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CHAPTER II

What is a Text? Shifting Paradigms of Textuality

1. Are Authors Part of Texts? Introductory Issues

Why should it be necessary to spend time on a discussion of the nature of texts? Is not the meaning of the word "text" self-evident, at least from the vantage-point of common sense? If we are reading literature, a text, we might assume, represents a more or less unified stretch of written language which has a beginning and a closure. If we are interpreting extra-linguistic or quasi-linguistic signs, the notion of "text" may be extended metaphorically to include messages generated by such sign-systems as traffic signals, religious or civic rituals, styles of dress, non-verbal body-language, or electronically coded indicators. In the case of the biblical writings, certainly the whole Bible, or whole books of the Bible, constitute texts. But what is the smallest working unit that can be called a text? In the context of language in general, John Lyons speaks of "utterance-units", to which such terms as "statement", "question", and "command" are applicable, but which are also "heavily context-dependent".[1] We may not be able to decide between certain possibilities of meaning "without drawing upon the information that is given in the co-text or context of situation."[2] These utterance-units may be seen as "basic units of language-behaviour".[3]

All this remains valid up to a point, but it takes us into highly controversial territory. What is controversial is not simply a matter of definition: differences between theories of the nature of texts and textuality carry with them fundamentally different conceptions of what it is for a text to convey meaning. In particular, different theories of textuality either link the text's author and context of situation inseparably with its meaning, or view meaning as a more pluralistic range of possibilities generated either by the sign-system of the text itself and its relation to other texts, or by the relation between a text and successive readers or reading communities, or by both.

Until recently the classical-humanist paradigm of textuality has dominated the history of biblical interpretation. In this tradition, texts are stretches of language which serve to express the thoughts and ideas of

their authors, and to refer to states of affairs in the extra-linguistic world. Even with the rise of Romanticist hermeneutics in the nineteenth century, a relatively minor change of emphasis shifted from the "thought" of authors to the shared "life" of authors, although some account was also taken of the "life-worlds" of readers. Texts were still seen as linguistically mediating inter-personal communication. In the case of biblical texts, there was room for the idea that God, Jesus or one of the prophets or apostles could "speak" directly through texts. In effect, it was as if the author and the situation out of which the author spoke formed part of the "text" itself. Theologically this approach fits very comfortably with the view that revelation is "given" through biblical texts; that the revealed word is enfleshed primarily in Jesus Christ as *the* Word of God; and that this word is also embodied in the lives and deeds of the apostolic community and in the history of Israel as the people of God. Revelation through texts is given, not made; it is interpersonal address; and it is enfleshed and embodied, rather than functioning purely as a language abstracted from life.

None of these traditional assumptions, however, can escape question if some of the competing claims about texts and textuality which have entered recent theory are deemed to be convincing or true. The collapse of many traditional assumptions and the need at very least to re-assess and to re-formulate them arises from the invasion of hermeneutics by three sets of forces: movements in literary theory; the development of certain strands in semiotics and deconstructionism; and the development of a tradition of sociology that owes much to the sociology of knowledge. A further significant factor arises from the important work of Walter Ong, Werner Kelber, and others, on the difference between textuality and orality. A print-orientated hermeneutic, Kelber maintains, especially in our study of the Bible, invites different hermeneutical dynamics from those of an oral hermeneutic.

In common with a number of other biblical specialists, Kelber appeals at a key point in his argument to the hermeneutical theory of Paul Ricoeur.[4] Ricoeur asserts: "Writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author. What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant."[5] The text is a work, or a structured totality, which cannot be reduced to the sentences out of which it is composed. It does indeed remain a "production" on the part of an author. But, in his essay entitled "What is a Text?", Ricoeur insists: "The reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading. The text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer. It thereby replaces the relation of dialogue, which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other".[6] The text becomes "emancipated" from the oral situation, and from "the situation, the surroundings, and the circumstantial milieu of discourse".[7] This principle forms part of what

Ricoeur calls the phenomenon of "distanciation", which leads to an eclipse of "the circumstantial world" in the "quasi-world" of texts.[8]

Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes develop this principle much further, and radicalize the whole notion of textuality. In his essay "Living On"/"Border Lines" Derrida writes: "The question of the text . . . has been transformed in the last dozen or so years".[9] A text is "no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces, referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces".[10] Barthes agrees in seeing the text as a "metaphor" of "network", which no longer bears its author's signature.[11] "The text is plural: it achieves plurality of meaning, an *irreducible* plurality."[12] A text, for Barthes, is not so much a "given" as an invitation to activity. On biblical interpretation he comments: "Some of the 'texts' of the Scriptures that have traditionally been recuperated by theological (historial or anagogical) monism may perhaps lend themselves to diffraction of meaning."[13]

If we leave aside, for the moment, the effects of the invasion of hermeneutics by semiotic theory, it is not difficult to see why many biblical interpreters find the paradigms of textuality which are offered by literary theory and the sociology of knowledge to be attractive and constructive. Ricoeur draws a contrast between the text-world "in front of" the text and the text-world behind it.[14] If we stand in front of the text, we experience its operative effects. The text projects forward a "world" which we may enter, and which may renew and transform us. In his work on Philemon and other Pauline epistles, for example, Norman Petersen argues that the Pauline texts project forward a "world" which is both a literary narrative-world of temporal sequence and also a sociological "world" of meanings, generated by perceptions of social relationships and social systems.[15] These social and epistemological constructs reflect ways in which members of a society categorize their experience, so that they may give it order and form.

