The Tradition of the Gospel Christians:
A Reconstruction of the Practice of Biblical Interpretation

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Introduction

The goal of this research is to propose a strategy for reconstructing the practice of biblical interpretation in the tradition of the Gospel Christians. David Kelsey defines the term 'practice'

> as any form of socially established human interactivity that is conceptually formed, is complex and internally coherent, is subject to standards of excellence that partly define it, and is done to some end but does not necessarily have a product. Any such practice is enacted in the context of a host society, its culture, and its history. Hence any such practice is historically contingent, deeply shaped by and relative to some society and its culture.[1]

This project is intended as a second order discourse about a first order practice enacted in the context of an Eastern evangelical tradition. The reason for reconstructing this historically conditioned practice of biblical interpretation cultivated by this interpretive community is twofold.

First, the diachronic analysis of this practice reveals a radical shift that took place in the tradition following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This shift has not been analysed or reflected upon in previous scholarly studies. The inductive Bible study method introduced by Western evangelicals and fundamentalists was imposed upon Eastern evangelicals in post-Soviet Ukraine as the one and only correct interpretational strategy, with its universalised set of standards of excellence. Previous reading strategies and standards of excellence were dismissed in a rather authoritarian mode as unscientific and

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[1] David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology,* vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 14.

simply wrong.[2] This internal rupture in the tradition's practice requires some critical reflection. It has also caused an impasse in the relationship between Eastern evangelical communities and newly-established educational institutions, which have appropriated Western evangelical rationality and standards.[3] MacIntyre suggests a way out of this impasse:

> When an epistemological crisis is resolved, it is by the construction of a new narrative which enables the agent to understand both how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs and how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them. The narrative in terms of which he or she at first understood and ordered experiences is itself made into the subject of an enlarged narrative.[4]

Second, the newly-introduced inductive method of biblical interpretation, as well as imported fundamentalist theologies, do not seem to have been productive in influencing the broader Ukrainian and Russian culture, either. The membership of evangelical churches has been in decline since 2003, and so has the enrolment of new students in evangelical theological institutions. Thus the shift in the practice that occurred nearly twenty years ago also requires critical reflection in light of the pragmatic failure to significantly influence the broader Ukrainian and Russian cultural contexts in which the tradition of the Gospel Christians operates.

It was argued elsewhere that the tradition of the Gospel Christians of St Petersburg was brought into existence by a wave of Anglo-American evangelical revivals in the second half of the nineteenth century. Since its inception, up until the present moment, the tradition has been dependent on developments in Anglo-American evangelical theology, aligning itself to the conservative mainstream.[5] Diachronic analysis of the practice of biblical interpretation will ensure that the new construction is tradition-continuous, while synchronic interaction with selected Western scholarship should compensate for the lack of critical theological self-reflection in the tradition's past. The hermeneutical horizon that will be brought about as a result of this analysis will enable interaction with selected academic discourses in the Western academy. In order to achieve this goal, I will briefly trace the development of the fragmentised practice, drawing on the discoveries of previous historical and theological research. The narrative of the historical development of the practice of biblical interpretation will serve as a filter for choosing appropri-

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[2] V. D. Tkachuk, *Metody i Printsipy tolkovaniia Sviaschennogo Pisania* (Lutsk: Tsentr Khristianskoi Zhizni Ukrainy, 2000), 1–10.

[3] Oleg Turlac, 'The Crisis in Evangelical-Baptist Theological Education', in *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 15:1 (2007) 19.

[4] Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science', in *Paradigms and Revolutions,* edited by Gary Gutting (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 69.

[5] Originally this research was intended to be the final chapter of my recent dissertation on the tradition of the Gospel Christians. The practice of bibli-

cal interpretation was systematically discussed as part of the thick description of this evangelical tradition. The tracing of the developments in the practice of biblical interpretation in this work is based on this description. See Andrey P. Puzynin, 'The Tradition of the Gospel Christians: A Study of Their Identity and Theology during the Russian, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Periods' (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, Lampeter, 2008). The dissertation has been published under the title *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians: A Study of Their Identity and Theology during the Russian, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Periods* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). In the present work I use the pagination of the book.

ate trends in Western hermeneutics and respective dialogue partners. The proposed strategy is intended to demonstrate a way for resolving, or at least relieving, the hermeneutical and theological crisis in the tradition of the Gospel Christians in the post-Soviet context.

I do not want to give the impression that the proposed reconstruction will solve all the hermeneutical problems; neither am I attempting to offer a full-blown theory of interpretation. Rather, the following reconstruction should be viewed as a road sign on the bumpy path of the tradition's interpretive practice. In line with Kung's theory of theological paradigms that leads to a post-modern dialogical programme, as well as in conformity with MacIntyre's post-Enlightenment turn to tradition-based rationality, I argue that post-Soviet Eastern evangelicals should seriously consider the possibility of going beyond the modernist programme of the inductive Bible study method, which claims scientific universality.[6]

Instead of depending uncritically on recently-imported reading methods from other Western traditions that sponsored the dissemination of their rationalities and programmes after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eastern evangelicals are invited to consider developing a tradition-continuous dialogical method of biblical interpretation that takes seriously into account the historical and socio-political contingency of the biblical authors and readers, as well as the unavoidable plurality of reading strategies. It is suggested that practice should move beyond—to use the idiom of Paul Ricoeur[7]—the first naivete of pre-critical interpretation through the objectivising and self-imposed constraints of the inductive Bible study paradigm to the second naivete. The second naivete signifies an interpretive stance, informed by the use of critical models, that is open to the multidimensional depth of meaning of the Christian scriptures from within an interpretive community that realises its own historical contingency. This postmodern paradigm takes seriously into account both the historical contingency of the Bible and that of its reading communities, as well as their interpretive approaches throughout the ages. The proposed provisional reading strategy for the historically-conditioned and culturally-shaped tradition of the Gospel Christians will need to be congruent with the self-identity of this interpretive community and eventually demonstrate sufficient explanatory power for interpreting both the scriptures and the tradition of their interpretation, as well as contemporary experiences of this particular community in the socio-political setting of the post-Soviet era.

