

**A Case Study of Theological Interpretation of Scripture –
An Evaluation of Jamieson and Wittman’s *Biblical Reasoning:*
*Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis***

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Introduction

We’ve all been there before. We arrive late to the monthly pastor’s fellowship or similar gathering, where deep and heady conversations are well underway. It takes fifteen minutes or so just to catch up on the topic being discussed, but by then the conversation has moved on and now we are so far behind it seems there is no way to comprehensively grasp the conversation taking place, much less to provide any kind of meaningful contribution. Nevertheless we listen patiently and learn that in the end, there truly is nothing new under the sun. Terminology may change, superficial arguments may take different forms, but it all makes sense because we’ve seen it before.

As we approach a discussion of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (hereafter “TIS”), and the Dispensational voice to those who advocate for such a method, we are approaching a conversation now decades, and some would even argue millennia, in the making. Contributors to the conversation grow with every new edition of the theological journals, Evangelical or otherwise. And yet for the Dispensationalist there are

clear principles which guide responses to the movement, and defensible arguments which may be given to TIS advocates. As the present author has been listening to Evangelical conversations about hermeneutics and TIS over the years, he has seen certain trends grow popular and pick up steam. The ideas themselves typically are not new, yet they gain new advocates and new articulations. It is the goal of this study to interact with two particular voices from a single volume in the world of theological interpretation and discern how these voices relate to the broader TIS movement. We will then consider what a traditional Dispensational response to these two voices, and to TIS more broadly, might look like.

1. The Theological Interpretation of Scripture

Before delving into the work in question, it is necessary to define our terms, most specifically the “Theological Interpretation of Scripture.” In an introductory article to the subject, Greg Allison defines TIS as “a family of interpretive approaches that privileges theological readings of the Bible in due recognition of the theological nature of Scripture, its ultimate theological message, and/or the theological interests of its readers.”¹ With the identity of TIS as “a family of interpretive approaches” it is notable that TIS is less a singular *method* of Biblical interpretation, and more a *movement* of relatively likeminded theologians with a cluster of shared principles.² In a brief online introduction to TIS, Biola

¹ Greg Allison, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14.2 (2010), 29.

² On this point cf. Michael Allen, *The Fear of the Lord: Essays on Theological Method* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2023), 94.

University associate professor of theology Uche Anizor summarizes these shared principles of TIS as “reaction, retrieval, and rules.”³ This summary is quite helpful in grasping the issues at play.

1.1 Reaction

As a “reaction,” the roots of TIS are in postmodern mainline theologians of all denominations, Protestant and Catholic, who were responding to Modernist methods of exegesis.⁴ These Modernist exegetical methods most principally included the historical-critical method of interpretation.⁵ Andreas Köstenberger in his hermeneutics textbook says that in this method

the study of Scripture was conceived not in theological but in historical terms. The study of the Old Testament often became a study in comparative religions ... and the New Testament church was discussed in relation to the mystery religions in the Hellenistic world and its practices.⁶

³ Uche Anizor, “The ‘Theological Interpretation of Scripture’,” Talbot School of Theology Faculty Blog, June 28, 2023, <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2011/the-theological-interpretation-of-scripture>. Dan Treier, an outspoken TIS advocate, follows this same tri-fold presentation, using other titles, in his *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering A Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 34-35. He alliterates these categories as “Culture,” “Canon,” and “Creed” in a published interview with the London Lyceum entitled, “The Theological Interpretation of Scripture Roundtable,” published on May 29, 2023; <https://redcircle.com/shows/bfb67000-a8bc-447f-b7f3-2a941c791a68/ep/b207e4a6-97aa-4f84-8577-530f56aa5402>.

⁴ I say this well aware of arguments that TIS is in fact an ancient practice rooted in the Church Fathers. This ancient aspect of TIS will be dealt with below under “Retrieval.” For now it is sufficient to note that TIS as a *contemporary movement* finds its roots in a reaction against Modernist hermeneutical methods.

⁵ Charlie Trimm, “Evangelicals, Theology, and Biblical Interpretation: Reflections on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 (2010), 312.

⁶ Andreas Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 560.

He concludes: “In the end, ... New Testament theology had become a completely historical enterprise almost entirely devoid of the category of divine revelation or theology.”⁷ Some Postmodern theologians observed that this exegetical method problematically separated the Scriptures from the Church, and they have reacted by seeking to return the Scriptures to the church.⁸

This return of Scripture to the Church involves reading Scripture not as “any other book,” but as “Christian Scripture.”⁹ Among other things, the Modernist reading of Scripture as “any other book” includes efforts to read Scripture “objectively,” with no presuppositions. In response to this Modernist idea, TIS advocates remind readers that no reading of Scripture is “presuppositionless.”¹⁰ Dan Treier, a systematic theologian who has been involved in evangelical forms of TIS for decades, turns the common illustration of presuppositions as “baggage” on its head when he writes,

the presuppositions of interpreters have often had a bad name in biblical studies...Presuppositions are ‘baggage’ to be set aside as much as humanly possible in a quest for ‘objectivity.’ This metaphor points to an alternative, however: baggage usually carries with us that which is essential, not that which we need to get rid of. What if presuppositions are not a threat to objectivity but rather an aid in preserving it?¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 560.

⁸ Allison, “Theological Interpretation,” 30.

⁹ Ibid., 29. The potential logical fallacy of this statement will be revisited later.

¹⁰ David Starling, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” The Gospel Coalition, May 19, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/theological-interpretation-of-scripture>.

¹¹ Treier, *Introducing*, 202.

In other words, everyone approaches the Scriptures with their own pre-understandings; the best readers can do is recognize and acknowledge those pre-understandings and seek to have those pre-understandings corrected by Scripture.¹²

1.2 Rules

But what precisely ought to correct pre-understandings? This is where Anizor's principle of "rules" comes in. The idea of a "ruled reading" of Scripture, and the "rule of faith" as the correcting standard for theological pre-understanding, is sourced from the Church Fathers who articulated such a rule in their writings. Adriani Rodrigues, a Brazilian scholar, notes that for the early Church Father Irenaeus, "the rule of faith seems to be described as a framework or system that serves as the correct set of presuppositions or preunderstanding for the activity of biblical interpretation."¹³ In contrast, D.A. Carson comments on the use of the Rule of Faith in TIS when he says,

At heart [of TIS] is a self-conscious return to the *analogia fidei*, the "analogy of the faith" or the "rule of faith" (early summary of fundamental Christian beliefs), as

¹² To be sure, this truth has been affirmed by those committed to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Cf. John H. Walton, "Inspired Subjectivity and Hermeneutical Objectivity," *Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (2002), 66.

¹³ Adriani Milli Rodrigues, "The Rule of Faith and Biblical Interpretation in Evangelical Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *Themelios* 43 (2018), 259. Rodrigues goes on to demonstrate that "Irenaeus seems to affirm the identity between the rule of faith and Scripture, and this rule is derived from an evident system in Scripture" (ibid., 260). He argues that for the Church Fathers the "concept of apostolic tradition, which comprises rule of faith and Scripture, restricts the scope of the rule only to the apostolic tradition, which does not include the post-apostolic creeds and doctrines of the church" (ibid., 261, emphasis added). Perhaps the TIS advocate ought to attend to Rodrigues' suggestion that for the Evangelical, "the rule should be situated within the boundaries of the apostolic tradition" (ibid., 269).

well as to an array of creeds and confessions. Not a few TIS writers assert that the *analogia fidei* is one of its central interpretive principles.¹⁴

Indeed, to Carson's point Dan Treier, in a recent interview with the London Lyceum, explained a Ruled Reading as

relating particular passages and larger summaries of biblical teaching to the rule of faith as it became embodied in the ecumenical creeds, perhaps also appropriating Protestant confessional traditions that widen beyond the patristic, Trinitarian and Christological dogmas.¹⁵

This association of the "Rule of Faith" with either the Apostles' or Nicæan Creed is quite common in the TIS literature.