In contrast to this, what occured "behind" the text may appear to reflect a more remote and antiquarian set of concerns. Traditionally biblical studies have presupposed a notion of textuality which leans heavily on a historical paradigm. We look behind the text at the situation which provided its raison d'etre. But should we start here? Recently Robert Morgan has criticized what he regards as an over-preoccupation with this historical paradigm in biblical interpretation.[16] In an attempt "to make explicit a model for bridging the gulf between critical scholarship and religious faith" Morgan argues that problems and tensions can be "eased by the switch to a literary paradigm for biblical interpretation".[17] In particular he attacks an approach in which biblical texts are used not with a view to asking what they project or set in motion, but as instruments for the different task of re-constructing a history. All too easily, he points out, a necessary use of historical *methods*

slides into a use of texts with solely historical *aims*.[18] Morgan observes: "Historical reconstruction of biblical persons, events, and traditions is an entirely legitimate activity, but possibly less fruitful for theology than the newly emerging literary approaches."[19] What he terms a "breakthrough" which amounts to a paradigm-shift consists in the movement away from persons and events behind the text "to the now available texts and their impact upon present-day hearers and readers".[20] In my judgment, this paradigm-shift brings both gains and potential losses, and the hermeneutical consequences of such a shift need to be examined in greater detail. I have discussed Morgan's specific arguments in another volume.[21]

Meanwhile Norman Petersen, in the book to which we have referred, rightly argues that what is at issue is the relation between text and context within the framework of questions about textuality. The key issue, he asserts, is "which should dominate in textual interpretation, the information internal (intrinsic) to the text, or contextual information that is external (extrinsic) to the text, like the author's intent, his biography, or the historical and cultural climate of his times."[22] He alludes to the New Criticism in mid-century theories of literature, with its emphasis on the intrinsic autonomy of the text, and to the later course of the debate in literary theory among such writers as Wolfgang Iser and Jacques Derrida. We cannot undertake even a brief study of textuality without reference to these writers, and so we need to examine the issues which they raise. Derrida's work is examined in the next chapter; the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur in chapter X, and reader-response theory more fully in chapter XIV. Meanwhile a wider and more fundamental account and evaluation of the impact of literary theory on biblical hermeneutics is offered in chapter XIII.

2. Are Situations or Readers Part of Texts?

The so-called New Criticism arose in reaction against perspectives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which had concerned themselves with material extrinsic to the text as an aid to understanding and interpreting it. By the mid 1950s it represented an established orthodoxy in the literary theory of the Anglo-American world, and its influence is currently still felt in biblical interpretation especially in terms of those discussions which focuss on such literary devices as ambiguity, metaphor, irony, tension, and paradox. Probably the most influential text-book which reflected the movement was René Wellek's and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949). Wellek and Warren argued that the paradigm of textuality and interpretation which had been inherited by previous generations too narrowly fitted the particular needs of classical studies and philology. This classical-humanist paradigm

could be seen for example in the hermeneutical and critical theory of Philip August Boeckh, whose *Encyclopedia and Methodology of the Philological Sciences* was revised and published by one of his students in 1877, and then in 1886. Significantly Boeckh had been a pupil of Schleiermacher, and like his teacher he argued that the interpreter must look behind the text to the situations, experiences, and intentions which gave rise to the text, some of which may not even have entered the author's awareness. Boeckh had produced a serious work of hermeneutics and criticism, but from the standpoint of a historical philologist of the time. We briefly examine Boeckh's contribution to hermeneutical theory in section 4 of chapter V.

Against such a background, Wellek and Warren urged that the whole idea of the author's intention, at least as a criterion of meaning in literature "seems quite mistaken". "The total meaning of a work of art cannot be defined merely in terms of its meaning for the author and his contemporaries."[23] The text is autonomous: it speaks on its own terms.

This approach received further support in the same era with the publication of Wimsatt's and Beardsley's essay entitled "The Intentional Fallacy".[24] To use the intention of an author as a criterion for judging the "success" of a work of literary art, they claimed, rested on a fallacy. For the author's intention represented a private state of mind, which was virtually inaccessible except through the text itself. If, on the one hand, the author had not wholly succeeded in his or her intention, it was useless to appeal to the text as evidence of it. If, on the other hand, the intention was fully successful, this intention was identical with the text, and there was no need to go "behind" the text. In this essay and in a later revised version of the argument, the possible relevance of biographical information was not entirely excluded, and it was allowed that intention may have some role in "practical" utterances. But the notion of going behind the text to ascertain criteria of success or meaning was said to embody not only an intentional, but also a "genetic", fallacy, derived largely from romanticism. Wimsatt and Beardsley stress the inadequacy of intention not only as a criterion of "success", but also as a criterion of meaning.

Wimsatt and Beardsley were addressing a pre-Wittgensteinian notion of intention as inner mental processes. H.P. Grice, John Searle and others have since argued firmly that what an utterance means is explicable in terms of what a *person* means by his or her utterance.[25] There are ways of expressing intention which identify the directedness of a speech-act without presupposing some pychological notion of "inner mental states". I attempt this in chapter XV, section 1. But the New Criticism faced more serious philosophical difficulties. It rested on the model of an autonomous self-contained text which addressed a reader who, in misplaced hermeneutical innocence, presupposed that with uncommitted neutrality, he or she could understand the text purely on its own terms. Wellek and Warren believed that "we can experience quite directly how things are"

with literary texts. Such an innocent objectivism could not be sustained as the second half of this century advanced. It attempted to replace classical humanism by modern mid-century liberal humanism. But in literary and semiotic theory this kind of perspective was radically questioned by such thinkers as Roland Barthes, and in hermeneutical theory, almost by definition, it could not survive the work of major twentieth-century theorists.

In his book *After the New Criticism* Frank Lentricchia identifies the publication of Northrop Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) as marking a point of transition which both looks back to the New Criticism and looks forward to post-modernism. He comments: "The great hope for literary critics in 1957, when the hegemony of the New Criticism was breaking, was that the muse would be demystified . . . and that younger critics would somehow link up poetry with the world again", that they would bring art "to the place in which the forbidden subjects of history, intention, and cultural dynamics could be taken up once again."[26] But this "great hope" was not to be fulfilled by a return to the text's relation to the *author* or to the world of *reality to which it referred*. If the text related to anything beyond itself, this would prove to be the *reader*, or simply *other texts*. In her introduction to a volume of essays on audience and interpretation, Susan Suleiman speaks of the movement away from the New Critical emphasis on "the text itself" towards "a recognition (or a re-recognition) of the relevance of context".[27] But here this is not the context of the author and the author's situation; it is the context of the reader or the audience.