Tracing Developments in the Practice of Biblical Interpretation

In our analysis of the Gospel Christians' practice of biblical interpretation, it was demonstrated that Lord Radstock, the founder of the tradition, practised

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[6] For my analysis of the tradition of the Gospel Christians, see the discussion and appropriation of the respective programmes of Kung and MacIntyre in Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* xxvii–xxxvi.

[7] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 318.

the pre-critical sort of biblical reading that was typical of the evangelicalism of the Victorian period.[8] Radstock, being an active participant in the Keswick Conventions and the British Evangelical Alliance, perceived the biblical canon as a unified whole and interpreted it Christocentrically, literally, typologically, and intra-textually.[9] This type of pre-modern interpretation, which did not take into account historical-grammatical factors, had been the general norm in this evangelical tradition until recently. This 'functional hermeneutic', concerned with the moral and spiritual formation of the audience, was in many respects similar to the classical hermeneutic of the Apostolic Fathers.[10] The major goal of Radstock's pneumatic expositions was to help the audience to perceive themselves as part of the scriptural story of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, interpreted through an evangelical grid, with its focus on convertive piety and assurance of salvation.[11] He prompted the attendees of his revivalist meetings to develop a personal and experiential relationship with Christ, along with a missionary and social praxis, in light of his belief in the impending eschatological closure. It was suggested that this theological standing of Radstock had *practically* resembled monophysite rather than Chalcedonian Christology, as the historical concerns of the text and its later reception by historical communities, as well as synchronic dialogue with competitive interpretive traditions, were suppressed and put aside as unnecessary and even harmful.[12]

The early V. A. Pashkov, a friend and follower of Radstock, believed that when the Bible is read literally in the spirit of mutual love, then a reading community, comprised of individuals of different backgrounds, would come to a common understanding of scripture on all issues.[13] Later in his life, however, he came to the conclusion that unity does not exclude interpretive diversity, as long as one tries to live out the Christocentric gospel narrative while practicing evangelical piety as well as engaging in social and missionary praxis. Both Radstock's and Pashkov's interpretation of scripture was done along the lines of the Brethren method of 'Bible Reading'.[14]

The method was in line with the epistemology of naive realism, according to which one retrieves the meaning of scripture by simple literal reading and a readiness to obey what is read. The affective, imaginative, and volitional components of interpretation were prevalent among the Gospel Christians from the outset of the movement. Pashkov, like his mentor Radstock, did not try to study scripture in its historical setting by means of historical analysis. It was believed that the Holy Spirit is the best guide, leading sincere Christians to a correct understand-

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[8] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* 40–52.

[9] Cf. George A. Lindbeck, 'Postcritical Canonical Interpretation: Three Modes of Retrieval'. in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs,* edited by Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 28–31.

[10] Cf. David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 45–55.

[11] Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 44–47.

[12] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* 48, 51.

[13] Ibid., 91.

[14] James Patrick Callahan, *Primitivist Piety* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1996), 134, 150–151.

ing of scripture.[15] It was demonstrated that Pashkov's hermeneutic was of a functional and circumstantial nature, as well.[16]

Later developments in the tradition demonstrated a growth of interpretive entropy that was correlated with the numerical growth of the tradition's members in the vast Russian Empire. One of the strategies for coping with the interpretive diversity was to develop an attitude of tolerance toward different interpretations and a willingness to drop one's own interpretation in order to protect the spirit of mutual love that reflects Trinitarian unity in diversity.[17] However, the threatening diversity of interpretations required interpretive homogenisation and some local criteria to resist unrestricted subjectivism and the threatening danger of interpretive chaos. The following elements were utilised for reducing the interpretive entropy: the use of the Apostles' Creed, the construction of local evangelical creeds, democratic councils and consultations over theological and practical issues, and elements of literary and historical analysis of every biblical book derived from Western evangelical sources. The introduction and use of theological creeds in the tradition of the Gospel Christians was in line with hermeneutical developments in the early church, in which the authoritative 'rule of faith' and church councils played an important hermeneutical role in navigating the theological confusions of the time.[18] The tradition had continually to rely on the intellectual resources and authoritative voices of mainstream Western evangelicalism in order, at least provisionally, to resolve its hermeneutical difficulties.[19]

The superficial theological training and the unstable socio-political situation brought about by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 prevented I. S. Prokhanov, the then-rector of the Bible institute in St Petersburg, from developing an intellectually virtuous culture of theological reflection and practice in the tradition of the Gospel Christians. However, the early Prokhanov had introduced an explicit Trinitarian framework for explaining diversity and polyphony in the Christocentric Anglo-American revivalist tradition.[20] In his unsystematic thinking, intuitions and insights from the historical-grammatical method of interpretation derived from his studies for a short period of time under Adolf von Harnack coexisted with those derived from the Alexandrian hermeneutics of multiple senses of scripture that he borrowed from unnamed sources, most likely of Russian Orthodox origin.[21]

In a similar vein, the interpretive strategy of V. Bykov, a colleague of Prokhanov in the same Bible institute, did not contradict the intuitions of Radstock,

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[15] For a description and analysis of this type of Christocentric and pneumatic hermeneutics influenced by the Keswick and Holiness movements, see recent dissertations on the life and theology of I. V. Kargel: Gregory L. Nichols, 'Ivan V. Kargel (1849–1937) and the Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality' (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales and International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), ch. 8–9; and Miriam R. Kuznetsova, 'Early Russian Evangelicals (1874–1929): Historical Background and Hermeneutical Tendencies

Based on I. V. Kargel's Written Heritage' (Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), ch. 5–6.
[16] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*, 107.
[17] Ibid., 146.
[18] Karlfried Froenlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 13–15.
[19] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*, 173–81.
[20] Ibid., 134–36.
[21] Ibid., 185.