Trimm observes that the Rule of Faith may serve two roles for TIS advocates. He states first that "it is a fence for interpretation: If an interpretation falls outside the rule of faith, then it cannot be accepted." He then continues, "Second, and more obliquely, it serves as a guide or a key to exegesis: it actively helps us to understand the text in a better and fuller way."¹⁶ He goes on to clarify this second point by noting that some TIS advocates take the Rule of Faith "as a heuristic model and then tr[y] to understand the text better based on that theology."¹⁷ Thus a Ruled Reading consists of bringing

¹⁴ D.A. Carson, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But...", in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 196.

¹⁵ Treier, "Roundtable," 0:06:10 timestamp.

¹⁶ Trimm, "Evangelicals," 315.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 316.

Christological and Trinitarian presuppositions to the text of Scripture to inform the meaning of a given text.¹⁸

1.3 Retrieval

The third part of Anizor's summary is that of "Retrieval," and it is perhaps at this point that TIS appears most radical to the Dispensationalist. TIS advocates almost universally seek to "recapture a spiritual use of Scripture, even at times an allegorical reading, as the church has done throughout the ages."¹⁹ Indeed, the medieval "Quadrige"²⁰ has seen a resurgence in popularity.²¹ This retrieval of a medieval hermeneutical method may strike the uninitiated evangelical as Romish Popery; however its advocates assure us that this reading is broadly catholic.²² Though the Protestant confessional documents remind us that "the true and full sense of any Scripture ... is not manifold but one,"²³ Craig Carter explains that this "one" meaning

¹⁸ Trimm gives a helpful example of this Ruled, Trinitarian interpretation of Scripture when he cites Markus Bockmuehl's work from *Seeing the Word*. Cf. Trimm, "Evangelicals," 323.

¹⁹ Stephen J. Wellum, "Editorial: Reflecting upon the 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture,'" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14 (2010), 3.

²⁰ The "quadriga" is the reading of Scripture according to a four-fold sense of "literal," "allegorical," "tropological," and "anagogical;" cf. Rodney Petersen, "Continuity and Discontinuity: The Debate Throughout Church History," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S Feinberg (Westchester: Crossway, 1988), 24.

²¹ Craig Carter, just to name one author, has written two popular volumes promoting this hermeneutical method: *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018) and *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition: Recovering Trinitarian Classical Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021).

²² See, for example, Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023) 189-194.

²³ Second London Baptist Confession, I.9.

in a premodern setting is not to refer to the conscious intention of the human author and the text's initial readers (that is, what tends to be called the "historical meaning" in modernity). Rather, the meaning would more naturally be understood as the Divine Author's intention in inspiring the text.²⁴

Thus the Divine Author and the human author are separated in terms of meaning, and the hermeneutical quest becomes the meaning of the *Divine* author. Dan Treier refers to this as the "Canonical reading" in that it relates "particular passages to the rest of Scripture on more than historical or inductive, biblical-theological grounds, also attending to literary connections and being open to theological connections that avoid a-contextual proof-texting."²⁵

It is precisely at this point that the Postmodern question of "meaning" enters the context of TIS. Postmodern hermeneuts hold to a "metaphysical assumption that it is impossible to understand the meaning of another author."²⁶ Consequently postmodern theologians look to the *reader* to determine the meaning of a text. Conservative practitioners of TIS rightly recognize the issue with reading Scripture in such a subjective manner.²⁷ However, in rejecting the human authorial intent of Scripture as the basis of "meaning," they are often left searching for another basis. How is one to determine the

²⁴ Craig Carter, "How to Read a Premodern Confession: The Single Meaning of Scripture and the 2LCF 1:9," *Credo Magazine*, January 19, 2023. <https://credomag.com/2023/01/how-to-read-a-premodern-confession-the-single-meaning-of-scripture-and-the-2lcf-19>.

²⁵ Treier, "Roundtable," 0:05:53 timestamp.

²⁶ Dale Leschert, "A Change of Meaning, Not A Change of Mind: The Clarification of a Suspected Defection in the Hermeneutical Theory of E.D. Hirsch, Jr.," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (1992), 186.

²⁷ Cf. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There A Meaning In This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 10-29.

“divine authorial intent” of Scripture if it is separated from the human author, as determined through historical-grammatical hermeneutical methods? Treier suggests that

the emergence of TIS opened the possibility, at least for scholars like me, that the relationship between scripture's divine and human discourse could be more hermeneutically complex or theoretically underdetermined without weakening verbal plenary inspiration.²⁸

Simply put, Treier suggests that “without weakening verbal plenary inspiration” Evangelicals may be less dogmatic on Scripture’s *singular* meaning and instead maintain a more subjective (“underdetermined”) approach to the meaning of Scripture as it relates to the divine and human authors, and as it is received in a particular community. In this respect TIS may be seen as a development from Karl Barth’s idea of Scripture as a *witness* to the Word of God, rather than the Word of God itself.

Similarly, another TIS advocate states that,

in line with the rationalistic position, theologically interested modern interpreters ground the theological weight of the biblical texts in the intent of their authors or the perspectives of their original audience. To make the views of the original authors or the original communities the primary questions of interpretation too easily neglects the ongoing theological significance and meaning the biblical texts themselves have for the reading communities today.²⁹

It may be observed that this articulation collapses the distinction of “meaning” and “significance,” or “interpretation” and “application.” It presupposes a “communication” between text and reader such that the reader can change the meaning/significance of the

²⁸ Treier, “Roundtable,” 0:09:38 timestamp. Stephen Fowl, a well-known evangelical TIS advocate, argues this same position in *Engaging Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 56ff. Likewise Allen, *The Fear of the Lord*, 62-71.

²⁹ D. Christopher Spinks, *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning: Debates on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 19.

text. This distinction between “meaning” and “significance,” championed in the hermeneutical world by authors such as E.D. Hirsch,³⁰ is commonly rejected among TIS advocates.³¹

In summary, the element of “Retrieval” in TIS indicates a return to the “pre-modern” assumptions of a distinction between the Divine Author and the human author, and results in a search for the meaning of the Divine Author in figurative readings of the Biblical text. At times a postmodern spin is put on this method, such that the “meaning” is found in “conversation” with the contemporary readers.

The overall principles of TIS advocates of “Reaction,” “Rules,” and “Retrieval,” (or, to put it another way, the efforts of TIS advocates to pay careful attention to “Culture,” “Creed,” and “Canon”) helpfully outline the concerns of the Theological Interpretation of Scripture. It is with this background established that the work of Jamieson and Wittman may be evaluated.

