

A SINGLE HORIZON HERMENEUTICS: A PROPOSAL FOR
INTERPRETIVE IDENTIFICATION

Stanley E. Porter
McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON, Canada

Introduction

The concept of the two horizons of interpretation—the original horizon of the author or text and the contemporary horizon of the interpreter—has become a standard paradigm in Western hermeneutical thought. This notion of two horizons is clearly the product of Enlightenment thought and the development of modern critical thinking. First adumbrated by Friedrich Schleiermacher,¹ the concept of the two horizons was perhaps most forcefully articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his *Truth and Method* (a book with questionable claims about both),² and then widely accepted and developed by numerous others. Even within evangelical hermeneutical thought (my primary though not exclusive audience for this paper), the notion of two horizons has become a standard interpretive paradigm. For example, Anthony Thiselton's arguably best known hermeneutical work is entitled *The Two Horizons*, after the concept articulated by Gadamer,³ and Grant Osborne plays with the fixed notion by creating reciprocity in his book on general hermeneutics, *The*

1. See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, ch. 1.

2. First published in 1960 in German, and then in English translation in 1975, and again in 2002. For a recent treatment of Gadamer, see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, ch. 9.

3. Thiselton bases his title upon Gadamer, who is one of the four major figures that he discusses in the volume, along with Heidegger, Bultmann, and Wittgenstein.

Hermeneutical Spiral.⁴ At first blush, the notion of two horizons seems to be a reasonable one, even an ineluctable one; modern interpreters recognize and appreciate the hermeneutical distance between their own horizon of understanding and the horizon of the (at least in biblical studies) ancient author and text. The former is governed by the presuppositions and assumptions of the interpreter's modern world and context, while the latter may include ancient Israel of the patriarchal, pre-exilic, or post-exilic period; or the Palestinian, Mediterranean, or even European worlds of the New Testament.⁵ It is fair to say that there have been many interesting and useful insights that have emerged from such a perspective. These include, not least, the hermeneutical appreciation of distance, otherness, and difference, and the need to find means of bridging the chronological, cultural, and perspectival breach between the two horizons and their concomitant worlds.⁶ Such has been the approach of modern Western biblical criticism since the rise of the historical-critical method,⁷ even by further developments into criticisms that wish to disregard the potential minimalism of modern interpretive approaches (such as canonical or literary criticism).⁸ However, there have also been severe and perhaps even harmful limitations

4. Osborne's emphasis is more upon the interactive process by which horizons supposedly interact, thus resulting in a spiral. He is followed by, among others, Klein et al., *Introduction*.

5. There have, of course, been other hermeneutical paradigms, including the single horizon hermeneutics of Rudolf Bultmann, who essentially dismisses the horizon of the author/text and reads in terms of only his own (highly limited and strictly materialist) horizon, seen especially in his program of demythologization. See Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology." It is arguable that many, if not most, forms of historical/higher criticism utilize a single horizon hermeneutics of the modern interpreter, even if not as extremely as does Bultmann.

6. These are preoccupations of recent modernist and post-modernist thought. See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, ch. 7 (structuralism) and ch. 8 (Derrida and deconstruction).

7. For histories of the historical-critical method in Old Testament see Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, and in New Testament, Baird, *History of New Testament Research*.

8. See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, ch. 11 (literary hermeneutics).

that have resulted from such a hermeneutical approach. Along with distance, otherness, and difference, there has come interpretive and hermeneutical alienation,⁹ loss of biblical confidence,¹⁰ and theological anxiety.¹¹

Despite such supposed interpretive advances as those promoted by the two horizons, there are those elsewhere in the contemporary world for whom such modern and even post-modern angst are not the realities of their hermeneutical and hence interpretive agenda. In a recent lecture at McMaster Divinity College,¹² Philip Jenkins made the important point (recounted here in my own words and interpretation) that miracles and other extra-normal phenomena are almost a commonplace among Christians in the majority world, such as sub-Saharan Africa. For them, the Bible is not an alien or ancient document but, they believe, one written literally for them, in that the context of the Bible is their shared and relevant context.¹³ In other words, what I think that Jenkins is indicating—and those in such hermeneutical contexts are realizing, even if inadvertently and without the ability necessarily to express it in these words—is that, in such interpretive contexts, the Bible and the modern interpreter share a single horizon. There is a single horizon hermeneutics in play. There are not two horizons that formalize and even perpetuate the interpretive divide between author/text and interpreter. Instead, there is a single horizon of author/text/interpreter, in which the horizon of creation and reception, promulgation and expectation, is common and shared. One might say that more is shared than even a creative and expectative horizon. It may be