A further paradigm-shift in the notion of texts and textuality can be seen, therefore, in the Reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser in Germany and in the related movement of Reader-response theory in America with the work of Stanley Fish, David Bleich, Wayne Booth, and others. Wolfgang Iser writes: "The text only takes on life when it is realized. . . . The convergence of text and reader *brings the literary work into existence*".[28] Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman entitle their work on reader-response theory *The Reader in the Text* to underline "the notion of the reader 'in' the text".[29] In an essay in this volume Robert Crosman argues that readers "make" meaning: "We arrive at the 'author's meaning' precisely when we decide we have arrived there: we *make* the author's meaning".[30] Stanley Fish questions the "givenness" of texts in any purely objective or objectivist sense. He writes: "I 'saw' what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see, and then I turned around and attributed what I had 'seen' to a text and an intention. What my principles direct me to 'see' are readers performing acts. The points at which I find (or to be more precise, declare) these acts to have been performed become (by sleight of hand) demarcations *in* the text."[31] But these "do not lie innocently in the world; rather they are themselves constituted by an interpretive act."[32] Jauss

is more concerned, like Gadamer, with the relation between hermeneutics and tradition. However, his central category is that of the reader's "horizon of expectation". We examine the views of Fish, Bleich, and Iser in detail in chapter XIV.

All this may be thrown into relief by noting how far the conception of texts and textuality which these approaches imply has moved from that of the classical world, Renaissance humanism, and the Reformers. From Aristotle until the end of the eighteenth century texts were seen as vehicles which conveyed the thoughts and ideas of their authors, and by this means also referred to the external world. Interpretation or intelligent reading entailed searching out leading concepts. The process, as it was borrowed by Cicero from Aristotle, was known as *inventio*. Aristotle called these leading concepts *topoi*; Cicero called them *loci*. Melanchthon and Erasmus wrote *loci* on biblical texts at the time of the Reformation. Calvin and Chladenius came to see that the selection and identification of *topoi* by the interpreter might arbitrarily disrupt the contextual flow of the text, and Calvin therefore used the method of running commentary. Calvin's work effectively represented the beginnings of the modern commentary. In his work on the epistles he saw it as his task to come to understand and to expound "the mind of Paul".[33] We discuss these points in chapter V.

Can such a view of textuality still be held with integrity today? We began this chapter by noting that John Lyons, a current exponent of linguistics and author of a standard work on semantics, views texts and text-sentences in a fairly traditional way, as sub-sets of utterance-units which constitute particular instances of language-behaviour, and to which such terms as 'statement', 'question', and 'command' are applicable.[34] Lyons also views with some favour the earlier work of J.R. Firth on the importance of context-of-situation for meaning.[35] Firth, who held the first Chair of Linguistics in the University of London, understands all utterances as instances of linguistic behaviour, the meaning of which consists in "a serial contextualization of our facts, context within context, each one being a function, an organ of a bigger context, and all contexts finding a place in what might be called the context of culture".[36] Lyons acknowledges that Firth's approach has limitations and invites criticisms, but concludes that we cannot afford to dismiss his insights.

In recent hermeneutical theory Werner G. Jeanrond expresses most clearly a view of textuality which explicitly regards the situation of communication as part of the "text". Internal organization and the "external relatedness" of linguistic acts *together constitute* the text. Textuality, Jeanrond writes, represents "more than a stringing together of single assertions".[37] The meanings of utterances, he continues, are "not determined solely by the choice of words or the manner in which the sentence is structured but also by the context in which an expression is embedded. This embedding

comes about through the linguistic context on the one hand and, on the other, through the situation of communication which is also constitutive of meaning." Jeanrond concludes: "This external relatedness of linguistic acts and its internal organization compel us to treat as foundational for linguistic studies that unit which can best do justice to those two relational characteristics of linguistic expression: the text".[38]

Such comments serve to underline that questions about the nature of texts not only remain entirely open and in need of further debate, but also interact closely with issues about the nature of meaning and also the hermeneutical goals of the interpreter. In his article "What is the Meaning of a Text?" Jeffrey Stout argues that there is a circularity in the relationship between interpreters' own formulation of questions about "the meaning of a text" and their respective emphases on the author's intention, contextual significance, or the present reader's orientation. He comments: "The controversial notion that interpreters *create* meaning in the texts they interpret can be explicated as the true but innocuous idea that different interests quite naturally issue in different readings of texts. Only when we think of the task of interpretation as discovering *the meaning* of a text does such a doctrine seem paradoxical."[39] As we shall note in chapter XIV, Stout's approach is compatible with a reader-orientated contextual pragmatism. In his recent book on biblical interpretation Robert Morgan makes a similarly pluralistic observation about biblical texts: "Texts, like dead men and women, have no rights, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose. If interpreters choose to respect an author's intentions, that is because it is in their interest to do so".[40]

Just how far, if at all, interpreters remain free to "choose" what goals effectively define textuality for them in the case of biblical texts raises such a number of complex issues that we cannot attempt to provide a full answer until we have considered at very least the following questions: (1) do considerations which emerge from Christian theology contribute any fresh factors concerning the nature of textuality in the case of biblical texts? (2) do issues which emerge from semiotic theory offer new constraints or new freedoms to the choices of interpreters, or new factors in determining the nature of textuality? (3) What light is shed on these issues by acts and processes of interpretation? (4) Does hermeneutical theory offer any criteria for the assessment and ranking of particular hermeneutical goals in relation to these issues? We shall consider these questions in the context of current theory, beginning with some distinctively theological issues which are raised by the present discussion of textuality. The remainder of the present chapter therefore focusses primarily but not exclusively on theological issues which bear on questions about textuality. Then in chapter III we consider issues raised by semiotics, and the basis of deconstructionist claims about the

nature of texts. After we have examined pre-modern and modern theories of hermeneutics, we return in chapter IX to metacritical questions of hermeneutics, and in chapters X through to XIV to the bearing on these issues of further literary and socio-critical approaches.

