Grace Theological Journal 9.1 (1988) 105-127

CANON AS CONTEXT: THE FUNCTION OF *SENSUS PLENIOR* IN EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Since the canon of Scripture is a unified literary work, the sensus plenior *of a given text is simply that which emerges when the text is subjected to the light of all of biblical revelation. Thus the use of* sensus plenior *as a hermeneutical method does not involve allegorization or eisegesis, but involves discerning in a text all the strata of meaning that the canonical context warrants. The progress of revelation dictates that the meaning of scriptural texts became deeper and clearer as the canon unfolded. The exegete, by considering the Bible as an integrated whole, reaches a fuller understanding of individual texts of Scripture. That fuller understanding involves strata of meaning, all of which the author expressed, whether or not he* intended *to express them.*

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INTRODUCTION

EVEN a cursory reading of recent literature treating the topic of evangelical hermeneutics reveals the intensity of the debate surrounding the use of *sensus plenior* in the process of interpretation and in the construction of a systematic theology. At issue for many evangelicals is the authority of God's word and the normative significance of theology. Should the meaning of Scripture be restricted to the results of a rigid grammatical-historical exegesis? Or is there a deeper meaning that goes beyond the results of grammatical-historical analysis? If a deeper meaning exists, how does one ascertain what precisely it is? What is the relationship between the divine author's meaning and the human author's meaning? These are a few of the concerns that recently have been raised in the evangelical community with respect to *sensus plenior*.[1]

[1]Cf., for example, D. A. Carson, "Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends," *Themelios* 5 (1980) 11-20; J. D. G. Dunn, "Levels of Canonical

Since God has chosen to communicate through Scripture, one must assume that his method of communication is adequate, and therefore comprehensible. This perspective, however, does not resolve the dilemma over hermeneutical methodology, namely determining the most effective and accurate method for understanding biblical texts. It is the thesis of this article that a circumspect and judicious use of *sensus plenior* should be part of a proper hermeneutical methodology. The discussion presented below will, therefore, propose some legitimate functions for *sensus plenior* in evangelical hermeneutics. Before turning to the functional aspects of the method, however, the term needs to be clearly defined. Its diverse connotations have resulted in much confusion.

A FUNCTIONAL DEFINITION OF *SENSUS PLENIOR*

The definition offered for purposes of this discussion will be *functional* in scope. That is, it will be concerned with defining the methodological aspects of *sensus plenior* in terms of its hermeneutical role rather than with the theological or ecclesiastical aspects which so many associate with the term.[2]

A proper *sensus plenior*[3] must be distinguished from allegory. The method does not consist of unbridled, imaginative eisegesis and

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Authority," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 4 (1982) 13 60; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "Evangelical Hermeneutics: Restatement, Advance or Retreat from the Reformation?" *CTQ* 46 (1982) 167-80; idem, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 23-50, 131-40; W. S. LaSor, "The *Sensus Plenior* and Biblical Interpretation," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. W. Gasque and W. S. LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); V. Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," *WTJ* 48 (1986) 241-79; idem, "Is Exegesis Possible? I. A Relational Perspective on Meaning," unpublished article, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Penn.; and B. K. Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. J. S. Feinberg and P. D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981) 3-18. Perhaps the individual who is most outspoken against *sensus plenior* and in favor of the "single meaning" of a text is Kaiser. He connects meaning solely to the intent of the human author, following the hermeneutical theory of E. D. Hirsch as set forth in his *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976); and *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967). Favoring a view that allows for the possibility of a divine meaning that may or may not have been a part of the human author's intention are LaSor, Poythress, and Waltke.

[2]For a general survey of opinion from a Roman Catholic perspective, cf. R. E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of a *Sensus Plenior*," *CBQ* 15 (1953) 141-62; idem, "The Sensus Plenior in the Last Ten Years," *CBQ* 25 (1963) 262-85.

[3]My views have similarities to those of LaSor, "*Sensus Plenior*"; and B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970). Also, I am indebted to the foundational work of Poythress, "Divine Meaning"; idem, "Relational Perspective"; and Waltke, "Canonical Process Approach."

the reading into a text of symbolic meaning that has no biblical basis. Further, it is not some sort of mystical or supernatural revelation acquired apart from the fruits of exegesis in which a previously hidden meaning is thrust into one's awareness, nor does the method consist of reading Scripture through a previously constructed grid of systematic theology or church tradition, and thus finding in the text only confirmation of what one already believes. Finally, this method is by no means to be separated from the grammatical-historical method and the human author's expressed meaning. Nor should its results be different from or contradict the results of grammatical-historical exegesis. Rather, the two should complement one another as two aspects of a single, unified process of interpretation.

Sensus plenior, here defined, refers to the recognition of the canon of Scripture as a single and unified literary work. Because it is one book, no part of the book can be properly understood apart from the whole. Therefore, reflection on the whole of Scripture becomes a vital and central aspect in the hermeneutical process. And one's understanding of a passage will be deeper and clearer as the result of being seen in the light of the whole. This may include levels of meaning that were not part of the conscious intention of the human author, but which are included in the expressed meaning of the publicly accessible text and which are a part of the canonical context.[4]

Of course there is also diversity within the canon, and the differences among biblical writings by different human authors must be recognized. At the same time, it must be recognized that these human differences are also divine differences. In other words, God uses a multiplicity of perspectives in his communication. The harmonization of texts does not serve well if it flattens out the divinely ordained diversity. But one does need to affirm that there are no contradictions in Scripture, and thus any differences are complementary perspectives, not mutually exclusive alternatives. Harmonization needs to be balanced by an appreciation of divinely ordained diversity.[5]

Thus a biblically based *sensus plenior* considers a given text in the light of the fulness of revelation. Any deeper meaning for a text comes only from other biblical texts. Using this definition one cannot be accused of looking to a source outside the canon for the meaning of texts, nor of reading into a text something that is not there. The meaning is there by virtue of the organic relationship of the parts of

[4]I am in basic agreement with R. E. Brown, cited in LaSor, "*Sensus Plenior*," 270. Cf. also Waltke, "Canonical Process Approach," 8–9; Poythress, "Relational Perspective," 8; LaSor, "*Sensus Plenior*," 275; and Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 99–109.

[5]V. S. Poythress, *The Stained-Glass Kaleidoscope: Using Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, to appear) 41.

