

Mimetic Christian Hermeneutics: A Response to Multiple or Expanded Sense(s) in Scripture

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INTRODUCTION

Imitation is a prominent feature of the New Testament (NT) authors' characterization of the Christian life. Believers are to imitate their leaders as they imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:1). I intend to apply this exhortation to hermeneutics. A "mimetic" Christian hermeneutic, then, is one that imitates the interpretive practices of the biblical authors themselves. *How* should Christians read the Bible? We should read it like the biblical authors did. The crux of the matter is the role of authorial intent in interpretation, which must be grounded in a conception of dual authorship that is both biblically demonstrable and logically defensible. The continuing debate regarding whether contemporary Bible readers *even can* imitate the interpretive practices of the biblical authors furnishes a question related to this ongoing hermeneutical conversation. Our goal is to outfit the people of God with a rich, sound, accessible hermeneutic that illuminates the meaning of

the Word of God to us and enables us to apply it in our lives with wisdom, precision, and discernment.

My thesis is twofold. First, the intent of the inspired human author of a text of Scripture is the sole object of interpretation. Second, the biblical authors themselves read the Scriptures in accordance with authorial intent. These two assertions coalesce into a simple exhortation—in our own interpretation of the Scriptures we must imitate the interpretive practices of the biblical authors. Our Christian hermeneutic must be “mimetic.”

My thesis will be pursued in three parts. First, I will argue for inspired human authorial intent as the sole object of biblical interpretation and propose a comprehensive hermeneutical theory for reading biblical texts in canonical context. Second, I will respond to specific features of Kevin Vanhoozer’s recent publication *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* and Patrick Schreiner’s employment of the fourfold sense in *The Transfiguration of Christ*. Finally, in an attempt to both defend and demonstrate my thesis and respond to Richard Blaylock’s argument for “privileged hermeneutical space” in a recent *JETS* article, I will show how the “seventy sevens” prophecy delivered to Daniel by the angel Gabriel as recorded in Daniel 9 does not undermine my exhortation to imitate the interpretive practices of the biblical authors but coheres with and enhances it.

AUTHORIAL INTENT IS THE OBJECT OF INTERPRETATION

The testimony of Scripture about itself according to Stephen Wellum in his recently published systematic theology is that “Scripture is *God’s Word written*, the unfolding of his eternal plan, the product of God’s mighty action through the word and by the Spirit, whereby *human authors freely wrote* exactly what God intended them to write without error.”¹ Here Wellum is summarizing the implications of Paul’s assertion that every Scripture is “*God-breathed*” or “*inspired*” (2 Tim 3:16) and Peter’s explanation that the biblical authors “*spoke from God*” (2 Pet 1:21) from which many of our confessional statements derive the conviction that “Scripture has for its author God.”² In short, as B. B. Warfield wrote many years ago, “What Scripture says, God says.”³ The Bible contains the “word-act revelation” of God; thus, he is its originator and, in this sense, its author.⁴

The Lord chose, however, to reveal his Word *through* the human authors of Scripture *by means of inspiration*, which is evident in Peter's explanation: "Not by the will of man was a prophecy ever carried along, but being carried along by the Holy Spirit, *men spoke* from God" (2 Pet 1:21).⁵ The human authors of Scripture wrote. What they wrote was from God, or inspired (2 Tim 3:16), and they themselves were inspired, or "carried along" by the Holy Spirit, but the human authors consciously wrote the Scriptures. Thus, the Bible is what John Webster has called a "sanctified creaturely reality," divinely sourced but written down in space and time by men.⁶ In the inspired texts of the Bible we observe the height of human literary ingenuity and artistry and, hearing directly from the Lord, biblical texts are unique among all other literature in their inerrancy and authority. Therefore, Scripture is uniquely suited to benefit readers in both wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in accordance with reality and in righteous living. Through Scripture alone the morning star, Jesus Christ, rises in our hearts (2 Pet 1:19) as we hear the Word concerning Christ and, by the grace of God, believe (Rom 10:17). But we must not allow our affirmation of the dual authorship of Scripture to minimize the divinely ordained mechanism by which the Lord chose to reveal his Word. The Lord *carried along* his chosen vessels to write *his* words at particular times and in particular contexts. Therefore, the object of biblical interpretation is properly the intended meaning of the inspired *human* author of the text.

The intent of the divine author, then, is only realized by inspiration through the human author who wrote the text. Therefore, there is no reason to bifurcate divine and human intent for a given biblical text. Readers have no access to an intent beyond that of the human author of the text because all we have are the words on the page. Divine intent and human intent in a given text are the same. The divine author means only what he inspired the human author to mean.⁷ Kevin Chen says it this way,

For standard hermeneutical approaches that rightly focus on the intent of the human author, [distinguishing the divine author's intent from the human author's intent] confuses the task and goal of interpretation... From a hermeneutical standpoint, 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...