3. Theological Claims about the Givenness and Actualization of Biblical Texts

It is often argued that hermeneutics begins, in François Bovon's words, with "a reflection on our status as readers". This exposes the problem that "a text does not have a single door nor a single key".[41] Since the work of Schleiermacher, many writers have defined hermeneutics in terms of the problem of human understanding, and have begun their study of the discipline by an examination of the interpretative proceses of the human subject. Some critics of modern hermeneutics see this as opening the door to an inevitable relativism in biblical interpretation. They blame a starting-point which begins with interpretative processes and human subjectivity for introducing into theology a subjectivism and a relativism which is, in the view of these critics, at variance with the stable objectivity and givenness of Christian revelation.

For this reason, the present study, which reflects a positive, even passionate, conviction that hermeneutics represents a fundamental, unavoidable, and fruitful discipline, begins consciously and deliberately with a consideration of texts, rather than with the human subject. Only when we have completed our enquiry about textuality shall we feel free to proceed with questions about interpretation, understanding, and hermeneutical theories. Traditional Christian theology finds a "given" not primarily in human processes of interpretation, but in biblical texts and in the messages which they convey, even if the role of interpretation in shaping what we *count as* a given is *also* duly recognized.

At first sight, any re-definition of textuality which loosens it from its anchorage in the flow of the historical processes of which it is part may seem to compromise the status of a text and its message as "given". Still more clearly, a reader-orientated or audience-orientated definition of texts which locates the reader "in" the text itself as part of the text will seem to relativize and to project into a more subjective (or at least inter-subjective) realm the whole notion of what "the message of the text" might seem to be. But here judgments should be made with care. The logic of "gift" and "givenness" in the biblical traditions themselves invites deeper reflection. When God "gave" the promised land to Joshua and to Israel, what this

giving consisted in, or amounted to, became visible and evidential in the people's capacity to enter it and to appropriate it (Joshua 1: 2–5, 13–14; 6:2; 8:1; 10:12; 11:23). "Gifts" of the Holy Spirit, including the capacity to teach, to heal, or to have special faith (1 Cor. 12: 4–11) become operative only in the activities of teaching, healing, or exercizing special faith. The "gifts" given by the risen and ascended Christ in Ephesians (Eph. 4: 7–13) likewise become actualized in processes of evangelism, pastoral care, teaching, and the building up of God's people. The heavier the emphasis which is placed upon gifts and grace in the biblical writings, the greater the correlative emphasis on the possibility and necessity of actualizing the gift in question through appropriate human response. It is the response which makes the grace "cashable" and evidential, as the Epistle of James so forcefully reminds us (Jas.2:14–26).

These considerations may influence some of our assessments about the relation between our discussions of shifting paradigms in textuality and the notion of a givenness as a quality of biblical texts, or of revelation through these texts, in Christian theology. First of all, we suggest that an appropriate emphasis on givenness *in no way conflicts with the basic distinction in virtually all theories of textuality between: (a) the capacity of the text, as a sub-system of signs operative within a life-world to communicate a message; and (b) the actualization of the text as a particular act of communication within the time-horizon of a reader or a reading community.*

For Christian theology it is not even enough to say that this view of texts remains congruent or consonent with Christian theological doctrine and Christian experience. More than this, such a view of texts calls attention to the living *eventfulness* of the text in the context of the work of the Holy Spirit in the worshipping community. In most Christian traditions, a self-consistency is noted between the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the biblical texts in their origin and transmission, and the Spirit's actualization of the message of these texts in the lives of successive generations of readers. Distinctions between different *time-horizons* should be kept logically distinct, at the least in the present discussion, from different questions about where the *interpretative constraints* of a text might lie. When biblical texts are actualized within the time-horizon of the present community, for example, these texts characteristically "speak" in the setting of liturgy and worship: at the Lord's Supper, in corporate prayer, in preaching and teaching, in corporate waiting on God in silence and expectancy.

In his book *The Power of the Word in the Worshipping Church* John Breck discusses this eventfulness of the word in liturgy. Like Georges Florovsky, who also writes on hermeneutics from an Eastern Orthodox angle, Breck sets the active, eventful, word in the context of the church's tradition and worship, and he concludes that in relation to so-called Protestant individualism and Roman Catholic sacramentalism, this emphasis remains

a distinctive feature of Eastern Orthodox hermeneutics.[42] But virtually all Christian traditions which have a serious theology of the Holy Spirit and an adequate ecclesiology see the eventfulness of the actualized word in these terms.

The model in which the reader confronts the text purely as an isolated individual, cut off from the activities of the community, arises only because the time-horizon of the act of reading is something artificially abstracted from the processes which lead up to it and follow it. In practice, a reader reads in the privacy of his or her own room only in the light of horizons of expectation which have been derived from, and shaped by, the communities to which the individual reader belongs: indeed a community of communities, ranging from the local church and church traditions to learning-processes and assumptions inherited through the family, school, and mass media, contributes decisively to this horizon of expectation. While a reader's *transactional* relation with the text may operate at the level of individual response, the processes of *reading and interpretation* which make any such transaction possible, owe more to community-factors than to those which are peculiar to the individual. We may note in passing that whereas the New Criticism in literary theory tended to operate with the model of the isolated lone reader, semiotic and reader-response approaches stress the role of the reading-community in reading texts.

We now move to a second consideration. It may readily be granted, without any difficulty, that *some* (or even in principle many) biblical texts do function in ways which invite a reader-orientated hermeneutic. Undeniably some or many parables of Jesus operate in this way. In the 1930s C.H. Dodd made the uncontroversial comment that some parables leave the mind in sufficient doubt about their precise application "to tease it into active thought".[43] As recent interpreters including Funk and Crossan have argued, Jülicher was mistaken in viewing many, all, or most parables as vehicles for general truths. It is arguable that Job and Ecclesiastes also function not to supply some packaged piece of information, but to place the reader in a position where he or she can work their way towards certain perspectives or even conclusions at first-hand. In neither case could a digest of contents or a bare description of "the message of the book" be the same thing as actually reading it. Behind both books lies the recognition that if some packaged "answer" were to be offered independently of the reader's struggle, the reader would perhaps cease prematurely to worry away at the problem.