Scripture to the whole of Scripture. Diversity in the canonical context, while it must retain its independent status as a legitimate biblico-theological point of view, also gives fuller and deeper meanings to texts that are conceptually related.

From another perspective, *sensus plenior* also serves to narrow the meaning of certain texts. Partly in view here are portions of the Bible that were written early in the process of revelation. As subsequent revelation was given, the meaning of the earlier text became more and more evident. Likewise, the theological language for proper interpretation of the NT is to be found in the OT. One cannot properly interpret NT texts without taking into account the clarifying function of the OT canon. Hence, the viable options for the meaning of the text actually are reduced, not expanded. This function is the opposite of what most biblical scholars think in connection with the use of *sensus plenior*. Kaiser, for example, is opposed to any suggestion of "fuller" meaning for biblical texts. Moreover, he is opposed to methodological proposals that are of the same nature described herein. For example, in arguing against the canonical process approach of Waltke, he states:

> what is it that the whole or unity of Scripture teaches that cannot be found in the individual parts by the grammar and syntax? And if we must answer that a *different sense* is taught that went beyond the consciousness of the original instrumental agent who wrote that text, then we must argue that such is not an objective *sensus plenior*. In fact, we must deny that such a different sense is scriptural at all.

He continues in the same vein,

> Does not this conclusion deprive the *sensus plenior* (which is a different, not the same sense) of one of its most essential elements—its scriptural status? Therefore, we easily dismiss it as having no force, authority, or as constituting no normative status over believers.[6]

On the basis of these remarks, it appears to be the case that Kaiser has misunderstood the proposal of Waltke. In point of fact, in the very article which Kaiser cites as the source of his information, Waltke declares unequivocally,

> in contrast to the normal sense of *sensus plenior* that God intended a fuller meaning in a text than that intended by the human author, the

[6]W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "A Response to 'Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation'," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 444–45.

> canonical process approach does *not* [italics mine] divorce the human authorial intention from the divine intention.[7]

If Kaiser did not misunderstand Waltke, then he is guilty of "term-shifting" with the idea of *sensus plenior*, which is defined differently by different scholars. Even though Waltke is careful to give his terms precise definitions, Kaiser shifts the discussion to his own definition of *sensus plenior* (which is based on current practices by scholars other than Waltke) and then proceeds to use it as an argument against Waltke. In either case, such a cavalier dismissal of Waltke's proposals is unwarranted.[8]

As an alternative Kaiser submits the notion of the "analogy of antecedent Scripture."[9] He opines that the human author could not possibly have intended any meaning of which he was unaware and that this extends to connections of a text with other portions of Scripture. Thus, in the exegetical process, there may be no comparison with any pericope that was written subsequent in time to the passage under consideration, for the author could not have intended a comparison with a passage of which he himself was unaware. Exegesis must be restricted to explicit affirmations found in the text being exegeted and to comparisons with parallel and equally explicit affirmations in pericopes that have preceded in time the passage under investigation. Comparison with the entire canon must be reserved for summarizing and/or systematizing, but never for exegesis or as a hermeneutical method.[10]

[7]Waltke, "Canonical Process Approach," 8.

[8]Kaiser, "Response," 444-45.

[9]Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 134-40; idem, "Evangelical Hermeneutics," 176; and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 16, 18-19, 190, 196, 219, 267.

[10]Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 134-40; and idem, "Evangelical Hermeneutics," 176. Cf. also D. A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 65-95. Carson also argues that the process of comparison between passages should be used as a final consideration rather than as a determinative part of the exegetical process. I find it peculiar that Carson takes this view while at the same time arguing for the unity of Scripture in doing theology. One should be careful to maintain the distinction between systematic and biblical theology as Carson is doing in his article. Nevertheless, if the Bible is indeed a literary unity, then comparison of conceptually related texts as a part of the exegetical process is a valuable method when determining meaning. If conceptual relationships within the canon may not be used as a source of meaning for texts, then the proposed unity of Scripture is vacuous. This use of the canonical context does not preclude a biblical theology, nor does it blur the distinction between biblical and systematic theology. As mentioned above, diversity has value and must not be harmonized to the extent of forcing biblical authors to say something that (1) they never intended to say,

Kaiser's concern that meaning be based on as objective a method as possible is certainly a legitimate one. And his proposals have many valuable insights. However, some features of Kaiser's approach need further refinement. His basic commitment to the principle of "antecedent Scripture" is one such feature. Although it is clear from his writings that Kaiser would never want man to be the autonomous authority over the text, his principle of antecedent Scripture does, in one respect, establish man's autonomy over the text. Man, rather than God, assumes the role of deciding to which areas of life the various canonical portions apply. Did not the divine author intend that each text become an integrated part of the canon (2 Tim 3:16)? Thus Kaiser, by excluding parts of the canon from the exegetical process for any given text, seems to establish man as the autonomous authority over the text. Man determines which Scriptures are in the "hermeneutical canon" and which are not.

A second and related feature consists in the consequences of this approach for meaning in texts. Meaning lies in the relationships of the parts to the whole and to one another.[11] Kaiser's method diminishes the larger framework of the whole canon. A fragmented exegesis that focuses only on smaller units of communication, such as words and sentences, can diminish a reader's awareness of the flow of thought as it occurs in the larger network of discourse and canonical relationships, thus causing a less accurate reproduction of a text's expressed meaning. Therefore an approach to the meaning of texts which does not consider the entire canonical framework is inadequate.[12]

For the most part the *sensus plenior* debate has centered on methodology and the consequences of methodology for the normative significance of meaning. But there is another level that is crucial to the dialogue, and that is the level of preunderstanding. Specifically, the determining factors in many of the approaches to this issue involve more fundamental perspectives on how God has revealed himself in Scripture. At this level there are certain convictions that

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or (2) is not a legitimate meaning (expressed or implied) of the written text of the author. When conceptually related texts diverge in meaning, however, they may never be said to contradict one another (unless one abandons the evangelical inerrancy stance). Therefore, when comparing two such texts, one must not force the meaning of one text into the other. But the comparison of the two texts is still valuable as a part of the exegetical process in that it reveals what the text *cannot* mean. The meaning of the text cannot contradict the meaning of any conceptually related text that has a different perspective. Hence, the clarifying function of the canon is still valuable even when diversity is evident.