9. I.e., the world of the original text is foreign and distant from the contemporary interpretive context.

10. I.e., modern thought is by definition viewed as fuller, superior and deeper, requiring adjustment of expectations regarding the necessarily more primitive and simpler (if not simplistic) earlier biblical text and its people.

11. This occurs when one realizes the difficulty of making an ancient and, dare one say, now dead text speak to a modern and living context.

12. Philip Jenkins was the guest of McMaster Divinity College to deliver three plenary lectures at a conference, “Globalization of Christian Faith and Ministry,” on 11 June 2011.

13. Jenkins makes a similar point in Jenkins, *New Faces*, esp. 4–7.

that there is, at least perceived to be, a similar cultural, religious, economic, educational, and political horizon (not horizons) between the two. This horizon would possibly include ethnic identification in the context of foreign intrusion, religious exclusivity within a broader panoply of other incompatible fervent religious belief, economic struggle and divide between the many who have not and the few who have, educational deprivation for many and privilege for few, and political oppression and struggle. I do not think that—assuming one can use such widespread generalities—it is unfair to say that the majority world of today has far more in common in almost all regards with the ancient world of the Bible, whether of the Old or New Testaments, than the modern Western world. The majority world, with its struggle for existence against oppressive antagonists and its pre-modern orientation to life, is very much more similar to the ancient world than is the post-Christian and post-religious, and even post-post-modern (and still very modern), West.¹⁴

The Proposal of a Single Horizon Hermeneutics against Other Hermeneutical Approaches

This interpretive situation, if I am even close to being right (and I believe that I am, at least to the point of promoting the topic for discussion), suggests that we may need to examine in more detail a single horizon hermeneutics. Such a hermeneutic values, validates, and even embraces the interpretive commonalities of the biblical world and the modern world, rather than continuing to advocate for a divided and alienated world of two horizons—always at a distance, and struggling for the first to be heard and appreciated against the backdrop of the skepticism of the second. A single horizon hermeneutics would endorse the notion that the

14. I acknowledge that such terms as modernism, post-modernism, and post-Christian are potentially problematic, but are here clear enough. I also sense that what many of us recognized from the start—the difficulty of the term post-modern (what comes after it?)—is now coming to bear upon our situation—we have moved beyond post-modernism, or, perhaps better, come to recognize that what we used to call post-modernism is just another subcategory of what we should probably still call modernism.

operative essentials of the biblical world should be taken seriously. These include the fact of God's existence,¹⁵ his actual and historical revelation in Jesus Christ through incarnation,¹⁶ the reality of God's work in the world by diverse means (not just the notional possibility but the reality of what are usually called miracles—and not as some kind of hypothetical possibility of violation of natural law, but the reality that God's world includes laws of his own making),¹⁷ the reality of resurrection of which Jesus Christ's was the first of many to come,¹⁸ and similar truths.

A single horizon hermeneutics would recognize that many of the developments in the post-biblical world have not genuinely enhanced understanding and application, or even general appreciation, of the biblical text. These developments have instead served in various ways to alienate the text from its primary readers, those who wish to call themselves Christians and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as God's perfect human expression of himself. A single horizon hermeneutics is of course not the panacea of all interpretive difficulties, because the biblical text, even if it is seen to share the same horizon as that of the biblical reader and even scholar, still requires interpretation, then as it does now. However, this interpretation is performed in an admittedly

15. I will refrain from comment about the so-called New Atheism, which is not new and not even thoroughgoing atheism, in that it worships its own inerrant gods (such as human reason, materialism, and the like). If instead labeled the New Paganism, many might more readily perceive it for what it is. See Overman, *Case for the Existence of God*; and Plantinga and Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality*.

