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A TRINITARIAN BASIS FOR REFORMING OUR APPROACH TO
MEANING IN GREEK EXEGESIS, ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN 17:3

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Exegesis is often understood as the process of drawing out the meaning of a text. I would like to propose a way in which, by altering the framework for our interpretation, we may be able to improve our understanding of textual meaning and of the process of exposing and explaining it. Thereby we may perhaps come to do it better—to reform.

Questions about Meaning and Communication

For this purpose, it is convenient to use an example, John 17:3:

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and
Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν
καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.

Let us begin by asking some questions that have to do more with our framework than with the details of the specific Greek wording. What is the meaning of this verse? And what are the meanings of the words and clauses within it? Do we know with perfect clarity what meaning is? Do we know what personal verbal communication is? Do we know what we are after? We might paraphrase the verse and re-express much of its meaning in our own words. By so doing, we show that we understand something about meaning. That is, we understand to some extent. But there are difficulties; there are complexities and subtleties. Might it be that our work may be influenced by our previous understanding of meaning, of communication, and of humanity itself? If we use resources from lexicons, grammars,

and higher-order theories like structural linguistics, do they influence us by the way in which the resources are crafted?

Linguistic Theory

The twentieth century has seen exciting developments in structural linguistics, traceable back to Ferdinand de Saussure and Leonard Bloomfield, among many others. Overlapping and competing theories have arisen, and sometimes have subsequently fallen from favor. Such theories may aid Greek exegesis. But if the theories are selective in their approach, or if they presuppose a flawed framework, they may also generate difficulties. Similar concerns could be raised with respect to earlier interpreters who used philology. Philological interpretation through the early twentieth century usually did not operate by the explicit guidance of a grand theory. But the practitioners lived in an atmosphere where philosophical views of meaning, whether Platonist or Aristotelian or Kantian, could still have influence. Assumptions that excluded miracles from historical investigation could have influence. The exegetes did not automatically escape problems merely by the absence of an explicit grand theory.

Among the theories in structural linguistics, I would draw our attention to one particular theory, tagmemic theory, which had a notable day in the sun in the last half of the twentieth century.¹ It was crafted within the larger sphere of the work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators. The principal architect was Kenneth L. Pike, aided by his wife Evelyn G. Pike, his sister Eunice Pike, and quite a few other members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, including most preeminently Robert E. Longacre.

Tagmemic theory never achieved prominence as a dominant theoretical player in the halls of academic power. There were perhaps various reasons for its humble performance. One, at least, is that in the late twentieth century, particularly in the United States, many academic linguists wanted linguistics to be scientific. And that meant mathematic-like rigor, scientific

1. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts; Language; Waterhouse, History*.

objectivity, clarity in terminology, and clean functioning models. Pike's version of tagmemic theory had none of these. Yes, it had discipline in method and it had technical terms for classification. But it did not have quite the *kinds* of method and classification that American academic linguistics mostly pursued. Instead, it had two other features: (1) it enabled people to notice fine-grained aspects of language that typically had no visibility in the major American theories; and (2) it kept human persons central. It refused to place the language observer outside the theory in order to make it objective and scientific. In the course of its development, it also acquired something else: a discovery of the reflections of the trinitarian foundation for language spread throughout language and human communication.²

Trinitarian Communication

Can we really think that the Trinity is the foundation of language? Let us begin with some more principial observations. John 17:5–8 implies that the central communication from Jesus has a trinitarian structure. The passage speaks of “your name” and “your word” in v. 6, and then speaks of “the words that you gave me” in v. 8. In v. 8, those words get passed on to “them,” that is, the disciples. Clearly the message that the disciples receive is a message originating from the Father and passing through the Son. If someone objects that John 17:5–8 confines its observations to the human nature of Jesus, we may respond by observing that a human nature does not communicate apart from the person who has the nature. Moreover, v. 5 speaks of “the glory that I had with you before the world existed,” which cannot be interpreted as a statement focusing on the human nature of Christ.

