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NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS OF HEBREWS AND THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

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Several years ago at a Society of Biblical Literature meeting in the United States, I arose one morning before sunrise to get an early start on the day. Since my colleagues were still sleeping, I dressed without turning on the lights, took my watch and glasses from the table, and turned to leave the room. Suddenly, the room took on a strange appearance, the furniture, pictures on the wall, and my colleagues shifting slightly out of focus. The effect was disorienting, but I attributed the phenomenon to the surreal aspect of the room, lit dimly as it was by artificial light filtering through the thick curtains on the window. I grabbed my attaché, made my way to the door, and, thankfully, entered a well-lit hallway leading to the elevators. I had taken only a few steps when the disorientation hit me again. As I approached the elevators I was contemplating the maladies which might be behind my blurred vision. Then I saw the problem in the mirrored image of the elevator door. Looking at the reflection, I realized I had picked up the wrong pair of glasses on the table. My roommate's pair was the same shape as mine, slightly different in color, but of course differing greatly in prescription. Having on the wrong glasses had a powerful, image-skewing effect.

Basic to the enterprise of exegesis is the dictum, 'There exists no presuppositionless exegesis' (Conzelmann and Lindemann 1985: 2). We all come with a set of 'glasses' which affect what we see in the text, and viewing the text through these lenses can be both distorting and disorienting. These glasses are made of our own histories of thinking (or lack of thinking) about the text, our traditions, be they critical or ecclesiastical, our communities, and our experiences—and should be acknowledged as one takes up the task of interpreting any passage. These presuppositions may or may not be valid, but they must be identified. Moreover, an understanding of this condition can infuse the process with both vigor and integrity, and raises the possibility that the exegete's presuppositions may be informed and modified in the process of study. Reminder of this need serves not

only the initiate, but also those practiced in the art of New Testament criticism. Although rigor in employing the historical-critical method can help guard against eisegesis, its use does not assure objectivity.

Integral to the historical-critical method are questions of a book's structure, language, date, authorship, and provenance, and presuppositions held regarding these issues carry great weight in interpretation and, at points, set parameters for conclusions that may be drawn. Therefore, the need to examine freshly these matters from time to time, in light of recent thinking and research, seems all the more necessary. The current essay seeks to demonstrate how presuppositions regarding these introductory questions influence the exegesis of passages in five New Testament books: Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude. I first deal with the text-oriented dynamics of structure and language and then turn to background issues of date, authorship, and provenance.

STRUCTURE

One needs only to examine introductions to several commentaries on any New Testament book to see divergence of structural assessments offered for that book. Often one's understanding or misunderstanding of a book's structure influences exegesis of specific passages. Decisions made concerning the structure of a discourse should be based on sound exegesis, but decisions made concerning structure also influence further exegesis. Thus in discourse analysis there exists an interplay between decisions made at the micro- and macro-levels of the text (Guthrie 1994: 45-58).

Exegetical errors may arise from a lack of attention to structural dynamics in a book. For example, at Heb. 1:4 the author introduces the comparison of Christ with the angels, a theme that pervades the first two chapters of the work. Some commentators have interpreted the comparison with the angels in chapter one to indicate that the readers were adrift theologically, toying with the worship of angels (Manson 1962: 242) or, perhaps, a form of aberrant Christology in which Christ was considered subordinate to an angel (Yadin 1958). Commenting on the verse, P.E. Hughes states, 'It follows, then, that those to whom this letter was sent were entertaining, or being encouraged to entertain, teaching which elevated angels, or particular angels, to a position which rivaled that of Christ himself' (Hughes 1977: 51-52).

Although speculation concerning angels seemed to present a

problem in some New Testament communities, and was known in various Jewish and, later, gnostic circles (Ellingworth 1993: 103), William L. Lane rightly points out the misdirection of this exegesis, and does so on the basis of structural considerations (Lane 1991a: 17). First, the reference to angels in 1:4 provides a structural parallel to the reference to the prophets earlier in 1:1-2. Both the prophets and the angels served as agents of the older covenant revelation (1:1-2; 2:2). Secondly, comparison with the angels in 1:1-14 sets up the *a fortiori* argument of 2:1-4 (Hughes 1979: 7-9). The author strongly supports the superiority of the Son over the angels with the string of Old Testament texts in 1:5-14. Having established this relationship, he proceeds to argue that (a) those who rejected the revelation given through the angels were severely punished; since the Son is greater than the angels it follows that (b) those who reject the revelation given through the superior Son deserve even greater punishment than those disobedient to the older revelation through angels. In 2:1-4, the author casts the angels in a positive, though inferior, role (Lane 1991a: 17). This positive role is foundational to the rhetorical argument that the hearers need to take seriously the revelation delivered through the Son.