[11]For a discussion of this phenomenon at the level of discourse, cf. Poythress, "Relational Perspective," especially 8ff.

[12]Ibid.

form the foundation of the present proposal for the use of *sensus plenior* in hermeneutics. Some of them have been briefly alluded to already. I turn now to a more detailed discussion of these foundational convictions.

FOUNDATION FOR THE USE OF *SENSUS PLENIOR*

When approaching a biblical text, it is impossible to separate oneself completely from all influences of culture and conditioning. Therefore, complete objectivity in the hermeneutical process is not a realistic expectation. One is never free from one's experience, questions, attitudes, values, judgments, and the like, which combine to influence one's perception.[13] The goal, then, is not neutrality but self-awareness. The interpreter must limit and refine his preunderstanding, but he cannot leave himself behind when he dons the cloak of an exegete. With this in mind, the following convictions are proposed as a foundation for the use of *sensus plenior*.[14]

(1) *God is the author of Scripture and he himself is the ultimate epistemological context for understanding the meaning of Scripture.* The biblical witnesses clearly assert that God is the author of the Bible (Heb 1:1, 2; 2 Tim 3:16). This does not mean that the role of the human author is to be ignored, but simply that the meaning of Scripture is grounded in divine authorship. Furthermore, in order to understand Scripture one must first know the divine author (1 Cor 2:10–16). Thus to know God is to be in a position to understand Scripture.

Inspiration, though, does not remove the text from its historical context. Nor does it eliminate our responsibility to conduct scientific exegesis, for there can be no separation of human and divine meaning. God chose to speak through human vessels and any "fuller" meaning of a text must also account for the human level of meaning.[15]

(2) *Only the Bible in its canonical form is the normative and authoritative source of theological data.* With the composition of the

[13]R. Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" in *Existence and Faith*, ed. and trans. S. M. Ogden (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961) 342–51; A. C. Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. H. Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 313–16, 323ff.

[14]Some of these convictions I share with Waltke, "Canonical Process Approach," and have expanded upon the shape he gave them in his article, 9–10. Cf. also B. K. Waltke, "Historical Grammatical Problems," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 51–129.

[15]For a detailed analysis of the interplay between divine and human authorship and its implications for the meaning of Scripture, cf. Poythress, "Divine Meaning."

final NT book the canon as a literary corpus was closed. These received Scriptures constitute the final literary framework for interpretation. Moreover, the meaning of the canon, as complex and expansive as it may be, was also closed when the final book was written. Although mortal man may never capture every nuance of meaning in Scripture, the possible meanings must be finite because the literary corpus is limited to sixty-six books. No assertion of tradition, modern criticism (e.g., the claims made by some that authority resides in an earlier stage of tradition-history), or new revelation can lay claim to normativity.[16]

(3) *The nature of progressive revelation is such that the meaning of the Scriptures became deeper and clearer as the literary corpus of the canon increased.* Earlier portions of the canon were understood more clearly in the light of Jesus Christ and the expanding canon. Try to imagine interpreting the OT without the light of the NT. The conclusions would be quite different from those reached with the NT in view.[17] Likewise, the reverse of this process is true. For an interpretation of a NT text to be as clear as possible it too must be read within the framework of progressive revelation and the whole of Scripture. Indeed, without the information from the OT, significant portions of the NT would be incomprehensible (e.g., Hebrews). Progressive revelation and the formation of the canon contribute to the perspective that the Bible is a single literary work produced ultimately by a single divine author. Thus, the Bible as an integrated whole is more meaningful than its discrete parts.

(4) *The canon has an organic unity that is demonstrated in its harmony of doctrine, perspective, and faith.* Included in the harmony of perspective within the canon is a common linguistic context involving words, sentences, paragraphs, books, and the totality of a literary collection.[18] It is this unity of Scripture that makes possible the task of systematic theology. And because of its unity, the canon provides a control over the possibility of whimsical interpretations staking a

[16]B. S. Childs has much to say in this regard in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). Dunn, "Levels," 18–27, posits four levels of canonical authority: tradition-history (earlier stages of composition), final composition (the final literary form of each book), canonical (the larger group of final compositions), and ecclesiastical (dogmatics). He argues that authority resides in the final composition of each book, not in the canonical collection of the books as a whole. His reason for taking this position is to account for the abundance of diversity which he claims is present in the canon. In effect, his position is that the Bible does not present a unified theology, but a group of widely divergent theologies. Cf. also J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1977). For a representative and clearly articulated argument against the authoritative use of the canon in biblical theology, cf. J. Barr, *Holy Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) esp. 63ff.

[17]Waltke, "Problems," 122.

[18]Ibid.

claim to canonical authority. The guarantee that Scripture is consistent and trustworthy is founded upon the consistent nature of God himself, the self-witness of the Bible, Christ's use of Scripture, and the divine content of Scripture. Therefore the canon is the legitimate source of data for systematic theology, and indeed is the very basis that makes possible the elaboration of the relationships between the whole and the parts.[19] And it is precisely at this level that a normative use of *sensus plenior* functions in articulating an evangelical theology.

Diversity in the canon, however, must be acknowledged. The question is, diversity of what nature and to what extent? Dunn has argued that the extensive diversities within the canon make the meaning of a text less clear than when the text is understood as a self-contained composition. Unity arises only as the result of imposing a theological grid on the canon and reading in one's presuppositions. Dunn concludes that the Bible does not contain a unified theology, but rather that it contains diverse theologies that cannot be harmonized.[20] Thus he would consider systematic theology to be impossible. The problem confronting Dunn is deciding which theology should be considered to be authoritative when two or more biblical writers diverge. I disagree, however, with Dunn's assessment of the nature of the diversity. The diversity in Scripture stems from complementary modes of expressing the same truth. For example, do Paul and James really contradict one another with respect to the doctrine of justification? Or are they expressing the same truth but from perspectives suited to their own purposes? While neither author's meaning should be forced upon the other, since the diversity is divinely ordained and should be respected, neither do they contradict one another. The diversity is complementary. This explanation accounts for the data sufficiently and does not preclude the possibility of a unified biblical theology. For indeed the unity of Scripture is of paramount importance as the evangelical community moves forward in articulating a normative theology for the people of God.

The convictions set forth above form the foundation for the use of *sensus plenior* in evangelical hermeneutics. But what is its role in the actual hermeneutical process? How does it cultivate a deeper and clearer understanding of texts?

