the reader who encounters the text. If employed in isolation, this proposal for a particular conception of authorship may draw attention away from the transforming event of Christ. If only a theory of divine authorship were emphasized, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the transforming event in light of which the Old Testament should be read could be neglected. Stress on Scripture as a covenant document which renders a relatively determinate meaning might neglect the unique narrative structure of Scripture which testifies to God’s ongoing action in history. Only if Vanhoozer’s two proposals of figural reading and divine authorship are held as complementary can the uniqueness and authority of Scripture be simultaneously demonstrated.

3. Conclusion and Remaining Challenges

Vanhoozer’s later work is devoted to the development of a First Theology which understands God’s Being as Pure, self-communicative Act, therefore understands all reality in light of God’s economic self-communication in Christ and Scripture. This model allows Vanhoozer to establish rules for reading Scripture which grant it authority over the reading community and provide a philosophically interesting, theologically significant proposal for developing an account of God as communicative act in light of Scripture’s many speech acts. Yet Vanhoozer’s later model also brings out a number of
significant difficulties which must be resolved if his project is to be completed. This section will identify four persistent difficulties in Vanhoozer’s later work which will be discussed later in the dissertation.

_Theological Presuppositions, or Disclosive Encounter?_ For Vanhoozer, the ability to read Scripture correctly is largely a matter of being able to employ the correct theological presuppositions to a literal reading of the Scriptural texts. Whereas Frei focuses on the realistic rendering of the text as disclosive to the reader in a straightforward way and Tracy focuses on the encounter between reader and text which pushes the reader to a new existential possibility, Vanhoozer focuses on the theological presuppositions of the reader, so that only those readers who have the right presuppositions concerning Scripture will be able to read. Reading the Scriptures rightly requires several presuppositions: God can communicate to human beings; God did so definitively in Christ; the canon is taken up into God’s self-communicative action; consequently, only these texts should be considered divine discourse. After this First Theology is presupposed, the interpreter may go on to employ general hermeneutical rules to Scripture in order to understand the diverse communicative acts that take place by means of the different genres. For Vanhoozer, doctrinal categories replace literary theory as the determinate element in Scriptural interpretation. With this new proposal, Vanhoozer’s earlier tension between reading within the Church and outside the Church simply disappears. If the interpreter reads correctly (i.e. with the right First Theology), she is in the Church. Only believers can read Scripture rightly, because only they are able to accept, by faith, the proper stance toward Scripture.
This First Theology shifts Vanhoozer’s hermeneutics of Scripture explicitly from the realm of “nature” to the realm of “grace.”\footnote{Vanhoozer is thereby is intrinsically opposed to the Enlightenment quest to read Scripture as any other book. Vanhoozer argues that this is not yet to make a judgment about whether grace “opposes, crowns, or outflanks reason;” it is simply to “establish theological interpretation as dealing with issues outside the realm of “nature” (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., \textit{Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 20).} When Vanhoozer speaks of “theological interpretation” in his later work, he always associates it with “divine action.” While it is right, Vanhoozer believes, to explore meaning behind, in, and in front of the text, secular hermeneutics “stops short of a properly theological criticism to the extent that it brackets out a consideration of divine action.”\footnote{Ibid, 20.} To attend seriously to the subject matter of Scripture means establishing a First Theology which necessarily breaks general hermeneutical rules.\footnote{This shows the progression in Vanhoozer’s thought. In his early work, Scripture largely followed the same hermeneutical rules because God grounds all communication. In his later work, Scripture is unique because it is God’s speaking action. In fact, Vanhoozer (ibid, 22), claims that reading to understand God can be considered the only legitimate primary purpose of Scripture: “the principal interests of the Bible’s authors, of the text itself, and of the original community of readers was theological: reading the Scriptures therefore meant coming to hear God’s word and to know God better.”} Theological interpretation, then, begins with a preunderstanding of God and God’s action that causes the interpreter to read the texts along a certain trajectory—remythologizing instead of demythologizing and participatory response instead of subjecting text to community norms. As we will see in the next chapter, De Lubac will add an additional dimension to this discussion, as he emphasizes that even the right theological presuppositions cannot, by themselves, lead to right reading without the process of conversion on the part of the reader. For de Lubac, theological presuppositions must lead to participation in the Mystery. Hence de Lubac will go further in grounding Scriptural reading in theology rather than literary theory.
Does God Still Speak? While Vanhoozer provides a strong argument for understanding God as able to speak and having spoken, Vanhoozer is often unclear about how God continues to speak. A rather strong tension exists throughout Vanhoozer’s later work between a very broad understanding of authorship in which authoring refers to the entire economy of redemption, and a very narrow view of authorship in which only revelatory events in history and Scripture are considered God’s speech acts. Overall, it appears that Vanhoozer is pressed to the narrow view of authorship, in which God’s speaking in Scripture is an entire past action, for three reasons. First, Vanhoozer spends a great deal of his work in dialogue with Barth, attempting to expand Barth’s understanding of God’s speaking action in Christ to include both Christ and Scripture as acts of speech. The underlying assumption for Vanhoozer is that God’s speaking action has taken place in the past and is both complete and determinate in meaning (both in Christ and in Scripture). In this sense, speech acts and revelation are virtually synonymous for Vanhoozer. Second, Vanhoozer’s whole argument about the supervening of divine illocutions on human illocutions to create a canon with determinate meaning is only intelligible if God’s speaking action ceased with the closure of the canon. God’s ongoing communication to human beings today must be distinguished from God’s speech acts, because the latter can be understood determinately in the context of the canon alone. Both revelation and speech acts, then, ceased with the closure of the canon. Third, the limitation of speaking to God’s actions in history and the canonical texts is also necessary to safeguard Vanhoozer’s claim that Scriptural meaning is determinate. It appears that God’s speech acts count as speech acts precisely because they are determinate in meaning, and hence complete as acts. Vanhoozer is committed to showing that because
meaning resides in the text itself, God’s speaking to human beings has a determinate meaning. The meaning of the text, then, must be closely associated with God’s speech acts, and must be distinguished from God’s ongoing communication. Consequently, God does not speak today, as that speaking action was completed with the closure of the canon.

Placing God’s speaking action entirely in the past, however, does not sit well with Vanhoozer’s later project. Vanhoozer’s purpose in developing a metaphysics of God as communicative Being is not simply to construct yet another doctrine of inspiration in the past, but to show that God continues to communicate to believers through Scripture today. Here a distinction, never really drawn out by Vanhoozer, between ‘speaking’ and ‘communicating’ becomes clearer. The ongoing action of the Holy Spirit is communicative, but cannot be considered speaking. Vanhoozer insists,

The Spirit’s role is not to go beyond Scripture, adding new words, but to enable the church to perceive and respond to the words that are already there. The Spirit is the advocate of the word written, the executor of the will of the Father and the Son. The Spirit is the efficacy of divine canonical discourse, the indispensable means through which the triune communicative action achieves its goal in the lives of believers.

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536 For example, Vanhoozer, *(Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 315), claims, “If meaning resides in the encounter of text and reader, it necessarily follows that meaning does not reside in the text itself and, consequently, that meaning will change and develop as it encounters new readers and enters new contexts.” It often appears that Vanhoozer’s understanding of meaning is built specifically to show that, “The way the church reads the Scripture does not affect its meaning, only its significance” (ibid, 279). Hence Vanhoozer *(The Drama of Doctrine*, 321), claims, “Sola scriptura is a reminder that textual meaning is independent of our interpretive schemes and, hence, that our interpretations remain secondary commentaries that never acquire the status of the text itself.”

537 Remember that meaning, for Vanhoozer, is the locutions and illocutions within the context of the whole speech act. This means that perlocutionary effect is excluded from the meaning of a text.

538 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 199.
The Spirit does not add new words, but “enables,” “advocates,” “executes,” “effects,” and is the “means through which” God’s speech is conveyed to human beings. Vanhoozer admits that the Spirit communicates through a number of channels, including sacraments, the leadership of the Church, lives of the saints, etc., yet God’s speaking action as illocutionary supervening on human speech acts, is unique to Scripture. Ongoing communication is the work of the Holy Spirit and is mediated in many ways, yet it is not determinate in meaning in the same way that revelation (God’s acts in history and Scripture) are determinate in meaning. This ongoing communication between God and reader must be developed further to account for the whole action of God in using Scripture.

Does sola Scriptura Work? Vanhoozer continually insists that authority ought to be granted to the Scripture over the Church. Vanhoozer’s concern with postliberals is what he perceives to be a willingness to grant authority to the Church over Scripture. In fact, the very equating of Scripture with revelation is very closely tied to the question of authority. For Vanhoozer, it is God’s speaking action that establishes Scripture’s authority. As a result, Vanhoozer does not feel comfortable extending that speaking action beyond Scripture, even though his whole project seeks to portray a God who communicates with believers on an ongoing basis. Vanhoozer attempts to expose, 

539 Ibid, 412.

540 Spinks, The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning, 153. Spinks (ibid, 151-52), is concerned that Vanhoozer’s “argument about authorial intent that...reduces the discussion about meaning to the same two options—either authorial intention or readers’ interests—does not effectively address the interplay of intentions and interests that takes place when people read most texts, especially those texts they deem sacred. When we speak of the ‘meaning of Scripture’, it diminishes the fullness and effectiveness of these sacred texts in the life of the community to consider the term ‘meaning’ as a placeholder for ‘authorial intention’ or ‘readers’ interests’.”
through the use of speech-act theory, a neglect on the part of postliberals to adequately show the relationship between Scripture and Church in the economy of redemption. Yet at the same time, Vanhoozer’s whole discussion of authorship rests on the assumption that the Church has acknowledged God as author of Scripture. Vanhoozer must, then, discuss the place of both Scripture and the Church within the context of the divine economy. I will show in the next chapter that the relationship between Scripture and revelation can only be addressed within the context of the whole economy of redemption.

What Unifies Scripture—The Event of Christ or Divine Illocutions? Vanhoozer’s construction of a divine supervening illocution seeks to establish a unity of the canon at the level of the text more than at the level of events of salvation history. Focus is on God’s speaking which unifies the canon into one speech-act, rather than the revelation of Jesus Christ which unifies the events of both Old and New Testament. Vanhoozer does at the level of illocutionary stances almost exactly what de Lubac does at the level of events. Vanhoozer claims that God’s supervening speech-action unifies the meaning of all other speech-acts to God’s own speech at the level of the whole canon (hence the canon becomes the principle of meaning by which to understand the individual parts). De Lubac will claim that the revelation of Jesus Christ unifies all Scriptural events and allows the whole of Scripture to be read in light of this principle of meaning. The focus for Vanhoozer is on text rather than event, and literary theory rather than history. We will see in the next chapter that this decision between text and event has significant consequences for the project of both Vanhoozer and de Lubac. De Lubac’s focus on history leaves his literary treatment of the text underdeveloped, and Vanhoozer’s focus
on the text leaves his understanding of the radical newness of Christ in history underdeveloped.

III. Ecclesiology: The Church as a Response to Scripture

Vanhoozer’s whole project of establishing Scripture as God’s speech act, articulating all Scripture as covenant, rehabilitating *sola scriptura*, distinguishing between Scripture’s mission and tradition’s commission, and appealing to a fixed meaning of the biblical texts, emphasizes his clear priority of Scriptural authority over the authority of Church and tradition. Vanhoozer summarizes that, “As a work of the Spirit, tradition plays the role of moon to Scripture’s sun: what light, and authority, tradition bears, it does so by virtue of reflecting the light of the Son that shines forth from the canon.”541 Though both Scripture as mission and Church as commissioned response are necessary parts in the economy of redemption, Scripture is always given authority over the Church. In Vanhoozer’s structuring of the economy, the Church derives its authority only from its faithful response to Scripture.

Like Frei, Vanhoozer’s project is driven by his persistent concern about the location of Scriptural authority. Vanhoozer’s emphasis on the authority of Scripture over the Church is really intended to be a manifesto for articulating the authority of God over the Church, and thereby for chastening readers to attend submissively to God’s authoritative speech. Yet Vanhoozer’s either/or schema comes at a high price, as his denial of the authority of the Church prevents him from adequately describing the Church

as a theological reality. This underdeveloped ecclesiology, in turn, opens a number of hermeneutical difficulties as Vanhoozer seeks to describe the relationship between Scripture and Church in the economy.

A. The Identity of the Church: An Evangelical Ecclesiology

Vanhoozer’s claim that Scripture is constitutive of the Church has its roots in Vanhoozer’s Evangelical ecclesiology which posits a strong distinction between the visible, present Church and the invisible, eschatological Church. Vanhoozer bases his argument that God does not normatively speak in tradition on the present incompleteness of the Church. Scripture is authoritative because it is complete, while the visible Church, because it is still being led toward its eschatological fullness, cannot be authoritative in the same way. Vanhoozer claims that, “Ecclesiology cannot be first theology because the church enjoys only the first fruits of its salvation. As an eschatological reality, it is indeed already in union with Christ, but not yet completely so.” Since the canonical Scriptures are already complete in content, Vanhoozer feels that they naturally should be given priority over a presently incomplete, sinful Church. The only authority the Church can claim for itself is its responsive participation in the economy of redemption, and this must continually be checked by some criterion which is authoritative over the Church. This strong distinction between visible and invisible

542 Ibid, 121.
543 Ibid, 163.
544 Vanhoozer (ibid, 121), argues, “The idea that cultures are closed systems, insular and internally consistent wholes that preserve a stable deposit of values and knowledge, is a distinctly modern
Church makes it quite difficult to show how the visible Church has a productive role in the economy of redemption.

Following Gerhard Ebeling, Vanhoozer equates tradition with the history of biblical interpretation, so that “church tradition” is defined as “the embodied social practice of biblical interpretation” and hence always “stands under the canon viewed as a dominical and spiritual practice of administering the covenant.” The Church, then, is constituted by Scripture, and the Church becomes the Church to the extent that it participates rightly in response to the mission of Scripture. The Church, for Vanhoozer, is “a ‘creature of the word’—brought into being and shaped by the Spirit’s ministry of the word.” The Church, then, appears to be a group of individuals who are individually and only then corporately called to respond to the Scriptures. It is the association of individuals responding to God who make up the Church. This focus on the Church as an association of individuals makes it difficult for Vanhoozer to describe the visible Church as a theological reality.

Yet Vanhoozer does try to give an account of the Church as a theological reality. Vanhoozer rejects the theological formulation of Church as sacrament, instead suggesting

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545 Ibid, 114. Vanhoozer (“The Spirit of Understanding,” 222), is very clear that Ebeling’s definition is needed to show that “text” and “interpretation” must continually be distinguished. In fact, sola scriptura is needed to preserve just this distinction. Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 235, 418), quotes Gerhard Ebeling: “the history of the church is the history of biblical interpretation.” Vanhoozer (ibid, 418), will enhance Ebeling’s claim, so that, “The history of the church is essentially the story of how the church interprets Scripture ‘bodily,’ through the shape of its community life. Church history is thus the history of biblical performance.”

546 Ibid, 230. Vanhoozer (ibid, 208), claims, “The church in the power of the Spirit is nothing less than the efficacy of the canonical word, rightly understood and rightly appropriated.”
that the Church “imitates” and “signifies” grace.\textsuperscript{547} In fact, Vanhoozer rejects both a description of the Church as “mediation” of grace and a description of the Church as a “memorial” of Christ, instead opting for a description of the Church as a “\textit{mimesis}” of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{548} Vanhoozer rejects mediation because it gives the Church too much sacramental value. Vanhoozer specifically rejects any ecclesiology in which the church is considered a “sign/presence of the triune God,” where “ecclesial words and actions mediate the grace of God.”\textsuperscript{549} This, he thinks, would give the Church an initiatory mission analogous to the mission of Scripture. Yet Vanhoozer also rejects a description of the Church as a memorial because it seems to deny the active role of the Spirit in the Church. Vanhoozer consequently seeks a middle ground in \textit{mimesis}: “The form of the church’s fitting participation in the drama of redemption is precisely that of \textit{mimesis}: an imitation of Paul, of God, of Christ.”\textsuperscript{550} Imitating is distinctly a mission of response, and consequently has less authority than mediation in the economy of redemption. For Vanhoozer, the Church’s task is that of “\textit{performing the word in the power of the Spirit},” and “\textit{present[ing] the body of Christ}.”\textsuperscript{551} Once again, Vanhoozer feels more comfortable with the terms performing and presenting, as they indicate a responsive role only, whereas mediating suggests a mission closer to that granted to Scripture. Proposing the model of imitation (mimesis), Vanhoozer feels, will provide the Church a participatory

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\textsuperscript{547} Vanhoozer, (\textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 401), claims that the Church is “less a sacrament than a means of signifying the divine grace poured out in Christ through the Spirit.”
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\textsuperscript{548} Ibid, 412.
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\textsuperscript{549} Ibid, 400.
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\textsuperscript{551} Ibid, 401, 407, respectively.
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role in redemption, yet will keep that action from being confused with God’s prior initiatory action.\textsuperscript{552} Drama, then, provides a helpful paradigm for showing that the Church is responsive to the divine and Scriptural missions yet actively participatory in them.\textsuperscript{553}

B. The Relationship between Scripture and Church in the Economy

Vanhooker’s Evangelical ecclesiology emphasizes a one-directional authority from Scripture to Church. Vanhooker’s later work does not place authority in the literary construction of the text itself, but in God’s supervening speech acts which establish the biblical texts as Scripture. As Vanhooker describes both Scripture and Church as extensions of the economic missions of the Triune God, Vanhooker proposes a structuring of the economy in which Scripture is given an active mission and the Church is given a responsive mission.

1. The Active Mission of Scripture in the Economy

\textsuperscript{552} Vanhooker sees “imitation” as a middle ground between claiming the Church is a simple (almost passive) remembrance of Christ, and a channel of mediation of Christ. In fact, Vanhooker’s model of drama attempts to incorporate “imitating” as an alternative to the traditional divide between memorial and sacrament in sacramental theology. Hence Vanhooker (ibid, 409), claims, “As celebration, the church is not a literal repetition of the body of Christ, nor a sacrament, nor an empty memorial, but an active mimesis.” Vanhooker’s treatment of sacraments covers only three pages, and unfortunately the focus is on defining them rather than showing how they are an essential and unique part of God’s self-communicative action. Sacramental theology would seem to be a very productive area for developing a theology of communicative action, and a greater development of this branch of theology would likely enhance Vanhooker’s project.

\textsuperscript{553} Ibid, 412.
Whereas Kelsey described First Theology as the theologian’s prior decision about how to use Scripture, Vanhoozer wishes to establish the authority of Scripture based on God’s use of these texts. Vanhoozer argues, “What becomes paramount is God’s use of the biblical texts…God, in and through the human authors, has an ongoing speaking part.” The Church, says Vanhoozer, can take responsibility neither for the establishment of the canon nor for establishing the literal sense as authoritative. This is because “it is not the church’s use but the triune God’s use of Scripture that makes it canon. That the church recognizes the canon authenticates the church rather than the canon, which needs no ecclesial approval to be what it is: the Word of God.” Ultimately, Scripture must be understood as God’s communication rather than human communication about God. Vanhoozer explains,

The crucial point is that Scripture is holy (set apart) and authoritative because it is ingredient in the economy of communication, that is, in the way in which the triune God ministers the Word of God in the power of the Spirit…Scripture is a creaturely medium taken up as an ‘extension of Christ’s active, communicative presence in the Spirit’s power through the commissioned apostolic testimony.’ As such, Scripture is a means of ongoing triune communication by which the church follows her master’s voice…

While Scripture is a “creaturely medium,” it is ultimately more a species of the economic triune communicative action than a product of human discourse. While the focal point of the economy of redemption “consists in what God has done and is doing in Christ, the Scriptures, as testimony to this act, are themselves caught up in it and become

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554 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 11-12.
555 Ibid, 177.
556 Ibid, 149-150.
557 Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, 264.
a means for God for building up his church in Christ through the power of the Spirit.”

Realizing that Scripture is finally an act of God in the economy of communication requires a re-estimation of the human language of Scripture. For Vanhoozer, “The human statements about God’s action and passion are not accommodations of a rich reality to poor words, but rather an elevation of human words to divine discourse: these human texts have been set apart as sanctified servants of divine revelation.” As a result, “In attending closely to Scripture we not only read about God but confront God in one mode of his self-presentation.”

The unique mode of self-presentation here seems to be dependent on Vanhoozer’s claim that Scripture uniquely contains God’s complete, determinate speech acts. The Scriptures are unique precisely because God uses them in a unique way.

Vanhoozer develops an argument for the place of Scripture in the economy of redemption by comparing the mission of Scripture to the mission of Son and Spirit. God exists as self-communicative Act, eternally communicating among the Persons of the immanent Trinity. Yet, Vanhoozer claims, “When directed ad extra, the communicative action of God is perhaps better termed mission. Hence the economy of communication is ultimately missional: divine communicative action involves the ‘sendings’ (missio) of Son and Spirit.” Vanhoozer proposes that Scripture is given a mission for redemption analogous to the missions of the triune Persons, and that “Scripture’s mission is tied up

558 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 418.

559 Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, 80, noting John Webster, Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 26.)

560 Ibid, 189.

561 Ibid, 261.
with the Trinitarian missions of the Son and Spirit.” Scripture is sent to the Church so that the Church may respond, just as Son and Spirit were sent for the purpose of redemption. As a result, “Scripture does not simply recount action; it is part of the action…it contributes to the realization of God’s purposes for the world…Scripture is thus a collection of statements—and promises, commands, warnings, and so on—all on their respective missions.” This claim locates Scripture in the economy of redemption, and it establishes the priority of Scripture over the Church as Scripture is ultimately an action of God (not of the Church).

For Vanhoozer, everything included in the economy of redemption has a particular mission. Since both Church and Scripture participate in the economy of redemption, each has its own respective mission which is essential to that economy. Yet two distinct kinds of mission must be distinguished. Vanhoozer calls these “mission” and “commission.” Mission is initiative, while commission is responsive. Since the Triune Persons extend themselves in economic mission, and because Scripture is caught up in that action and likewise sent, the mission of Scripture is an initiative kind of mission. At the same time, those to whom the missions of the Son, Spirit and Scripture

562 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 60.

563 Ibid, 70. Vanhoozer (ibid), draws an “analogia missio” between “incarnation” and “inscripturation,” based on three analogies: “(1) both are species of triune communicative action—embodied in the case of Jesus, verbalized in the case of Scripture; (2) both aim to draw communicants into the new covenant community; (3) both are accompanied by the Spirit and require the Spirit in order to complete their respective missions.”

564 Vanhoozer (ibid, 69), claims, “The whole theodrama is essentially missional.”

565 Vanhoozer (ibid, 93), very much appreciates the postliberal understanding of doctrine as “a rule for ‘storied practice’” because it seeks to overcome the divide between theory and practice. Vanhoozer (ibid), feels the postliberal understanding of doctrine is quite helpful, though it “ultimately fails to preserve biblical authority.”
are sent are themselves called to participate in mission, but this is a “commissioned” mission, a mission of response. Vanhoozer concludes, “The Bible is thus the locus of God’s ongoing communicative action in the church and in the world...The mission of the church, and therefore of theology, is to participate in and continue the joint mission of Word and Spirit.” Yet, while each of these kinds of mission is essential, each does not have equal authority. Initiating mission (God’s initial act) always has authority over commissioned responsive mission (the effect that God’s initial act produces). The essential thing to notice here is that the mission of Scripture is located on the side of God’s self-communicative act rather than on the side of participated human response. Scripture has priority over the Church because Scripture is mission sent by God to the Church, and hence the Church’s mission is constituted in response to that mission.

Failure to locate the place Scripture’s mission among the various missions of the divine economy, Vanhoozer feels, is a mistake of most modern theology. Vanhoozer suggests that both “Chicago” and “Yale” go wrong precisely by seeing Scripture more as a response to revelation than as God’s communicative act. Vanhoozer suggests that Ricoeur was correct to propose a “Copernican revolution” in biblical interpretation which

566 Vanhoozer (ibid, 71), emphasizes, “The church does not send itself; it is rather appointed, commissioned. Its mission derives from its prior commission.” Church doctrine, a construction of the Church’s practice, is caught up in the divine drama and has its own mission, but this mission is one of response to Scripture. Vanhoozer (ibid, 60), keeps the direction clear: “The mission of theology is to enable the people of God to participate in the mission and ministry of the gospel... Scripture’s role in the economy of the gospel... is that of the gospel’s normative specification.” The Church’s responsive mission depends on the Scriptures’ initiative mission.

567 Ibid, 71.

568 Hence Vanhoozer (ibid, 78), argues, “Doctrine proceeds from an authoritative script and gives direction as to how individuals and the church can participate fittingly in the drama of redemption.” Thus for Vanhoozer, (ibid, 102), “Doctrine is direction for the fitting participation of individuals and communities in the drama of redemption.”
would render the reader a submissive learner of the unique subject matter of Scripture. However, Vanhoozer feels that Ricoeur was unable to accomplish this project because Ricoeur could not precisely articulate how the biblical text is ‘of God.’ Vanhoozer claims,

Ricoeur…fails to consider the possibility that the Bible as a unified canonical whole may itself ultimately count as a divine communicative work, in which case the self-naming of God would not be limited merely to one or two instances, such as the burning bush of Exodus 3, but would comprise the entire length and breadth of the canon. God would therefore be not only the subject of the biblical mythos, but also in some sense its author.569

To complete Ricoeur’s Copernican revolution and articulate the correct relation between Scripture and Church, the theologian must go beyond a claim about the uniqueness of the subject matter (i.e. these texts name God, and hence may invert general hermeneutical rules) to a claim that God has used this text in a unique way (these texts are caught up in God’s self-communication).570 Scriptural language is not a human projection about God, but is rather God’s true and real self-revelation.

It is this location of Scripture as active mission in the economy that reestablishes the principle of sola scriptura in Vanhoozer’s later work. Vanhoozer suggests that only by returning to the traditional Protestant doctrine of sola scriptura will resolve the crisis of authority in the Church, because only this doctrine will allow God to use Scripture

569 Ibid, 12.

570 Vanhoozer (ibid, 11), uses Ricoeur’s emphasis on “naming God” as his point of departure, but “[G]oing beyond Ricoeur, we can say that God also speaks and acts in and through all these discourses differently as well. Consequently, this work derives a doctrine of God’s being from an analysis of God’s speaking, something Ricoeur never attempted.”
against the Church. Sola scriptura, then, operates both as a principle of authority which, when recognized by the Church, in conjunction with a First Theology, will conform the Church’s concrete practices toward Scripture.

2. The Passive Mission of the Church in the Economy

In Vanhoozer’s articulation of the relationship between Scripture and Church, then, the Church has an actively responsive role in the economy of redemption. Vanhoozer clarifies this relationship between Scripture and Church by claiming,

The human readers of Scripture are indeed active, but in a peculiarly passive way. The Spirit catches readers up into the theo-dramatic action not by inspiring but illumining them, enabling them to read the Bible in order to hear and do the Word…The church is ultimately not the author but the passive recipient of the canonical Scriptures…

571 Vanhoozer (ibid, 17), claims, “The supreme norm for church practice is Scripture itself: not Scripture as used by the church but Scripture as used by God, even, or perhaps especially, when such use is over against the church.” Notice that this Protestant doctrine is simply used by Vanhoozer, ibid, as a theoretical construct to locate authority. It does not mean Scripture alone, but is “a responsive, directional practice of the Church… namely, the practice of corresponding in one’s speech and action to the word of God.”

572 Vanhoozer (“Scripture and Tradition,” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 166), claims that sola scriptura means that “Scripture is a polyphonic testimony to what God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ for the salvation of the world. No other story, no work of genius, communicates that. Sola scriptura means that this testimony is not only irreducible, but that Scripture should enjoy epistemic and existential primacy in the life of the Church.” It is difficult, on this account, to distinguish sola scriptura from First Theology. And, for Vanhoozer, this appears to be precisely the function of sola scriptura. Vanhoozer (ibid, 152), continues, “To the extent that sola scriptura is an indispensable tool of ideology critique, its future seems assured. Indeed, seen in this light, sola scriptura sounds positively postmodern to the extent that it questions whether any single human point of view captures universal truth. For the voice of God in Scripture is mediated by a polyphony of human voices.”

What is important to notice here is that there are only two options; the Church is either “passive recipient” or “author.” Since the Church is not author of Scripture, the Church must only have a mission of response to Scripture’s author. This structuring of the Scripture/Church relationship sets the stage for Vanhoozer’s discussion of drama and performance. While Scripture alone is authoritative for the Church, Vanhoozer will suggest that the Scripture is incomplete without the responsive mission of the Church. Since the very mission of Scripture is to “form a new people,” this mission cannot be fulfilled without the incorporation of the Church into a commissioned mission. At this point Vanhoozer agrees with Gadamer that “only the performance brings out everything that is in the play….To be occasional is essential to it: the occasion of the performance makes it speak and brings out what is in it.” Yet far from generating meaning in conversation with Scripture, Vanhoozer emphasizes that performance is a response to Scripture, and cannot be authoritative over Scripture nor affect the meaning of Scripture.

Vanhoozer suggests that “‘performing texts’ may be the best means for reframing traditional discussions concerning the Scripture/tradition relationship,” so that the necessity of the Church can be acknowledged in a way that safeguards the authority of Scripture. The Church, then, is called the “theater of the gospel,” the location where

574 Ibid, 182. Vanhoozer (ibid, 165), claims, “The holy script…is both complete and incomplete. On the one hand, the story of God’s word-acts in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ is finished…On the other hand, without a people to embody it, the script lacks something essential, for the canon “delivers its meaning only as it is ‘played out’ in patterns of human action in Church and society.” See also Vanhoozer (ibid, 235), who claims, in this sense, the “canon as script comes into its own only when it is realized in understanding and responsive action.”


576 Ibid, 179. It is important to emphasize that this one-directional establishment of authority is not intended to make the Church’s response to Scripture a rote, fundamentalist adherence to an ancient
the Gospel drama is played out, while those incorporated into the Church are “the company of performers” who can “function as a ‘hermeneutic of the gospel.’”\textsuperscript{577} Vanhoozer further clarifies his distinction between importance and authority, suggesting that “script and performance are equally necessary, though not equally authoritative. Biblical script without ecclesial performance is empty; ecclesial performance without biblical script is blind.”\textsuperscript{578} While both have essential missions in the fulfillment of the economy of redemption, Scripture always has the authoritative role and the Church the responsive role.

Vanhoozer’s emphasis on the plurality of literary genres unified as a divine speech act provides a further argument for the passive mission of the Church in response to the active mission of Scripture. In dialogue with postliberals, Vanhoozer agrees that literary genres are social constructions built in response to community needs. Genres are “communicative practices, rule-governed literary forms that authors employ to engage reality and interact intelligibly with others.”\textsuperscript{579} Genres provide the agreed-upon structure for communication to occur in social situations, and new genres must arise in response to new social realities. Vanhoozer writes,

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In short: genres are bound up with the aims and purposes of beings who act and react within social situations in certain rule-governed ways to accomplish certain
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\textsuperscript{577} Ibid, 413.

\textsuperscript{578} Ibid, 362.

\textsuperscript{579} Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 283.
kinds of communicative objectives. Literature falls into generic types precisely because the situations humans find themselves in often recur…each [literary genre] makes a distinct social contribution.\textsuperscript{580}

In Scripture, literary genres are the product of a “covenant form of life,” literary forms which establish possibilities and boundaries for communication in a new social reality. The best example of this is the production of the literary genre, Gospel, which was an attempt to respond to the new event of Christ.\textsuperscript{581} Ultimately, because “Covenant is the social situation to which the various language games of Scripture broadly correspond…the many canonical practices represent and render the \textit{real in Christ}, the shape, and hope, of glory.”\textsuperscript{582} God, then, can communicate the many aspects of the covenant to the Church by means of the many genres.

Yet whereas postliberals propose that the Church establishes the “language games” by which Scriptural interpretation can take place, Vanhoozer argues that canonical Scripture, not Church practice, has already established those rules. On Vanhoozer’s account, there is simply no need to start from community practice, because Christians already have, in the canon, the authoritative means to develop a Christian form of life.\textsuperscript{583} Thus “the uses to which Christians should attend to learn the meaning and correct grammar of ‘God’ are the patterns of usages (practices) in the canon itself.

\textsuperscript{580} Ibid, 214.
\textsuperscript{581} Ibid, 216.
\textsuperscript{582} Ibid, 220.
\textsuperscript{583} Ibid, 216. Vanhoozer (ibid, 215), notes, “Stated in dramatic terms, \textit{genres provide direction for one’s fitting participation, whether by word or by deed, in particular types of social situations.}” This particular response “marks the decisive break” with a cultural-linguistic approach because, “It is not that participating in the contemporary community helps clarify the meaning of biblical narrative but rather that \textit{the literary practices of the canon teach us how to participate in the story-shaped ecclesial community.”}
Christian theology is, or should be, ruled by a properly *canonical* grammar.”584 The very genres of Scripture, as the social forms of Christian identity, are able to form community practice. Scripture takes the active mission in establishing the form of the Church, which responds in passive mission.

In Vanhoozer’s later work, the Spirit is the one who links both the authoritative mission of the Scriptures and the responsive mission of the Church by bringing about the perlocutionary effect of the fixed meaning of Scripture. It is the particular role of the Spirit to communicate the determinate, fixed covenant message of Scripture to the Church, and to bring about the intended response.585 As a result, the Church can only claim relative authority to the extent that it can demonstrate interpretive competence. Clearly, this argument for associating the Spirit with the perlocutionary effect of the text has not changed from Vanhoozer’s early work. What has developed, however, is the emphasis on God’s communication to the Church instead of the human author’s communication to individual readers. Vanhoozer argues that the missions of Word and Spirit must be closely connected, because “Word without Spirit is powerless; Spirit without Word is directionless…. *The canon is the Spirit’s chosen means to mediate the covenant and foster the communion that obtains between Christ and the church.*”586 By locating the places of God, Scripture, and Church in the economy of redemption, then,

584 Ibid, 213.

585 The argument is familiar by now. For example, Vanhoozer (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 208), argues, “The Spirit brings about perlocutionary effects: he creates the new people of God. But—and this is the crucial point—the Spirit produces these effects by bringing about an *understanding* response on the part of the interpreting community to the canonical testimony about Christ.”

586 Ibid, 199.
Vanhoozer is able to show the necessity of the Church for completing Scripture, even as he shows the necessity of the Scriptures in constituting the Church.

IV. Vanhoozer’s Contributions to the Scripture in the Economy

Vanhoozer’s later work provides a substantial theological proposal for understanding Scripture which moves beyond the impasse between Frei and Tracy. Vanhoozer moves beyond the impasse both by articulating an argument for God’s use of the Scriptures in the economy of redemption, and by placing both Scriptures and the Church in the broader context of the divine economy. Discussions about methods for reading are set within a structure of the economy of redemption in which theological presuppositions form a foundation for reading. The Scriptural texts are unique as they are uniquely used by God and as they relate uniquely to the Church. Vanhoozer’s later work advances the discussion between Tracy and Frei by easing the persistent difficulties of locating authority (Frei) and explaining disclosure in multiplicity of genres (Tracy). Authority, Vanhoozer argues, is located in the literal reading of these texts because God has used the plain sense to communicate plainly to readers. At the same time, Vanhoozer shows, the various genres of Scripture do have unique disclosive potential precisely because God has chosen just these forms of communication for self-mediation to readers.

Vanhoozer’s construction of the divine economy as a series of missions is a particularly fruitful development in the discussion. Vanhoozer shows that in the economy of redemption, God exists as self-communicative Act, Scripture exists as communicative act sent on economic mission through which the Word and Spirit carry
out their respective missions today, and the Church exists as Christ and Spirit-led responder to the mission of Scripture through the work of the Spirit who makes the Scriptures effective in the Church. Whether or not one is convinced by Vanhoozer’s series of arguments to establish the authority of Scripture (that God is Author of Scripture, that only *sola scriptura* will solve the crisis of authority in the Church, that the Church’s mission is always responsive), Vanhoozer’s analysis of the various elements of the divine economy provides valuable resources for discussing the interpretation of Scripture. From beginning to end Vanhoozer’s project has been more about establishing the proper theological presuppositions necessary for reading Scripture than it has been about the development of a particular method of reading. What Scripture is and what Scripture does has inevitable consequences for how Scripture is read, and this understanding of Scripture can only take place within the context of the divine economy. Hence Vanhoozer has shown that the relationship between Scripture and Church is essential to hermeneutical method.

At the same time, it is not at all clear that Vanhoozer has rightly articulated the relationship between Scripture and Church. Vanhoozer’s strong “either/or” language creates significant deficiencies which weaken the strength of the overall argument. Vanhoozer’s emphasis on the completeness of Scripture and the incompleteness of the visible Church causes Vanhoozer to take a stance of continual suspicion toward the Church and trust toward Scripture. While Vanhoozer discusses the relationship between various parts of the economy of redemption, an apologetic for *sola scriptura* often overwhelms substantial ecclesiological reflection. Here I will highlight several such tensions.
The first difficulty concerns Vanhoozer’s articulation of the relationship between Scripture and Church as each is “sent” on an economic mission. It remains somewhat unclear in Vanhoozer’s account why the mission of Scripture must be placed on the side of God’s initiation (and hence authoritative) while the Church must be only placed on the side of commissioned response (and hence submissive). From a historical standpoint, those who wrote the biblical texts and those who assembled the canon appear to have thought themselves to be responding to revelation as they wrote. God guided the process of this human response and then incorporated Scripture into a mission in the economy of redemption. It is difficult to see why the Church should not likewise be considered as also being incorporated into the active, mediating mission of God. Although one may grant that “[n]either tradition nor practice can be the supreme norm for Christian theology, because each is susceptible to error,” this also does not necessarily prohibit the Church from also being caught up into the divine economy and also used to mediate truth. If God could use human words of human authors (susceptible to error), and incorporate them into an active economic mission in Scripture, it appears at least possible that the Church could also be so used. One of the most serious

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587 Childs (Speech-Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation, 381), claims that the early Church “understood [the canon’s] formation as a response to the divine coercion of the living Word of God…It set the boundaries within which God’s voice was heard.” It also seems worth noting that the early Church understood their own community as the locus of God’s communicative action as well.

588 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 22.

589 My suspicion is that there is a good deal of productive ground between the either/or Vanhoozer posits. Some of this ground has already been claimed by Wolterstorff, Lindbeck, and Childs, all of whom have said they could accept some claim to divine discourse in Scripture, and yet are also willing to grant a greater amount of interpretative authority to the Church than Vanhoozer is willing to do. All three agree that some claim to divine discourse is a helpful articulation of Scripture’s authority, yet Vanhoozer thinks all three give too much authority to the Church. Their granting of interpretive authority
oversights here is Vanhoozer’s lack of attention to the process of canonization. Vanhoozer’s claim for divine authorship has been that the biblical texts become God’s speech acts as God’s illocutionary stance supervenes over the whole collection of texts. Individual genres, illocutionary stances and texts, on this account, cannot be considered God’s authorship, no matter how indispensable to the illumination of God’s speech act they have become. Yet it was the Church which was used by God to collect just the right set of texts so that God’s supervening illocution could become known. As a result, the Church must have a more active role in the economy; to some extent it has the role of constituting the Scriptures. The difficulty with Vanhoozer’s construction is not his promotion of sola scriptura as a criterion of authority over the Church, but that Vanhoozer simply does not sufficiently explore the nature of the Church as a theological reality. Vanhoozer simply follows his Evangelical tradition in emphasizing the distinction between the visible Church and the invisible Church, and then concludes that the visible Church, being incomplete, can only be a mission of response.

A second, closely related difficulty regards the scope of Vanhoozer’s ecclesiology. Nearly all of Vanhoozer’s ecclesiology is worked out in dialogue with postliberal theologians, especially Lindbeck. In this sense, Vanhoozer’s ecclesiology may be best appropriated as an apologetic against misbalancing the economy of redemption in favor of Church practice. As such, Vanhoozer’s project articulates a helpful argument for interpretive humility and the continual chastening of readers. Yet to the Church is expressed variously through a doctrine of providence (Childs), a cultural-linguistic understanding of doctrine (Lindbeck), or a second hermeneutic (Wolterstorff).

590 Interestingly, Vanhoozer (Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible, 22), claims, “A theological interpretation of the Bible is more likely to be critical of readers than of biblical
one theological reduction must not be countered by another. The reduction of Scripture to the Church cannot be corrected by a reduction of ecclesiology to elevate Scripture. Thus when Vanhoozer writes, “This emphasis on the community’s use of the biblical text tends to obscure the question of God’s use of the text,” he may be quite correct in the contemporary climate; yet, to dismiss community use in favor of authorial discourse may be to accept one aspect of the economy of redemption to the exclusion of another.\footnote{Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 175.}

Both Frei and Tracy are also critical of what they believe is Lindbeck’s wholesale appropriation of authority to tradition, and they all pursue ways of establishing Scripture as a normative authority for the Church. If the only two ways to express the relationship between Scripture and Church were Lindbeck’s linguistic postliberal method and Vanhoozer’s theo-dramatic \textit{sola scriptura} method, there may be compelling reasons to side with Vanhoozer. Indeed, the Scriptures must be allowed some critical authority over the Church. Yet Vanhoozer does not enter into serious dialogue with any Catholic theologian on the topic of authoritative interpretation, and his overall arguments seem to suggest that the Church simply cannot ever make an authoritative interpretation of Scripture. It is one thing to say that, “Church authorities do not have the mandate either to define doctrine that runs counter to Scripture or to invent new truth,” and quite another to say that the Church lacks authority to “preserve doctrine…and to pronounce doctrinal definitions of the faith” because Scripture stands as an authority over the Church.\footnote{See Hans Boersma, "On Baking Pumpkin Pie: Kevin Vanhoozer and Yves Congar on Tradition," \textit{Calvin Theological Journal} 42 (2007), 254.}

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\item Authors or biblical texts…A properly theological criticism will therefore seek to do justice to the priority of God. One way to do so is to guard against idols: images of God manufactured by the interpretative communities.”
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Vanhooker does not adequately distinguish between these two. Since Vanhoozer does very little to examine the options beyond a standard account of Evangelical and postliberal ecclesiology, it will be difficult to find in Vanhoozer the resources to establish a far-reaching, constructive proposal for the Church’s *use* of Scripture in its responsive mission in the economy.

The next chapter will consider the work of Henri de Lubac, who shares Vanhoozer’s desire to locate Scriptural interpretation in the economy of redemption. Though their hermeneutical projects vary greatly, the chief difference between Vanhoozer and de Lubac will not be found in their method, but in the different way in which each understands the Church to relate to Scripture in the economy of redemption. As de Lubac provides a more thorough description of the theological nature of the Church, it will be possible to identify helpful theological resources by which to advance a more complete theological interpretation of Scripture.
CHAPTER 3:
HENRI DE LUBAC: SCRIPTURE AS MEDIATION OF MYSTERY

I. Introduction: Placing de Lubac in Discussion with Tracy, Frei and Vanhoozer

In the first chapter I suggested that impasses in the discussion between Tracy and Frei are largely a consequence of their nearly exclusive focus on the relationship between text and reader. The chapter concluded that Frei’s central difficulty of deciding whether to locate Scripture’s authority in the text or in the Church, and Tracy’s central difficulty of showing that the identity of Jesus Christ is the singular subject matter of Scripture, cannot be resolved without placing hermeneutical discussions in the broader context of the economy of redemption. The second chapter examined the work of Kevin Vanhoozer to show how his explicit articulation of Scripture’s role in the economy of redemption provides theological resources which have potential to advance the discussion on method. The chapter concluded that while Vanhoozer has rightly attempted to shift hermeneutical discussions beyond the relationship between text and reader, Vanhoozer’s one-sided insistence on the authority of Scripture over the Church has prevented him from completing his hermeneutical project. This chapter will examine the project of Henri de Lubac in order to show how a different way of structuring the relationship between Scripture and Church in the economy of redemption may advance hermeneutical discussions between Frei and Tracy. This chapter will suggest that de Lubac provides two theological insights which can help interpreters move beyond certain impasses. First, de Lubac has explicitly identified the central hermeneutical issue in a Christian reading of Scripture as the movement from text to spiritual reality in such a way that the relationship
between Christ, Scripture and Church become visible. This concern, I have shown, is
central to Tracy and Frei, although the philosophical tools they employ prevent them
from not explicitly identifying this hermeneutical movement. Second, de Lubac has
shown the intrinsic relationship between Scripture and Church in the economy of
redemption in such a way that eases the tension of locating authority in either Scripture or
Church. De Lubac’s structuring of the relationship of the Church to Scripture provides a
way to move beyond Vanhoozer’s investment of authority in sola Scriptura and Frei’s
investment of authority in the community consensus of the Church. These two insights
will be explored within the context of de Lubac’s overall project.

Ressourcement Theology: De Lubac’s own theological project is best located in
the Ressourcement movement of French theology. Although labeled “La nouvelle
théologie” by its opponents, the movement intended to return Christian theology to riches
of Christian tradition which had been lost by a separation of biblical studies, historical
theology and systematic theology. D’Ambrosio describes the movement as a “creative
hermeneutical exercise in which the ‘sources’ of Christian faith were ‘reinterrogated’

593 Other theologians commonly classified in this movement are Jean Danielou, Yves Congar,
and Marie-Cominique Chenu, Gaston Fessard, Henri Bouillard, and Pierre Tielhard de Chardin (see Wood,
Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 6).