Even Eccles. 12:13 and Job 42: 10–17, do not really constitute "answers" to the questions which their writers have raised, whatever their time of composition in relation to that of the main body of these books.[44] Such texts as Job, Ecclesiastes, and the parables do not function *primarily* as raw-material for Christian doctrine. If they are used in this way, a responsible hermeneutic

would demand that they are read in interaction and conjunction with other texts whose meaning is less dependent on where the reader stands. Their primary function is to invite or to provoke the reader to wrestle actively with the issues, in ways that may involve adopting a series of comparative angles of vision. Kierkegaard recognized the unique importance of *this* kind of "indirect communication" in certain situations. In reader-reponse theory of a more moderate kind Iser works with this principle, and Umberto Eco recognizes that the applicability of different reader-response models *depends on the nature of the text in question.*

Nevertheless, our third point qualifies all this. In the case of different categories of biblical texts, there remain *some* texts which cannot be up-anchored from the contextual setting in life and history, which decisively shapes their meaning. In such passages this setting imposes constraints on the range of interpretative options which remain open to the responsible reader. The argument put forward by Stout and by Morgan that the reader or interpreter has liberty to *choose* whether what he or she regards as "the meaning of the text" is true only, up to a point, in a secondary or derivative sense. It is true in the sense that the interpreter's hermeneutical goals inevitably determine what *counts* as "the meaning of the text", at least within a given framework. But not all choices can be defended with the same level of rational or ethical justification. Some texts, by their very nature, draw part of their meaning from the actions, history, and life with which they are inextricably interwoven.

To select a key example from the point of view of the earliest Christian communities, the statement "and they crucified Him" (Mark 15:24; *par* Matt. 27:35; Luke 23:33; John 19:18) draws the referential dimension of meaning from the historical state of affairs which it depicts, as well as from its broader theological and narrative context. Theoretically a modern reader might choose to read it only as a narrative-event within the projected narrative-worlds of the evangelists and no more, but this would consciously transform the function of the texts from that which they clearly performed in the theological thought, life, and purposes of the communities in which they were written and transmitted. Two millennia of interpretative tradition cohere with this purpose. A particular justification for such an innovative interpretative choice would therefore need to be offered if it were to be taken seriously on rational and ethical grounds. This does not indeed imply that no interpretative judgment is required of the reader; or that we can take it for granted, without careful reflection, that history-likeness in this example is history.[45] On the contrary, as David Tracy reminds us, every time we deliberate or make a judgment, we interpret.[46] We return to these questions in chapters VIII, IX, X, XI, XIII and XIV–XVI.

A more extended example may be suggested in Jesus' language about the Kingdom of God. In his book *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*

Norman Perrin puts forward the case that "Kingdom of God is a *symbol* rather than a *conception* in the message of Jesus".[47] Using Philip Wheelwright's terminology, he argues that it is a "tensive" symbol rather than a steno-symbol.[48] Part of the process of the proclamation of the Kingdom, therefore, is to use parable, metaphor, paradox, image; indeed the kind of language and hermeneutic to which we alluded in earlier paragraphs. Nevertheless, partly perhaps because he chooses to place too much weight on the term "myth", Perrin's arguments seem to run out just when they have bcome most interesting. Even granted that the hearer or reader needs to make his or her own judgments about the meaning of "Kingdom of God", nevertheless another principle operates: the frame of reference presented by Jesus himself is that of *his own life and deeds* as well as that of the larger developing verbal context of his teaching with which his deeds were interwoven.

The double function of these texts about the Kingdom of God is explored constructively by Lategan and Vorster in their book *Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts* (1985).[49] Jesus used language, Lategan argues, which is unusal and foreign enough to be inviting, but familiar enough to recognize.[50] It is not simply flat description. But, Vorster insists, Jesus used language *about* the Kingdom.[51] Jesus referred to a reality which could not be reduced entirely to language. In particular this language must be understood against the extra-linguistic background and context of Jesus' own *deeds*. These are "seminal events in the ongoing stream of life and history."[52] The Kingdom of God is present, in a sense, in the deeds of Jesus (Luke 11:20; *par* Matt. 12:28). These, at very least, "relativize the autonomy of the text", by constituting a context of situation which remains *part of the text*. It does not undermine this referential or extra-linguistic dimension if we regard "Kingdom", with Perrin, as a metaphor. Paul Ricoeur and others have argued that metaphor is not imprisoned within a merely intra-linguistic world, and a careful argument for the capacity of metaphor to *refer*, even if within the framework of developing traditions of language and life, has been put forward in detail by Janet Martin Soskice.[53] In chapter VIII we take these issues further by examining Christological texts in the light of speech-act theory. Some Christological utterances, we shall argue, would be empty and inoperative if they did not presuppose situations in the extra-linguistic world.

A third and admittedly more controversial example might be suggested in the triple dating with which Luke introduces the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1,2). The material is peculiar to Luke, and dates the ministry of John first with reference to Tiberius Caesar and Pontius Pilate; then with reference to Herod, Philip and Lysanias; and finally with reference to the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. The style reflects that of classical historians especially Thucydides, as well as Polybius

and Josephus. But is this, as Norman Petersen and others would maintain, part of the stage-setting of a Lucan narrative-world? [54] Or does it represent Luke's genuine concern to anchor the history of salvation in the broader context of world-history itself, in which Luke-Acts seems to reflect a special redactional interest? Luke's concern expressed in his prologue (Luke 1:1–4) concerning sources, and eyewitnesses, and traditions might also arguably bear on the issues. What he has received from earlier witnesses has a quality of givenness about it, which he is eager for "Theophilus", his actual or implied reader, to note. The broader issues which this example raises in relation to literary criticism are examined more fully in chapters III, X, XIII and XIV.