2. The Proposal of *Biblical Reasoning*

R.B. Jamieson and Tyler Wittman have contributed to the larger conversation of TIS in a compelling volume entitled *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*.³² Jamieson is a pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church and has completed

³⁰ Cf. Hirsch’s 1967 work, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

³¹ Cf. the aforementioned “Roundtable” sponsored by the London Lyceum. The three TIS advocates participating in the roundtable each reference the “Hirschian” method at least once in their comments, each time with a disparaging dismissal of the idea.

³² R.B. Jamieson & Tyler Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022).

many writing projects for the 9Marks ministry, including the books *Sound Doctrine: How a Church Grows in the Love and Holiness of God*, *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership*, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in The Epistle to the Hebrews*, and *The Path to Being a Pastor: A Guide for the Aspiring*.³³ Tyler Wittman is an assistant professor of theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and has done work on the nature and attributes of God, the theology of Thomas Aquinas, and the theology of Karl Barth.³⁴ Thus Jamieson represents the voice of biblical theology and exegesis in this project, and Wittman represents the voice of systematic and historical theology, providing a balanced perspective and presentation.

Jamieson and Wittman display an uneasy relationship with the label of “TIS.” In their introduction to *Biblical Reasoning* they observe,

Some readers may wonder whether the book they are holding is a work of “Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (TIS). Certainly we have learned much from, and appreciate many elements of, work that has been done under that heading. If someone were to apply that label to our work, we would offer little objection, though we would also see little gain. We find the phrase to be overly broad, with little descriptive value. Further, we are far more interested in doing theological interpretation than in theorizing it. Theological interpretation is justified by its exegetical children; by the fruits of our readings you may know us.³⁵

The authors seem to be reacting against the very broad umbrella of TIS, an umbrella which, as has already been observed, includes theologians both mainline and

³³ Cf Jamieson’s profile page on the CHBC website: <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/about-us/leadership-staff/member/1410134>. Accessed 7/7/2023.

³⁴ Cf. the Curriculum Vita of Wittman, available at <https://www.nobts.edu/Faculty/cv/Wittman%20Tyler%20VITA.pdf>. Accessed 7/7/2023.

³⁵ Jamieson & Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, xxiv.

conservative. However, throughout their introduction as they describe their methodology, they reference some of the very authors and works which have been cited in the present case study as those who represent the evangelical “side” of TIS. Thus they intend to show what *kind* of TIS they identify with through their “doing” of theological interpretation. They do not see themselves as an alternative to TIS, but rather as a voice representative of a certain current within the stream of TIS. Their arguments and methodology will therefore be engaged as representative of a certain form of TIS.

In an effort to connect *Biblical Reasoning* to the larger TIS movement, the methodology of Jamieson and Wittman will be presented in the same three-part rubric that the TIS movement more broadly was examined (“Reaction,” “Rules,” “Retrieval”). Therefore this case study does not follow the argument of the book exactly, and should not be confused with a book review.³⁶ Nevertheless every effort will be made to represent the authors fairly and in their own context.

2.1 Reaction

The first of three central concerns of TIS is that of “Reaction.” As discussed previously, TIS is a reaction against modernist theological methods which strip Scripture of its Divine authority and reduce Scripture to the mere writings of ancient religious leaders. Jamieson and Wittman share this same reaction against modernist historical criticism when they ask rhetorically, “Shouldn’t exegesis be protected from prior

³⁶ For a traditional book review of *Biblical Reasoning*, please see the Appendix.

dogmatic commitments? Hasn't historical criticism freed Scripture from the shackles of creedal constraint?"³⁷ They immediately and carefully reject this proposition of Modernist historical criticism, recognizing this anti-creedal supposition as antithetical to their project.³⁸

An outcome of the modernist project was that Scripture was no longer relevant to the church; it became the property of the academy.³⁹ The response of TIS was to prioritize the theological "use" of Scripture for the church, using Scripture interpreted Theologically to promote Christian piety. Jamieson and Wittman demonstrate this same concern for the piety of the reader of Scripture. In fact, *Biblical Reasoning* is divided into two parts, and the entire first part – the first three chapters – is dedicated to the cultivation of the personal piety of the reader of Scripture.⁴⁰ The authors provide the following purpose statement for their project of "biblical reasoning": "Holy Scripture presupposes and fosters readers whose end is the vision of Christ's glory, and therein eternal life. Biblical reasoning must be ordered to this same end."⁴¹ The authors then elaborate the meaning of beholding Christ's glory through the historical category of "the beatific vision."⁴² The whole first chapter is remarkably devotional and soul-stirring as it provides the reader

³⁷ Jamieson & Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, xxi.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Spinks, *Crisis*, 18-19.

⁴⁰ That is, the discipline of "Theological Prolegomena," or "Knowing and Loving God."

⁴¹ Jamieson & Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 4.

⁴² Ibid., 6-8.

with a very clear understanding of the spiritual purpose of the study of Scripture. The study of Scripture is never merely an academic exercise. It is the life and spiritual sustenance of the believer.

A common mantra of TIS is that Scripture ought to be read “as Christian Scripture” and not “as any other book.” This sentiment is also affirmed by Jamieson and Wittman when they note that “in reading Scripture we are not called to mere observation of the text and its truths ... it proceeds to a further step of prayerfully meditating on these truths until they form a comprehensive impression on our minds that prompts praise.”⁴³ Thus for Jamieson and Wittman the question of reading the Bible as Christian Scripture speaks less to the *method* of reading, or the hermeneutical process, and more to the *purpose* or *goal* of reading: Scripture must be read in such a way that the readers’ hearts are engaged and transformed. This purpose of reading is in reaction to the modernist purposes of Biblical reading which approached the text merely as some sort of an historical document to be examined.

When TIS advocates react to modernist methods, an important aspect of that reaction is the reunification of exegesis and theology.⁴⁴ Modernist theologians imagined that dogmatic (or systematic) categories were the result of later ecclesial reflections on

⁴³ Ibid., 21. One is reminded of Johann Bengel’s famous words, *Te totum applica ad textum, rem totam applica ad te* – “Apply your whole self to the text; apply the whole subject matter to yourself.” Quoted in R.W.L. Moberly, “What Is Theological Interpretation of Scripture?” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3 (2009), 168.

⁴⁴ Cf. David Yeago, “The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis,” in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen Fowl (Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 96.

the text, not rising from the text itself. Thus Modernist theologians separated dogmatic categories from the exegetical study of Scripture. TIS responds by insisting that presuppositions and theological convictions cannot be set aside when studying the text.