Thirdly, in Heb. 2:5-9 the author makes a transition to the next major unit (2:10-18), which deals with the Son's incarnation, an event that, for our author, fulfills the words of Ps. 8:5-7: ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχὺ τι παρ' ἀγγέλους (2:9). Is it likely that an author, wishing to counter a heresy by which Christ was deemed less than pre-eminent, would introduce a text stressing the positional subordination of the Son to the angels? No. In Hebrews 1-2, the angels play a very specific and important role in the development of the discourse. They are a reference point from which to magnify both the exaltation and incarnation of the Son. Therefore, it is both unnecessary and ill-advised to describe the author's use of angels as polemical. In this case an understanding of structural dynamics in the broader context corrects a misreading of Hebrews.

By their approaches to the structure of James, Peter Davids and Martin Dibelius offer a second example of the role structural assessments play in the exegetical enterprise. Specifically, their different approaches illustrate how a commentator's attitude concerning structure can influence the data that are chosen when dealing with a text. Davids follows those who understand James as organized around a double opening (1:2-27), a body (2:1-5:6), and a

closing (5:7-20). In the body, the redactor recapitulates the themes of testing, wisdom, and wealth introduced in the double opening, and the closing statement provides a final summary of these three major themes (Davids 1982: 22-29). Dibelius, on the other hand, posits the sayings and proverbs of James to be a stringing together of unrelated units that lack continuity in thought (Dibelius 1976: 2).

For Davids, an analysis of 5:7-20 can be carried through in light of insights mined earlier in James. Introducing this unit he comments, 'there is a real sense of unity with the rest of the book as themes are resumed and brought into dynamic relationship with one another' (Davids 1982: 181). Thus he comments on the theme of patience in 5:7-11 with reference to 1:2-4, 12. The topic of harmony he considers in light of 4:11-12, 3:1-18, and 1:19-21, and the author's common concern over the use of the tongue (e.g. 1:26; 3:1-17) is revisited in the 'rejection of oaths' of 5:12 (Davids 1982: 181-89). Dibelius, on the other hand, reads Jas 5:7-20, for the most part, in isolation from the rest of the work. Thus for Davids the dynamic of broader literary context plays a vital role, while for Dibelius, broader contextual concerns are practically nonexistent. Needless to say, these divergent approaches to the structure of James affect the way each commentator understands particular dynamics in Jas 5:7-20.

A third example of the relationship between structural assessment and exegesis may be found in the influence that a critical methodology wields on exegesis. In recent years, rhetorical criticism, the analysis of New Testament texts in light of ancient Greek literary and oratorical conventions, has been on the rise. The rationale for the methodology goes as follows. The New Testament literature developed in a Greek cultural context. Rhetoric stood in a highly systematized form at the educational center of that culture and was extensively documented in handbooks of the day. The writers of the New Testament would have been influenced by this approach to public address, even if they did not have the benefit of formal training. Therefore, the New Testament displays patterns of rhetorical argumentation as expounded in the Greco-Roman handbooks.

Although in practice rhetorical criticism examines the text at the micro-discourse level, seeking to identify features of style, it also involves whole-discourse analyses of New Testament documents. By labeling portions of these documents in terms of Greco-Roman rhetoric, the analysis reflects interpretative decisions concerning the role played by units in the discourse. In rhetorical criticism, the role of

each unit in turn affects how the critic analyzes specific constituents in that unit, and constituents are analyzed mostly in terms of their effect on the hearers. In the conclusion to his rhetorical analysis of Jude and 2 Peter, Duane F. Watson states

This study also shows that rhetorical criticism is an important tool for the interpretation of the New Testament. A specific pericope can be reasonably assigned to an element of arrangement, be placed in the inventional scheme, and be investigated for stylistic features. The ability of the interpreter to analyze the pericope is enhanced by the wealth of knowledge derived from the rhetoric of the whole (Watson 1988: 189).