*sound hermeneutical methodology for any text is geared toward determining the human author's intent.*⁸

Abner Chou concurs,

Second Peter 1:21 reminds us God moved certain men to speak, such that their message is actually from God. Man's words *precisely* communicate God's own ideas. The way the apostles quote Scripture affirms that alone is the meaning of the text. They interchangeably discuss what the "prophet" spoke (Rom 10:16) with what "God spoke through the prophet (Acts 28:25) with what the 'Scripture spoke'" (Gal 3:8). This affirms *human intent is God's intent* and this unified intent is the legitimate meaning of Scripture.⁹

The assertion that divine and human intent are the same in a given text raises three rejoinders. First, the unique nature of Scripture demands a special hermeneutic distinct from the general hermeneutical principles proffered by E. D. Hirsch Jr. in *Validity in Interpretation*.¹⁰ In response, having already affirmed the unique nature of Scripture relative to all other literature, since the biblical texts were written by men according to the will of God, we should interpret them according to the same principles by which we interpret any other literary works written by men. I would argue that the uniqueness of the Bible—that it is the very Word of God—lies primarily in its inerrancy and authority, which affect how readers respond to the text rather than how we determine its meaning. Again, the substance of the doctrine of inspiration is that men wrote the Bible consciously and with conscious intended meaning that perfectly cohered with the intent of the Lord who carried them along. The uniqueness of the Scriptures impacts how we respond to the text, which is post-exegetical, rather than how we pursue exegesis itself.

Several NT texts do either explicitly state or imply that full understanding of what the Bible teaches is either granted or restricted by the Lord.¹¹ I would argue that this reality applies to all things rather than specifically or especially to understanding the Bible. Overcoming the tendency of sinful humanity to suppress in unrighteousness the truths of God's eternal power and divine nature evident in creation (Rom 1:18–20) must be granted by the Lord as well. Furthermore, consider Jesus' critique of Nicodemus that, as a

teacher of Israel, he did not “know” what Jesus was talking about concerning the nature and necessity of regeneration (John 3:10). Jesus then said to him, “What we know we speak about, and to what we have seen we testify, and you do not *receive* our testimony” (John 3:11). The foremost problem is one of belief rather than interpretive ability as Jesus is purposefully using an opaque metaphor for regeneration rather than an explicitly OT concept like heart circumcision (Deut 30:6) or replacement (Ezek 36:26), with which Nicodemus likely would have been much more familiar. Nicodemus must receive the testimony of Jesus that he is Messiah, which at this point in the narrative he will not, which is a manifestation of unbelief rather than exegetical inability. Jesus said the same to Jewish leaders on the Sabbath: “You search the Scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life, and these are these things that testify about me, and *you are not willing to come to me* so that you may have life” (John 5:39–40), and more explicitly, “If you *believed* Moses, you would *believe* me, for that one wrote about me. But if the writings of that one you do not *believe*, how will you *believe* my words?” (John 5:46–47).¹²

So, it is not that the Bible demands a special hermeneutic because it is the Word of God; it demands a special *response*. We all know brilliant but unbelieving biblical scholars who make helpful contributions to interpretive conversations and who even understand that the NT teaches that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of OT messianic anticipation. The problem is that they do not *believe* it, which is at the heart of Paul’s dichotomy between the natural and spiritual in 1 Corinthians 2:14–15.

A second rejoinder is that divine intent arises from, and expands the meaning of, the text when it is considered in canonical context.¹³ In my view, when scholars refer to canonical context they mean one of two things—either inner-biblical interpretation or Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS).¹⁴ In the case of inner-biblical interpretation, readers observe an inspired human author’s interpretation and/or application of an earlier text in his context and to serve his own purpose.¹⁵ In such cases, the object of interpretation remains the intent of the human author who is quoting, alluding to, or otherwise making use of a biblical text in his own composition, and in such cases a later author’s use of earlier Scripture does not change the meaning of that text.¹⁶

In the case of TIS, on the other hand, some argue that biblical texts can take on expanded meanings — either in keeping with the human author’s meaning or not — when read by Christian people with Christian imaginations in context with the rest of the Bible.¹⁷ Apart from textual validation, however, such readings depart the realm of hermeneutics proper and enter the realm of reader response, for the only basis for arguments concerning validity is the author’s intended meaning evident in the words he wrote.¹⁸ If the inspired human author did not intend a connection between texts, there is no recourse to the divine author’s intent apart from reader contribution, which is not hermeneutically valid. John Webster is helpful here again as he has argued that appeals to divine intent apart from the human authors undermine the creaturely reality of the Bible.¹⁹ The method for reading and interpreting biblical texts in their canonical context with the highest degree of hermeneutical validity is to observe author-intended inner-biblical interpretation according to the forward-looking, anticipatory trajectory of the Scriptures themselves.