594 It appears to be Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (“La nouvelle théologie ou va-t-elle?”
Anglicum 23 (1946), 126-45), who first applied this term to de Lubac, and associated the movement with
the philosophy of Maurice Blondel (see Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 6, and Marcellino G.
D’Ambrosio, Henri De Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI
Dissertation Services, 1991), 2-3; 20-21). De Lubac rejected the term because he saw his project as
providing answers to contemporary questions precisely through a return to the patristic and medieval
sources. De Lubac was viewed as something of a ring-leader for this movement toward a critical retrieval
of the sources of Christian theology, and his work was viewed with suspicion during his career. After the
publication of the encyclical Humani Generis in 1950, several of de Lubac’s books, Surnaturel, Corpus
Mysticum, and Connaissance de Dieu, were banned. Yet in 1960 de Lubac was invited by Pope John
XXIII to be a consultant for the preparatory Theological Commission at the Vatican II Council, where de
Lubac consulted in the drafting of Dei Verbum. In 1983 de Lubac was named by Pope John Paul II as a
cardinal (see Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 3-5).
with new questions,” rooted in the needs of the modern Church. The very name “ressourcement” implies a “going back” to the sources of Christian faith to bring out theological insights and resources forgotten or overlooked in the Church at present. As D’Ambrosio emphasizes, the “sources” mined by these theologians were viewed as much more than ancient texts; they were “wellsprings of dynamic spiritual life.”

D’Ambrosio claims, “The events and words of Scripture, the doctrine of the Fathers, the Creeds and decrees of the councils, the rites of the liturgy—all of these are, for them, vehicles and, in an analogous sense, sacraments of the dynamic and living Mystery of Christ.” De Lubac’s early work, Catholicism, became programmatic for the Ressourcement movement, as it stressed the “social character of the church as the true universal community in embryo, rather than as a mere external machinery for the saving of individual souls.” The Church, as the social reality established by God which participates integrally in the mystery of Christian faith, mediates that singular mystery through its sources, and these must continually be re-approached for the revitalization of the Church.

The Ressourcement movement was at once a rejection of contemporary neo-Scholastic Thomism and the modern Protestant liberal tradition. The latter, thought de Lubac, denied the transcendence of Christian faith, while the former denied the intrinsic

595 Marcellino G. D'Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic, 3.

596 Ibid, 9.

597 Ibid.

relationship between history and the Christian mystery. Neo-Scholasticism, as D’Ambrosio describes it, “has virtually no historical sense. In an existentialist world, it remains resolutely essentialist and objectivist, oblivious to human subjectivity….Hardened by its Scholastic categories, neo-Thomism remains basically incomprehensible to most people and is thus incapable of offering them spiritual and doctrinal nourishment.” Rationalist and liberal theology, on the other hand, tended to focus on “closed, clear systems” which has “impoverished theology and has almost done away with the mystery.” The return to the sources of the Christian faith, then, will seek to recover both the transcendent of the Christian mystery, and the intrinsic relationship of that mystery to the human being.

*The Influence of Maurice Blondel:* De Lubac’s hermeneutical system is heavily influenced by the philosophy of Maurice Blondel, who has provided a description of the Christian “Mystery” which will be used by de Lubac in several important ways. First, for Blondel, Mystery is always granted as revelation, and is consequently a gift.

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600 Ibid, 8.

601 Maurice Blondel was the most influential philosophical influence on de Lubac, as Blondel’s proposal for a distinctly Christian philosophy sets forth many of the distinctive features which de Lubac finds central to his own hermeneutical project. De Lubac also influenced by many other philosophers and theologians, although they will not be discussed in this dissertation (D’Ambrosio, *Traditional Hermeneutic*, 2, mentions J.A. Mohler, John Henry Newman, A. Gardeil, Charles Peguy and Paul Claudel).

602 Blondel (*La philosophie et l’esprit chrétien I*, 14, cited in Adam C. English, *The Possibility of Christian Philosophy: Maurice Blondel at the Intersection of Theology and Philosophy*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, Routledge Radical Orthodoxy Series (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 65), claims, “We will use this word ‘mystery’ in order to signify a revealed truth that the human spirit, left to its own resources, would not have been able to discover and identify with certainty. [It is] a secret that, even once revealed, remains impenetrable in its depth. Yet, it is not without useful significance, illuminating and profitable for us. [It is] a speculative and practical teaching which, in
amount of intellectual striving will grasp the Mystery, since Mystery is revealed and not intellectually mastered.  Blondel distinguishes between “enigma,” an “impasse, a moment of confusion, a stumbling block to thought” which ought to be but has not yet been solved, and a “mystery” which “by contrast, is not something that eludes but something to be found and entered into; it does not describe the state of knowledge at the end of data but rather the state of being confronted by Truth.”  A mystery, then, is intelligible but never comprehensible.  Since scientific disciplines are structured to solve enigmas, they do not possess the right tools for approaching Mystery.

Second, Since Mystery is an opening to a dimension greater than can be comprehended or intellectually mastered, Mystery is approached primarily through sacramental signs and is always understood through paradox.  According to de Lubac, all Christian

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603 De Lubac (ibid, 13-14), claims that mystery “is not, therefore, something irrational or absurd or merely non-contradictory; but, even so, the intellectual approach will always be fruitless…Neither is it a truth which would remain provisionally out of reach but as human reason attained ‘adulthood’ would become progressively more accessible.” For Blondel, philosophy could take a person to the point of encounter with the very Mystery of existence, yet it could not answer that question. For example, Blondel ends his doctoral thesis, *Action, 1893: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Olivia Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), by claiming, “There is no middle ground or neutrality: not to do as if it were true, is to do as if it were false. It is for philosophy to show the necessity of posing the alternative: ‘Is it or is it not?’ …But philosophy can go no further, nor can it say, in its own name alone, whether it be or not.”


605 Blondel has claimed, “We will use this word ‘mystery’ in order to signify a revealed truth that the human spirit, left to its own resources, would not have been able to discover and identify with certainty. [It is] a secret that, even once revealed, remains impenetrable in its depth” (La philosophie et l’esprit chrétien I. Autonomie essentielle et connexion indéclinable (Alcan : Presses universitaires de France, 1944), 229, cited in English, *The Possibility of Christian Philosophy*, 65).

606 Henri de Lubac, (Medieval Exegesis Vol. 2, trans. E.M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids and Edinburgh: Eerdmans and T & T Clark, 1998), 20), emphasizes that the Latin word “sacrament” really means “mystery,” and hence visible things can be given a sacramental role in mediating the Mystery. De
realities (including Scripture and Church) have a fundamentally sacramental structure, where an intrinsic relationship exists between the visible sign and disclosure of the Mystery. This Mystery can only be approached intellectually through a series of paradoxical relationships. Theology (and philosophy) will always be fundamentally paradoxical, as they highlight the tension between seen reality and the spiritual realm to which it points, but which stands in tension with it.607

Third, for Blondel, appropriation of the Mystery is never passive, but always requires participation.608 The truth of Christian faith is one which must be lived to be understood. As a result, faith grows as it is practiced, since “perfection is in the act.” 609 Hence Blondel claims, “It is through action that the divine takes hold in man, hides its presence there, insinuates into him a new thought and a new life…”610 Blondel argues that the “thought that follows the act is richer by an infinite degree than that which

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607 For de Lubac (The Church: Paradox and Mystery, 62), paradox refers to the very structure of reality, so that “Paradoxes: the word specifies, above all, then, things themselves, not the way of saying them.” D’Ambrosio (Traditional Hermeneutic, 63), claims, “The great methodological sin for de Lubac is one-sidedness” which would eliminate one side of tensions between nature and the supernatural, and hence creation and redemption, etc. Henri de Lubac, Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man, trans. Lancelot C. and Elizabeth Englund Sheppard (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). 182), claims, “The whole of dogma is thus but a series of paradoxes, disconcerting to natural reason and requiring not an impossible proof but reflective justification. For if the mind must submit to what is incomprehensible, it cannot admit what is unintelligible, and it is not enough for it to seek refuge in an ‘absence of’ contradiction’ by an absence of thought.”

608 Blondel’s L’Action emphasizes that active participation is a prerequisite for the real understanding of lived history, and hence of Christian Mystery. Blondel (ibid 371), claims, Faith requires action because, “Truth does not live in the abstract and universal form of thought… It is a gift, but a gift we acquire as if it were an earning.”

609 Ibid, 377.

610 Ibid, 380.
As approaching the Mystery is more than an intellectual assent to a particular set of truths, Mystery must be lived in order to be known.

Fourth, because the Mystery is manifest through the sacramental structure of Scripture and Church alike, and because it is manifest in participation, an intrinsic unity must exist between Scripture and Church. Tradition, Blondel shows, is the medium of participation in the Mystery, and it provides a “living synthesis” between the historical narrative of Scripture and the lived experience of Christian faith today, what Blondel calls “real history.”

This understanding of Mystery has significant implications for de Lubac’s theological interpretation of Scripture. First, since the scientific disciplines are structured to solve enigmas but are not able to apprehend Mystery, de Lubac insists that the various scientific disciplines which inform the interpretation of Scripture can never finally determine the meaning of the text, nor will they bring encounter with the Mystery. A ‘spiritual sense’ of Scripture, the spiritual reality to which the text points, always transcends that which is accessible to any scientific investigation. Second, since both Scripture and Church have the same sacramental structure and mediate the same Mystery, de Lubac insists that the Church possesses an implicit and unique understanding of the

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611 Ibid, 371.

612 Blondel speaks of “real history” in contrast to the history developed by the historical scientist. “Real history,” says Blondel (History and Action, 237), is “composed of human lives; and human life is metaphysics in act.” Blondel (ibid, 239), is against separating the two in such a way that the historian is given the domain of historical research and the theologian is assigned to develop doctrine which articulates the lived reality of the community as if they were separate, and he is against reducing “real history” to what the secular historian can deduce. Consequently, Blondel (ibid, 237), claims, “It remains true that the historian has to make the determinist explanation as intelligible and complete as possible—but it remains equally true that it is his duty to leave the issue open or even to open it as widely as possible to the realist explanation which always lies beneath.”
meaning of history and has a unique ability to interpret Scripture according to its own self-understanding. A reciprocal causality exists between Scripture and Church so that each constitutes and vitalizes the other, while both mediate the singular Mystery. Third, for de Lubac, the basis for all Scriptural interpretation is the “transcendence” of the spirit over the letter which “forms the central event of Christianity that remains continuously present at every moment.” It is Christ who gives meaning to history, unifies the Testaments, and establishes both Scripture and the Church to mediate this mystery. This mediation of revelation is essentially sacramental, and Scripture and Church have each been given a particular role in the divine economy lead toward the eschatological reality of the totus Christus. Consequently, all de Lubac’s discussion of the interpretation of Scripture in the Church will take place in the larger context of God’s use of Scripture, Church and sacrament to mediate the mystery of the supernatural in the economy of redemption.

Through this understanding of Mystery and tradition, de Lubac develops an understanding of the relationship between Scripture and the Church in the divine economy which provide further resources for the hermeneutical projects of Tracy, Frei and Vanhoozer. Like Frei, de Lubac stresses the centrality of Christ for all Christian reading of Scripture, as well as the importance of the Church’s self-description as a starting-point for hermeneutical reflection. Like Tracy, de Lubac emphasizes the public character of Christian faith and a symbolic understanding of Scriptural reading, in which

613 For a detailed discussion of these three descriptions of the Church, see Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 71-128.

the text discloses encounter with the divine. Yet de Lubac goes beyond Tracy and Frei by grounding his hermeneutical reflections in a theological description of the place of Scripture and Church in the economy of redemption. By situating Scriptural reading in this broader context, de Lubac is largely able to bypass both Tracy’s difficulty with Christological reference and Frei’s difficulty of authority. De Lubac, like Vanhoozer, will alleviate certain hermeneutical difficulties by placing Scripture in the economy of redemption. Yet de Lubac’s placement of Scripture in the divine economy will produce very different rules for reading than Vanhoozer’s placement of Scripture in the economy, since each will understand the relationship of Scripture and Church in very different ways. While Vanhoozer emphasizes the authority of Scripture over the Church, de Lubac emphasizes the reciprocal constitution of each by the other, and the direction of both toward the singular Christian Mystery.

II. Scriptural Interpretation: Emphasizing Spiritual Reality within the Letter

Although de Lubac (1896-1991) writes a generation before Frei, Tracy and Vanhoozer, de Lubac shows a similar concern about the tendency of historical critical method to reduce the content of Scripture to historical reference. De Lubac’s hermeneutical focus is always on God’s use of the Scriptural texts to mediate the singular mystery of the Christian faith revealed in Jesus Christ. For de Lubac, Christianity is unique among religions in its historical grounding, as God has entered into human history for self-revelation. This revelation is divided into a covenant of promise (Old Testament) and a covenant of fulfillment (New Testament). This twofold structure of letter and spirit
characterizes de Lubac’s understanding of the relationship between nature and the supernatural, and hence his understanding of all reality from a Christian perspective. The transcendent mystery of the supernatural, though always beyond the grasp of the human intellect, is nonetheless sacramentally disclosed in certain natural realities through which God has chosen to make Godsself known. Hence Scripture is unified in Christ, who mediates Himself to the Church by means of this witness to Himself. This section will explore de Lubac’s insistence on the unity of the Scriptures in Christ and the sacramental structure of Scripture by which Christ mediates Himself to readers.

A. Unity of the Testaments in Christ

The center of de Lubac’s Scriptural hermeneutics is the premise that Christ is at the same time both singular Object and Subject of Scripture. As Object, “Jesus Christ brings about the unity of Scripture, because he is the endpoint and fullness of Scripture. Everything in it is related to him. In the end he is its sole object.” As Subject, “Inasmuch as he is the exegesis of Scripture, Jesus Christ is also the exegete. He is truly Scripture’s Logos, in an active as well as a passive sense.” The goal of Scriptural exegesis, then, is not to search for some thematic relationship between Old Testament and New Testament; it is to look to the reality of Christ and read all Scripture in light of

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615 For a good treatment of the relationship between nature and the supernatural for de Lubac and the consequences this has for his whole theological project, see John Milbank, "Henri De Lubac," 76-91, where he presents a clear description of the issues involved without his more idiosyncratic reading reflected inJohn Milbank, The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

616 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, I, 237.

617 Ibid, 238.
Him as Object. Yet to exegete Christ in Scripture is not to read Scripture in light of some new doctrinal principle or teaching; to exegete Christ is to participate in Christ’s presence. De Lubac claims that “Christ’s exegesis, insofar as it is essential and decisive, does not consist of words first and foremost. It is actual. It is Action….The mysteries of Scripture are ‘revealed in action…’”  

This action is both the action of God and the action of the interpreter. On the side of the interpreter, Christ, as Object, cannot be understood without participation in Him. On the side of the referent, Christ, as Subject, continually offers to the reader incorporation into the singular Mystery.

The unification of all Scripture in Christ is what makes the Christian Scriptures unique among religious books. For de Lubac, the relationship between the Testaments can be described neither simply by a doctrine of progressive revelation nor by the assumption that there is a spiritual dimension which transcends the letter. Other religions bring both of these presuppositions to their religious books, yet the Christian unity of the Testaments goes beyond both. The Event of Christ goes far beyond progressive revelation, as the “history of revelation…offers the spectacle of a discontinuity that has no equal, which makes the traditional idea of allegory, understood in its most profound essence, irreplaceable.”

Christ reorients all of Scripture toward Himself. The Event of Christ goes far beyond the assumption that Old Testament letter points to a deeper spiritual reality. All religions of the Book claim that the reality to which their text points is greater than the words themselves, and every religion “fancies that there is some

618 Ibid. De Lubac (ibid, 239), claims that Christ “is an exegete, in principle, from the moment of his Incarnation,” in the sense that he is the unified Mystery.

619 De Lubac, ibid, 234-35.
hidden meaning” in their religious texts. Yet the Christian faith, for de Lubac, is not a religion of the book, but a religion of the Word. The movement from letter to spirit in the Christian Scriptures is unique because it is grounded in the “definitive” and “eternal” act of Christ which unifies the Testaments. Hence, “In fulfilling” the Old Testament, the act of Christ “gives it new life and renews it. It transfigures it. It subsumes it into itself. In a word, it changes its letter into spirit.”

De Lubac’s implication here is that one cannot, like Tracy and Ricoeur, employ a general strategy of reading which leads the reader to discover in the subject matter a content which transcends the letter and hence presses the reader to limit experiences. All religions suggest this dimension in their texts. The Christian Scriptures are unique because Christ, as Object of Scripture, gave meaning to both Testaments by entering into history and unifying them within Himself. They are unique because Christ, as Subject of Scripture, continually mediates Himself through them in a unique manner. Thus the Event of Christ which unifies Scripture establishes the unique character of Christian reading.

It is the movement from the literal sense to the spiritual sense (often called allegory) in interpretation which insures that all Scripture is read as a unified whole. De Lubac claims,

Thus, using ‘allegory’ as a means of going beyond the literal significance of Old Testament texts and finding in them the mysteries then being revealed in the flesh by the New was a way of showing the indissoluble unity of the two Testaments. Hence, the relationship of history to allegory, of fact to doctrine or of the figure to

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621 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I, 228, and *The Sources of Revelation*, 90.
the truth was the link between the two parts of Scripture and the witness to its profound unity. 622

Christ, the great Allegory, is the ground upon which all subsequent allegorical interpretation of a particular passage can be legitimated. The more resolutely the reader approaches the text presupposing the unity of the Testaments in Christ, the more Christian will be the disclosure yielded by the interpretation.

B. Unity of the Senses of Scripture in Christ

For de Lubac, the spiritual senses are the threefold means of approaching the singular Mystery. 623 De Lubac writes, “Each sense leads to the other as its end…A unity of source, and a unity of convergence.” 624 The literal sense discloses the Mystery, which must be illumined in three intrinsically related ways. There is an integral movement from one sense of Scripture to the other, which de Lubac calls a “living evolution,” so that the senses of Scripture, while distinguished from one another, cannot be separated from one


623 One way de Lubac highlights the intrinsic unity of the spiritual senses is to relate them to the three advents of Christ. Christ’s advent in history radically transformed the meaning of the OT history and creating the spiritual reality of the Church (allegory); Christ is born daily in the soul of the individual believer, causing an interiorization of the Mystery (tropology), and Christ will return in glory at the end of time (anagogy). (see, for example, Medieval Exegesis, II, 138-40). Another way de Lubac often highlights their unity is by showing their correspondence to the threefold Pauline theological virtues, faith, hope and love. Allegory is the Christian faith, tropology corresponds to the love which is the interiorization of the Christian faith, and anagogy corresponds to the hope of the final consummation of the Christian faith (see The Sources of Revelation, 221).

624 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, II, 203. See also de Lubac (ibid, 26), who claims, “But in Scripture itself, one professes that there is no dissociation of the two senses. The spirit does not exist without the letter, nor is the letter devoid of the spirit. Each of the two senses is in the other—like the ‘wheel within the wheel.’ Each needs the other. With those two they constitute ‘the perfect science.’”
another. The whole structure of Christian reality is the movement from sign to the unified Christian Mystery viewed in three aspects: as the radical transposition of the OT in the advent of Christ (allegory), as the transformative participation of the individual in the body of Christ (tropology), and as the eschatological union of the totus Christus, Christ and Church (anagogy). The fourfold nature of Scriptural interpretation is really the fourfold understanding of all of Christian reality. Only the Christian Scriptures can be interpreted in a fourfold manner, because they are the privileged witness to the revelation of the whole Mystery of Christ who, coming in history, transformed the meaning of history, and invites individuals to share in this salvation history and await the fulfillment of history. The purpose of this section is to show the intrinsic relationship between each of the senses, as well as the way in which movement occurs from letter to spirit.

1. Literal Sense

Indispensability of the Letter: The letter of Scripture is the indispensable starting point for all Christian reading for two essential reasons. First, Christian faith is a uniquely historical faith, and the literal sense narrates the historical events of salvation

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625 De Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation*, 221. This de Lubac (*Medieval Exegesis*, II, 203), also described as a “living development” or an “organic unfolding.”


627 Besides these two characteristics of the letter which make it indispensable for Christian faith, de Lubac notes several other less essential characteristics about the literal sense for premodern interpreters. First, the literal sense is the way for beginners to enter the Scriptures, as it does not require conversion to be understood. Second, the literal sense provides moral lessons for readers (see de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 44-45 and 70, respectively). The distinction of this understanding of morality from tropology will be seen later.
De Lubac insists: “is it not essential for Scripture to recount a history, the history of redemptive events? Is that not, even for the unbelieving observer, the characteristic that most markedly differentiates the Bible from so many other sacred scriptures?”

In his classic work, *Catholicism*, de Lubac emphasizes the historical, and hence social nature of the Christian faith, showing that “if the salvation offered by God is in fact the salvation of the human race…any account of this salvation will naturally take a historical form—it will be the history of the penetration of humanity by Christ.”

For premodern interpreters, according to de Lubac, the “literal sense” meant essentially a narration of God’s action in human history, so that stress was on the events behind the text rather than the text itself. Due to Christianity’s uniquely historical character, Scripture must first be a record which “delivers us facts,” and to participate in Christian faith we are “obliged to believe in a whole series of facts that have really come about.”

It is essential to Christian faith to realize that “redemption has not been accomplished in the imagination, but in time and in factual reality,” so that “our whole salvation in fact is worked out in…history.” Hence de Lubac states strongly, “Christianity is not one of

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628 D’Ambrosio (*Traditional Hermeneutic*, 173), notes that the “letter” and “history” were basically “synonyms in the patristic and medieval exegetical tradition,” and de Lubac emphasizes that the “letter” refers to “objective facts or events in history.”


630 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 141.

631 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 44. De Lubac (“On an Old Distich,” 114), adds that Christian “religion is first of all a historical fact. God has intervened in human history: the first thing to do is to learn the history of his interventions from the Book where they have been recorded by the Holy Spirit.”

the great things of history: it is history which is one of the great things of Christianity.”

There is an intrinsic relationship between Christianity and history so that one cannot explain either without the other.

Second, the letter is the indispensable means of rendering present the Spirit. Summarily, de Lubac claims, “The spirit is not separate from the letter but is contained and, at least initially, hidden within it. The letter is both good and necessary, for it leads to the spirit: it is the instrument and the servant of the spirit.” This necessary movement from history to spirit could be described as a sacramental relationship, in which “the letter is ‘the sacrament of the spirit.’” Without the letter, then, the singular Mystery of Christian faith would never be known. This role of the letter as means to the Spirit will be developed further in the section on allegory.

**Uses of the Letter:** These two roles of the letter make the study of Scripture in its literal sense the indispensable foundation for spiritual understanding. Yet a great deal of ambiguity exists in de Lubac’s work about the exact meaning of the “letter” which has resulted in difficulty for readers in explaining the relationship between letter and spirit.

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633 De Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 145, cited in D’Ambrosio, *Henri De Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutic*, 176, n. 123. De Lubac (*Medieval Exegesis*, II, 75), realizes that many practiced a tendency “to pass rapidly over this ‘letter,’ so as to have more time to give to the exploration of the ‘mystery,’” yet he recognizes this as a problem in practice, and not in principle.

634 De Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation*, 87.

635 De Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation*, 14. De Lubac often likens the letter of Scripture to wax which holds honey (the spiritual sense) (see, for example, de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 162-5 and *The Sources of Revelation*, 87). A number of theological and anthropological analogies are also given to show the indispensability of the letter in leading to the divine reality. De Lubac uses the analogy of the relationship of the Son to the Father in the Trinity (the Son is the indispensable means to know the Father), the soul to the body in a human being, and the human nature to the divine nature in Christ (See *The Sources of Revelation*, 14, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 45, and II, 60-61, respectively). These are, of course, just analogies, but they show the intrinsic nature of the relationship of the literal sense of Scripture to the spiritual senses of Scripture.
While some of this ambiguity can be attributed to the flexibility of the patristic usage of the term, part of the ambiguity lies in de Lubac’s relishing of paradoxes in the relationship between letter and spirit. De Lubac at times suggests quite varied understandings of the letter, often leaving the reader to discern from the context exactly what he meant by the term. Overall, de Lubac appears to be more interested in emphasizing the relationship of letter to spirit than he is in providing a precise definition of the literal sense. De Lubac describes the letter in a variety of ways that he feels are advantageous in illuminating the manner in which the letter hides, contains, and discloses the spirit. Here I will identify four distinct ways in which de Lubac uses the literal sense.

First, the literal sense often means the Old Testament Scriptures before the advent of Christ. De Lubac claims, for example, that “Scripture has two meanings. The most general name for these two meanings is the literal meaning and the spiritual (‘pneumatic’) meaning, and these two meanings have the same kind of relationship to each other as do the Old and New Testaments to each other.” In this usage, the letter corresponds to the Old Testament, while the Spirit corresponds to the New Testament. Here the letter was preparation for the Spirit and contains the Spirit, so that the economy of Old Testament history was transposed by the economy of New Testament grace.

Second, the literal sense often means the Old Testament read without Christian faith. This usage, however, provides a significant ambiguity which further complicates the understanding of the literal sense. On the one hand, the “letter” could refer to the reading of the Old Testament by a Jewish person who refused to read it in light of the New. De Lubac’s classic text to illustrate this kind of reading is Paul’s distinction

636 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, I, 225.
between the veiled letter and the Spirit. The Jewish exegete, by refusing to read in light of Christ, would only read the “mere letter.” On the other hand, the “letter” could refer to the reading of a secular historian who insisted on reading the Old Testament text only as a secular history. Using only his secular methodology, the secular exegete could only access the “mere letter,” since this is all that can be discerned using the tools of secular historical research.

De Lubac often equates these two uses of the “letter,” since the outcome of such reading for the unbelieving Jew and secular historian is basically the same. As the letter was not allowed to operate as a sign which points to the spiritual reality, for both Jew and secular historian it becomes a “mere letter.” Failing to see Christ as its inner reality, the “living spirit of prophecy is no longer within it; it is a body…after the soul has been taken from it.” Equating these two uses creates a serious difficulty, however, since the way the Jewish person views Scripture is quite different from the way the secular historian views these texts. As Susan Wood notes, the Old Testament, read in a Jewish

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637 See 2 Cor. 3:15-17: “Whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”


639 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 81. This is the picture of the modern commentators who, de Lubac (ibid), says, “consider the Bible ‘as a book that interests them, but which does not concern them.’”

640 D’Ambrosio (*Traditional Hermeneutic*, 182), claims that the letter that kills is “that attachment to the literal sense that blinds the interpreter to the spirit hidden within it…the obstinate refusal to go beyond the *littera sola.*” David M. Williams (*Receiving the Bible in Faith: Historical and Theological Exegesis* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 154), notes that the central problem by those who create a “mere letter” was that the letter “was restricted in scope. It failed to acknowledge the inner potential that would find its actuality in the Gospel and, explicitly or implicitly, denied the affirmation that would be later integrated into the Creed: that these things happened in fulfillment of the Scriptures.”

way, “is itself an interpretation of positivistic phenomena from a perspective of faith,” and hence differs greatly from the interpretation of the secular historian who first excludes such presuppositions.\textsuperscript{642} As we will see, this ambiguity has a significant impact on de Lubac’s understanding of the relationship between text and event, and his doctrine of inspiration.\textsuperscript{643}

Third, the literal sense often designates \textit{the historical events of salvation history}. As de Lubac follows the Medieval formula, the letter “delivers us facts” of history.\textsuperscript{644} Things signify things. Here the focus is on God’s revelatory action in history as event, to which the text bears witness. In the New Testament, because of Christ, the Great Allegory of the Old, the literal sense is also the spiritual sense,\textsuperscript{645} as the New Testament bears adequate and authoritative witness to the “fact” of Christ in history. The letter is used to show the indispensability of history to Christian faith. Here all history could only be understood rightly through the very historical event of Christ. As we will see, ambiguity also exists in this third sense between the Old Testament as letter anticipating Christ and the New Testament as letter and allegory, showing the realized historical event

\textsuperscript{642} Susan K. Wood, \textit{Spiritual Exegesis and the Church}, 34.

\textsuperscript{643} One key difference is the issue of inspiration. The Jewish interpreter would accept the inspiration of the author, and hence would understand the events of history as rendered in a particular way that is beneficial for salvation. The secular historian, on the other hand, could not begin with the presupposition that the biblical text was inspired. As such, the secular historian would not appreciate the work of God in the preservation of just this text. This creates an extremely significant difference between a Jewish reading of Scripture and a secular reading of Scripture, for the Jew would understand the text as rendering the events of salvation history, while the secular historian would see merely a set of conjoined historical happenings.

\textsuperscript{644} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 44.

\textsuperscript{645} Wood (\textit{Spiritual Exegesis and the Church}, 33), claims that “the allegorical meaning is also historical insofar as history is the interpreted event and the principle of this interpretation is the Christ event…”
of Christ. The concluded canon as unified in the historical event of Christ is a very different kind of letter than the Old Testament history anticipating the spirit. This ambiguity will cause some confusion about the ongoing nature of allegory today.

Fourth, the literal sense often means the plain sense of the text. D’Ambrosio defines the literal sense as “the sense directly conveyed by the words, irrespective of the intention of the human author.” God, as divine Author had overseen the pattern of words in such a way that the meaning that they render is reliable. It is in regard to this usage that de Lubac insists on basing theological arguments on the literal sense only. As this understanding of the letter deals with the text itself, the literary genre is essential for understanding the meaning of the letter. Figurative texts such as Song of Songs, despite not being a record of history, had a literal sense determined by the plain meaning of the words. Appreciating the importance of the plain sense of the text, de Lubac shows that the tradition had made a distinction had been made between the “ad litteram”

646 D’Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic, 174. D’Ambrosio may exaggerate de Lubac’s disinterest in human authors (de Lubac and the early Christian tradition were not entirely uninterested in the intended meaning of the author). Notice, for example, that de Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, II, 79), claims that even the “letter” itself, “as letter, had in fact a sort of ‘inside,’ since, before passing to the spiritual interpretation, one inquired about the ‘intention of the letter.’” This at least shows some concern for authorial intent at this point, as this would have been an object of inquiry for all books, not just the Scriptures. Yet the focus is certainly on most common sense meaning of the words to the contemporary listener.

647 In fact, de Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, IV, 382), claims that all “theological argumentation…can only proceed from the literal meaning, and theological proofs cannot be based on the allegorical sense” (cited in Susan Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 32).

648 Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 32. Here she cites Genesis 1-3 as a place where the literal sense is a figurative sense. Wood claims that in this particular situation, the allegorical sense is different from the figurative, literal sense in that the former is grounded in a Christian interpretation, whereas the latter is not.

649 De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, II, 41-44), claims that non-historical genres such as proverbs, parables, etc. on the one hand “have no literal sense” because they do not recount history, but on the other hand they are history insofar as they are a historical response to God’s action in history which recounts either actions of God or commands of God. Because “history” is as broad as “the thing done or the thing seen,” it can include both accounts of events and accounts of what the author wrote about.
(the “linguistic order”), the “ad sensum” (the “signification of the words”), and the “ad sententiam” (the “ideological content of the passage”).\textsuperscript{650} As we will see, the ambiguity between the literal sense as historical event and the literal sense as the plain sense of the text will result in difficulty for articulating a truly hermeneutical project of theological interpretation.

\textit{Conclusion:} Overall, de Lubac’s use of the “letter” is usually the one he believes is most appropriate in highlighting the relationship of letter and spirit. Only the specific context will help the reader discern whether the letter refers to the text itself or to the historical event behind it, to the Old Testament as anticipation of or in rejection of New Testament reality, and if the latter, to the Jewish reading or secular reading of the Old Testament texts. Yet what must be stressed here is that the literal sense is always that which grounds Christian faith in history and that which intrinsically contains and discloses the spirit. All four above mentioned uses of the historical sense are structured emphasize both of these aspects. Thus the literal sense really cannot be understood without describing the spiritual sense of Scripture which is intrinsically contained within it and disclosed by it.

2. Allegorical Sense

\textit{Allegory as the Meaning of History:} If history discloses the Mystery, allegory is the Mystery disclosed in its various aspects. Allegory is thus the intended completion of history. All historical events, if they are to be understood, need a principle of reference,

\textsuperscript{650} Ibid, 79.
without which they remain merely random events. Allegory is the meaning of history, for it shows that all history is unified in Christ. De Lubac claims, “At the summit of history, the Fact of Christ supposed history, and its radiance transfigured history.” It is in this sense that allegory is, as the Old Distich says, first of all “what you must believe…doctrine, the very object of faith.” This “theological sense of history,” de Lubac claims, is the only kind which really has resources to understand the whole of history, since it has “recourse to the final causes” which can allow the interpreter to understand the individual parts. As a result, far from undermining the historical importance of Scripture, the spiritual sense was actually “providing the foundation for the objective sense of history and by that very fact giving history its proper value.” Thus, de Lubac claims, “If it is…a dive into the ‘mystery,’ it in no way follows that it is, as it has been accused of, a ‘flight from history.’”

651 Ibid, 105. Hence allegory, de Lubac (ibid, 107), claims, was a very useful and necessary tool to “construct…the edifice of the faith” and show “how all of biblical history bears witness to Christ.”

652 De Lubac, “On an Old Distich,” 114. De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, II, 109), explains that the “content” of allegory “is exactly ‘the doctrine of the holy Church.’” The allegorical sense of Scripture is “The Catholic sense.”

653 Ibid, 71. For de Lubac (ibid), “This is why, if any not merely partial and relative but total, comprehensive, and absolutely valid explication of history is truly possible, this explication can only be theological. Only faith anticipates the future with security. Only an explication founded upon faith can invoke a definitive principle and appeal to ultimate causes.” De Lubac (ibid, 77), calls this “total exegesis” and “theology itself” and even “spirituality.”

654 Medieval Exegesis, II, 72 (emphasis his). This is a happy alternative to the immanentism that de Lubac, (ibid, 71), sees lurking in many secular histories, which he calls “absolutized History.”

655 Ibid, 100. To show the great difference between Christian allegory and pagan allegory, de Lubac (ibid, 104), asks, “Where would one find, in the facts of history, or only in the thought or imagination of the Greek allegorists, the irruption of some ‘new testament’ analogous to that of the Christians, an irruption which one day would have turned the ancient exegesis of the Homeric poems upside-down by overturning the very being of their exegete? Where would one find…anything even remotely resembling the opposition between the oldness of the letter and the newness of the spirit?”
De Lubac never tires of stressing the unique historical character of Christian allegory as opposed to the allegory used by classical writers, claiming that, “Biblical allegory is…essentially allegoria facti.” not allegory based on the words alone, like other instances of ancient allegory.656 A fundamental difference existed between Christian allegory and pagan allegory, as Christian allegory was always a unification of history in an actual historical event, as opposed to pagan allegory which sought to reconcile fictitious stories and myths with “timeless philosophical truths.”657 The Christian use of allegory was developed from the apostle Paul, who saw his own allegory grounded in real historical events.658 While the allegorical sense is the doctrinal sense, it can never operate apart from the foundation of the historical (literal) sense. Wherever there is spirit, there is also history. For de Lubac, Christian allegory was based in history and saw history as essential, while pagan allegory was often an attempt to escape something embarrassing in history. The spiritual reality cannot be disclosed in Scripture without attention to the literal sense.

656 De Lubac (ibid, 88), is here citing John Scotus Eriigena (In Jo., fr. 3 (PL, CXXII, 344-45), who argues that “mysteries are things that are handed on according to allegory of deed and word….So mysteries are what have both been historically done and literally narrated in both Testaments, whereas symbols are what are said, not done…” See also Henri de Lubac, "Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory," in Theological Fragments (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 165-96 for de Lubac’s most pointed description of the difference between Christian allegory and pagan allegory.


658 De Lubac (“On an Old Distich,” 123), claims that “even if allegory has a certain value, it alone does not provide the doctrine to be believed.” For Paul’s establishment of a distinct Christian practice grounded in history and not in words, see especially Henri de Lubac, "Typology and Allegorization," 129-64 and "Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory," 165-96 in Theological Fragments, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).
Allegory as Movement from Nature to Supernatural: The realm of allegory brings the reader into a qualitatively new dimension. The transition from letter to spirit is the movement from nature to the supernatural. De Lubac insists that in this movement exists an “infinite qualitative difference” exists, which, if diminished, would “make out of the allegorical sense, which is a spiritual sense, a new literal sense; and this would practically negate the interiority of the Christian mystery.” The rule of thumb seems to be that if a secular historian could notice the historical correspondence based on his or her own secular tools, observation could not yield an allegorical reading. Boersma suggests that the movement from letter to spirit can best be described as a sacramental relationship. This means that for de Lubac, “The sacramental character of history implied that it pointed beyond itself not just in a horizontal, historical, but also in a vertical sense. The natural-supernatural relationship should provide the pattern for the relationship between history and spirit.” No method, then, can move the exegete from history to spirit. This movement is made by God, as the reader places herself in the place of submission to receive the mediation of God’s revelation by Scripture.

De Lubac’s emphasis on the entrance into a new dimension of reality with the spiritual sense can be illustrated by showing his dissatisfaction for typology and sensus plenior. Typology could be defined as an instance recorded in Scripture where an earlier historical event in salvation history is recognized to prefigure a later historical event of salvation history. Typology, de Lubac feels, falls short of the radical newness of allegory

659 Medieval Exegesis, II, 98-99. Thus de Lubac (ibid, 108), claims, “Faith is the light ‘that makes one see the light of the spirit in the law of the letter’…we are therefore ‘to be imbued in the faith through allegory.’”

because typology is grounded only in historical correspondence and not in the definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{661} The very uniqueness of Christian allegory is grounded in the radical newness of the Event of Christ giving meaning to all historical events. As a result, typology “does not have a foundation of its own, typology by itself says nothing about the dialectical opposition of the two Testaments nor about the conditions for their union. It does not explain the unique passage from prophecy to Gospel.”\textsuperscript{662} Typology, then, taken on its own, could only diminish understanding of the radical newness of Christ, because typology “lacks the ability to show that the New Testament is something other than a second Old Testament which…would leave us completely within the thread of history.”\textsuperscript{663} Typology without allegory, then, would leave the reader in the realm of nature and consequently without apprehension of the Mystery or personal incorporation into it.\textsuperscript{664}

The movement to a supernatural dimension in the biblical texts forces the reader to relinquish control over the meaning of the text. This insistence is perhaps best seen in de Lubac’s criticism of the sensus plenior. De Lubac resists any attempt use a conception of sensus plenior to “constitute a ‘scientific demonstration of the harmonies of the two

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{661} Notice that for de Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 144), “Scriptural allegory provides a justification for typology, provides a foundation for it and contains it within itself.” Thus de Lubac is not arguing against typological reading; he is only showing that typology falls short of allegory in showing Christian newness. See also Henri de Lubac, ”Typology and Allegorization,” in Theological Fragments (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 129-64.
\item \textsuperscript{662} Ibid. Typology, claims de Lubac (Sources of Revelation, 16), “has the drawback of referring solely to a result, without alluding to the spirit or basic thrust of the process which produces that result.” Hence “it stops the spiritual impulse at the half-way mark” (145).
\item \textsuperscript{663} Ibid, 144.
\item \textsuperscript{664} Typology, claims de Lubac, (ibid, 144-45), “does not express the connection between spiritual understanding and the personal conversion and life of the Christian.”
\end{itemize}
Testaments, as this approach will always attempt to capture knowledge at a natural level and will never advance to the level of faith. De Lubac insists that when reading Scripture, “In order to receive it, it is not enough...to ‘press hard,’ to ‘seek’; it is also necessary to ‘pray,’ to ‘implore.’” This is because the only adequate movement to the spiritual sense is one which takes place “on the level of faith,” which “cannot be something purely technical or purely intellectual,” but is “a gift of this Spirit.”

**Allegory as Conversion to Mystery:** Since the passage to allegory brings passage to a qualitatively new dimension, de Lubac insists that spiritual meaning “stems totally from the Spirit’ inasmuch as it presupposes an entire grasp of the history of salvation as directed toward Jesus.” Yet this qualitatively new dimension is not simply an intellectually apprehended theological presupposition. The reader must not think that the event of Christ in history provided the singular historical clue which would allow the secular historian to now decipher all history without personal faith. De Lubac claims that in Scripture, “To stop at the objective datum of the mystery would be to mutilate it, to

665 Ibid, 150-51. *Sensus plenior* refers to the deeper meaning intended by God to the text written by the human author. This deeper intended meaning comes to light in the reading community only through further revelation (e.g. the Old Testament meaning revealed in Christ), or through a deepening understanding of revelation in the Church (e.g. the progress of doctrine). (see here, for example, Raymond Brown, “The history and development of the theory of a sensus plenior.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 15: 141-62). De Lubac’s concern (*Sources of Revelation*, 151), is that the *sensus plenior* “presupposes a transposition which is impossible or unseemly without ‘newness of spirit.’” Consequently, while the goal of *sensus plenior* was to show the gradual recognition of God’s communication in Scripture, it cannot incorporate the radical newness of Christ without moving from the realm of observation to the realm of faith (ibid, 152).

666 Ibid, 152-53.

667 Ibid, 152.

betray it.”\textsuperscript{669} Since the Christian Mystery cannot be understood without participation, allegory is essentially the process of conversion.\textsuperscript{670} De Lubac shows this desire to read first for conversion rather than mastery of the text as he claims that for the premoderns, “It was an undefined understanding, precisely because it was an approach to the depths of God. It was not a matter merely of a text being explicated, but of mysteries being explored.”\textsuperscript{671} As a result, de Lubac emphasizes that it is not guaranteed that those most knowledgeable, even in Christian theology as an academic discipline, will understand allegory. He claims, “But it is not ordained by God that the most learned will inevitably be the most believing, nor the most spiritual; nor that the century which sees the greatest progress realized in scientific exegesis will, by that fact alone, be the century with the best understanding of Holy Scripture.”\textsuperscript{672} Allegory, then, is more than reading the Scriptures as a unified whole: It is participating personally in the Mystery.

\textit{Allegory as the totus Christus}: The Christian Mystery which is disclosed in allegory is not, properly speaking, the Triune God as divine Persons in themselves. Neither is the Christian Mystery Jesus Christ considered as an individual Person. Rather, the Christian Mystery is the union of the Triune God with human beings. In the movement from letter to spirit, Scripture “always shows forth the Mystery of Christ, indivisible. The same unique mystery is also the mystery of ourselves and our

\textsuperscript{669} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 134.

\textsuperscript{670} De Lubac, \textit{The Sources of Revelation}, 20-21, cited in William F. Jr. Murphy, "Henri De Lubac's Mystical Tropology," \textit{Communio} 27 (2000). 186. De Lubac (\textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 117), writes, “To pass from history to allegory or from the letter to the mystery or from the shadow to the truth, is without a doubt always to pass to spiritual understanding: but it is also, thereby, ‘to be converted to the faith…”’

\textsuperscript{671} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, I, 34.

\textsuperscript{672} De Lubac, \textit{The Sources of Revelation}, 157.
eternity." Thus the Mystery encompasses Christ, Church, and all salvation history. The one Mystery was anticipated in salvation history and revealed in Jesus Christ (past), mediated to the Church by Scripture and sacrament alike (present), and anticipated as the *totus Christus* (future).

As the meaning of history, then, allegory is the disclosure of the Mystery of Christ and the Church. De Lubac emphasizes that Christ’s Incarnation has as its goal the union with Church as body. Consequently, the “whole content of the Bible” is the mystery of Christ and the Church. In the scope of salvation history, then, “This ecclesial body…must thus be said…to be ‘truer’ than the [incarnate body], because it constitutes a more perfect, fuller realization of the divine design.” Emphasizing the *totus Christus* does not in any way depreciate the value of the Incarnation, but instead shows this unique and transformative event in light of its completion. De Lubac shows that at times premodern exegetes understood the object of allegory to be Christ, yet at other times they speak of the object as the Church, and at times they do not distinguish between them. De Lubac likens this difference in approach to the distinction drawn in contemporary

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673 Ibid, 222. Because the Mystery is precisely that union between God and human beings, de Lubac also, in a secondary way, describes the human person as mystery as well. The human being is the one created for, enabled, and called into this relationship as partaker of the Mystery. In this way, de Lubac can, at times, speak of the human being as mystery.

674 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 90. One of de Lubac’s most frequent uses of Mystery is the usage taken from Paul about the relationship of Christ and the Church in Ephesians 5. De Lubac (ibid, 92), claims, “[A]s Saint Paul said, Christ and the Church are just one great mystery; this is the mystery of their union. Now the whole mystery of Scripture, the whole object of *allegoria*, resides in this. This enables one to discover everywhere the ‘deeper mysteries about Christ and his body.’”

675 De Lubac (*History and Spirit*, 412), claims, “The assumption of individual flesh has a unique importance, of course, because it constitutes the point where God inserts himself into our humanity. But it is not an end in itself. Its goal is to allow the assumption of the Church.”
Christology between “Christology from above” and “Christology from below.” For the premoderns, one could consider the *totus Christus* from the perspective of Christ as head, or from the perspective of Church as body, but both must be considered in relation to each other. De Lubac explains that, “The matter of holy Scripture is the whole Christ, head and members,” and because “Christ and the Church are just one great mystery,” one cannot really consider one reality without the other, without risking abstraction. As head of the body, one cannot look to Christ abstractly without also including the Church.

Since the Mystery revealed is the *totus Christus*, the Church is included in the allegorical meaning of Scripture. De Lubac explains that, “For a long time, allegory was taken by theology to mean, and often in the broadest sense, the mysteries of Christ and of the Church as they appeared in Scripture.” As D’Ambrosio claims, “The fact that biblical allegory has the mystery of the Church as part of its very object means that the Church and its tradition must necessarily be a principle of interpretation.” God has both ordained the events recorded in Scripture to disclose the Church as Mystery and has ordained that the Church, by participating in the Mystery, is the only institution that can understand the disclosed Mystery.


677 De Lubac, ibid, 93.

678 Ibid, 92.

679 De Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation*, 12.

Allegory Regulated by the Church: Since the allegorical sense includes the Church and can only be understood by the Church, it follows that allegory can only be regulated within the Church. All allegorical interpretations must be in accord with the understanding of the Church, since the Spirit operates both in the text and in the Church. Hence, “The ‘true’ meaning of the Scriptures, their complete and definitive meaning, can really be nothing other than the meaning ‘which the Spirit gives to the Church.’” The Church, as that institution which participates in the Mystery, is the only one which has an intuition of the Mystery, and this intuition toward which the Church yearns allows the Church to sense which interpretations are legitimately part of its Faith.