SENSUS PLENIOR AS A HERMENEUTICAL METHOD

Any discussion of *sensus plenior* as it functions in the hermeneutical process must begin with the relationship between meaning and

[19]Carson, "Unity and Diversity," 69–79. He presents a more detailed discussion of this perspective on the unity of Scripture with which I agree, but which goes beyond the scope of the present investigation.

[20]Dunn, "Levels," 37–38, 42. Cf. also Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*.

authorial intent. Much of the debate surrounding the idea of a text's deeper meaning has focused on this relationship. Even when *sensus plenior* is defined as the conceptual relationships between a text and the canonical context—thus retaining a fully biblical perspective and authority—there are those who oppose it. Generally the opposition is based on a perceived separation between divine meaning and human intent. But it is clear from Scripture that the final composition of each book contains both divine meaning and human meaning (e.g., Heb 1:1-2; 2:3-4; Acts 4:25; Jer 10:1-10). Thus there can be no separation between the deeper meaning of a passage and authorial expression.[21]

One approach to the problem of meaning and authorial intent that has received much attention is that of Hirsch.[22] His concern that interpretation not become just an exercise in subjectivity is a valid one. Certainly there is a "correct" meaning to be striven for which is reproducible. This meaning Hirsch identifies as the author's intent. Whatever meaning the author intended to convey is precisely what he did convey. Furthermore, meaning in the text is fixed and unchanging, and is represented by the text's vocabulary, grammar, and other related areas. Meaning at this level includes what is expressed indirectly and what can be legitimately inferred from the text. Legitimate inferences are said to be a part of the author's intent.[23]

All of this seems sensible enough. And when applied to biblical interpretation there should be no hesitation in affirming that what the human author intended to say is also part of God's meaning. But it is another matter to ask whether the full meaning of the text is restricted to human intent. Is it possible that God intended what the human author expressed as well as something more? In particular, God has known from the beginning his entire plan for redemptive history. Moreover, God has always known the final shape of the canon. Thus, God had his entire redemptive plan as well as the entire Bible in view as he inspired each writer to record his portion of revelation. Certain relationships of the parts of Scripture to the whole and to one another were elements of God's intention, but not necessarily part of the human author's intention. Indeed, it is largely beside the point to be concerned with human authorial intention when considering these

[21]Poythress, "Divine Meaning," provides an extended discussion of the implications of dual authorship. The separation of divine meaning from human meaning is one of Kaiser's major concerns in opposing *sensus plenior*; see his "Evangelical Hermeneutics," and *Exegetical Theology*, esp. 105-46.

[22]Hirsch, *Validity*; see also *Aims*.

[23]Hirsch, *Validity*, 51ff., 217-24. In order to account for implications which may or may not have been in the author's consciousness at the time of writing, Hirsch introduces the notion of "unconscious intention." Thus logical inferences can be said to partake of intentionality, albeit at the unconscious level.

kinds of connections, unless one is willing to suggest that God made each writer aware of his entire redemptive plan and of the totality of biblical revelation while he was writing! Rather, at the level of canonical relationships it is divine authorial intention and the expressed meaning of texts that is of concern. Yet one can still affirm the unity of intent and meaning between God and the human writer. The divine is inclusive of the human but transcends it.[24]

Does this mean that a text has "multiple" meanings? The terminology itself involved in speaking of "multiple" meanings can be confusing. It could imply a view of meaning that separates the divine from the human or that postulates unrelated meanings from the same text. This is not a proper use of *sensus plenior.* Hence, the "single" meaning of a text is an important distinction for evangelicals to maintain, and here there should be basic agreement with Kaiser's concern for the relationship between the "single" meaning of a text and biblical authority.[25] But the idea of "single meaning" needs further refinement.

Contending that each text has but a single meaning does not imply that meaning is a narrow, one-dimensional phenomenon. The meanings of texts are not set in concrete. The relationships of texts within the frame of the canon create deeper and clearer meanings than can be seen with a narrow "scientific" approach to exegesis. Therefore, while maintaining the view that meaning in texts does have parameters beyond which the exegete cannot go, it is also necessary to postulate that meaning in texts is multi-dimensional. The "single meaning" in a text refers to its unity of meaning, with all of its dimensions being connected to the results of grammatical-historical exegesis. The meaning of a text is that which is expressed by the discourse. Where a deeper meaning emerges as the result of reflection on either the relationships of a text to other texts or on the integration of texts into the canonical structure, it is the multi-dimensional nature of meaning that is coming to the fore. Even further reflection

[24]Kaiser, "Evangelical Hermeneutics," 168–76, argues for the "single" (univocal) meaning of texts, basing his argument on the premise that God would not say anything in a passage that was not part of the human author's conscious intent. Anything else is application, not meaning. The level of awareness on the part of the human author seems to be very important for Kaiser as he attempts to defend his view that God said only what the human author said, and nothing more. In a recent work (*The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* [Chicago: Moody, 1985] 70–71), he attributes a high level of awareness to the prophets in defense of his view that human intent is the only legitimate criterion for meaning. He states, "It is as if the prophet, on receiving the divine oracle, looked out over the future horizon and was divinely enabled prophetically to see both one or more near results as well as a distinctive, but more distant climactic fulfillment, with both the near and distant results of that word so generically linked that the words possessed one meaning in a collective whole."

[25]Kaiser, "Evangelical Hermeneutics," 176; *Exegetical Theology*, 23ff.

within the gestalt of the canon might result in the recognition of numerous dimensions connected to the grammatical-historical conclusion. The dynamics of the process are similar to those involved in viewing a master painting. If the painting were viewed from the perspective of its component parts (e.g., brush strokes, figures, and shades of colors), it would not have the same impact as it does when viewed as a whole. When viewed in its entirety, the integration of the colors, figures, and brush strokes constitute a structure with properties not derivable from its parts. Each component of the painting takes on even more meaning when viewed in the light of the entire structure. Yet each of the three components also has intrinsic value: brush strokes reveal the artist's level of competency with brush techniques, figures reveal his ability to express dimensions and spatial relationships, and colors express his penchant for selecting aesthetically pleasing or provocative combinations of hues. A single brush stroke thus has multiple dimensions, none of which is separable from the single brush stroke. The same phenomenon of understanding occurs when biblical discourses are integrated into the larger canonical context.[26]