Where inner-biblical interpretation observes or indicates typology specifically, there are two relevant points to clarify. First, I agree with Ardel Caneday that typology is an intentional feature of divine revelation rather than an interpretive contrivance and imposition on the text on the part of readers.²⁰ Thus, typological trajectories are intended by the inspired human authors of the Bible.²¹ Second, while the canonical *significance* of the earlier text is illuminated by later interpretations, the scope and substance of the *meaning* of the earlier text does not change at all because its meaning is inextricably tied to its author.²² So, while the Lord certainly providentially ordained typology in historical persons, events, and institutions, divine authorial intent does not arise from, or expand upon, human authorial intent when texts are interpreted in the context of the whole canon. Inspired human authorial intent is evident in inner-biblical interpretation at the canonical level, which impacts the significance of individual texts that contribute to a typological trajectory rather than their meanings.²³

A final rejoinder is that the NT authors often claim that the gospel entails a mystery revealed. For example, Paul closed his epistle to the Romans, “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery having been *kept secret* for long ages but now is *disclosed*” (Rom 16:25–26).

Many scholars, of whom D. A. Carson may be representative, argue that in examples such as this one Paul and the NT authors claim that the mystery revealed is the full *meaning* of OT texts now evident in their fulfillment in Christ.²⁴ I would argue, however, that fulfillment in Christ does not impact the meaning of OT texts; rather, the things anticipated in OT texts but not yet realized *have come to be* in Christ. Mystery revealed does not refer to the “transfigured” or expanded meaning of things previously recorded.²⁵ It does not refer to something that people have tried to uncover but have failed to comprehend, which is what modern usage of the word “mystery” would suggest.²⁶ It refers to the time and person for which the prophets were diligently searching the Scriptures and about which they were prophesying for centuries (1 Pet 1:10–11). The one to whom the OT texts look forward has come, as Paul wrote in Colossians 2:2, “that the hearts [of all who have not seen me face to face] may be encouraged ... unto the knowledge of the *mystery of God, namely, Christ.*”

Returning briefly to Romans 16, Vanhoozer argues regarding the revelation of the mystery in Paul’s gospel “now disclosed, and through the prophetic Scriptures ... made known to all the nations” (Rom 16:26) that the OT texts have been “illuminated” or “transfigured” by the light of Christ so that their literal sense is now “thickened,” by which he means that their meaning has been expanded in context with the revelation of Christ himself and the writings of the NT.²⁷ What I have argued above regarding the nature of mystery revealed stands here — Paul is not saying that the *meaning* of the OT texts has changed, but that the anticipatory trajectories contained in the OT have come to their fulfillment in Christ and in this way they are an integral part of the gospel message, for the identity and work of Christ only make sense in light of the message of the prophets.

In summary, my argument throughout this section has been that the intended meaning of the inspired human authors is the object of biblical interpretation.²⁸ This assertion best accounts for the progressive nature of the Scriptures themselves, for their dual authorship, and for inspiration as the mechanism by which the very Word of God is contained in a creaturely object written by men in time and space.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE BIBLICAL AUTHORS AS EXEMPLAR

The inspired-human-authorial-intent-centered hermeneutic that I have summarized could be called “mimetic” in the sense that Bible readers should seek to read the Scriptures like the biblical authors themselves did. The interpretive practices of the biblical authors — especially observed in 1) Moses’ worldview forming narration of historical events spanning from before his lifetime through the forty years of wandering in the wilderness and 2) in the inner-biblical interpretations by both later OT authors and the apostles in the NT — serve as our exemplar.

Moses himself set the stage and trajectory for subsequent revelation by interpreting and narrating persons and events that preceded him according to his own type as “the prophet” (Deut 18:15) and the exodus of Israel from Egypt.²⁹ The interpretation of the Pentateuch and other earlier Scriptures by later OT authors always proceeds according to the intent of the human author of the antecedent text, which I labored to demonstrate in my published work on the interpretations of Isaac’s birth from barrenness in the Nazirite forerunner type (cf. esp. Judg 13 and 1 Sam 1) and in the prophet Isaiah’s anticipation of new exodus Edenic restoration (Isa 51:1–3).³⁰ The apostles follow the example of the prophets in always interpreting OT texts as fulfilled in Christ according to the intent of the OT authors, which I endeavor to explain in my published work on Matthew’s interpretation of the “Son of God type” in his quotation of Hosea 11:1 (Matt 2:15) and also on the OT resurrection typology antecedent to Paul’s claim that Christ was raised from death on the third day “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:4).³¹ Where the biblical authors allude to, interpret, and employ Scripture, their interpretive perspective is always formed by the intent of the inspired human authors of Scripture. Therefore, our own Christian hermeneutic must imitate theirs.³²

My purpose in this section is to respond to two recent hermeneutical proposals by prominent fellow evangelical scholars, namely, Patrick Schreiner’s employment of the fourfold sense, or *quadriga*, in his recent book *The Transfiguration of Christ* and Kevin Vanhoozer’s magisterial work *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*. Their proposals are every different, so I will address them in turn, but they also display a similarity in interpretive method that I will highlight as departing from the example of the

biblical authors, and this in addition to the apparently coincidental appeal to the transfiguration narrative in the Synoptic Gospels as a hermeneutical key in both works. In short, attempts to both revive the fourfold sense and fold multiple senses into one “thickened” or “transfigured” literal sense in canonical context muddle interpretation by appealing to multiple authorial intentions.