The precise relationship between exegesis and theology remains a significant part of the debate within TIS, evangelical and otherwise. Charlie Trimm suggests a spectrum of positions when it comes to the relationship of exegesis and theology, with Modernist theologians representing the far “left” of the spectrum, where theology is opposed to exegesis.⁴⁵ On the far “right” of the spectrum is the most postmodern, reader-response version of TIS where exegesis is entirely theologically focused, and there is little interest in original meaning; the text is read “entirely in light of theology and the history of interpretation.”⁴⁶ An example of this kind of exegesis may be found in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible published by Brazos Press, an imprint of Baker Books.⁴⁷

In the middle of Trimm’s spectrum are two mediating positions represented by most evangelicals: “theologically open exegesis”⁴⁸ and “theologically curious exegesis.”⁴⁹ In Trimm’s heuristic, “theologically open exegesis” represents the position of those who

⁴⁵ Trimm, “Evangelicals,” 319-320.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 326. It is worth noting that while Trimm tries to place Dan Treier in a more moderate category (see his comments on page 323 of the cited article), Treier himself contributed a volume in the Brazos Commentary.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 321-322.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 323-325.

understand the relationship between theology and exegesis to be one-directional: exegesis informs theology, and not the other way around. By contrast, “theologically curious exegesis” represents those who are “curious about questions theology brings to the text, although the answers are not determined by theology.”⁵⁰

These categories are helpful to have in place for understanding the position of Jamieson and Wittman. They comment that

Biblical reasoning finds its place primarily in the economy of divine teaching and secondarily in more proximate contexts, such as particular streams of tradition. None of these factors are barriers to sound exegesis. Instead, they are conditions for it: hearers of the Word are those addressed in *this* text, in *this* setting.⁵¹

Thus the goal for Jamieson and Wittman is not to set aside all presuppositions (“streams of tradition”), but to acknowledge them and recognize their importance for coming to sound exegetical conclusions. They state that

exegesis is inescapably theological ... While we can distinguish exegetical from dogmatic reasoning, we must not exclude the latter from the former ... Proper dogmatic reasoning moves not away from Scripture to a final resting place in theological construction but stays within Scripture, moves within Scripture, and delves deeper into the inexhaustible riches of the mysteries declared in Scripture ... Dogmatic concepts and judgments need not dominate exegesis; instead, they can and must serve it.”⁵²

This seems to place Jamieson and Wittman squarely in the center of the exegetical spectrum.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 323.

⁵¹ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 49.

⁵² Ibid., 233.

⁵³ It may be noted that D.A. Carson, himself a critic of TIS, in his model of a theological method recognizes the two-way relationship between exegesis and theological development. Carson also reckons with “Historical Theology” in his theological method, but he carefully brackets it off from primary

The acknowledgement of particular streams of tradition which may influence exegesis may be seen particularly in Jamieson and Wittman’s vision of the nature of God. They frequently argue for what is commonly called the “Classical” view of God,⁵⁴ a vision of God undermined and denied throughout Modernist theology. In fact, the fourth principle for sound exegesis which Jamieson and Wittman develop is that “God, who is the creator of all things *ex nihilo*, is holy, infinite, and unchangeable. Since God is qualitatively distinct from all things, he therefore differs from creatures differently than creatures differ from one another.”⁵⁵ They go on to describe God as transcendent,⁵⁶ without passions,⁵⁷ simple,⁵⁸ etc. These doctrines are questioned not only in the broader evangelical world, but even within evangelical systematic theology.⁵⁹ However, Jamieson and Wittman understand this classical vision of God to be an essential component to faithful exegesis.

considerations, in contrast to the conception of the “Rule of Faith” in TIS. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “D.A. Carson’s Theological Method,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29 (2011): 262-263.

⁵⁴ See, for example, James Dolezal’s description of “Classical Christian Theism” in *All That Is In God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), chapter 1, kindle edition.

⁵⁵ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 63.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁷ Jamieson and Wittman dedicate a whole “case study” to this doctrine: *ibid.*, 84-90.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁹ Cf. the model of God proposed in John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001). In response, see Dolezal’s withering critique of those who undermine the God of “classical Christian Theism” in *All That Is In God*.

When considering the principle of “Reaction” within Biblical Reasoning, it is clear that Jamieson and Wittman share important concerns with the broader TIS movement. However, it is also clear that their position within TIS is fairly conservative and perhaps even represents a meaningful balance between the extreme poles of the relationship of exegesis and theology.

2.2 Rules

The main contribution of *Biblical Reasoning* is to the category of “Rules” and the idea of a ruled reading of Scripture. A “Ruled Reading” of Scripture is to read and interpret Scripture in light of the “rule of faith.” Usually the “rule of faith” is defined by TIS advocates as the ancient, ecumenical creeds of the church such as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicæan, or as Scripture itself.⁶⁰

Necessary to understanding the position of Jamieson and Wittman *vis-à-vis* a ruled reading is their affirmation that “theological concepts are best thought of as approximations of Scripture’s native precision and clarity rather than improvements on the Bible’s raw materials.”⁶¹ Theological formulations (e.g. creeds) are “approximations” of Scripture’s exactness. Scripture’s affirmations require Christians to ask how certain truths cohere; this coherence is then expressed in doctrinal confessions and creeds.⁶²

⁶⁰ Rodrigues, “Rule of Faith,” 268-269.

⁶¹ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 53.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 56,

The structure of *Biblical Reasoning* is the presentation of ten rules which must govern proper exegesis, sourced from seven principles concerning the nature and identity of Scripture, the Triune God, and Christ. These ten rules are all consistent with, and at times the language is derived from, the ecumenical creeds and writings from the Apostolic Fathers. Jamieson and Wittman use historical terms such as “inseparable operations,”⁶³ *communicatio idiomatum*,⁶⁴ and “partitive exegesis,”⁶⁵ among others. However, Jamieson and Wittman never affirm that the creeds *as creeds* are the “rule of faith,” nor that the creeds *as creeds* serve as normative interpretative guidelines for Scripture.

As noted earlier, TIS advocates understand the Rule of Faith to exercise one or possibly two roles: it is “a fence for interpretation” and perhaps also “a guide or key to exegesis.”⁶⁶ Jamieson and Wittman explain that

the grammar with which Scripture speaks ... grants hermeneutical purchase on both individual texts and their larger canonical horizon. Doctrine functions this way because it is formulated *a posteriori*, on the basis of careful exegesis, rather than *a priori*, imposed on the text from elsewhere.⁶⁷

Thus for Jamieson and Wittman, if the Rule of Faith (or the formulation of the ten rules of *Biblical Reasoning*) is to serve as a guide to exegesis, it is only because of its prior foundation in the text itself. If the rule is misshapen in its formulation, as determined by

⁶³ Ibid., 124.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 128.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁶⁶ Trimm, “Evangelicals,” 315.

⁶⁷ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 56.

a careful⁶⁸ reading of the text, Jamieson and Wittman would not find it useful as either a fence or a guide. In other words, a ruled reading is not necessary because of the history or tradition of the rule, but because of the faithfulness of the rule to the text of Scripture.

For Jamieson and Wittman a “ruled reading” is

to read ... passages in such a way that they cohere with each other and the rest of Scripture, and in a way that both presupposes and pursues a larger theological vision. So we should be alert to the possibility that the intuitions we naturally bring to these passages may mislead us into reading them in a way that clashes with Scripture’s overall witness to the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁶⁹

Thus it is clear that when it comes to the TIS principle of “Rules,” Jamieson and Wittman represent a careful, balanced, text-faithful development and use of exegetically-derived rules to guide the reading of Scripture.

2.3 Retrieval

The third category which marks TIS advocates is the “Retrieval” of premodern hermeneutical and methodological sensibilities. Jamieson and Wittman’s work is significant in light of the retrieval methods noted earlier within TIS advocates. Three important points will be observed related to Jamieson and Wittman’s theological method and the elements of “retrieval” commonly observed in TIS advocates.