Pashkov, and Prokhanov. Bykov borrowed his literal-figurative interpretation from a Russian translation of a textbook written by the French Catholic Professor Ful-cran Vigouroux. The focus of Bykov's hermeneutical intuition was the formation of the virtuous interpreter, able to practise both literal and figurative interpretation that was compatible with pre-critical patristic and medieval interpretation governed by the Christocentric rule of faith.[22] The spiritual condition of the interpreter (the interpreter must be 'born again') played the most important role in the process of interpretation.[23] The approach articulated and outlined by Bykov was dominant during the Soviet period. The flaws of this interpretive approach were demonstrated in the example of the complex relationship of the Gospel Christian movement with the Pentecostal tradition that grew out of this movement. The Gospel Christians developed an anti-Pentecostal hermeneutics in a rather arbitrary and authoritarian way, in order to resist Pentecostal enthusiasm over supernatural experiences that caused divisions and splits among their congregations in different regions of the Soviet Union.[24] They could not accept the Pentecostals' narrative interpretation of the baptism of the Spirit or their teaching on glossolalia as a normative Christian experience and ecclesial practice. It was also established that dominating leaders, such as Prokhanov, could persuade the community with regard to the 'unbiblical nature' of both classical Reformed theology and that of evolving Pentecostalism by the sheer use of his authority, status, rhetoric, and ability to promulgate his views through various newspapers and magazines that he edited and published. The tradition has never established a written research culture; the major genres for doing and communicating theology were preaching, the recitation of poetry, the sharing of personal testimonies, and the composing of spiritual songs.[25]

A short article written by Ivan Motorin in *Bratskii Vestnik* (The Brotherly Herald) after World War II contains an insight that scripture should be read in dialogue with masters of the Christian tradition, both ancient and modern.[26] Although Motorin's insight has never been appropriated or developed in the tradition, it provides the necessary historical dimension for reading a text of scripture against the backdrop of the history of its reception in the broader spectrum of Christianity and its diverse traditions. Motorin's view stands in accord with Leskov's major contribution to the *Russian Workman* in the 1870s. Leskov suggested reading the Bible in light of the patristic tradition, but this vision was suppressed by the primitivist theological tendencies and practices of the evolving evangelical spiritual and ecclesial restorationism.[27] The major fundamentalist researcher of the tradition's theology after World War II, Alexander de Chalandeau, was seriously troubled by the diversity of interpretations in the newly established AUCECB (All-Union Council of Evangelical [Gospel] Christians-Baptists) in the 1970s.[28] The diversity of interpretations was encouraged by the heterogeneous na-

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[22] Ibid., 185–86.
[23] Ibid., 187.
[24] Ibid., 188–90.
[25] Ibid., 176, 189.

[26] Ibid., 218.
[27] Ibid., 60.
[28] Ibid., 215–17.

ture of the AUCECB, which soon included Pentecostals as well. The incorporation of the Pentecostals into the Union demonstrated that the theological boundaries of the norms of biblical interpretation were shifting and being negotiated, due to changes in the political climate in the society.[29]

Up until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the composite tradition of the Gospel Christians-Baptists was protected by the Iron Curtain from interaction with modernistic theological constructs of the West.[30] This forced isolation from the rest of the world inhibited theological processes for several decades in this offshoot of the Anglo-American revivalist tradition in the East. Post-Soviet developments introduced the method of inductive Bible study developed and universalised in the North American evangelical context of the twentieth century. This method was introduced by the tradition's authorities educated under the guidance of Western evangelical missionaries as *the* 'healthy' and 'scientific' method of reading Scripture.[31] The latter have helped to establish and sponsor educational institutions and accrediting agencies in Russia and Ukraine ever since. The Western practice of theological accreditation was introduced to validate newly-established theological practices, and in so doing it began to suppress past theological practices by labelling them as unscientific and misleading.[32] The suppression of the past was in line with the latent modernist component of the tradition introduced by Prokhanov, who sincerely believed in progress, objectivity, and science.[33] Being affected by the Western rationality of modernity, post-Soviet Gospel Christians disregard the notion of tradition as such and often uncritically accept the most recent developments in Western, mainly North American, conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism.[34]

Reconstructing the Practice

Having traced the development of the fragmentised practice of biblical interpretation in the evangelical tradition, I suggest that its reconstruction begin. I will develop my argument along two lines. First, I will argue that the radical shift in the practice of biblical interpretation from pre-critical functional hermeneutics, which assumes diversity of textual meanings and biblical intratextuality, to 'scientific' algorithmic interpretation, which is focused on either the authorial intent of the empirical historical writer or a single meaning of the text, is a historically, theologically, and pragmatically unjustified rupture in the tradition's communal

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[29] Ibid., 195–200.
[30] Cf. Alexander Popov, 'The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as a hermeneutical community: examining the identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) through the way the Bible was used in its publications' (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales and International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), ch. 4.
[31] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* 234.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Cf. A. K. M. Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical*

Criticism? (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 2–5.
[34] In this essay I demonstrate a deficiency of the inductive Bible study method and a possibility of its insensitive usage in another cultural setting. A more sophisticated inductive approach is developed in David Bauer and Robert Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). I would like to express my gratitude to professors William W. Klein and Kevin J. Vanhoozer for valuable suggestions as to the possibility of a more delicate usage of inductive Bible study in various cultural contexts.

rationality. Second, I will argue that a critical integral-differential hermeneutics, which has recently begun to be developed in Western theological discourse, is a tradition-continuous hermeneutical strategy for Eastern Gospel Christians to adapt in order to relieve or even provisionally resolve the current hermeneutical crisis.[35] It will be argued that the proposed reconstruction of the practice of Biblical interpretation should be in line with the newly-constructed narrative of the Gospel Christians as a free evangelical eschatological community in the Eastern European Orthodox context, which participates in the divine dialogical activity of recreating fallen humanity, fallen social power structures, and fallen systems through Christ by the power of the Spirit.[36] In other words, I am arguing that the paradigm shift that happened in the tradition's practice of biblical interpretation after the collapse of the Soviet Union needs to be critically evaluated and provisionally overcome. A new paradigm for biblical interpretation needs to be constructed, a paradigm that corresponds to the newly-constructed theological framework and self-identity of the Gospel Christians discussed in my previous work.