Num 11:29, in which Moses expresses his wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them, will serve as an example of integrating a text into the canonical context. This expressed desire by Moses might evoke questions with respect to how God would proceed in bringing about the fulfillment of his wish. Or one might ask whether God would ever want *all* his people to prophesy. And if God were ever to pour out his Spirit on all the people of the covenant, what precisely would happen? When this verse is read in combination with Joel 2:28–32, we see that the prophet predicts and describes a fulfillment of Moses' wish. Then the Day of Pentecost presents a deeper and clearer picture of how the realization of Moses' wish might be accomplished. We see more precisely how God could proceed to fulfill the prophecy given to Joel. More details become available with regard to the effects of the outpouring among God's people. God did indeed make the gift of prophecy potentially a gift for all his people. These, then, become strata of the grammatical-historical meaning in Num 11:29 as that meaning was expanded in Joel and then in Acts. The added dimensions of meaning are in the text by virtue of the canonical context and the nature of progressive revelation. An important observation should be made at this point with respect to the clarifying function of the

[26]This illustration had its origins in the course entitled "Hermeneutical Foundations," conducted during the spring semester, 1986, at Westminster Theological Seminary, under the instruction of Vern S. Poythress.

canon. In this example the canonical context has actually functioned to make our understanding of the text more precise. It has eliminated some meanings and focused attention more exactly on others.

But are these canonical meanings all from the later texts while the earlier text retains its vagueness? The answer to this question must be based on one's perspective of the unity and relatedness of the canon. If one assumes that the various portions of the canon are not related, then of course the answer will be in the affirmative. Conversely, if one argues as I have, that the canon is a unified field, then the answer will be in the negative. Moreover, the methods of the NT writers are an important consideration in this matter. They did not hesitate to make these kinds of canonical connections, even to the point of combining related texts in extended citations of Scripture (e.g., 1 Pet 2:4–8). For the NT authors, the person of Jesus Christ was the final revelation that clarified all previous revelation.

When viewed in this way, it does not seem that a fine distinction is necessary between what the human author expressed in the historical situation and what God may mean in the light of later revelation. There is no "added" knowledge, only strata of knowledge already present in the canon. Thus one can affirm both the historical meaning and the *sensus plenior* without reading into the author's expressed meaning something that is distinct from it. The expressed meaning of the text can include both. If one distinguishes at this point between the historical meaning of the text and that which is apparent in the light of later revelation, it creates problems for our understanding of certain OT promises. Specifically, if the historical meaning that is "in" certain promises is retained in a form distinct from the meaning those promises have when considered in the light of later revelation, then some of God's promises were never fulfilled. For example, consider the promises made to David on behalf of the nation of Israel for a Davidic dynasty that would be "made sure forever" (2 Sam 7:11*b*–16), and for a permanent and peaceful earthly dwelling place for the nation (2 Sam 7:8–11*a*). In this author's view, these promises were never fulfilled in a "literal" sense. But the *sensus plenior* in this example, which is made plain in the light of Christ, can certainly be said to reside "in" the expressed meaning of the discourse. Any claim of normativeness for the "literal" meaning creates grave problems for our understanding of God's promises. He must have meant all along that these promises would be fulfilled in Christ, and therefore the meaning based on the canonical context must be "in" the text.

But the "literal" meaning of these promises also retained a certain vagueness until the time of fulfillment in Christ. If one reads only 2 Samuel and writings antecedent to it, the details of exactly how God would accomplish his purpose with respect to those promises

remain unknown. Only when the entire canon is read and all the elements of the progress of revelation are taken into account is the full, and one could say "literal," import of the divine author's expressed meaning realized. The phenomenon is similar to that which occurs when reading a novel. Not until the end of the book does one fully understand all the strands and details of the plot. And then upon a second reading of the novel certain details that were vague during the first reading become clear. The important thing is the *expressed* meaning of the author, which in terms of Scripture always must be determined in the light of the canonical strata of divine meaning.

It is yet another matter to ask whether the strata of meaning found through the use of *sensus plenior* are normative. Inasmuch as they are based on relationships between texts within the canonical context, and thus must be accepted as biblical, the answer is yes. But care should be taken to ensure that the connections one makes in this manner are legitimate. Conceptually unrelated texts should not be forced upon one another. The explicit conceptual relatedness of texts can only be determined after the texts have been exegeted and the results compared to ensure that they are addressing the same concept. Furthermore, when there are no direct conceptual parallels between two texts, but there are connections at the implicational level, one must be very circumspect in claiming normative theological value. Measuring implicit connections is more difficult than measuring the explicit results of grammatical-historical exegesis in which exegesis is the controlling method. When determining implicit connections, however, the results of exegesis are not to be disregarded. Indeed, deduced implications should be made on the basis of exegetically determined meanings of texts. It is only when texts share these exegetical implications, that relatedness at the implicational level should be pursued. Admittedly, some implicit connections are tenuous, and the perceived connections are subjective. These kinds of implicational connections should not be used in the exegetical process or in doing theology, for the controls are not sufficiently objective. The explicit connections based on grammatical-historical exegesis, however, do have a legitimate function, since the grammatical-historical method provides an objective control when comparing the relatedness of texts. Again, caution must be exercised when using the *sensus plenior* method, for in its use there is potential for eisegesis and other exegetical abuses. And while all methods have potential for abuse, *sensus plenior* may be more readily abused than some others.

The use of the OT in the NT is another area that impacts the use of this method. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to attempt any detailed discussion of so complex an issue. However, some gen-

eral observations are in order. Foremost in the relationship between the testaments is the fact of the incarnation. The OT in every respect looks forward to Christ. In Christ the entire OT covenant finds its fulfillment and perfection resulting in the promised new covenant (Heb 8:1–13; 11:39–40; 1 Cor 11:23–26). Therefore, it is necessary for the church to read the OT in the light of Christ. In addition, because the NT is the record of Christ's person and work, it is necessary also that the OT be read in light of the NT. The progress of revelation, as seen earlier, is another determining factor in NT priority.