The theological understanding of biblical texts as given, then, does not short-circuit questions about the reader and the reader's response. It does not foreclose questions which we have yet to examine about processes of interpretation and understanding. No less important, it does not call into doubt the basic contrast in theories of textuality between the text as a sub-set of signs or signals transmitted through some code and medium and the text's actualization in an act or event of communication within the time-horizons of the reader or readers. This issue will be clarified further in the light of the necessary process of semiotic encoding and de-coding which we describe at the beginning of the next chapter. Nevertheless, these considerations place serious question marks against theories which attempt to dispense altogether with authors or with extra-linguistic contexts of situation, regardless of the nature of the particular texts under examination. In many cases (although not in every case) these place constraints on the range of options which are available to the responsible reader. How serious these constraints might be, and whether they are weak or strong, awaits further discussion when we consider the nature of interpretation, and of the part played by the choice and ranking of different hermeneutical goals.

4. Further Theological Issues: Disembodied Texts or Communicative Address?

At the centre of all theological considerations about revelation and its relation to biblical texts stands the Christological affirmation that Christ himself is *the* Word made flesh. Supremely and paradigmatically the truth of God is revealed and focussed in the *person* of Jesus of Nazareth. In Christ the truth of God is *spoken, embodied, and lived*. The language of Jesus is addressed to those who will hear, as *inter-personal* communication. It is of course possible to distinguish between strong and weaker senses

of "address". Dick Leith and George Myerson write: "Language is always addressed to someone else, even if that someone is not immediately present, or is actually unknown or imagined. The term is preferable to *communication* since this word is often linked in people's minds with an unproblematic "transfer" of "information" from one person to another".[55] In this chapter it is used in a generally stronger sense but does not entail less than that which Leith and Myerson indicate.

The Christian church has always been suspicious of doceticism: the tendency to spiritualize away the bodily enfleshment of Christ. But is the Word made flesh to become purely and exclusively "word" again, when the oral message of Jesus, *embodied* in his life and deeds, takes the form of *a written text which can be transmitted independently of the life-context which it presupposes*? In the Fourth Gospel word and deed are presented as interwoven in a flow of acted "signs". These sustain the principle that Jesus speaks through an enfleshed and acted-out word. (John 2:11, 20:30). His claim to be the Bread of Life has a frame of reference in the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:35; cf. 6:1–14); his description of himself as the light of the world operates against the background of his giving sight to the blind (John 8:12; cf. 9:1–11); his self-designation as the resurrection and the life comes in the context of the "raising" of Lazarus (John 11:25; cf.11:38–44). His language about service is framed by the episode of his washing the feet of his disciples (John 13: 5–11; cf. 12–17). The Johannine commission does not seem to suggest that this pattern of relationship between word and deed should discontinue after the resurrection. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you". (John 20:21). The disciples of Jesus are to function as apostolic witnesses to the word. The question which we shall raise in chapters VIII and XIII, however, especially in the light of work by Searle and by Recanati, is whether this "action" dimension is simply part of Johannine stage scenery. Is deed or act, after all, *only* deed or act *on stage* (i.e. within the text which disappears when the lights go up)?

In Paul this pattern is heavily pronounced. Paul can appeal to a consistency of conduct on his part that matched the words of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:7; 1 Cor. 9: 12–23; 2 Cor. 1:9,12,24; 4:2–12; 6:3–10; 12:9,15; 13:4). Often when he speaks of "power" in contrast to "word" Paul means that which is effectively operative in life, as against mere speech (1 Thess. 1:5; 1 Cor.4: 19,20). Yet Paul uses writing and written texts. Does this therefore imply, as Ricoeur and others might seem to suggest in their theories of textuality, that the written text becomes a disembodied voice, detached from the author and the author's situation, and no longer constituting an act of inter-personal communication?

Theologically this contrast between oral speech and written language would become increasingly problematic if it involved not only a disembodiment of the language of the gospel, but also a reduction of its capacity

to function as inter-personal address. In traditional Christian theology, the biblical writings are perceived to function not only as words *about* God, but also as words *from* God. If we recall Markus Barth's analogy between biblical texts and love letters, only in the living situation shared by two lovers in which the letter is read as address, can the letter itself constitute an *act* of love. Outside this situation, for lawyers, detectives, or biographers it is only a record from which inferences may be drawn. To compare a more mundane example suggested by the philosopher John L. Austin, when an angry parent responds to a neighbour's complaint with the words: "He promises, don't you Willie?" the logic of the utterance is different from that of first-person commitment and address. Does Jesus, or God in Christ, say "I forgive you" or "I love you" only *on stage*?

Language concerning divine promise and address raises complex issues, and we discuss this language in detail in chapter VIII. We may begin to address the problem at a more modest level by returning, in the first place, to our observations about the language of Jesus and Paul. Does the transformation of their speech into written texts mean the kind of "hermeneutical distanciation" which removes the author and the author's life from the field of the text? Is this what the work of Ricoeur and others implies, when Ricoeur states that in writing as opposed to speech, the writer is "absent" from the reading?[56]

Werner Kelber has carried out some pioneering research on texts of the New Testament in relation to this contrast between oral speech and writing. His work has also been discussed by Lou Silberman, Walter Ong, and others in a recent number of *Semeia* (1987). Kelber argues that our study of the Bible is dominated by "a disproportionately print-orientated hermeneutic".[57] The thrust of his work is to draw a carefully-argued distinction between an oral model of textuality which is appropriate to Paul, to Q, and to the pre-literary Synoptic tradition, and a written model of textuality which is applicable above all to Mark.