16. See Taylor, *Names of Jesus*, a now widely neglected but still valuable study.

17. See Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*; and for a recent treatment in relation to the biblical audience, Keener, *Miracles*.

18. See Licona, *Resurrection of Jesus*. There has been much unnecessary squawking regarding some of his minor conclusions, but I think the work is overall very sound in method and conclusions. Although I certainly agree with Wright's conclusions in *Resurrection* regarding the reality of Jesus Christ's resurrection, one does not need the full 800 pages he takes to prove it, especially as many of the pages are for the most part extraneous to the case he makes. See the review of Bedard, Review of Wright, *Resurrection*.

complex way in the context of a shared horizon of interpretive expectations and assumptions, rather than from a distinctly different and even alienated horizon diachronically and synchronically removed.

Some may believe, however, that some previously articulated hermeneutical models have already addressed many, if not most, of the issues briefly introduced in this short excursion into hermeneutical thought. Two models that come to mind, and often linked together, are canonical approaches or canonical readings, and so-called theological interpretation.¹⁹ There are many potentially good things to say about these interpretive strategies and their desire to address the theological distance of modern interpretation. However, I do not believe that they address the heart of the issue outlined in this article.

Canonical readings, especially those influenced by the work of Brevard Childs, and perhaps the most important New Testament practitioner of his method, Robert Wall,²⁰ address the issue of the integrity and unity of the canonical biblical text as the maximal hermeneutical context. They recognize it as a product of the church, and interpret it in light of the church's claim upon it. Canonical readers are often sensitive to the shape and development of the canon, and how these factors influence the reading of the Bible. However, canonical readings, for all of their interpretive strength, are still subject to the historical distance and even tension found in modern critical readings—hence they resort to the canon as hermeneutical context. Childs was an accomplished historical critic who never wished to create a disjunction between his approach to the Bible and historical criticism. Similarly, Wall wishes to appropriate the results of historical criticism, even while bracketing out historical conclusions in his

19. There are many similarities between these two approaches, although their noteworthy differences should emerge in the discussion that follows.

20. See, for example, Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament*; Childs, *New Testament as Canon*; Wall and Lemcio, *New Testament as Canon*. For a recent Old Testament treatment, see Seitz, *Character of Christian Scripture*. There are many other studies as well, especially in Old Testament studies. Wall himself has been the major figure in New Testament studies.

effort to preserve and interpret the text.²¹ The major problem is that his bracketing of historical questions concedes that his position as modern interpreter is alien to the historical context of the Bible, and in fact elevates it as superior to the understanding of the ancients, including the first Christians. The interpretation of the Pastoral Epistles presents a well-known example. Rather than accepting them as Pauline letters, as they by all accounts were by the earliest Christians (a point acknowledged even by those who believe them to be pseudepigraphal), canonical criticism has two alternatives. It must either pretend this is not true by imposing a foreign sense of authorship as divorced from historical reality, or even adopt a historical-critical conclusion—that of pseudonymy—and utilize this stance as a means of reading the letters as early interpretations (though canonized) of the genuine Paul.²² Neither satisfies the requirements of a single horizon hermeneutics, but each falls back on modern horizons of interpretation as a means of dictating to the horizon of the original text and author.

Theological interpretation—whether it is considered a hermeneutical stance or instead a variety of hermeneutical positions that commonly lay hold of pre-modern exegetical and theological conclusions—has been widely heralded as a modern (or perhaps even post-modern) solution to the conundrum of the two horizons, including the possible sterility of historical-critical interpretation.²³ Theological interpretation, though varied in

21. This is clear in the exchange that I had with him. See Porter, "Pauline Authorship: Implications"; Wall, "Pauline Authorship"; Porter, "Pauline Authorship: Response."