First, although Schreiner does not attempt a full explanation and defense of the fourfold sense in his book, he does employ it and he has a forthcoming volume in which he intends to offer a fully formed argument in favor of its usefulness. The fourfold sense is a hermeneutical method in which readers draw out of the text four senses, or meanings—literal, spiritual or typological, tropological or moral, and anagogical or eschatological. Following Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Schreiner argues that the literal sense, which is the product of grammatical-historical exegesis and thus is tied to human authorial intent, is the basis for the others. In other words, the spiritual senses must organically develop from the literal sense.³³ This mooring of the additional senses to the literal is a necessary and commendable hermeneutical guardrail.

What is unclear, however, is what exactly the ground for claiming additional senses, or meanings, that organically arise from the literal sense is if they are not discerned through grammatical-historical exegesis? Schreiner’s answer is, “The spiritual sense listens for the voice of the omnipresent divine author urging us to connect the dots from one part of the canon to the other.”³⁴ It is on this assertion that I am focusing my response. Aside from the bare grammatical problem of a “sense” listening rather than the reader, Schreiner affirms multiple intentions in the dual-authored biblical canon, which muddles interpretation as I have already argued. Opening this door inevitably leads to the words on the page becoming mere symbols to which meaning is assigned from the outside rather than communicative tools that reveal intent from their source.³⁵ It is the human authors of Scripture that connect dots between texts for readers, which they consciously do via inner-biblical interpretation. If a canonical connection between two texts cannot be validated textually because it is not intended by the human author, it lacks hermeneutical validity because the only remaining basis is the reader’s own contribution. To use Schreiner’s language, if *readers* “connect the dots,” if the connection originates in *readers* apart from human authorial intent,

readers are shaping the reading of the text rather than the text shaping readers. While I heartily affirm an active Christian imagination informed by the Scriptures in reading them, such an imagination cannot be the only basis for an extended “sense” of a text.³⁶

Two final points on the four senses. First, proponents of the fourfold sense, including Schreiner, do not claim that every biblical text *intends* or *contains* these four senses. But if that’s true, the three spiritual senses then have unavoidably become an extratextual interpretive grid through which the text is read and, further, they necessarily originate in the reader to some degree even if the reader attempts to connect them to the human author’s intention, that is, the literal sense. Again, the connection originates in the reader rather than the author. Second, Schreiner elevates the four senses over the oft appealed-to meaning and application evangelical hermeneutical paradigm.³⁷ This comparison is apt because applications in teaching and preaching are very much reader responses to the text that ought to organically arise from the literal sense but that involve reader imagination, the post-interpretive activity that Hirsch calls “significance.”³⁸ Thus, the problem here is not drawing a moral and eschatological sense out of every text to exhort believers and give them hope; rather, the problem is claiming that these reader-response senses are part of the meaning of the text and intended by the divine author. It is unfortunate, in my opinion, that Schreiner’s otherwise precise, studious, and reverent exegesis of the transfiguration narrative is so overshadowed by an unnecessary appeal to the *quadriga*.

Thus, in my estimation an acceptable employment of the fourfold sense would include the meaning of the text intended by the inspired human author; the possibility of typological implication if it is (1) intended by that same author and (2) interpreted as such by later biblical authors; and two forms of application or significance—moral exhortation and hopeful assurance.

On the other hand, and second, Vanhoozer does not claim that there are multiple senses or meanings in a given text of Scripture. Instead, he argues for a “transfigured” literal sense, which encompasses “thickened,” or expanded, and illumined meaning when the text is read in the context of the whole canon of Scripture on the basis of divine authorial intent.³⁹ So, distinction between the divine author and the human author allows for distinction in

intent and thickening of literal meaning because the divine author intends something beyond but coherent with his inspired human author. And such readings can be conducted forward through the canon or backward.⁴⁰ Here is Vanhoozer in his own words,

My claim, then, is twofold: 1) divine authorial intent comes into focus in canonical context, and 2) this canonical intentionality is synonymous with God's trans-figural intent. Trans-figural interpretation follows the way God makes the biblical words run and figures fly: beyond the human authorial intent, through history, across the canon, and from their original to their ultimate referents... we should avoid defining the literal sense apart from divine authorship or limit divine authorship to the semantic constraints and historical contingencies of the Bible's human authors.⁴¹

And yet, limiting his own authorship to the constraints of his prophets is precisely what the Lord chose to do in revealing his Word to his created world. I agree with Vanhoozer that "God makes the biblical words run," but he does this through inspiration of his human authors and his providential ordering of history into typological trajectories that anticipate and are fulfilled in Christ and are observable through inner-biblical interpretation by those human authors. We are not limiting divine authorship in pursuing inspired human authorial intent; the Lord limited himself.