But there is another level of communication in the NT which indicates that the church should read the OT in the light of Christ: the attitudes of the NT writers toward the OT. The NT writers did not hesitate to interpret OT texts in the light of their own context and the revelation of Jesus Christ. The precision of their exegesis is not the issue here, for they were guided by inspiration and wrote from a revelatory stance. The point of focus is rather upon their general perspective which may serve as a paradigm for the perspective of the church. That is, the NT provides a broad perspective on the canon which in some respects was not exclusively the perspective of the inspired writers. Some aspects of this NT perspective, such as reading the OT in the light of Christ, have value for exegesis today. However, this approach to the OT should not be undertaken apart from a careful exegesis of the OT text on its own merits. It is simply that the OT does not reflect its fullest meaning apart from the NT perspective of fulfillment. The later portions of the canonical context, then, are of critical importance for any study of the OT.

In like manner the NT must be read in the light of the canonical context. The NT writers saw a great deal of continuity between themselves, as participants in the covenant, and the OT participants in the covenant. Much of the theology of the NT is thoroughly grounded in the previous revelation of the OT. Consequently, the relationship can be boiled down to one of basic continuity between the testaments. This canonical relationship has profound implications for the univocal approach of Kaiser.

Another important aspect of the relationship between the testaments that provides enriched understanding of texts is to be found in the area of typology.[27] Typology should not be confused with allegorization which involves miniscule correspondences that are historically and biblically unrelated. Also, allegorization attempts to derive

[27]For a more extensive analysis see the following works which are devoted to the typological understanding of the Bible: D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976); P. J. Cahill, "Hermeneutical Implications of Typology," *CBQ* 44 (1982) 266–81; and L. Goppelt, *Typos*, trans. D. H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

deeper meaning from a single text, rather than suggesting correspondences between historical events and persons which become evident against the backdrop of God's actions in history. Conversely, typology is grounded in a biblical record that presents God's activity on behalf of his people as a continuous and uniform pattern.

Typological phenomena reflect the continuity between the testaments and the integration of each component into a single literary work, written by God. But this feature of the canon is not restricted to the area of progressive revelation in which later writings (e.g., the NT corpus) reflect a typological understanding of earlier documents (e.g., the OT corpus). So pervasive is the typological structure of the canon that even the OT's understanding of itself is typological. In the OT itself certain historical phenomena and persons were understood to have both vertical and horizontal correspondences with divine ideals.[28] Hence the garden of Eden was perceived as a type of the heavenly paradise which was to come (Isa 9:1, 2; 11:6–9); the exodus looked forward to a future second exodus (Isa 43:16–21; 48:20–21); the wilderness experience typified yet another wilderness wandering (Hos 2:16, 17; 12:9, 10); and the prophets saw David as the type of a future king (Isa 11:1; 55:3, 4; Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23–24; Amos 9:11).

The NT typological understanding of the OT also provides a clear picture of the integrative nature of the parts of Scripture. It reflects an unflagging effort by the NT authors to make relevant the traditions they possessed. For they saw the consistent and typical acts of God in history as their own history of promise which was now being fulfilled. The "symbols" of history were now becoming reality. Thus the NT has sweeping typological perspectives of the two Adams (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15), the nation of Israel (Gal 3:1–19; 6:15–16; Heb 2:16; 1 Pet 2:9–10), and Jerusalem (Gal 4:25–26; Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10). And this exemplary list is by no means exhaustive! The entire book of Hebrews is pervaded with a comprehensive typological view of redemptive fulfillment in Christ.

Furthermore, this NT typological perspective has certain characteristics that establish it as a legitimate biblical view. Most importantly, biblical typology has a christocentric focus. All former modes of salvation find their fulfillment and climax in the ultimate type: Christ. Additionally, the antitype intensifies and enhances the previous understanding of the type. That is to say, the type takes on a deeper and clearer meaning in the light of the antitype. And, as stated previously, there is a definite sense of historical continuity between the type and its antitype. In general, the OT is of a preliminary nature whereas the NT records the fulfillment.[29]

[28]Cahill, "Typology," 274; Baker, *One Bible*, 243–50.
[29]Goppelt, *Typos*, 198–205; Cahill, "Typology," 270–73.

The experience of Christ so transformed the understanding of the NT authors that they were confronted with the need to reinterpret their theology in the light of him. So then, typology is one method of interpretation that brought a deeper and clearer understanding (a *sensus plenior*) of the OT Scriptures to the people of God. And it is grounded in more than just the historical continuity between type and antitype. It is grounded in the very perspective and understanding of the inspired writers and in the literature they produced. Now the question arises as to whether this continues to be a legitimate hermeneutical approach. If its foundation is in the canonical context the answer must be in the affirmative. Moreover, should the church reject a perspective on the OT, and indeed on all of Scripture, that was held by the biblical writers? Caution is again in order, however, for typological correspondences that are not explicitly identified as such by a biblical writer can be tenuous. Even though theology based on this kind of deeper understanding is generally normative, without a carefully considered approach to the canonical context it may become so tenuous as to move outside the parameters of the canon and thus lose its normative significance. The canonical context is the criterion for determining the validity of this aspect of *sensus plenior*. If, after a grammatical-historical exegesis is carried out on the related pericopes, a typological correspondence is determined to exist within the canon, then its significance should be recognized as canonical. However, the modern exegete is not free to move outside the canon and claim normative significance for correspondences between biblical events and modern events, for this assumes a revelatory stance.

More needs to be said, though, about the controls over the misuse of *sensus plenior* than just an appeal to the canonical context, although that is very important and actually sums up what now needs to be considered in more detail. In the process of setting forth some guidelines it may be profitable also to look at certain aspects of the grammatical-historical method that are related to the use of *sensus plenior*.

Obviously, the results of any interpretation may not contradict the clear teaching of Scripture. Therefore, in controlling the use of *sensus plenior* it is of primary importance to subject its results to the analogy of faith. The analogy of faith is quite useful as long as all portions of Scripture are given equal status in the procedure. That is, one group of "proof-texts" should not be set up as the framework through which all other texts are read. When this occurs, inevitably the theology of the proof-texts is read into the other texts, thus beclouding legitimate, divinely ordained diversities. For example, the book of James must not be forced through a Pauline grid. James gave a perspective that deserves to be heard on its own merit. The exception to this rule would be texts with "obscure" meanings. Also,

at this point in the hermeneutical process it would be healthy to receive feedback from systematic theology, although this too must not become a matter of forcing Scripture into a preunderstood grid. Nevertheless, as long as it remains subject to the results of exegesis, it is healthy for systematic theology to inform exegesis.