22. See my latest analysis of this type of approach in Porter, "Implications."

23. Some key works in this area, among many, are Vanhoozer, *Dictionary*; Watson, *Text, Church, and World*; Watson, *Text and Truth*; Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*; Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation*; Billings, *Word of God*; Green, *Seized by Truth*; and Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*. There has been much theorizing about theological interpretation and, to date, the interpretive results are relatively slender and unconvincing, including the examples in the Two Horizons Commentary Series (the title is descriptive of the purpose). See Porter, "What Difference Does Hermeneutics Make?" Furthermore, it would probably shock some of those included in Fowl, *Theological Interpretation* (edited volume) to be found in such a collection, and the

approach, has as several of its common strands the invocation of pre-modern interpretive conclusions as in some sense determinative for modern interpretation, giving priority to the theological conclusions of the early church especially as found in the great creeds such as that of Nicea, and endorsing the theological interpretation of the church as preserving and transmitting theological truth.²⁴

No doubt there is much to welcome in such a position that affirms Christian Trinitarian belief, welcomes the church as an active participant in theological understanding, and recognizes that serious theological thinking about the Bible did not emerge for the first time with the Enlightenment. However, theological interpretation itself embraces a number of problematic assumptions in its efforts to bridge the interpretive chasm of the ancients and moderns. One of the major problems is why in its interpretive regress theological interpretation comes to land firmly in the fourth century or so, or at least on the major creeds. This is not in any way to diminish the importance of the creeds and the role they have played in Christian history and thought. The inherent sentiment seems to be, however, that whereas the biblical account may be theologically diverse and open to divergent interpretation, these creeds are fixed in their meaning. Further, whereas the biblical text is the inspired text of interpretation, the creeds and statements by fathers of the early church seem to displace them as themselves revealed pronouncements. Nevertheless, these statements themselves are not final interpretations of

range of examples in Vanhoozer, *Dictionary*, is surprisingly broad. See also Adam et al., *Reading Scripture*, for further examples. In Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, the author purports to be in this line of interpretation but his reader-response and reception-theory orientation, rather than solving the problem of the two horizons, places interpretation firmly within the modernist agenda, with its concomitant results. A brief (and in this climate, thereby good) summary is found in Fowl, *Theological Interpretation* (Cascade). The roots of this movement are seen in the theological hermeneutics of Thiselton (see Thiselton, *Two Horizons*; Thiselton, *New Horizons*) and Vanhoozer (see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*; Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*). Cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, ch. 10.

24. For an assessment, see Porter, "What Difference Does Hermeneutics Make?"

issues, but are attempts in an ongoing process of encapsulating and refining the admittedly rich and abundant teaching of the Bible in precise statements suited to their own interpretive contexts. In other words, the creeds and similar formulations, for all of their worth, are at worst time-bound interpretations reflecting the issues around which the councils were called or the statements formulated, and at best excellent, though brief (and perhaps in some cases strangely- if not mis-formulated), statements in the developing thought and application of the Bible to contemporary contexts. That is, the creeds themselves reflect in many ways the same kind of exercise as modern theological interpreters are engaged in. The question is legitimately raised as to why theological interpreters do not revert to the Bible itself, rather than simply focusing upon the fourth century or other early pre-modern interpreters as forming their horizon of interpretation. Furthermore, there is no necessary virtue in allowing the church to have determinative interpretive powers. The Christian church itself is a tremendously important institution, if by that we mean the church instigated by Jesus Christ as his representative means of work in the world. However, the church as usually understood is highly diverse in belief and practice, and not inherently better able to adjudicate interpretation than modern critical thought. One only needs to examine differences between the eastern and western churches, disputes over such important institutions as baptism and communion, contentions over church order and office, and even the understandings of major doctrines, such as the Trinity. This list does not even address the significance of the institutionalization of the church in the fourth century and how that politico-theological act radically altered the relation of the church to society—an effect that has never been remedied in the West.²⁵ Finally, early interpreters such as Augustine, Jerome, and Aquinas, as well as others, for all of their brilliance, were themselves not of one mind, and often had a number of highly contentious theological ideas,

25. Leithart, *Defending Constantine*. Constantine was no doubt sincere in his faith, but despite good intentions, the result was highly questionable.

alongside more settled ones.²⁶ Such ideas are often highly informative, but a far cry from being determinative for theological understanding. Whatever is gained by a return to early Christian interpretation is lost by the realization that there are fewer answers in these hallowed mists of time than there are further questions and paradoxes.