A Critique of the Modernist Paradigm of Biblical Interpretation

It has been established that the major shift in the practice of biblical interpretation in the tradition of the Gospel Christians happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[37] Because the Gospel Christians were isolated from the rest of the world by the Iron Curtain, their theological practices were inhibited from interacting with the broader spectrum of Western theological currents. The modernist political and cultural environment of the USSR was ideologically hostile to all forms of religious thinking, which was considered to be merely an ideological weapon of the capitalistic system.[38]

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its atheistic ideology radically changed the socio-political and cultural contexts. New experiences opened up new horizons, and new connections with Western institutions introduced new theological approaches, as well as new interpretive methods. The well-sponsored Western missionary enterprise rapidly established hundreds of theological schools throughout the former USSR. These schools, as one might have expected, reflected the mindset of the respective Western institutions active in the post-Soviet context.[39] It did not take very long, however, for a crisis to loom large. There are two major aspects of this crisis: on the one hand, theological education and its respective diplomas are not recognised by the state; on the other hand, Eastern evangelical com-

[35] In many respects my proposal resonates with the post-modern strategy for Pentecostal interpretation developed by Kenneth Archer, who moves away from the Enlightenment foundationalist epistemology of discovery to the post-modern epistemology of construction-discovery/suspicion-retrieval that allows for the linguistic input of a reading community in the process of discovering and producing meaning. The story of Pentecostalism in Ukraine is a sub-story of the Gospel Christians. See Kenneth J. Archer, *A*

Pentecostal Hermeneutics for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004).
[36] See Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*, ch. 7.
[37] Ibid., 233–39.
[38] Cf. P. L. Iarotskii, *Klerikal'nyi Antisovetizm: Sistema Ideologicheskikh Diversii* (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury Ukrainy, 1984).
[39] Cf. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

munities have been disturbed by the influx of Western theological traditions which have not been sensitive either to the Eastern evangelical past or to the wider cultural context.[40] As the scaffolding of Western financial support began to be withdrawn from the post-Soviet context following the events of 9/11 in 2001, the system of theological education built in accordance with Western evangelical blueprints appears to have been in danger of collapse ever since. The scaffolding appears to have been (mis)interpreted by Eastern evangelical theological builders as part of the construction itself.

At this point I would like to reiterate and further develop my critique of the paradigmatic shift in the practice of biblical interpretation that occurred in the Eastern evangelical tradition after the introduction/imposition of Western academic standards, theologies and practices. In the previous study I discussed the book on biblical interpretation written by V. Tkachuk, a former vice president of the Ukrainian Union of Gospel Christians-Baptists, who received his unaccredited doctor of ministry (D.Min.) degree from Kiev Theological Seminary.[41]

Tkachuk decided not to discuss the previous practices of biblical interpretation in the tradition and basically repeated the material from Henry Virkler's book published in Russian several years earlier.[42] In a rather authoritarian way Tkachuk introduced 'healthy biblical interpretation' by providing a set of algorithmic rules derived from the Western source.[43] It was suggested that this turn towards 'scientific' hermeneutics was in line with the tradition's trajectory, which has been constantly transformed and shaped by its often-authoritarian leaders to accommodate for the changing socio-political cultural context and developments in conservative Anglo-American theology.

The interpretive disarray that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union required some unification and resistance to the centrifugal forces; the inductive Bible study method is used as a suitable instrument for providing the desired stability. However, this turn to 'objective' hermeneutics that locates meaning in the author's intention has several deficiencies. First, it is not tradition-continuous and creates a significant disruption in the practice of biblical interpretation. It creates a chasm between traditional communities of faith and newly-created educational institutions. The 'principles' for 'healthy hermeneutics' are imposed in a rather authoritarian way. For example, Tkachuk establishes a rule according to which the narrative material of scripture should be interpreted in light of its didactic material.[44] However, he fails to provide any reasons or criteria for this rule. Richard Bauckham correctly points out that the Bible 'is primarily a story. . . . Story is the overarching category in which [other genres] are contextualised'.[45] Second, it is

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[40] Cf. Oleg P. Turlac, 'The Crisis in Evangelical Christian-Baptist Theological Education in the Former Soviet Union', in *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 15:1 (2007) 19.

[41] V. Tkachuk, *Metody i Printsipy Tolkovania Sviashchennogo Pisania* (Lutsk, Ukraine: Centr Khristianskoi Zhizni Ukrainy, 2000).

[42] Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981).

[43] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* 235–36.

[44] Tkachuck, *Metody i Printsipy,* 88.

[45] Richard Bauckham, *Scripture and Authority Today* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1999), 10.

not dialogical, because it is assumed that anyone who does not follow these 'obvious' and 'common-sense' rules is not practicing 'healthy interpretation'. Third, this approach does not solve the problem of interpretive pluralism. Despite its claims to scientific objectivity, the approach has not been able to resolve theological differences among Eastern evangelicals, who are still divided over a number of issues such as Calvinism vs. Arminianism and the cessation or non-cessation of supernatural gifts, to name just a couple. Fourth, the approach shifts the accent from communal participation in Bible reading and social praxis to an algorithmic, cognitive methodology. Fifth, it is not clear why the interpretive community should even read scripture, which contains raw and uninterpreted material, instead of just reading scholarly commentaries, produced by experts who practiced the same methodology, but with greater rigour. And finally, this approach can be used as a powerful tool for the ideological support of hierarchical structures ('kyriarchy') for absolutising their views on certain theological or practical issues. As a result of the uncritical copying and pasting of this sort of rationality, there are dozens of schools, hundreds of lecturers, and thousands of graduates with unrecognised diplomas and certificates, but no professional societies or respective scholarly journals that sustain a lively dialogue about relevant issues. The evangelical community is splintered into many fractions, and no professional dialogue is going on either within evangelicalism or with non-evangelical constituencies.