John 17 does not directly mention the Holy Spirit. But John 17 is set against the background of John 14–16. John 14–16 makes it evident that the work of the Holy Spirit includes teaching and guiding the disciples concerning the meaning of the

2. Pike, “Language and Life,” 36–43. For further reflections along the same lines, see Poythress, *In the Beginning*.

person and work of Christ (e.g., 14:26; 16:13–15). When we take John 14–16 into account, we see that all three persons of the Trinity are directly involved in divine communication to the disciples. And the first disciples, though they are special, are also analogically related to us who are later disciples (17:20).

Now, according to v. 8, the words that the disciples receive are first words that the Father gave to the Son. So there appears to be verbal communication between persons of the Trinity (so also 16:13). Since the Trinity is the absolute God, there is no foundation for the Trinity in words or ideas that pre-existed the Trinity or that exist as another eternal reality outside the Trinity. Therefore, these words themselves have their structure and meaning wholly derivative from the Trinity.

Since the words that the disciples receive reflect the words already given by the Father to the Son, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the words that they and we receive reflect a trinitarian structure. But how might that work?

Contrast, Variation, and Distribution

Kenneth Pike found out one way in which it might work when he formulated his first triad for linguistic analysis, the triad of contrast, variation, and distribution.³ He discovered this triad when he was striving to formulate a nonreductionistic account of phonemes. He then noticed that the same triad applied to other linguistic units like words. The first member of the triad, namely “contrast,” might be more fully described as “contrastive-identificational features,” that is, characteristics that serve both to identify a unit positively and to contrast it with other, distinct units.

We may illustrate by considering the word for “life,” ζωή, in John 17:3. If a person wants to know its meaning, he can look it up in the standard Greek lexicon, Bauer’s lexicon. In the lexical entry for ζωή, the student finds two major sections, “1. life in a

3. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 39–65; Waterhouse, *History*, 12. Pike first developed the triad in about 1948, building on his work on phonemics, published in 1947 (*Phonemics*); Kaye, “Interview.”

physical sense, *life*,” and “2. transcendent life, *life*.”⁴ Each of these sections is further divided into subsections. The contrastive-identificational features are expressed in commonalities that hold the entire entry together and indirectly indicate what distinguishes (“contrast”) the word ζωή from other words in Greek. The Greek word ζωή is a distinct word with a distinct spelling and a distinct identity. The unity in meaning is effectively expressed in the English word *life*, which characterizes the meaning of the Greek word positively and also indirectly contrasts it with other words—death, sickness, health, dog, man, and so on.

Next, the *variation* in the word ζωή is its range of use. Variation is expressed preeminently in the multiple subsections. The same word can be used with reference to physical life or “transcendent life.”

Third, the *distribution* of the word is its pattern of occurrence in larger contexts. Distribution is expressed preeminently in the details of the subsections, where samples are given concerning how the word occurs in surrounding phrases, clauses, sentences, and whole books of the NT.

So the terms *contrast*, *variation*, and *distribution* correspond to operations in the lexical entry that help us in understanding meaning. At one level Pike may appear to be giving general linguistic names to familiar realities that have always functioned in major lexicons. But there is more to it. Pike’s theory maintained that the triad of contrast, variation, and distribution had three aspects that interlocked rather than being strictly separable. He maintained that it was in reality impossible to have one without the other two simultaneously and inextricably.⁵ This interlocking

4. BDAG. The second edition of BAGD, under the entry ζωή, has two main sections, labeled slightly differently: “1. of life in the physical sense,” and “2. of the supernatural life belonging to God and Christ, which the believers will receive in the future, but which they also enjoy here and now.” We could illustrate the general pattern with other words and other lexicons.

5. Pike, *Language*, 84–91. In this book, the terminology is somewhat different. Contrastive-identificational features are in focus with the “feature mode”; variation is in focus with the “manifestation mode”; and distribution is in focus with the “distribution mode.”

functioned in more than one way. First, any contrastive feature, if minutely analyzed, had within itself contrast, variation, and distribution, as manifested in the words or phrases used to describe the contrastive feature. Similarly, any variation had contrast, variation, and distribution describing it. And likewise with distribution.