Neither of these proposed solutions seems to be able to rise to the necessary standard of interpretation sought by those who wish to be able to appreciate the theological importance and significance of the Bible. This compels us to explore further the single horizon hermeneutics.

The Ramifications of a Single Horizon Hermeneutics

There are, of course, many questions to be raised by the proposal of a single horizon hermeneutics, especially in this modern, post-modern, or post-post-modern age. We live in an age when foundationalism (whether grounded in propositionalism, idealism, empiricism, or naturalism) has in many ways given way to non-foundationalism (or at least, in some who wish to maintain some of the trappings and security of the old without completely giving over to the new, anti-foundationalism), only now to have a resurgence of a chastened and more circumscribed foundationalism.²⁷ Despite any protests to the contrary, I believe that attempts to eliminate or transcend hermeneutical horizontal distance are attempts to establish a form of interpretive foundation. The goal is to find a firm basis for defining common interpretive ground, so that there is a means by which one can say that what the ancient text says constitutes a basis of belief that can be transferred or mediated into the modern world. Even more than that, it can provide a platform for contemporaneous faith and practice. In such hermeneutical contexts, more is demanded of

26. As Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 49–60, points out in the case of Chalcidius.

27. See Bonnycastle, *In Search of Authority*; Cunningham, *Reading after Theory*; Donoghue, *Practice of Reading*; Sollors, *Thematic Criticism*; and Livingston, *Literary Knowledge*.

interpretation than that we simply appeal to language games, but that such language be grounded in something more, such as the larger functional revelatory context. Contextless speech-acts are inadequate to describe the full range of functionality of language, which is necessary to grasp its meaning-significance.²⁸ And surely we are past the kinds of simplistic, unvalidatable, and hence invalid assertions of logical positivism or anti-absolutism.

This does not mean that there are not other problems to confront with a single horizon hermeneutics. We must remember that our interpretive stance of today indeed is—and no doubt at least in part because of Enlightenment thought and historical criticism—the product of previous thought. We are at the end of a stream of interpretive history, or the history of reception and response to the formative and foundational texts of our traditions. It is virtually impossible for one to even imagine, to say nothing of implement, a return to pre-Enlightenment thought, to forget the accumulated history of the pre-modern period and modernity and its accomplishments, especially when in order to do so we must utilize and appropriate the very tools that have only come to fruition by means of such modernistic thought and processes. We cannot be expected to forget, or to ignore, previous critical interpretation, and we certainly cannot pretend that all of what has transpired in what we might call the modern world simply never existed. That is an impossibility. Besides this not constituting a hermeneutical stance or resulting in interpretation, this is not what a single horizon hermeneutics demands. A single horizon hermeneutics does not demand that we undo the past or overlook the present, but that we subsume our understanding so as to adopt the same horizon as the text/author that we wish to interpret.

28. Attempts have been made along these lines in Thiselton, *Two Horizons*; Thiselton, *New Horizons*; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*; Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*; among other works. See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, ch. 10. Cf. Klemke, *Contemporary Analytic and Linguistic Philosophies*.

Single Horizon Hermeneutics and Interpretation

The final issue to address is what exactly a single horizon hermeneutics might look like in practice, and especially in relation to interpretation of the biblical text. As noted above, adopting a single horizon hermeneutics does not mean that one obviates the history of interpretation, denies how texts have been received over time (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), pretends to be an ancient interpreter though living in the present, and flagrantly disregards modern interpretive methods and techniques as if they were never developed and never utilized. To the contrary, all of these elements are still pertinent to—though not definitive of—a single horizon hermeneutics, and can in fact be utilized by a single horizon interpreter to aid in the task of interpretation. The condition of the single horizon hermeneutics is that one does not degrade the status or position of the single horizon of the author/text or exalt the stance and insight of the modern interpreter. Instead, the horizon of the original text is given interpretive precedence as establishing the singular horizon of interpretation, and thereby delimiting the legitimate boundaries of interpretation, defining the questions to be posed to the text, circumscribing the limits of methods to be invoked in interpretation, and establishing the parameters of legitimate interpretation. There is no fusion of horizons that attempts to discover, much less create, an unattainable common ground of interpretation, because such a common ground can never do justice to the perspective of either the author/text or the interpreter. There is also no fusion of horizons that of necessity subordinates the ancient, as inherently limited and parochial, to the more expansive understanding of the present. Single horizon hermeneutics recognizes that other “horizons”—whether invoked, posited, or created—are incapable of doing justice to the horizon of the original text. Only when the single horizon of the original author/text provides the interpretive parameters is interpretation that is faithful to the meaning

of the original ancient text and responsible to its present significance possible.²⁹