At about the same time post-Soviet evangelicals were accepting and learning to use inductive Bible study methodology that is oriented towards a singular meaning of a text, the Western academy began to sense a deep problem with any approach that promises to deliver one correct meaning of a text, or even to clarify the meaning of the term 'meaning' without making reference to extratextual reading communities, with their interpretive goals, strategies, values, and norms.[46] Thus while a version of historical-critical inductive methodology was squeezing out precritical interpretive practices in the East, this very methodology was being rigorously questioned and criticised in the West, as a growing number of Western scholars were determined to retrieve classical approaches to biblical interpretation.[47]

Differential Hermeneutics

At this juncture our interlocutor is A. K. M. Adam.[48] Adam provides a thorough critique of technical critical scholarship oriented towards the discovery of a single meaning in a biblical text. He argues that 'technical biblical interpretation', as he dubs it, has many inherent limitations and has produced many expressions of frustration among students and clergy. Without denying the importance of the historical-critical approach adopted by conservative proponents of the inductive Bible study method, Adam questions its monopoly for interpretive reflection. He criticises this method on several counts. First, it engenders an insufficiently self-

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[46] Cf. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
[47] Cf. George A. Lindbeck, 'Postcritical Canonical

Interpretation: Three Modes of Retrieval'.
[48] A. K. M. Adam, *Faithful Interpretation: Reading the Bible in a Postmodern Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

critical attitude towards the basic premises and criteria of the discipline, which are taken as self-evident or obvious by practitioners of the method. Second, it utilises metaphors that attribute literal ascriptions of agency to inert texts: 'the text requires or permits this'. Adam correctly points out that such literal ascriptions 'disfigure our understanding of whence meaning comes and of who stands accountable for interpretive claims'. Third, its proponents tend to treat all interpretive deliberation as a more or less close approximation of verbal communication. Fourth, as a result of taking verbal communication as a paradigm of communication in general, it is assumed that there is only one interpretation that rightly ascertains the final (subsistent) meaning that the text expresses. And fifth, it is based on the assumption that the only alternative to conventional hermeneutical assumptions is interpretive chaos.[49] According to Adam, meaning does not subsist in texts; rather, meaning is arrived at by people in an attempt to reach shared understanding.[50] Thus the pendulum is swung in the opposite direction: from the discovery of the one and only correct meaning that subsists in a text to the interpreting human subjects and communities.

According to Adam, one needs to take into account not only verbal expressions (*phenotext*), but also the non-verbal media of these expressions (*genotext*) and their respective contexts which influence one's interpretive choices. 'We can reverse the apparent sense of a sentence by sneering as we recite it or render a vivid narrative painfully tedious by reading it without variation in tone'.[51] Adam suggests that interpreters should go beyond the investigation of only the *phenotextual* aspects of communication and take into consideration the *genotextual* aspects, as well. And even though one may express a legitimate concern about the danger of interpretive chaos, Adam points out that pre-critical interpretation was pluralist and that 'critical scholarship did not usher in the era of stable, scientifically certain interpretation'.[52] In order to limit the account of idiosyncrasy, Adam suggests that we 'elicit reasons for particular interpretations and measure them against criteria we can identify and articulate'.[53] Thus a case is made for 'differential hermeneutics', oriented towards interpretive plurality in ongoing communication between people. 'Integral hermeneutics', oriented towards the discovery of the one and only correct interpretation, which is usually associated with authorial intent is criticised for its tendency to cause divisions.

Adam convincingly demonstrates the historical contingency of the criteria of the historical-critical approach. He does not deny its value but questions the definitive authority of historical criticism for theological purposes. Rather, he argues for another set of contingent criteria that would better serve the development of theological discourse and its respective practices. He provides four such criteria for the discipline of biblical theology: 1) it should be theologically oriented – theological concerns should be an explicit part of research interest; 2) it should be 'biblical', meaning that the text of the Bible should function as the source or

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[49] Ibid., 2.
[50] Ibid., 5.
[51] Ibid., 8.

[52] Ibid., 9.
[53] Ibid., 10.

basis; 3) it should be aesthetically appropriate; and 4) it should be ethically accomplishable. These criteria are applied within social groups which make judgments concerning these criteria in light of their conception of good.[54] The major deficiency of Adam's proposal is threefold. On the one hand, Adam shifts attention away from readers' ethical obligation to authors and toward their ethical obligation to other readers.[55] Vanhoozer provides a thorough critique of this move:

> The core of Adam's argument is his apology of a prochoice hermeneutics and the concomitant proliferation of interpretation. What keeps proliferating hermeneutics from becoming profligate? The problem is not sheer plurality of interpretations—plurality is a sign of abundance—but the possibility of interpretations that misrepresent Jesus and, we might add, the possibility of interpretations that misrepresent God and the gospel.[56]

Vanhoozer asks reasonable questions concerning the local criteria of different interpretive communities, even those which interpret the narrative identity of Jesus differently from traditional Christianity (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and various liberal reconstructions, to name a few).

Secondly, Adam's proposal is too general. Different interpretive communities may have different interpretive interests. Should the historical origins of an interpretive community be open for public investigation in order to validate their research interests and interpretive conclusions? Should the community be open to self-critique and the critique of outsiders? If the interpretive activity is publicly funded, should the community of professional interpreters justify how their interpretations serve the good of the wider community of taxpayers? These sorts of specific questions do not seem to receive proper treatment in Adam's works. One might say that Adam's programme of differential hermeneutics appears to be somewhat underdeveloped as it stands.

Thirdly, Adam makes the validity of interpretations depend exclusively on social structures and the interpretive conventions of respective readers.