Since absolute objectivity is impossible to achieve, the exegete should strive for self-awareness and continually engage in self-critical reflection. When combined with this kind of hermeneutical introspection, the grammatical-historical method serves also as a control over the abuse of *sensus plenior*. Notwithstanding one's theological presuppositions, this type of exegesis generates fruitful and accurate results. It is essential for understanding what the author expressed. And the deeper meaning of a text may never contradict the results of a careful exegesis of that text. Nor may it be unrelated to the results of exegesis. Of ultimate concern for evangelicals must be the fixity of meaning in the text. The meaning of a text must not be viewed as autonomous, an atemporal object loosed from its historical conditioning and no longer under the control of authorial expression. Grammatical-historical exegesis is a key weapon in this battle against the advances of modernity with its relativistic approach to biblical norms. But fixity of meaning does not preclude a deeper and clearer meaning, so long as every stratum is viewed as a part of the fixed meaning of the text. For ultimately it was God who determined the fixity of meaning by causing the canon to be written, thereby setting the boundaries for the meanings of texts.

However, this endorsement of the grammatical-historical method is not without qualifications. "Scientific" exegesis must not be made into some sort of sacred cow, grazing on the lush grasses of objectivity while eschewing the barren pastures of subjectivity. Some advocates of the grammatical-historical method seem to understand hermeneutics as the mastery of certain principles that are then used to extract the meaning from a text as though it were an object to be uncovered in an archaeological dig. If presuppositions are properly refined, then the correct, one-dimensional meaning of the text will be revealed by means of the objective methodology. This approach is not fully satisfactory in several respects.

First of all, the "scientific" grammatical-historical method is itself shaped by the community from which it arises.[30] Consequently, the results of the method will be slanted toward a western mind-set. Moreover, the theology based on such an analysis will be articulated within the epistemological categories of western civilization's ratio-

[30]P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966). Berger and Luckmann show that all epistemological categories are ultimately founded in the societal values from which they arise.

nalistic and empirical world view. Such a scientific orientation makes it difficult for some scholars to accept the supernatural world view of the Bible. Others of a more evangelical orientation accept the world view of the Bible with respect to past ages (e.g., the apostolic age), but find it difficult to accept the idea of those same supernatural phenomena continuing into the present age. Perhaps certain rationalistic presuppositions concerning the nature of reality actually prevent some from accepting the supernatural perspective of Scripture. An approach such as this actually widens the gulf between the two horizons.

Second, the illusion of absolute objectivity can prevent one from apprehending all the layers of meaning that might be in a text. Therefore, the canon's function as context should be made an integral aspect of the hermeneutical process and should work hand in hand with grammatical-historical investigation. It should not be relegated to a separate and final stage of systematizing, a stage that is basically unrelated to the process of interpreting the text. Furthermore, systematic theology is determined to a great extent by hermeneutical methods, so why should the two be separated? A narrow use of the grammatical-historical method, then, does not adequately account for the canonical "iceberg."

Third, a narrow and fragmentizing exegesis can have the opposite result and reach conclusions that are too vague. Apart from the canonical context one may miss pertinent information that would have the effect of making a text clear. Thus, while the canonical context may actually reduce the viable options for interpretation and give us greater clarity, the grammatical-historical method may result in vagueness.

Fourth, the emphasis of much exegesis is still upon smaller units of communication such as words and sentences. Even when this level of exegesis is conducted in a balanced manner, the underlying assumption seems to be that theology is contained in the meanings of words and precise syntactical relationships. Thus the results tend to be atomistic and perhaps not that relevant to the larger conceptual framework. In this respect the Bible should be read "like any other book." When we read other works of literature, when we write, even when we speak, do we conduct a lexicographical investigation of every word being used? Of course not. Our awareness is focused on larger kinds of meaning. Our interpretations should also have this focus.[31]

Finally, an overly scientific methodology may cause one to miss the primary goal of hermeneutics, namely, a personal encounter with the risen Lord. The ultimate objective is not to know the meanings of

[31]Cf. Poythress, "Relational Perspective."

texts, or even the deeper meanings of texts. The ultimate objective in hermeneutics is to know Christ. This does not mean that the scholarly discipline of academic investigation must be thrown out. But that part of the process must not obscure the spiritual dimension. The Scriptures do more than communicate propositional truth; they mediate the presence and power of God to redeem man. In this respect, the Bible interprets us, and it is carnal to think that we are somehow "masters" of its meaning.

For the Bible to interpret our lives it must have some effect on us. When we have an encounter with the risen Lord it usually evokes a response on our part. And it is difficult to separate precisely our responses from the meaning of the text since one flows directly from the other. Since any effect that meaning has can generally be called application, I proceed now to consider that topic.

SENSUS PLENIOR AND THE APPLICATION OF MEANING

In the final analysis, the problem of Scripture's authority within the evangelical community is not one of articulating a doctrine of the Word of God to which all will subscribe. The real problem, it seems, is to articulate the meaning of the Bible as relevant to modern culture in a way that retains full divine authority. This is the task not only of theology in a systematic sense, but also in a pastoral sense. Any theology that lacks application is fruitless. How, then, may the *sensus plenior* of Scripture yield fruitful results in the area of application?

Evangelicals must reject the concept that the needs of modern man determine the meaning of the text and thus also its application.[32] At the same time it must be acknowledged that we are "trapped" within our historical situation and there is no escape. So in one sense, sharing in the meaning of a text by way of application cannot avoid historical conditioning. Yet in the fusion of the biblical and modern "horizons," it is the modern horizon that must be subject to refinement, not the horizon of the text. Authority resides in the text, not with the interpreter.

Hirsch, whose view of meaning and intention was considered in the preceding section, has also offered a solution to the problem of application.[33] He suggests a strict separation of meaning and "significance." Meaning in his theory, as seen earlier, is what the author intended to express. "Significance" is a perception by the reader of a relationship between the meaning of a text and his own situation. Application, then, consists of these perceived relationships. An obvious weakness with this view is that a reader may perceive a relation-

[32]See Thiselton, "New Hermeneutic," 303–10.