Second, each contrastive view of a word actually presupposes, within its viewpoint or focus, the presence of variation and distribution. A contrastive view presupposes an *instance* or instances that it uses to formulate contrast. Each instance represents a variant manifestation of the word. With the word ζωή, an instance occurs at the head of the lexical entry on ζωή. Without some instance, we don't know what we are talking about. If there are no instances, there is nothing to identify. In addition, each contrastive view of a word sets the word within some larger context. The word is thus *distributed* in that context, even if the context is the second-order, artificial context of a linguistic discussion of the nature of words and the nature of dictionaries. Likewise, variation presupposes the presence of contrast (something that can vary, and yet still be recognized as fundamentally "the same"). And variation presupposes distribution. There is always a larger verbal or nonverbal context in which the variation functions to facilitate communication.

The three elements, contrast, variation, and distribution, are like complementary perspectives on a word. These perspectives *indwell* each other. They are all present together. I cannot take the time at this point to justify the claim that this mutual indwelling reflects the mutual indwelling or coinherence of the persons of the Trinity.⁶ But one can see a hint in John 17:8. The words from the Father are the same as the words given by the Son, if we focus on contrast. The two occurrences of the words, namely as coming from the Father and as coming from the Son to the disciples, are distinct instances or variations if we focus on variation. Finally, the entire communication takes place in the context or distribution formed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

6. Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 154–58.

The usual organization of a lexical entry can easily produce the illusion that the three aspects are isolatable, because the organizational structure of the lexicon deliberately undertakes to highlight each of the aspects at different locations within the overall entry. But I believe that closer analysis discloses that this organizational structure is a simplification at best, and an illusion if taken to represent with complete adequacy the nature of words and the nature of their meaning. There is pressure towards isolation of the three aspects for the sake of rigor and “scientific objectivity.” But true knowledge involves understanding reality rather than subtly falsifying it. Both rigor and objectivity are illusions, if they are understood as capturing reality rather than simplifying it.

Analogy

We can see one dimension of the difficulty if we pay attention to the two main sections of the lexical entry on ζωή. The sections distinguish “physical life” from “transcendent life.” We can understand the distinction. And it may be helpful to recognize that the word ζωή has this kind of flexibility. But the organization of the lexicon can tempt us into thinking that the two meanings are isolated from each other, almost like two meanings of “trunk,” for the trunk of a car and the trunk of a tree. But in the case of the word ζωή, the two sides are not isolated. They are involved in each other.

How did living plants and animals originally come to be? They were created by the living God, who has a Son, the Word, who is life: “In him [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). John 1:4 is of course warming up for places later in the Gospel where Jesus is the life (John 14:6), who offers eternal life to those who eat his flesh. But John 1:4 has not yet arrived at that goal. The preceding verse, v. 3, speaks of the activity of the eternal Word in creation: “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” The origin of physical life is in transcendent life, namely the divine life of the eternal Word. And the physical life reflects and displays its origin: “his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived,

ever since the creation of the world, in the *things* that have been made” (Rom 1:20). John will go on to show that the divine life in the eternal Word, having come in the flesh, grants eternal life to those who feed on his flesh (John 6:54). The people who participate in Christ have a form of transcendent life in the very midst of continuing physical life in this world. The meaning of the Gospel of John depends on our holding together these three aspects of life, the physical aspect, the divine origin, and the promise of eternal life. They are not three separate meanings of the word, with only one meaning occurring per context, with no resonances between distinct occurrences.

And indeed, what do we even mean by “transcendent” life? The life of each animal is the work of the Spirit (Ps 104:130). Animal life is not on the same level as human life, but it too transcends our understanding—because it manifests the life of the Spirit himself, reflected in the creature.

I suggest, then, that the triadic framework of contrast, variation, and distribution allows affirmation of unity of meaning and simultaneously variation that encompasses analogical relations between different occurrences. Variation in the form of remaining vagueness exists even within a single occurrence that has connections in more than one direction through analogy.

A Grammatical Feature

A similar analysis can be conducted concerning grammatical features, such as the genitive case or the imperfect tense. These grammatical features have contrast, variation, and distribution, and their meaning or function in communication has contrast, variation, and distribution. These three aspects coinhere, and the coinherence cannot be transparently represented in a clean diagram or a clean organizational structure in a Greek grammar.