> Interpretation is a necessarily subjective, value-laden activity. The text, while possibly existing as an objective set of data, cannot function in interpretation to authorise or rule out given readings apart from the set of interests and presuppositions that interpreters bring to their endeavours. The work of interpretation is not so much methodological as conventional.[57]

Even though the social accountability of interpreters is important, because they have to be socially responsible, Adam seems to universalise the pluralistic Western democratic structures in which he operates. Secular power structures and their ideologies are prone to reconfiguring biblical texts and placing them into frameworks different from those of Christian communities. Adam correctly acknowledg-

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Four Theological Faces of Biblical Interpretation', in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, edited by A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 139.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Adam, *Faithful Interpretation*, 130.

es that integral approaches may be abused by oppressive political forces, but he does not raise the question of how to live with differential hermeneutics in a totalitarian state or within the context of social structures that do not tolerate interpretive diversity.[58]

The collapse of the Soviet Union revealed that a social crisis may and does cause some people to change their former convictions in order to continue receiving benefits from institutions that needed to begin operating in a new socio-political environment. In my earlier work I pointed out that some Marxist ideologists and institutions in the former Soviet Union who waged war on religion during Soviet times have now abandoned their former interpretations and have adjusted their interpretive frameworks to the new socio-political climate in post-Soviet Ukraine. The very same institutions inherited a monopoly on licensed education and the benefits thereof and are now majoring in religious studies and theology, establishing their own local standards and criteria in these disciplines.[59] In light of this, one might ask a legitimate question about the truthfulness and rightness of interpretations in totalitarian, authoritarian, or hierarchical states, where education and publishing houses are controlled by authoritarian power structures.

Integral Hermeneutics

The ardent evangelical critic of differential hermeneutics, Kevin Vanhoozer, is a proponent of a modified type of authorial discourse interpretation.[60] According to Vanhoozer, the meaning of a text subsists in the authorial communicative intent embodied it what is actually written. He argues for the necessity of studying the linguistic conventions that were used by the historical writer, the historical context in which the text was produced, as well as the history of its interpretation. 'The text is a child of authorial discourse yet, precisely as begotten by authors, it can grow.'[61] In his understanding, the true interpretation of Scripture is approximated by a diversity of particular methods, contexts of reading, and interpretive communities.[62]

> If I have a theory concerning the one and the many in biblical interpretation, it amounts to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls creative understanding. To understand creatively is progressively to discover the full, intrinsic meaning potential of authorial discourse through a process of reading texts in contexts other than the original.[63]

However, the original authorial communicative intent should be taken as normative. Biblical interpretation is complicated by dual authorship of the Scriptural canon. For Vanhoozer Scripture is first and foremost divine discourse. 'The human authors are divinely commissioned, prophets and apostles who serve as "porte-

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[58] Ibid., 94.

[59] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* 221–232.

[60] See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1998); *First Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002); *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John

Knox Press, 2005); *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[61] Vanhoozer, *Four Theological Faces,* 141.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 142.

paroles." This dual discourse view complicates the question of intention, to be sure. I suggest that the distinctly divine communicative intention best comes to light at the larger levels of discourse: genre and canon'.[64]

The problem with Vanhoozer's proposal is at least threefold as well. First, the biblical writers and their social contexts are gone. Sometimes we do not know who the author or the audience were or when or where and under what circumstances this or that biblical text came into being or to its final form. All we have is the final form of a text that has been preserved in different manuscripts, canonised, and interpreted by the interpretive community of the church throughout its history. The absence of autographs and presence of textual differences that suggest editorial activity before the text came to its final form contribute to the problem of pinpointing the original authorial intent. Vanhoozer's approach is too theoretical and general. He does not pay enough attention to the exegesis of particular texts to demonstrate how the drama unfolds in a specific historical tradition located in a specific historical context.

Second, Vanhoozer's approach is rooted in the epistemology of critical realism, which makes a sharp dichotomy between discovery and construction. He states that interpreters only creatively discover what is there in the text, but they do not create the meaning.[65] The reader can creatively improvise as an actor on the stage of history where the divine drama is unfolded. The Bible is metaphorically interpreted as a script for this unfolding drama; God is taken as the author, director, and main actor. According to Vanhoozer, different interpreting communities may discover different facets of the complex authorial intention.[66] However, it is not clear, either from the theoretical or practical point of view, why these different facets of meaning may not also be creatively constructed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (or without it), and not only creatively discovered by different interpreters located in different contexts and times. Vanhoozer states that 'reading Scripture with, for example, Lutherans, Methodists, and Episcopalians may bring to light certain aspects of the biblical text that one might not have seen by one's Presbyterian self'.[67] Unfortunately, he does not discuss why those 'certain aspects of the biblical text' may not have been creatively developed by creative interpreters who read the text with other interpretive backgrounds and interests. Inert texts (*phenotextual aspect*) cannot actualise their meaning potential in new contexts without the breath of life (*genotextual aspect*) that comes from creative and responsible readers who not only abide in those new contexts but also transform them. As new social contexts and traditions are created by the activity of creative individuals and communities, so is the meaning of a text when it is creatively read anew in these dynamically changing contexts. It is not clear why Vanhoozer (mis)interprets the creative potential of Mikhail Bakhtin exclusively in terms of creative discovery. Vanhoozer states: 'It is important . . . to root meaning potential in the text'.[68]

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[64] Kevin J. Vanhoozer (personal communication, March 02, 2012).

[65] See Stephen W. Need, *Human Language and Knowledge in the Light of Chalcedon* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 185 ff.

[66] Vanhoozer, *Four Theological Faces,* 142.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?,* 390.

It is not clear, however, why all the meaning potential should be rooted exclusively in the text and why the active agent of 'rooting' lacks this potential.[69] It could be argued that one must take it as a matter of fact that the meaning is both discovered and constructed in the actual practice of reading by different readers in different contexts with different interests.[70] The orientation towards the origins of the text does not seem to be promising in this modified version of the pursuit of authorial intent in Vanhoozer's proposal, as it is not clear what to do with conflicting interpretive diversity among scholars interested in the authorial discourse, not to mention those who read biblical texts with other interpretive interests, goals, and strategies. In the course of writing up my long-term research on the Gospel Christians, I found that by the time I finished the project I had a tendency to read some parts of my own text differently than when I originally produced them. Interpretation is an open-ended activity even for authors' own texts.