For de Lubac, the Church ought to focus more on the illumination of the Mystery through allegory than on the regulation of careless allegorical interpretation. While de Lubac admits that many allegorical interpretations have been inadequate and should be quickly dismissed, he also insists that interpreters “not confuse them with what they

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681 D’Ambrosio, 190, citing de Lubac, The Sources of Revelation, 114.

682 De Lubac believes that the Spirit always resides in the Scriptures to disclose the Mystery to the Church. De Lubac’s whole project of recovering the wealth of traditional insights illustrates his emphasis on doctrinal maximalism (D’Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic, 59, for example, claims that de Lubac’s ultimate goal is “to help Christians enter into sanctifying communion with the divine principle of tradition which is the Holy Spirit.”)

683 De Lubac agrees that there was need for some control on allegory. Wood (Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 49-50), notes several of de Lubac’s criteria for limiting allegory, although none of these appears to have been unanimously followed either by the tradition nor by de Lubac’s own judgment. First, “divine revelation” both in the sense that the New Testament explicitly authorizes a particular allegory and in the sense that there is “unanimous agreement” among the Fathers about such an interpretation (49). Second, the analogy of faith is helpful, because it points to the one, unified meaning of Scripture (50). Third, allegory should, properly speaking, flow only from allegoria facti (allegory of the events of history) and not allegoria verbi (allegory based on a correlation of terminology). This kept the allegory always based in and dependent upon history, rather than being based in the imagination of the commentator (50).
are intended to signify”—the great Allegory of Christ. 684 So long as the interpretation fit within the analogy of faith, it should be appreciated as being a “Christian” reading. The most important thing to remember was that, as D’Ambrosio says, “All successive allegorical interpretations performed by Christian commentators through the centuries are no more than incomplete attempts to trace the lines of this great Allegory of the Scripture performed once and for all by Christ.” 685 No individual allegorical interpretation adds to the Mystery revealed in Christ, but simply seeks to illumine this Event by all of history. 686

This fundamental stress on illumination over regulation is seen in de Lubac’s tacit acceptance of allegoria dicti. De Lubac has argued that allegoria facti is distinctly Christian while allegoria dicti is not, as the Christian understanding of allegory is established on real historical events rather than from relationships drawn between figures in the text. 687 However, in practice de Lubac does not see allegoria dicti as inappropriate, provided that it is grounded on allegoria facti, the Great Transposition of Christ. 688 As D’Ambrosio claims, “So long as allegoria facti is given first place, and the theological principles that establish its validity granted, [de Lubac] regards the use of

684 De Lubac, The Sources of Revelation, 143.
685 D’Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic, 184.
686 De Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 99-100), emphasizes that the early interpreters “no longer sought to ‘actualize’ ancient Scripture; they realized that it had been actualized in Jesus, once for all. Thus they were able to devote their attention to particularizing, in the joyful daring of their faith, the magnificent allegory which Scripture spread before them. They were fully aware that, through this endless activity, they neither prolonged nor completed in any way the total allegorization which had definitely made of Scripture by Christ.”
688 D’Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic 186. As D’Ambrosio (ibid, 193), claims, “Thus, in the ancient exegetical tradition, the various allegoriae dicti are ordinarily pressed into the service of the one great Allegoria facti by means of the analogy of faith.”
verbal allegory as a matter of indifference.” Allegoria dicti may be fanciful, imaginative, and in fact mistaken interpretation, but it is not harmful to Christian faith so long as it directs the imagination toward the great Act of Christ. As long as the Mystery is being contemplated, the maximum range of interpretations should be allowed.

Allegory Continued in Preaching: De Lubac sees the role of the apostles and their successors as that of expositing the Scriptures, the Old Testament in light of the New. The chief duty of preaching does not concern “some ‘oratorical genre’ or some sort of ‘moral teaching,’” but to “proclaim the whole Christian faith as revealed in Scripture.” This means that all “Christian preaching is an exegesis, and indeed an ‘allegorical’ exegesis.” What is important to note is that all successive Christian expositors, even up to the present time, are called to this task. De Lubac emphasizes that, “This was true of the first Christian preaching, that of the apostles; this is equally true of the preaching of those who succeed them in the Church: the Fathers, the Doctors, and our

689 Williams, Receiving the Bible in Faith, 171.

690 It is somewhat unclear why de Lubac locates the discussion of “apostolic preaching” under the sense of anagogy (See Medieval Exegesis, II, 216-26), as it would seem that this topic should have been placed under the section on allegory. The emphasis here seems to be that the apostles and their successors were entrusted with the task of proclaiming, for each age and context, the whole mystery of the faith, and this included the fourfold meaning of Scripture.


692 Ibid, 222.

693 Hence de Lubac (ibid, 219), claims that the apostles and their successors “draw the fire, that is to say, the light of the faith, from the pits where the patriarchs and the prophets had hidden it, that is, from the deep obscurity of the Scriptures,” which, “thanks to the ‘inspiration of the Holy Spirit,’ [makes known] its content in their ‘expositions.’” The emphasis here is on the succession of the task of exposition as the apostles initiated it. De Lubac claims that the “great miracle of Pentecost” in which “the disciples there were filled with the Spirit; they themselves became like a book written within and decorated without,” and hence “the miracle is being perpetuated from generation to generation” as those entrusted with preaching continues “always in unfolding the Scripture, as Jesus did, by relating it all to Jesus” (ibid).
Successors to the Apostles, though they have not witnessed the historical event of Christ (and hence could not write Scripture), are still entrusted with the same task of allegory. De Lubac feels that the first successors of the Apostles must have understood themselves to have been entrusted with the role of carrying on the allegory of the apostles because,

Up until the end of the second century, the writings later referred to as the New Testament were considered not as ‘Scripture,’ but as the spiritual or allegorical interpretation of Scripture. The apostles and evangelists were then considered exegetes. Hence, the apostolic writings, in their literal sense, are already *allegoria*.

Thus de Lubac suggests a fundamental continuity in interpretive method between the apostles and their successors, for interpretation is the reading of the whole Scriptures as a unity in light of Christ. Significantly, for de Lubac, the closure of the canon does not mean that the allegorical method of the New Testament authors was unique to their age. Rather, the New Testament provides the foundation for continuing allegorical interpretation of Scripture. It is the role of successors to go beyond the Apostles in tracing lines of allegory between Old and New, as successors reproduce the same spiritual movement of the first Apostles. Since de Lubac’s focus is not on the text itself but on the event behind the text, de Lubac argues that all generations of successors have qualitatively the same access to Christ as the first apostles. Yet it must be asked whether the access of the first Apostles to the historical Christ and the access of their immediate

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694 Ibid, 218.

695 D’Ambrosio, *Traditional Hermeneutic*, 194. De Lubac (*Medieval Exegesis*, 216-23), shows this awareness on the part of the successors to the apostles, who typically write literal expositions on the works of the apostles, not allegorical commentaries on the apostolic writings.
successors to the oral tradition witnessing to that Christ is the same as the access of later successors to canonical, textual witness to Christ. If the mediation of Christ is significantly different between these three modes, we will have reason to ask whether allegory can really be performed today exactly like it did for the first Apostles. Here the relationship of text and event will be quite significant.

Conclusion: Allegory is the Mystery of Christ contained in the letter of history. While allegory is the meaning of history and the completion of the letter, it belongs to the realm of faith and therefore cannot be discerned through history alone. The only reality able to discern this Mystery is the Church, which is constituted by the Mystery and participates in the Mystery. The fourfold structure of apprehending the Christian Mystery stresses that because the unified Mystery can never be fully comprehended, there will always be “an incurable character of non-fulfillment which marks all spiritual understanding…there will always be new aspects of doctrine to bring to light and new applications of it to be adduced” as the Scriptures are studied.\textsuperscript{696} It is the role of the successors of the Apostles to continue allegory in the Church by continually tracing the lines of Old Testament history to the Event of Christ.

De Lubac’s understanding of allegory yields several significant insights for this study. First, de Lubac’s understanding of the infinite qualitative difference between letter and spirit goes beyond the relationship between text and spiritual reality portrayed by Tracy, Frei, and Vanhoozer. While all see allegory as the meaning of history, and all have some sense of the movement from letter to spirit, only de Lubac stresses the qualitative difference from the realm of nature to that of the supernatural. De Lubac’s

\textsuperscript{696} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, I, 29.
articulation of allegory will go beyond Frei’s emphasis on figural readings which extend the literal sense to the whole Scriptures. It will go beyond Vanhoozer’s emphasis on a canonical sense in which the right theological presuppositions will allow God to be heard in the literal sense. And it will go beyond Tracy’s emphasis that the subject matter of the text presses the reader to a limit-experience. None of these articulations of the relationship between text and spiritual reality, de Lubac feels, really gets at the radical newness of Christian allegory.

Second, de Lubac’s position that the successors of the apostles ought to carry out the same interpretive strategy as did the original apostles will place him in a unique position among these four theologians, for it causes him to de-emphasize the significance of the completed canon for ongoing interpretation. It must be asked whether subsequent allegorists really have the same role in extending allegory in the same way after the New Testament canon is formed as those who practiced allegory before it. The key question will be, ‘What difference, if any, does the existence of a closed New Testament canon impose on subsequent allegorical interpretation?’ It would seem that while the first apostles interpreted in light of their experience, subsequent apostles interpret in light of the closed canon. Here the closure of the New Testament writings may have a more significant impact than de Lubac has stressed.

Third, while Tracy, Frei, and Vanhoozer understand the literal sense more in terms of the plain meaning of the text, de Lubac’s treatment of the literal sense is almost functional, as it focuses mainly on the way events render spiritual realities. As a result, de Lubac spends very little time explaining how the New Testament text, as literal sense, renders the event of Christ. Here de Lubac largely ignores the question that concerned
Frei so greatly: ‘How is it that just this text provides disclosure and regulation of individual interpretation of the Event of Christ?’ This relationship between text and event which is given so much attention by Frei, Tracy, and Vanhoozer receives very little focus by de Lubac.

3. Tropological Sense

**Relationship between Church and Individual:** As has been shown above, tropology is not so much an additional sense of Scripture as it is one intrinsic aspect of the unified spiritual sense. Hence tropology does not move beyond allegory, but gives allegory specification in the individual. Tropology refers to the “daily” advent of Christ into the soul of the individual believer as the Mystery is continually being interiorized, and hence illumines the intrinsic relationship between the Church and the individual believer.697 Just as believers could not come to faith without the Church, so the Church could not exist without individuals.698 On the one hand, “if the soul can effectively be united to the Word of God, this is because the Church is united to Christ.” Yet on the other hand, the individual soul is the “microcosm of the perfect Church.”699 The meaning of Scripture, then, must be accomplished in both the Church and in the individual soul.

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697 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 138. De Lubac (ibid), insists that “in this Christian soul, it is each day, it is today, that the mystery, by being interiorized, is accomplished…Moraliter, intrinsecus and quotidie are three adverbs that go together.”

698 De Lubac (ibid, citing Ambrose, *De myst.*, c. vii, n. 39 (SC, 25, 120)), claims, “The tropological sense presupposes, or rather, expresses the mystery: for if the souls are Christian only within the Church, the reverse holds: ‘it is within the souls that the Church is beautiful.’”

699 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 136, noting Cassiodorus, *In Ex.*, h. 9, n. 3-4 and Origen, *In Gen.*, h. 10, nt. 5, respectively.
Hence, says de Lubac, “everything in Scripture that is susceptible of being allegorized also can and ought to be moralized.”

Just as history intrinsically points to the Mystery in the Church, so history intrinsically points to the Mystery interiorized in the individual. De Lubac explains the same relationship between tropology and history as he has shown to exist between allegory and history. Hence he writes, “All that Scripture recounts has indeed happened in history, but the account that is given does not contain the whole purpose of Scripture in itself. This purpose still needs to be accomplished and is actually accomplished in us each day, by the mystery of this spiritual understanding. Only then…will Scripture bear us its fruit in its fullness.”

The very plan of God in salvation history which is seen in the unity of the Testaments takes place for the purpose of the transformation of the individual soul.

_Tropology and Morality:_ While tropology is often referred to as the moral sense of Scripture, this does not mean that it refers to Scripture’s moral instructions. In fact, passages of moral instruction do not have a privileged place in tropology at all. As we

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700 De Lubac, _Medieval Exegesis_, II, 134. As specification of allegory, tropology produces charity. De Lubac (ibid, 141), shows this intrinsic relationship as he claims, “It is in charity that tropology shows itself to allegory in interior perfection: for the perfection of the Law is charity and it is at the same time the Christ.” Christ’s fulfillment of the old economy (the Law) produces a new economy externally (the Church) and transforms the individual internally (charity). Because the interiorization of Christ is the life of charity, believers participate in this new economy in the Church.

701 Ibid, I, 227. See also de Lubac’s claim (ibid, II, 138), “Now everything that came about for the first time in history had no other end than that. All that is accomplished in the Church herself had no other end. Everything is consummated in the inner man. This ought to be said of all the external facts related in the books of the two Testaments; it ought equally to be said of the Mystery of the Christ. History, allegory, tropology, draw an unbroken line from the unique redemptive action…”

702 Lewis Ayres (“The Soul and the Reading of Scripture: A Note on Henri De Lubac,” _Scottish Journal of Theology_ 61, no. 2 (2008), 176), claims, “The unity of the testaments is grasped not merely by seeing Christ present through both, but by seeing how both point to and describe the mystery of the soul’s restoration effected in Christ.”
have seen, de Lubac has already classified these under the literal sense and has shown that the Holy Spirit has ordered history in such a way that the responsive reader can understand and incorporate moral lessons from the text.\footnote{De Lubac has claimed that the letter, as history, was a source of moral edification. This kind of moral edification must be distinguished from tropology (as we will see), because it does not require conversion to understand. De Lubac (\textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 70), claims that all “[h]istory was...a moral science, which was studied with a view to improving morals...Indeed, whether it were a question of good acts or bad, the history that reports them always draws a salutary lesson from them, teaching people to imitate the good acts and to avoid the rest...What is true of every history is still more true of sacred history.” Scripture, having been shaped by the Holy Spirit, was useful in teaching moral lessons because it provided such lessons, not just from the perspective of a human historian, but from the perspective of the God who grounded all morality. While de Lubac (ibid), claims that “the very report that [the Bible] makes concerning the worst crimes there results for our use a ‘warning to turn to a better life,’” it does so in a qualitatively and quantitatively greater way than other texts, because the Holy Spirit stands uniquely behind those examples which have become part of Scripture.} Tropology is qualitatively different from moral instruction, as it refers to the interiorization of the Christian Mystery.\footnote{Ibid, 141. As interiorization, de Lubac (ibid), can claim that “whatever page I meditate upon, I find in it a means that God offers me, right now, to restore the divine image within me.” It is the Mystery interiorized which transforms the reader, not the moral instruction of the text.} It is this essential distinction between moral instruction as part of the literal sense and the interiorization of the Mystery as the tropological sense which occasions de Lubac’s preference of the fourfold sense of Scripture over the often used threefold sense in the history of interpretation. Really, it is not the number of senses which are important to de Lubac, but the order in which they are developed. In the threefold schema, the order of the senses is history, tropology, allegory, while in the “classic” fourfold schema, the order of the senses is history, allegory, tropology, anagogy. It is the place of tropology in the order which determines how the whole schema is to be understood. As de Lubac puts it, “Depending on its position, it yields either a natural anatomy and physiology of the soul and its virtues (the first formula) or a Christological spirituality
and asceticism (the ‘classic’ formula).”

If tropology is placed before allegory, the result is that the text in its literal (and hence natural) sense supplies the moral sense as general natural lessons for morality. If tropology is placed after allegory, tropology is understood as an interiorization of the Mystery which allegory discloses. Since Christ is the real basis for Christian morality, not nature, de Lubac claims that “only the second of the two orders, the one that puts allegory right after history, expresses authentic doctrine in both its fullness and its purity. It alone gives an adequate rendition of the Christian mystery.” Ultimately, in de Lubac’s understanding, tropology would simply be natural moral instruction without allegory, and allegory has not been grasped without the interiorization of the Mystery in tropology. Christian moral action, then, is not developed by simply following the example of Christ, but rather is an interiorization of the Mystery of Christ.

De Lubac believes it has always been a temptation for both preachers and theologians to lose the intrinsic relationship between allegory and tropology, since the


706 Lubac recognizes that both threefold and fourfold schemas are represented in Christian tradition, yet he finds the fourfold schema to be a far superior articulation of the relationship of the senses. Both orders, claims de Lubac (*Medieval Exegesis*, I, 142-43), go back to Origen, who applied his understanding of the threefold constitution of the human being (body, soul and spirit) to Scripture as well (“corporeal sense for history, psychical sense for morality, and spiritual sense for allegory (or anagogy”). The threefold articulation was accepted (and even preferred) by many early exegetes because it emphasized the progress of moral development toward the depth of the Christian Mystery. D’Ambrosio (*Traditional Hermeneutic*, 113), notes that this threefold articulation “was also generally more attractive to contemplatives in that it expresses the degrees of the ascent of the soul and corresponds to the dynamism of the spiritual life.” However, de Lubac emphasizes the superiority of the fourfold sense, because it rightly places tropology as an inevitable interiorization of allegory. De Lubac (*Medieval Exegesis*, I, 105), feels that this significant difference has been overlooked by many historians, resulting in a significant depreciation of the uniqueness of the nature of Christian of tropology.

707 Murphy (*Henri de Lubac’s Mystical Tropology*, 184), claims that it is the interiorization of revelation which reformulates the Christian imagination and desire toward moral action which participates in grace.
tasks of both preaching and dogmatic theology are simplified when one is not required to trace the intrinsic connection between Mystery and action. De Lubac chronicles the reduction of tropology in the Middle Ages, a reduction which he feels was inevitable as soon as allegory and tropology were split. The split began when the disciplines of dogmatic theology and preaching became separated, with allegory becoming more associated with the academy and tropology becoming more associated with preaching. Consequently, allegory “became more theoretical, more impersonal, in a certain way drier,” and ultimately became the “object of theological speculation,” while tropology became “more practical, looking more to regulate external activity than to nourish the interior life,” and ultimately became the primary subject matter for preaching. Yet however natural such a separation was, de Lubac insists it had a tragic effect on Scriptural interpretation for several reasons. First, as moral instruction lost its intrinsic relationship to allegory, it became a product of nature rather than the supernatural. Hence to emphasize morals to a congregation of believers without showing its intrinsic relationship to doctrine inevitably depreciates the reality of the Christian life. Second, the intrinsic connection of individual to Church was likewise lost, with the result that moral action lost contact with the anagogical hope of the union of individuals in the Church with Christ as head. Third, preaching lost touch with its fundamental task, the

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708 In Medieval preaching, de Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, I, 12), notes that tropology was naturally given misbalanced attention over allegory, since, “It may, indeed, be possible for an overly profound ‘allegoria’ to engender error or confusion in unsubtle minds that are incapable of following the preacher, whereas solid moral instruction is accessible to all and useful to all.” Likewise, the dogmatic intricacies of allegory in an academic setting often did not press on to interiorization. De Lubac (ibid, II, 209), realizes that the genre of preaching lends itself to tropology, while the genre of commentary lends itself to allegory.

709 Ibid, II, 176.
explanation of the whole Mystery of Christ in the unified Scriptures. Hence the
disassociation between allegory and tropology was devastating for both senses.

The Process of Interiorization: It is specifically through the tropological sense of
Scripture that Christ reveals the reader to him/herself. Lewis Ayres has shown that
tropology depends on a doctrine of the soul as a spiritual meeting place between God and
human beings, where the Mystery may take effect and elicit the return response.710 The
human being, for de Lubac, has already been created with the imprint of the Logos
within, a place that could theologically be called the soul. Thus when the Mystery is
interiorized in the soul, the Logos reveals the human being to him/herself. Consequently,
de Lubac claims that, “By taking possession of man, by seizing hold of him and by
penetrating to the very depths of his being Christ makes man go down deep within
himself, there to discover in a flash regions hitherto unsuspected. It is through Christ that
the person…becomes conscious of his own being.”711

This anthropology which affirms the inscription of the Logos on the soul has
immediate implications for the tropological reading of Scripture. De Lubac sees,
following Origen, a reciprocal effect between Logos inscribed in the soul and Logos
inscribed in Scripture. De Lubac writes,

What I draw from myself with respect to the Bible, provided that it is really, in
fact, from the depths of myself, I draw from the Bible also; since Scripture and

710 Ayres (“The Soul and the Reading of Scripture,” 176), claims, “For De Lubac it is the
existence of an inner spiritual core to the human person that is both the source of moral action and the
location of Christ’s restoring grace which draws together the various senses of Scripture.” Although the
soul is never defined by de Lubac, his discussion of the soul “enables De Lubac’s account of Christ’s
restorative action and it provides a site for exploring the mystery of human action and the presence of
Christ and Spirit” (ibid).

711 De Lubac, Catholicism, 338-39.
the soul have the same structure, or rather the same ‘inspiration’; since one and the same divine breath gives birth to them and never ceases to animate them…it is thus the sign that normally reveals my soul to me; but the converse also has its truth.712

This insight shows the importance, for de Lubac, of reading the Bible’s salvation history as one’s own interior history. The narrative construction of the individual is one which yearns toward the Logos. Consequently, when Scripture is read, there is a certain awareness of identity between the narrative of salvation history and the individual’s own narrative identity. The narrative structure of the Bible reflects the narrative structure of the individual. Consequently, de Lubac speaks of Scripture as a mirror, in which the individual reader reads his/her own history in the narration of history in Scripture. De Lubac claims,

In this mirror we learn to know our nature and our destiny; in it we also see the different stages through which we have passed since creation, the beautiful and the ugly features of our internal face. It shows us the truth of our being by pointing it out in its relation to the Creator. It is a living mirror, a living and efficacious Word, a sword penetrating at the juncture of soul and spirit, which makes our secret thoughts appear and reveals to us our heart. It teaches us to read in the book of experience, and makes us, so to speak, our own exegesis.713

Scripture can be described as a mirror because the Logos is already inscribed in the interior realm of the human being. The claim that the Logos is written on the soul of every person legitimates the interiorization of the Logos in Scripture. De Lubac suggests that interiorization takes effect through a double movement of, on the one hand, sustained contemplative reflection on the relationship between history and allegory, and on the

712 De Lubac, History and Spirit, 398.
713 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, II, 142.
other hand, repentance and conversion.\textsuperscript{714} As this takes place, “Interior experience and meditation on Scripture accordingly tend to merge in a unique ‘experience of the Word,’” in which each deepens and furthers the other.\textsuperscript{715}

\textit{Conclusion:} Tropology is an inevitable aspect of the spiritual meaning of Scripture as it is the personal interiorization of the Mystery. What is useful about de Lubac’s model is his recovery of an integrated life of discipleship through which the Scriptures (history and meaning) are interiorized or assimilated to the reader as the reader is converted to the Mystery they reveal. The Christian moral life, for de Lubac, is not based primarily in a set of biblical or traditional rules, or in a following of the moral example of Christ. Instead, spiritual reorientation takes place as Christ is present to the reader as the reader reads his/her own history in light of God’s action in history culminating in Christ.\textsuperscript{716} It would be interesting to speculate about de Lubac’s response to the debate between the narrative theologies of Tracy and Frei. De Lubac would likely agree with the narrative construction of the individual, yet would add an important addendum: the human being is so structured as the Logos is inscribed on the individual soul. This would provide a theological description which is much more akin to Tracy’s understanding of human beings than Frei’s and would provide a valuable ontology to supplement the postliberal descriptions of the role of narrative. Yet, on the other hand, de

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\textsuperscript{714} De Lubac (\textit{History and Spirit}, 421), claims that “the essential work of the Christian will be meditation on Scripture, in order to achieve an understanding of it. But, on the other hand, since this understanding of Scripture is identically the act of listening to what the Word makes heard interiorly, it necessarily presupposes purification of the soul.”
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\textsuperscript{715} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 142. De Lubac (ibid, 174), claims, “When the Word comes to the soul, it is to instruct her in wisdom, and this understanding of the soul with the Word” is not “imaginary;” rather, “the mystery interiorizes itself within the heart, where it becomes experience.”
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\textsuperscript{716} Ibid, 140-41.
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Lubac would almost certainly side with Frei in his insistence to read one’s own experience in light of Scripture rather than to read Scripture with correlation to one’s own experience. The incorporation of the Logos in Scripture stands logically and ontologically prior to the inscription of the Logos on the individual soul, and it is the soul which is incorporated into the Mystery through Scripture. Furthermore, the means by which the Logos incorporated in Scripture meets with the Logos-inscribed soul is the ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Here it will be de Lubac’s account of God’s use of Scripture which gives his understanding of tropology theological density.

4. Anagogical Sense

*The Union of the Senses:* The sense of anagogy anticipates the union of the four senses of Scripture in the eschatological return of Christ. De Lubac claims, “The doctrine of the four meanings of Scripture (history, allegory, tropology, anagoge) is fulfilled and finds its unity in traditional eschatology. For Christianity it is a fulfillment, yet it is, in this very fulfillment, also an expectation…real anagogy is, therefore, always eschatological. It stirs up in us the desire for eternity.”\(^{717}\) The movement from allegory to anagogy is not a further passage to a greater reality, since the Church and individual

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\(^{717}\) De Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation*, 217. As the unity of the threefold spiritual sense of Scripture can thus best be seen in the anagogical sense, it is only fitting that de Lubac devotes over half of his chapter on anagogy in *Medieval Exegesis* II to the unity of the senses (See “Anagogy and Eschatology” in *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 179-226, where de Lubac devotes 17 pages to anagogy and 29 pages to the unity of the spiritual senses).
already participate in the Mystery.\textsuperscript{718} Yet the fourfold Christian apprehension of reality can only be seen as unified as it is directed toward anagogy.

Anagogy unifies the spiritual senses of Scripture by “achieving a synthesis” between allegory and tropology which “is neither ‘objective’ like the first nor ‘subjective’ like the second.”\textsuperscript{719} Consequently, both allegory and tropology are “contained within anagogy, as the first and the second coming of Christ are included within the last.”\textsuperscript{720} Anagogy contains the eschatological hope of the “objective” content of allegory, the union of the \textit{totus Christus}. Although “the whole mystery of salvation had undoubtedly been revealed,” it will “not fully be grasped” until the end of time.\textsuperscript{721} God’s revelation is presently accessible only to faith, whereas at the end of time it will be accessible to “another sort of knowledge” (the “face to face” of 1 Cor. 13 rather than the “mirror”). Thus allegory, although it is the full revelation of the Mystery, can only be described as an “image” and a “promise” of what is to come.\textsuperscript{722} Further, anagogy contains the more specified hope of the “subjective” sense of tropology as the individual is fully incorporated into the \textit{totus Christus}. Tropology is inherently ordered toward anagogy,

\textsuperscript{718} De Lubac (Ibid, 183), emphasizes that with the understanding of allegory, the believer now has “the very reality of salvation which henceforth is inserted in history and immediately offered to us…he has already, albeit still secretly, penetrated into the kingdom.”

\textsuperscript{719} Ibid, 187

\textsuperscript{720} Ibid, 186. Because anagogy is the final union of the allegorical and tropological senses, it is natural that two strands of anagogy are discerned within the Christian tradition: Doctrinal anagogy as the theological study of eschatology which focuses on the fulfillment of allegory as all things are summed up in Christ, and interior anagogy as the hope for full interiorization of the Mystery which focuses on the fulfillment of tropology as the individual soul is united both to Christ as Head and Church as Body (see ibid, 181-82). Since anagogy remains eschatological hope at the present time, doctrinal and interior anagogy can be distinguished.

\textsuperscript{721} Ibid, 182.

\textsuperscript{722} Ibid, 182.
since “it is in each of the members of his mystical body that Christ, at the end of time, completes the work of the Father.”\textsuperscript{723} Furthermore, anagogy unifies the literal sense with the spiritual senses, as Christ returns in glory within history to unify all history within Himself.

The Scriptural sense of anagogy must be distinguished from what de Lubac calls total anagogy. Scriptural anagogy is the hope for the final union in Christ, while total anagogy is its actual arrival in history. Total anagogy will occur when faith becomes sight, the moment of union of doctrinal and interior anagogy when the \textit{totus Christus} is complete. This “fully concrete anagogy,” or “total anagogy” is “reserved for the ‘fatherland,’” because “Mystical contemplation is not yet vision.”\textsuperscript{724} Thus while anagogy as an exegetical practice is the sense which yearns for completed anagogy, the time when Scripture is “merged with the great Book of Life,” and hence will reveal “its final secrets,” total anagogy is the moment this takes place.\textsuperscript{725} At this final realization of anagogy, sacramental signs from the current divine economy will no longer be needed for mediation of the Mystery, and hence at the final union of the senses the whole of Scripture will give way to the unmediated presence of the Mystery.\textsuperscript{726}

\textit{Immanentism and the Breakdown of Anagogy}: Throughout his career, de Lubac was continually concerned about the encroachment of immanentism, the loss of the

\textsuperscript{723} Ibid, 186-187. As de Lubac (\textit{The Sources of Revelation}, 218), says, “this spiritual life must then open out into the sun of the kingdom, at the end of time, which is the object of anagoge—for what we now realize in Christ through deliberate acts of will is exactly what will one day, after it has been freed of all obstacles and all obscurity, be the essence of eternal life.”

\textsuperscript{724} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 192.

\textsuperscript{725} Ibid, I, 85-86.

\textsuperscript{726} Following Augustine, de Lubac (ibid, II, 189) emphasizes that “The just and the saints…would enjoy the Word of God ‘without reading, without letters.’”
dimension of eschatological hope as Christian faith is reduced to historical progress. De Lubac suggests that this tendency arose during the Middle Ages, as theology became a product of the monastery. De Lubac highlights a correspondence between the rise of monasticism and the decrease in eschatology, as a misbalance emerged which tilted attention toward the "interior life" and away from "the end of history."”727 Hence, “As spiritual individualism gained ground, the great dogmatic vision became blurred,” as “morality and spirituality, though still referred to as tropology and anagogy, split in two, and this was at the expense of eschatology.”728 De Lubac agrees with Congar that “lack of the eschatological sense…represents the most crucial defect arising from scholasticism.”729 Without a firm sense of Christ’s eschatological Advent in history, anagogy “tends to become, on the one hand, a process of natural mysticism, and, on the other, a chapter of natural theology.”730 This reduction of Christian faith, de Lubac argues, is the chief danger of the Church today, as it tends to eliminate the Mystery in the Christian vision of reality and reduce Christian faith to an expression of human progress. In the section on ecclesiology I will show how de Lubac’s insistence on the anagogical sense of Scripture matched his insistence on the Church’s eschatological dimension. The integral unity of the Christian vision of reality constitutes the fourfold understanding of both Scripture and Church.

727 De Lubac, The Sources of Revelation, 52-53.
728 Ibid, 53-54.
730 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, II, 195.
Conclusion: Since anagogy is, for de Lubac, the dimension in which all the senses of Scripture are united, analysis of anagogy shows the relationship of all the spiritual senses. This examination of the different senses of Scripture highlights certain key points for de Lubac’s understanding of Scripture and all of Christian reality. First, there is an intrinsic relationship between letter and spirit, so that Christian faith cannot be adequately expressed without both. The believer cannot access the Mystery without the letter, and the letter is incomplete without the spiritual senses. Second, the three spiritual senses of Scripture are not so much different ways to read the text as they are mutually complementary aspects of being brought into contact with the one unified Mystery of Scripture: the union between God and human beings in Christ. None of these senses of Scripture could be removed from the Christian understanding of reality without the collapse of the integral Christian vision. It is impossible to practice one of the spiritual senses in isolation from the others, just as it is impossible to practice faith, hope or love in isolation from the others or to understand the Mystery of Christ without one of His three advents. There will, then, be a reciprocal deepening in all the spiritual senses when any one of them is rightly engaged. Third, the senses of Scripture are dimensions of an integral understanding of Christian reality, which cannot be understood in isolation from the divine economy. It is only as readers understand the place of Scripture in the economy that they will understand the way in which the spiritual senses are related to one another.

C. Scripture’s Role in the Economy
Since the letter of Scripture discloses the spiritual sense, and since the spiritual sense is inaccessible without the work of the Spirit, the very distinction between letter and spirit shows that God must use the Scriptures in a unique way for communication. While Tracy and Frei use literary theory and philosophical reflection to articulate the causal relationship between text and content rendered, de Lubac wishes to place the discussion of how the letter discloses the spirit within the broader discussion of God’s ongoing use of Scripture in the divine economy. In this section, I will show how de Lubac understands the spiritual sense of Scripture to be, in many ways, equivalent to God’s communicative action. I will suggest that while de Lubac’s articulation of the relationship helpfully shows the way in which Scriptural reading discloses spiritual reality, his project also presents a fundamental ambiguity about the way in which the literal sense of Scripture participates in God’s communicative action. The ambiguity will be illumined in this section so that in the final chapter I will be able to suggest that the projects of Tracy, Frei and Vanhoozer provide just the resources to advance de Lubac’s project.

1. God’s Use of Scripture

For de Lubac, the text possesses a quasi-sacramental character and a communicative character as it is used by God to mediate the Mystery. Theological categories of presence, inspiration, authorship, and speaking all take priority over literary theory in describing God’s use of the Scriptural text. This section will describe the communicative character of the texts of Scripture under the central category of inspiration. De Lubac continually emphasizes God’s presence in and communication
through the texts as being the spiritual sense of Scripture. Since the spiritual sense of Scripture is God’s communication through the texts, the category of ongoing inspiration dominates de Lubac’s work. At the same time, de Lubac is somewhat ambiguous about the way in which the literal sense of the text participates in God’s communicative action. This section will explore the way in which de Lubac articulates God’s communication to readers through both the spiritual sense and the literal sense.

**Inspiration in the Spiritual Sense:** To speak of inspiration in the spiritual sense, of course, is to speak tautologically, since de Lubac insists that the spiritual sense is inaccessible without the action of the Spirit in the reader. The whole recovery of spiritual exegesis has as one of its goals the explanation of the Spirit’s role in the entire process of Scriptural mediation, from the inspiration of original authors to the inspiration of texts to the inspiration of readers. Yet when de Lubac speaks of inspiration, his focus is usually on the ongoing aspect of inspiration, in which the Spirit continues to mediate the Mystery to the believer by means of the spiritual sense of Scripture. This spiritual mediation is perhaps the defining characteristic of de Lubac’s whole hermeneutical project, as the very distinction of “letter” and “spirit” emphasizes the Spirit’s involvement in the text beyond the letter. In a summary statement, de Lubac emphasizes,

> It is not only the sacred writers who were inspired one fine day. The sacred books themselves are and remain inspired. It can and must be said of them, with especially good reason, what Saint Augustine said of all the beings of creation: ‘God did not create them and then depart from the scene. They come from him and exist in him.’

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731 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I, 81. Significant also is de Lubac’s discussion of Origen’s understanding of inspiration. De Lubac (*History and Spirit*, 300-301, translated and cited in D’Ambrosio, *Traditional Hermeneutic*, 146), claims that Origen “focused upon the objective inspiration of the Book itself,” yet de Lubac’s emphasis is that “That does not only mean that its origin is supernatural….It
While not denying inspiration of the original texts, de Lubac’s emphasis here is clearly on the Spirit’s continual action within the texts rather than the providential ordering of the original documents. De Lubac is concerned that theories of inspiration are often developed for apologetic reasons to safeguard God’s past action in the text. Furthermore, de Lubac continually worries that believers will see the inspired Scriptures simply as a warehouse of dogmatic propositions which need only to be mined and applied in the Church. Both tendencies, De Lubac thinks, ignore the intrinsic unity between letter and spirit and tend toward extrinsicism. To avoid this error, de Lubac emphasizes the passage to the spiritual sense as the moment when the communicative action of God takes place. This communication is best described as spiritual communion, and hence is grounded in, but does not take place in, the literal sense.

This kind of ongoing inspiration is better described as presence than as providential action. De Lubac does not really distinguish between the continued inspiration of the Holy Spirit and Scripture as an incorporation of the Logos. In fact, there is such a close connection between the two that ongoing inspiration can only be understood in light of de Lubac’s understanding of the incorporation of the Logos in

signifies moreover and above all, as we have seen, that this Spirit dwells in it.” De Lubac, then, shifts emphasis away from Origin’s focus on inspiration of the text and onto the ongoing aspect of inspiration.

732 See, for example, de Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 62-63), is dissatisfied that in contemporary “treatises on hermeneutics…there is much more discussion about the inspiration of the sacred writers than about the inspiration of Scripture.”

733 Ibid, 225-26. De Lubac sees this problem in Protestant theology, in which only the literal sense is accepted and the ongoing speaking action is the application of certain dogmatic truths in the text to the contemporary Church. He also sees this problem in Catholic neo-Thomism, as many theologians suggested that the Church could continually find hidden dogmatic truths in Scripture which the Spirit originally placed in the text to be found by the Church at the proper time.
Scripture. In *History and Spirit*, de Lubac claims, “In his Scripture as in his earthly life, Origen thought, the Logos needs a body; the historical meaning and the spiritual meaning are, between them, like the flesh and the divinity of the Logos.” Just as the Spirit prepared a physical body for the Logos so that God’s revelation could take place, so the Spirit prepares a literary body for the Logos so that God’s revelation could become effective in the Church. The Spirit is the active agent in both, and the Spirit uses the physical and literary bodies to manifest the Mystery which transcends them both. Scripture, then, is characterized by the continual presence of God, just as was the humanity of Christ. De Lubac emphatically claims,

> Within the Scripture, God resides; by the Scripture, God makes himself known; the mystery of the Scripture is the very mystery of the Kingdom of God…Thus Scripture is not merely divinely guaranteed. It is divinely true. The Spirit did not merely dictate it. The Spirit immured himself in it, as it were. He lives in it. His breath has always animated it. Scripture is ‘fertilized by a miracle of the Holy Spirit.’

Since Christ and the Spirit of Christ are continually present in Scripture, communication to the believer is always available through the movement from letter to the spirit of Scripture.

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734 It is significant that for de Lubac, the Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ. Wherever Christ is incorporated, the Spirit is always present mediating the Mystery. Distinguishing between aspects of the Spirit’s work as, on the one hand, the incorporation of the Logos, and on the other hand, continual inspiration of the text to the reader was not much of a priority for de Lubac, as his program sought to see these as the same mediation of the Mystery.

735 De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 104. Boersma (*Nouvelle Theologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 161-62), suggests a close link between “Incarnation and the inspiration of Scripture” and claims that “the medieval mindset had realized that at the divine level much more was at stake than just a comparison [between text and human flesh],” since ultimately Christ is the Object of both, and both are used by the Spirit to reveal Christ.

It is within this discussion of the ongoing inspiration of the Spirit that de Lubac’s comments about God’s speaking action in the text ought to be located. De Lubac insists that “the Word of God…speaks to us still” in Scripture, “reaching the depth of our souls as the limits of the universe.”\footnote{De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 81.} A primary purpose of Scripture is to mediate God’s communication to human beings, yet de Lubac does not emphasize the role of God’s speaking in the literal sense. On the contrary, De Lubac claims that Scripture “is not a document handed over to the historian or thinker, even to the believing historian or thinker. It is a word, which is to say, the start of a dialogue. It is addressed to someone from whom it awaits a response…a return movement.”\footnote{De Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 346-47.} Speaking here is attributed to the spiritual sense of Scripture, as de Lubac emphasizes that while the historian may see a document, the purpose of Scripture is only fulfilled as the believer hears God’s voice.\footnote{Due to the action of the Spirit in the text, de Lubac (\textit{The Sources of Revelation}, 223), claims, “An old text can, by means of allegory, always make further aspects of the newness apparent; the new mystery can always be further interiorized and can always introduce eternity still more deeply into the heart.”} This speaking is inaccessible at the level of the letter. Primarily in de Lubac’s work, the literal sense points to events, which, when contemplated in light of Christ, open the reader to the speaking action of God.

Normally, then, God’s speaking action in the text is identified with the Spirit’s ongoing inspiration of the text and reader. The speaking that takes place in Scripture is a twofold action: It is a disclosure of the Mystery to the reader and a transformation of the reader which enables understanding. Notice the twofold action by God in this extended quote:

\begin{quote}
\footnote{De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 81.} \footnote{De Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 346-47.}
\end{quote}
It is the same God who gives us scripture and makes it understood; what appear to be two successive acts on his part are in reality but one. The Spirit communicates to the sacred text a limitless potentiality, which therefore entails degrees of profundity which can go on and on. No more than this world was Scripture, that other world, created once for all: the Spirit “creates” it still, as if every day, to the extent that he ‘opens’ it. Through a wondrous and precise correlationship, he ‘expands’ it to the extent that he expands the understanding of him who receives it... The volatus of the contemplative soul, no matter how far into the heavens of Scripture it might carry the soul, will never cause it to collide at any frontier, for both space and flight are provided, proportionately. This is a bold view indeed, but, properly understood, the boldness is precisely the boldness of faith.  

God gives Scripture, opens it for understanding, and uses it to move the individual soul toward union with God. On the one hand, Scripture “expands” to the reader, and on the other hand, the reader is “expanded” to Scripture. Speaking, then, is the drawing of the individual into the unified Mystery, and takes place as one enters into the spiritual sense.

*Inspiration in the Letter:* While de Lubac’s emphasis is on the ongoing aspect of inspiration in the spiritual sense, his insistence on the uniqueness of God’s action in history leads him to articulate God’s providential preservation of those events in the letter of Scripture as well. On account of the intrinsic unity of the literal and spiritual senses in Scripture, inspiration must be attributed to both. De Lubac insists that because “God

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740 Ibid, 225-26. De Lubac (ibid, 223), further claims, “The Word of God never stops creating and burrowing within a man who makes use of his capacity to receive it, so that the understanding which also believes can grow indefinitely” (emphasis mine).

741 De Lubac (ibid, 224), claims, “Scripture...‘moves forward with those who read it.’...Scripture, which contains God’s revelation about himself, is, we might say, expandable—or penetrable—to an infinite degree.” Yet at the same time, de Lubac (ibid, 157), suggests, “As a result of the revealing unction of the Spirit, our mind is expanded for the understanding of the Scriptures.”

742 De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, II, 26), claims, “To tell the truth, from the start they even constitute really only one. The spiritual sense is also necessary for the completion of the literal sense, which latter is indispensable for founding it; it is therefore the natural term of divine inspiration, and...‘pertains to the original, principle plan of the Holy Spirit’...The spirit is not outside the history.”

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has intervened in human history...the first thing to do is to learn the history of his interventions from the Book where they have been recorded by the Holy Spirit.”

De Lubac makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is involved in the letter and has providentially ordained that just these events are preserved. Here the primary role of the Spirit in the inspiration of the letter seems to be the providential action of insuring that the account inscribed by the human authors was adequate for salvation history. The focus, as usual, is on the events rather than the text itself, and what is required of the text is that it is a reliable mediator of events.

Yet at times de Lubac goes further and describes the Spirit as having an integral role in the authorship of the text in such a way that the texts themselves have a certain role in salvation history beyond merely leading readers to events. This is seen in several ways: First, the Spirit seems to have been responsible for the recording of events which were not pertinent to salvation history but which would provide moral lessons for readers. Here we are referring to those moral lessons contained in the literal sense, not tropology. For example, de Lubac claims that the Spirit saw fit to record certain ignoble instances in history, events not part of God’s intervention in history, in order to provide moral lessons for readers. Noting that God’s providence moves ahead of the biblical authors, de Lubac speaks of “the whole Old Testament” as having “value as prophecy,” so that even “a disgraceful act,” when providentially recorded in Scripture, “becomes a prophecy.”

Even the “less worthy” parts of Scripture, “made of rather gross material,” are part of God’s prophetic plan, because “the Holy Spirit has turned a precious content within them

744 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 64.
Whatever the intent of the human authors, the Spirit orchestrated the content in such a way that it is useful today. De Lubac suggests that “if the Holy Spirit had perceived no shame in mentioning such histories, we have still less reason to disguise them.” Hence the Spirit actively inscribed moral lessons in the texts during their composition.

Second, because the early Church assumed that the Spirit authored the whole Scriptures, they consequently assumed that even the difficult passages of Scripture must have meaning, even if an interpreter could not immediately discern them. In fact, it was assumed that the Holy Spirit placed difficulties into the literal sense so that readers would be humbled and would be required to think more deeply into the truths of Scripture.

The early readers “took the opportunity to admire the ‘magnificent and salutary’ art of the Holy Spirit, who knows how to pacify our hunger with the clear passages and to prevent satiety by means of the obscure ones...The clarity of the first illuminates us; the difficulty of the second keeps us breathless. Thus, made for all, helpful to all, Scripture is always adapted to all.” Hence one primary purpose of unclear passages was develop the character of the reader. Since the Church believed that the Spirit authored the text, one of the goals of premodern exegesis was to show that the Spirit was in agreement with Himself throughout the text. Since all of Scripture “has the same God as author,” the

745 Ibid.

746 Ibid, 69.


748 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, II, 75.
exegete “works on it until one can finally say: ‘All the divine writings stand together at peace with each other.’” Exegesis of the literal sense necessarily included the reconciliation of difficult passages, since interpreters must assume that the divine Author inscribed them purposefully.

Although de Lubac stresses ongoing inspiration in the spiritual senses, he also accepts the providential and even authoring action of the Spirit in the composition of the literal sense of the Scriptures, which insures in just these texts their unity, their reliability, and their intrinsic connection between the literal and spiritual senses. The distinction between providence and authoring is important here, because it highlights the distinction between the literal sense as history and the literal sense as the plain reading of the words. The Spirit providentially insured the literal sense to be a reliable rendering of God’s action in history, and the Spirit authored the literal sense to communicate just those moral lessons and plain meaning of the words which will draw the reader into the Mystery. I will show in the next section that this distinction between text and event is quite significant for our discussion, as Vanhoozer, Tracy and Frei are all focused on the literal sense of the text, while this aspect remains the least developed for de Lubac.