One very important issue that I have raised today that is absent in any meaningful sense from Vanhoozer's work is the interpretation of earlier biblical texts by OT authors and their subsequent casting of those expectations into the future to be realized in the promised one to come. The eschatological frame of reference appears only to apply to post-resurrection readers.⁴² Such an apparent limitation detaches Vanhoozer's entire project from the practice of the biblical authors at least to some degree. The focus of the book is almost exclusively on how contemporary believers should read the Bible ultimately as a single book with one divine author. As I have argued, this approach leaves the progressive nature of the Scriptures themselves unacknowledged and inevitably introduces reader response into the interpretive equation because there is not a tangible starting point for questions regarding hermeneutical validity. Observing the interpretive

practices of the inspired biblical authors is the necessary precursor to a mimetic Christian hermeneutic.

While Vanhoozer's proposal is certainly more in keeping with the classical Reformed conception of literal and spiritual sense than the *quadriga*, and he is cognizant of the necessity that a text has one sense or meaning rather than four, his method nonetheless departs from the apostolic example along with Schreiner's.⁴³ Despite this difference in defining the senses, the distinction in authorship leading to distinction in meaning runs through both books as does their appeal to the transfiguration narrative as a hermeneutical tool, which itself is questionable.⁴⁴ Thus, ultimately, my response to both is the same. Distinguishing between the divine and human authors and their intended meanings in the text of Scripture unnecessarily muddles interpretation and departs from the interpretative practices of the biblical authors themselves. The OT is certainly a fully furnished but dimly lit room upon which the light of Christ in the NT shines.⁴⁵ This reality, however, does not necessitate an expansive, canonical divine intent; rather, individual OT texts with intentionally prospective typological meaning—the furniture in the room—attain to their full, glorious *significance* in their typological trajectories as they are interpreted by later authors and, finally, fulfilled in Christ as presented by the NT authors.

To summarize this section, while Schreiner's work is primarily exegetical, Vanhoozer's relishes the theoretical and historical and, for a more-than-four-hundred-page book on hermeneutics, it is decidedly lacking in demonstration by way of extended exegesis of biblical texts. Such exegesis is a necessary component of sweeping hermeneutical proposals so readers can actually see what the theory looks like in practice.

A mimetic Christian hermeneutic best in keeping with the example of the biblical authors themselves respects the mechanism by which the Lord gave revelation—inspiration—by making human authorial intent the object of interpretation for a given text. It also respects the manner by which the Lord gave revelation—temporal, formal, and material progression—through forward reading of the canon and observation of author-intended inner-biblical interpretation.⁴⁶ Thus, we truly imitate the biblical authors themselves.

Some, however, argue that in some cases the prophetic or apostolic example cannot be imitated in full.

PRIVILEGED HERMENEUTICAL SPACE: A RESPONSE TO RICHARD BLAYLOCK

In a recent article in *JETS*, Richard Blaylock argues that biblical interpreters can imitate the hermeneutics of the biblical authors in most cases, but there are some that must be attributed to what he calls “privileged hermeneutical space (PHS).”⁴⁷ PHS is another expression for Richard Longenecker’s “revelatory stance,” which the biblical authors occupied but which contemporary interpreters do not.⁴⁸ Blaylock, however, tempers Longenecker’s thesis that interpreters today cannot imitate the biblical authors at all by asserting, “The biblical authors’ hermeneutic is *generally replicable* but not *entirely* applicable because the prophets and the apostles occupied PHS.”⁴⁹

While I commend Blaylock’s exhortation to Christians to “pattern their approach to Scripture after the hermeneutical example of the prophets and the apostles,” ultimately his attempt at nuanced third-wayism falls flat because his affirmation of “fuller sense” in canonical context is essentially in agreement with Vanhoozer’s “transfigured” literal sense in canonical context, both of which appeal to divine authorial intent. Blaylock writes, “I agree with those who argue that biblical texts can have a fuller sense (*sensus plenior*); in other words, texts may have a divinely intended sense that goes beyond . . . the human author’s intention.”⁵⁰ Blaylock’s “fuller sense” is Vanhoozer’s “thickened literal sense.”

Blaylock’s foremost example of PHS is Daniel’s interpretation of Jeremiah’s prophecy of seventy years in exile (Daniel 9:20–27). According to Blaylock, “Gabriel reveals the *divine* interpretation of the Jeremiah prophecies that Daniel had been reading . . . the *heavenly* meaning . . . a *deeper* understanding of the meaning” of Jeremiah 25:11–12 and 29:10.⁵¹ So, in reading the Jeremiah scroll Daniel understood what Jeremiah, the human author, intended — namely, seventy literal years of exile — but Daniel did not grasp the fullness of the prophecy’s *divine* intent, that is, the meaning intended by the divine author.