In his analysis of the text, Watson assigns rhetorical labels to units in Jude and 2 Peter and consistently analyzes these texts in terms of what one would expect to find there based on descriptions given in the rhetorical handbooks. He outlines 2 Peter as having an epistolary prescript (or quasi-*exordium*), an *exordium* (1:3-15), a *probatio* (1:16-3:13), and a *peroratio* (3:14-18).

Watson identifies 2 Peter as deliberative rhetoric. He explains that this form of rhetoric need not have an *exordium* per se, but may have one based on the circumstance being addressed. Also, he informs the reader that a simple case, as with 2 Peter, requires only a short *exordium*. Against the rhetorical critic's expectation, 2 Peter has a lengthy *exordium*, a fact Watson attributes to the author's incorporation of the testament genre. Watson further suggests that the length of the *exordium* may be due to a lack of awareness or preparation on the part of the audience. It may be that they do not understand the dire straits in which the author sees them (Watson 1988: 88).

Watson notes further that the *exordium*, when judged in terms of the deliberative rhetoric of the day, seems wanting. The negative rebuttal of charges made against the faith by the heretics found in the *probatio* and *peroratio*, according to Watson, should be found in the *exordium* to prepare for what follows. This negative feature is lacking from the *exordium* and, therefore, 'the *exordium* produces only half the results that the case requires, and so is faulty' (Watson 1988: 94). Why the lack? Because the testament genre forces the *exordium* to be a positive presentation of the Christian faith.

Rhetorical critics quite literally interpret the New Testament text with the text itself in one hand and the rhetorical handbooks in the other, which proves productive in identifying stylistic features in the text. Certain rhetorical dynamics have prevailed across many

literatures of the ancient world. However, the exegete evaluating various methodologies to utilize in analysis of the New Testament needs to consider whether pegging the whole of 2 Peter and other New Testament books as species of Greco-Roman rhetoric, and using that identification as a starting point for exegesis, elucidates or skews interpretation. Such a methodological decision certainly affects the way one understands the structure of a book and, therefore, affects that book's interpretation.

LANGUAGE

As we turn to consider language as used by New Testament authors, we must consider dynamics in both the ancient and modern horizons. First, an understanding of an author's style of writing, that is, the crafting of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, is especially important for analysis of the New Testament text. The exegete may examine patterns of sentence structure, whether the author uses identifiable forms of argument, strategic use of vocabulary and idioms, and the possible presence of Semitisms or Septuagintalisms. Secondly, students of the text neglect to their peril recent advances in the study of language, most notably the redirection brought about by James Barr in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961). In this regard, certain exegetical fallacies must be avoided.

One author criticized harshly by Barr was T.F. Torrance, whose book *Royal Priesthood* offered Barr numerous examples of exegetical missteps. For example, Torrance argued against Platonic philosophy as an interpretative grid for Hebrews, and did so on the following bases. The Old Testament word for 'pattern', תַּבְנִיִּת, is translated by the LXX either by παράδειγμα or by εἶδος, and these terms, according to Torrance, are philosophically loaded to communicate the Platonic idea of eternal forms. Hebrews, on the other hand, corrects the Septuagintal importation of Platonism by using the term ὑπόδειγμα in place of these 'Platonic' terms (Torrance 1955: 20-21, 90-91).

Among Barr's criticisms of this line of linguistic reasoning are, first, that it cannot be shown that uses of παράδειγμα in the LXX are meant to refer to Platonic concepts, nor can it be inferred that the author of Hebrews rejects such concepts by not using the word. Torrance's arguments in this regard are based on dictionary treatments of the terms in question rather than a serious study of the texts. Secondly, in the LXX there occur examples of παράδειγμα translating תַּבְנִיִּת to communicate 'plan' or 'design' of a building, a

straightforward meaning found in broader Greek literature. Thirdly, Torrance's arguments present words as theologically loaded in and of themselves, separate from any context (Barr 1961: 152-56).