First, and most in common with TIS advocates, is Jamieson and Wittman’s use of the early Church Fathers. *Biblical Reasoning* abounds with references to and citations

⁶⁸ Their concept of a “careful” reading of the text will be addressed shortly.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 202. One may observe the similarity between Jamieson and Wittman’s explanation and Rodrigues’ description of the Rule of Faith in the Apostolic Fathers (Rodrigues, “Rule of Faith,” 261).

from early Church Fathers. Jamieson and Wittman see their work in clear continuity with the theological assertions and conclusions of the early Church Fathers. However, for all their references to the *conclusions* of the Church Fathers, never once do Jamieson and Wittman reference the *theological method* of the Fathers, nor do they follow explicitly the exegetical decisions of the Fathers. Their method for argumentation lies elsewhere.

For example, in defending the unity of the divine Person in the incarnation, Jamieson and Wittman turn to a careful reading of Hebrews 2. From this text they seek to establish the distinction of Christ's human nature from the eternal divine person. After carefully establishing the doctrine exegetically they quote the fourth century bishop Athanasius, who eloquently defends this doctrine.⁷⁰ This same practice demonstrates itself frequently throughout the book, particularly culminating in chapter 10, "Putting the Rule-Kit to Work," which serves as a summary and application of the book as a whole. In this chapter the authors arrive at exegetical conclusion after exegetical conclusion, and always reference a Church Father who articulates the same conclusion.⁷¹

Yet it is at this very point where the methodology of Jamieson and Wittman diverges from TIS advocates, which leads to the second and third observations related to "retrieval": the use of the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method, and the distinction between meaning and significance.

⁷⁰ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 133.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 213-234.

Most evangelical TIS advocates downplay the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, as they find the meaning of the text bound up not in the human author's words, but in the Divine Author's. They believe that in so doing they are in fact following the premodern theologians in affirming a "literal" hermeneutic and yet extrapolating from that literal reading three other senses. This rejection of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic represents an extension of the broader TIS movement's rejection of the Modernist historical-critical hermeneutic. The historical-critical hermeneutic had stripped Scripture of any divine meaning in the text, reducing the text to the religious writings of an ancient people. Meaning was located strictly in the human author as he was situated in a particular social and religious milieu. His theological positions may be consistent with, or in opposition to, other prophetic voices recorded in the canon. Thus there is no longer a Divine voice "above" or "within" the human writer.

In response to this method, TIS advocates read the Scripture "theologically," presuming the writings actually have a divine intention. TIS advocates believe they are retrieving a premodern hermeneutical method of theological interpretation, yet often the Modernist assumptions of the human authors continue uncontested by TIS advocates.⁷² This point must not be overlooked: where the premodern theologian understood that the human authors wrote by the hand of God, many TIS advocates take for granted the Modernist presuppositions of the human author and simply add a theological reading

⁷² See, for example, the presuppositions of Robin Parry in relation to the authorship of Isaiah in "Prolegomena to Christian Theological Interpretation of Lamentations," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et. al., Scripture and Hermeneutics 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 401.

after the fact. The “theological reading,” or the meaning of the Divine author, seems to simply be added to this inherited historical-critical reading in a *sensus plenior* manner.⁷³ The human meaning as determined by the historical-critical method is downplayed and the divine, theological meaning is probed. Evangelical practitioners of TIS analogously downplay the historical-grammatical hermeneutic which may seem to “box God in.”⁷⁴

Jamieson and Wittman do not seem to share this concern with the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Though they nowhere explicitly identify their hermeneutical method as “historical-grammatical,” they are in practice everywhere drawing the reader’s attention to the importance of the grammar of the text as determinative of the meaning of the text. They even go so far as to say that “exegesis is undertaken best when employing a full range of linguistic, grammatical, historical, and literary skills.”⁷⁵ They quickly add that these skills are to be practiced with genuine spirituality.⁷⁶ For Jamieson and Wittman it is this combination of exegetical precision and spiritual vitality that characterizes “theological exegesis.” Simply put, Jamieson and Wittman faithfully display a commitment to an historical-grammatical hermeneutic as the conveyer of the meaning of the Divine and human authors.

⁷³ I use the term analogously, not technically.

⁷⁴ Carson, “Yes, but...”, 202. In context Carson is critiquing, not condoning, this practice.

⁷⁵ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 49.

⁷⁶ “Theological exegesis also involves faith, prayer, docility, humility, a love of truth, willingness to obey, and much more.” *Ibid.*, 50.

The third important point to be observed in Jamieson and Wittman's work in relation to the matter of "retrieval" is that of the distinction between "meaning" and "significance." TIS advocates regularly question the distinction between "meaning," what the author intended to say to his original audience, and "significance," the application of the writings to the contemporary reader. The divine intention of a text transcends the human intention,⁷⁷ and the divinely intended "meaning" therefore extends to the contemporary situation and depends on the contemporary reader.⁷⁸ The TIS advocate often identifies *everything* as "meaning" in this sense, since "meaning" is dependent on the hearing of the Church. Jamieson and Wittman provide a very sophisticated argument to counter this methodology. They affirm that

Jesus's sovereign movement among the churches attests his identity as the eternal God, so he is not confined to the past or future. This means that the temporal location of Scripture is one in which Jesus remains present to us now. Historical-critical approaches to Scripture largely assume an account of time uninformed and uncorrected by the ascended, present, and ruling Lord. Consequently, the text is usually treated as an artifact of ancient religious culture accessible mainly to the historian's craft rather than to the disciples' faith. On this reckoning, the text is located in the past.⁷⁹

They go on to say that the

text originates in the past, replete with a material history of its composition that may be studied and analyzed with historical tools (cultural location, historical and social circumstances of authorship and reception, and so on). Yet the text is also more, in light of the Spirit's inspiration and Christ's presence: it inhabits a divine economy in which its temporal location is not merely the past but also the present, as the Lord continues to speak with these texts to his church now. Indeed, since both audiences are part of the same economy, the divide between "original" and

⁷⁷ See above, section 1.3.

⁷⁸ See below, footnote 89.

⁷⁹ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 47.

“contemporary” audiences is really a distinction within the *one* audience that is the people of God.⁸⁰

In other words, Jesus is always speaking through His Word to His Church. However, the key distinction between the TIS advocate and this argument from Jamieson and Wittman is that our authors clearly distinguish between “inspiration” (“The Spirit gives textual form to the voice of Christ in inspiration”⁸¹) and “illumination” (“the church is the hearing of that voice that the Spirit creates in illumination”⁸²), and they are focusing these comments on the perpetual *applicability* of Scripture to the contemporary life of the church.⁸³ It is this distinction that separates Jamieson and Wittman from the average TIS advocate. For example, Michael Allen, a TIS advocate, makes almost the same exact argument of Jesus presently speaking to the church as Jamieson and Wittman, *yet without distinguishing* between inspiration and illumination.⁸⁴ This leaves Allen effectively collapsing “significance” into “meaning” such that the meaning of Scripture is not what the human author intended to communicate in his context but rather what the Church believes the divine author to be speaking in the contemporary context.⁸⁵ Jamieson and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 48, emphasis original.

⁸¹ Ibid., 48.

⁸² Ibid., 48.

⁸³ In its context Jamieson and Wittman seem to be merely providing a sophisticated, theological explanation for the truth taught in Hebrews 4:12, “the word of God is living and active ... discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (ESV)

⁸⁴ See below, footnote 95.

⁸⁵ Allen, *The Fear of the Lord*, 66.