As a result of adopting a single horizon hermeneutics, there is a significant and meaningful place for many if not all legitimate interpretive methods. Rather than simply reverting to the theological beliefs of the church of the fourth century, or entoning a particular creed, or invoking a nebulous interpretive construct called church tradition, a single horizon hermeneutics demands focus upon the ancient text itself, with all of its interpretive challenges firmly in place, not smoothed away or otherwise mitigated by later ecclesial or theological refinement.

Church history in such a model becomes a set of examples of the history of interpretation of the biblical text, from its earliest interpreters (for example, the New Testament writers interpreting the Old Testament) to the present. Such significant interpretive moments as the development of the many early creeds are examined for their importance, not least as indicators of matters of interpretive disagreement and proposals of tentative resolution, but not as final or determinative interpretations of the Bible—especially in their paraphrastic and interpretive language that invokes non-biblical formulations. Other important interpretive moments—though ones not always recognized for their ecclesial effect—are ecclesial institutionalization and the interpretive result of transforming the Christian church from a divinely instigated and functionally arranged organism into a humanly structured and politically appointed institution. Further moments of importance are the rise of the medieval church, with its scholasticism, as well as various internal and external theological conflicts that resulted in various schisms, whether broad or narrow, external or internal. These schismatic tendencies, to which the church as a human institution has always been susceptible, again help to define issues of conflict and potential divergent understanding and even misunderstanding. I believe that these trends

29. A somewhat similar approach is found in Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism”; Lewis, *English Literature*, 32; and Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*. See also Jackson, *Historical Criticism*, and his definition and utilization of it.

have been exacerbated within the context of institutionalized religion, which has overlayed simpler church organization with manifold ecclesial structures. The history of interpretation would not be complete without the work of the Reformations and the counter-Reformation. The Reformation itself is a multi-faceted interpretive complex, in which various theological priorities resulted from varied contemporaneous historical, political, and religious contexts. These Reformations called forth a counter-Reformation that has its own interpretive hallmarks, and which came to a hermeneutical crisis in the Second Vatican Council. In the meantime, the so-called Protestant church, which soon became less oriented to protest and more geared toward maintenance and establishment, encouraged Enlightenment thought and biblical interpretation that attempted to mediate the biblical world through its interpretive grid, straining out assumptions and results that appeared to run contrary to understanding of the modern world, even a modern world that itself was scientifically uncertain and still given to categorical fickleness. Globalization has, as a result, strained modernist biblical interpretation, because it has forced sedentary and self-secure Western interpreters to acknowledge their interpretive hegemony, while also compelling them to confront the fact that the majority world may not share its limited modernist, scientific horizon.

Theology itself is in many ways a more idealized reflection of the historical conflicts that the church and society have undergone in the last two thousand years. There remain attempts to make systematic or dogmatic theology an entity in itself, as if theology were an a-contextual endeavor. This is still to be seen in various nominal theological positions that assert—as if the assertion were the same as revelation—the inherent rightness of one theological system over another, failing to note that each such system is conditioned by its inciting environment and the reflective thought that emerged from it—however closely tied to the Bible it may purport to be. However, much recent theology has accepted that systematic or dogmatic theology (it is not necessary to parse the difference in this article) is a final product of reflective, contextual thought, and not an instigating force in

interpretation.³⁰ The problem is not with theology being systematic or even dogmatic (if dogmatism is understood in its best possible light), but with how the systems and dogmas are formulated and the grounds on which they are laid. Theology is a third order synthetic interpretive endeavor, drawing upon the first order conclusions of biblical interpretation, and the second order partial-synthetic results of biblical theology (including that of the New Testament and Old Testaments, or as a whole). There is an unfortunate tendency to invoke a multi-horizoned hermeneutic that includes systematic theology, in which the system has equal status with the biblical evidence and the biblical theological organization. This often results in a top-down inversion of necessary interpretive procedure. In a single horizon hermeneutics, the biblical evidence is the foundation that supports the partial-synthesis of biblical theology, which is then able to be systematized into the kinds of categories—whether they are dogmatically or philosophically formulated—of systematic theology.