It is interesting to note that many commentators have addressed Hebrews' use of ὑπόδειγμα as *supporting* a Platonic interpretation of the book, an intention exactly opposite to that of Torrance. However, ὑπόδειγμα, as used in Heb. 8:5 and 9:23, is considered Platonic on false grounds (Hurst 1990: 13-17). Commentators draw parallels to Platonic thought on the false understanding of the term as meaning 'copy', roughly synonymous to Plato's use of μίμημα or εἰκὼν. Yet, there are no instances in known Greek literature where ὑπόδειγμα can be shown to have this meaning. In ancient literature, the word signifies an 'example', 'prototype', or perhaps 'outline'—that is, something to *be* copied, rather than the copy itself. In this case, a false understanding of a word's meaning again skews interpretation of a specific text and points to the danger of carrying an exegetical argument on the back of individual terms divorced from a thorough study of their uses in context.

Turning to the ancient horizon, an understanding of the general features of an author's style can aid in the process of exegesis. For example, features in James, such as careful attention to word order, the lack of anacolutha, the use of the gnomic aorist, and choice of words, point to a highly developed Koine literary style. In addition, the book is replete with qualities pointing to the orality of this text; for example, alliteration, rhyme, short sentence structure, and forms of direct address. James also contains an undercurrent of Semitic influence, perhaps most prominently derived from the language of the LXX (Martin 1988: lxx-lxxi; Davids 1982: 58-59). Therefore, the student attempting exegesis on James must be aware of these features and how they affect one's understanding of the text.

The phrase ἐν ταῖς πορείαις αὐτοῦ in Jas 1:11 may be regarded as a Semitism meaning 'pattern of life'. The statement here is proverbial, and is meant to present a generalized truth about the misjudgment committed by those who take pride in riches. When commentators such as Mayor relate the phrase to the specific life situation of traveling merchants mentioned in Jas 4:13-16, they show too little recognition of its proverbial style, and the interpretation is skewed (Davids 1982: 78).

A third way in which sensitivity to language affects exegesis is in the attempt to identify traditional material in New Testament books.

The process is somewhat circular, in that a critic identifies language in the book as indicating traditional material, then interprets aspects of the text in light of that identification. For example, the question of the Gospel tradition in 1 Peter has fostered a robust discussion. R.H. Gundry has catalogued numerous allusions to the teachings of Jesus in 1 Peter (Gundry 1966–67; 1974). Although many of Gundry's suggestions have come under fire (Best 1982: 52–53), he has furthered consideration of possible links between the book and traditional Gospel material. Thus, for example, the phrase 'have no fear of them' in 1 Pet. 3:14 may prompt reflection as both a quotation of Isa. 8:12 LXX and echoing Jesus' words (Michaels 1988: 186–87).

At points, a theory of traditional material, derived from the use of language in a text, can strongly influence the exegesis of particular words and phrases. F.L. Cross designates 1 Pet. 1:3–4:11 as part of a baptismal rite associated with Easter, the Paschal celebration (Cross 1954). Cross draws connections between Easter and Passover and finds significance in that 1 Peter uses the Greek word for suffering, *πάσχειν*, more than other pieces of New Testament literature. Thus Cross interprets the theme of joy running through the book as related to Easter. In 1:18–19, Jesus is interpreted as the new Passover lamb, and the exhortation of 1:13, 'gird up', for Cross harks back to Exod. 12:11 and the first Passover. Cross's exegesis of 1 Peter at these points provides a poignant example of a theory casting a strong influence over the exegesis of specific passages.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The questions of authorship and date of the Catholic Epistles are notoriously difficult, and provide rich examples of the impact that introductory questions have on exegesis. Through the years, certain positions on authorship and dating of these books have reached, in some circles, a level of 'orthodoxy', whether that orthodoxy be traditional or critical. Yet these issues are complex and demand an ongoing assessment of the data in light of critical discussion. Although swimming against the current of majority opinion, works such as J.A.T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament* (1976), which challenge commonly-held positions, should be considered carefully in light of the New Testament texts. One can rush too quickly to an assumption as to dating or authorship, which will have vast implications for the process of thinking about the New Testament literature (Ellis 1979–80).