Wittman therefore recondition a common TIS argument and reformulate it according to an historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

2.4 Summary

In summary, Jamieson and Wittman provide a compelling, conservative approach to TIS which may sit uncomfortably with many TIS advocates. Jamieson and Wittman explicitly articulate their reaction against the Modernist, liberal theological movements. They reject the excesses of historical criticism and seek to return the Scriptures to the Church. They affirm the need to read Scripture as Scripture, not as a mere history book. By this they mean that Christians must always seek to be transformed by their reading of Scripture.

They seek to bring theology and exegesis together in a balanced way, always allowing exegesis to establish the conclusions of theology, yet on the basis of sound exegesis allowing theology to provide guards and guides for the reading of Scripture. They promote a ruled reading of Scripture; yet these rules as articulated in the creeds are not guides simply because they are the creeds of the church; they are guides to the extent that they properly articulate the precise teachings of Scripture.

And though Jamieson and Wittman join shoulders with the church catholic in affirming the doctrines of the Faith, they do not rest on the Fathers as models of exegesis. The retrieval of the Fathers does not extend to the retrieval of the theological method of the Fathers, but simply the return to the doctrines affirmed by Scripture and articulated by the Fathers. It is the historical-grammatical method that drives the exegesis of

Jamieson and Wittman, not a typological or allegorical method as practiced by the early Church Fathers.

There is much to be grateful for in the work of Jamieson and Wittman. In Part 1 of *Biblical Reasoning* the authors lay out a Theological Prolegomena that is as well-explained and soul-stirring as any that this present author has ever read. They clearly explain their vision for the “end” or *telos* of Biblical reasoning: the vision of Christ’s glory. This point resonated with the present author and in fact aligns with his philosophy of ministry. This Prolegomena is worth the cost of the book alone.

Not only is Part 1 helpful, but the rest of the book is vigorously studied, penetratingly insightful, and carefully written. Apart from the larger conversation about TIS, this volume deserves to be read in its own right.

3. A Dispensational Response to TIS and *Biblical Reasoning*

The Theological Interpretation of Scripture and its various sensibilities are concerning to the Dispensationalist for a number of reasons, and Jamieson and Wittman’s work aids the Dispensationalist in developing a constructive response to TIS.

A first concern for the Dispensationalist relates to the TIS advocate who speaks of reading the Bible “as Christian Scripture.” Jamieson and Wittman carefully define this as reading Scripture with eyes fixed on the glory of Christ. Other TIS advocates define “Christian reading” in more redemptive-historical terms. For example, in David Starling’s introduction to TIS he states that to interpret Scripture

in light of the larger shape of the biblical story, its climax and fulfillment in the events of the gospel, and the basic convictions about God and the world that are

the presuppositions and entailments of that story ... is not to impose on it an alien dogmatic grid but to imitate and participate in interpretive practices that we learn within the canon of Scripture itself, from Jesus, from the apostles, and from the writers of the New Testament.⁸⁶

He goes on to say that “our task, therefore, is ... to follow their lead [i.e. the lead of Jesus and the apostles] in interpreting the Old Testament (and all things) in light of Christ and Christ (and all things) in light of the Old Testament.”⁸⁷ This argument that “we learn our hermeneutics from Jesus,” however, seems to be a matter of question-begging. What precisely is this Jesus-hermeneutic? Starling (and others who use this kind of argument) assume rather than defend certain hermeneutical methods⁸⁸ and present those methods as the hermeneutical standard and the definition of “reading the Bible as Christian Scripture.”⁸⁹ While rhetorically impressive on paper, this argument is a fallacious method

⁸⁶ Starling, “Theological Interpretation,” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/theological-interpretation-of-scripture>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ These methods include reading the Old Testament in light of the New, or reading the Old Testament through the lens of Christ (so-called “Christocentric” readings), typological readings, etc.

⁸⁹ There is a certain irony for the non-dispensationalist at this point. Michael Allen argues that “Christian interpretation of the OT” has “necessitated much of this debate” about the meaning of Scripture (Allen, *Fear of the Lord*, 65). In other words, for all their claims of continuity between the testaments, non-dispensationalists are in fact revealed to be the theologians of *discontinuity*. Non-dispensationalists force a *mere spiritual* continuity between New Covenant promises to Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament, resulting in a radical discontinuity for everything else in the Old Testament. Allen himself attests to this discontinuity when he argues for an “historical-critical study of what God did through the original writers and compilers (as Jewish text *qua* Jewish text)” and a “present appropriation of these texts as locales for God’s speech to the church today (as Christian text *qua* Christian text)” (Allen, *Fear of the Lord*, 65-66).

The Dispensationalist on the other hand sees a strong continuity between the Old Testament story and the New Testament story, the Old Testament promises and the future fulfillment of those promises in the Messiah as confirmed by the New Testament. The Dispensationalist argues that if the Old Testament text is read properly (see footnote 100 below), the unity of Scripture in the unfolding of the Kingdom of God according to the administrative plans which God established will be clearly seen (see, e.g., Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books,

of question-begging. Much better would be an approach which clearly explains what reading the Scripture *not* as Scripture would look like,⁹⁰ and then, as Jamieson and Wittman do, clearly articulates how the doctrine of inspiration necessarily produces a devotional and deeply pietistic reading of Scripture.

TIS advocates also emphasize so-called “theological” readings of Scripture which depend on an Author/author bifurcation. This is perhaps the point of TIS which is so troublesome to the Dispensationalist. “Theological” readings are often in response to the modernist historical-critical method, but they present as a retrieval of the “premodern” hermeneutic. The premodern started his interpretation with the “literal” sense of the text, but then proceeded to expand on that meaning with allegorical, spiritual, or Christological readings of the text.⁹¹ The Dispensationalist, concerned to preserve the unity of the Divine and human authors, may observe with Vanhoozer that,

although so-called precritical interpretations took biblical authority seriously and sought to read for the church’s edification, they may be vulnerable at three points: they may fail to take the text seriously in its historical context. They may fail to

1959], Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* [Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2017]). The Old Testament text needs no radical re-reading according to the context of the Church, for the text as written and believed by OT saints awaits its fulfillment as promised in the eschaton. The fault of re-reading the Old Testament in light of the New is resolved when the Church realizes Christ did not fulfill all His Old Testament promises at His first coming. Though the promises were guaranteed by Christ in the first advent, Israel and the Church await the *parousia* for the fulfillment of those Old Testament promises.

⁹⁰ E.g. rejecting presuppositions of inspiration, probing for multiple sources for the authorship of the Pentateuch or Isaiah rather than accepting Biblical testimony, etc.

⁹¹ Barrett, *Reformation as Renewal*, 189; Craig Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition* (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2018), chapter 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

integrate the text into the theology of the OT or NT as a whole. They may be insufficiently critical or aware of their own presuppositions and standpoints.⁹²

It is the first vulnerability to which the Dispensationalist draws attention: the premodern interpreters fail to take the text seriously in its historical context when they locate the divine meaning in anything other than the human meaning.⁹³ For example, if God intended a Christological sense in the Song of Solomon, then the Divine meaning has been separated from the human meaning and relativized according to the *reader's* perception – regardless of whether or not that reader is maintaining a pious attitude. The same is true for *postmodern* readers who seek to follow the same hermeneutical method.⁹⁴ The Dispensationalist contends that the meaning of the text ought to be located in the unity of the divine and human authors as the divine author inspires the human author in the historical and canonical contexts of the human author.⁹⁵ Jamieson

⁹² Kevin Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

⁹³ For example, methods seeking a Christological sense, spiritual sense, etc. It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider whether such a distinction is in fact present in the ancient and medieval church. A possible area for further research from a Dispensational perspective would be to consider the ancient and medieval notions of the “sense” of Scripture and relate those notions both to the implicit notions of “meaning” latent in the Biblical text, and to contemporary notions of “meaning,” including Divine and human authorial intent.