Larger Units of Text

The same kinds of observation apply to the understanding of larger pieces of text. Pike’s CVD triad applies to phrases, clauses, and sentences as well as words. What is the meaning of the whole sentence in John 17:3? It has contrast, variation, and distribution. It says something specific and stable, which we

sense when we focus on contrast (and therefore also on identificational features). It has variation, which implies that it does not have an infinitely sharp meaning or infinitely sharp boundaries to meaning. It has distribution, which implies that it fits into the context of the immediately neighboring verses and then the larger context of John 17 and John 13–17 and the whole Gospel of John. It does not have its function in isolation from these contexts.

As usual, the three elements in the CVD triad interlock. If so, the idea of a perfectly isolated meaning for 17:3 as a single sentence is an illusion. An exegetical process that proposes as its goal the isolation and reformulation of precisely this sentence meaning has a goal that does not correspond to reality.

Particle, Wave, and Field Views

In 1959 Pike discovered another triad, the triad of particle, wave, and field views, applicable to language and to human behavior in general.⁷ These three views may be renamed the static, dynamic, and relational perspectives. The observer may focus on stable pieces, like the word ζωή. This approach exemplifies the static perspective. Or an observer can focus on the dynamic development, as the writer and the reader move through a literary piece from beginning to end, and in the process the reader moves also in growing understanding. This focus on movement represents a dynamic perspective. Finally, an observer may focus on relations. How does the contribution of the word ζωή relate to the immediately surrounding words? And how does the contribution of the whole sentence relate to the theme of life, the theme of eternal life, and the theme of resurrection (John 11; 20:31) in the whole Gospel of John, and indeed in the whole canon of Scripture?

Once again, Pike thought that these three perspectives interlocked. Each perspective involved simultaneous presence of the two perspectives that might temporarily not be in focus. The triad of perspectives manifests the indwelling of the elements,

7. Pike, "Language as Particle," 37–54; Waterhouse, *History*, 90. The triad is further explained in Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 19–38.

each in the other. That is, it manifests coinherence. This coinherence reflects the original coinherence of the persons of the Trinity. Therefore, interpretation cannot legitimately isolate a word or a sentence and provide a full account by trying to answer the question, “What is the meaning of this word or sentence?” The answer cannot be full if it does not acknowledge the indwelling of the dynamic and relational perspective, each of which draws us out into the whole literary piece, and to the larger context of human and divine communication in history.

Other Triads

For the sake of brevity, we pass over a third and a fourth coinherent triad. The third triad consists in units, hierarchy, and context. The fourth coinherent triad consists in phonology, grammar, and semantics (including reference).⁸

The Indispensability of Persons

Finally, Pike’s theory refused to dispense with persons. The language in John 17:3 expresses personal communion between the Father and the Son, because the Son is addressing the Father, and we as readers of the Gospel are invited to focus on that intratrinitarian communication. The life offered to believers reflects the internal life of the persons of the Trinity, which is infinite. Consider also what the verse says about the nature of life. It is “eternal life.” We could pause if we wished to reflect on the significance of this phrase, which enjoys resonances with the major theme of eternal life in the Gospel of John as a whole. But let us rather focus on 17:3. This verse says that eternal life is life found in personal knowledge: “that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Since this verse involves communication from the Son to the Father, it involves the understanding by the Father and by the Son of true knowledge. The Son has knowledge of the Father eternally and completely (Matt 11:27). That knowledge is evoked by the wording of the communication from the Son to the Father in John 17:3,

8. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 39–136, and 67–106; Poythress, “Framework,” 277–98; “Hierarchy,” 107–37; *In the Beginning*, chapter 32.

when it speaks of knowing the only true God. The Son knows that about which he speaks, because he knows the Father. The Son's words also pass to us. They include in their focus the subordinate knowledge that believers may have of the Father and of the Son.

By offering such wording, the Gospel of John is continuing the process described in v. 8 and in v. 20, in which we as readers are invited to know the true God through Jesus Christ. The crafting of the passage involves attention to its impact.

And what is that impact (related to the dynamics of meaning)? Paul on the Damascus road saw the glory of Christ, the glory of the appearing of God, and heard the voice of God from heaven: "I am Jesus . . ." (Acts 9:5). Paul was temporarily blinded by the glory, but also transformed.