Notice, for example, the assumptions underlying the following statement by Hans Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann concerning the dating of Hebrews:

The statement in 13:7, about the 'leaders' whose example is to be followed and who had proclaimed the word of God, further indicates *clearly* that the apostolic era already belongs to the past. Likewise, the difference between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians is *quite obviously* already history; the dispute with Jewish Christianity is merely theoretical (Conzelmann and Lindemann 1988: 265) (italics mine).

Yet, is the case really 'clear' and 'quite obvious'? First, the term *ἡγούμενοι* was used in the broader culture of state officials and had been used in the LXX of religious, political, and military leaders (e.g. Sir. 17:17; 33:19; 1 Macc. 9:30; 2 Macc. 14:16). In Acts 15:22, the word occurs adjectivally to designate Judas and Silas as *ἄνδρες ἡγούμενοι*, and Luke 22:26 speaks to the role of *ὁ ἡγούμενος* as servant among the disciples (Lane 1991b: 526; Ellingworth 1993: 702–703). The term, used in a Christian context for a Church office, finds expression in *1 Clement* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, documents related to the church at Rome and normally dated between 80 and 150 CE. However, there is no reason why *ἡγούμενοι* could not have been used to designate a Church office earlier, and if, as many suppose, Hebrews is associated with the Roman church, the usage may be due to geographical rather than temporal concerns. Even if one understands Heb. 13:7 to indicate that the leaders had died (Lane 1991b: 526), this does not necessitate a post-apostolic date, since church leaders certainly died prior to the end of the apostolic era.

Secondly, to suggest that the 'theoretical' nature of Hebrews somehow indicates that a time of dispute between Jewish and Gentile branches of the Church is past must be questioned. Whatever one's opinion on relations between Jews and Gentiles in primitive Christianity, this argument rests on the shaky foundation of silence. Supposedly, since the author did not raise practical concerns about strained relations between these groups, he must have known of no such concerns. Besides, Hebrews has no dispute (theoretical or otherwise) with Jewish Christianity, but rather shows the inferiority of the older covenant institutions.

The much-loved question concerning the authorship of Hebrews has prompted commentators to spill buckets of ink in pursuit of an unanswerable question. Spicq, along with many others, has argued strongly for Apollos, a suggestion that originated with Luther (Spicq

1952–53: I, pp. 209–19). However, in Spicq's case, the discussion interplays with his conviction that Hebrews has highly Philonic overtones. That Apollos was from Alexandria, therefore, is deemed quite significant. For Spicq, the identification of Apollos as author of the book becomes another piece of evidence supporting a Platonic interpretation of Hebrews.

Turning to 1 Peter, the discussion of authorship and date has implications for specific points of exegesis. For those such as F.W. Beare who take a late date and pseudonymous authorship of the epistle, 1:1 and 5:1 are part of the apparatus of pseudepigraphy. Beare interprets the author's description of himself with συμπρεσβύτερος (5:1) as mock modesty, which when coupled with the claim to 'unique experience and peculiar privilege would ill become Peter himself' (Beare 1947: 172). J.R. Michaels, while stressing the tentative nature of any position on authorship, is more comfortable speaking of the apostolic overtones established by 1:1 and echoed in 5:1–2. This is due to an openness to the possibility of Peter's influence on the letter, whether before or after his death (Michaels 1988: lxii–lxvii, 280). W. Grudem, who holds to the apostle Peter's authorship of the letter, goes a step further and interprets μάρτυς τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων of 5:1 as 'eyewitness' of the events surrounding the death of Christ (Grudem 1988: 186). The term, governed by the article before συμπρεσβύτερος, more probably refers to the ministry of Christian preaching shared by the author and the elders being addressed (Michaels 1988: 280–81).

A final example further demonstrates how one's understanding of authorship and date may have an impact upon interpretation of the New Testament text. E. Earle Ellis, in his work *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, understands Jude to be midrashic in character, that is, a commentary on Old Testament texts, or apocryphal elaborations of Old Testament texts, and he provides a portrayal of Jude's structure on this basis (Ellis 1993: 221–23). He points to the formal similarity that Jude has with other New Testament texts such as 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Romans 1–4, 9–11, and partially on this basis places Jude in mid-first century. Ellis understands the book to be a product of the prophet Jude, one of the 'brothers' (i.e. co-workers) of James mentioned in Acts 15 (Ellis 1993: 229–32). The false teachers excoriated by Jude are not gnostics, as suggested by some commentators proposing a late date for the book, but are identical with the Judaizing counter-mission opposed by Paul. Ellis

supports this argument by showing idiomatic parallels between Paul's treatment of the Judaizers and the description of the false teachers in Jude.