⁹⁴ Kevin Chen draws attention to this issue in the introduction of his work, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*. He observes that “if the divine intent can go beyond the human intent ... there is no systematic way of distinguishing between the human intent and the divine intent, or, equivalently, of ascertaining the divine intent that goes beyond the meaning of the words of the human author” (Chen, *Messianic Vision*, 19).

⁹⁵ In his book *The Fear of the Lord: Essays on Theological Method*, Michael Allen argues for an “underdetermined theory of interpretation” (67) by affirming that although “God does not speak to us the same way he spoke to Hosea and Joel,” nevertheless “God continues to speak and requires constant attention. Scriptural reading in each [ecclesial] context finds fresh meaning in the text, demonstrating God’s faithfulness to speak to generation after generation in its own time and place” (Allen, *The Fear of the Lord*, 66). Simply put, God speaks to the Church today using the same words He spoke to Hosea and Joel.

and Wittman demonstrate a sound hermeneutic from the perspective of Dispensationalism in this regard, as they locate the meaning of the text in the exegesis of the text according to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

More needs to be said at this point, however. Some TIS advocates seem to share with the Modernist a presupposition of the human author as reducible to the historical-critical (or historical-grammatical) context. Recognizing the Modernist loss of spirituality, the TIS advocate then wants to transcend the human author's meaning to reach the Divine Author via figurative readings.⁹⁶ Likewise, the historical-grammatical hermeneutic may indeed open itself up to criticism if it is practiced in such a way that the human author's meaning is bound up *merely* in the historical and grammatical context, *apart from canonical and prophetic contexts*. Some theologians seem to interpret the books of Scripture (especially in the Old Testament) as though the human authors were writing in

However, since the Church is in a different context than Hosea and Joel, the words take on a different meaning for the church today than they did to Hosea.

Perhaps an example would elucidate the TIS proposal: If I speak the words, "you need to finish your vegetables" to my 8-year-old daughter today, and I speak those exact same words to my daughter in 20 years, the words will mean something different to her in 20 years than they mean to her today. Today they are an imperative; in twenty years they will be a wise suggestion. Similarly, TIS advocates propose that God is speaking the same words to the church today that He spoke to Hosea; when Hosea is read by the Church, God speaks through Hosea to the church. Nevertheless, because of the church's present context, those same words take on a different (albeit related) meaning.

This theory of speech is problematic, however. Essentially, Allen treats the word "speak" univocally. God "speaks" to the prophets and the church. But Allen does not distinguish between God's speech in *inspiration* and God's speech in *illumination*. To use the Hirschean categories, "meaning" belongs to *inspiration* and the Biblical author's original intention; "significance" belongs to *illumination* and refers to the subjective application of Biblical truth to the life of the Christian. These are two different senses of the "speech" of God. Jamieson and Wittman refer to the same conception of God's speech, but they rightly distinguish between inspiration and illumination (Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 48).

⁹⁶ Figurative readings such as the quadriga, typology, etc.

hermetically sealed historical contexts, isolated from the larger prophetic, canonical context. These theologians interpret the Biblical author's arguments with very little reference to the linguistic, canonical arguments which preceded them. And this kind of historical-grammatical hermeneutic is indeed insufficient.

To put a finer point on it, if the historical-grammatical hermeneutic has no way to account for Biblical authors who intentionally and frequently use the ideas, words, and phrases of the prophets who preceded them, producing Spirit-inspired intertextuality and canonical unity, then the Dispensationalist is left with some form of a dictation theory of inspiration to account for the unity of Scripture wherein God somehow caused the human authors to use just the right words apart from any understanding and intentionality on the part of the human authors.⁹⁷ In contrast to this idea Abner Chou writes,

the prophets never wrote about theology in a vacuum; thus, intertextuality can help to fill in the full nature and/or consequences of propositional statements...the prophets and apostles are exegetes and theologians. They made the bridge between exegesis and theology by virtue of their intertextual logic. They often developed theology by tracing how texts were interconnected in Scripture. Our job is just to think their thoughts after them, and by seeing how they wove Scripture together, we gain the same bridge between exegesis and theology, *the bridge they originally intended*.⁹⁸

That is to say, the historical-grammatical hermeneutic ought to take into consideration the way a particular human author, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, picked up and developed certain theological themes, ideas, metaphors, and doctrines, and amplified

⁹⁷ Which ironically still bifurcates the Author/author intention.

⁹⁸ Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 210, emphasis added.

those ideas in his own writing. Chou writes, “The Old Testament writers were also therefore theologians. Thus, the prophets were not simplistic in their thinking and writing. Rather, being guided by the Holy Spirit, they were precise and sophisticated.”⁹⁹ If meaning is to be found in the single intention of the divinely inspired human author (as Dispensationalists affirm), and if the human authors were indeed sophisticated theologians (as Chou suggests), then there is no need to search for a higher spiritual or allegorical meaning in Scripture. The meaning of Scripture is theological from the beginning, as intended by the Divine and human authors. Further advocacy and development of this idea would go far to provide Dispensationalists with a robust theological interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰⁰

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Theological Interpretation of Scripture is not a welcome, but rather a concerning theological development for the Dispensationalist. Although TIS advocates make important arguments concerning the unity of exegesis and theology, evangelicals and Dispensationalists historically never stopped making those arguments.¹⁰¹ What was lost by Modernist, liberal theology was not lost by the Dispensationalist.

⁹⁹ Chou, *Hermeneutics*, 48.

¹⁰⁰ The development of these ideas with specific reference to the Pentateuch may be found in Kevin Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*. Essential to his argument is the unity of the Divine and human authors and the intentional development of the messianic promises by Moses throughout the Pentateuch. Similar work needs to be done in the rest of the canon, demonstrating the intentional unity of the canon from the perspective of the human authors under divine inspiration.

¹⁰¹ Trimm makes this point admirably in “Evangelicals,” 312-313.

Furthermore, for the Dispensationalist the bridge between exegesis and theology is not crossed by allegory, typology, or other figural readings. As Jamieson and Wittman demonstrate, it is crossed by establishing theology on careful exegesis, and on the basis of sound exegesis allowing theology to provide guards and guides for the reading of Scripture, all the while recognizing the intentional theological development of themes, promises, and prophecies by the inspired human author.

This is not to say that Dispensationalists have nothing to learn from the TIS advocate. Their work on historical retrieval is beneficial to the church catholic, helping Christians understand better their brothers and sisters who went before them. Dispensationalists give a sympathetic reading to those brothers and sisters, and Dispensationalists may learn to read with grace and charity the works of this great cloud of witnesses.