On the Pauline writings, Kelber convincingly takes account of the work of Robert Funk and others, to confirm that the Pauline travelogue, as a minimal starting-point is "harbinger of oral words and personal presence". He declares: "Oral analogies are the key to the Pauline gospel".[58] In Pauline language "the ear triumphs over the eye."[59] Kelber rightly sees that for Paul words must always be matched by deeds. To borrow a simile from Wittgenstein, words from Paul are like paper money which is always backed by the gold of action.[60] This "equivalence of word and deed" in Paul (to use Kelber's phrase) can be seen from such passages as 1 Cor.4:11,12; 9: 1–19; 2 Cor. 4:7–14; 6:3–13; 10:11; 11:7–15; 12:13–16; 1 Thess.2: 8,9; and 2 Thess.3:8,9. Kelber notes: "The teacher lives a life that is paradigmatic in terms of his message. Because in oral hermeneutics words have no existence apart from persons, participation in the message is inseparable

from imitation of the speaker: 'We decided to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also ourselves' (1 Thess.2:8,9)"[61]

In the pre-Synoptic traditions, Kelber finds "a speaking of living words in social contexts . . . Voiced words well up in a person . . . Spoken language consists in speech acts".[62] He also attributes this kind of orality to the sayings-source Q. But Mark, he argues, is a very different matter. Mark disrupted the oral life-world. Mark has brought about "a freezing of oral life into textual still- life". Kelber quotes Ricoeur: "The reader is absent from the writing of the book; the writer is absent from its reading".[63] There is a "decontextualization of words from their oral matrix"; a "de-activation" of the dynamistic component".[64] By placing himself outside the life-flow, Mark can now manipulate the text. He can construct his own coherent narrative. But the price is distanciation. Mark is donor of the text, who also hides behind it.[65] He loses control over the process of interpretation.

In a critical discussion in *Semeia* one writer views Kelber's work on Mark as a "breakthrough". But Silberman and Ong emphasize the still greater significance of orality as a hermeneutical model for texts which nevertheless took written form. Silberman alludes with more than a hint of scepticism to the deconstructionist assumption that a written text belongs "absolutely" to the reader; and he asks: "What if the text is vocally constructed? Can the author's voice be silenced?"[66] Walter Ong endorses the basic writing-orality distinction as a matter of hermeneutical principle. However, he points out that a written text in an oral culture does not yet possess the dynamics of a hermeneutic of written texts as such. Attention should be given to a "persistently oral milieu" which may "envelop even a highly developed textuality", and "deeply effect both the composition of texts and their interpretation".[67] Rather than viewing Mark as representing an "explosive" discontinuity with the pre-Marcan oral tradition, Ong prefers to speak of Mark as an *interpreter* of the tradition which he received.[68]

Such a view of Mark does not seem to conflict with the emphasis found in a number of recent studies on Mark which portray the evangelist as an interpreter of tradition who creatively combines elements of tradition into a unified and holistic narrative or story. Ernest Best's study *Mark: the Gospel as Story* provides a good example, although others could also be mentioned.[69] Mark's particular achievement was to provide a continuous narrative structure, in which the structuring of the material conveyed the message: this is how the pieces make sense. For example, Mark's use of *euthus* (immediately) some thirty-one times, leads the reader on at a rapid pace, but the pace begins to slow down in Mark 9 and 10 when the Passion sayings are introduced. The cross is the goal to which all the narrative movement is leading. In so ordering his material, Mark interprets it in terms of the centrality of the cross. There is no contradiction between an apparently causal chain of events in the life of Jesus and the fulfilment of the

divine purpose. In the absence of infancy narratives, the only introductory framework is that of the Old Testament and John the Baptist. Sometimes one episode is fitted inside the frame of another. There are also omissions and silences, loose ends and rough edges, which invite the reader to ask questions and to engage actively with the text.

In response to the claim that Mark is primarily "interpreting" rather than disrupting the pre-Marcan tradition, Kelber re-asserts some of the discontinuities with tradition which he finds in Mark, especially the "role-reversal" of the disciples in Mark: "the insiders are turned into outsiders", and the narrator's viewpoint is distanced from that of the disciples within the Marcan narrative.[70] But this kind of discontinuity, if this is what it is, does not represent decisive evidence for a clear-cut contrast between the dynamics of oral speech as inter-personal communication and a hermeneutic of written texts. What may readily be granted is that Mark does choose to step back out of the scene as anonymous narrator who knows the end from the beginning. With Patrick Grant and other literary theorists whom we discuss in chapter XIII, we may admit that Mark's "voice" functions in a different way from Paul's. Secrecy, overview, and narrative distance, play an important part, and the text is at times, to use Eco's contrast, creative and generative, and not simply a vehicle of transmission. Nevertheless, while Kelber is no doubt right to claim that Mark has stepped back from his text in a way that differentiates his literary role from that of Paul, it remains doubtful whether this difference has become one of *kind*, rather than of *degree*. It still makes sense to speak of *Mark's* theology, and of *Mark's* theological purpose. Mark is a purposive agent; not a semiotic construct. His object is not simply to let readers "make what they like" of his work. Our view of Kelber's work will depend ultimately on whether we are willing to follow Paul Ricoeur and others in drawing such a very sharp contrast between speech and writing. In the case of biblical texts, there are both theological and hermeneutical reasons for firm caution about accepting such a clear-cut distinction, and these will emerge in the subsequent pages of the present work. The issue forms part of a wider discussion about inter-personal communication, speech-acts, and the relation between intertextuality and intersubjectivity. Moreover, as we shall now see, Ricoeur's claims about revelation as declaration and address do not seem to fit entirely comfortably this aspect of his theory of textuality.

Can revelation through biblical texts include the notion of inter-personal address from God? We have already argued that such an address, if we can conceive of it in these terms, would occur not simply through a disembodied text, but through a text interwoven at certain key points with life and history. It may be helpful to try to view part of this problem in dialogue with the work of Paul Ricoeur, since Ricoeur has attempted simultaneously to affirm the

absence of the author from processes of reading written texts (notably in his books *Interpretation Theory* and *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*) and also to acknowledge that biblical revelation embodies *irreducibly first-person and second-person address* (mainly in his *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*).[71] The direction of a path towards the reconciliation of these two standpoints can be found especially in his essays "Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation" and "Biblical Hermeneutics".[72] This initial discussion of Ricoeur's hermeneutics will be developed more fully in chapter X.