On the basis of Ellis's arguments he denies that ἡ πίστις (Jude 3, 20) must refer to a later, post-apostolic conception of formally transmitted tradition. Rather, he suggests that it fits well with Pauline thought (e.g. 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6; 1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 16:17). Furthermore, Ellis interprets the apostolic prophecy of Jude 17–18 to indicate that the readers are contemporaries of the apostles from whom they have received instruction concerning the fate of disobedient persons (vv. 5–15) and the future arrival of scoffers (v. 18) (Ellis 1993: 234).

PROVENANCE

In addition to authorship and date, the background question of provenance may carry some weight in exegetical decisions. William L. Lane identifies the recipients of Hebrews as members of a house church in or near the city of Rome (Lane 1991a: lviii–lx). Thus he cautiously interprets Heb. 10:32–34 in light of the Claudian expulsion of Jews from Rome in 49 CE. For the Jewish Christians, this persecution perhaps meant banishment, loss of property, imprisonment, injury, or other indignities (Lane 1991b: 301). Furthermore, recent research has affirmed the multiplicity of house churches throughout Rome in the first century. This may suggest why the church struggled with the twin problems of disunity and a tendency toward independence. When read in this light, Heb. 13:17 is understandable. A tension existed between the church leaders and members of the audience due, in part, to their fragmentary social situation. The author wishes to remind the audience that they are not autonomous, free to isolate themselves from others in the Christian community. In exhorting them to have an attitude of common respect for and submission to their leaders, he offers them a remedy to the problem of disunity. They are further exhorted to greet 'all the saints' (13:24a), not just those of a particular faction (Lane 1991a: lx).

Provenance also plays a pivotal role in F.W. Beare's interpretation of 1 Peter. As foundational to dating 1 Peter, Beare points to the region of address designated in the book's opening (1:1). It was in Bithynia and Pontus, Beare explains, that persecution against Christians broke out during the reign of Trajan (98–117 CE). Thus, he

uses the specific social context of the addressees to date the letter (Beare 1947: 9-24).

For Beare, the 'fiery trial' of 1 Pet. 4:12-16 reflects an official state persecution of the Church, focused in Pontus and Bithynia under the governor Pliny the Younger about 111-12 CE (Beare 1947: 13-14, 19-24). This in turn affects the commentator's interpretation of specific terms in the passage. The 'astonishment' of the letter's recipients at the 'strange' situation they are encountering (4:12) stems from the fact that, for the first time in their experience, persecution has risen to the level of a painful crisis, well beyond the normal trials of the Christian life. Commentators who opt for a less critical social situation, however, understand the passage to deal with trials addressed throughout 1 Peter as common to those living for Christ in a pagan culture (Davids 1990: 164; Kelly 1969: 183). The point is that provenance has a great impact on Beare's dating and placing of the letter, and thus on the interpretation of 1 Pet. 4:12-16.

EXEGETICAL ISSUES AND DIFFICULTIES

Several years ago, I was presenting a lecture on 'Matters of Introduction' to a class on 'Hebrews and General Epistles', speaking eloquently on the subjects of authorship, date, and so on. The students were so enthralled, so deeply engrossed in thoughtful meditation, that a couple in the back even looked as though they were asleep. In the midst of this significant academic moment, one bright student had the audacity to ask, 'What difference does all this make anyway?'. Hopefully, this essay has offered some small defense of the difference made by one's thinking on matters introductory to these New Testament books. It remains for us to consider certain issues and difficulties surrounding the exegesis of Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude. This essay concludes with general observations concerning the study of these books, rather than citing conundrums related to particular passages.