In addition to the hermeneutical problems associated with distinguishing between human and divine intent in inspiration that I have already addressed in response to Schreiner and Vanhoozer, there are two problems with Blaylock’s proposal. First, there are tacit indications in

the book of Jeremiah itself, especially in Jeremiah's interpretation of Deuteronomy 30, that the seventy years prophecy included an intentional extended symbolic meaning. That Jeremiah's conception of post-exilic restoration is formed by Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 30:1–14 is evident in his repeated use of the phrase "The Lord will restore your fortunes" (Jer 29:14; 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26), which first appears in Deuteronomy 30:3.⁵² The first instance in Jeremiah 29:14 even occurs in close context with one of the references to a seventy year period prior to restoration to the land. In Jeremiah 29:10–14, the Lord promises that after seventy years of Babylonian rule he will "restore" Judah to their place, and then when they call out to him, come to him, pray to him, and seek him with their whole heart, he will hear and be found, and he will "restore" their fortunes. Not only does Jeremiah adopt Moses' distinction between physical return to the land and heart circumcision (cf. Deut 30:1–6) in his twofold "restore," he also situates the key phrase "restore your fortunes" *after* the turning of the people back to the Lord with their whole hearts.⁵³ Moses prophesied the same, where "restore your fortunes" included both return to the land (Deut 30:3–5) followed by heart circumcision (Deut 30:6) resulting in covenantal devotion and life.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is likely that Jeremiah understood the seventy year period to be both literal with respect to the rule of the Babylonians and a return to the land and symbolic with respect to the eschatological whole-heart restoration of the people of God.

The time stamp given to situate Daniel's vision is "the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, from the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans" (Dan 9:1), which was likely 538 BC and, thus, would have aligned with the seventy year reign of Babylon prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 29:10). Daniel has observed the fall of the Babylonian empire and prays that the Lord would enact what he promised, namely, the eschatological salvation of his people. In response, the angel Gabriel gives him new revelation expanding the seventy years to "seventy sevens" (Dan 9:24). Daniel's request follows the evident meaning of Jeremiah 29:10 and he seeks to activate the Lord to accomplish the "restoration of fortunes," namely, spiritual restoration. Thus, both Gabriel and Daniel interpret Jeremiah according to his consciously intended dual meaning as I summarized above. Gabriel's "not yet" answer does not necessarily mean that Daniel misunderstood Jeremiah; rather, it can simply

mean that the extension of Jeremiah's seventy years was undefined. Gabriel granted "understanding" (Dan 9:22–23) to Daniel regarding the precise future timing of Jeremiah's "restoration of fortunes" (Jer 29:14) and Moses' "heart circumcision" (Deut 30:6).

Second, I would argue that Daniel 9 is not properly an example of inner-biblical interpretation, so it does not support the thesis of Blaylock's article at all. When inspired biblical authors received direct divine revelation as Daniel did in this case, that new revelation did not change the meaning of antecedent texts, nor did it "thicken" the sense, nor did it reveal a sense of the antecedent text unintended by the human author but intended by the divine author. Gabriel's message concerning "seventy sevens" did not change the meaning of Jeremiah; rather, it added an installment in progressive revelation that enhanced Daniel's—and now any other Bible reader's—understanding regarding the precise timing of eschatological salvation.⁵⁵ In this case Daniel absolutely occupied a privileged position as a prophet receiving revelatory visions, but that is precisely the point—the canon of Scripture was not yet closed.⁵⁶ Daniel was not properly interpreting an earlier text and applying it to his audience. He received new revelation and narrated the occasion of the vision and its content *without interpretation*. So, in one sense, I agree with Blaylock that Daniel 9 represents something that Bible readers today cannot replicate because it narrates direct revelation, which is no longer available or relevant. On the other hand, I think raising Daniel 9 in this way is a category error because it is not properly an instance of inner-biblical interpretation by an inspired human author.

Therefore, interpreters of the Bible can and should imitate the interpretive practices of the biblical authors evidenced in the Scriptures themselves. PHS applies to the biblical authors where they received direct revelation from the Lord, which is an altogether different textual event from a conscious inner-biblical interpretation of an earlier text by an inspired author.

CONCLUSION

This article could be subtitled "A Once-for-All Rejection of the Fourfold Sense" for two reasons: 1) to highlight the hermeneutical proposal that I think departs most from the example of the biblical authors and 2) to attempt to encompass all hermeneutical proposals involving additional

or expanded senses in my critique. I am not arguing that Vanhoozer's and Schreiner's methods are the same, nor am I saying that Blaylock is somehow invoking the fourfold sense into his argument regarding imitation of the biblical authors. My argument is: any conception of biblical interpretation that involves multiplied senses or an expanded sense based on divine authorship in distinction from the inspired human author's intent evident in the text departs from both the example of the biblical authors and from logically sound hermeneutical principles. My response here is almost certainly not "once-for-all," but in my opinion a Christian hermeneutic in which the object is one, fixed, intended meaning by the dual author of Scripture — the inspired human author — best accounts for the biblical data itself, best imitates the practices of the prophets and apostles, and is the most logically defensible.