Ricoeur distinguishes between five primary modes of discourse in the biblical texts, which are not exhaustive: prophetic, narrative, hymnic, prescriptive, and wisdom modes. The prophetic mode represents an address not simply from the prophet, but also from God. Nevertheless this *model* of revelation is *qualified* by the other four modes, and in particular by the wisdom mode. He alludes here to Ian Ramsey's work on models and qualifiers.[73] For Ricoeur, even the notion of inter-personal communication between God and man remains a *personal model* that needs to be *qualified by divine transcendence and hiddenness*. Hence he dissociates himself from the "personalism" of Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel.[74]

In the prophetic mode of discourse, Ricoeur fully allows that "the prophet presents himself as not speaking in his own name, but in the name of another, in the name of Yahweh".[75] There is a "*double author* of speech and writing" (Jer.2:1,2; 3:12; 4:27). Likewise in hymnic modes of discourse, such as in the Psalms, hymns of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication are addressed *to* God. Celebration transforms story into invocation.[76] In narrative, typically in the Pentateuch, the Synoptic Gospels, and Acts, the author often disappears, as if events recounted themselves; but the essential ingredient is the emphasis on founding events "as the imprint, mark, or trace of God's act".[77] Prescriptive discourse expresses the will of God. It represents a relationship of commanding and obeying within the framework which the term 'covenant' broadly conveys: "The idea of covenant designates a whole complex of relations", running from meticulous obedience to the Law to loving Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5,6) and a new heart and spirit (Ezk.11:19).[78] Jesus sums up this mode in the Golden Rule (Matt.7:12). But there remains the revelatory mode of wisdom. Wisdom speaks to every person through limit-situations, Ricoeur argues: through experiences of solitude, anguish, suffering, and death. Hebraic wisdom interprets these as signifying "the incomprehensibility of God – as the silence and absence of God".[79]

Over the years Ricoeur has developed a special interest in the Book of Job. He regards it as the outstanding example of wisdom in the Old Testament, and it is not surprising, in the light of his sustained reflection on Job, that he refuses to subordinate the wisdom model of

revelation to that of the prophetic mode. For our present discussion what is most significant is the simultaneous presence of dialogue, of silence, of indirect communication, and of what is perceived as the absence of God, or at very least his hiddenness. In his earlier work *The Symbolism of Evil* Ricoeur comments on Job 23:8, 30:20; "Faced with the torturing absence of God, the man (Job) dreams of his own absence".[80] While, in his later essay "Religion, Atheism, and Faith" he declares that Job receives no "answer" to his questions. Ricoeur also asserts: "The fact that the Lord *speaks* is what is essential. He does not speak *about* Job; he speaks *to* Job".[81] Ricoeur therefore tries to hold together the notion of divine *address* with a qualifying attention to divine transcendence which in Job 42: 1–6 "cannot be transcribed by speech or *logos*".[82] Wisdom reveals "a hidden God" who takes as his mask "the anonymous and non-human course of events".[83] Job is brought to the point where he is no longer pre-occupied by the need for self-protection. Alluding to Bonhoeffer, Ricoeur sees Job as encountering the God of the Crucified One, where "dialogue is in itself a mode of consolation".[84]

Does God reveal Himself through inter-personal address in biblical texts? Ricoeur can offer an affirmative answer only with strict qualifications. God remains hidden, "infinitely above human thought and speech".[85] Hence every model of communication, including that of inter-personal address, is decisively "modified" so that it speaks of or from the "Wholly Other" analogically or in symbol.[86] The first-person prophetic model and the second-person hymnic model also remain valid to a degree, provided that we understand these inter-personal models *analogically*. In chapter X we explore these issues in much fuller detail, noting both the philosophical and theological contexts which serve to shape Ricoeur's approach. Among the evaluations of Ricoeur's approach, we note the theological assessments offered by Kevin J. Vanhoozer among others.[87]

Although defences of analogy have rested partly on a theology of the image of God in humankind, the case becomes more decisive when emphasis is placed on the belief that the fullest and uniquely definitive revelation of God has occurred in the person of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:2,3; Col. 1:15,19; John 14:6–9). But while it remains entirely clear that analogy enters into our understanding of *descriptions* about God it is less self-evident in what sense the category of address is analogical. In an obvious but philosophically unremarkable sense, analogy comes into play in the sense that if someone cannot "hear" God, we do not advise him or her to purchase a deaf-aid. Yet when we have allowed for analogy in *this* sense, *address remains an integral aspect of the logical grammar of what it is for God to "speak" at all.* Wittgenstein makes the *conceptual* observation: "'You can't hear God speak to someone else; you can hear him only if you are being addressed.' This is a grammatical remark."[88]

There remains therefore some internal tension between the claim that, even if analogically, God may *address* his people through modes of language embodied in a text, while the text is also said to have become detached or "*distanciated*" from a speaker and the speaker's context of utterance. The importance of the role of context of situation and of the relation between the text and its author becomes important, as Vern Poythress argues in some detail, when we are considering the notion of what Poythress calls "the Divine meaning of scripture".[89] The work of the Spirit of God, he concludes, concerns not simply the texts, but also the lives and actions with which the text is interwoven.[90]

A hermeneutic which is orientated towards a view of textuality dependent on the role of intra-linguistic worlds and intertextuality, then, may stand in contrast to a hermeneutic which is orientated towards a theory of texts in which texts are embedded in inter-subjective situations of inter-personal communication. This contrast will emerge regularly as we proceed. Theologically a hermeneutic of an *embodied* text reflects an incarnational Christology, in which revelation operates through the interwovenness of word and deed. It also coheres with a theological account of the role of the community in which their actions and witness give credibility to, and facilitate understanding of, the word which is spoken and read. *The text is more than a "docetic" or disembodied system of signifiers.*

At the same time we cannot attempt to formulate any theory of textuality simply on the basis of what may cohere with our theology. We must also evaluate theories of texts on their own terms. The most powerful arguments about disembodied systems of signifiers arise not only from literary formalism (to which we return in chapter XIII) but also from particular applications of semiotic theory. We therefore turn in the next chapter to the work of Saussure, Peirce, and other more recent writers in semiotics, and we ask in particular whether semiotic theory as such necessarily leads to purely intralinguistic theories of texts, or even to deconstructionism. The theories of texts associated with Barthes and with Derrida which we discuss in the next chapter also raise questions about truth and truth-claims, and to these truth issues we shall return again in chapters VIII through to XIV.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. John Lyons, *Semantics* (2 vols) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 2, 633.
2. *Ibid* 634.
3. *Ibid* 633.