2. The Movement from Text to Spiritual Reality

De Lubac has argued for the necessity of spiritual understanding in reading Scripture, seeking to demonstrate that fourfold Christian exegesis flows inevitably from a holistic Christian vision of reality. Both letter and spirit form an indissoluble unity in

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749 Ibid, 78.
Scripture. Yet to move from theological vision to hermeneutical explanation, it will be necessary to explore exactly how the letter discloses the Mystery. It is in this movement from letter to spirit that the importance of de Lubac’s hermeneutical program will begin to emerge. In this section I will evaluate the relationship between the text of Scripture and the event it signifies in order to show a significant tension in the relationship between letter and spirit. I will suggest that de Lubac’s work does not adequately articulate the movement from text and signified historical event, and consequently that it does not enter into adequate hermeneutical discussion about the relationship between letter and spirit. Yet I will suggest that these difficulties are significantly eased by de Lubac’s insistence that the understanding the way Scripture as text mediates the spiritual reality is only be possible in light of how God uses the biblical text in the divine economy. So long as the place of Scripture in the economy is clearly articulated, hermeneutical method will not be the decisive factor in gleaning theological meaning in Scripture.

A fundamental ambiguity exists throughout de Lubac’s writings about the relationship of the Scriptural texts to the historical events they signify. As we have seen, when de Lubac speaks of the letter, he sometimes means the plain sense of the text, and at other times he means the historical events to which Scripture points. For de Lubac, historical reference (objective history—the events themselves) is typically given priority

Articulating de Lubac’s understanding of the transition from letter to spirit is complicated by several factors. First, de Lubac relishes a number of paradoxes to describe the relationship which are difficult to systematize. Spirit is at times in the same discussion opposed to the letter and the fulfillment of the letter. Second, de Lubac desires to represent the breadth of the whole Christian tradition, and therefore provides a wealth of quotes which are difficult to reconcile systematically. Third, a genuine ambiguity exists in de Lubac’s own thought between the relationship of the letter of the text to the events of history which make it unclear which letter de Lubac is referring to. Fourth, the relationship between letter and spirit must be seen in light of de Lubac’s whole understanding of Christian reality in all its various forms: the relationship of nature/supernatural, Church as divine and human, sacramental presence, etc.
over textual sense (subjective history—Scriptural witness to those events). De Lubac makes a key distinction between “history in the objective sense as a past event and history in the subjective sense as a report of that past event by witnesses” When de Lubac claims that “the letter is ‘the sacrament of the spirit,’” he insists that this refers to the letter “not Scripture as text, but sacred history as contained in Scripture…since spiritual meaning is not the meaning of words but the meaning of things.” Furthermore, de Lubac insists that “to discover…allegory, one will not find it properly speaking in the text, but in the realities of which the text speaks; not in history as recitation, but in history as event…allegory is indeed in the recitation, but one that relates a real event.” It is the emphasis on things signifying things that forms the basis of all allegorical interpretation. The text leads the reader into the events, and the events prefigure and signify other events. Theologically, it seems clear that the historical events themselves are more important than Scripture’s witness to them, for events are the foundation of Christian faith.

Yet, granting the Christian priority of events over texts, the way in which the Scriptures mediate historical events must still be articulated. It is here that ambiguity can be seen. On the one hand, de Lubac speaks of the text as merely pointing to historical events, which, in turn point to spiritual realities. De Lubac claims, for example, that “the

751 De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, II, 44), distinguishes between “on the one hand, the deeds recounted and, on the other, the report of these deeds.”

752 Wright.,” 262, noting de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, II, 44.

753 The Sources of Revelation, 14-15, n. 10.

754 Medieval Exegesis, II, 86. Quoting St. Victor, de Lubac (ibid, 88), suggests, “Therefore holy Scripture is superabundant in the other senses….In the divine page not only do the understanding and words signify things, but the things themselves signify other things.”
text acts only as spokesman to lead to the historical realities; the latter are themselves the figures, they themselves contain the mysteries that the exercise of allegory is supposed to extract from them.”  This would suggest a providential relationship between text and event only, as God has preserved an adequate and reliable witness about historical events so that the events may render spiritual realities. The literal sense, then, as text, would simply be a providentially ordered witness to history.

Yet on the other hand, de Lubac at times has a quite robust understanding of the spiritual reality intrinsically contained in the text of Scripture itself. De Lubac calls Scripture an “incorporation” of the Logos, claiming, “The Logos is already truly incorporated there; he himself dwells there, not just some idea of him, and this is what authorizes us to speak already of his coming, of his hidden presence,” a “presence that [is] actualized anew each time this Scripture illumines us…” While defending Origen’s understanding of Eucharistic presence, De Lubac claims that while the Eucharist “truly contains the Body and Blood of Christ…in a subsequent, more elevated and profound and, therefore, ‘truer’ sense, Scripture is the Body and Blood of the Logos.”

The Logos dwells in Scripture as mystery, analogous to the way the Logos dwells in the flesh of Christ. At times, de Lubac speaks of two Incarnations of the Word. Just as the Word was clothed flesh, so also the Word descends to the Scriptures. Significantly, de

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755 Ibid, 86. Thus de Lubac (ibid, 87), follows Augustine in claiming that, “The facts of the Bible…in their very reality, ‘were words, destined to signify something to us…”

756 De Lubac, History and Spirit, 389 (citing John Scotus, In Jo., fr. 1). De Lubac (ibid), notes the difference with the Logos’s presence in the Incarnation, as he shows that “the Logos is…not, properly speaking, incarnated as he is in the humanity of Jesus.”

757 Ibid, 415.

758 Ibid, 393. De Lubac (ibid), is comfortable with a double meaning for Hebrews 4:11, allowing the “living and active” referent to be both Jesus Christ and Scripture, for the Logos dwells in both.
Lubac records Origen’s claim that this dual “incarnation” (using Origen’s term) “is here something more than a comparison; ‘letter’ and ‘flesh’ are not only alike in that they are both likened to a ‘veil’; for, according to Scripture itself, one can say that ‘the Word of God has been incarnated in two ways,’ since at bottom it is one and the same unique Word of God who descends into the letter of Scripture and into the flesh of our humanity.”

Here Scripture as text seems to have something of a sacramental value. De Lubac strengthens this sacramental allusion by claiming, “Already in its literal sense, or in its ‘body,’ Scripture expresses something of the Logos, just as something of him is glimpsed through the flesh of Christ.” Furthermore, de Lubac records Origen’s claim that even before the Incarnation, the Word was present in Scripture and “the function of Scripture is to reveal this Logos.”

Here the text of Scripture itself, as the dwelling place of the Logos, intrinsically discloses the Mystery. While de Lubac never himself claims that the Word was present in Scripture before the Incarnation, de Lubac does seem to agree that texts, unified by Christ, provide access to the Logos as Mystery because they are words which render the Word. Thus Scripture has the same role in disclosing the second Person of the Trinity as does the humanity of Christ. When the Mystery is viewed in terms of its historical revelation, the great Act of Christ, the event has priority.

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759 De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II, 60-61. Quoting Augustine, de Lubac (ibid 61), speaks of both the humility of the letter and the humility of the Son of Man, emphasizing that the divine is present in both the letter and the humanity.


761 Ibid.
over the text. Yet when the Mystery is viewed in terms of the reality revealed, the Logos, both text and incarnation are seen as efficacious signs.\textsuperscript{762}

Furthermore, yet another position can be discerned, which is Distinct from both of these two contrasting understandings of the literal sense of the text as mere witness to historical event, and as sacramental embodiment of the Logos. Often it seems that something of a double movement takes place from words to events to spiritual reality. Words really signify and make present the events of history, and the events, in turn, really signify and make present the Mystery. For example, De Lubac suggests that for Origen, history takes a “new mode” when written down in Scripture, so that the past events “survive today…as signs and mysteries….for the purpose of our ‘edification’.”\textsuperscript{763} This “new mode” is not simply the record of events, but the providentially ordained record of salvation history. The letter preserves the event, and hence participates in the flow of history from past to present. The purpose of this recorded history is to “pass on,” and hence, “‘In following the trail of truth in the letter of Scripture’, we ‘will thus be served by history as by a ladder’.”\textsuperscript{764} The “ladder” which de Lubac refers to allows the reader to climb from text to event to spirit. De Lubac’s understanding seems to be of the human authors themselves being caught up into the events of salvation history as they recorded sacred history, so that the Mystery is disclosed through “both” the events themselves and the written record of the events. Hence de Lubac claims that although “the human

\textsuperscript{762} It is important here to again note that for de Lubac, the Mystery is singular. There is no incompatibility between disclosure of the Logos and disclosure of Christ, as both ultimately are aspects of the same Mystery. Christ is the definitive revelation of God in history, yet the Logos is always working in history to incorporate believers into the Mystery.

\textsuperscript{763} Ibid, 322, noted by Wright, “The Literal Sense of Scripture,” 264.

\textsuperscript{764} De Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 323.
authors of the holy Books have died,” and “the events that they have reported have passed away,” yet still “the Word of God was expressed through both.”

In some way, texts, authors and events are all drawn as integral and indispensable parts into salvation history, so that the texts themselves are used as mediation of the Logos, and not just the events to which they point.

It would be tempting to describe this as a double sacramental movement, where text sacramentally discloses event and event sacramentally discloses spirit. Yet the text cannot be said to have a sacramental relationship to the event, because in this movement the text only renders history, not spiritual reality. Those who wish to grant a sacramental status to the text itself must clarify that the text is not sacramental insofar as it leads to events. On the other hand, as we have seen, some sacramental value must be accorded to the letter of the text as text, as it, and not the event to which it points, is said to be an incorporation of the Logos. This seems to be an unresolvable lacuna in de Lubac’s work, and it has consequences on the appropriation of de Lubac’s work today. While Frei focuses on meaning in the text situates his project in the movement from text to event, Tracy’s focus on meaning in front of the text situates his project completely on the ability of the literal sense of the text to disclose new human possibilities. To both, de Lubac’s inattention to this relationship would make it nearly impossible to appropriate de Lubac’s work.

765 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, II, 81. See also Wright, “The Literal Sense of Scripture,” 264.

766 Boersma (Nouvelle Theologie, pp. 154-60), consistently emphasizes that the letter as history which is sacramental. Yet in discussing Origen’s understanding of Scripture as the “incorporation” of the Logos, Boersma changes his focus from history to text as sacramental (see esp. 163-64). The fault here is perhaps not Boersma’s, but Origen’s lack of distinction between text and event as sacramentally making present the spirit.

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Overall, it seems that de Lubac would like to shift the discussion from the way texts render events to the way in which God uses both text and history to mediate the Mystery. In discussing the way the text renders its spiritual content, de Lubac is less concerned with hermeneutical theory and more interested in articulating the place of Scripture in the divine economy. Thus the manner in which the text of Scripture discloses the Mystery can only be discerned in relation to the way Sacrament and Church disclose the Mystery. In this shift of emphasis, explanation of the relationship between text and event is left unfinished.

3. Conclusion and Remaining Challenges

De Lubac insists that allegory is grounded in events of history, not texts. Current exegetical and hermeneutical discussions center almost completely on the textual rendering of the event, leaving historians to investigate the events themselves. Hence many contemporary exegetes write off allegory as fanciful interpretation before even investigating it, since they do not feel that it technically falls under their domain. Texts are judged by literary criteria, and historical events are judged by the criteria of secular history. This is exactly the division that de Lubac desired to overcome. Yet De Lubac’s explanation of the relationship between letter and spirit reveal several ambiguities in the relationship of text and event which have significant consequences for exegesis. Some of

767 The Christian Scriptures are different from other ancient texts which were subjected to allegory, in that Christian allegorists clearly distinguished between allegoria facti and allegoria verbi (see especially Henri de Lubac, "Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory," in Theological Fragments, 165-96).
these difficulties can be traced to de Lubac’s ambiguity about the literal sense, while others can be traced to inattention to the relationship between text and letter.

One of de Lubac’s difficulties in describing the relationship between text and event arises from not adequately distinguishing between secular history and biblical history. De Lubac locates history in the realm of nature, not the supernatural, claiming that “by themselves, historical events bring us no increase in supernatural revelation. They remain always ‘ambiguous’ and in a kind of state of ‘expectation,’ and it is they that must be enlightened for us by the light that comes from the Gospel.”

De Lubac’s focus is, as always, on the infinite qualitative difference in the movement from letter to spirit. Yet in describing the “letter” itself, a further distinction still needs to be made between a secular understanding of history and an understanding of history as guided by the Holy Spirit.

While both are described as the “letter,” the text of Scripture is not the mere letter. Not just any interpretation of the events of salvation history will do, for interpretations without the providential ordering of God fail to configure the events in such a way that the Mystery can be intrinsically disclosed. When the Great Act of Christ transformed history, it transformed a certain history—that which was recorded through


769 The latter here is often described as the “religious sense” in which the Bible is read to understand the religious experience of Israel (see D’Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic, 232-33). In the “religious sense,” de Lubac (Sources of Revelation, 26), claims, the Christian historian attempts to understand the history of Israel and, “Since we are dealing with a unique history, it is important that the historian who recounts that history do so as a believer.” Still, de Lubac insists on a qualitative difference between the “religious sense” and the “spiritual sense” to such an extent that the religious sense is simply a species of the literal sense. While de Lubac is correct that Christian interpretation must insist that the reader approach Scripture as “his own history, from which he cannot remove himself” (Sources of Revelation, 27), the sharp distinction that de Lubac draws between these two seems unnecessary if the literal sense of Scripture can be shown to itself participate in salvation history. Frei’s project of figural reading will be shown to have potential to expand de Lubac’s proposal here.
the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Scripture and discloses the presence of the Logos. Scripture as a text is both the providentally ordained theological interpretation of revelation and an incorporation of the Logos.

As soon as it is emphasized that what is “in the text” is the only adequate God-ordained guide to understanding what is “behind the text,” some theory of dual authorship must be articulated. Consequently, the inspiration of the human author must also be considered. As we have seen, de Lubac’s emphasis is on the ongoing aspect of inspiration rather than on the inspiration of the original authors, leaving the inspiration of the letter quite underdeveloped. Yet the relationship between human authors and divine Author must be addressed. De Lubac has already suggested God has a meaning in the spiritual senses that may not only expand, but may be viewed in opposition from the intention of the human author. He also suggests a certain divine authorship of Scripture that seems to go beyond the providential recording of events. Hence divine authorship applies even to the literal sense. Yet no real discussion of the role of the human authors is discussed. David Williams highlights this problem as he critiques de Lubac’s understanding of the original authors:

As one magnifies the importance of the overall biblical gestalt as the object of God’s intention and a primary medium of the Spirit, so the significance of what the human authors of individual books intended to convey diminishes. Their intention, as with any human effort, is part of the particular historical context that is now gone; it must pale to some degree when contrasted with an opportunity to discern the movement of the divine plan borne by the Spirit…

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770 Williams, *Receiving the Bible in Faith*, 171.
Williams is suggesting that de Lubac’s emphasis on ongoing inspiration of the Spirit in the spiritual sense forces him to neglect God’s guiding action on the part of the original writers. Indeed, if the literal sense simply tells us facts, and if the text is the incorporation of the Logos, we would expect the ongoing inspiration of the Spirit to dominate. But the text does more than tell us facts: it tells us what human authors reliably recorded about the facts, how they thought their audiences ought to respond to the facts, etc. The problem becomes quite practical in exegesis. For example, in a difficult passage, should the exegete assume both that the Spirit has placed this difficulty in the text to humble the exegete and that the text must be able to be harmonized with other texts because it is authored by the Spirit, or should the exegete assume a human mistake? The assumption of divine authorship requires a mutual discussion of human authorship. In order to attend to this, more attention needs to be given to the role of human authors in encoding meaning in the text.

A second difficulty in describing the relationship between text and event arises from an ambiguity in the definition of the literal sense. As we have seen, the letter is sometimes described as “history” and sometimes as the “plain sense” of the text. When de Lubac describes the letter as the plain sense, however, the text’s relationship to both history and spiritual reality becomes unclear. At times, de Lubac emphasizes that the text is only a “spokesman” to lead the reader to history, while at other times he claims that the plain sense of the text is the “incorporation of the Logos.” Often a double movement from text to event to spiritual reality seems to emerge throughout de Lubac’s work, in which both text and event are caught up in salvation history and lead to the spiritual sense. I would suggest, here, that in this double movement from text to event to spiritual
reality, there is a great deal of room for literary theory and philosophical reflection to explain the first movement from text to event. De Lubac should feel uncomfortable describing the text as a sacrament, since the text points to a historical event, and in a sacramental relationship one natural thing cannot disclose another natural thing. Hence explanation of the rendering of event by text belongs to the realm of literary theory rather than sacramentality. As most of the discussion between Frei, Tracy and Vanhoozer focuses on the relationship between text and referent, their work could be quite instructive to this part of de Lubac’s hermeneutical project. Frei’s entire project, for example, may be classified as an attempt to describe this first movement from text to event. De Lubac is so focused on showing the necessity of historical events as the foundation of Christian faith that he does not give enough attention to the relationship between God’s action in history and God’s assurance that just this rendition of history will be preserved in Scripture. In keeping with de Lubac’s project, to appreciate the historical character of Christian faith without allowing the secular historian to have the final word and thereby reduce the Mystery to historicism and immanentism will require more than simply an insistence upon an anagogical reading. It will require a thorough explanation of just how these texts mediate the events of salvation history to the reader.

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771 Given his sacramental understanding of the whole economy of redemption (Incarnation, Scripture, Church, Eucharist, Nature/Supernatural), it seems significant that de Lubac never speaks of a double sacramental movement from text to event to reality. He does call the “letter” a sacrament, but in that context is clear that the letter refers to history (See de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, II, 34, 60-61, 162-5 and The Sources of Revelation, 14).

772 The problem is heightened when the exegete attempts to assess the importance of those parts of Scripture which are not historical, but are themselves responses to revelation. It is not enough to say that the letter leads us to historical events, when certain non-narrative responses to events are preserved and others are not. It seems clear that written responses to revelation themselves have a privileged place in mediating spiritual realities that have not been sufficiently described.
Hence de Lubac’s project would not be compromised by placing greater attention on the relationship between text and event. Rather, de Lubac’s project would be furthered by this attention, as discussion of the relationship between text and event would provide the theologian with resources to describe how just this text can render just these events in just the way that will be effective for salvation.

A third difficulty in describing the movement from letter to spirit arises specifically from a lack of clarity about the nature of the New Testament as a text. While at times de Lubac speaks of the literal sense as the reading of God’s action in the Old Testament which anticipate the New, at other times de Lubac speaks of the literal sense as the whole witness to God’s action in history. In the New Testament, the literal sense is the allegorical sense. This explanation needs further clarification, since, while it is true that the Act of Christ transfigures history, the record of Christ’s transformation of history became the literal sense after it was recorded as Scripture. Hence even the secular historian can read the whole of Scripture in its plain sense and understand with relative clarity what the apostles, the first allegorists, believed about the event of Christ. The relationship between a literal reading of the New Testament and a spiritual reading of the New Testament must be more carefully developed.

Here the relationship between text and events once again becomes important. When the emphasis remains on events, we see that no matter how energetically the secular historian studies the New Testament texts, he or she could not grasp the Event of

773 It is in this sense that a secular New Testament historian might read only the “mere letter” of Scripture. For example, de Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 154), is clear that spiritual understanding is a meaning that the secular historian can never grasp, for human effort by itself “can never furnish anything other than a better historical knowledge.” The historical knowledge, here, is knowledge of the event of Christ, yet it does not move to the spiritual sense.
the New Testament (the Incarnate Christ unifying history and anticipating the *totus Christus*), and hence could never see the intrinsic relationship between Old Testament history and New Testament meaning. However, if the emphasis is on the whole text of Scripture as a canonical unity, it seems that the secular historian could intellectually recognize the Christian Faith without subsequently participating in it. In this sense, the New Testament is the adequate and authoritative witness to the meaning of history in Christ, and this testimony is located in the plain sense of the text, accessible to all readers. The plain sense of the Old Testament is very different from the plain sense of the unified canon, for the unified canon does provide the rules and theological presuppositions necessary to discern, intellectually, the distinctly Christian faith. The upshot of this distinction is that the presence of a New Testament canon really may change the subsequent use of allegory. While the first Christians were first required to access the meaning of history by interpreting the Old Testament in light of the Event of Christ which they had experienced, Christians today are required to access the meaning of history by first reading the plain sense of the text and accepting it in faith.  

Here the concern by Tracy, Frei, and Vanhoozer about the continued use of allegory may have some merit. While de Lubac suggests that the continuation of allegory is a primary task of apostolic succession as it continues the work of the New Testament writers, Frei and Vanhoozer’s insistence that the priority of interpretation should be on Scripture as a canonical whole may restrict allegory in a way that would be consistent even to de Lubac’s project.

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774 Williams (*Receiving the Bible in Faith*, 208-10), makes suggestions in this direction. We will return to his assessment in the next chapter.
These three ambiguities must be addressed if de Lubac’s work is to provide a consistent hermeneutical reflection which will advance the theological interpretation of Scripture. In the final chapter I will suggest that Vanhoozer’s emphasis that the literal sense is the canonical sense, as well as Frei’s method of figural reading, provide resources which could develop de Lubac clarify the way in which the very literal sense is used by God to mediate Christ to readers. The strength of de Lubac’s project lies not in his development of literary theory or philosophical description about the process of reading, but in his insistence that when the interpretation of Scripture is understood within the wider context of the divine economy, a movement to the threefold spiritual sense is inevitable. The fourfold interpretation, for de Lubac, is a part of a fourfold understanding of all Christian reality in which God uses Scripture, Church and Sacrament to mediate the unified Mystery. As Scripture is understood in this broader context, hermeneutical issues relating to literary theory and the rendering of meaning by texts are subjected to theological descriptions of the economy. Thus de Lubac’s project, more clearly than the others, shifts discussions of textual interpretation from literary theory to the mediation of the unified Mystery through these texts.

III. Ecclesiology: The Church as a Sacramental Reality

De Lubac’s ecclesiology can only be understood in light of the way he understands Scripture, Eucharist, and the Church to play essential roles in mediating the
Mystery in the divine economy. All three, for de Lubac, have a sacramental structure, in which the visible discloses the Mystery. Furthermore, all three operate with the same fourfold understanding of Christian reality. As the Church points toward and makes present Christ, it does so with an understanding of the fourfold reality of the economy, which is also the fourfold sense of Scripture. The visible Church discloses the Church as divine reality, which in turn effects transformation in individuals and yearns toward its eschatological fulfillment in the **totus Christus**. Of the four theologians, only de Lubac provides a description of the Church which seeks to show the integral identity between Church and Scripture in the economy of redemption. This section will first describe the identity of the Church, then will show the relationship of the Church to Scripture and Eucharist in the economy.

A. Identity of the Church: Mystery and Sacrament

De Lubac’s development of an ecclesiology in which the Church is both Mystery and Sacrament sets his work apart from that of Frei, Tracy and Vanhoozer. These descriptions of the Church flow naturally from de Lubac’s understanding of God’s use of the Church to mediate Christ. The Church already is the Mystery of the **totus Christus**, yet it always acts as sacramental sign which leads to Christ. Here the Church exhibits the fourfold structure of Christian reality in its own self-identity as the visible Church is the

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775 Wood (*Spiritual Exegesis and the Church*, 62), concludes that for de Lubac “the spiritual interpretation of Scripture is in fact a sacramental theology, but one which situates sacraments within the entire historical economy of salvation.” Wood’s argument is that de Lubac is able to draw his parallel between Eucharistic theology, ecclesiology, and spiritual interpretation by correlating the Eucharist with the allegorical sense of Scripture. In his Eucharistic ecclesiology, the Eucharist makes the Church as it unites Christ as head with the Church as body. This action, though, presses toward the anagogical sense for its final conclusion, where the **totus Christus** will be complete.
indispensable means to the fullness of the *totus Christus* as it incorporates individuals and yearns for its eschatological fullness.

*The Church as Mystery:* As we have seen in the section on allegory, de Lubac insists that the Church, in an incomplete way, is the Mystery. De Lubac claims, “The Church is a mysterious extension in time of the Trinity, not only preparing us for the life of unity but bringing about even now our participation in it. She comes from and is full of the Trinity…She is ‘the Incarnation continued,’” the “presence of Christ on earth.” The Church really is Mystery because it is the reality of the *totus Christus*. De Lubac insists, “The Church on earth is not merely the vestibule of the Church in heaven…for she stands to our heavenly home in a relation of mystical analogy in which we should perceive the reflection of a profound identity. It is indeed the same city which is built on earth and yet has its foundations in heaven…” Anagogy thus unites the Church as it exists today with the fulfillment of the *totus Christus*. The Church is not the cause of the Mystery, nor can it claim any role in mediating the Mystery other than what it has received as a gift. Rather, “The Church is a mystery because, coming from God and entirely at the service of his plan, she is an organism of salvation, precisely because she relates wholly to Christ and apart from him has no existence, value or efficacy.”

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777 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 72. De Lubac (*The Splendor of the Church*, 119), suggests that the difficulty in seeing the eternal nature of the Church is “because we don’t yet see her from a viewpoint wide-embracing enough. We are thinking of the Church only as the Church Militant, not as the perfect and glorious Bride…” A theological understanding of the Church must include the Church Militant, purgatory, and the Church Triumphant.

778 De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 15. De Lubac (*The Splendor of the Church*, 106) notes that the Church is both “holy” and “the Church of the holy,” not because there are no sinners in the Church, but because it is the Church which sanctifies and the Church that is purified by the Holy Spirit.
Church is Mystery because the Church is the organization ordained by God and united with Christ in which salvation history receives its meaning and yearns for its ultimate completion.

De Lubac insists on accepting the implications of the Church as Mystery. While the Church is sinful and its visible structures are not eternal, these present features of the Church are not its primary identity. De Lubac claims that the Church should not understand “herself…so much from her structures or her history as from her predestination in Jesus Christ and her orientation towards the parousia.” Even in the present state of the Church, “there is between her and Him a certain relation of mystical identity,” so that, “Practically speaking, for each one of us Christ is thus His Church.” So intrinsic is this relationship between the Church in its “transitory, imperfect state” and its “complete, spiritual, definitive state” that a certain “exchange of idioms” should be allowed between Christ and the Church, because “between the means and the end there is not merely an extrinsic relationship.” Refocusing attention on the divine reality of the Church and its anagogical completion as Mystery is, of course, an act of faith. Hence de Lubac claims that “no one can believe in the Church, except in the Holy Spirit.” To grasp the intrinsic relationship between visible Church and divine reality is to enter the very Mystery which is intelligible but not comprehensible.

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781 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 68. De Lubac (ibid, 72-73), claims that because “The Church, without being exactly co-extensive with the Mystical Body, is not adequately distinct from it…there should arise a kind of exchange of idioms: *Corpus Christi quod est ecclesia*.”

782 Ibid, 74.
Though de Lubac insists on understanding the Church in terms of its divine reality, he nonetheless demonstrates a very realistic picture of the sinfulness of the Church, admitting that the visible Church will often hide rather than disclose this divine reality. De Lubac claims that “this very same Church, is often unfaithful and unsubmissive. In her members she is a sinner…the Church is also a symbol of perpetual decline and mortality.”

On account of the communication of idioms between the Church and Christ, the visible Church is often the same kind of stumbling block that the humanity of Christ posed to understanding his divinity. Yet the ability of the body of Christ to hide Christ is much greater in the Church than in Christ’s human body, because the behavior of the Church is often sinful.

De Lubac realizes that the Church has a responsibility to continually be a fitting sign. The actions of the Church serve to either hide or disclose the divine reality of the Church. The behavior of those within the Church has a real effect on whether the sign hides or discloses the reality.

Yet de Lubac claims that the ability to see the divine reality of the Church is part of the gift of

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784 De Lubac (*The Splendor of the Church*, 48-49), claims, “[T]here is something yet more ‘scandalous’ and ‘foolish’ about belief in a Church where the divine is not only united with the human, but presents itself to us by way of the all-too-human, and that without any alternative…Truth to tell, the Church is even more compact of contrast and paradox than Christ. We can say of the Church, as of Christ, ‘a great mystery and wonderful sacrament,’ but we are driven to say of her even more than of Christ…‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence’…If a purification and transformation of vision is necessary to look on Christ without being scandalized, how much more is it necessary when we are looking at the Church!”

785 In *The Splendor of the Church*, after his chapter on the Church as sacrament (pp. 203-35), de Lubac spends the rest of the chapter exhorting the Church to realize its sacramental position and not mute the sacramental value of the sign (see esp. 228-35). The behavior of the Church has a real effect on its value as sacramental sign.
faith itself and stands despite the witness of its members.\textsuperscript{786} In fact, faith that the Church will truly be eschatologically transformed is one of the tests of Christian faith.\textsuperscript{787}

\textit{The Church as Sacrament:} De Lubac has been a leading figure in emphasizing the sacramental nature of the Church, resulting in the incorporation of this theological description in the Second Vatican council.\textsuperscript{788} In \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, de Lubac describes the Church as “the great sacrament which contains and vitalizes all the others.”\textsuperscript{789} The Church is the great sacrament precisely as it operates in a sacramental chain from Eucharist to Church to Christ to Triune God. De Lubac writes in \textit{Catholicism},

If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him…she really makes him present…she is his very continuation…the… exterior organization…is but an expression…of the interior unity of a living entity, so that the Catholic is not only subject to a power but is a member of a body as well, and his legal dependence on this power is to the end that he might have part in the life of that body.\textsuperscript{790}

This description of the Church as sacrament will form the background for all de Lubac’s discussion of the Church. On account of its sacramental nature, de Lubac feels

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\item \textsuperscript{786} De Lubac (ibid, 46), claims, “But the dark side of the mystery is there too, and just as surely…For the unbeliever whom the Father has not begun to draw to Him, the Church remains a stumbling-block. And she can be a testing-round for the believer too, which is a good thing; perhaps the test is all the more strenuous in proportion as his faith is purer and more vital.”
\item \textsuperscript{787} De Lubac (ibid, 49), claims, “Let us within the Church, who speak of ourselves as being ‘of the Church’, manage to grasp the fact as sharply as it is sensed by those who are afraid of her and those who run away from her.” However, this sense of faith will result in an optimism for the Church rooted in faith. De Lubac (ibid, 78), claims, “We should…be on our guard against cramping within concepts that are inadequate to it God’s power to transfigure His Bride. Far from struggling against belief in something which our imagination cannot picture, we ought to let the daring of faith sweep us off our feet.”
\item \textsuperscript{788} The Vatican II Council’s \textit{Lumen gentium} (I, 1; II, 9; VII, 48) is the first time the Church is called a sacrament in an ecumenical council.
\item \textsuperscript{789} De Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 203. De Lubac’s chapter, “The Sacrament of Christ” (pp. 203-35), forms the climax of his first concentrated work on ecclesiology.
\item \textsuperscript{790} De Lubac, \textit{Catholicism}, 76.
\end{itemize}
that the Church can only be understood in terms of a series of paradoxes. The visible is the indispensable means to the invisible, as is the human to the divine and the temporal to the eternal.\footnote{791} Since de Lubac’s ecclesiology has the same fundamental fourfold structure as his understanding of Scripture, it can be assumed that the sacramental relationships which exist in the Church can illumine de Lubac’s understanding of the movement from letter to spirit in his theology of Scripture.

**Intrinsic Relationship Between Visible and Invisible:** De Lubac’s understanding of the Church as sacrament suggests that at the fulfillment of the *totus Christus*, the sign will pass away into reality. Given the pairs of paradoxes used to describe the Church, it would be easy to associate the visible with the temporal and the human, and the invisible with the eternal and the divine. Yet this would destroy the Christian Mystery. Much of what is visible and human is also eternal, since the *totus Christus* will be the union of the Church in history with Christ as head. Thus it does not follow that the sign will pass away in all these relationships. Rather, just as in the sacramental nature of the Incarnation, the sign is an integral and continual part of the Mystery.

Due to the intrinsic relationship between the human and divine aspects of the Church, De Lubac emphatically rejects any division between the invisible Church and the visible Church which would reduce the visible to merely a human institution.\footnote{792} On the one hand, because the visible Church is “the sign of something else, it must be passed through, and this not in part but wholly…it is not something intermediate, but something

\footnote{791 See especially de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 23-29.}
\footnote{792 De Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, 85-87.}
mediatory.” On the other hand, however, a sacramental sign cannot simply “be changed at will” because it is “essentially related to our present condition.” Hence, de Lubac claims, “We never come to the end of passing through this translucent medium, which we must, nevertheless, always pass through and that completely. It is always through it that we reach what it signifies; it can never be superceded, and its bounds cannot be broken.” If viewed from the perspective of the sacramental structure of the Church, the visible Church is inferior to the spiritual reality it signifies. And yet it is impossible to discover that spiritual reality without the historical, institutional, visible Church. The individual believer will never be able to discover Christianity without the Church nor go beyond the Church to a purely spiritual faith.

Since much of the function of the visible Church is to mediate sacramentally the Mystery, however, those aspects which exist for this purpose (e.g. hierarchical organization, sacramental system, etc.) will disappear with the return of Christ. De Lubac claims, “The sacramental element in the Church, being adapted to our temporal condition, is destined to disappear in the face of the definitive reality which it effectively

793 Ibid, 203.
794 Ibid, 204.
795 De Lubac (ibid, 147), claims, “Recognition of authority in the Church is the first and indispensable condition without which we cannot have any part in her vitalizing work...” De Lubac (The Motherhood of the Church: Followed by Particular Churches in the Universal Church and an Interview Conducted by Gwendoline Jarczyk, trans. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 68, emphasizes that the three functions of “Word, worship, and government” cannot be “dissociated,” and thus the visible structure could never be considered optional.
796 De Lubac (The Splendor of the Church, 205-09), recounts the many enthusiastic proposals by Enlightenment philosophers and theologians to move to a purely spiritual faith, a “Church of the Holy Spirit” (the new era prophesied by Joachim of Fiore). De Lubac emphasizes that the age of the Spirit has already occurred simultaneously with the age of Christ, and that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. As a result, it is impossible to move beyond the Church which Christ formed to a less institutional faith.
signifies; but this should not be thought of as one thing’s effacing of another. It will be
the manifestation of sacramentality’s own proper truth; a glorious epiphany and a
consummation.”

Thus de Lubac emphasizes, “We ought, indeed, to love that very
element in the Church which is transitory—but we ought to love it as the one and only
means, the indispensable organ, the providential instrument, and at the same time as ‘the
pledge, the passing image, the promise of the communion to come.” Certain
sacramental aspects of the Church are destined to pass away when anagogy becomes
reality, yet this does not mean that the visible Church will give way to the invisible
Church.

De Lubac is careful not to say that the true Church is identical to the Roman
Catholic Church, but he does insist that the visible dimension of the Roman Catholic
Church is the true structure of the Church. De Lubac claims, “We shall not reduce the
mystical body of Christ to equivalence with the forms of the Roman Church, nor will we
water down the Church until it becomes a ‘body’ conceived in an entirely ‘mystical’
fashion. What we shall affirm is that the Church mysteriously transcends the limits of her
visibility, that by her very essence she carries herself, as it were, above herself.”

The visible aspect is intrinsically related to the divine reality, yet the visible dimension is not
identical to the whole reality.

797 De Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 68.

798 De Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 83. Wood (Spiritual Exegesis and the Church,
107), summarizes the relationship in this way: “the human element in the Church makes the divine element
present by making Christ present.”

799 De Lubac, The Church: Paradox and Mystery, 27.
Protestant theology, de Lubac feels, has lost the intrinsic relationship between visible and invisible by focusing only on the invisible Church. De Lubac feels that this disregard for the visible Church causes Protestantism to implicitly deny the structure of the Christian Mystery. By denying the sacramental necessity of the visible, they also disregard the radical newness of the invisible. De Lubac argues that such Protestant theologies could not possibly call the Church a sacrament, because their understanding of the Church is “more inspired by the Old than the New Testament or, in other words, does not fully enter into the logic of the Mystery of the Incarnation.” In their stress on the invisible Church, they have lost the uniqueness of the entry of God into human history and the formation of the Church as a visible reality.

The Immediate Danger of Immanentism: De Lubac’s ecclesiology, just as his scriptural interpretation, seeks to avoid what he perceives to be the current errors of the extrinsicism of the Neo-Thomists and the immanentism of contemporary secularism and theological liberalism. Throughout his career, de Lubac resists the extrinsicist tendency on the one hand to see the Church primarily in terms of its divinely ordained ecclesiastical structure (thus giving priority to the temporary aspect of the Church), and

800 De Lubac (Catholicism, 75-76), claims that “the experience of Protestantism should serve us as sufficient warning. Having stripped it of all its mystical attributes, it acknowledged in the visible Church a mere secular institution; as a matter of course it abandoned it to the patronage of the state and sought a refuge for the spiritual life in an invisible Church, its concept of which had evaporated into an abstract ideal.” One could suspect that de Lubac is primarily lamenting the current state of German Lutheranism.


802 Ibid. De Lubac (ibid), dislikes the Protestant argument to liken the visible Church to rebellious Israel, in which a remnant (the invisible Church) will be saved. To appreciate the Christian Mystery, one must realize that the Church really consists of something that the OT people of God did not. Christ really is joined to this body in a way that the OT people of God did not have access to. The Church is really the reality that the OT people of God pointed toward as a sign.
the historicist tendency on the other hand of viewing the Church simply as a social institution of this world (thus forgetting the eschatological reality of the Church). Both errors, de Lubac feels, are resisted by stressing the intrinsic sacramental structure of the Church. Boersma claims, “For de Lubac, the neo-scholastic overemphasis on hierarchical authority and the liberal critique of authority stemmed from one and the same source: a sharp disjunction between nature and the supernatural resulting in a ‘separated theology’ that failed to see how authoritative, supernatural means of grace played a divinely ordained role within the Eucharistic life of the Church.” An intrinsic relationship between sign and reality must be maintained so that the believer may be incorporated into the Mystery through the movement from sign to reality.

During his later career, especially after the Second Vatican Council, de Lubac sees immanence as the primary danger confronting the Church, as he perceives a tendency to dismiss the eschatological dimension in order to focus on the world at present. The very structure of Christian reality presses de Lubac to emphasize the divine, eschatological character of the Church as a counterbalance to what he perceives as one-sided emphasis on the visible, this-worldly Church. Much of de Lubac’s later writing centers on the danger of immanence in the Church.

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803 Boersma, *Nouvelle Theologie*, 258.

804 The extent to which a need to stand against the immanence of the Church is seen in *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 122-23, where de Lubac provides a list of qualities which will characterize the person of holiness will possess in the future. Most of these center on a resistance to immanence: “They will not…be ideologists…If they bring something truly new to the world….it will not be by means of worldly generalities on the necessity to create and invent…tradition will be a source of strength, not a millstone round their necks…They will not confuse the openness of life with the dissolution and disintegration of death, nor the idolatry of man with brotherly charity…” This list indicates de Lubac’s continual concern about the encroachment of immanence.
De Lubac’s concern about immanentism is seen in his rejection of Schillebeeckx’s claim that the Church is “the sacrament of the world.” De Lubac, having emphasized that the Church is the sacrament of Christ, worries that Schillebeeckx will “confuse the ‘progress of the world’ with the ‘new creation.’” De Lubac claims, “Does the ‘eschatological kingdom’ not appear, in all this, as the culmination of our ‘earthly expectations’, as their supreme fulfillment and consummation?” Consequently, de Lubac believes, making the Church the sacrament of the world would eliminate the “difference between the Old and the New Testament.” The Church would no longer be the sacramental embodiment of the Mystery, but would fall victim to immanantism.

De Lubac’s concern about immanentism is also seen in de Lubac’s disappointment that Lumen Gentium chose the description “people of God” for the Church over other New Testament images such as bride or body of Christ. De Lubac

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806 Schillebeeckx, Church and World, 129-30 (cited in Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 119).


808 Ibid, 226.

809 Boersma (Nouvelle Theologie, 265), claims that de Lubac “believed that Schillebeeckx had fallen into the trap of accepting nature as an isolated entity, which was exactly the problem Blondel had described as ‘historicism.’”

810 While de Lubac (The Church: Paradox and Mystery, 55), appreciates the council’s desire “to emphasize the human traits of the Church,” he laments that the image of Church as bride of Christ is
disapproves of the phrase for two reasons. First, this phrase stresses “continuity” over “transformation,” thus straining the sacramental nature of the Church. Instead, de Lubac emphasizes, as always, the radical transformation brought about by the event of Christ, in which “the infusion of the Holy Spirit placed the people of God in an essentially new position…the Spirit of Christ has renewed, transfigured, and ‘spiritualized’ everything.” Second, de Lubac feels that the phrase ‘people of God,’ undervalues the eschatological reality which the Church already participates. For de Lubac, the eschaton has already broken in to the natural order, and because of its union with Christ, the Church is the eschatological reality, the kingdom, already, even if it still awaits its full union. The radical newness to which the spiritual senses of Scripture point is a present, if uncompleted reality in the Church.

For de Lubac, the key to retaining the sacramental nature of both Church and Scripture is the preservation of anagogy. For de Lubac, where the eschatological focus is abandoned, the relationship between the historical sense and the allegorical sense will

“subordinated to that of the people of God,” since it is well-represented in both Scripture and in the Fathers. Thus, says de Lubac, “readers must be careful not to take this expression in isolation” (23).

811 De Lubac, ibid, 39-44.
812 Ibid, 43.
813 Ibid, 49-50. See Lumen Gentium II, 9-17. De Lubac (The Church: Paradox and Mystery, 50), sees the problem mostly as a matter of emphasis, claiming that the council did not “suppress the consideration of collective eschatology, showing the people of God being guided, generation after generation, towards, and already mystically united to, the heavenly Jerusalem” (50). The problem of immanentism, then, is largely a problem of the subsequent application of the council.
814 De Lubac (ibid, 51), criticizes the council for “a certain narrowing of the patristic horizons,” which neglects the ‘already’ aspect of the eschatological understanding of the Church. De Lubac (ibid, 52), claims, “In one way, for the people of God envisaged as still on pilgrimage through the obscurity of this world, it is altogether a matter of the ‘not-yet’. But in another way—and one that cannot be disassociated from the first—for which the Church considered as a gift from above and the habitation of Christ and his Spirit, we are faced with the ‘already-present.’”
815 Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 68.

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no longer be understood in a sacramental manner. The abandonment of the anagogical sense will almost inevitably result in a focus on nature without the supernatural. If allegory is not finally realized in the totus Christus, the “different order” made present by allegory becomes simply a higher dimension of the natural order.

B. Relationship between Scripture and Church in the Economy

As we have seen, the strength of de Lubac’s hermeneutical proposal is found in his attempt to shift the discussion away from simply the relationship between text and reader and onto the place of Scripture in mediating the Mystery in the divine economy. In this section I will examine how Scripture, Eucharist and Church relate to one another as fellow mediators of the totus Christus. As the singular Mystery is approached in various ways, de Lubac insists that an intrinsic unity must exist between these different realities in the economy.

In his emphasis on the singular Mystery of Christian faith and the various ways in which God mediates this Mystery, de Lubac once again develops his thought from the philosophy of Maurice Blondel. In his important essay, History and Dogma, published in 1903, Blondel sought to avoid what he saw as the dual errors of “extrinsicism” and

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816 Dismissal of anagogy would be dismissal of “the presence of the eternal.” De Lubac (Catholicism, 357-58), emphasizes that “it is the role of the Christian…to raise his voice and remind those who forget it of their own nobility; man is only himself, he only exists for himself here and now if he can discover within himself” the “presence of the eternal.” De Lubac (ibid, 354-55), emphasizes that, “‘Becoming’, by itself, has no meaning; it is another word for absurdity” without an eschatological dimension, a “fulfillment” to the human being.

817 De Lubac, Brief Catechesis, 119.
“historicism” through “tradition.” Extrinsicism is defined by Blondel as the use of the historical evidence of Scripture primarily as an instrument of apologetics to prove a spiritual reality, rather than seeking to understand the revelation brought about by, or contained in, the historical event. In extrinsicism, historical events are regarded as merely extrinsic signs which point toward, but are not intrinsically related to, the spiritual reality that is assumed. The opposite error, historicism, is defined by Blondel as the reduction of the content of the Christian faith to only what is in principle observable to the secular historian. In historicism, Christian faith is viewed as merely a historical or social reality, without any intrinsic relationship to a transcendent reality.

Blondel suggests that both extrinsicism and immanence, though completely opposed to each other, are really two sides of the same coin. Both reduce the revelatory action of God in history; extrinsicism by limiting God’s action to the ‘proof’ that can be adduced from it, and historicism by limiting God’s action to what the secular historian can ascertain. Neither approach is useful for apprehending the reality of Christian Faith,

818 Blondel (Blondel, History and Dogma, 224-41), seeks a middle way between two “incomplete and incompatible solutions,” on the one hand the extrinsicism of the neo-thomists who use history as apologetic data to support the legitimacy of the Christian faith, and on the other hand the historicism of theological liberals who reduced the spiritual realm to what can be explained by means of some universal human spirit or demonstrable historical data. Blondel’s solution is to re-identify the role of tradition as the “living synthesis” which unifies God’s past action in history with the present Christian faith.

819 Blondel (ibid, 227), claims that in extrinsicism “historical facts are merely a vehicle, the interest of which is limited to the apologetic use which can be made of them; for, whether this or that miracle is involved, provided that it is a miracle, the argument remains the same” (emphasis his). The result, Blondel, (ibid, 228), claims, is that “the relation of the sign to the thing signified is extrinsic, the relation of the facts to the theology superimposed upon them is extrinsic, and extrinsic too is the link between our thought and our life and the truths proposed to us from outside.”
as both have disconnected spiritual reality from historical event.\textsuperscript{820} To confront these errors, Blondel makes a key distinction between secular history, the historian’s construction of the past by whatever tools are available, and “real history” which is the whole reality of life and hence always transcends what could be reconstructed by the secular historian.\textsuperscript{821} Blondel realizes that philosophical description must be given to the element which maintains the intrinsic relationship between both historical event and lived reality, history and dogma.\textsuperscript{822}

For Blondel, tradition is that living link which connects history as a lived reality with events as they are observed by the secular historian. Blondel suggests that because “the Church does not rest entirely on the Scriptures, and that the History in which Catholicism obliges us to believe is not only the history which the historian can establish,”\textsuperscript{823} it is necessary to say that “only a principle distinct from texts and formulae can relate, harmonize and organize them.”\textsuperscript{824} This principle, for Blondel, is tradition, which provides a “living synthesis” as it links history and spiritual reality through

\textsuperscript{820} Ibid, 244-64. Blondel’s distinction between the “historic Christ” and the “real Christ” is aimed at showing that when historical event and spiritual reality are separated, the result is always a truncating of Christian faith.