Nevertheless, Dispensationalism remains committed to a hermeneutical method which sees the Divine author truly speaking through the human author, uniting His meaning with the human meaning in producing the inspired text. Meaning resides in the text, and is determined by the united Divine and human authors. Access to that meaning is only attained through a careful reading of the text, using the “full range of linguistic, grammatical, historical, and literary skills”¹⁰² as explained and demonstrated by Jamieson and Wittman. Though new ideas and methods are popularized in the academic theological world, even with good intentions, Dispensationalists remain committed to

¹⁰² Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 49.

such a careful reading of the text for the explicit purpose of knowing and loving the God revealed in the text better through every encounter with Him in the text.

Appendix: Book Review

Jamieson, R.B. and Tyler R. Wittman. *Biblical Reasoning: Christological And Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. \$29.99

How do the tasks of exegesis and theology relate to one another? One of the challenges in Biblical studies over the past 200 years has been properly relating the disciplines of exegesis and theology without divorcing the two nor allowing one to swallow up the other. Jamieson and Wittman, in their recent work *Biblical Reasoning*, seek to provide a satisfactory account for the relationship of the two disciplines in a manner which is eminently practical and explicitly targeted at growing the faith of the theologian. Jamieson and Wittman themselves represent the two sides of this tension, R.B. Jamieson being a trained Biblical theologian and exegete, and Tyler Wittman being a systematic theologian.

The volume is divided into two parts: “Biblical Reasoning” and “Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis.” Through these two parts the authors establish seven principles and ten rules based on those principles which ought to govern the theological task.

The first part of *Biblical Reasoning* serves to provide something of a theological prolegomena: the task of biblical reasoning has as its *telos* the vision of the glory of God in Christ. The study of Scripture is therefore always a spiritual task because the purpose of God in giving us Scripture is to teach us and transform us into the image of Christ. The three chapters comprising this first part are filled with keen insights and devotional

thoughts. Each chapter explicates a given principle related to the nature of Scripture and the purpose of God in Scripture.

Chapter one explains the principle that Scripture itself “presupposes and fosters readers whose end is the vision of Christ’s glory, and therein eternal life.” Since this is the *telos* of Scripture, “Biblical reasoning must be ordered to this same end” (p.3) The chapter then demonstrates this principle from the text of Scripture itself, using the historic language of the “beatific vision.” The authors make it clear that this vision is not reserved for the Biblical elites, but is the goal and end for every Christian.

Chapter two builds on this first principle by further proposing that Scripture is the tool given by God to teach finite man from His infinite wisdom. Since Scripture cannot but fulfill this task perfectly, Christians have the responsibility to commit themselves to learning from Scripture about God. God teaches man through Scripture in a way that man can understand, in a way gradual enough that man can change from the teaching, and in a way that genuinely changes man through the regenerated heart.

The third chapter not only provides a third principle, but also proposes two corresponding rules which ought to guide the Christian study of Scripture. In this chapter is one of the most helpful statements in clarifying the presuppositions and method of *Biblical Reasoning*. Jamieson and Wittman write, “exegesis is undertaken best when employing a full range of linguistic, grammatical, historical, and literary skills” (p.49). They quickly add, however, that “theological exegesis also involves faith, prayer, docility, humility, a love of truth, willingness to obey, and much more” (p.50). These two affirmations taken together seem to sum up what Jamieson and Wittman mean by

“Biblical Reasoning” (or “theological interpretation of Scripture”). If these were the core commitments of all TIS advocates, there would surely be much less controversy surrounding the topic.

Part Two of *Biblical Reasoning* moves from theological prolegomena to basic considerations of Who the Triune God is and what is the nature of the Incarnation. These two topics, the Trinity and Christology, form the rest of the study. For Jamieson and Wittman, these two doctrines and their entailments are necessary first doctrines for all other theological development. In this they may be seen to be establishing the exegetical foundation for Nicene Orthodoxy.

Chapters four through six address the doctrine of the Trinity, progressing from a broad principle the uniqueness of God, and a corresponding third rule of the God-fittingness of theological reasoning (chapter four) to the more narrow considerations of the oneness of God (chapter five) and the three-ness of God (chapter 6). The principle established in chapter four of the uniqueness of God carries more and more weight as the book progresses. Chapter five brings to prominence the doctrine of the simplicity of God. Though this doctrine has been challenged within Evangelicalism as illogical or unnecessary, Jamieson and Wittman see it as foundational to the Christian conception of Who God is, and therefore the Christian’s basic interpretation of Scripture. Chapter six likewise relies on classical formulations of the relations of God, most basically the principle that *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* (the external works of the Trinity are indivisible). We therefore “count persons rather than actions” (p.117) when considering the work of God revealed in Scripture. Scripture speaks about the actions of one of the

members of the Trinity in ways that are fitting for that person, but we must not thereby pose ontological distinctions between the Persons. The works are inseparable, and each Person's work is therefore fitting to the relation of that Person to the other Persons.

In chapter seven Jamieson and Wittman move from the Trinity to the doctrine of the Son and the incarnation. Common objections to the doctrine of the incarnation are carefully handled, such as how the *Son* could become incarnate if "the external works of God are indivisible." Though at first glance this may seem to be a contradiction, Jamieson and Wittman carefully explain how one person may be acting according to two natures. Though that doctrine is paradoxical, they are careful to show that it is not contradictory. The emphasis of this chapter is the *one divine person* who became flesh.

Chapter eight continues the doctrine of the incarnation, but focuses the reader's attention on the *two natures* of Christ. This introduces the issue of partitive exegesis, or reading Scripture according to the precise referent. Sometimes texts speak of Jesus according to His human nature, and other times according to His divine. Christians must be keen to discern "which dimension of Christ's existence the author is talking about" (p.163). Key to this chapter is the doctrine established in chapter four that "God differs from creatures differently than creatures differ from one another." Put differently, there is a "noncompetitive relation between divinity and humanity" (p.163). Fascinating to consider at this point is that God made man in such a way that although God is utterly different than us, He is not different in such a way that precludes His becoming one of us. This is an incredible mystery of wisdom!

Chapter nine is the capstone, built on all the doctrines which precede it. In this chapter the nature of the relations of the Trinity is explored. The “from-ness” (p.191) of the persons is communicated in a number of nouns and verbs in Scripture, all which demonstrate the relations of origin within the Trinity. The conclusion of this chapter is the ancient truth that “divine missions reveal processions” (p.200).

Chapter ten is an exegetical study of John 5:17-30, a text which uniquely puts on display all seven principles, and the ten rules derived from them. Jamieson and Wittman demonstrate in one final, convincing *tour de force* the exegetical soundness of their “Biblical reasoning.” They note that exegetical reasoning accounts for an individual passage; dogmatic reasoning accounts for what a passage teaches about its ultimate subject matter and what the whole Bible teaches us about its ultimate subject matter (p.233). Thus “Biblical reasoning” serves as the bridge between exegesis and theology.

There are many strengths to *Biblical Reasoning* which ought to be commended. First, the book is full of insightful exegesis. In fact, each principle is built on numerous careful exegetical studies. The exegetical insights are useful because, second, the authors are careful and consistent to apply the historical-grammatical hermeneutic in their interpretation.

Further, though the book is very tightly argued and dense, it is nevertheless accessible and easy enough to understand. More than that, the devotional tone throughout the book compels the reader to understand. *Biblical Reasoning* repays frequent rereading and is an important contribution to the discipline of theological method. Though the present reader does not agree with every exegetical conclusion in

the book, the method on display is sound and devotional, and therefore deserves to be put into practice.

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