Third, the approach of Vanhoozer can function only in developed countries, which provide access to scholarly libraries and research facilities. His approach seems to assume, however, that Christian communities cannot interpret scripture correctly and wisely if they do not have trained scholars with the requisite skills and knowledge for the retrieval of original meanings. However, it was demonstrated that the tradition of the Gospel Christians was developed even behind the Iron Curtain, on the assumption that God is the true author of the Russian Synodal translation of the Bible completed in 1876. Despite their lack of professional training, their readings and literal/figurative interpretations had the power to nourish and transform lives in a totalitarian and hostile milieu. Vanhoozer's emphasis on authorial intent could be as easily integrated into the mentality of cultural colonisation as the fundamentalist algorithmic interpretation discussed above.

Differential-Integral Hermeneutics

In his recent book Pol Vandevelde argues for a middle course between Adam's interpretive pluralism and Vanhoozer's sophisticated version of monism.[71] He notices that in the actual practice of interpretation, there are no clear-cut distinctions between the monist and pluralist positions:

> Usually interpreters do not claim that a particular text means this and that without qualification, but are careful to specify the type of meaning they are interested in, the perspective they take, and the methods they use.[72]

However, having established their interpretive qualifications, they usually argue that their interpretation is the best one they can think of and provide reasons

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[69] Cf. Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 95–97.

[70] Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Hutchinson Press, 1981). For an introduction and critique of 'reader-response' approaches see Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*

(San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), ch. 13.

[71] Vanhoozer would probably not call his approach a 'sophisticated monism'. I use the term in order to contrast Vanhoozer's position to Adam's self-conscious interpretive pluralism.

[72] Pol Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter: Text, Meaning, and Negotiation* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 3.

for this argument. According to Vandevelde, any text as an object of interpretation is identified by its author. The fact that the text was produced by someone else implies the presence of a certain intention.[73] Vandevelde suggests that monism and pluralism constitute not a dichotomy but rather two theoretical positions on two different aspects of interpretation, which he defines as *event* and *act* respectively:

> By event I mean the fact that we as speakers and interpreters participate in a culture and a language that carry with them concepts, values, and habits of which we might not be aware, so that our interpretation is something taking place in a tradition. By act, I mean an act of consciousness: someone interpreting a text makes a statement and through his or her act is committed regarding the truth of what is said, his or her truthfulness, and the rightness or appropriateness of what is said so that, if prompted, the interpreter must be ready to defend the interpretation made regarding these three claims.[74]

Vandevelde suggests that three levels of interpretation are available for interpreters: the author's intention, the literal meaning, and the representational content. Interpreters may focus on one or all three interrelated levels and are expected to justify their interpretive decisions in the process of interpretation.

First, Vandevelde focuses on the practice of translation. Upon his analysis of twenty-five English, thirteen French, and twelve German translations of a short passage from *The Odyssey* by Homer, he convincingly demonstrates that both the verbal meaning and the author are categories of interpretation. 'Because they are produced by particular communities of investigators, they can change'.[75] In light of this he suggests that interpreters are accountable to their respective communities: they have to validate their interpretation. Vandevelde acknowledges the historical contingency of interpretive standards of different communities. The broader the community, the more rigorous are the criteria for validation. 'When translating Homer in the twenty-first century, translations of the past cannot be ignored: the translator has to claim not only that the translation is better than the one made by contemporaries, but also that it is better than those of the past'.[76] Thus translators should pursue the original intention of the historical author as well as the meaningfulness of that intention for their community. It is expected that they will demonstrate why their interpretation is better than its past and present alternatives.

Discussing the level of textual or literal meaning, Vandevelde convincingly demonstrates that it depends on the interpreter's background of interpretation. The same sentence could have different meanings in different contexts or could be interpreted differently by diverse communities with different background assumptions. Having analysed different aspects of the hermeneutics of John Searle and Gregory the Great, Vandevelde suggests that interpreters should justify their background assumptions for their literary reading. For example, the literal Jewish read-

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[73] Cf. Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), ch. 3.

[74] Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter,* 4.
[75] Ibid., 105.
[76] Ibid., 108.

ings of the Old Testament are different from those of the New Testament writers who interpreted them in light of the Christ event.[77] Because the interpreter may choose to focus on different levels of meaning besides the author's intention—the spirit of the epoch, the social milieu, etc.-—the meaning of the text may objectively grow with its diverse readership. However, 'In case of conflicts among Christian interpretations, the decision favors the one that contributes to the increase of charity and thus to the edification of the Christian community'.[78] In the case of the Gospel Christians, whose narrative identity was reconstructed as the Protestant evangelical community which participates in the eschatological drama of transforming the fallen creation by living out Christ's victory over the fallen powers, the interpreter will have to demonstrate how his or her interpretation helps the community to be faithful to its self-identity and core values, as well as its background assumptions.[79] The background assumptions, self-identifying narratives, and core values should be open for critical reflection and reasonable validation in light of scripture, tradition, and the experience of the community.

The third-level key concept of interpretation discussed by Vandevelde is the representational content of the text that is its subject matter.[80] The discussion of representational content is focused on 'narratives that readers extract from the text and apply to their situation, leading the text to configure their reality' and on 'a set of intentional states that readers construe out of the text, colonizing the text for making sense of the world around them.'[81] Vandevelde discusses the representational content of fiction and successfully demonstrates that interpretation for representational content is an ongoing process of communal negotiation of meaning that has the potential to shape the public sphere. A good interpretation for representational content will involve all three levels of interpretation: an attempt to reconstruct the authorial intent, the meaning of words and sentences, and what the story tells its readers.

The mode of interpretation for the representational content of a biblical text is exemplified in the recent work of Angus Paddison.[82] Unlike Vanhoozer, whose theology seems to be oriented towards the origins of the text and the recovery of the author's intentions, Paddison's approach is oriented eschatologically. Following Karl Barth, he claims that the subject matter of scripture cannot and must not be limited by the historical context of the original witness. Instead of moving back to the historical origins of the text, Paddison moves on from the text '*forward* into its history of reading in the church, and *forward* into a sympathetic reading alongside its subject matter'.[83] This move is based on the assumption that God's revelation in Christ cannot be limited by the historical time and context in which the event took place. 'In Christ, God has entered into time and endorsed our time as being capable of creatively reading and expanding the text. The inexhaustible rich-

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[77] Cf. Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 1–29.