\textsuperscript{821} Ibid, 237-38. Blondel (ibid, 240), claims further that when secular history replaces real history, “The historical facts will be given the role of reality itself; and an ontology, purely phenomenological in character, will be extracted from a methodology and a phenomenology.”

\textsuperscript{822} Ibid, 264. Hence Blondel (ibid), claims that there is “need for an intermediary between history and dogma, the necessity for a link between them which would bring about the synthesis and maintain solidarity without compromising their relative independence” and which for Christianity would answer the “initial question: ‘How is it that the Bible legitimately supports and guarantees the Church, and the Church legitimately supports and interprets the Bible?’”

\textsuperscript{823} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{824} Ibid.
experience and reason in submission to Christ, its Head.\textsuperscript{825} Since the singular Mystery cannot be comprehensively manifested in a particular historical event, the Church is required to continually manifest its reality.\textsuperscript{826} On Blondel’s account, tradition “extends further than Scripture. Even in regard to what Scripture tells us, it possesses a special virtue and a distinct competence; and it does not rely only on oral transmission to lead us deeper and deeper into the reality revealed, and to the Revealer himself who constitutes it in its entirety.”\textsuperscript{827} As a result, a reciprocal relationship can be said to exist between Scripture and Tradition, so that each deepens the understanding of the other.

De Lubac furthers the work of Blondel by providing a more complete theological description of the intrinsic relationship between tradition and Scripture. In the case of the Christian faith, the ‘spirit’ which transcends what is observable to the sciences is precisely the Holy Spirit, and consequently must be understood to be qualitatively and quantitatively different from the ‘spirit’ of any lived reality which transcends what is observable in that reality.\textsuperscript{828} Just as the secular historian cannot expect to understand the fuller dimension of lived history, so much the more the historian cannot expect to understand the full spiritual reality of the Christian faith through the discipline of history

\textsuperscript{825} Blondel (ibid 269), claims that “the active principle of the synthesis lies neither in the facts alone, nor in the ideas alone, but in the Tradition which embraces within it the facts of history, the effort of reason and the accumulated experiences of the faithful.”

\textsuperscript{826} Ibid, 268. Hence Blondel (ibid, 276), claims, “Only a progressive and synthetic movement can lead us from the effects produced to their cause, can trace all the rays of light in the Christian consciousness over the centuries to their source, and through its unending progress imitate the infinite riches of God, revealed and always hidden, hidden and always revealed. In that profound sense, when it is a question of finding the supernatural in Sacred History and in dogma, the Gospel is nothing without the Church, the teaching of Scripture is nothing without the Christian life, exegesis is nothing without Tradition…”

\textsuperscript{827} Ibid, 270.

\textsuperscript{828} D’Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic, 57.
alone. Both Scripture and Church are fellow mediators of the Mystery of Christ, and the intrinsic relationship between them is grounded in the Incarnate Christ. In *History and Spirit*, de Lubac follows Origen in calling Eucharist, Scripture, and Church three “incorporations” of the Logos and seeks to distinguish the sacramental role of each in mediating the one Mystery in the divine economy. All three incorporations are distinct from revelation, yet are employed by God in mediating revelation. While each incorporation has a unique role in the economy, all three mediate the same Mystery.

1. Incarnation of the Logos: The Singular Revelation of Christ

For de Lubac, revelation is God’s action in history, culminating in the event of Christ. De Lubac emphasizes the priority of the Event of Christ over Scriptural witness to that event when he claims, “Christianity is not at all, properly speaking, a ‘religion of the Book’: it is the ‘religion of the Word’—but not merely nor principally of the Word in its written (or oral) form.” Since the Word is incarnated in the humanity of Christ but only incorporated in Scripture, only the former is to be considered revelation.

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829 In a section of *History and Spirit* entitled “The Incorporations of the Logos” (pp. 385-426), de Lubac speaks directly to the relationship between four sacramental realities in the divine economy in which dwells the eternal Logos: the hypostatically united Christ, Scripture, Eucharist, and Church. Each is an aspect of the same Mystery, yet each operates causally on the others in this mediation. The first of these is an “Incarnation” of the Logos, while the last three are “Incorporations” of the Logos. The distinctions between these two words are decisive, since it was the historical event of the Incarnation which grounds the Christian faith. Incorporations are ways of making the Mystery made present in the historical event present today.


831 Voderholzer, “Dogma and History,” 658, claims, “Revelation is achieved in the incarnate Word, which unifies and fulfills the many words of the Old Covenant, and which is then unfolded in the New Testament’s witness to revelation as the word of God in the word of men.” Voderholzer, (ibid, 664),
Lubac claims that Scripture “contains all of revelation” although revelation and Scripture are not identical.\(^{832}\)

De Lubac maintains the priority of event over text in the literal sense of Scripture because revelation was, strictly speaking, event. It is this priority of Christ over textual witness which necessitates the fourfold exegesis of Scripture. De Lubac emphasizes,

To say that the Scriptures are the Word of God is not, therefore, simply to designate a succession of books. It is to aim at its internal organization, its structuring around the center that is Christ. The reading of the holy Scriptures grants us communion with the faith of these concrete men who were seized by God and opened to the mystery of Christ by the Holy Spirit; Christ unites us with them.\(^{833}\)

For de Lubac, to interpret Scripture in light of Christ is to give the event of Christ, as revelation, logical priority over the mediation of that event by Scripture. This, in turn, necessarily imposes a fourfold hermeneutic to keep all of Scripture unified on this event.

It is also the priority of Christ over Scripture which necessitates reading in the Church. The distinction between Scripture and revelation allows de Lubac, in continuity with Vatican II, to subject both Scripture and Church to the event of Christ and emphasize that both Scripture and tradition are used by God to mediate the Mystery.\(^{834}\)

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\(^{833}\) Moulins-Beaufort, "Henri De Lubac: Reader of *Dei Verbum,*" 680.

\(^{834}\) De Lubac, *La révélation divine*, 164-65, cited by Moulins-Beaufort, "Henri De Lubac: Reader of *Dei Verbum,*" 680. Christ, “The revealed object ‘is transmitted to us whole and entire by Scripture, and whole and entire by Tradition, both of which are intimately connected.’” As Moulins-Beaufort (ibid, 681), says, “Scripture and Tradition are two sources in the sense in which the theologian has recourse to two instruments in order to know the Christian faith.” (See here *Dei Verbum*, II, 7-10,)
The Church, currently participating in the Mystery and existing as Mystery, is the only organization which has a sense of this Mystery. De Lubac claims, “Now it is in the Spirit that the Church…receives her heritage and understands this heritage in truth. The ‘true’ meaning of Scripture, its full and definitive meaning, cannot be other than the one ‘that the Spirit gives to the Church.’”

It is only in the Church that the unity of the Testaments can be maintained, since only the Church has the “instinct” to read Scripture in this way.

The Catholic insistence on interpreting Scripture within the Church has long been viewed suspiciously by Protestants, who are concerned that human beings will place themselves above the word of God. This fear has caused them to summarily dismiss serious investigation of other senses of Scripture beyond the literal sense. Yet de Lubac argues that the role of the Church is to ensure that Scripture is always used for the illumination of the Mystery. Hence, de Lubac claims,

The Magisterium merely guarantees that the development of the mysteries of the faith in the minds of believers remains within the complete and definitive ‘figure’ of this mystery. It guarantees that the communion of these believers remains open to an Object that is ‘incomprehensible’ in the etymological sense of the word, because it is he who ‘embraces me beyond my capacity to embrace him’—and this embrace is that of a living Person.”


835 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, I, 27.

836 De Lubac, ibid, I, 242, and The Sources of Revelation, 114.

837 De Lubac, The Sources of Revelation, 114, claims that the Church always knows by instinct the relationship between the two Testaments: “In subtle balance, ordered by an extremely sure instinct, the Church affirms from the time of her birth and will maintain during the whole course of her history ‘the precise and indissoluble interdependence of the Old and New Testaments.’”

The role of the Magisterium is to keep the interpretation of the text oriented toward the singular Mystery, and to proscribe those interpretations which prohibit such Christian readings. Here de Lubac’s focus, much like Frei’s work, is on the chastening of readers rather than the muting of the text. The reading of Scripture within the Church is meant to eliminate those readings of Scripture that are incompatible with the identity of the Church and to illumine the Mystery to which only the Church can sense. This understanding of the Magisterium is possible only when it is assumed that the event of Christ grounds both Scripture and Church as mediators of that Event. As I will now show, a certain reciprocal causality exists between Eucharist, Scripture and Church as unique but intrinsically and ultimately unified mediators of the Mystery.

2. Incorporations of the Logos: Scripture and Church

De Lubac refers to Scripture, Church and Eucharist as mutual incorporations of the Logos. The terminology qualitatively distinguishes Christ as the Incarnation of the Logos from these theological realities which mediate Christ as Incorporations of the Logos. Incorporations are the various ways by which God mediates the Mystery in the economy of redemption. De Lubac, then, subjects both Scripture and Church to the event

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\[\text{Commentaire De La Constitution Sur La Revelation, ed. R. and M. Thurian Schultz (Taize: Presses de Taize, 1966), 4, cited by Moulins-Beaufort, 691), claims, using a citation from Saint Francis de Sales, “According to us, it is not Scripture that needs rule or light, but our glosses; we do not place a judgment between God and ourselves, but rather between a man like Calvin and another man like Morus.”}^39

$^39$ See de Lubac, History and Spirit, “The Incorporations of the Logos” (pp. 385-426).
of Christ and shows that their authority and their intrinsic relationship are grounded in Christ.  

_Eucharist Makes the Church:_ De Lubac’s, _Corpus Mysticum_, written in 1944, focused on the causal relationship between the Eucharist and the Church. There de Lubac claims that “the Eucharist corresponds to the Church as cause to effect, as means to end, as sign to reality.” De Lubac argues in the book that throughout the early Church and up to the 12th century, the Church had been able to hold together Eucharist, Church, and Christ by understanding that the Eucharist was the _corpus mysticum_ which had as its goal the unity of the Church with Christ its head. During the Middle Ages, de Lubac feels, an “inversion” took place in the terminology between “_corpus mysticum_” which had been applied to the Eucharist and now was applied to the Church, and “_verum corpus_” which had been applied to the Church but was now applied to the Eucharist to emphasize Real Presence. This inversion resulted in the loss of focus on the causal relationship between Eucharist and Church, placing apologetic emphasis only on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. De Lubac argues that the “final result was that the first two of the ‘three’ bodies, that is, the historical and sacramental bodies, were

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840 De Lubac (La révélation divine, 164-65, cited by Moulins-Beaufort, ”Henri De Lubac: Reader of Dei Verbum,” 680), claims that Christ, “The revealed object ‘is transmitted to us whole and entire by Scripture, and whole and entire by Tradition, both of which are intimately connected.’”


842 De Lubac (Catholicism, 100, n. 68), claims, “At first and for quite a long time, ‘Corpus mysticum’ meant the Eucharistic body, as opposed to the ‘corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia’, which was the ‘verum corpus’ par excellence. Was it not in fact quite natural to designate as ‘mystical’ that body whose hidden presence was due to ‘mysterious prayer’ and which was received in a ‘mystical banquet’? that body offered in forms which ‘mystically’ signified the Church? It is possible to trace the slow inversion of the two expressions.”
identified with each other while the third, the ecclesial body, was detached from the historical and the sacramental.” The importance here is that when the Church understood her existence in terms of the fourfold Christian understanding, it understood that the visible sacrament of the Eucharist constitutes the Church and moves it toward its eschatological reality as the *totus Christus*. Hence an intrinsic relationship exists between sacrament and Church, wherein the sacrament has a causal effect on the *Corpus Mysticum*, the body of Christ, anticipating its analogical union as *totus Christus*.

*Scripture Makes the Church:* In *History and Spirit*, the efficacy of the Eucharist is equated with the efficacy of Scripture. Like the Eucharist, Scripture constitutes the Church as Scripture makes present the Mystery of Christ. De Lubac claims, “Scripture is…already like the coming of the Son of Man, for it has within itself the radiance of truth. Now the Church, in accepting it, takes in this radiance…Scripture is thus like the voice of Christ speaking to the Church and in the Church; it is his efficacious sign; it thus assures the luminous presence of Christ to the Church.” Thus Scripture, by being incorporated by the Logos, has a causal role in the divine economy in forming the Church’s members into the one body of Christ. Boersma claims that de Lubac

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844 Boersma, (*Nouvelle Theologie*, 163), claims, “In de Lubac’s portrayal, Origen had regarded Scripture as one element in a ‘trilogy’ of ‘incorporations’ of the Word. Scripture and Eucharist had both functioned as ‘body of Christ’ sacramentally pointing to the Church and, through the Church, to the completed body of Christ, the eternal Logos.”

845 De Lubac (*History and Spirit*, 418), claims, “The life of the Church has its source in Scripture. It has it no less in the Eucharist.” De Lubac (ibid), notes that Origen gives Scripture a certain causal priority over the Eucharist because “the ‘Word’ is, in its pure essence, that very reality: for the Son of God, God himself, is ‘Word’.” This does not mean that Scripture is above the Eucharist, but that while both “express and reveal the Logos… Scripture does so, in the final analysis, with a superiority that allows one to consider it…as the ‘truth’ of which the Eucharist would be the symbol” (419).

846 Ibid, 418.
“emphasized the ‘efficacious sign’ character of Scripture and Eucharist, both of them transforming the recipients into Christ himself: ‘Scripture and Eucharist are thereby joined once again. Both never ceased to “build up” the Church.’” 847 Both Scripture and Eucharist render Christ present to the Church, and thus both constitute the Church and impel the Church toward its eschatological reality. 848

The Church Makes the Scripture and Eucharist: Though both Scripture and Eucharist make the Church, mediation of the Mystery is not one-directional, since both Scripture and Eucharist depend on the Church for their existence and efficacy. With regard to Scripture, de Lubac emphasizes that “it is only in the Church, through the effect of the Church’s preaching, that this Scripture ceases to be a simple mass of letters in order to become a living language.” 849 The Church has produced the Scriptures and has the ability to interpret Scripture, and without such interpretation, the individual could never understand the Logos within it. 850 With regard to the Eucharist, de Lubac emphasizes that the hierarchy makes the Eucharist as part of its sacramental structure. Balthasar notes this reciprocal relationship claiming, “There lies at the heart of the Church an ineradicable complementarity: the Church (through her hierarchical office)

847 Boersma, Nouvelle Theologie, 163, citing de Lubac, History and Spirit, 418.

848 De Lubac (History and Spirit, 422-23), emphasizes the anagogical sense of Scripture as he focuses on the causal effect of Eucharist and Scripture on the Church, as both Scripture and sacrament will be “only still symbolic in relation to what it will become in the other life, or rather, what the other life will be…” Susan Wood notes the necessity of anagogy for both the Eucharist/Church relationship with the literal/spiritual senses of Scripture. Wood (Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 55-56), notes that in both Eucharistic ecclesiology and spiritual exegesis, sign and reality can only be held together by looking forward to a full future union between the two (an anagogical sense) in the totus Christus.

849 De Lubac, History and Spirit, 422.

850 De Lubac (ibid, 420), claims that the Church “dispenses” the Word, because the “Church is for each of us the place of the Logos. In the Church…we hear the Word, and it is the hearing of the Word that builds up the Church for all eternity.”
‘makes the Eucharist’, and the ‘Eucharist makes the Church’ as incorporation into Christ’s body.”\textsuperscript{851} De Lubac concludes that “we must be careful not to make the smallest break between the Mystical Body and the Eucharist…The two mysteries must be understood by one another and their point of unity grasped at depth.”\textsuperscript{852} Hence there exists a reciprocal causality between Eucharist, Scripture and Church, so that all become constitutive signs which lead to the others yet which are ultimately unified in the divine economy.

IV. De Lubac’s Contributions to Scripture in the Economy

In this chapter I have suggested that de Lubac’s project seeks to explain two essential hermeneutical issues which have potential to advance the discussion between Tracy and Frei. First, de Lubac has explicitly shown that a Christian reading of Scripture will inevitably make a move from text to spiritual reality. This movement is essential to Christian reading, de Lubac suggests, because the Triune God uses just these texts for self-communication to the Church in the economy of redemption. Readers are drawn into the singular Christian Mystery as they interpret Scripture according to the fourfold structure of the economy of redemption. All Christian reality can be approached in this fourfold manner, seen most clearly in the traditional fourfold interpretation of Scripture.\textsuperscript{853} Here Scripture is understood as both letter and spirit, with the spiritual

\textsuperscript{851} Hans Urs von Balthasar, \textit{The Theology of Henri De Lubac}, 108.

\textsuperscript{852} De Lubac, \textit{The Splendor of the Church}, 156-57.

\textsuperscript{853} In fact, Blondel’s discussion of tradition anticipates the fourfold dimensions of apprehension of the Mystery that de Lubac’s fourfold sense of Scripture will develop in detail. While the
reality emphasizing both the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ aspects of the Mystery (allegory and anagogy), as well as the intrinsic relationship between the individual and the Church (tropology and allegory). In order to read Scripture in the economy of redemption, some movement from text to spiritual reality must be clearly articulated.

Second, De Lubac has shown that an intrinsic relationship exists between Scripture and Church, since both are ordained by God to mediate the singular Mystery revealed in Christ, both are structured toward the fourfold understanding of Christian reality, and each exercises a causal relationship on the other. De Lubac emphasizes that the premodern Church interpreted Scripture in accord with its own nature. Moulins-Beaufort summarizes the relationship between scriptural interpretation and ecclesiology for de Lubac by claiming that “the ultimate criterion of the interpretation of Scripture is not some hermeneutical principle, but the unity of persons for whom the Church exercises her maternity.”

As the Church realized that it is the new reality formed in relationship to Christ the head (allegory), which was anticipated by the sign (history), it realized also its movement toward eschatological fulfillment (anagogy) in the totus Christus through the transformation of individuals incorporated into the whole (tropology). De Lubac’s insistence that the Church be understood primarily as it will be in its eschatological form allows him to show that the fourfold interpretation of Scripture

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flows naturally from the fourfold structure of the Church, and hence the fourfold structure of all Christian understanding.

These two conclusions the role of Scripture in the economy and the intrinsic relationship between Scripture and Church provide several insights by which to advance the discussion between Frei, Tracy and Vanhoozer. First, de Lubac’s description of the Church as a theological reality moves beyond Frei’s description of the Church as a socio-linguistic community, and will better show how the Church participates in the Mystery of Christ. De Lubac would likely be quite suspicious that Frei’s description of the Church comes close to lapsing into immanentism, and would insist that only as the Church is described as a theological reality can the Church work out a consistent hermeneutic of Scripture. Second, de Lubac’s ecclesiology provides a possible solution to the disagreement about authority between Frei and Vanhoozer. Where Vanhoozer places authority in Scripture as God’s communication, and Frei places authority in the self-description of the community as constitutive of the normative role of the literal sense, de Lubac advances the discussion by grounding both Scripture and Church in the reality of Christ and giving Church and Scripture essential mediating roles in communicating that reality. De Lubac would agree with Vanhoozer that Scripture is a species of God’s communication to guide and direct the Church, and de Lubac would agree with Frei that the self-description of the Church is fundamental for establishing rules of Scriptural reading. Yet in both Vanhoozer and Frei, de Lubac would find a deficient theological description of the Church at the root of inadequate interpretive strategy. Where Vanhoozer describes the Church as only a response to Scripture, de Lubac would seemingly say that the Church is also constitutive of Scripture, and that both mediate and
are impelled toward the same Mystery. Where Frei describes the Church as establishing the literal sense as normative by a community consensus, de Lubac would argue that the Church is compelled to read the Gospels literally as a recognition of God’s action in history is the indispensable means to the disclosure of the Christian Mystery in which the Church participates.

Yet while de Lubac’s project provides theological resources for moving beyond certain impasses in the debate between Frei and Tracy, several hermeneutical difficulties remain in his own project which could be helped by the projects of Frei, Tracy and Vanhoozer. First, de Lubac’s equation of the “letter” with history simply bypasses much of the contemporary hermeneutical debate, which centers on the way in which the text renders its referent. De Lubac’s work remains underdeveloped in treating the literal sense of Scripture, and this confuses the movement from text to historical referent. Lack of specification between the literal sense as history or as plain sense, as Old Covenant anticipation of the New Covenant or as the whole canon viewed by the secular historian limits de Lubac’s exegetical influence. Much is at stake in this movement from text to history, for what the text uniquely renders will help to show the place of Scripture in the economy. It is here that Tracy, Frei and Vanhoozer will be instructive to de Lubac, as their projects will insist on the importance of the literal sense.

Second, de Lubac’s project depends on a particular “sacramental ontology” of the movement between nature and the supernatural. Yet while it may be true that

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855 This presses for a return to a symbolic method of theology. See here Boersma (Nouvelle Theologie, 252), who claims, “In short, de Lubac did not just present a plea for a return to a more Eucharistic understanding of the Church; his concern was also for the restoration of a symbolic approach to
Christian self-description depends on a fourfold understanding of Christian reality, both Vanhoozer and Frei suggest that it is possible to preserve the dimensions of transcendence and anagogy indispensable to Christian faith while interpreting only the literal sense of the text. While de Lubac has thoroughly shown the foundation of the fourfold interpretation of Scripture in the Christian tradition, his goal of re-establishing spiritual exegesis as a practice of the Church has remained largely unrealized. Frei and Vanhoozer especially would remain critical that such a hermeneutical practice would reduce to eisegesis, as it would allow the Church to avoid the plain sense of the text. In the next chapter, I will suggest some possible convergence between these four theologians which gives adequate attention to the role of Scripture in the broader context of the divine economy.
I. Introduction: Advancing the Discussion

In the first chapter of this dissertation I suggested that many of the impasses between Hans Frei and David Tracy have been caused by a narrowing of hermeneutical discussions to the relationship between text and readers. I suggested that by locating the place of Scripture in the broader context of the economy of redemption, it would be possible to ease many of the difficulties between them, as the hermeneutical discussion would be expanded to include God’s use of Scripture to communicate to the Church. Kevin Vanhoozer provided one attempt to locate Scripture in the economy of redemption, as he builds an ontology of God as author who communicates to the Church through the literal, canonical sense of the Scriptural texts. Henri de Lubac provided a very different approach to locating Scripture in the economy of redemption, as de Lubac explains the economy as the singular Mystery revealed in Jesus Christ and mediated sacramentally in Scriptural texts. In this chapter, I will place all four authors in dialogue to show how each of these very different hermeneutical projects, when examined in the context of the economy of redemption, are able to contribute to a more complete theological interpretation of Scripture. Here I will examine how God uniquely uses Scripture for Triune self-mediation to readers so that they may be uniquely incorporated into the Church as the eschatological totus Christus. This structure is based on the classic understanding of the divine economy as exitus and reditus, God’s action toward creation,
the transformation of creation by God, and the return of creation to God. Thus situating Scripture in the divine economy will place the text/reader relationship between two other essential relationships: The relationship between Christ and Scripture and the relationship between Scripture and the Church.

In this introduction I first suggest that different categories are needed to describe the differences between Tracy and Frei than those which have typically been used. I will suggest that locating Scripture in the economy will provide just those categories which will advance the discussion. Then, I will show that the projects of both Tracy and Frei require them to articulate this broader theological context in which reading takes place. I will suggest that because both Frei and Tracy see Scriptural reading as a unique activity in which the Triune God is disclosed to the reader, they must explain both the way in which God uses Scripture and the capacity of the Church to encounter God in Scriptural reading. After showing that articulation of the relationship between Christ and Church is a requirement of their own hermeneutical aims, I will show how articulating this broader context will advance the debate.

A. The Inadequacy of the Usual Categorizations

A number of theological and philosophical distinctions have been suggested in an attempt to categorize the divergent trajectories of revisionists and postliberals. While

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856 This typical way of structuring the economy of redemption is seen, for example, in Aquinas’s structure of the Summa (See Jean-Pierre Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work, trans. Robert Royal, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 150-52). Telford Work (Living and Active, vii-xi) similarly structures the divine economy as, “The beginning of Scripture: the Word of God,” “the mission of Scripture: a school for all the world,” and “the end of Scripture: God’s word in faithful practice.”
some are quite helpful in illuminating certain key similarities and differences between the two schools, I will argue here that the discussion has led to impasse because no proposal has thus far been successful in getting to the heart of the difficulty. The real issue has not proven to be the choice between a system of “proclamation” or “manifestation” as Tracy typically describes it, nor has the real issue been captured in the relationship between philosophical description and the Church’s self-description, as Frei’s *Types of Christian Theology* so helpfully categorizes it, nor has the real issue fully surfaced the distinction between “foundationalists” and “nonfoundationalists,” as many postliberals have suggested. While each of these categorizations has illumined significant options for theological method, none of them has really probed to the center of the disagreement between Tracy and Frei. The real difference between Tracy and Frei, I will suggest in this chapter, is that each uses a different hermeneutical method to show the movement from the plain sense of the text to the spiritual reality which it discloses to readers. These methods appear to be incompatible when they are compared only in the context of the text/reader relationship. Yet, when examined in the broader context of the economy of redemption, they may be seen as compatible and even mutually complementary. Here I provide a short description of the most common categorizations of the disagreement and show why each falls short of really getting to the heart of the issue.

*Proclamation and Manifestation:* Tracy has suggested that the primary difference is the distinction between “manifestation” and “proclamation” theologians. Tracy


858 See especially Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* 371-89, as well as the previous discussion about proclamation and manifestation in this dissertation in chapter 2, “Relationship to David
wants to show that theologies of proclamation can ultimately be located as critical moments within the larger schema of manifestation, and therefore that the trajectory of manifestation better captures the essence of the Christian tradition. Tracy’s attempt to incorporate “proclamation” theology as a necessary moment in his own system of “manifestation” was intended to show that encounters of radical transcendence and confrontation are a common and necessary prerequisite for encounters of “manifestation,” in which readers recognize “some pervasive yes at the heart of the universe, some radical mystery sensed as power, as an abiding love that undoes all our more usual senses of the futility and absurdity of existence.” Vanhoozer, in his early writings, agreed that Tracy’s distinction adequately captured the nature of the debate. In those writings Vanhoozer strongly resisted the entire trajectory of manifestation because he felt it necessarily compromised the Gospel message. Vanhoozer argued that both Ricoeur and Tracy were manifestation theologians who were consequently unable to articulate the nature of revelation in an adequate way. As a result, Vanhoozer vigorously defended a system of meaning which would safeguard Christian proclamation

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Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 379), characterizes “manifestation” as that “power…now disclosed…reflecting upon the original experience of wonder in existence…to a mediated sense of a fundamental trust in the ultimate reality of God as well as an attendant trust in all reality as graced. Reflection upon that uncanny sense of wonder discloses the uncanny giftedness of all creation. It transforms the stuttering self into a creature alive to and with a fundamental trust in the ultimate reality manifesting itself/himself/herself as none other than the incomprehensible, a pure, unbounded, powerful love decisively re-presented as my God in the event of Jesus Christ.” Tracy (ibid, 386-87), characterizes “proclamation” as emphasizing “the radical transcendence of God and the eschatological coming of God’s word into this world in the triumph of grace in Jesus Christ” so that “only if God comes to disclose our true godforsakenness and our possible liberation can we be healed.”

Ibid, 386.

Vanhoozer (Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, 180), claims, “By attributing to the poetic word the sacramental function of manifesting transcendence, Ricoeur erases the very distinction between nature and grace that was so important to Barth….For Ricoeur…revelation is not so much an ‘impossible possibility’ as a natural possibility shared by sacred and secular narratives alike.”
from what he considered to be the destructive advances of the manifestation theologians.$^{861}$ Even in his later work, Vanhoozer remains a decidedly “proclamation” theologian, although his recent ontology of communication would force him to somewhat temper his early harshness.

Yet when Vanhoozer is compared to de Lubac, it appears that Tracy’s dichotomy between proclamation and manifestation is not so helpful after all. Vanhoozer and de Lubac share many theological commitments, and both emphasize the uniqueness of encounter in Scripture, God’s supervening use of Scripture to communicate to the Church, and the need to develop a participatory hermeneutics which incorporates the reader into the meaning of the text. Yet while Vanhoozer develops his career on the proclamation trajectory, de Lubac would be better located in Tracy’s manifestation model. De Lubac proclaims with vigor the disruptive, transformative Word of God mediated through Scripture, yet de Lubac’s sacramental ontology is much more at home with a system of manifestation than proclamation. In de Lubac, Vanhoozer would find a manifestation theologian whose theological convictions are very close to his own. When Vanhoozer and de Lubac are compared, we see that the real disagreement is the location of the Church in relation to Scripture in the economy of redemption, a disagreement that has little to do with manifestation and proclamation.$^{862}$ Hence proclamation and

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$^{862}$ To be sure, the trajectories of proclamation and manifestation do lead to different emphases by each theologian. While Vanhoozer, in terms typical of proclamation theologians, emphasizes the authoring character of God in relation to Scripture, de Lubac, more akin to manifestation theologians, emphasizes the ongoing communication of the Spirit of Christ through the text in terms of sacramental mediation. Yet for neither theologian would these differences create a deep conflict in the resulting program. The real remaining difference between them is the understanding of the place of the Church in
manifestation appear to be only a small part of a larger disagreement about the structure of the economy of redemption.

**Critical Correlation:** Frei and Tracy have both suggested that a central disagreement between them is the relationship between Christian self-description and secular philosophical systems of meaning. The debate, as Frei articulates it, is whether the interpreter ought to employ an “ad hoc” or “systematic” correlation in order to render the content of Christian faith intelligible. Frei affirms the need to make the Christian faith intelligible using general philosophical concepts. But he does not look for any particular criteria to ground this correlation, as he feels that the criteria itself would have priority over Christian self-description. Tracy, on the other hand, is committed to finding both criteria of “appropriateness” to the Christian tradition and criteria of “intelligibility,” a systematic correlation between the Christian tradition and common human experience based on secular criteria.

Yet while Frei’s posthumous book, *Types of Christian Theology*, is a remarkable achievement in presenting options for articulating the relationship between theological discourse and secular reason, Frei’s *Types* does not really get to the heart of the impasse between revisionists and postliberals. Three examples will show that Frei’s *Types* leave certain key issues unresolved. First, in his later career, Tracy appears to have moved from type 2 (a system in which “external description and self-description [of the Church] relation to Scripture, not manifestation and proclamation (see the comparison of de Lubac and Vanhoozer below, ppg. 74ff).  


864 Tracy (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 26), claims, “In any theological method which remains distinctively Christian, there logically must be criteria to assess the appropriateness of any particular theological proposal as Christian. For some theologians (including myself) there must also be criteria of intelligibility or credibility for a full theological method.”
merge into one, and the joint product is justified by a foundational philosophical scheme”) to type 3 (a system in which philosophy and “Christian self-description” are “correlated as two autonomous yet reciprocally related factors,” and Christian self-description is not subjected to philosophical description) on Frei’s continuum.865 If this is so, all four theologians represented in this dissertation would be located in type 3 or 4 (a system in which “theology is not philosophically founded” and “Christian self-description is quite independent of every external endeavor to describe Christianity as a specific religion”).866 Yet, just as divergence remains between Schleiermacher and Barth, so these four theologians continue to disagree greatly on important points of interpretive method. Second, Vanhoozer himself could be described as moving from type 2 to type 4 between his early work and his later work, yet his theological commitments remain largely unchanged.867 Third, while Vanhoozer, Frei and de Lubac would all probably fit in type 4, each would remain quite wary of the others’ employment of hermeneutical method. Vanhoozer, for example, rejects Frei’s “turn to the Church” and, against Frei, constructs his own proposal to grant authority to God rather than to the Church. Frei is

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865 For Frei’s definitions of Types 2 and 3, see Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 30 and 34-35, respectively. This move from type 2 to type 3 is most explicit for David Tracy in “Writing,” 383, where he admits that his articulation of the classic, while perhaps helpful for fundamental theology, is not adequate for Christian self-description. Furthermore, Tracy (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 36-43), has admitted the importance of Frei’s work in emphasizing the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ, and hence admits that Christ is the proper referent of the text. Hunsinger and Placher suggest that Tracy’s later work might be better appropriated in type 3 (Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, x).

866 For Frei’s definition of type 4, see *Types of Christian Theology*, 39.

867 Vanhoozer’s early work could best fit in type 2 of Frei’s typology (see Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, 30-34), insofar as Vanhoozer does attempt to ground Scripture in a particular theory of meaning that comes from literary theory grounded in theological presuppositions. Vanhoozer’s early work attempts to move to type 3, yet it appears to remain grounded in type 2, since the general hermeneutical project proved inflexible enough to not be able to incorporate Vanhoozer’s suggested theological underpinnings. Vanhoozer’s later work could be classified almost certainly in type 4, as it begins with Scripture’s place the economy of redemption, and then moves to methods for reading.
wary of de Lubac’s turn to the spiritual sense as he feels this will draw attention away from the unsubstitutable identity of Christ rendered realistically in the literal sense. De Lubac would see the projects of both Frei and Vanhoozer as failing to capture the distinctiveness of the Christian hermeneutic as they restrict meaning to the literal sense alone. Thus while Frei’s typology may be useful for articulating the relationship between Christian self-description and secular reason, it says little about options for Christian hermeneutics. Together, these three observations indicate that some hermeneutical element exists which Frei’s typology does not identify. This element can be analyzed explicitly only when Scripture is located within the economy of redemption, as the relationship between Christ, Scripture and Church are specifically articulated.

*Narrative Theology and Foundationalism: Nor is the issue really the problem of “narrative theology” vs. “foundationalism,” as has occasionally been the charge of postliberals. Often postliberals have accused revisionists of being “foundationalists,” or those who claim some common human experience which forms a philosophical foundation for truth claims.*

Postliberals, in turn, have claimed to form their identity on “nonfoundationalist” narrative readings of reality. Yet while the postliberal allergy to foundationalism has helped to bring some precision to the relationship between the Church’s self-description and philosophical categories (for example, it has helped to

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868 See, for example, Nancy Murphy (Stanley Hauerwas, Nancey Murphy and Mark Nation, *Theology without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994, 9-16) who calls foundationalism a claim that all knowledge can be traced back to a bedrock of knowledge which cannot be questioned, an idea which she believes began in Descartes. The implicit claim is that an epistemological foundation which cannot exist apart from the philosophical tradition of Descartes lacks usefulness in the contemporary situation.

clarify why Frei’s *Types* 1 and 2 are unhelpful for Christian reading), it has yielded few insights which will help advance the debate between Frei and Tracy.\textsuperscript{870} With perhaps the exception of the early work of Tracy and Vanhoozer (which both authors admit to have failed), all theologians in this dissertation desire to give priority to the self-description of the Church through a literal reading of the Gospel narratives, yet all insist that the unsubstitutable identity of Christ must be articulated for a secular sensibility. Vanhoozer, de Lubac, and Frei, all make extensive use of various philosophical tools to illumine Christian truth while still reading intratextually. For each, philosophical models must be put in the service of articulating the claims of revelation.\textsuperscript{871} Frei is particularly wary of “type 5” theology in which Christian self-description (language games) has no relationship to criteria for truth outside the Church.\textsuperscript{872} Tracy likewise insists on creating space for Christian self-description and admits that where he has been unsuccessful at giving revelation priority over philosophy, his project needs to be corrected.\textsuperscript{873} Furthermore, Tracy thinks that his incorporation of recent insights from hermeneutical

\textsuperscript{870} For Frei’s definition of type 1, see *Types of Christian Theology*, 28, where Frei claims that in this system, theology as a “philosophical discipline… takes complete priority over Christian self-description within the…Church.”

\textsuperscript{871} Each in his own way attempts something of a reversal from “onto-theology” to “theo-ontology” (The phrase is Vanhoozer’s (See Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 8, 222, etc.).

\textsuperscript{872} For Frei’s definition of type 5, see, *Types of Christian Theology*, 46, where Frei claims that in this system “Christian self-description” leaves no place for philosophy, “neither in adducing criteria for coherence, adequacy, or appropriateness, nor…of any metaphysical scheme by the theologian.” Significantly, Frei’s critique of type 5 representative D.Z. Phillips is much like Tracy’s critique of Lindbeck: “To ask a question about the reality of God is to ask a question about a kind of reality…asking that kind of question is asking for criteria. How do you judge whether or not you’ve got the right grammar?” (Types, 47). See Tracy (“Lindbeck’s New Program,” 468), who similarly claims that Lindbeck “has [not] resolved the issues he has set for himself (viz. relativism and fideism)” with his insistence on a “linguistic-cultural” theology.

philosophers has fully cleared him of the charge of foundationalism. Both theologians, then, are committed to assigning a relative priority to the Church’s self-description, as well as to insisting that correlation be made between Scripture and secular reason. It seems, then, that the fundamental disagreement between Tracy and Frei is theological, not philosophical, as it does not so much concern discussions about modernist and postmodern philosophical method, but about the way in which Christ is mediated to the Church through occasioned by a theological reading of Scripture.

**Conclusion:** All of the above distinctions help to illumine important interpretive issues in the debate, yet none of them really moves the discussion beyond its present impasse. Instead, quite different issues will begin to emerge as Tracy and Frei are brought into discussion with Vanhoozer and de Lubac. I will show that what is ultimately important to Tracy and Frei alike is the development of a hermeneutical project in which Scriptural reading is ultimately about encounter between Triune God and responsive reader. Through Vanhoozer and de Lubac we can see that all methods for Scriptural reading should be ordered to that end. As we will see, this changes the parameters of the discussion, as a description of this movement requires an understanding of Scripture’s role in God’s ordering of the economy of redemption.

**B. Scripture’s Spiritual Sense and the Economy of Redemption**

The very hermeneutical method of Tracy and Frei requires that each locate Scripture in the economy of redemption. Central to the method of each is the

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presupposition that, uniquely in the reading of Scripture, a movement takes place from simply understanding the content of the text to encountering God. As much as Tracy and Frei try to focus only on the relationship between text and reader, their very goal of showing that Scriptural reading is about encounter with the Triune God requires that they provide deeper description of theological realities which attend Scriptural reading. In this section I propose that the very methods of Tracy and Frei require them to adopt what de Lubac calls a spiritual sense of Scripture, and that this will, in turn, obligate them to locate the text/reader relationship in the broader context of the economy of redemption. Through the lens of de Lubac’s project of spiritual interpretation, it can be shown that Tracy and Frei must attend more specifically to theological realities in the context of the divine economy in order to complete their hermeneutical projects.

1. The Enduring Value of the Spiritual Sense of Scripture

De Lubac has argued that in traditional Christian readings of Scripture, an essential movement takes place from the text itself to the spiritual reality to which the text points. De Lubac describes this as the movement from the literal sense to the spiritual sense, and his whole work on Christian hermeneutics of Scripture could be described as an attempt to recover this essential movement which he calls spiritual interpretation. Yet despite de Lubac’s insistence on the importance of such a move from text to spiritual reality, contemporary theologians have found it notoriously difficult to articulate exactly what the spiritual sense of Scripture is, and consequently how it ought
to be pursued in reading Scripture today. Among the authors represented in this dissertation, there is little appreciation for de Lubac’s insight. Tracy is willing to accept the usefulness of spiritual interpretation, provided that some other criteria be employed to judge it. Vanhoozer and Frei, who see the text as rendering spiritual reality to readers in some way, nonetheless deny that spiritual interpretation is a discipline in its own right. Even de Lubac refuses to develop a method for what he calls “spiritual interpretation.” At first glance, de Lubac’s project seems antiquated and unuseful.

875 This seems to be the complaint of Joseph Fitzmeyer (The Interpretation of Scripture, 91), who claims, “The problems that the spiritual sense of Scripture raises today are different and multiple, but they are almost all derived from the fact that the term ‘spiritual,’ when used of the meaning of a biblical passage, has become a weasel word. Its connotation always depends on who is using it, and one has to try to sort out its intended nuances.” Fitzmeyer (ibid, 92), himself finds “the christological sense of OT passages,” to be the only legitimate and unproblematic use of the spiritual sense today. Even many theologians who hold a deep appreciation for de Lubac’s work finally conclude that what de Lubac’s “spiritual interpretation,” is no longer necessary for the Church. Notice this extended quote by Susan Wood (Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac, 141): “One can conclude…that even though spiritual exegesis is now foreign to scientific biblical study, its categories continue to shape the Christian worldview. De Lubac does not call for a return to this method of exegesis: its time is truly past as a method of biblical study, the emphasis now being on a scientific and historical study of the literal sense of Scripture, a literary analysis of the biblical narrative, or various other exegetical methodologies. However, the fruits of this exegesis endure and serve as the foundation of a Christian vision of reality.” Wood herself does not fully appreciate the intrinsic unity between the spiritual sense and “scientific biblical study,” and a better articulation of the inevitable movement from text to spiritual reality may show greater ongoing legitimacy in de Lubac’s ongoing work.

876 See On Naming the Present, 120. The chastening of spiritual interpretation by an outside criteria, of course, is exactly what de Lubac argues cannot be done, and consequently it shows how little Tracy understands what de Lubac was arguing for. This makes it all the more interesting to see Tracy embrace something of a spiritual sense that has a distinct resemblance to de Lubac’s spiritual sense.

877 It seems fair to conclude that Vanhoozer’s canonical sense and Frei’s literal sense (which includes figural reading) do, in fact, constitute a spiritual sense of Scripture. While both Vanhoozer and Frei would insist that they are not advancing a spiritual sense, both assume the same set of presuppositions that de Lubac’s spiritual sense requires: the unity of the testaments in Christ, an understanding of Christ as the meaning of history, and the unique spiritual meeting between God and reader that Scripture occasions. See here Denis Farkasfalvy, "A Heritage in Search of Heirs: The Future of Ancient Christian Exegesis," Communio 25 (1998), 505-19, who suggests a movement to the spiritual sense depends on three presuppositions: First, reading with a focus on the “context of salvation history” (this includes the unity of the Testaments in Christ as well as the ongoing action of Christ through the Spirit)(344). Second, reading with a “parallelism between the community and the individual” (This means that each individual finds his/her own salvation history mirrored in God’s relationship with Israel and the Church)(346). Third, reading in light of the principle of “interiorization” (This means that the Bible “ultimately addressed to man’s spiritual faculties in order to elicit from them the response of faith and love”)(347). It seems that
Ironically, however, Tracy, Frei, and de Lubac all provide different strategies for appropriating just the kind of move from text to spiritual reality that de Lubac saw as essential to Christian reading. While showing little appreciation for de Lubac’s hermeneutical project, each performs the same hermeneutical move. Here an analogy between de Lubac’s “spiritual interpretation” and Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* illustrates the issue. In *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Frei claimed that there is a quality in the Gospels called realistic reading, that all interpreters saw it, and yet they “eclipsed” it because they had no method to deal with it. I suspect that something very similar is taking place among these authors in the move from text to spiritual reality.

Vanhoozer would emphatically agree with all three presuppositions, and would see the ‘canonical sense’ as the way in which the interpreter aligns him/herself with them.

De Lubac (*The Sources of Revelation*, 228-29), claims, for example, “The more religiously beautiful and powerful a text is, the more it is stripped of its beauty and power by too ready or rigid an attempt to find a ‘spiritual meaning’ in it….We must, therefore, reject too all-embracing or too automatic practice of spiritual interpretation, so as to preserve the religious value of the Old Testament, considered both literally and in its historical situations.”

Following on the research of the earlier chapters, the implicit move in each could be shown as including at least the following: Frei sees the move from text to spiritual reality in terms somewhat analogous to Anselm’s ontological argument: when the plain sense of the Gospel narratives are read, the reader cannot but understand the referent of those stories to be the living and present Christ today. Frei then furthers his argument by showing that the formative Christian practice was to read the whole of Scripture with Christ at its center. Tracy claims that when it is understood that the very subject matter of Scripture is God, the reader is placed in a position where he or she risks a claim to the whole and thereby moves from text to encounter with God. Tracy sees the greatest intensification of this revelatory potential in Jesus Christ, the Christian classic, but also in other genres of Scripture and, by extension, in other religious texts. Vanhoozer believes the move from literal sense to spiritual sense occurs in the presupposition that God is the author of Scripture, supervening divine illocutions on the human speech acts so that the whole canon ultimately comes to be understood as the communication of God. Vanhoozer’s key phrase, “the literal sense is the canonical sense,” shows a distinct move from text to spiritual reality as it highlights God’s authorship over the authorship of the human writers. De Lubac understands the move as occurring in the shift from understanding the events of history to understanding the meaning of history as it was transformed in the event of Christ.

Frei (*The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 10), describes his thesis about the ‘eclipsing’ of realistic reading with his central thesis: Realistic reading is “a feature, as obvious as it is important, of many of the biblical narratives that went into the making of Christian belief…It can be highlighted by the appropriate analytical procedure…[it] was actually acknowledged and agreed upon by…commentators. But since the…procedure for isolating it had irretrievably broken down…[it] came to be ignored, or…denied for lack of a ‘method’ to isolate it.” This, I suggest, is a very close description to what has also happened to the spiritual sense of Scripture.
Each sees such a move as essential to Christian reading, yet after recognizing its necessity, each fails to describe it since he has no method for it. As a result, the movement from text to spiritual reality, central to Christian interpretation of Scripture, remains unexplored, and is sometimes denied even while it is being used. I suggest that each of these contemporary theologians is quite interested in demonstrating some movement from text to spiritual reality, yet that movement will not be identified as such until the broader theological reality of Christ’s relationship to the Church is shown to determine interpretive method. Below, I suggest why this confusion has taken place and how it can be fixed.