By analogy, John 17:3 offers to us an entryway into an understanding of the glory of Christ: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:5). The communication in John 17:3 has within it the capability of blinding us with its surpassing glory, and also transforming us.

Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), the major reformer in Basel, Switzerland, understood this implication of reading the word of God. In his commentary on Isaiah (1525, based on lectures in 1523) he comes to Isaiah 6, where Isaiah sees the glory of God.

Observe here, whoever acts as a preacher, [the nature of] your office. For the task is, that with Isaiah you may first be a disciple rather than a teacher, and may be among those who have seen God . . . the task is, that in you may be prostrated Saul, and may rise up Paul; that you may no longer seek the things which are of the flesh, the things which belong to pharisaical righteousness, the things which are yours, but those of Jesus Christ, and those of others [who are] in Jesus . . . And when you know God and see how great is his majesty, beyond profound and inscrutable judgment, and how great is his goodness, then, if the vision be to that [such a calling], teach, lest you be among those who run but are not sent, and instead of the word of God you offer the trash of your dreams.

In the Scriptures, however, if you search them, you will see God.⁹

Oecolampadius speaks of seeing God and communion with God not through a mystical route that abandons language, but through Scripture. We might well ask ourselves if anyone could write this way unless he himself had come to see God in the interpretation of Scripture. If Oecolampadius saw God, there is a way by which we may too.

The ultimate exegesis is to see God in Scripture. And no allegedly scientific method leads there. I suggest, then, that we may seek how to reform our view of exegesis. Exegesis consists in the whole person listening to God speak in the whole of Scripture.

Solving the Difficulty with a Distinction

One possible response to my proposal might be to make a distinction. We could distinguish between *intellectual understanding* and *spiritual understanding*.¹⁰ Intellectual understanding is an understanding such as even an unbeliever might have, an understanding enabling him to translate the Greek into English or to paraphrase the meaning of the English. Spiritual understanding has something in addition, namely a spiritual taste and love for the truth, leading to communion with God. According to this view, exegesis properly speaking would consist in working through intellectual understanding as the first stage. Then, as a second stage, we would seek spiritual understanding, based on the earlier intellectual understanding. Oecolampadius and I would be understood as seeking to encourage a second stage, in addition to intellectual understanding.

If we want more modern terminology, we might speak of *meaning* and *significance*.¹¹ Or, in the context of the use of the Bible, we might use the terms *meaning* and *application*.

9. Oecolampadius, *Iesaiam*, 56v–57r.

10. Dr. Jeff Waddington supplied me with this terminology, which he traced to Jonathan Edwards.

11. I am thinking of the distinction between meaning and significance introduced by Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*. It is a distinction to which some evangelicals have been favorable.

Meaning is represented by an English translation or a faithful paraphrase. Application encompasses a spiritual dimension in which meaning is appropriated into our lives. Robust application would take place on top of, and subsequent to, the initial absorption of meaning. Let us call this approach, in which we make a sharp distinction between intellectual and spiritual understanding, or between meaning and application, the *dichotomous approach* to meaning.

I have sympathy with this approach, because it surely is the case that we can contemplate someone being able to work with the basics of Greek grammar and vocabulary and to do a reasonable translation of a Greek sentence, especially the simple Greek of John 17:3.

Nevertheless, I am not satisfied with the dichotomous approach as a whole. In fact, taken as a whole, it is diametrically opposed to my proposal. We need to ask some questions. Is the distinction between intellectual understanding and spiritual understanding valid? What warrants it? Does that distinction really express a reality about communication, or is it an imposition that in fact suppresses aspects of communication?

It does recognize the ability to translate without applying. But is the difference between the two a matter of two discrete forms, or instead is it a difference between two or three coinherent perspectives? The focus on “meaning” corresponds to John Frame’s normative perspective; the focus on spiritual communion corresponds to Frame’s existential perspective; and a focus on renewed living corresponds to Frame’s situational perspective.¹² The three perspectives are three coinherent perspectives on the same whole—namely the human actor.