[78] Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter,* 142.

[79] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians,* 275–279.

[80] Vandevelde, *The Task of the Interpreter,* ch. 5 and 6.

[81] Ibid., 148.

[82] Angus Paddison, *Theological Hermeneutics and 1 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[83] Ibid., 64.

ness of Scripture's language is now to be read in the context of the catholicity of the whole time.'[84] Subject matter is the ultimate authority and the goal of interpretation. In this eschatological perspective the semiosis is inexhaustible, as the origins of the subject matter are located outside of history and not in the historical past.[85]

In his treatment of 1 Thessalonians, Paddison effectively demonstrates his reading strategy at work. Paul is perceived as a witness to an eternal truth, and his message cannot be limited by his historical background. Starting with historical-critical reconstructions, he investigates the subject matter of Pauline theology in this epistle in the exegetical works of Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin. In his constructive part he dialogues with a number of theologians of different Christian traditions and times, revealing the inexhaustible fullness of the subject matter of 1 Thessalonians, as well as the provisionality and open-endedness of any interpretation. This dimension of reading biblical texts for their subject matter in light of the history of their reception by different masters of the Christian tradition was envisioned by I. Motorin but never developed among the Gospel Christians.

Realising their own historical contingency as well as the historical contingency of biblical texts, I suggest that Gospel Christians continue using the typological (analogical) mode of interpretation for rendering the eternal subject matter into their socio-political and cultural contexts.[86] Because the Eastern evangelical tradition is located in a specific socio-political context, it needs to understand that context well.[87] In order to be relevant and to be able to challenge and transform the world, the Gospel Christians will need to properly read and interpret their world. Without this critical realisation and description, the believing community of Gospel Christians may repeat the mistakes of the past, when socio-political forces caused a radical change in the self-identity of this tradition.[88] Uncritical accommodation to the changing socio-political context has led the tradition into an identity crisis. A sample of typological reading of the world was accomplished in my previous work. It was demonstrated that the radical revisions of the self-identifying narrative of the community following the Bolshevik revolution (Eastern identity), following World War II (Western identity), and following the collapse of the Soviet Union (quasi-Orthodox identity) needs to be re-read through the lens of scripture against the background of the Cross.[89]

Validation of Meaning

Interpreters may focus on different levels of biblical interpretation. Their interpretations, however, should be open for public scrutiny and validation by insiders

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[84] Ibid., 59.

[85] Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 20–36.

[86] See Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, KY, and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 3–10, and George A. Lindbeck, 'Postcritical Canonical Interpretation: Three Modes of Retrieval', 37–40.

[87] Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 44–49.

[88] Puzynin, *The Tradition of the Gospel Christians*, 151–168, 195–212.

[89] Ibid., 266–277.

of the community of Gospel Christians as well as outsiders.[90] The insiders of the community should discern whether the interpretation is theologically as well as practically appropriate, and whether or not it reflects the community's narrative identity and values. Gospel Christians view Christianity as a way of life. Thus the praxis of faith and worship is the primary context in which interpretation takes place. In the process of validation, the community must also take into consideration the wider church body and the history of doctrinal development.[91] The method of interpretation as well as the interpretation itself should also be intelligible and logically coherent, in order that it can be examined and critiqued by outsiders from other traditions and/or cultural contexts.[92]

The process of validation is dialogical, open-ended, and provisional. The community will need to adjust its interpretations of scripture and of the external world in light of their contingent experiences, as well as of internal and cultural crises that require ongoing hermeneutical activity. Thus taking seriously into account the author's intent, the literal meaning, and the subject matter of a text in the history of its interpretation, Gospel Christians should embody and live out the life of an eschatological community whose interpretations and transformation of reality will have to undergo the final validation process at the eschatological closure.[93]

Conclusion

In our second-order analysis of the practice of biblical interpretation, it was demonstrated that the practice was historically conditioned, as was the entire tradition of the Gospel Christians in which this practice was developed. From its beginnings in 1874 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the evangelical tradition of the Gospel Christians used the pre-critical mode of interpretation typical of the evangelicalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their reading of the Bible was characterised by Christocentrism, intratextuality, literal and figurative interpretation, interpretive pluralism, and the governing role of the Apostles' Creed. The major shift in the practice of biblical interpretation occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the inductive method of biblical interpretation brought in by Western evangelical missionaries suppressed previous reading strategies and approaches, rendering them as unscientific. 'Differential hermeneutics' was dismissed by 'integral hermeneutics', to use the terminology of A. K. M. Adam.

The proposed reconstruction, based on the differential-integral (event-act) hermeneutical theory of Pol Vandevelde, suggests an incorporation of all the previous interpretive approaches, including the inductive Bible study method, whose major concern is the discovery of the author's intent. Interpreters who belong to the historically contingent tradition of the Gospel Christians may choose to focus on one of the three levels of interpretations or on all of them: authorial intent,

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[90] Cf. David Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 84–121.
[91] Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-first Century*, 187–189.

[92] Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion*, ch. 5.
[93] Sue Patterson, *Realist Christian Theology in a Postmodern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 27.

literal meaning, and/or representational content in the history of a text's interpretation. They will need to justify their interpretive decisions on each of the levels and demonstrate how their interpretation serves the good of the community in light of its historical narrative identity, its core values, and its praxis of life and worship. The major mechanism for transforming reality is typological interpretation that allows the community to 'absorb the world' through the lens of Scripture—that is, to frame, reinterpret, and transform aspects of the unredeemed order within and without this historically conditioned interpretive community. Different levels of interpretation and different methodologies may be chosen in light of different factors and contexts of interpretation. Interpretation on the literal level may be more suitable for lay ministry, while the author's discourse analysis and the study of representational content would better fit the nascent academic culture in the tradition. However, interpreters should be expected, if necessary, to publicly validate their interpretive choices and praxis of life.

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