First, the importance of introductory topics to the task of exegesis vindicates ongoing, critical examination of these matters. Someone has affectionately designated Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles as 'the Leftovers', due to their neglect, comparatively speaking, in New Testament criticism. Certainly the volume of research on the Gospels or Paul dwarfs that accomplished on the documents under consideration. However, their stars seem to be rising. This is important, since effective exegesis demands good tools, be they

commentaries, articles, monographs, or other reference works.

Since 1980 Hebrews, once considered the 'Cinderella' of New Testament scholarship, has experienced a 'mini revival' in interest (McCullough 1994a: 66). Weighty commentaries such as those by Lane and Attridge have offered the student of Hebrews up-to-date, razor-sharp tools to aid in exegesis. Although ground has been gained on the questions of authorship (that is, a general profile of the author), date, provenance, thought-world, and structure, much remains to be done.

Work on James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude has also advanced, though not with the intensity of work on Hebrews. Helpful commentaries, such as those by Davids, Laws, and Martin, while benefiting from the earlier work of Dibelius, have blown fresh breezes through the exegetical study of James. The same may be said of Michaels on 1 Peter and Bauckham on 2 Peter and Jude. Yet, the study of this branch of New Testament literature warrants increased attention from New Testament scholars.

Secondly, exegetical difficulties sometimes relate to the sparsity of evidence that Hebrews and the General Epistles offer for assessing certain topics of introduction. The person-specific authorship of Hebrews and the provenance of Jude or 2 Peter are merely representative. This fact has frequently generated arguments from silence, which, at best, offer poor speculation and, at worst, a distortion of what evidence lies at hand. Harold Attridge has noted wisely, 'The beginning of sober exegesis is a recognition of the limits of historical knowledge...' (Attridge 1989: 5). At times, the confession, 'we do not know', represents a judicious point of departure for exegesis.

Thirdly, investigation of intersecting streams of tradition in early Christianity has born some fruit in the exegesis of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles, and this dynamic deserves further attention. Some scholars suggest, for example, that Hebrews has strong affinities with traditional material used in 1 Peter (Attridge 1989: 31). The same may be true of 1 Peter and James, both of which seem to include forms of Gospel tradition. Too often, New Testament criticism has presented primitive Christian 'schools' or 'communities' as if they were isolated, developing alone in the Greco-Roman world without the benefit of interaction with other communities and streams of tradition, yet this perspective seems to be changing where warranted by details of the text. The difficulty here, of course, lies in going beyond verbal

similarities to the question of meaning. What controls are needed to help the exegete guard against reading one document's use of tradition into the use made by another?

Fourthly, the process of exegesis should include consideration of meaning relationships within and above the sentence level in a text. Traditional exegetical concerns with backgrounds, word meanings, and syntax are mandatory to the process and staple fare in good commentaries. Yet, more needs to be done to address sense relations between various parts of a discourse unit and relations between units (Cotterell and Turner 1989: 188-256). For example, 1 Pet. 4:1-2 could be analyzed as follows:

<i>basis of the exhortation:</i>	Χριστοῦ οὖν παθόντος σαρκί
<i>EXHORTATION:</i>	καὶ ὑμεῖς τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν ὀπλίσασθε
<i>purpose:</i>	ὅτι ὁ παθὼν σαρκί πέπαυται ἁμαρτίας
<i>result:</i>	εἰς τὸ μηκέτι ἀνθρώπων ἐπιθυμίαις ἀλλὰ θελήματι θεοῦ τὸν ἐπίλοιπον ἐν σαρκί βιώσαι χρόνον.

Every phrase in every unit of every meaningful text has a function. The same is true of every unit in a discourse. Perhaps the day will come when enough of a consensus will be reached concerning possible phrase and unit functions within a discourse that meaningful interaction on these matters will be common to commentaries, as is the case now with Greek syntax.

Finally, as demonstrated by this handbook, in recent years scholars have set forth numerous new methodologies for study of the New Testament. Most taking up these new approaches, as well as those holding to more traditional criticisms, feel strongly about their particular approach to reading the text. Albeit unintentionally, this state of affairs can lead to the fragmentation of New Testament studies. What is needed is work from all sides to integrate the strengths of these various methods (Pearson 1989: 387-88). Perhaps in the coming decades, as those of various methodological persuasions have meaningful interaction, study of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles will be advanced greatly, and so also the task of New Testament exegesis.

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