Biblical theology and hermeneutics originate with Moses in the Pentateuch, develop and proceed through the interpretation of the Pentateuch and other texts by later inspired authors, and reach their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ as explained by the apostles. This progression is how the Scriptures were produced and how they were received and canonized by the people of God.⁵⁷ Respect for this progression, along with a conception of dual authorship that emphasizes inspiration and identifies the inspired human author's intention as the object of interpretation, is the foundation for a mimetic Christian hermeneutic.

¹ Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept*, vol. 1 (Brentwood: B&H Academic, 2024), 1:110, emphasis mine.

² This statement was originally published by William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. and ed. William Fitzgerald (1588; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 407.

³ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1980).

⁴ For more on Scripture as God's "word-act" revelation, see Wellum, *Systematic Theology*, 174–77. See also Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001), 10, and G. E. Ladd, "Biblical Theology, Nature of," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:506.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of biblical texts are my own.

⁶ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 21.

⁷ Thomas J. Sculthorpe, "He Makes Her Desert Like the Garden of YHWH: A Typological Understanding of the Birth of Isaac as Resurrection from Death" (PhD Diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024), 19–23.

⁸ Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 18–19.

- ⁹ Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 28.
- ¹⁰ E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967). On the distinction between general and special hermeneutics, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 269. For an argument defending the necessity of special hermeneutics that do not prioritize the intent of the human authors in biblical interpretation, see Craig S. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 32–33, 44, 57–58.
- ¹¹ See, for instance, Paul's assertion that the gospel is "veiled to those who are perishing" by "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:3–4).
- ¹² See James M. Hamilton Jr., "John," in *ESV Expository Commentary: John–Acts*, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 9:121–24, and James M. Hamilton Jr., *In the Beginning Was the Word: Finding Meaning in the Literary Structure of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2025), 93–95.
- ¹³ For more on the "canonical horizon" as one of three necessary interpretive contexts in biblical hermeneutics, see Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 259–311, and Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 118–129.
- ¹⁴ For two self-attesting explanations of TIS methodology, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) and Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*.
- ¹⁵ See Russell L. Meek, "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology," *Biblica* 95.1 (2014): 280–91.
- ¹⁶ For examples of hermeneutical proposals that involve expanded meaning in canonical context, see Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, "The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed., D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 737–46, and Aubrey Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, "Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology," *SBJT* 21.1 (2017): 11–34.
- ¹⁷ See especially #9 in Trier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 200, affirmed and cited from Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 3–5.
- ¹⁸ This statement encompasses the main thesis of Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*. I am aware that Hirsch himself later adjusted his thesis; see E. D. Hirsch Jr., "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 202–25. I agree with his earlier work in *Validity*, and I think his later adjustments detracted from the value of his contributions to hermeneutical discussions broadly.
- ¹⁹ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 39.
- ²⁰ See Ardel B. Caneday, "Biblical Types: Revelation Concealed in Plain Sight to be Disclosed — 'These Things Occurred Typologically to Them and Were Written Down for Our Admonition,'" in *God's Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of Thomas R. Schreiner*, eds., Denny Burk, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Brian Vickers (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2019), 135–55.
- ²¹ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 26–28.
- ²² On the distinction between meaning and significance in hermeneutics, see Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8–9, 57, 62–64; Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Authors*, 30–34; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 261–62.
- ²³ Specifically with reference to how NT authors interpret OT texts, Iain Provan argues that the "communicative intentions" of those who compiled the biblical texts into the canon carried exegetical import and shaped how the intended meaning of individual texts were explained; see Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University, 2017), 86, 102. I affirm Provan's argument but would place any hermeneutical developments due to canonical placement under the realm of significance rather than expanded meaning, which would place the canonizers in an inner-biblical interpretive position themselves.
- ²⁴ See D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and the New," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, eds., D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Siefrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 409, 411–12, 432–35.