Difficulty with Meaning

I maintain that the dichotomous approach is an imposition. First, we can observe that Google translate or a similar software program could accomplish translation. And the program could have done it without understanding anything at all. What the dichotomous approach calls “intellectual understanding” need not be

12. Frame, “Primer”; Frame, *Christian Life*, 131–382.

“understanding” at all, in any real sense. It may be merely a mechanical, “algorithmic” product, produced by a software program. Or, if a person is involved, it may easily be a matter of *misunderstanding*.

If we define meaning as identical to or even closely related to authorial intention, we can see that misunderstanding is involved if there is not also response. The human author in John 20:31 writes that the purpose of the whole Gospel is centrally that “you may believe . . .” and that “you may have life in his name.” The reader who understands this authorial purpose sees that John 17:3 is intended by the author to lead by means of the intrinsic force of its testimony to belief and eternal life. A reader who resists has violated rather than grasped the author’s intention. And the same goes even more strongly with respect to the intention of the divine author.

The reply might be that a reader could see that the text is intended to lead to belief, but still not be convinced. Yes, but if he is not convinced, he has still not seen the intrinsic power of the claims being made. He has not genuinely understood authorial intention. Because the intention intrinsically includes the intent to generate response, the application cannot in fact be cleanly separated from the meaning.

But things are worse. Does the resistant reader really understand the meaning of “life” in the verse, in distinction from the meaning of ζωή in the dictionary? According to Pike’s theory, we must do justice to variation and to distribution, not merely to contrastive aspects of meaning that surface in a dictionary. The life in 17:3 is eternal life through Christ. The unbeliever does not know the meaning that the word evokes *in this particular occurrence*. Neither does he know the meaning of “know” or “God” or “Jesus Christ” or “sent” in the way that he could and in the way that a believer comes gradually to know. He does not yet understand these things, because all the key words are colored by the context. In this context, the words describe aspects of the reality of communion with God, which the unbeliever does not know. So where, now, is the so-called “intellectual understanding” of the unbeliever? It appears to me to be an instance of *misunderstanding*. He misunderstands the words, and he

misunderstands the joint impact when they are taken together in one sentence.

Two Stages?

My difficulty, then, with the two-stage theory of attaining spiritual understanding is this: the theory represents a false disengagement of the process of interpretation into two discrete spheres. The first stage is already ruinous because the student is encouraged to think that he can disengage spiritual issues from his use of Greek (in other words, there is no coinherence between the two). Having disengaged the spiritual issues, and no longer attending to the presence of the God of Israel, he does his exegesis and completes his translation. This two-stage picture falsifies human nature, which is a whole. It falsifies divine nature, which is unified in the communion put forward through the text. And finally, it falsifies the nature of language and communication, which coinherently unite meaning and personal communion. Are we likely to be helped to arrive safely at a second stage when at the first stage we falsify the nature of the challenge?

The issue can be put dramatically, if hyperbolically. The two-stage theorist is like someone who advises the student of Greek first to attain the pharisaical righteousness of unbelief in his understanding of the verse. "God, I thank you that I am not like other interpreters, hermeneutical extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I use my Greek every day, and I use the advanced lexicons and grammars with skill." Later on, he is supposed to graduate to a second level, at which point he will cry out for mercy.

Or it is like Jeremiah and the false prophets. The two-stage theorist is like someone who would advise the false prophets to engage the issue of the fate of Jerusalem first by using "their own minds" (Jer 23:16). As a second stage, they are told to be caught up into the divine council and hear the word of God (Jer 23:18, 22). But it is already too late. They have already become false prophets. The only remedy is to start with the divine council, to which one is admitted only by the grace of Christ. One

repudiates false prophecy—which I am using as an illustration for spiritual disengagement—at the beginning.

Conclusion

I suggest, therefore, that the two alleged stages are not two discrete stages, but at most two distinct foci or distinct emphases within a total process of interpretation. From beginning to end this process all along has to do with hearing the Triune God speak the glory of Christ through Scripture. Hearing God involves hearing the voice of God, that is, the speech of God, and that speech is irreducibly trinitarian in structure: (1) as a whole, as the speech of one God in three persons; (2) in its manner of communication by the Father in the Son through the Spirit, in that it is personal communication to us who are to receive it through the indwelling Spirit who transforms us into the image of the Son (Rom 8:29); and (3) in its morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences, which reflect the mystery of the Trinity in the coinherence of aspects.

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