2. Clarifying the Spiritual Sense of Scripture

While it seems that de Lubac’s central problematic is perhaps the central one for developing a contemporary theological interpretation of Scripture, de Lubac’s own lack of clarity has left his insight underappreciated. To clarify the movement from text to spiritual reality, it will be necessary to differentiated four distinct aspects of spiritual interpretation in de Lubac’s work which de Lubac himself does not often distinguish. First, spiritual interpretation provides the theological presuppositions necessary for Church and individual reader to participate in the meaning of Scripture. These include the presuppositions which make Scripture unique, such as Scripture’s participation in the Logos, God’s use of Scripture for self-disclosure to readers, the unique location of the Church as a theological reality, although the two most important seem to be the necessity to reading all Scriptures in light of Christ and to recognize the fourfold structure of Christian reality. Second, spiritual exegesis describes the unique capacity of the Church
to encounter Christ in the Scriptures. For de Lubac, spiritual interpretation always includes a theological description of the Church as reading community which allows disclosure to take place in a unique way. De Lubac shows that believers have a unique capacity to encounter the Triune God in Scripture, based on an imprint of the Logos on the soul of every human being. This capacity can be identified at the level of the individual (the tropological sense) or at the level of the Church (the allegorical sense), yet the two are united in anagogy. Third, spiritual interpretation describes the transformative result of reading the Scriptures in light of Christ. This result remains mysterious as it is an encounter with God which draws the reader into Mystery. Ultimately, the result is the building of the eschatological totus Christus consequently the believer in this way is incorporated more deeply into the Church, the body of Christ which participates in its eschatological reality already even if such eschatological (although not yet fully realized) reality.

Finally, spiritual interpretation may or may not involve a particular method of reading. De Lubac shows that the whole process of spiritual reading is the process of conversion and thus cannot be contained in a particular method, although certain hermeneutical methods may be more useful than others at leading readers to this...
encounter with God. The Christian hermeneutic may include a wide variety of reading methods, provided that it respects the plain sense of the text and employs unique theological presuppositions about God’s use of the text and the spiritual nature of the community responding to God’s communication. In other words, the method in spiritual interpretation is unique precisely because of the uniqueness of the theological presuppositions employed, the capacity of those who read, and the transformative result of Scriptural reading. Consequently, to discuss hermeneutical method in Scripture interpretation, one must describe theological realities beyond the text/reader relationship. One cannot arrive at a sufficient method simply by describing the interaction of the text and reader.

Much of the confusion about de Lubac’s account of spiritual interpretation can be attributed to a lack of consistent distinction between the various parts of the movement from text to spiritual reality. De Lubac is notoriously unsystematic about the various aspects of spiritual interpretation. Even in describing the project, de Lubac at times uses the phrases “spiritual sense,” “spiritual understanding,” “spiritual interpretation,” and “spiritual exegesis” interchangeably, as if there were some hidden Christian method, unavailable to scientific exegesis, which would lead to disclosure of spiritual reality. This conflation often makes it unclear whether de Lubac is speaking of approaching the text with Christian theological presuppositions, or whether he is speaking of the disclosive gift of God received as gracious result of Christian reading. If spiritual interpretation is to be recovered, theologians must be clear about their interpretive aims. For example, de Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 114), claims, “The ‘true’ meaning of the Scriptures, their complete and definitive meaning, can really be nothing other than the meaning ‘which the Spirit gives to the Church,'” he supposes a theological description of the Church which strongly distinguishes between insiders and outsiders. Frei and Vanhoozer naturally bristle at this claim, feeling that the relative clarity of the plain sense is being quickly dismissed in favor of some method accessible only to “insiders.” Yet the disagreement exists primarily because Frei and Vanhoozer are focusing on a different aspect of spiritual interpretation than that which de Lubac emphasizes. De Lubac’s claim acknowledges that the meaning of Scripture is accessible only to the Church because the Church brings a unique set of theological presuppositions to Scripture, that the Church has a unique capacity to understand the spiritual meaning as it uniquely participates in Scripture’s Logos, and that those in the Church can participate in a transformative result not open to all readers. When Frei and Vanhoozer emphasize the external clarity of Scripture, they are referring to the method by which the Scriptures can be read. De Lubac has persistently demonstrated his commitment to scientific exegesis of the literal sense grounded in Christian theological commitments. In this sense, de Lubac is in full agreement with Frei and Vanhoozer, and there is no reason to fear that de Lubac has lapsed into an arbitrary hermeneutic. When de Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 29), warns that, “We must...reject too all-embracing or too automatic a practice of spiritual interpretation,” so as not to circumscribe God’s transformative communication to the reader, he is here speaking of the result of spiritual reading, encounter with the Triune God and incorporation into the world of the text. This movement from text to spiritual reality is, for de Lubac, a
The very methodological goals of Tracy and Frei require that they attend to theological realities beyond the text/reader relationship. Essential to the method of each theologian is the assumption that a movement takes place from text to spiritual reality which, we have now seen, can only be explained when certain theological categories are developed. Consequently, it can be shown that only when these theologians begin to deal explicitly with the broader theological issues attending this movement such as the \textit{theological presuppositions} about God’s use of Scripture, the \textit{capacity} of the Church to receive the disclosure of God, and the \textit{result} that occurs when the movement takes place, can they develop insights about the text/reader relationship which are appropriate to the Scriptural texts. In order to advance the discussion between Tracy and Frei, then, it is necessary to locate Scripture’s role in the economy of redemption. This will mean articulating the relationship between Christ and Scripture, and the relationship between Scripture and the Church.

3. Advancing the Discussion in the Divine Economy

Having shown that Frei and Tracy are obligated, by their own hermeneutical aims, to locate Scripture’s role in the broader context of the economy of redemption, the rest of this chapter will seek to show the specific hermeneutical implications of articulating the relationship between Christ and Scripture and Scripture and the Church. As I examine the relationship between Christ and Scripture in the next section, I will suggest that the most helpful model by which to show how Christ is related to Scripture is de Lubac’s \textit{result of reading} rather than a specific \textit{method} for reading. Keeping these aspects separate will help clarify both how this move from text to spiritual reality occurs.
claim that Christ stands as both Subject and Object of Scripture. This lens will show the intrinsic unity between the literal sense of Scripture and the inevitable movement from text to spiritual reality in Christian reading. This will advance the debate between Frei and Tracy by showing that Frei’s insistence on the plain sense reading of Scripture is quite compatible with Tracy’s insistence on disclosure in reading, so long as Christ is understood as the one who is both sole subject matter of Scripture and the one who is mediated to the Church through Scripture.

As I examine the relationship between Scripture and Church in the following section, I will suggest that the most helpful lens by which to show how Scripture is related to the Church is de Lubac’s distinction between the “Imprint,” “Incorporations,” and “Incarnation” of the Logos. This lens will show the intrinsic unity between Scripture and Church and will show how the Church possesses a unique capacity for understanding Scripture which is grounded in the authority of Christ. This will advance the debate by showing that Frei’s insistence on the identity of Christ rendered in the realistic reading of the Gospels is intrinsically connected with Tracy’s insistence on the self-description of the identity of the Church which reads its Scriptures for the disclosure of Christ, and that both proposals mutually deepen one another. Yet although I will suggest that de Lubac provides the best articulation of the relationship between Christ, Scripture and Church in the economy of redemption, my goal is not to defend de Lubac, but to develop a more adequate Christian hermeneutic of Scripture which incorporates the insights of all four authors and ultimately advances the discussion between Frei and Tracy. Consequently, in each section, after providing a summary of each author’s thought I will state a theological proposal to advance the discussion and show its impact on hermeneutical method.
II. The Relationship between Christ and Scripture

Articulating Scripture’s place in the economy of redemption requires reflection on the Church’s traditional confessions: 1) the Scriptures participate in the Logos, 2) Christ is the Incarnate Logos and the climax of revelation, and 3) Christ mediates Himself to readers by means of the Scriptural texts. Here a thicket of issues must be discussed, including the way in which Scripture and revelation are distinguished but not separated, the way in which a plain sense reading of Scripture renders spiritual disclosure of Christ, and the way in which the Scriptures are regarded as God’s past and present communication.

Henri de Lubac provides a hermeneutical lens which has potential to clarify these relationships. The center of de Lubac’s Scriptural hermeneutics is the claim that Christ is at the same time both singular Object and Subject of Scripture. The Person of Christ is both the unifying hermeneutical principle of the texts and the active Subject who addresses readers by means of those texts. This hermeneutical principle affirms the consistent testimony of the Church that the Scriptures harmoniously witness to Christ and that the texts themselves participate in Christ as the Incarnate Logos mediates Himself to readers by means of them. Consequently, this lens illumines the way in which

883 De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, I, 237-38), claims that as Object, “Jesus Christ brings about the unity of Scripture, because he is the endpoint and fullness of Scripture. Everything in it is related to him. In the end he is its sole object.” As Subject, “Inasmuch as he is the exegesis of Scripture, Jesus Christ is also the exegete. He is truly Scripture’s Logos, in an active as well as a passive sense.”

884 Dei Verbum I, #2 reflects this emphasis of de Lubac: “Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the fullness of Revelation,” and shows that the presupposition that Christ is both Subject and Object of Scripture is an integral part of the faith of the Church. See (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html. Accessed July 12, 2011)
Christian reading must both participate in Christ and to preserve the identity of Christ. Use of this hermeneutical lens will clarify the way in which each author conceives of the relationship between Christ, Scripture, and the Logos, and will provide a way in which to incorporate the insights of all four authors into a fuller Christian hermeneutic. In this section I will first survey the work of each author by means of this lens to see the specific emphasis of each about the relationship between Christ, Scripture, and Logos. Then, I will provide a theological proposal about the way in which understanding Christ as Subject and Object of Scripture can advance the discussion between these authors. Finally, I will provide specific insights for the relationship between text and reader which will lead to a more adequate theological interpretation of Scripture.

A. Surveying the Positions of the Four Authors

As each author seeks to show that Scriptural reading renders spiritual reality to readers, it is necessary for each put forth some argument about the way in which Christ relates to Scripture, both as its subject matter and as the one who actively uses Scripture to transform readers. This section, then, will summarize the way in which each author relates Christ to Scripture as its Subject and Object. I will argue that while no author is completely successful in showing the relationship, insights from each can be used in developing a useful hermeneutical framework.

*David Tracy:* Tracy’s emphasis lies almost completely on the present disclosure of risen Christ to the contemporary reader, helpfully reminding Christians that Scriptural reading is essentially a disclosive, transformative encounter with the living God revealed
in Jesus Christ. Yet Tracy’s constant focus on the text/reader relationship keeps his attention on the way in which readers access and experience this encounter rather than the way in which Christ mediates this encounter, and hence keeps his project from adequately describing the way in which Christ stands as Subject of Scripture. Tracy’s early model seems to describe Scripture as an intensification of some general revelatory potential. Tracy’s argument for the potentially disclosive nature of all religious texts prevents him from showing how Scripture participates in the Logos in a qualitatively unique way, and hence how the Incarnate Logos mediates Himself to readers as Subject of Scripture. In his later work, Tracy admits that his conception of Scripture as a religious classic is difficult to reconcile with the Church’s affirmation that Scripture participates in the Logos. Tracy attempts to reformulate his discussion of Scripture in light of contemporary philosophical discussions of presence and absence in writing. This new focus on the dialectic between presence and absence allows Tracy to articulate

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885 I refer here to Tracy’s Blessed Rage for Order account specifically. Tracy (“On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,” 64, nt. 51) has admitted the failure of this account. This account seems to suggest that Scripture contains a greater intensification of disclosive potential than other religious texts because Scripture bears testimony to Christ, the greatest Christian classic. Hence Scripture is revelatory only as a greater intensification of what can be disclosed in lesser ways in other religious texts. In his later work, Tracy (Analogical Imagination, 231-338), does place a firm priority on Christ as the primary Christian classic, thus distinguishing Scripture as a secondary Christian classic which holds its status as a classic by its relation to Christ. Yet Tracy does not quite complete his argument and must still show how the texts render precisely this Christ to readers.

886 Tracy (“Writing,” 383), claims that Judaism, Christianity and Islam do not see their sacred texts as “classics, nor even as sacred texts, but as Scripture and thereby as somehow participatory in what is construed as the revelation of God.”

887 Tracy (“Writing,” 390), claims, “There are good theoretical reasons to hold that the interplay of presence (in spoken, proclaimed word and sacrament) and Scripture-as-writing in Christian self-understanding needs more attention for clarifying Christian hermeneutics of Word and Scripture.”
more clearly the way in which Scripture participates in the Logos and mediates Christ.  

Hence it is precisely by abandoning his model of the classic that Tracy is able to more successfully show how Christ stands as Subject of Scripture.

Tracy’s focus on the classic which discloses truth to readers in front of the text also makes it difficult to specify exactly how Tracy understands Christ as Object of Scripture in his early work. Frei’s persistent complaint is that Tracy does not show how the whole narrative of Scripture testifies to the unique identity of Christ. Frei argues that Tracy tends to make the narrative of Christ into a disclosive story about the existential situation of the contemporary reader, causing the story to be about the existential possibility of the reader rather than on the identity of Jesus Christ. In Tracy’s later work, he recognizes this difficulty and attempts to overcome by showing that Christian experience is defined in terms of Christ’s particular identity. 

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888 Tracy (Ibid), claims, “In Christian self-understanding, except for the unique status of Christ-as-Logos, there is no claim to full or simple self-presence in either manifesting Word-as-Logos or proclaimed word as rendering present the Word in distance (Bultmann) or sacrament. There is some presencing, to be sure, but mediated in and through writing/scripture. Presence is never full, simple, or whole.” Unfortunately, this new option is suggested only in summary form, and Tracy never really draws out the implications of this new model.

889 Frei (Types of Christian Theology, 82), explicitly targets Tracy’s phenomenological schema of ostensive and non-ostensive referents, complaining that Tracy’s “interpretation ends up having two meanings or referents at the same time, Jesus and some general experience,” which Frei feels necessarily mutes the plain sense of the text and leads to “hermeneutical incoherence.” Frei feels that Tracy’s model quickly shifts emphasis to the non-ostensive reference, leaving the ostensive reference as one instance of general experience.

890 In his later work Tracy, ("Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," in Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 138), insists on the particularity of Christ. Tracy (ibid), claims, “God, for the Christian, is the one who revealed decisively who God is in and through the message and ministry, the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of none other than Jesus the Christ. The most profound New Testament metaphor for who God is remains the metaphor of 1 John: ‘God is love.’…However, if this classic Johannine metaphor...is not grounded in and thereby interpreted by means of the stark reality of the message and ministry, the cross and resurrection of this unsubstitutable Jesus, who, as Christ, is God’s decisive self-disclosure as love, then Christians may be tempted to think that the metaphor is reversible into ‘Love is God.’”
integrate Frei’s insistence on plain reading into his own emphasis on plurality and diversity may yield something of a plan for figural reading, which would show how the identity of the reader must be grounded in the unsubsitutable identity of Christ.\textsuperscript{891}

Tracy’s later work suggests that readers may read the literal sense with a great deal of diversity and plurality, provided that those readings are always ordered to the plain sense of the Gospel narratives.\textsuperscript{892} If these later insights were organized into a system of figural reading, Tracy’s project could contribute much in showing how Christ as Object of Scripture.\textsuperscript{893}

\textit{Hans Frei:} Whereas Tracy is most concerned to illumine the potential for disclosure rendered in Scripture, Frei is most concerned to demonstrate that the particular identity of Jesus Christ is the singular Object of Scripture. For Frei, Christ is not an

\textsuperscript{891} Frei and Tracy are very close in their mutual emphasis on a plurality of readings subordinated to the plain sense of the passion narratives at this point. In his later work, Frei (Letter to Gary Comstock, 5 (unpublished manuscript, 1984), cited in Higton, \textit{Christ, Providence, and History}, 84), emphasizes the legitimacy of a plurality of readings in the Church, provided that they do not undermine the plain sense. Frei (ibid), claims plainly, “For me ‘meaning’ in the gospel narratives is more and more a combination of 1) the communal-religious interpretive tradition and what \textit{it} has seen as their primary meaning; 2) the fact that the tradition has given primacy to their realistic, ascriptive sense; 3) that outside of that tradition there is no reason to think of \textit{any} single interpretive move or scheme as \textit{the} meaning of these stories; 4) and even within it there is room for others, provided they do not conflict with the primary, realistic or literal sense; 5) that subordination of understanding to the text…is in no way the same as the elimination of interpretive understanding and of a possible multiplicity of interpretations.” Tracy (\textit{On Reading the Scriptures Theologically}, 43-44), makes almost exactly the same point: “[T]he church has made clear through the centuries how it fundamentally reads all the canonical books: through their harmony with the common Christian confession as that confession is more fully articulated in the plain sense of the passion narratives. Nevertheless, the entire canon already bespeaks so remarkable a diversity of readings of the common confession and narrative that the diversity should also be theologically affirmed as long as the plain sense of the common passion narrative is not disowned.” I believe that much advancement of the dialogue with Frei could be made if Tracy developed this insight into a full program of figural reading.

\textsuperscript{892} Tracy, ibid, 43-57.

\textsuperscript{893} This emphasis on plurality would open space for lively Christian discussions about the way in which Christ, as Subject, addresses the Church, while allowing such discussions to be judged by their ability to be related to the plain sense of the Gospel narratives. See Tracy (\textit{On Reading Scripture Theologically}, 41 and 59, nt. 17), where he emphasizes that he wishes to add Frei’s work to his own without substantially changing his project.
“Object” of Scripture in the sense that the historical Jesus Christ is the ostensive referent of Scripture. Rather, the particular identity of Jesus Christ is the singular subject matter of the whole canon. Frei emphasizes the clarity of realistic narrative to render the Christ, to whom the whole Scriptures witness, to the reader. Frei then uses figural reading to extend the narrative of Christ to the whole of Scripture, so that the entire biblical text can be normatively read as an extension of the story of Christ.

Frei is careful not to equate Scripture with revelation, as Christ is the unique revelation of God to which the Scriptures bear witness. Yet Frei’s project of realistic narrative seeks to remove the gap between text and referent to such an extent that it is practically difficult to distinguish between Scripture and revelation. For Frei, while Scripture formally is the responsive texts of the community to the event of Christ, there is really no practical distinction between Christ and Scripture for readers today. This is the case because Scripture renders Christ present to the reader. For Frei, as Dawson claims, “The text does not deliver God to its reader, as though it were a mere channel through which God might be conveyed. On the contrary, the text that renders the identity of Jesus, like (although not identical to) the logos incarnate in Jesus, just is, says Frei, the linguistic presence of God.”894 In realistic narrative, text and event can be logically distinguished but not practically separated. By eliminating the gap between meaning and referent, realistic reading causes Scripture to participate in revelation so closely that Scripture is practically equated with revelation.

While Frei’s project has yielded tremendous insights in showing that Christ is the singular Object of Scripture, Frei does little to show that Christ is Subject of Scripture.

894 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity, 165-66.
For Frei, realistic reading renders Christ’s identity to the reader, and when the reader recognizes this identity, the reader encounters Christ as present. Yet Frei remains hesitant to say that Christ speaks to the reader or encounters the reader in a transformative way. Instead, the reader is simply required to recognize the identity of Christ to which the whole Scriptures attest and then follow Him. For Frei, the participation of Scripture in the Logos is limited to the narrative rendering of the Christ. By so focusing on Christ as Object of Scripture, Frei does not make sufficient room for Christ’s transformative presence as Subject of Scripture whom readers encounter readers through the text. Frei simply claims that Scripture makes the identity of Christ present to the reader, but he leaves undeveloped both the doctrinal grounding and implications of this claim. The consequence is that Frei does not really develop the way in which the Church is transformed by Christ through encounter with Christ in Scripture.

Kevin Vanhoozer: Like Frei, Vanhoozer argues strongly for the primacy of the literal sense and the centrality of figural reading to render Christ as the singular Object of Scripture. Furthermore, Vanhoozer’s unique articulation of the whole canon as actively used by God to incorporate readers into the economy of Triune missions, as well as his insistence that the canon is the complete and relatively determinate speech action of God, provide theological presuppositions which allow for the movement from text to spiritual reality when believers read Scripture. Vanhoozer’s proposal that Scripture is an

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895 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 222), claims the Bible must be read figurally because figural reading “represents the inner logic or telos of the canon by interpreting the story of Israel and the story of Jesus as one story,” and because figural reading is “the rule for present-day Christians to make sense of their stories as Jesus did of his, precisely by reading their own lives in light of the life of Jesus.”
extension of the Triune missions has great potential for showing how Christ stands as
Subject of Scripture, using it for the purpose of self-revelation to the Church.

Still, Vanhoozer’s use of speech-act theory may actually prevent Vanhoozer from
showing that Christ is both Subject and Object of Scripture. Despite Vanhoozer’s
insistence that Scripture is a species of God’s speaking action, Vanhoozer’s apologetic
for the closed, determinate meaning of Scripture through his use of speech-act theory
prevents him from showing Christ’s role as active Subject of Scripture.896 Vanhoozer’s
argument that God’s speaking action is found in the in the supravening illocutionary
stance encoded in the literal sense of Scripture seems to force Vanhoozer to argue that
God’s speaking action ceased with the closure of the canon.897 At the same time,
Vanhoozer’s use of speech-act theory at times shifts the emphasis away from Christ as
sole Object which unifies Scripture and onto the philosophical articulation of God’s
illocutionary speaking action as the causes of the canon’s unity, thus practically
detracting from the centrality of Christ as Object of Scripture.

“Perlocutionary effect” remains a decidedly general literary category rather than a
theological concept in Vanhoozer’s project. Vanhoozer’s apologetic for determinate meaning keeps his
focus on the way in which perlocutionary effect does not influence the meaning of the text, rather than on
the way in which encounter does take place between the reader and the Triune God. Overall the Spirit is
restricted to simply applying to readers a determinate meaning which all readers should be able to grasp,
provided that they apply the correct theological presuppositions to the text. Certainly Vanhoozer wants to
describe conversion and incorporation into Christ, but the philosophical resources of speech-act theory, as
Vanhoozer employs them, really do not prove sufficient to articulate the gracious encounter between God
and reader occasioned by the text.

God, it turns out, does not really “speak” today, but rather “makes effective” in readers
what God spoke long ago. Vanhoozer (Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 428), claims, “The Spirit’s
present-day leading of the community into all truth is best viewed, I believe, under the rubric of
perlocutionary effects….The Spirit thus opens readers’ minds and hearts so that the words can produce all
their intended effects…the Spirit’s role is not to add a new sense to the Word, but to energize and empower
the sense—the speech act—that is already there.”
Henri de Lubac: De Lubac, more than any of the other theologians, emphasizes that reading Scripture occasions an address by the living, present Christ who stands as Subject of Scripture. For de Lubac, the Christ who is Object of Scripture is always the Christ in act, and the reader cannot move from the plain sense of the text to the spiritual reality without being addressed by Christ as Subject. A Christian reading of Scripture is always more than reading the plain sense of the text in light of the correct theological presuppositions. This means, for de Lubac, that the “letter” is always the “mere letter” if it does occasion transformative result. It is the incorporation of the individual into the eschatological body of Jesus Christ which only occurs when Christ actively addresses the reader.

De Lubac is clear that the whole Scriptures must be read in such a way that they testify to Christ. As Object, de Lubac writes, “Jesus Christ…is the endpoint and fullness of Scripture. Everything in it is related to him. In the end he is its sole object.” Yet de Lubac’s emphasis lies decidedly on the side of Christ as active Subject who addresses readers in the interpretation of Scripture, and seems to argue that Christ is Object of Scripture precisely because He stands as Subject of Scripture. De Lubac shows that, “It is [Christ] and he alone who explains [Scripture] to us, and in explaining it to us he is himself explained.” Consequently, “Jesus, thus, is Exegete of Scripture in himself, in

898 De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, I, 237.
899 For example, when de Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 105), speaks of Christ as the “unique Object” of Scripture and the “totality of its exegesis,” this is so because “Jesus Christ effects the unity of Scripture because he is its end and its fullness.” In fact, de Lubac seems to believe that figural reading is incomplete precisely because it would allow the exegete to see Christ as Object without seeing Him as Subject.
900 Ibid, 106.
all his mystery. In principle, he is this Exegete from the first instant of his incarnation.”

De Lubac’s persistent difficulty is his tendency to downplay the role of the literal sense in mediating Christ as he emphasizes the spiritual sense. Consequently, de Lubac locates Christ’s role as both Subject and Object of Scripture in the spiritual sense, not in the literal sense. We have already seen that de Lubac likewise tends to locate God’s communicative action in Scripture in the spiritual sense rather than in the literal sense. A particular challenge arises for de Lubac to show the connection between the particular Christ rendered in the plain sense and the living, present Christ who addresses the Church. Likewise, de Lubac must more clearly show the connection between the plain sense and God’s communication in the spiritual sense. Where Frei insists that the literal sense of Scripture achieves just this unity of the Scriptures in Christ as singular Object, de Lubac so emphasizes the need for the spiritual sense that he does not adequately show how the literal sense mediates the Christian Mystery.

B. Proposal #1: Christ as Subject and Object of Scripture

As we have seen, locating Scripture in the economy of redemption requires a clear articulation of the relationship between Scripture, Christ and the Logos. Christian confession affirms that Christ stands as the full presence of the Logos in human flesh, and that Scripture participates in the Logos as it bears unified witness to the Incarnate Christ. Thus while both Scripture and Christ mediate the Logos, they do so in qualitatively

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Footnote: 901. Ibid, 108. Yet de Lubac (ibid, 109), suggests that Christ is Object most specifically in the event of the Cross.
different ways, Scripture is called *revelatory* as it participates in and bears witness to the Christ who is *revelation*. In the economy of redemption, the glorified and present Christ uses the Scriptures as unique, unified witness to Himself. Through the Scriptures, Christ mediates Himself to readers in order to incorporate them into His Mystical body, the Church. Christian reading, then, always moves from text to spiritual reality, as the recognition of Christ in Scripture occasions encounter with Him which incorporates the reader into His body. Below, I provide a theological proposal which, using the insights of all four authors, seeks to provide categories for developing a more complete Christian hermeneutic of Scripture.

**Premise 1: To affirm that Christ is the Subject of Scripture is to necessitate the recovery of a movement from text to spiritual reality as a normative hermeneutical principle for Christian reading.** This movement from text to spiritual reality, recovered by de Lubac, has a central and lasting significance for the Christian interpretation of Scripture, and the explicit acknowledgement of such a movement will lead to a better articulation of Christian hermeneutical method. All four authors, I have argued, implicitly see this as the central issue in their hermeneutical projects, although only de Lubac is able to describe it and thus sufficiently explain its relevance. As de Lubac has shown, it is impossible to explain the place of Scripture in the economy of redemption without somehow showing that Christ actively uses Scripture to mediate Himself to the Church. Reciprocally, it is impossible to read Scripture as Christ’s mediation to the Church without likewise recognizing a spiritual dimension into which the texts draw the receptive reader.
Premise 2: The affirmation that Christ is Object of Scripture gives priority to the plain sense reading of Scripture as the means by which Christ is rendered to readers. This insistence on the plain reading of the literal sense to render the particular identity of Jesus Christ, recovered by Frei, likewise has enduring value for the Christian reading of Scripture. The claim that Christ is Object of Scripture shows that the whole Scriptural witness testifies to Christ as subject matter of the Christian story. This gives the Gospels’ narrative witness to Christ a privileged place in the Christian canon, and it shows that all Scripture is somehow ordered to the realistic narrative which renders the identity of Christ. Affirming that Christ is Object of Scripture requires some method such as figural reading to show how the whole Scriptures are a unified narrative which testifies to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Figural reading not only reads Christ as the singular subject matter of the closed canon, but it also draws the reader into that story in such a way that the reader finds her own reality in the narrative of Christ (what Frei calls “inratextual” reading). Frei’s emphasis on realistic reading, as well as his extension of the story of Christ to the whole Scripture and to present readers through figural reading, provides the best resources for examining Christ as Subject of Scripture.

Premise 3: All properly Christian readings of Scripture must be able to show the intrinsic connection between Christ as unified Object of Scripture and Christ as active Subject of Scripture. Articulating Christ as Subject and Object of Scripture provides a useful hermeneutical lens because it holds together the two traditional Christian claims about the nature of Scripture which have been recovered by Frei and de Lubac. First, through Frei, we see more clearly that the plain sense reading of Scripture, which is ordered to the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ, forms the
normative hermeneutical framework for Christian faith and practice. Second, through de Lubac, we see that Christ actively encounters readers by means of Scripture to incorporate them into His eschatological body, the Church. These two traditional claims, however, cannot simply be held loosely together. Rather, they must be shown to be connected intrinsically to one another in the economy of redemption. Here, an integration of Frei’s emphasis on the plain sense with de Lubac’s emphasis on the spiritual sense is essential for showing how Christ is both Subject and Object of Scripture in a way connects the plain sense reading with the active address of Christ.

Furthermore, reading Christ as both Object and Subject of Scripture allows readers of Scripture to participate in the realm of grace, not just nature, as they read. While it would be tempting to simply associate Christ’s role as Object of Scripture with the literal sense and Christ’s role as Subject of Scripture with the spiritual sense, this would create a false dichotomy. The biblical texts are Scripture precisely because they are understood by the community to participate in the Logos through their relation to Christ. Although the Scriptures participate in the Logos, they are not themselves the revelation. They are revelatory in that they point to and mediate Christ, who is the Incarnate Logos. De Lubac is correct when he gives priority to Christ’s role as Subject over the rendering of Christ as Object, since the biblical texts are Scripture to the extent that they are drawn into the divine economy by Christ. Consequently, for the Christian even the plain reading of Scripture, though equally accessible to all readers, occurs in the realm of grace, since the very plain reading of the Scriptures is a mediation of Christ, who stands behind them, unifies them in Himself, and guides the community in reading them. While the Old Testament texts refer to events which occurred before the covenant
of grace, the very act of Scriptural *reading* occurs in the realm of grace as a result of the completed Scriptural canon unified in Christ. As a result, it would be incorrect to say that literal reading is a matter of nature and spiritual reading is a matter of grace. Once the entire corpus of Scriptural texts is unified as canonical Scripture, the literal reading of Scripture, which renders Christ as Object, is elevated to the realm of grace by Christ Himself to whom the plain reading always points as a unified witness.  

C. Advancing Hermeneutical Method in the Text/Reader Relationship

Articulating the relationship between Scripture, Christ and the Logos by locating Scripture in the economy of redemption yields significant implications for the relationship between text and reader. This section will return to the discussion of hermeneutical method and suggest some ways in which each of these authors contributes to the advancement of a Christian hermeneutic. While most of the discussion will focus on relating Frei’s insistence on the literal sense of Scripture with de Lubac’s insistence on the spiritual sense of Scripture, all four authors contribute insights which will provide resources useful for advancing the debate between Tracy and Frei, as Scripture is located in the broader context of the economy of redemption.

1. The Centrality of Figural Reading: Frei and de Lubac Advancing Vanhoozer and Tracy

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902 Vanhoozer’s insight that the literal sense is the canonical sense provides a helpful way of articulating this (see *Is There a Meaning in this Text*, 313).
The first methodological consequence of the Christian hermeneutic is the foundational role figural reading plays in understanding Christ as Subject and Object of Scripture. Traditionally figural reading has been the central way to both extend the whole narrative of Scripture to be about Christ and to incorporate the reader into the world of the text. As Mike Higton notes, “Figural reading had fulfilled two related functions in pre-critical exegesis: it had exhibited the unity of the canon, particularly the unity of the Old and New Testament, and it had provided a link between the biblical story and the readers’ own time.”

Going further, David Dawson summarizes the participatory goal of figural reading in this way:

“Figural reading in the Christian tradition seeks to express the dynamic process of spiritual transformation in ways that respect the practitioners’ commitment to both past and future, both old identity and newly refashioned identity. Imbedded in figural practice is all the drama of discerning the point of existence and identifying one’s place in it, figured as a journey from a former mode of existence through various states of transformation toward some ultimate end.”

The purpose of figural reading is to illumine Christ as the meaning of the Scriptures and to incorporate the reader into the story Christ as He establishes the Church and leads it to eschatological fulfillment in the *totus Christus*.

Conversely, when the practice of figural reading is abandoned, Christ quickly becomes an existential paradigm of possibility for our present situation rather than our situation finding meaning in Christ. Dawson summarizes, “what is meaningful is no longer, as the practitioners of figural reading would have insisted, the mysterious

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903 Mike A. Higton, *Christ, Providence and History*, 145.

904 Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*, 216.
transformative interactions of God in history, but rather the deeply subterranean humanity that all persons share." Without figural reading, it becomes very easy for some abstract quality to replace Christ as the ground of meaning and reference point from which all other narratives must be judged. It is precisely this abandoning of figural reading that Frei calls the “great reversal” from narrative to external meaning systems. Frei concludes,

[W]hen the pattern of meaning is no longer firmly ingredient in the story and the occurrence character of the text but becomes a function of a quasi-independent interpretive stance, literal and figural reading draw apart, the latter gradually looking like a forced, arbitrary imposition of unity on a group of very diverse texts. No longer an extension of literal reading, figural interpretation instead becomes a bad historical argument or an arbitrary allegorizing of texts in the service of preconceived dogma.

It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain an intratextual reading of Scripture if figural reading were abandoned. Vanhoozer, Frei and de Lubac all think that figural reading is the sine qua non practice of intratextual Scriptural readings. The test for any project of figural reading is its ability to hold together both the centrality of Christ (Christ as Object) and the incorporation of the reader into the narrative of Scripture through incorporation into the totus Christus (an implication of the premise that Christ is Subject of Scripture). Here I argue that Frei and de Lubac both develop proposals which can be mutually beneficial to each other and corrective of Vanhoozer and Tracy.

905 Ibid, 212.
906 Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 37.
907 See Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 223; Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 1-20, and de Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, 1, 23.
Uniting Frei and de Lubac: Even in the description of figural reading it is impossible to escape a discussion of Christ’s role as both Subject and Object of Scripture. Frei and de Lubac illustrate both sides of the dialectic which must govern Christian interpretation, as Frei stresses Christ’s place as Object of Scripture while de Lubac stresses Christ’s active role as Subject of Scripture. Frei and de Lubac both insist that Christ is the Subject Matter of Scripture and the entire canon must be read in light of Him. Yet a fundamental difference exists between Frei’s insistence on figural reading and de Lubac’s insistence on allegory as the foundational principle for unifying the Testaments in Christ. This disagreement runs deeper than a difference of definition and highlights a key hermeneutical emphasis which must be clarified.908 De Lubac insists that only Christian allegory can adequately explain the transformation of the Old Testament by the New in Christ, arguing that typological or figural readings cannot make the sacramental movement from text to spiritual reality. Frei, for his part, worries that allegory would diminish the efficacy of the literal sense in rendering the particular identity of Christ and would replace Christ’s particular identity with some vague dogmatic proposition.909 Here it is possible to see most clearly the impact of Frei’s

908 Certainly some of the disagreement between Frei and de Lubac about allegory is simply based on different definitions of the term. For Frei, allegory is the imposition of an external system of meaning on the text, while figural reading allows the whole narrative to render its own meaning (see Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 212). For de Lubac, allegory is reading Scripture in light of the radical transposition of Christ, its hermeneutical principle, while figural reading, if taken alone, would reduce Scripture to a mere system of historical correspondence. I find no evidence that Frei ever read de Lubac’s work. If he had done so, he almost surely would have been more careful in his distinguishing of allegory from figural reading. Furthermore,

909 Significantly, Frei still sees a valid place for allegory in the history of Christian interpretation, and claims that allegorical reading is legitimate, so long as it works to unify the whole Scriptures to Christ. Frei, then, is in a peculiar position, in which he must defend allegory’s unifying role in the Church, and yet reject it as a legitimate reading. While Frei disagrees with allegorical interpretation, he sees allegory as an important part of reading the whole Scriptures as a unified whole throughout the
emphasis on Christ as Object and de Lubac’s emphasis on Christ as Subject of Scripture. Frei is so focused on Christ as Object that he never fully considers the full implications of Christ as Subject confronting the reader in the text, while de Lubac is so focused on Christ as active Subject that he never fully appreciates the way the external clarity of the whole text renders Christ as Object. This difference is motivated to some extent by different apologetic aims. Frei’s project seeks to reverse the eclipsing of Christ’s particular identity while de Lubac’s project seeks to show that Scripture is the locus of the active presence of Christ. Consequently, Frei is most concerned about preserving the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ (Christ as Object), while de Lubac is most concerned about showing how believers are incorporated into Christ (Christ as Subject). Nonetheless, the disagreement leads to very different understandings between the two about the way in which believers participate in the economy of redemption.

Frei’s emphasis on the unsubstitutable identity of Christ leads him to emphasize that believers only follow that identity from a distance. Dawson claims, “Frei wants to show how Jesus’ identity is a consequence of his unique relation to God, a relation that

history of the Church. Frei (“Literal Reading,” 39), claims, “it was largely by reason of this centrality of the story of Jesus that the Christian interpretive tradition in the West gradually assigned clear primacy to the literal sense in the reading of Scripture, not to be contradicted by other legitimate senses—tropological, allegorical, and analogical. In the ancient church, some of the parables of Jesus…were interpreted allegorically as referring latently or spiritually to all sorts of types, and more especially to Jesus himself, but this could only be done because the story of Jesus itself was taken to have a literal or plain meaning.” In other words, the literal sense (that plain reading which renders ascriptive identity) is the foundational reading for the Christian faith. Figural reading is an extension of the literal sense (though not the only possible reading of realistic narrative), as it extends the plain sense from the Gospels to the whole of Scripture. Allegorical reading is a subordinate and nonessential (although sometimes useful) tool which, by employing a different criterion of meaning on the text, reinterprets the plain sense of the text (often to refer to Christ as its meaning).
human beings cannot share (and therefore cannot usurp).”910 Dawson helpfully summarizes Frei position in this way:

“Frei’s notion of figural extension also emphasizes the unidirectionality of figural reading: figural reading is not a triumphalist retrospective observation of the extent to which one has superseded a past that has been rightly repudiated; rather, it is a patient ‘working through’ the spiritual dynamics of the disciple’s movement from his or her state of figure to one of fulfillment, a working forward in light of the assurances of Christ’s first coming but also of the uncertainties of his not-yet-realized second coming. Frei’s characteristic way of stating this progression is not, however, to speak about the disciple’s journey, but about the singularity of Christ’s identity (as the expression of God’s identity), and to describe how figural readings seek out the complex ways in which that identity is rendered by both Old and New Testaments….he…continues to describe the figural process more as a matter of textual interpretation than of historical transformation.”911

For Frei, the Scriptures establish the condition for the possibility of the Church—readers can only understand their own identity-in-relation when they have first recognized the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. Yet while Frei’s emphasis on Christ’s particular identity is essential his articulation of it is one-sided, for it does not sufficiently examine the implications of that unsubstitutable identity on the life of the reader.912 For de Lubac, the Scriptures bring about the transformation of the reader precisely because they mediate the Christ who stands as Subject of Scripture. De Lubac always emphasizes that the partial yet deepening incorporation of the believer into the identity of Christ is the result of being encountered by the Christ about whom the believer

910 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 186.
912 Dawson (Ibid, 213), criticizes that “when Frei textualizes body and history in this way [i.e. that of identity description], the reader—with his or her own body and the bodily effects of his or her reading—begins to drop out of sight, as all attention is directed to the way the gospel text renders the identity of Jesus.” Dawson (ibid), suggests further, “The literal reader of the text’s realistic, narrative sense gets to encounter Jesus as only Jesus alone is, but the action of Jesus or God impinging upon the embodied, historical life of the reader is a matter left to take care of itself without much comment.”
reads. Hence the three aspects of the spiritual sense (allegory, tropology and anagogy) all show the intrinsic relationship between reader and Mystery that occurs when one moves from the literal sense to the spiritual sense.913

Both projects appear indispensable for a Christian reading of Scripture, because both recapture foundational theological presuppositions about the way in which Christ stands as Subject and Object of Scripture. Furthermore, it seems that both projects can be harmonized, provided that different elements of spiritual interpretation are distinguished.914 In Frei’s insistence on the literal sense, he remains focused on safeguarding a method which will preserve the identity of Jesus Christ but he says little about the capacity of the Church to receive this disclosure or the result of this encounter with Christ on readers. De Lubac’s suggestion that a sacramental move occurs as Christ uses Scripture to mediate Himself to the reader moves beyond Frei’s focus on method to address the capacity of the Church to receive disclosure and the result which takes place when God encounters the reader. Since each describes different aspects of the interpretive process, there appears to be no real tension between the method Frei proposes for figural reading and the method de Lubac proposes for allegory. Frei’s method of reading the plain literal sense to render the particular identity of Jesus Christ present to the reader seems to only strengthen de Lubac’s affirmation that the Christian Mystery is

913 As Bryan C. Hollon puts it, “it is through spiritual exegesis that the church moves from an encounter with the historical Jesus to a union with the cosmic Christ” (Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri De Lubac, Theopolitical Visions 3 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 165).

914 Here I speak again of the distinction between theological presuppositions (e.g. that Christ is Subject and Object of Scripture), capacity (i.e. the unique location of the Church to receive the mediation of Christ), method (i.e. the rules by which one must read the text) and result (i.e. the encounter that takes place when believers read the text) developed at the beginning of the chapter.
accessible only through the literal sense. Both projects appear to be mutually compatible and necessary, as the reading of the plain sense does intrinsically lead to the spiritual interpretation of Scripture as the result of reading the plain sense. The encounter with the Present Christ who causes incorporation into His eschatological body, is a properly sacramental movement which is rendered by, but not contained in, the literal sense. Frei and de Lubac Correcting Tracy and Vanhoozer: In light of Frei and de Lubac’s insistence on some form of figural reading to relate all reality to Christ, Tracy’s lack of interest in figural reading appears significant. In his early work figural reading does not appear useful to Tracy’s project, as Tracy was more interested in showing how Scripture participates in the contemporary situation than in showing how the reader is incorporated into the narrative of Scripture. Tracy’s later work expresses appreciation for Frei’s insistence on the centrality of Christ as narratively rendered in the Gospels, and Tracy claims that he can incorporate Frei’s insistence on the centrality of Christ into his own project. Yet Tracy never develops a system of figural reading. This lack of interest in figural reading is a significant indication that Tracy has not completed a hermeneutical project focused on Christ as both Subject and Object of Scripture who fulfills the Scriptures in Himself. Tracy still may, in practice, tend to see Christ as the greatest instantiation of an existential possibility for the contemporary reader. Tracy’s later work is clearly committed, in principle, to ordering all Scriptural readings to the plain sense of the Gospels. Were Tracy to incorporate a system of figural reading into his project, he

915 Practically, it appears that it will be a persistent challenge for those who start from allegory to show the clarity of the literal sense, while it will be a persistent challenge for those who start from figural reading to account for the transition from text to spiritual reality.
would do much to clarify the way in which he envisions the un substitutable identity of Christ to establish the hermeneutical rules for Scriptural interpretation.\footnote{Tracy (On Reading the Scriptures Theologically, 42), claims, “As long as the plain sense reading of the passion narratives is understood as the fullest rendering of the common Christian confession, then a diversity of readings of both confession and narrative will inevitably occur.” Here Tracy could better show how the Scriptures both regulate and this plurality. For example, Telford Work (Living and Active, 299), suggests, “It is...both significant and discouraging how rarely the status of a particular text is defended with respect to its roles in the history of salvation that begins in Israel, and climaxes in the earthly life of Jesus, and continues in the Spirit-indwelt Church. Usually the appeal is to an abstract primitivism or developmentalism.” It is precisely here that Tracy could complete his project by grounding the diversity of Scriptural readings in this overarching system of figural reading.}

The emphasis on figural reading by Frei and de Lubac may also correct Vanhoozer’s project. While Vanhoozer develops a coherent philosophical system for articulating God’s authorship of Scripture, Vanhoozer’s suggestions may actually distract from the centrality of Christ. Vanhoozer claims with Frei and de Lubac that the practice of figural reading is indispensable for Christian reading. He argues that figural reading “is the mainspring of theo-dramatic unity, the principle that accounts for the continuity in God’s words and acts, the connecting link between the history of Israel and the history of the church, the glue that unifies the Old and New Testaments.”\footnote{Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 223.} Yet while Vanhoozer insists that figural reading is the hermeneutical key to Christian interpretation of Scripture, Vanhoozer’s use of speech-act theory (in which God has supervened divine illocutions on human speech acts so that readers encounter the very Word of God in Scripture), tends to shift attention from the presence of Christ as both Subject and Object of Scripture to a more abstract theory of God’s speech acts. Those who accept Vanhoozer’s model must be careful that a philosophical conception of authorship does not replace Christ as the unifying principle of Scripture. In fact, it would seem that all
“authorial discourse” readings may share this same danger of shifting focus away from Scripture’s witness to Christ and onto a philosophical description of God’s speaking action. Vanhoozer’s early work appears to have been guilty of just this reduction, as Vanhoozer there emphasized the authoritative content of Scripture without simultaneously showing how readers are incorporated into Christ as they read the text. This does not mean that Vanhoozer is wrong to emphasize the primacy of God’s authorship or to use speech-act theory to describe it. It only means that there is a constant danger in allowing a philosophical description of authorship to replace the centrality of Christ when such a philosophical description seems better fitted for securing the authority of Scripture. Frei and de Lubac provide a helpful corrective as they emphasize that the Christ who speaks in Scripture is its singular Object and that all claims to the authority of Scripture as God’s Word must be ordered to Christ.