- 25 See Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, 402, for a definition of “transfigured” sense under “literal sense,” which reads, “the meaning of the human-divine biblical discourse when read grammatically-eschatologically in canonical context.”
- 26 Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 28.77, and “μωσῆριον G3696” in Moisés A. Silva, rev. ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 3:350–57.
- 27 Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, 167–80, especially 167–68.
- 28 Even though Provan does argue for a “double literal sense,” which includes on the one hand the conscious intent of the original inspired author and on the other hand the intent of those who arranged the canon, he makes no appeal to the divine author’s intention in canonical organization. It would appear that the canonizers were as inspired as the authors themselves and were performing a form of inner-biblical interpretation in their arranging of the material in accordance with the intent of the original inspired authors; see Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture*, 96, 102, and Vanhoozer’s interaction with him in Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, 172–75.
- 29 See Seth D. Postell, “Reading Genesis, Seeing Moses: Narrative Analogies with Moses in the Book of Genesis,” *JETS* 65.3 (2022): 437–55. James Hamilton argues that the promise of redemption in Genesis 3:15 shapes the typological patterns observed through inner-biblical interpretation in the rest of the canon culminating in Christ; see Hamilton, *Typology*, 6–17.
- 30 Sculthorpe, “He Makes Her Desert Like the Garden of YHWH.” See also Thomas J. Sculthorpe, “Birth from Barrenness as Resurrection from Death: Typological Structures in Genesis,” *Presbyterion* XLVIII no. 2 (Fall 2022): 48–66.
- 31 Thomas J. Sculthorpe, “Plenior, Praegnans, or Progressive: Inner-Biblical Interpretation and Authorial Intent,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2022): 50–71 and Thomas J. Sculthorpe, “Why Does Moses Call the Promised Savior a Seed? Resurrection Typology in Genesis 1–3,” *Kenwood Bulletin* 1.1 (Fall 2025): 41–61.
- 32 For the opposite conclusion, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), who argues that the biblical authors were inspired by God to correctly interpret earlier biblical texts and that, because contemporary readers are not inspired, we cannot imitate them.
- 33 Patrick Schreiner, *The Transfiguration of Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Reading* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024), 29, and his oft-cited main source Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
- 34 Schreiner, *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 29.
- 35 Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 126n37.
- 36 On the necessity of an imagination formed by the Scriptures in interpretation, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 15–16, which Hirsch defines as the “shared type” between author and reader (see Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 64–66).
- 37 For instance, see Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1996).
- 38 See note 22.
- 39 See note 27.
- 40 Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, 271–83.
- 41 Vanhoozer, 175, 77.
- 42 Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, 139–141. I argue that the “eschatological frame of reference” appears only to apply to Christian readers after the resurrection because Vanhoozer repeatedly claims that the ultimate referent of Scripture is Christ. Vanhoozer calls this a “Christian frame of reference” on page 138. I agree with this assertion in principle, but room must be made for a category like “seed of the woman” or “one to come” in the OT because Christ had not yet come.
- 43 For more on the classical Reformed conception of the literal sense, see Michael J. Pereira, “‘And Now the Lord Has Sent Me His Spirit’: the Divine Missions, the Literal Sense, and Reading the Old Testament,” *JETS* forthcoming.

- 44 Vanhoozer explains, "Jesus' transfiguration is an underappreciated hermeneutical resource, which Western theology has for the most part neglected... it provides a unique vantage point from which to think about the ends and means of Christian hermeneutics in distinctly Christological terms," in *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, 24–25.
- 45 See B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 22, and Caneday, "Biblical Types: Revelation Concealed in Plain Sight to be Disclosed," 155.
- 46 Vanhoozer defines the formal principle of "mere Christian hermeneutics" as "a trans-figured literal sense" and the material principle as "the knowledge of God concentrated and communicated in the shining face of Jesus Christ," in *Mere Christian Hermeneutics*, 24. In my dissertation, I argue that the formal principle of progressive revelation is author-intended typology evident in inner-biblical interpretation and the material principle is covenant; see Sculthorpe, "He Makes Her Desert Like the Garden of YHWH," 243–44.
- 47 Richard M. Blaylock, "Can We Read Like the Prophets and the Apostles? A Nuanced Answer to an Important Question," *JETS* 67.3 (2024): 421–46.
- 48 Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, xxxiv–xxxviii.
- 49 Blaylock, "Can We Read Like the Prophets and the Apostles?" 446, emphasis original.
- 50 See especially Blaylock, "Can We Read Like the Prophets and the Apostles?" 437n103, where he refers to and affirms Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 264.
- 51 Blaylock, "Can We Read Like the Prophets and the Apostles?" 435, emphasis mine.
- 52 The prophet also applies this phrase to Moab (Jer 48:47), Ammon (Jer 49:6), and Elam (Jer 49:39) as representative nations indicating that new covenant blessings will extend beyond Israel and Judah in keeping with the promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3).
- 53 See also Deut 4:29–30 where Moses situates the seeking of the Lord with the whole heart "in the last days," which is a reference to eschatological salvation; see Chen, *Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 19n39. For more on the phrase "in the last days" in the Pentateuch, see John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 395–97, 557–60, 571–73.
- 54 The specific sequence of events in Deut 30:1–6 is exile, repentance, regathering and return to the land, multiplication, heart circumcision, covenantal fidelity, and life. Thus, Jeremiah, in his inspired interpretation of Deut 30, likely in context with Deut 4:29–31, appears to clarify that physical return will precede spiritual restoration, all of which is encompassed by the phrase "restore your fortunes."
- 55 Others who interpret Dan 9:24–27 as new revelation include James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, NSBT 32 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 109, and Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 617–29.
- 56 This assertion is confirmed by Blaylock's own speculation regarding the possible source(s) of Matthew's fulfillment language concerning Jesus being from Nazareth (Matt 2:22–23); see Blaylock, "Can We Read Like the Prophets and the Apostles?" 444–46.
- 57 For more on chronological canonization, see Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1985).