Biblical interpretation involves the most important, and understandably most precarious, place within a single horizon hermeneutics. Much of the complaint against modern interpretive and exegetical procedure has revolved around how modern horizons of interpretation have led to devaluing the meaning and even foundational significance of the biblical text within the life of the modern church. There is no doubt much truth in this accusation. Some of the blame must be laid on interpretive methods that are, perhaps not necessarily in and of themselves (although some might be), biased toward embracing a minimalist interpretive agenda. These methods, which by orientation are dismissive of evidence, can then be constrained by interpreters to produce minimalist and even highly skeptical and anti-foundational conclusions. There are other interpretive methods, however, that are not inherently biased in such a way, but that are, while not theory neutral in their formulation, more maximalist in orientation and provide results that support the position and place of the biblical text. There is no doubt that there is

30. See, for example, Hodgson and King, *Christian Theology*; and Bloesch, *Theology of Word and Spirit*.

within the hermeneutical panoply of modern interpretation a mix of methods and interpretive attitudes that can result in a variety of interpretive results, ranging from destructive and minimalist readings to uncritical and maximalist reinscriptions. The fundamental problem, however, does not seem to be with the methods or even the interpreters, but with the hermeneutical framework itself. All of these interpretive approaches attempt to function within the two horizons hermeneutics, in which there is an attempt—by means of method and interpretive inclination—to bridge the two hermeneutical horizons by means of modern interpretive approaches. The result is bound to constrict and even distort the biblical text, because, even if the modern interpreter does not wish to subsume the biblical horizon to the modern one, the two horizon approach itself is based upon a fusion and hence a compromise of horizons.

Instead, when a single horizon hermeneutics is adopted, certain assumptions of the horizon itself are put in place. These are closely bound to the worldview of the original author, the social history and configuration of the peoples involved, the socio-linguistic contexts of the participants, the political, economic, and anthropological/sociological orientations of the active entities, and the religious beliefs and orientations of all concerned. The resulting interpretive configuration allows and even insists upon any and all available interpretive and exegetical tools to be marshaled to examine the texts within their original horizon, so long as they can function within the operative horizon of the biblical authors. Methods that do not conform to these ancient interpretive parameters, and that therefore attempt to draw the biblical text into a world foreign to itself, while they may have merit in helping us to understand the modern interpreter, can only create misleading and even possibly false interpretive conclusions of the original text. In other words, they provide answers for questions that have not been asked and in some cases cannot or possibly even should not be asked of the biblical text—if by that one is interested in understanding the text as it was called forth by the ancients, rather than as an exploration in modern interpretive legerdemain.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to offer a brief exploration of the notion of a single horizon hermeneutics. This has been a study in hermeneutics, addressing the shortcomings of the reigning hermeneutical paradigm, and proposing that another paradigm has better hermeneutical claims and interpretive possibilities. I have not addressed the questions of actual interpretation of texts. In some ways, I do not believe that I must do this, because the interpretive paradigms themselves are largely determinative for their interpretive conclusions. If one invokes the two horizon hermeneutics one may well arrive at a conclusion that is compatible with a modern understanding of the world, but in its attempt to be reflective of that world it must inevitably compromise its view of the ancient world. If my assumption is correct that interpretation of the Bible (whatever else some may think it is about) is at the very least about discerning the meaning of the ancient author/text, then a single horizon hermeneutics—while not necessarily answering all interpretive questions—provides a more reasonable, more responsible, and ultimately more satisfactory reading than other proposed methods. By this I mean it will have a better chance of actually reflecting the meaning of the author/text within its ancient context.

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