The heart of the problem is Vanhoozer’s insistence that because both Christ and Scripture are unique communicative actions of God, both Christ and Scripture must be

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918 As an example, see here Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Many Evangelical attempts which follow Wolterstorff and Vanhoozer and emphasize authorial discourse are primarily proposals for authority in which Christological and figural readings become minor points, if they are mentioned at all. For example Jeannine K. Brown, in her *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), centers her whole book around the implications of speech-act theory for hearing God’s voice, without any centering of the whole Scriptures on the Person of Christ. My criticism is not of what such books say, but rather what is left unsaid. Practically, covenant instruction begins to take over the narrative function of the text and obscure the centrality of Christ.

919 Vanhoozer (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 223), corrects this problem in his later work, claiming, “While universal history may be the locus of divine action, however, the focus of divine action is the history of Jesus Christ….Jesus Christ is the hermeneutical key not only to the history of Israel but to the history of the whole world, and hence to the meaning of life, for he is the Logos through whom all things were created.” Here it is Jesus Christ including His history, which is only rendered in the Scriptures, which is the hermeneutical key to all understanding of history.
considered revelation. By not adequately distinguishing between Christ as \textit{revelation} and Scripture as \textit{revelatory}, Vanhoozer’s project continually runs the risk of shifting emphasis from Christ to texts as he emphasizes the ability to recognize God’s determinate speaking action in Scripture. This difficulty appears more clearly when comparing Vanhoozer with Frei with respect to the distinctions between Scripture and revelation. Whereas Frei locates the revelatory nature of the text in the elimination of the gap between sense and reference (thereby allowing the text to participate closely in the event of revelation), Vanhoozer locates the revelatory nature of the text in the supervening of God’s speech acts over human speech acts. For Frei, Scripture is revelatory because it is realistic narrative of Christ, while for Vanhoozer Scripture is revelatory because God’s illocutionary action supervenes upon the intended speech acts of the human authors. This difference means that the encounter occasioned by the text between God and reader occurs in fundamentally different ways. According to Vanhoozer’s model, disclosure takes place as the reader engages the text with the proper theological presuppositions. The reader must understand that the words of Scripture are the communicative action of God, and that these texts are uniquely authoritative and demand obedient response. According to Frei’s model, narrative fitly renders the event of Christ to the reader so that the reader encounters the present, risen Christ. This difference in emphasis places Frei and Vanhoozer on somewhat different trajectories. Frei will direct his focus \textit{in the text} to the event of Christ extended through figural

\footnote{Vanhoozer continually emphasizes the close association between words and deeds found in William Alston, \textit{Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). Expanding on Barth, Vanhoozer (Vanhoozer, “A Person of the Book,” 56), claims that speech-act theory helps to reconcile Barth with Evangelicals by showing that because “God’s Word is His act,” the revelation of the Logos in Christ and the revelation of the Logos in Scripture are both forms of revelation.}
reading, and Vanhoozer will direct his focus *behind the text* for a philosophical conception of authorship which illumines God’s past and present action. Distinguishing between Scripture’s participation in the Logos and Christ’s hypostatic union with the Logos would allow Vanhoozer to articulate a clearer distinction between Scripture and revelation, which would allow him to better explain how Christ mediates Himself to the Church by means of Scripture. ⁹²¹

2. The Regulation of the Canonical Sense: Vanhoozer Advancing de Lubac

Despite de Lubac’s achievement in retrieving the spiritual impulse of precritical Christian interpretation, many contemporary exegetes have found his project unusable. This is because they fear that a move from text to spiritual reality may quickly degenerate into arbitrary and fanciful eisegesis. ⁹²² As one critic has noted, “The exegete can never feel confidence in an approach to the Bible which is so free of method and control.” ⁹²³ Understandably, many interpreters worry that to accept uncritically De Lubac’s suggestion that Scripture contains an “infinite forest of meanings” may discount the importance of genres and grammar, leaving God’s communication in Scripture

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⁹²¹ Telford Work (*Living and Active*, 95), helpfully distinguishes between “inlibration” (the Word’s union with the human words of Scripture), and “incarnation” (the Word’s union with the human nature of Christ), showing that God’s Word in Scripture as “real presence” is different from God’s Word in Christ as “full personal presence.” We will see that de Lubac’s distinction between “incorporation” of the Logos in Scripture and “Incarnation” of the Logos in Christ would help Vanhoozer clarify the relationship between Christ and Scripture in a way that would retain the centrality of Christ even as the revelatory nature of Scripture is explored (see *History and Spirit*, 422).


ambiguous.\textsuperscript{924} As Boersma writes, “De Lubac appeared to give the imagination relatively free reign, as long as the interpreter remained within the edifying teaching of the Scriptures. To specify exactly the cases in which allegory might be acceptable would probably have struck him as an attempt to limit the ‘infinite forest of meanings.’”\textsuperscript{925} De Lubac’s hesitation to locate Christ’s mediating action in the literal sense tends, at times, to suggest that careful exegesis of the literal sense is optional for hearing God’s speaking action. Boersma continues, for de Lubac “the most important question was whether the spiritual meaning was based on the overall teaching of the Scriptures and so ‘fruitful’ to the believer.”\textsuperscript{926} Williams summarizes the difficulty by claiming that for de Lubac, as for the early Church, “However subjective a given interpretation may be, so long as there is linkage with that major allegoria…the interpretation is not without basis.”\textsuperscript{927} De Lubac’s chief difficulty seems to be that he has not adequately shown the way in which the literal sense is itself taken up into God’s communicative action and how it is uniquely fitted to serve as a locus of God’s communicative activity.

\textsuperscript{924} De Lubac, Medieval Exegesis, 1, 75.

\textsuperscript{925} Hans Boersma, Nouvelle Theologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 188.

\textsuperscript{926} Ibid, 167, noting de Lubac, History and Spirit, 358.

\textsuperscript{927} Williams, Receiving the Bible in Faith, 158-59. De Lubac (History and Spirit, 374-5), excuses many of the arbitrary employments of the spiritual sense in the early Church by claiming, “If in fact the detail of their explanations…seems so fanciful, it is because that was not for them the essential thing. They spread out comfortably ‘in the vast field of divine Scriptures’. They had no scruples about exercising their fertile imaginations there by freely using the ‘analogy of faith’…This is because, they thought, ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the freedom to understand.’” De Lubac (“Old Distich,” 122) defends his position by emphasizing that the singular Allegory to which all others relate is nonetheless objective: “Allegoriae are never more than the small change of the main allegoria that the believer has presented initially with all the vigor of his faith, and he is well aware that the work he is doing with the allegoriae is less assured. Taken one by one, the allegoriae that he discovers can be rather subjective….But the principle that they should highlight, the major allegoria of Scripture, is always objective.”
For Vanhoozer and Frei, the very essence of Christian revelation is the claim that God’s communication to human beings is clear enough to be sufficiently understood. The Christian reader must be able to approach the Bible with some confidence that she will, in fact, hear what God intended to say therein. While de Lubac’s emphasis on encounter with Christ as Subject of Scripture is certainly essential to Christian reading, it should not devalue Frei’s insistence that the opposite is also true: the reader will never encounter the Christ who is Subject of Scripture in a way that is disconnected from encountering Christ rendered in the literal sense. If de Lubac’s description of the movement from text to spiritual reality is to be adequately appreciated, it must also show how the plain sense of the text intrinsically mediates the Christian Mystery in a way that is open to public investigation and dialogue.

In light of Frei and Vanhoozer, one can see that de Lubac does not always sufficiently appreciate the way in which the closed canon of Scripture regulates subsequent allegorical interpretation. This issue gets to the heart of much contemporary concern about de Lubac’s method, and de Lubac Himself seems to suggest that Christian interpreters today ought to perform the same task as did the New Testament authors in exploring allegory in the rich fields of the Old Testament in search of connections to Christ. Williams (Receiving the Bible in Faith, 210), claims, “For de Lubac, the special concern of allegory within the larger framework is ‘the work of redemption which is continued in the Church and its sacraments,’ and its task is to trace the significance of prior figures and events in relation to the accomplishment of that initial Advent.”

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David Williams has suggested that a very great distinction exists between allegory as it was practiced by the New Testament authors and spiritual interpretation as it is central to Scriptural interpretation today. Williams argues that the early Church’s use of allegory was “not strictly speaking… interpretation …inasmuch as it stems from lived experience and oral communication rather than encounter with the written texts.”

Williams suggests that the apostles did not interpret the Old Testament in light of the New, as much as they applied the Old Testament to their new experience of the reality of the risen Christ. With the closure of the New Testament canon, Williams claims, this situation changed. After the closure of the canon, Christian spiritual interpretation became primarily an investigation of God’s communicative action at the level of the canonical whole. Consequently, allegory (a correlation of individual OT historical events to Christ), can now be relegated to a non-essential role in biblical interpretation today without destroying the spiritual sense. Such correlations, Williams claims, may still have great value, but they must be classified as “applications” rather than interpretation, since the “[i]nclusion of the NT in the body of authoritative Scripture provides a stable if many-sided narrative and explanatory center to God’s action. Drawing what had gone before into more explicit connection with that center then becomes a matter of discerning purpose and meaning operative at the level of the canonical whole.”

For Williams, discerning the spiritual sense now is the process of discerning God’s communicative

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929 Ibid, 208-09.

930 Thus Williams (ibid, 210-12), suggests separating allegory (what he calls the responsibility to make connections between biblical events) from the spiritual sense (what he calls the “meaning” of the Bible).

931 Ibid.

Williams’s proposal rightly shows that the interpretive situation is different for contemporary Christians than it was for the Church prior to the closure of the canon. Moreover, he helpfully illustrates the regulatory function that the closed canon places on subsequent readings of Scripture. Frei and Vanhoozer emphasize that the distinctive change brought about in the Church after the closure of the canon is of chief importance for intratextual reading. Vanhoozer insists that the literal sense is now the canonical sense, and consequently certain constraints are imposed on meaning only after the closing of the canon. For Vanhoozer, the meaning of the text is now relatively stable and clear in light of its completion. Frei claims further that figural reading ought to follow a linear motion throughout the canon, thereby respecting the literal sense yet extending the singular narrative to the whole of Scripture. For Frei, the reader is incorporated into the world of the text when she reads the text in continuity with its linear development, and not as interpreting from her own experience, as did the early Church. Frei’s clear plain sense and Vanhoozer’s canonical sense, then, could only be implemented after the closure of the canon. These programs differ significantly from the practice of allegory in the early Church in which the apostles interpreted the Old Testament in light of their experience of the contemporary event of Christ. Together, Frei and Vanhoozer’s proposals do not discourage the further correlation of Old Testament types to New Testament antitype, but they do provide an additional regulatory principle for reading the whole of recorded salvation history as the plain sense. The completed canon, read as a
literary whole, does provide a foundation for evaluating the legitimacy of all subsequent Scriptural correlations.

De Lubac’s focus on the continuity between the New Testament apostles as allegorists and successors of the apostles as allegorists tends to discount this decisive shift.932 A decisive difference does exist between the pre-canonical practice interpreting the Old Testament in light of the experience of Jesus Christ and the post-canonical practice of reading all things in light of Christ. Vanhoozer and Frei show that the method has changed from the experience of the pre-canonical Church to the interpretation of the post-canonical Church. Christians today are regulated by the closure of the canon in a way that the early Church could not have been. Vanhoozer’s “canonical sense” helpfully brings this decisive shift of method into focus, as it insists that God’s speaking action can be discerned after the closure of the canon in a way previously unavailable to the Church. Frei’s figural reading shows that the reader is obligated to read plainly in a way that is now regulated by the contours of the text which testifies authoritatively to Christ rather than to interpret in light of the Church’s contemporary experience of the risen Lord.

Consequently, readers can approach Scripture with confident expectation that they can understand what is plainly written and that their Scriptures plainly bear harmonious witness to Christ. Plain canonical reading is the indispensable means to understand the living Christ who mediates Himself to readers through His present communicative Action. This claim is not meant to contradict de Lubac’s understanding of allegory, but only to chasten it in light of the plain literal sense. Readers can indeed access the

932 See especially de Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, II, 216-26), who emphasizes that all successors of the apostles are entrusted with this fundamental task of allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
meaning of Scripture through its plain sense and read for understanding just as they can read any book (with perhaps the necessary theological presuppositions imposed by the canon). It is through this medium of plain communication that Christ mediates Himself. It is possible to read Scripture plainly while employing the theological presupposition that the whole of the story is about Christ, and to extend the story of Christ to all of Scripture without being thereby obligated to develop connections between the Old Testament and the New.

3. The Integral Relationship of Text and Event: Frei Advancing de Lubac

All four theologians agree that the result of reading Scripture is encounter with a Mystery fitly rendered by, but too great to be contained in, the biblical text itself. De Lubac wants to call the movement from text to spiritual reality a sacramental movement, yet his suggestion is beset with a certain methodological difficulty which must be overcome to make this insight work. As we saw in the last chapter, de Lubac often relegates the text itself to the role of ‘spokesperson’ which renders the events of history, and it is those events which, in turn, sacramentally disclose the spiritual reality. It remains unclear, on de Lubac’s account, exactly what role the text plays in the rendering of spiritual reality. As long as the text only leads to history, the text itself cannot participate in this sacramental movement, since one natural thing (the “letter”) cannot sacramentally render another natural thing (history). Here it will be suggested that while de Lubac’s sacramental ontology provides a helpful description of the movement from text to spiritual reality, his framework needs Frei’s explanation of realistic narrative to work consistently.
On Frei’s account of realistic narrative, de Lubac’s undetermined gap between text and event is a false problem, since realistic narrative assumes that there is no gap between text and referent. The text itself is a fitting vehicle for the movement to divine reality, as it makes the event present to the reader. Through his use of realistic narrative, Frei “insists that the flesh or letter is not opposed to, but is rather the fit expression of, spirit or meaning.” Because the text “means what it says,” the text is not a vehicle which guides the reader to the ostensive referent, but is the God-ordained means of presenting history to the reader. That history presented to the reader must be distinguished from, yet can never be separated from the narrative which renders it present.

Through realistic narrative, Frei illumines the importance of de Lubac’s claim that, in the New Testament, the literal sense is the spiritual sense. Frei claims, “But since it is the story of Jesus taken literally that unveils this higher truth, the ‘literal’ sense is the key to spiritual interpretation of the New Testament. In this as in some other respects, ‘letter’ and ‘spirit’ turn out to be mutually fit or reinforcing in much orthodox Christianity, despite the superficially contrary Pauline declaration (2 Cor. 3:6).” Based on a realistic reading of the Gospel narratives, the literal sense fitly renders the spiritual sense, inasmuch as the text renders an event that shapes the meaning of the entire

933 Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 175.

934 Murphy ("Henri De Lubac's Mystical Tropology," 181), claims, concerning de Lubac’s thought, “Strictly speaking, the New Testament does not have an allegorical sense because the literal sense itself reveals the various dimensions of the Mystery of Christ. Practically speaking, however, the allegorical sense can be applied to the New Testament to refer to a deeper and broader understanding of the reality mediated by the letter of the text.”

Christian canon. Thus Frei implies something of a sacramental relationship which takes place at the level of the text. The literal reading of the text, by realistically rendering history, is a fit vehicle to move the reader to divine reality, as it renders the Christ who is present now, who subsequently provides the understanding of the whole picture of Christian reality. As this literal, realistic story is extended through the whole Scriptures, all Scripture fitly renders the events of history in such a way that the text itself leads the reader to the spiritual reality. Frei’s achievement of method thus clarifies de Lubac’s desired move from text to spiritual reality, as it shows how the text fitly render the spiritual reality. Where de Lubac emphasizes that the Scriptural texts are an incorporation of the Logos, de Lubac can only carry this claim through consistently as he shows how the texts present to the reader the very salvation history that the Logos has effected.

II. The Relationship between Scripture and Church

At this point it is necessary to turn from the theological presuppositions about the way in which Christ mediates Himself to readers by means of Scripture to an explanation of the capacity which the Church has uniquely been given to receive the disclosure of Christ in Scripture. Just as the move from text to spiritual reality is the central movement in a Christian reading of Scripture which must be explained in the broader context of the

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936 For Frei (The Identity of Jesus Christ, 147), “For the believer to know who Jesus Christ is, to affirm his presence, and to adore him are one and the same thing…concerning Jesus Christ and him alone, factual affirmation is completely one with faith and trust of the heart, with love of him, and love of the neighbors for whom he gave himself completely.” While it seems that these different aspects indeed need to be distinguished (hence a move from the literal sense to the spiritual sense), Frei’s emphasis that all these elements is what the Bible means by Jesus Christ is helpful for understanding the way the text brings the spiritual reality to the reader.
economy of redemption, so the spiritual capacity to receive such disclosure must be articulated within this broader context as well. The Church, as a theological reality, stands in a unique position where it is uniquely constituted by and drawn into encounter with Christ by means of Scripture. Some ecclesiological reflection, then, which explains this unique capacity, must instruct hermeneutical discussions.

Despite its importance, the relationship between Scripture and Church has proven quite difficult for these four theologians to articulate for a number of reasons. First, as we have seen in the previous chapters, a tension exists between emphasizing the external clarity of the Scriptural texts and acknowledging the unique capacity of certain readers to participate in a qualitatively greater way in Scriptural disclosure. All four theologians struggle with articulating the movement from text to spiritual reality because they feel the pressure to emphasize both the clarity of the plain sense and the capacity of Scripture to disclose spiritual reality to receptive readers. When emphasis lies on the external clarity of Scriptural reading, it becomes quite difficult to show how some readers are capable of receiving the disclosure of spiritual reality in a qualitatively greater way than others. Second, it is in the discussion of receptive capacity that theological presuppositions about the relationship of nature and grace arise with greatest force. The way in which each theologian conceives the nature/grace relationship necessarily

\[937\] For Tracy, the authority of Scripture is built, in part, upon its ability to engage intellectual discussions in the public square with clarity. For Frei, the authority of Scripture is built on its ability to communicate Christ to the reader with clarity. For Vanhoozer, the authority of Scripture depends on its ability to be understood by all persons who employ the right theological presuppositions. Consequently, Tracy's focus is on the disclosive capacity of Scripture, yet he wants to make theology public, and therefore needs to show that Scripture is potentially disclosive to all persons who employ useful hermeneutical strategies. Frei argues that the Christian community ultimately determines the rules for reading, yet emphasizes that anyone who reads Scripture according to those rules will encounter the living Christ rather than simply a story about Christ. Vanhoozer claims that the Scriptures is disclosive to all those who read plainly with the right theological presuppositions.
structures the way in which he will describe the disclosure rendered to readers in Scripture and how readers will receive that disclosure. Third, since the Reformation, both Protestant and Catholic theologians have framed discussions of the relationship between Scripture and Church in terms of authority. The disagreement between Vanhoozer and Frei about the location of authority in either Scripture or tradition is illustrative of this ongoing debate. This debate tends to draw focus away from discussion of the Church’s theological nature and role in the economy of redemption.

The way in which each author articulates the relationships between external clarity and unique capacity, nature and grace, and Scripture or Church as locus of authority leads to very different articulations about the unique capacity of the Church to receive disclosure. When these three issues are discussed with only the text/reader

938 The proposal set forth in this dissertation does not require the theologian to take a specific position on the nature of grace. The real ongoing issue which sets Tracy’s work apart from Frei, Vanhoozer and de Lubac is that Tracy locates the work of the Spirit more with creation than with redemption. (In that issue, there appear to be many similarities between the disagreement between de Lubac and Schillebeeckx about the sacramental nature of the Church and the disagreement between Frei and Tracy about the particular identity of Jesus Christ. The particular identity of Christ and the historical character of grace as event are closely related, and have significant implications for one another. (For a good discussion on the debate between de Lubac and Schillebeeckx, see Wood, Spiritual Exegesis and the Church, 109-28)).

939 We have seen that this is a central problematic for Frei and Vanhoozer. Frei’s central problematic is the location of authority for Scriptural reading, and his arguments against Tracy centers on either returning to the authority of the plain sense in his early work, or giving priority to the Church’s self-description in constructing hermeneutical method. Vanhoozer also centers his project on the problematic of authority, emphasizing sola Scriptura and articulating the economy in such a way that the Church is always responsive to the Scriptures. Consequently, discussions of the unique capacity of the Church in reading Scripture tend to become mired in questions about the relationship between Scripture and Church as primary authority for Christian life.

940 Boersma (“On Baking Pumpkin Pie,” 248), notes Congar’s argument that the tendency to choose either Scripture or the Magisterium as the final authority over the Church reflects a divide which took place in the middle ages so that, “Slowly but surely, the ‘rule of faith’ came to be identified with the active tradition of the magisterium rather than with the uncreated truth of divine revelation itself.” Consequently, Boersma (ibid, 253, nt. 48), claims “[O]ver time Scripture and Church (magisterium) have become separated, with Protestants focusing on the canon as the rule of faith, and with Catholics assigning this role to the magisterium.”
relationship in view, they necessarily reach impasses. Yet when the relationship between Scripture and Church is placed in the broader context of the economy of redemption, it is possible to ease tensions between these issues and provide a helpful description of the unique receptive capacity of the Church which allows it to participate uniquely in the disclosure of spiritual reality in Scripture. This section, then, will examine the way in which each theologian articulates the unique capacity of the Church, as the reading community, to receive the disclosure of Christ in Scripture. It will then make a theological proposal, based on the insights of all four authors, which will establish a helpful framework for advancing the discussion. Finally, it will provide specific observations which will advance hermeneutical method for the relationship between text and reader.

A. Surveying the Positions of the Four Authors

This section will show how each theologian attempts to explain the unique relationship between Scripture and Church in a way which uniquely positions the Church for reception of Christ in Scripture. I will argue that Frei and Vanhoozer do not provide adequate theological reflection on the nature of the Church to be able to articulate the Church’s unique capacity for disclosure. Only de Lubac provides sufficient theological reflection to show why the Church possesses a unique capacity to receive disclosure in the Scriptures, as he describes both Scripture and Church as incorporations of the Logos.

David Tracy “Capacity as Openness to Disclosure”: Tracy’s early model of the classic illumines a powerful transcendental insight that all persons possess the condition
for the possibility of the disclosure of the divine. Tracy’s project is driven by a theory of “manifestation” in which all readers engage truth in an already-graced world. All readers are “fitted” to receive disclosure of the divine because, as created in the image of God, they are able to recognize the universal gracious work of the Spirit. Yet while Tracy focuses on the capacity of all persons in receiving disclosure, he says very little about the way in which participation in the Church affects the believer’s reading of Scripture. Two practical factors prevent Tracy from adequately describing the Church’s unique capacity for encounter. First, Tracy’s effort to keep theology a public discipline practically discourages reflection on the unique capacity of Christians in reading. Tracy must emphasize the general conditions for the possibility of religious experience to promote continual public dialogue about religious experience. Second, Tracy wants to show that a number of religious texts such as Bible, the Koran, etc. are able to disclose a claim to the whole which is (at least in principle), accessible to all readers. All readers are constituted in such a way that they could, in principle, be brought to a limit-experience through the text, even if the subject matter disclosed is unique to each religious classic. While Tracy is comfortable talking about a greater and lesser potential for revelatory experience, and a greater and lesser intensification of disclosure, he does not feel comfortable discussing a unique capacity for disclosure.

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941 Philosophy is the most common mode of reflection limit-experiences in this situation of manifestation. Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 379), writes that “...the power is now disclosed through the critical mediations of reason reflecting upon the original experience of wonder in existence only to yield through the philosophical reflection to a mediated sense of a fundamental trust in the ultimate reality of God as well as an attendant trust in all reality as graced. Reflection upon that uncanny sense of wonder discloses the uncanny giftedness of all creation.”

942 This is not foundationalism, but is a low-level observation that texts can and do render subject-matter. The actual moment of encounter is, for Tracy, as for all three other theologians, a judgment for theological anthropology and ecclesiology, not philosophy.
In his later work, Tracy admits that his transcendental model is insufficient to articulate a truly Christian capacity for disclosure, and he acknowledges that Christians read for disclosure precisely because they believe that the Scriptures participate uniquely in the Logos. Tracy does describe the theological presuppositions that he feels must attend a properly Christian reading of Scripture (namely, Jesus Christ is the greatest instance of God’s revelation; Scriptural readings must not be in discontinuity with the apostles; Scripture participates in the eternal Logos). Yet he never really shows how the Church possesses a unique capacity to receive such disclosure. Both Tracy’s claim that the Church understands Scripture as uniquely participating in the Logos and his claim that the Church is a sacrament require some articulation of this capacity than is possible through the general model of the classic. As long as Tracy grounds capacity for disclosure only in general human capacity and the universal work of the Spirit, and not specifically in Christ as Incarnate Logos, Tracy can only articulate a quantitative difference between disclosure within the Church and disclosure outside the Church, and not a qualitative difference.

Hans Frei “Capacity as Employment of Method”: Frei’s early work is based on the assumption that the texts plainly render a particular identity accessible to all readers. Frei’s argument against any external meaning system imposed upon the text requires him to show that all Scriptural “meaning” is contained in the text and accessible to all readers. Since there can be no hidden meaning in the text accessible to insiders only, the only


944 In the last section, I argue that Tracy has indeed implicitly articulated something of a qualitative distinction, although he does not develop the implications of his insight.
distinction between “insiders” and “outsiders” that can exist is that “insiders” are part of a particular community which is bound by particular theological presuppositions and hone particular interpretive skills.

In Frei’s later work, he tends to ground authority in community consensus over the inherent nature of the texts. But Frei never provides a convincing theological argument for why the Church decided to read their texts literally. Frei is reticent to provide a substantive theological description of the Church, and instead focuses on describing it as a socio-linguistic community. As a result, even where Frei has opportunity to focus on the theological nature of the community, all discussion about the capacity of the Church reduces to the way in which the Church as a social (not theological) community forms rules for method. Although Frei claims that reading the plain sense should lead to the recognition of the Christ who is living and present, Frei never sufficiently shows how the reader’s incorporation into Christ affects subsequent interpretation. Consequently, Scriptural reading for Frei becomes more of a honing a set of skills based on observation of the text than a transformative encounter with the Triune God through the text. Conversion, practically speaking, becomes more a matter of perfecting interpretive method than participating in spiritual transformation. Only

945 See Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 141-93, and Bryan Hollon, Everything is Sacred, 106-47.

946 Dawson (Christian Figural Reading, 212-14), provides a very insightful summary of the differences between Frei and Origen regarding spiritual interpretation. For Frei, Dawson concludes, literal reading and employment of interpretive skill is necessary to “make sure disciples do not confuse Jesus’ identity with their own…” (213). See also Cyril O'Regan, "De Doctrina Christiana and Modern Hermeneutics," in De Doctrina Christiana: A Classic of Western Culture, ed. Duane W.H. and Pamela Bright Arnold, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). who claims, “Understanding the biblical text…is according to Frei more like a skill, a species of know-how,” so that the focus is on “competence or incompetence in the practice of interpretation.”
when further doctrinal reflection is given to the way in which conversion affects subsequent interpretation of Scripture will it be possible for Frei to place Scripture in the economy of redemption and thus ease the thorny issue of authority.

Kevin Vanhoozer “Capacity as Acceptance of Theological Presuppositions”: Vanhoozer’s project is motivated by a desire to show that God is the primary author of Scripture and that God’s speaking action is intelligible to all readers in the literal sense. Vanhoozer suggests that all readers can understand the human speech acts which compose the literal sense of Scripture. But because believers recognize that God’s speech acts supervene on the human speech acts at the level of the canon, they are able to hear the very speaking action of God as they read. Vanhoozer’s use of speech-act theory leads him to argue that the unique capacity of the Church to hear God in Scripture is almost entirely a matter of applying the right theological presuppositions to the literal sense. Disclosive reading, for Vanhoozer, is a process of lining up the correct doctrinal presuppositions and then reading the plain, canonical sense of the text.

At first glance, Vanhoozer appears to have altogether avoided the tricky issue of capacity by means of a confessional paradigm: those who confess that God is the primary author of Scripture are, by definition, in the Church and are able thus to hear the voice of God when Scripture is read. On this account, those who read the literal sense with the presupposition that Scripture is a covenant document of God do actually hear the voice of God. Subsequently, when those believers read the plain sense of the canonical Scriptures, a rule of faith emerges which then determines the confessional boundaries for being within the Church. Christians, then, enter the hermeneutical circle by
acknowledging that God is the primary author of Scripture. Subsequently they find Scripture to establish the clear and authoritative boundaries for their reading community.

Yet it is unclear that Vanhoozer’s proposal really solves the problem he sets out to overcome. First, Vanhoozer places a great deal of weight on a particular philosophical model of authorship as *the* doctrinal foundation for a Christian hermeneutic. Vanhoozer is correct in saying that the Church’s claim that the Scriptures are the Word of God (what he calls the “Scripture Principle”) and the Church’s claim that the Scriptures manifest dual authorship are grounded in the unified witness of tradition. Yet Vanhoozer’s own articulation of the Scripture principle and dual authorship is distinctly not a traditional claim, but is based on speech-act theory, and should not be so hastily argued to be the faith of the Church. Consequently, this understanding of authorship may not have the strength to ground Vanhoozer’s whole proposal. Second, Vanhoozer’s proposal is supported by a very dense theological scaffolding which only finds credibility within the Church. Hence the same authority problem which led Frei to locate the authority of Scripture in the consensus of the Church returns to plague Vanhoozer’s model. Placing authority in God’s communicative action necessitates granting authority to the Church to recognize and receive that communication. Vanhoozer’s “Scripture Principle” and his case for the primacy of the literal sense must both be grounded in some unique capacity

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947 For example, Brevard Childs ("Speech-Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation," 80), criticizes “authorial discourse theories” using speech-act theory for attempting to bypass the fundamental Judeo-Christian claim that “the movement by which scripture becomes the vehicle of divine revelation was by means of the Holy Spirit. Human words in all their time-conditioned form were received thereby as the divine voice addressing an expectant recipient. It is to be noted that the human words were not altered into another form of speech, but as the Written Word became the Word of God for them. The human words were not transformed into a new form of illocutionary divine discourse, but were now understood and made alive through a divine activity.” Childs (ibid), concludes, “In my judgment, the most fundamental flaw in the new hermeneutical theory arises from the failure to understand the role of the church in collecting, shaping and interpreting the Bible, which is the issue of canon.”
of the Church to establish fruitful methods for reading. While Vanhoozer’s typical
approach is to promote a theological argument for God’s use of the text over the authority
of tradition, until Vanhoozer explores the nature of the Church as a theological reality, his
work will likely only convince those Protestants who already agree with *sola Scriptura*.

Henri de Lubac “Capacity as Incorporation of the Logos”: Of the four
theologians, only de Lubac explicitly articulates the unique capacity of the Church to
receive the mediation of Christ in the reading of Scripture. De Lubac makes three
important moves which serve to describe the unique capacity of the Church to receive the
disclosure of Christ in Scripture. First, de Lubac clearly distinguishes between Scripture
and revelation, allowing him to subject both Scripture and Church to the event of Christ
and to emphasize that both are used by God to mediate the Mystery of Christ. De
Lubac clarifies this claim by showing that the Church possesses a unique capacity for
reading because the Church, like Scripture and the Eucharist, is an “incorporation of the
Logos” which is grounded in the Incarnate Logos. Hence the distinction between
Scripture and revelation allows De Lubac to provide a theologically rich description of
both Scripture and the Church as fellow incorporations of the Logos and as fellow
mediators of the singular revelation of Christ. This model provides resources to speak of
the Church as having both the unique capacity to receive the disclosure of Christ in
Scripture and the unique capacity to mediate Christ along with Scripture.

948 De Lubac (*La révélation divine*, 164-65, cited by Moulins-Beaufort, "Henri De Lubac:
Reader of *Dei Verbum*," 680), claims that Christ, “The revealed object ‘is transmitted to us whole and
entire by Scripture, and whole and entire by Tradition, both of which are intimately connected.’”

Second, de Lubac’s understanding of tropology suggests that readers possess a unique capacity for disclosure because they bear the imprint of the Logos. De Lubac builds an argument that all persons are “fitted” to recognize and receive the Logos incorporated in Scripture because they have the imprint of the Logos on their souls. When Scripture is read, the individual understands her own history to participate in the story of the Bible because she participates in the Logos. As the reader fits himself into the narrative of the Scriptures, de Lubac claims, “Interior experience and meditation on Scripture accordingly tend to merge in a unique ‘experience of the Word,’” in which each deepens and furthers the other.\textsuperscript{950} This theological explanation for the efficacy of Scripture provides a much stronger reason for expecting encounter with the Incarnate Logos in Scripture than either Tracy or Frei provide. De Lubac moves beyond Tracy’s argument for a general capacity for disclosure in all human beings by providing more adequate theological terminology to describe this capacity as a function of the Logos who is Incarnate in the particular Jesus Christ. De Lubac moves beyond Frei by showing that disclosure in Scriptural narrative is not simply a result of narrative being a more fitting genre to render identity, but is a consequence of the Logos causing a recognition of identity between the narrative of Scripture and the reader.\textsuperscript{951}

Third, de Lubac grounds the capacity of the Church in a rich understanding of the totus Christus, in which the Church interprets in light of the “already” of allegory and the “not yet” of anagogy. As the Church realizes that it is the new reality formed in

\textsuperscript{950} De Lubac, \textit{Medieval Exegesis}, II, 142. De Lubac (ibid, 174), claims, “When the Word comes to the soul, it is to instruct her in wisdom, and this understanding of the soul with the Word” is not “imaginary;” rather, “the mystery interiorizes itself within the heart, where it becomes experience.”

\textsuperscript{951} See De Lubac, \textit{History and Spirit}, 398.
relationship to Christ the head (allegory), it realizes also its movement toward eschatological fulfillment in the *totus Christus* (anagogy), it interprets Scripture according to its nature. Here de Lubac establishes a theologically rich description of the Church which cannot be gned through a discussion of phenomenological method (Tracy), authority (Vanhoozer), or ascriptive identity (Frei). The fourfold structure of Christian reality is inscribed on the Church by its participation in Christ. The Church, in return, not only uniquely holds the correct theological presuppositions for reading this unique text, but is itself “fitted” by Christ for receiving disclosure of Christ. The Church, as that institution which participates in the Mystery, is the only one which has an intuition of the Mystery. This intuition toward which the Church yearns allows the Church to sense which interpretations are legitimately part of its faith.

These three steps allow de Lubac to develop an ecclesiology sufficient to articulate the way in which the Church participates in Christ as it reads the Scriptures. De Lubac would insist that the Church is not, as Frei suggests, simply that institution which follows the identity of Christ and understands its own identity in relation to the identity of Christ. Consequently, Scriptural reading is not *simply* a recognition of the identity of Christ plainly rendered in the literal sense. Furthermore, de Lubac would insist that the Church is not, as Vanhoozer suggests, simply that community which responds in obedience to Scripture. Consequently, Scriptural reading is not *simply* the recognition of and response to divine speaking action. For de Lubac, the Church is primarily an eschatological reality, the body of Christ which participates already in the

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952 Vanhoozer (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 235, 418, etc.), typically uses Gerhard Ebeling description of the Church that “the history of the church is the history of biblical interpretation.”
kingdom, even as it awaits full union with its head. De Lubac’s emphasis that the “infusion of the Holy Spirit placed the people of God in an essentially new position” as “the Spirit of Christ has renewed, transfigured, and ‘spiritualized’ everything,” would allow de Lubac to stress the “already-present” dimension of the Church, and would cause him to worry that both Frei and Vanhoozer have overlooked the very Mystery of the Church as a theological reality. 953

B. Proposal #2: Distinguishing the “Imprint,” “Incorporations,” and “Incarnation” of the Logos

I have suggested that de Lubac’s ecclesiology has the most developed resources to describe the unique capacity of the Church to receive the disclosure of Christ in Scripture. At this point, I will use insights from all four authors to sketch a theological proposal about the unique capacity of readers within the Church which will provide helpful insights for the relationship between text and reader. This proposal should advance Tracy’s project by showing how disclosure is intensified in certain readers and provides resources to help Frei and Vanhoozer avoid the problem of locating authority in either Scripture or the Church.

I will base my proposal on de Lubac’s distinction between “imprint,” “incorporation” and “Incarnation” of the Logos as qualitatively deepening modes of divine presentation. The distinctions between “imprint,” “incorporations” and “Incarnation” of the Logos are qualitative distinctions and cannot be seen as simply differences of intensity of the mediation of the Logos. The “Incarnation” of the Logos is

953 De Lubac, The Church, Paradox and Mystery, 51 and 43 respectively.
the unique and climactic event of human history to which the whole of Scripture testifies. This testimony of the whole Scriptures to the singular Event of Christ grounds the importance of the literal sense. The term “incorporation” of the Logos refers to the way in which the Triune God has drawn certain human realities into God’s own economic missions. Scripture, Church, and Eucharist are all called “incorporations” as they uniquely bear and mediate the presence of the Logos who has been singularly revealed in Jesus Christ. These human realities all have a sacramental nature, as they present the Mystery of the Logos to believers as they point to Christ, the Incarnate Logos. Finally, de Lubac claims that all readers bear the “imprint” of the Logos upon their souls. This, again, is a qualitative distinction, as it does not suggest a sacramental relationship to the Logos, but rather allows readers to recognize their own identity in light of the Incarnate Logos. Together, these distinct mediations of the Logos provide conceptual resources which show the structure of the economy of redemption and the way in which readers participate in it.

Premise 1: Every human being is fitted with an “imprint” of the eternal Logos who is incorporated in the Scriptures and Incarnate in Jesus Christ. This imprint is a gift of creation and is not entirely eliminated by the Fall. This principle grounds Tracy’s transcendental reflection theologically, showing that all persons do have a capacity for disclosure because they bear an imprint of the Logos written within them. Mike Higton, providing a charitable (and I believe correct) reading

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954 At the lowest level, I am agreeing with the legitimacy of de Lubac’s use of Origen to show that the image of God contains some trace of the eternal Logos. I am only taking seriously the Imago Dei imprinted on every human being and am suggesting that response to grace does place the individual into a qualitatively different situation.
of Tracy, claims, “Tracy is wanting to say that there is something about human being (the proximity of ‘absolute mystery’ to us) that makes the truth disclosed in Jesus of Nazareth potentially recognizable as a truth by any human being, even though that truth is inherently linked to the particularity of Jesus.”

Tracy’s early work focused so greatly on the ‘fit’ nature of human beings to experience the divine that Tracy did not adequately emphasize the way in which the unsubstitutable identity of Christ rendered plainly in the Gospels enabled this capacity for disclosure until Frei’s critique. Yet Tracy has always worked to tie that capacity of human beings to receive religious disclosure to the mediation of Christ. As early as The Analogical Imagination, Tracy wrote, “We are always already in the presence of an absolute mystery….We are…hearers of a possible revelation or self-manifestation from the freedom of the absolute mystery….But for the Christian, that revelation (as self-manifestation of God) has in fact occurred in the free and decisive event called Jesus Christ—a position explicated in systematic theology.”

Throughout Tracy’s work, he tries to argue for both the capacity of all readers to receive disclosure of the divine and the particularity of Jesus Christ in mediating that disclosure. De Lubac’s model brings both general capacity and the unsubstitutable identity of Christ together by showing that the eternal Logos is imprinted on every person by virtue of the

955 Higton, “Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity,” 586.

956 Citing Rahner, Tracy (The Analogical Imagination, 162), claims “that revelation, as ‘transcendental,’ is always already present in this concretely graced world; that revelation as ‘categorial’ is present in the gratuity of God’s self-manifestation in the events of ‘salvation history,’” specifically in Jesus Christ (Karl Rahner, Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity, (New York: Crossroad, 1978), pp. 163-62; 206-28). Tracy’s own comment on Rahner is even more specific: “We are always already in the presence of absolute mystery—a position defended in ‘philosophy of religion.’ We are, therefore, in fact hearers of a possible revelation or self-manifestation from the freedom of the absolute mystery…(ibid)”
work of the Logos in all creation, yet that the Logos is revelation only in the Incarnation of the Logos.

Furthermore, because the Christian Scriptures participate in the Logos as they testify to the Incarnate Logos, readers of Scripture are able to recognize an identity between themselves and the Logos in Scripture in a way that is always grounded in the Incarnate Logos. De Lubac’s model provides the theological language to describe the reader’s capacity for disclosure grounded both in creation and in the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ as the Incarnation of the Logos. Here every reader has a capacity to find, in the narrative of Scripture, a “mirror” in which the reader reads his or her identity. This means that all readers are “fitted” to read more than the plain sense of Scripture. They are “fitted” to participate in the spiritual reality to which it points by a certain imprint of identity with the texts which both point to Christ.

Premise 2: Since the Scriptures are an “incorporation” of the Logos which testifies to the Incarnate Logos in Jesus Christ, the reader is led to the Logos by reading the plain sense of the text which directs the reader to Christ as the Object of Scripture. Here Frei and Vanhoozer’s projects are useful alongside de Lubac’s theological description of Scripture as an incorporation of the Logos. Through Frei, we

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957 My suggestion does not simply propose an alternative form of foundationalism, as the imprint of the Logos upon the soul is a theological, rather than a philosophical, description of the commonality of all persons, and is not identifiable through a particular philosophical analysis (see Lewish Ayres, “The Soul and the Reading of Scripture,” 173-90, who proposes that de Lubac’s understanding of the soul as a meeting place between God and human beings can only be described theologically). This reality of imprint may not be experienced without a particular act of grace and a particular rendering of the Incarnate Logos mediated by Scripture. Nonetheless, it is a commonality of all human persons and does describe a common capacity to recognize and respond to the revelation of Christ mediated in Scripture. Consequently, Tracy may be correct that all persons stand with a capacity to receive the disclosure of Absolute Mystery, yet it may be equally valid to accept Lindbeck’s argument that human beings cannot experience the presence of the Logos without being able to name it (see Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, 38, for his charge against Tracy).
see most clearly that the literal sense is the indispensable means to the spiritual reality and thus plain reading is the normative means to encounter with Christ. Through Vanhoozer, we understand more clearly the importance of the canonical sense, in which as Christ emerges as Object of Scripture readers are drawn to the Christ who addresses the Church as Subject of Scripture. These projects are corrective to de Lubac as they close the gap between the literal and spiritual senses, showing how the literal sense is taken up into God’s communicative action and how the unsubstitutable identity of the Incarnate Logos is indispensable for the movement to the spiritual sense. Christ’s address to readers as Subject of Scripture is intrinsically linked to recognition of Christ as Object of Scripture. Thus readers are bound to the plain sense of the text so that they may recognize the identity of the Incarnate Christ as Object and thereby encounter Him as Subject.

It is important here to emphasize that for the believer, reading both the literal sense and the movement to spiritual reality occur in the realm of grace. Clarifying this issue may help to ease a particular tension in Frei’s writing. For Frei, Scriptural reading always tended to be an activity for the realm of nature, not grace. Frei argued that anyone could read the plain sense of the text realistically and recognize that the identity of Jesus Christ is as the one who is present.\textsuperscript{958} Still, Frei could never explain why one person believes and the other does not, even as both read the same plainly rendered

\textsuperscript{958} Frei (The Identity of Jesus Christ, 4), claims, “In our knowledge of Jesus Christ, his presence and his identity are completely one. We cannot properly think of him as not present, as we can think of others without their real presence.”
identity of Jesus Christ. The present account proposes that the movement from nature to grace in the reading of the plain sense may be the difference between recognizing the unsubstitutable identity of a Person rendered plainly (nature), and recognizing the intrinsic correspondence between the imprint of the Logos on the human soul and the Incarnate Logos mediated in the Scriptures (grace). In other words, while any reader may read the Gospels plainly while remaining in the realm of nature, the believer moves to the realm of grace when recognition of the particular identity of Jesus Christ reveals to the reader the correspondence between this particularly rendered Incarnate Logos and the imprint of the Logos on the individual’s soul. If this is so, it seems that realistic reading may render the identity of Jesus Christ as the identity of God. Yet this realistic reading does not affect the reader’s own life until the reader recognizes the correspondence between his own identity and the identity of Jesus Christ when Christ enables the imprint of the Logos to recognize the Incarnation of the Logos through the Incorporation of the Logos in Scripture. Consequently, it could be said that for the believer even the plain reading of Scripture occurs in the realm of grace, insofar as the reader can recognize the correspondence between his own story and the narrative of Christ rendered in the plain sense precisely because the Incarnate Logos stands as Subject of the Scriptures, mediating Himself to the reader through the texts. Hence there is no real dichotomy, as if recognizing Christ as Object of Scripture were a matter of nature and recognizing Christ

959 Frei (The Identity of Jesus Christ, 151-52), claims that although “there is a kind of logic in a Christian’s faith that forces him to say that disbelief in the resurrection of Jesus is rationally impossible…whether one actually believes the resurrection is, of course, a wholly different matter…no matter what the logic of the Christian faith, actual belief in the resurrection is a matter of faith and not of arguments from possibility or evidence.” This difficulty is articulated in Frei, The Identity of Jesus Christ, 12-25, although Frei simply concludes that he cannot explain how the believer comes to believe and is not obligated to try to explain this.
as Subject of Scripture were a matter of grace. Though any reader can recognize the plain identity of Christ by reading the literal sense in the realm of nature, the believer recognizes correspondence and is drawn into participation by reading that same literal sense.

Premise 3: As the reader recognizes and responds to the Incarnate Logos rendered in the plain sense of Scripture, the reader is changed from simply bearing the imprint of the Logos to being an incorporation of the Logos as a member of the Church. This change of capacity is both qualitative and quantitative. On the one hand, Tracy is correct that the change is one of intensification of receptive capacity for disclosure, since it is the same Logos which has left an imprint on the individual into which the reader is now incorporated. Yet on the other hand, the change goes beyond intensification to a qualitative difference, as the believing reader really is incorporated into the Logos by incorporation into the Church. Hence the believing reader participates in Christ in a way that is qualitatively different from someone outside the Church. The very entry of the believer into the Church makes the believer a fellow incorporation of the Logos.