[33]Hirsch, *Aims*, 95–158. Cf. also his *Validity*.

ship between meaning and his own circumstance which is not at all related to the text.[34] Some scholars, such as Kaiser, have appropriated the Hirschian theory of application into the hermeneutical process.[35] He contends that the two processes of exegesis and application must be kept separate and distinct. If application is a part of the meaning, then the meaning of a text changes with each new application. Thus, in order to protect the stability and authority of a text's meaning, he argues for separation. However, even though application is a distinct and separate item from the meaning of the text, Kaiser opines that good applications will be in harmony with the universal truth expressed by the passage.

On the surface this appears to be a logical and practical way of dealing with application. But there are problems with it. God gave Scripture for the very purpose of application through encountering Jesus Christ in the words of the biblical witness. Scripture evokes awareness of "how great a salvation" believers possess by virtue of its witness to Christ (Heb 2:3–4). The holy Scriptures also make men "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). These are applicational characteristics of the very nature of God's Word. Since application is part of the ontological essence of Scripture, it is problematic to entertain any degree of separation between the two. It would be like trying to separate the attributes of God from the being of God. Application is an attribute of Scripture.

Furthermore, the separation of meaning and application results in the loss of normativeness for the message of the Bible. If application is not fully a part of meaning then it is not binding on one's life. Clearly, Kaiser does not wish to have application separated entirely from the text, for he contends that application should be in harmony with the universal meaning of the passage. His burden is to protect against a hermeneutical posture in which meaning does not reside in the text but only in the interpreter's application of the text. If meaning is said to reside only with the interpreter and his perceived relationships between the text and his own historical milieu, then it becomes detached from the intent of both the human and divine author. Poythress has argued correctly that this kind of strict separation is tantamount to agreeing with the view of neo-orthodoxy, which also holds to a dichotomy between the propositional content of a text and one's personal encounter (application) with the text.[36] But Kaiser's suggestion that application should be kept separate from

[34]Poythress, "Divine Meaning," 4.

[35]W. C. Kaiser, "Inner Biblical Exegesis as a Model for Bridging the 'Then' and 'Now' Gap: Hosea 12:1–6," *JETS* 28 (1985) 33–46. Cf. also Kaiser, *Exegetical Theology*, 32.

[36]Poythress, "Divine Meaning," 17–18.

meaning may lead some to understand his position as advocating a more radical kind of separation in which application is not meaning. The danger with which he is concerned can be eliminated when one first engages in the exegetical task and then takes care to ensure that all applications are drawn from the meaning of the text. The meaning of Scripture can be appropriated normatively in the present historical context only if application is the warp and woof of the meaning. At this point one can be confident that God has foreseen every historical context, every cultural milieu, the societal mores of all generations, and each individual's personal circumstances, and that he intended the Holy Scriptures to be applied to all of them, indeed, that he has placed application within the very nature of the Bible. Application is a dimension of meaning.

If these concerns are valid, then how does one determine the applicational aspect of the meaning of a passage? And how can the interpreter be sure that his application is a part of that meaning? The illumination of the Holy Spirit is crucial in this part of the hermeneutical process. In addition to the leading of the Spirit, the use of *sensus plenior* can provide assistance in making "meaningful" applications. By exploring the canonical context, and reflecting on the relationships of a text to the whole, strata of meaning are realized which provide sound biblical parameters for application.

The example of the second commandment in Exod 20:4 will serve well. It reads, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down and worship them." In its historical significance this commandment is probably addressing religious syncretism, or the worship of pagan deities. However, upon reflecting on the canonical context, one discovers that the concept of idolatry is expanded, and other dimensions of meaning for the commandment emerge. Eph 5:5 indicates that immorality, impurity, and greed constitute idolatrous behavior. Elsewhere as well, these three sins are identified as idols or considered as idolatrous behaviors (e.g., Col 3:5, 1 Cor 5:10; 6:9; 1 Pet 4:3). Even more profound a connection is seen in the simple command, "Keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21), where John summarizes his entire discussion concerning the things of God and the things of this world. His juxtaposition of the two realms clearly indicates that they are mutually repugnant, and so he says not to love the world or the things of the world (2:15). Functioning as a conclusion, the phrase, "Keep yourselves from idols," summarizes all that John meant when he gave the instruction not to love the world. In the light of the canonical context, then, the second commandment has far-reaching meaning in the present. The *sensus plenior* of idolatry involves giving anything or anyone higher priority

than one should in his life. To do so causes sin, and replaces the priority that God claims over one's life with a priority of one's own choosing. The applications for twentieth century man are obvious. But are they part of the meaning in Exod 20:4? Yes. The canonical relationships that have been examined are clearly strata of the meaning of idolatry in *God's* second commandment. Moreover, they are not the result of allegorization but arise from legitimate relationships established within the one book (the Bible), by the one author (God). Since one is to avoid *all* forms of idolatry according to the expressed meaning of the text, the expressed meaning must include the *sensus plenior* of "idolatry." Consequently, the meaning of the text must also include the applications arising from the canonical context, for they are part and parcel of the *sensus plenior.*

These suggestions for the use of *sensus plenior* in the application of biblical truth will, it is hoped, contribute meaningfully to the dialogue. There is certainly an urgent need for the discussion to continue. Ultimately, the normative value of Scripture for the life of God's people and the redemption of modern man is at stake.

CONCLUSION

The canonical context is a complex network of relationships so integrated as to constitute an act of divine communication with properties not derivable from its discrete parts. In other words, the Bible is a type of gestalt. Within the parameters of this gestalt are texts that have strata of meaning by virtue of their integration into the whole, as well as meaning in the light of their historical origins. The suggestion put forth in this study is that hermeneutical methodology should include both approaches to meaning, thereby obtaining as many strata of the "single" expressed meaning of the text as possible. Furthermore, by reflecting on the canonical context one is able to see applications for the modern situation that are part of the warp and woof of a text's expressed meaning. It is essential that the church receive all the meaning that Scripture has for her. This is particularly important in the light of God's purpose in giving us his Word, which is to bring us into conformity to the image of his Son.

Perhaps these proposals with respect to the use of *sensus plenior* will provide some basis for dialogue. It is hoped that all the parties concerned will continue to struggle with biblical meaning and continue to pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit as attempts are made to articulate a prophetic word for this generation.[37]

[37]This article was originally prepared for the doctoral seminar entitled "Hermeneutical Foundations," at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Penn. The inspiration and assistance of Professor Vern S. Poythress are gratefully acknowledged.