Here de Lubac’s proposed relationship between allegory and tropology is important for identifying the relationship between the individual and the Church. As the individual soul is the “microcosm of the perfect Church,” the individual reader becomes

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960 See here Dei Verbum’s claim (I, 5), to a qualitative change: “To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind…” This must a qualitative change as it is the effected conversion of the individual.
an incorporation of the Logos as she is incorporated into the Church.\textsuperscript{961} Tropology, as we have seen, is not a spiritual dimension beyond allegory, but is the specification of allegory in the individual, thereby relating the individual to the Church and making the individual an incorporation of the Logos. This means that the believer, by being incorporated into the Church, bears a qualitatively greater capacity for reception of the Logos to the extent that the believer participates in the Church.

**Premise 4: The only sufficient way to express the relationship between Scripture and Church is in terms of their intrinsic identity, as the same unsubstitutable Jesus Christ rendered through the plain sense of the text is the Christ who constitutes the Church and draws it toward its eschatological end.** Just as the task of showing the intrinsic relationship between Christ as Subject and Christ as Object of Scripture is essential to the development of a Christian hermeneutic, so the task of showing the intrinsic relationship between the Christ rendered in Scripture and the Christ experienced as present in the Church is crucial to the advancement of a Christian hermeneutic. This means that just as the formative Christian community was compelled to establish rules for reading based on their experience that the present, risen Christ was the same Christ rendered realistically in Scripture, so the Church today exists to mediate this present Christ as the One rendered in a plain reading of Scripture. Consequently, the Church has authority to safeguard a Christian hermeneutic which will allow Christ to be mediated as both Subject and Object of Scripture and to renew itself continually by returning to the Christ who is so mediated in Scripture. Practically, this means that any attempt to locate authority in either Scripture or the Church will fail to advance a

Christian hermeneutic because it will fail to show the intrinsic relationship between the two incorporations of the Logos.

C. Advancing Hermeneutical Method for the Text/Reader Relationship

The theological description given to the reading community has significant implications for the relationship between text and readers. When method is emphasized without adequately describing the relationship of the Church to Scripture in the economy of redemption, the task of interpretation becomes largely a skillful employment of literary or theological rules, in which readers are either required to respect a meaning which is said to be determinate or are encouraged to conform a meaning to their own self-understanding which is said to be indeterminate. This section will examine Vanhoozer’s central problematic of authority and Frei’s central problematic of identity and will show that both emphases are one-sided because they both attempt to chasten readers through the plain reading of the text without giving adequate attention to the intrinsic relationship between Scripture and Church in the divine economy. First, I will place Vanhoozer and de Lubac in dialogue to show that although they locate Scripture very similarly in the economy of redemption, Vanhoozer’s location of the Church forces readers to posit authority in either the Church or Scripture. Second, I will show that the very same ecclesiological deficiency that plagues Vanhoozer’s work is also evident in Frei’s project. As a result, Frei also is forced to locate authority either in Scripture or in the Church. Finally, I will show that the best way to resolve the tension about the

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962 The former is most clearly seen in Vanhoozer’s early work, while the latter is a persistent difficulty in Tracy’s early work.
location of authority is by showing the intrinsic connection between Scripture and Church. Here I will suggest that de Lubac’s description of the Church and Tracy’s later insights on the theological interpretation of Scripture provide the best resources for showing the intrinsic similarity between Scripture and Church, and thus advance the dialogue.

1. Authority in Scripture and Church: Comparing De Lubac and Vanhoozer

For Vanhoozer and Frei, it is necessary to safeguard the plain sense of the text in order to uphold Scripture’s authority to confront the Church. Unfortunately, both authors, the authority issue tends to be posed in terms of an either/or dilemma, in which the theologian must choose one reality or the other as the ground for Scripture’s authority. It is quite informative that the strong disagreement between Vanhoozer and Frei about whether to place Scriptural authority in the texts or in the Church has tended to make their two very similar hermeneutical projects appear nearly incompatible with one another.

The path to overcoming this impasse, it appears, is through a more explicit theological description of the Church as a reading community which will appreciate both

963 Historically, the issue of authority has had a significant impact on what de Lubac calls the “traditional hermeneutic,” since it has been precisely the debate about locating authority in either the plain sense of Scripture or the Magisterium that has contributed what I am calling the ‘eclipse of spiritual interpretation.’ See Boersma, “Pumpkin Pie,” 253, nt. 48, who claims that much of Vanhoozer’s focus on authority illustrates “Congar’s point that over time Scripture and Church (magisterium) have become separated, with Protestants focusing on the canon as the rule of faith, and with Catholics assigning this role to the Magisterium.” De Lubac (The Sources of Revelation, 55-71), chronicles the decline of spiritual interpretation leading up to the Reformation.

964 Vanhoozer (“The Spirit of Understanding,” 219), complains sharply that with Frei, “It is the community, ultimately, that enjoys interpretive authority” so that “[i]nterpretive might makes right.” While I have argued that this is a particularly uncharitable reading of Frei, it illustrates a disagreement about authority which must be relieved for Christian interpretation to advance beyond the impasse.

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de Lubac’s insistence that the Church possesses a unique capacity for interpreting Scripture and Vanhoozer’s insistence that the Scriptures possess the authority to correct the Church. When Vanhoozer’s attempt to locate Scripture in the economy of redemption is compared with de Lubac’s, it is possible to see the impact of a better developed ecclesiology on Christian interpretation. Since both Vanhoozer and de Lubac address the question of authority within the context of Scripture’s place in the economy, the two authors will be placed in dialogue to show how similarly they articulate the role of Scripture in relationship to the Church. This will specify that the real issue is the role of the Church in the divine economy.

The Relationship of Scripture to the Church: A close examination of the work of Vanhoozer and de Lubac reveals a striking similarity in the way each understands the purpose of Scripture to the Church and the manner in which the Scriptures exercise authority over the Church. The following seven points illustrate the fundamental similarity between the two projects. First, both Vanhoozer and de Lubac specifically speak of Scripture and the Church as human realities which have been drawn into the economy of redemption to share in the missions of the Triune God. Second, both agree that the Scriptures conduct an active, initiatory mission of confronting and renewing the Church. Third, both see Scripture playing a causal role over the Church

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965 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 177) claims, “To be sure, the biblical texts have a ‘natural history’; they have human authors. Yet these human testimonies are caught up in the triune economy of word-acts and so ultimately become divine testimonies.” De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, I, 81), claims, “The sacred books themselves are and remain inspired….‘God did not create them and then depart from the scene. They come from him and exist in him.’”

966 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 210), claims, “Word, Spirit, tradition, and church belong together; all have a vital role to play. Only the Word serves as magisterial norm, however, for only the written word is the commissioned testimony of the church’s Lord and Master.” De Lubac (History and
in the divine economy by mediating the present, risen Christ to the Church. Fourth, both ultimately locate the authority of Scripture in the action of the Triune God who uses it to address the Church. Fifth, both agree that Scripture, since it is authoritative as it is used by God to incorporate readers into the Church, is incomplete until it accomplishes its eschatological mission. Sixth, both suggest that the literal sense of Scripture always has an authoritative role over the Church to establish parameters for its interpretation because the Church is incomplete and still sinful. Seventh, both suggest that the

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967 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 124), claims his development of his “canonical” hermeneutic “has everything to do with the church meeting its risen Lord through the testimony of his commissioned witnesses.” Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 71), argues further, “In the final analysis, the mission of Scripture is to minister Christ and to build up the body of Christ. This is what God is doing with his written words: in diverse ways and at diverse times speaking his Son into the world, giving thick (canonical) descriptions of what he is saying and doing in Jesus Christ…” De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, I, 82), agrees that “Within the Scripture, God resides; by the Scripture, God makes himself known…Scripture is ‘fertilized by a miracle of the Holy Spirit.’”

968 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 176-77), argues that, “Scripture…is…a mode of divine communicative action whereby the triune God furthers his mission and creates a new covenant people….God, in and through the human authors, has an ongoing speaking part.” Vanhoozer (Remythologizing Theology, 264), claims that “Scripture is a means of ongoing triune communication by which the church follows her master’s voice.” De Lubac (History and Spirit, 418), claims, “Scripture is thus like the voice of Christ speaking to the Church and in the Church; it is his efficacious sign; it thus assures the luminous presence of Christ to the Church.” De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, II, 81), insists that “the Word of God…speaks to us still” in Scripture, “reaching the depth of our souls as the limits of the universe.”

969 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 165), claims, “The holy script…is both complete and incomplete. On the one hand, the story of God’s word-acts in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ is finished: the climax of the drama of redemption (cross and resurrection) has been accomplished, its conclusion (eternal life with God) is sure. On the other hand, without a people to embody it, the script lacks something essential, for the canon ‘delivers its meaning only as it is “played out” in patterns of human action in Church and society.’” De Lubac (Medieval Exegesis, I, 227), similarly writes, “All that Scripture recounts has indeed happened in history, but the account that is given does not contain the whole purpose of Scripture in itself. This purpose still needs to be accomplished and is actually accomplished in us each day, by the mystery of this spiritual understanding. Only then…will Scripture bear us its fruit in its fullness.”

970 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 163), claims that, “Ecclesiology cannot be first theology because the church enjoys only the first fruits of its salvation. As an eschatological reality, it is indeed already in union with Christ, but not yet completely so.” De Lubac (The Church: Paradox and
Church possesses the authority to safeguard Scripture’s authority so as to enable fruitful readings. With these similarities, it seems clear that both de Lubac and Vanhoozer locate the authority of Scripture in God’s use of the texts and that all subsequent readings must recognize and submit to that authority.

The Relationship of the Church to Scripture: In light of the close agreement between Vanhoozer and de Lubac about the active, initiating, authoritative mission of Scripture and the responsibility of the Church to respond to Christ’s speaking action in Scripture, it is all the more significant that Vanhoozer insists on posing an either/or structure of authority, while de Lubac sees the relationship between Scripture and Church as one of reciprocity and continuity. It becomes apparent that the real impasse between the two is not caused by the way each theologian structures the role of Scripture in the economy of redemption, but rather by the role and reality each gives to the Church in that economy.

While Vanhoozer is continually focused on showing God’s missional presence in Scripture, he does not define the Church as the community which either bears or mediates the presence of Christ on earth. In fact, Vanhoozer specifically rejects the articulation of the Church as a sacrament, arguing that “the church is less a sacrament than a means of...”

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*Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 123), laments that in the Protestant practice of *sola scriptura* authority tends to reside in “individual readers” and claims that his intent “is not to denigrate church tradition but to locate it properly within the economy of salvation and the pattern of divine authority. From this perspective, conforming to church tradition is not what is primary: what is primary is attending to the Spirit who speaks in the Scripture of Jesus Christ….we cannot take for granted that the content of the apostolic tradition is found in the teaching of the church.” De Lubac (*La révélation divine*, 158-59, cited by Moulins-Beaufort, "Henri De Lubac: Reader of *Dei Verbum*," 692), claims, “The Magisterium merely guarantees that the development of the mysteries of the faith in the minds of believers remains within the complete and definitive ‘figure’ of this mystery. It guarantees that the communion of these believers remains open to an Object that is ‘incomprehensible’...a living Person.”*
signifying the divine grace poured out in Christ through the Spirit.” Vanhoozer instead argues, “The form of the church’s fitting participation in the drama of redemption is precisely that of mimesis: an imitation of Paul, of God, of Christ.” Vanhoozer then defines the Church as “the company of the gospel, whose nature and task alike pertain to performing the word in the power of the Spirit.” Since Vanhoozer provides this definition in direct response to a sacramental view of the Church, it is clear that Vanhoozer intends the phrase “company of the gospel” to replace the phrase “presence of the triune God,” and the phrase “performing the word” to replace “mediating grace sacramentally.” Any similarities between Vanhoozer and de Lubac about the responsive role of the Church to Scripture or the authority of Scripture over the Church should be read in light of this hesitance by Vanhoozer to locate the presence of Christ in the Church.

972 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 401), emphasis his. Vanhoozer does understand his own position to locate the role of the Church in the economy of redemption in a very different place. Vanhoozer (ibid, 400-01), claims, “In sacramental theater, ecclesial words and actions mediate the grace of God. This is one possible construal of how the church participates in the drama of redemption: by mediating grace sacramentally.” Vanhoozer’s rejection of the Church as sacrament, then, is not an oversight, but is significant to his own position.

973 Vanhoozer (ibid, 401), clarifies that this is a “creative imitation, a nonidentical participation.”

974 Ibid, emphasis his.

975 See ibid, 400-01. This argument is particularly interesting, since Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 400), has just claimed that, “Any sufficiently thick description of the church must include something about the church being not only the people of God but the presence of God in the world.” Vanhoozer, then, seems to have in mind a model which will allow for Christ’s presence in the Church but will grant the Church no authority to mediate that presence other than by extending the Scriptures to others.

976 While Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 153) recognizes the “necessity, even the inevitability, of tradition,” and yet argues that “Everything depends...on giving an adequate dogmatic account of their proper ordering [i.e. of relationship between Scripture and Church].” Vanhoozer (ibid, 230), then, emphasizes that “The church is ultimately...the passive recipient of the canonical Scriptures...,” thus relegating it to a lesser authority.
De Lubac’s ecclesiology, in bold contrast to Vanhoozer’s, emphasizes Scripture’s authority within the context of the radical newness of the Church in the economy of redemption. For de Lubac, “The Church is a mysterious extension in time of the Trinity, not only preparing us for the life of unity but bringing about even now our participation in it. She comes from and is full of the Trinity…She is ‘the Incarnation continued,’” the “presence of Christ on earth.”\(^{977}\) De Lubac would claim that Vanhoozer’s hesitance to show the Church as bearing or mediating the presence of Christ “does not fully enter into the logic of the Mystery of the Incarnation,” is “more inspired by the Old than the New Testament,” and consequently cannot really show what the Church is that is new in the economy.\(^{978}\) De Lubac would likely feel that Vanhoozer has implicitly denied the structure of the Christian Mystery by failing to show the presence of Christ in the visible Church.\(^{979}\)

*From Authority to Capacity:* Vanhoozer’s hesitance to locate Christ’s presence in the Church creates some very pressing difficulties for his hermeneutical method which threaten to topple his whole project. First, for all of Vanhoozer’s emphasis on the authority of the closed canon based on God’s determinate speaking action within it, Vanhoozer never produces a convincing argument about how the Christian community recognized just this canon in the first place. Vanhoozer cannot really explain why the

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\(^{978}\) De Lubac (ibid, 25), dislikes the Protestant argument to liken the visible Church to rebellious Israel, in which a remnant (the invisible Church) will be saved. To appreciate the Christian Mystery, one must realize that the Church really consists of something that the OT people of God did not. Christ really is joined to this body in a way that the OT people of God did not have access to. The Church is really the reality that the OT people of God pointed toward as a sign.

\(^{979}\) Ibid.
Church had the authority to select certain books rather than others and why it accepted the literal sense as its normative hermeneutical approach to reading. This problem is intensified when Vanhoozer claims that the recognition of God’s speaking action in Scripture (and hence its authority) takes place at the level of the whole, completed canon. It is, on Vanhoozer’s account, unclear how the authority of these texts could ever have come to light, and hence how the Church could accept them, if the divine speaking action were not discernable until the canon was closed by the Church. Some authority must be granted to the reading community in order for the Church to even be able to select the books which would be the canon or establish normative rules for reading them. Vanhoozer is so wary of granting authority to the community that he suggests the Rule of Faith ought to be considered authoritative only as it rightly summarizes the Scriptures. Yet once again Vanhoozer must show how the Church, led by its experience of the risen Christ, developed a Rule of Faith and established a canonical Scriptures in fundamental continuity with their experience which then established the norms for canonical acceptance. While Vanhoozer is right to argue that

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980. For example, Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 149-150), claims that “it is not the church’s use but the triune God’s use of Scripture that makes it canon. That the church recognizes the canon authenticates the church rather than the canon, which needs no ecclesial approval to be what it is: the Word of God.” While it is true that God’s speaking action requires no subsequent validation, it is very difficult to find this to be a helpful description of how the canon came to be regarded as authoritative.

981 See, for example, Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 179), proposes the phrase “canonical illocution” to show “what God is doing by means of the human discourse in the biblical texts at the level of the canon” and Vanhoozer (Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 342), where the resulting supervening divine illocution is described as: ‘confessing faith’ (349), ‘proclaiming God’s salvation’ (342), ‘testifying to Christ’ (342), “bearing witness” (349), or “providing guidance for future generations” (380).

982 Vanhoozer (The Drama of Doctrine, 206) even claims that “the authority of the Rule [of faith] depends on its conforming to the Scriptures.” (See his whole discussion on the Rule of Faith, claiming that it is based on the authority of the canon in The Drama of Doctrine, 203-10). While it is certainly true that the Rule of Faith is in agreement with the Scriptures, it does not account for the way in which the Rule served as a causal norm for the formation of the canon and the hermeneutical method applied to reading the canon as a unified whole.
the Church must now recognize the authority of the canon, he must explain what gave the Church the authority to receive its canon, if the closed canon which established the rule of faith and allowed God’s speaking action to be heard in the Church.

Second, for all Vanhoozer’s emphasis on God’s speaking action in Scripture, Vanhoozer’s articulation of God’s present speaking action to readers remains unpersuasive, as his account seems to require that God’s speaking ceased with the completion of the canon.\(^{983}\) While the Spirit mediates God’s past speech to present readers, Vanhoozer’s model requires that the Spirit only guide the perlocutionary effect of Scripture.\(^{984}\) Yet the transition between God’s past, closed, determinate speaking action and present speaking to the Church simply cannot be accomplished without some articulation of Christ’s ongoing presence in the Church. Boersma explains this difficulty by saying, “If I am not mistaken, [Vanhoozer] means to say that the Spirit confronts believers with the Scriptures each time anew. As a result, it is difficult to avoid the impression that believers need to jump the chronological gap between the horizon of their own context and that of the Scriptures.”\(^{985}\) The movement from past speech to present speech without some continuity of presence in the community would, on de Lubac’s account, amount to little more than a form of extrinsicism. At the very least, it is difficult

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\(^{983}\) Vanhoozer (ibid, 152), suggests, “It is precisely as a past performance (i.e., as a discourse fixed by writing) that the canon serves as normative specification of what God was saying and doing in Christ.” This claim is, of course, consistent with Vanhoozer’s claim that God’s speaking action is equated with revelation: Revelation ceased with the final apostolic writing, and became discernable with the closure of the canon.

\(^{984}\) This articulation appears much more driven by a safeguarding of the authority of the past, closed canon than by a desire to show how the risen Christ addresses His Church. See Vanhoozer (Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 410), who claims that “the Trinitarian language of ‘procession’ is apt: as the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, so the literary act proceeds from the author, and so too does the perlocution (persuading, convincing) proceed from the illocution (claiming, asserting).”

to appreciate Vanhoozer’s emphasis on the development of doctrine through “creativity,” “imagination” and “improvisation” without showing how tradition has some authority to help form the imagination as it bridges the gap between the past texts of Scripture and the present Christian community.\textsuperscript{986} Here de Lubac’s emphasis on Tradition as a “living link” between past events and present reality would provide resources for Vanhoozer to extend God’s past speaking action in Scripture to the present reception in believers in a way that does not change the meaning of Scripture, but deepens that meaning in the Church.\textsuperscript{987} Only if Vanhoozer can show how the Church also participates in the mission of Christ, and hence a locus of Christ’s presence and an active agent in mediating it, can he show how God’s present speaking action occurs.

Vanhoozer’s argument that both Scripture and Church are “caught up in” and “sent” as missions in the Triune economy is remarkably close to de Lubac’s argument that Scripture and Church are fellow incorporations of the Logos. Were Vanhoozer to accept some form of de Lubac’s distinction between “imprint,” “incorporations” and “Incarnation” of the Logos, it would seem that his project could show a more intrinsic relationship between Scripture and Church without undermining the authority of Scripture. Precisely this theological grounding would strengthen Vanhoozer’s arguments against those postliberals who, according to Vanhoozer, have turned the balance of

\textsuperscript{986} These three words form the basis for Vanhoozer’s “theo-dramatic” model. See especially, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 335-44.

\textsuperscript{987} De Lubac would agree with Blondel ("History and Dogma," 276), that, “In that profound sense, when it is a question of finding the supernatural in Sacred History and in dogma, the Gospel is nothing without the Church, the teaching of Scripture is nothing without the Christian life, exegesis is nothing without Tradition…” The converse, Vanhoozer would insist, is also true!
authority from Scripture to the Church. Vanhoozer would strengthen his argument for the authority of Scripture by providing a theologically rich description of the Church which shows the intrinsic connection between the literal reading of Scripture and the community to which God speaks by means of the text. Acceptance of some form of de Lubac’s claim that the Church “dispenses” the Word because the “Church is for each of us the place of the Logos,” would ease Vanhoozer’s project by allowing the Church, as one “mission” or “incorporation” of the Triune economy to mediate Christ intrinsically rather than extrinsically. It would also allow Vanhoozer to respond to his specific hermeneutical difficulties, as he would be able to better articulate how the Triune God enabled the Church to recognize just those books upon which He would supervene His speaking action, and why the Church has felt compelled to read their Scriptures literally.

2. Identity in Scripture and Church: Returning to Tracy and Frei

The above comparison between Vanhoozer and de Lubac is particularly helpful, it turns out, in providing resources to advance the debate between Tracy and Frei. By

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988 It may seem ironic to suggest that Vanhoozer’s greatest allies in combating what he feels is the transfer of authority from Scripture to tradition may be those who hold a high theological view of the authority of the Church. See The Drama of Doctrine, 1-12, where the chief problematic of the whole book is the relationship between Scripture and tradition. Vanhoozer writes the book because he fears that “The prevailing postmodern cultural winds currently blow away from sola scriptura toward tradition” (10). Yet Vanhoozer may need some argument for the authority of tradition to support his project. Really, I see no Catholic theologian who would disagree with Vanhoozer’s particular understanding of sola Scriptura. In fact, one Catholic theologian, Thomas Guarino, has suggested that many Catholic theologians can “accept the phrase sola Scriptura” (“Catholic Reflections on Discerning the Truth of Sacred Scripture,” in Your Word is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 96), cited in Boersma “Pumpkin Pie,” 250). Thus the issue is not the authority of Scripture, as the normative Christian argument is that the Scriptures play a corrective role in relationship to the Church. The real issue is the argument over Christian interpretation, and this is issue is best worked through by locating Scripture’s place in the economy of redemption.

989 De Lubac, History and Spirit, 420.
comparing Vanhoozer and de Lubac, I have sought to show that the (largely unnecessary) dilemma of locating authority in either Scripture or the Church is caused by Vanhoozer’s inability to show the intrinsic connection between the Logos incorporated in Scripture and the Logos incorporated in the Church both of which are grounded in Christ, the Incarnate Logos. At this point, I wish argue that the way Frei structures his project to safeguard the identity of Christ leads him into the same either/or dilemma that has plagued Vanhoozer’s ecclesiology, and that Frei’s project would also benefit from showing the intrinsic unity between the identity of Christ rendered and the experience of Christ in the Church.

Frei and the Identity of Christ: Vanhoozer’s description of the Church as imitation of Scripture is very similar to Frei’s description of the Church as identity-in-relation to Christ. For both, the Church grows toward its eschatological union with Christ as it recognizes the plain sense of Scripture and follows the Christ rendered in it. Just as Vanhoozer’s chief concern is to emphasize God’s speaking action in Scripture so as to safeguard the authority of Scripture to address the Church, so Frei’s chief concern is to emphasize the plain sense of Scripture so as to safeguard the particular identity of Jesus Christ for the Church. Yet for both, unfortunately, this stress on identity and imitation leads to a practical depreciation on incorporation and participation. Just as Vanhoozer’s emphasis on the authority of Scripture prevents him from showing the unique capacity of the Church to bear and mediate the presence of Christ, so also Frei’s emphasis on the identity of Jesus Christ prevents him from showing how the Christian community bears and mediates the presence of Christ as it follows that identity. For both, the intrinsic
connection between recognition of Christ and participation in Christ is left underdeveloped.

A genuine ambiguity exists in Frei’s description of the Church. On the one hand, the Church is “simply a witness” to the identity of Jesus Christ depicted in the Gospels. The Church, Frei emphasizes, “is called upon to be a collective disciple, to follow at a distance the pattern of exchange…” Yet on the other hand, the Church is “the indirect, localized presence of Jesus Christ in and for the world.” The Church, for Frei, also is “the public and communal form the indirect presence of Christ now takes.” The first account emphasizes separation and distance in an attempt to safeguard the particular identity of Jesus Christ, while the second account speaks of incorporation and divine constitution in an attempt to connect the unsubstitutable identity of Christ with His community of disciples. The upshot is that Frei’s focus on the particular identity of Christ has prevented him from adequately describing the identity of the Church and the fundamental connection between those identities. Frei’s attempt to safeguard Christ’s particular identity causes him to undervalue a description of the believer’s participation in that particular identity. Dawson claims that for Frei, “Jesus’ identity is a consequence of his unique relation to God, a relation that human beings cannot share (and therefore

990 Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 160.

991 Frei (Identity, 159), claims, “The church is simply the witness to the fact that it is Jesus Christ and none other who is the ultimate presence in and to the world.” Yet Frei (ibid, 157), speaks of the Person of the Spirit as being the indirect presence of Christ in the Church.

992 Ibid, 157. Frei (ibid, 159), claims, “The given and instituted, spatial and temporal bases for the indirect presence of Christ allow the church that relatively permanent institutional structure without which no community can exist or be self-identical…”
Thus although Frei rightly shows that readers can only understand their own identity-in-relation when they have first recognized the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ, Frei never spells out the difference between recognition of Christ’s particular identity accessible to all and incorporation into that identity by those who participate in it. Dawson suggests that in Frei’s work, “The literal reader of the text’s realistic, narrative sense gets to encounter Jesus as only Jesus alone is, but the action of Jesus or God impinging upon the embodied, historical life of the reader is a matter left to take care of itself without much comment.”

Frei’s inability to sufficiently draw Scripture’s rendering of Christ’s identity together with Christ’s presence in the Church causes the same practical difficulties for Frei’s hermeneutics that the authority dilemma has caused for Vanhoozer. Central to Frei’s project is his belief that literal reading was not a historical accident but an outworking of the community’s foundational belief in the present, risen Christ. Yet Frei is obligated to show why that those normative rules were established as a result of the indirect presence of Christ in the Church, and not simply by a matter of community consensus. Frei often grounds these community decisions in a robust view of God’s providence, yet providence is too general of a category to describe the theological correspondence between Church and Scripture. Without some theological argument describing why the Church felt compelled to establish the literal sense as normative,

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993 Dawson, Christian Figural Reading, 186.

994 Ibid, 213. As Mike Higton (“A Carefully Circumscribed Progressive Politics” 63), puts it, Frei views the Church as “an unsubstitutable corporate follower of an unsubstitutable Lord.”

995 See Mike Higton (Christ, Providence and History, esp. 138), who, as the title of his book suggests, emphasizes that Frei’s whole project depended on a robust doctrine of God’s providence.
based on the intrinsic relationship between the identity of Christ rendered in Scripture and the identity of Christ experienced in the community, Frei’s project is in danger of placing the construction of the Church’s own tradition above the triune God who constituted the Church.\textsuperscript{996}

STS Tracy and the Identity of the Church: It appears, then, that the disagreement between Vanhoozer and Frei about the location of Scriptural authority is a symptom of the same inability to show the intrinsic connection between the Christ rendered in Scripture and the Christ experienced as present in the community. Here the insights of Tracy and de Lubac are helpful for resolving this difficulty, as they show why the experience of the Christian community inherently testifies to the authority of the literal sense to render the very identity of Christ that they experience. In his later work, Tracy proposes an insight which, when combined with de Lubac’s ecclesiology, may advance the projects of Frei and Vanhoozer as it shows the intrinsic connection between the identity of Christ rendered in the plain sense of Scripture and the self-identity of the Christian community as the locus of the presence of Christ. Tracy claims that, in addition to the genre of narrative so helpfully emphasized by Frei, the genre of proclamation can also yield important insights about the nature of Christian identity. Tracy defines

\textsuperscript{996} This appears to be precisely the concern of Vanhoozer and Tracy about postliberal method. Vanhoozer (\textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 11-12), seems to indicate that in the postliberal system “Tradition…effectively trumps Scripture” leading to relativism. Tracy (David Tracy, “Lindbeck’s New Program for Theology: A Reflection,” 461), reads Frei more charitably, yet with in Lindbeck’s work, Tracy suspects the possibility of “‘relativism,’ ‘confessionalism,’ and even ‘fideism.’” Admittedly, Frei typically almost always settles for describing what the early Church did, rather than going on to explain \textit{why} the Church felt compelled to do so. See, for example, Frei (\textit{Types}, 15-16), for his three rules for reading the literal sense: The Church has reached such a consensus reading (first rule) and the contemporary reading community cannot go behind what is written (second rule) precisely because the words render the subject matter (third rule). Frei’s project always tends to remain simply descriptive rather than providing theological reasons for why it must have been the case.
proclamation as the “proclamatory or kerygmatic character of the gospel by speaking of the ecclesial Christian affirmation of the ‘event and person (not only the ‘event’) of Jesus Christ.” 997 While Tracy admits that reflecting on the genre of narrative is the only way to “show, and not merely state (confess), who this Jesus Christ, present to us in word and sacrament, really is for the Christian,” 998 Tracy believes that reflecting on the genre of proclamation allows the theologian to see the “implications of the common Christian confession that ‘I (we) believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles.’” 999 Thus the genre of proclamation allows the theologian to articulate “the Catholic sense of how the Scripture is the church’s book.” 1000 Both narrative and proclamation, then, are complementary to each other and deepen the insights of the other. 1001

This connection between proclamation and the narrative rendering of Christ has significant implications for explaining the foundational identity of the Church, and hence for understanding why the Church has traditionally insisted on reading the plain sense of Scripture, why it has adopted certain books as its canon, and what capacity it has to receive the disclosure of Christ in Scripture. Tracy’s key insight (which remains implicit in his own work), could be summarized something like this: *The genre of confession*

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998 Ibid, 40.
999 Ibid, 39.
1000 Ibid, 37.
1001 Ibid, 39. Consequently, Tracy (ibid), claims, “The confessional genre and the kerygmatic categories do defend the first and dominant ecclesial and theological meaning of the ‘plain sense’ of Scripture and thereby are appropriately Christian. However, the confessional genre and the kerygmatic categories state but fail to show what can only be shown in explicitly narrative terms...just how and why the identity and presence of Jesus as the Christ is indeed confessed in the common Christian confession, but is rendered in its fullness only in and through the details of the interaction of the unsubstitutable character of Jesus and the specific circumstances of his passion and resurrection.”
reveals the particular identity of the Church, while the genre of narrative reveals the particular identity of Jesus Christ. By analyzing the Gospels as proclamation, it is possible to recognize that the Church is that community which proclaims Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Logos and which experiences Christ as present. By analyzing the Gospels as narrative, it is possible to recognize the unsubstitutable identity of that Jesus Christ who is present. The way to encounter the living, present Christ is through the narrative rendering of His identity, whiles the way to reflect upon the self-identity of His body, the Church, is through analysis of the proclamation of the Church’s common confession.

Tracy rightly makes it clear that there can be no disjunction between the two modes of presentation of the living Christ, and that each genre reciprocally deepens reflection on the other. Tracy claims, “If the Christian community means that ‘Christ’ and the ‘Spirit’ are present through proclamatory word and manifesting sacrament as well as through various Christian spiritualities of ‘presence’, then the Christian community should try to clarify how Christ is present as none other than this narratively identified Jesus the Christ and the Spirit is present as the Spirit released by Jesus Christ.”

Reflection on Christ’s presence in the community naturally intensifies the emphasis on Christ’s ascriptive rendering in the Gospel narratives, and focus on the particular identity of Christ in the Gospels deepens the Church’s self-identity as the locus of Christ’s presence.

Tracy’s insight, when combined with de Lubac’s description of the Church as an incorporation of the Logos, goes a long way in clarifying the continuity between the

1002 Ibid, 41.
unique identity of the Christian community and the plain reading of Scripture. The Christian community is the locus of the presence of Christ and the Spirit, and that presence is manifest through the various incorporations of the Logos (i.e. Scripture, Church and Eucharist). The Church proclaims this presence and interprets Scripture in light of that presence, recognizing the fundamental correspondence between the narrative rendering of the identity of Christ and its own story—with an insistence that Scripture be read plainly to render that identity. In this self-understanding, the Church recognizes its participation in the Mystery. As the locus of the presence of Christ, the Church cannot but interpret the particular identity of Christ and receive the disclosure of the Christ who addresses the Church.

Together, the proposals of de Lubac and Tracy show the concern of Frei and Vanhoozer to locate authority in either Scripture or Church is a false problem. The Scriptures do have an authoritative function of correcting the Church as they continually call Christians to the common confession “We believe in Jesus Christ with the apostles” through the realistic rendering of the narrative of Jesus Christ. The self-identity of the Church does enhance the authority of the plain sense of Scripture as the Scriptures render the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ in a way that incorporates the reader into its

1003 Significantly, Tracy (Ibid, 41), suggests that theologians have a responsibility to “clarify, beyond Frei’s narrative analysis, the proclamatory (or kerygmatic) character of the passion narratives as gospel,” so that “the exact kerygmatic nature of the ‘manifestation’ of Jesus as Jesus Christ in the passion narrative is clearer than a purely narrative account displays.”

1004 Ibid, 41. Tracy (ibid), provocatively suggests that “much could be gained and little lost by showing how these relatively late passion narratives with their ‘Jesus Christ kerygma’ relate to the earliest apostolic witness of the historically reconstructed ‘Jesus-kerygma’…Then one could show, through a modest genre analysis of kerygma, how the Jesus Christ kerygma of the passion narratives, i.e., the identity and presence of Jesus the Christ to the Christian community, is in direct kerygmatic relationship to the relatively non-narrative, but clearly kerygmatic, character of the Jesus kerygma of the original apostolic witness.”
story. Since the Church already participates in the Mystery, the Church recognizes the presence of the living Christ and can do no other than to read the Scriptures in light of His identity. A chief and authoritative function of the Magisterium of the Church, then, must be to safeguard the Christian hermeneutic in such a way that believers are able to encounter Christ in Scripture.\footnote{1005} D’Ambrosio’s claim that “The fact that biblical allegory has the mystery of the Church as part of its very object means that the Church and its tradition must necessarily be a principle of interpretation,”\footnote{1006} ought not give the Church an overly-confident reading of Scripture, but rather a chastened hermeneutic. The Church, by its own internal logic, must safeguard the plain sense which will allow the text to render Christ as present to readers, and must encourage rigorous self-critique based upon the plain sense as it attempts to understand the Christ who addresses it.

IV. Conclusion: Scripture and Church Unified in Christ

This chapter has placed all four authors in dialogue within the broader context of the economy of redemption in order to show that certain impasses between them can be resolved when the whole context of Scriptural interpretation is considered. As the relationship between text and reader is seen as only one part of the larger process of

\footnote{1005} The emphasis of Dei Verbum is decidedly on the safeguarding of a Christian hermeneutic. Dei Verbum II, 10, 755-56, claims, “But the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.”

\footnote{1006} D’Ambrosio, Traditional Hermeneutic, 189.
Christ’s communication to the Church by means of the Scriptural texts, certain hermeneutical tensions are eased. When Christ is articulated as both sole Object of Scripture and active Subject of Scripture, it is possible to show the harmony between Frei’s insistence on the plain sense of Scriptural narrative and de Lubac’s insistence on the spiritual sense of the texts. This harmony establishes a pattern for reading in which the plain sense is understood to render the unsubstitutable identity of the same Jesus Christ who now mediates Himself to the Church in Scriptural reading. When a unity is articulated between Scripture and Church as both are grounded in the same risen Christ and mediate the central Christian Mystery, it is possible to show the necessary harmony between the plain sense reading of Scripture and the experience of Christ in the Church. The Church, then, cannot usurp authority over the plain sense of the Scriptural texts, but neither is it only responsive to them. The more integral the relationship between Scripture and Church in the practice of the Church, the more the risen Christ will be mediated by both.

These insights ease certain tensions between the four hermeneutical projects. First, these insights show the disagreement between Tracy and Frei about plain sense reading and reading for disclosure to be two inevitable parts of the same interpretive process. As Tracy corrects his own hermeneutical project to also insist on the plain sense reading of the Gospels to render the identity of Jesus Christ, he is able to better emphasize the disclosure of the risen Christ to the reading community. A canonical, plain sense, figural reading of Scripture mediates Christ who incorporates readers into the Church. Second, these insights show the disagreement between Frei, Vanhoozer and Tracy, about the location of authority, to be a largely false issue. The Scriptures have
authority as the same Christ stands as Subject and Object of Scripture, and this authority can only be recognized in the community which experiences the authority of Jesus Christ. Vanhoozer is correct that Scriptural authority is properly grounded in God rather than the texts themselves, but this does not necessitate a doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, as Vanhoozer thinks. Instead, it requires an articulation of the intrinsic relationship between Scripture and Church which Tracy helpfully identifies in hermeneutical reflection on the Gospels and de Lubac specifies as the mutual mediation of Christ in Scripture and the Church.
CONCLUSION:

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROJECT

In this dissertation I have suggested that many of the hermeneutical impasses between Tracy and Frei, and consequently between revisionists and postliberals, are the result of narrowing the focus of hermeneutical reflection to the context of text and reader without describing the theological realities which always attend a Christian reading of Scripture. The dissertation has placed in dialogue four theologians with very different theological emphases in order to show that when their hermeneutical projects are examined in the broader context of the economy of redemption, many of the apparent tensions in method are eased or shown to be mutually compatible. As this broader context of Christ’s self-communication to the Church is examined, it is possible to advance the discussion between Tracy and Frei.

As these four different hermeneutical projects were placed in dialogue, it became apparent that the impasse in method between Tracy and Frei may not best be identified through the usual classifications (manifestation vs. proclamation, critical correlation, or narrative theology vs. foundationalism), but instead may be a result of a hermeneutical focus which examines only the relationship between text and reader. Yet since the goal of both Frei and Tracy is to show how the texts render a spiritual reality, both authors are required by their own hermeneutical aims to discuss Scripture in the context of the economy of redemption in order to complete their hermeneutical projects. The projects of both Vanhoozer and de Lubac successfully broaden the context of Scriptural reading to
include God’s use of the texts and the Church’s reception of the texts, persuasively showing that these realities are always necessary elements of reflection on a Christian interpretation of Scripture. Consequently, the mediation of Christ through Scripture, as well as the Church’s capacity to respond to that mediation, must be explained in the process of articulating a theological interpretation of Scripture. This refocusing of the theological debates has produced several conclusions.

First, the dissertation suggests that both what de Lubac calls ‘spiritual interpretation’ and what Frei calls ‘realistic reading,’ are inevitable and complementary aspects of a Christian reading of Scripture. Not only have both been central practices of the Church, but both are dependent upon one another. Here I suggested that de Lubac’s claim that Christ is both Subject and Object of Scripture accounts for both spiritual interpretation and realistic reading, as Christian interpretation always occurs within the dialectic of understanding Christ as sole Object of Scripture and as active Subject of Scripture. Consequently, de Lubac’s insistence that Christ uses Scripture to mediate Himself to the Church and Frei’s insistence that the plain sense of the text renders the unsubstitutable identity of Christ are central parts of Christian interpretation. Both poles are necessary for Christian reading, as both together allow for a sufficient articulation of Scripture’s place in the economy of redemption. Any project that fails to emphasize Christ as Object will tend to make Christ a type to which some feature of the contemporary ‘situation’ is the antitype, thus reducing Christ to merely one (if paradigmatic) instance of a contemporary ideal. Any project that fails to emphasize Christ as Subject will tend to de-emphasize the believer’s participation in the risen Christ and may deny the essential movement from text to spiritual reality. This dialectic
between understanding Christ as Subject and Object, I suggested, is best seen in the different emphases between Frei’s figural reading and de Lubac’s allegorical reading, as Frei focus primarily on Christ as Object and de Lubac focuses primarily on Christ as Subject. Here I suggested that Frei’s project could be improved by more strongly emphasizing the implications of Christ’s present address to readers by means of the Scriptural texts, while Tracy’s project could be enhanced by developing a method of figural reading to relate all Scriptural reading to the identity of Christ rendered in the Gospels.

Examining Scriptural interpretation within the dialectic of Christ as Subject and Object has allowed certain methodological strengths to be identified and weaknesses to be corrected. The key methodological difficulty for Vanhoozer is his tendency to focus more on a particular philosophical construction of authorship than on the Christ who unifies the Scriptures. Here the projects of Frei and de Lubac provide a correction to Vanhoozer as they show a method of figural reading that seeks to draw focus from particular philosophical constructs and onto the event of Christ. The key difficulty in de Lubac’s method is his ambiguity in showing the connection between text and event, and consequently in showing how the texts of Scripture themselves participate in God’s communicative activity. Consequently, de Lubac’s emphasis on allegory tends to depreciate the importance of method for explaining the plain sense of the text. Here Vanhoozer’s emphasis on the closed, canonical sense as the literal sense provides a helpful solution, as it better regulates the Christian imagination in Scriptural interpretation. Frei’s emphasis on realistic reading also provides a helpful solution, as it
closes the gap between text and event in such a way that the text itself is able to sacramentally mediate spiritual reality.

This proposal to articulate how Christ is Subject and Object of Scripture does not depreciate the emphasis on the text/reader relationship in hermeneutical discussions, but seeks to develop a richer hermeneutical project as it places this relationship in the larger context of Christ’s relationship to the Church. Articulating the intrinsic relationship between Christ, Scripture and Church upholds the plain sense reading of Scripture without leaving the final word about the meaning of the plain sense to the secular exegete. Nor does it reduce the authority of the plain sense of Scripture by arguing for the necessity of a movement from text to spiritual reality. Rather, it locates this authority in Scripture’s intrinsic relationship to the Church as both mediate the risen Christ. Consequently, it upholds the authority of the plain sense of Scripture even as it describes why the Church had the authority to decide to read Scripture in this way and to establish its own canon.

Second, the dissertation has suggested that because the primary role of Scripture in the economy is to mediate the communication of the risen Christ to the Church, then the Church must have some unique capacity for receiving the disclosure of Christ in Scripture (i.e. to make the movement from text to spiritual reality). Here I proposed that de Lubac’s structuring of the economy provides helpful categories for understanding this unique capacity, as de Lubac emphasizes that Scripture, Church and Eucharist are Incorporations of the Logos which are grounded in Christ the Incarnate Logos, and that all readers have the imprint of the Logos on their souls which enables them to recognize the intrinsic identity between their own narrative and the narrative of Scripture. This
description is helpful as it illumines a qualitative difference between the capacity of believers for receiving the disclosure of Christ in Scripture and the capacity of all readers outside the Church, while grounding the capacity of both in the action of the Incarnate Christ.

Furthermore, the description is also helpful because it shows the intrinsic relationship between Scripture and Church as both mediate the risen Christ. Articulating the intrinsic unity of Scripture and Church in the economy of redemption shows that hermeneutical projects which attempt to locate authority in either Scripture or the Church pose a false dilemma before the theologian. By comparing Vanhoozer and de Lubac, both of whom explicitly locate Scriptural interpretation in the broader context of the economy of redemption, it can be seen that the real difference between them is the way in which each understands the Church relating to Scripture. Vanhoozer constructs his understanding of the Church in such a way that it is only responsive to, and does not mediate, the risen Christ. This one-sided emphasis supports Vanhoozer’s doctrine of sola Scriptura, yet it leads to a number of tensions in Vanhoozer’s work which are difficult to overcome without granting some authority to the Church. De Lubac shows that the Church is always dependent on the literal sense of Scripture for its life and nourishment, even as it has authority to protect the literal sense and enable believers to participate in the mediation of Christ through it. This emphasis on the intrinsic unity between Scripture and Church has resources to ease Vanhoozer’s hermeneutical difficulties without forcing Vanhoozer to yield his insistence on the authority of Scripture.

By placing the discussion of Vanhoozer and de Lubac in dialogue with the debate between Tracy and Frei, I suggested that it is possible to advance the discussion. Frei’s
concern to preserve the plain sense of Scripture causes him to develop an either/or
schema in which he must decide whether to place the authority for the plain sense reading
in the texts themselves or in the Church. Much of Frei’s later argument against Tracy
attempts to prevent philosophical analysis from overwhelming the plain sense of
Scripture established by the Church, and to do this he insists on Christian self-description
over philosophical description. However, this dissertation suggests that it is because Frei
fails to show the intrinsic unity of Scripture and Church and to ground both in Christ that
his work has reached an impasse with Tracy’s. Here both de Lubac’s project, which calls
both Scripture and Church fellow incorporations of the Logos, and Tracy’s project, which
emphasizes the ongoing need to read the Gospels as both proclamation and narrative,
provide insights for better articulating the intrinsic unity between the Church and
Scripture. Tracy’s work is particularly helpful as Tracy suggests that the Gospels can be
read as both narrative and proclamation so that they render the identity of Christ and
reveal the identity of the Christian community. This shows how the believer recognizes
her own experience of the risen Christ as intrinsically related to the identity of Jesus
Christ narrated in Scripture. As a result, Christian Scriptural reading recognizes the
intrinsic unity of the identity of Christ even as it draws the reader into the experience of
that risen Christ.

Ultimately, for the Christian, hermeneutical method for reading Scripture can only
be developed as reflection is given to the mediation of Christ to the Church by means of
the Scriptural texts. By explaining the role of Scripture in the economy of redemption, a
number of persistent hermeneutical difficulties which surface in describing the
relationship between text and reader are able to be reevaluated and even resolved. While
it seems both inevitable and beneficial that theologians will articulate the relationship of Christ, Scripture and Church in somewhat different ways, the absence of such description will deprive hermeneutical projects of the resources necessary for the completion of their tasks. Fifty years after the Second Vatican Council’s drafting of *Dei Verbum*, the Church’s first major statement on revelation, it is hoped that the Church may be ready to further develop the implications of the relationship of Christ, Scripture and Church in the economy of redemption into a more complete system for a Christian reading of the Scriptures.
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