

## THE DIVINE MEANING OF SCRIPTURE: EXPLANATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

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The task of evangelical theologians is complicated by our belief that the Bible is consistent within itself and does not contradict itself. Because of our worldview we ask questions of the text and seek to answer questions that are of little if any concern to others. While they might throw their hands in the air thinking there is no solution to a seeming contradiction, we struggle to make the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

We believe the Bible is God's Word. It is diverse and was revealed progressively, and yet it is a unity. It was written by some forty human authors over some 1500 years, and yet in another sense God is the author of it all. Scripture is concurrently the words of God and the words of men. To put it another way, it is "the Word of God given in the words of men in history."<sup>1</sup>

Since God gave his Word in the words of the human authors of Scripture we seek his meaning through the interpretation of the meaning of the human authors.<sup>2</sup> But there is no consensus of opinion about the relationship between God's meaning and the meaning of the human author. Is it correct to limit God's meaning to the intended meaning of the human author? How do we explain the fact that Scripture often quotes itself and interprets or applies a passage of Scripture in such a manner that the meaning in the original context is expanded or focused? Is it fair to suggest that in such situations the expanded or focused meaning that differs from the meaning in the original context is part of God's intended meaning in the original passage?

The major burden of this paper is to grapple with concepts of meaning and the divine-human authorship of Scripture. It is the thesis of this essay that while there may be a development of the divine meaning of an individual text of Scripture as the canonical context grows, in that development or further dimension of meaning the original meaning is not lost.

In an attempt to address this issue I will outline key Biblical support for the fact that God can intend more in a passage of Scripture than the human author intends. Next, I will summarize the changes in E. D. Hirsch's theory of meaning and authorial intention. Then I will attempt to outline the cur-

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<sup>1</sup> G. E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 12.

<sup>2</sup> G. R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991) 1–2.

rent discussion of meaning among evangelicals to highlight key contributions. Finally, on the basis of this discussion I will present limitations and guidelines to define God's fuller meaning and its relationship to the human author's meaning.

### I. DIVINE MEANING AND AUTHORIAL INTENTION

Since the Scriptures are the result of the cooperation of God and human authors, a major concern is whether God can intend more in a passage of Scripture than the human author intends. Walter Kaiser and Bruce Waltke agree that there is no distinction between the intended meaning of the human author and God's intended meaning. They defend this position from different perspectives. Kaiser<sup>3</sup> argues that if the message is a revelation from God the prophet must understand what God is trying to say even though God may have a more complete understanding of the full significance of the revelation than the prophet has.<sup>4</sup> He says that "the writers can and do have an *adequate* understanding of the subject on which they write even if it is not a comprehensive control of all the particulars and parts that belong to that subject."<sup>5</sup>

A key element in Kaiser's theory is the concept of "generic promise." According to this concept the human author foresees all of the future fulfillments of his prophecy as one generic whole, and in his one prophetic statement he consciously includes all of the future fulfillments of that generic promise. The main unknown to the prophet is the time of the various fulfillments of the promise.

Waltke's<sup>6</sup> "canonical process" approach is based on the work of Brevard Childs, and yet he distinguishes his approach from that of Childs.<sup>7</sup> Waltke says:

By the canonical process approach I mean the recognition that the text's intention became deeper and clearer as the parameters of the canon were expanded. Just as redemption itself has a progressive history, so also older texts in the canon underwent a correlative progressive perception of meaning as they became part of a growing canonical literature.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See especially W. Kaiser, "The Single Intent of Scripture," *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith* (ed. K. S. Kantzer; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978) 123-141. Cf. also Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 106-114; *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 17-23; "Legitimate Hermeneutics," *Inerrancy* (ed. N. L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 117-147, 457-460.

<sup>4</sup> Kaiser, "Legitimate" 135.

<sup>5</sup> Kaiser, *Uses* 21. See also p. 23, where he puts a further disclaimer on his theory. One of the most difficult aspects of Kaiser's theory for many to accept is his suggestion that the prophet foresees all the future fulfillments of his prophecy at the time he makes the prophecy (cf. *ibid.* 70-71).

<sup>6</sup> B. K. Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," *Tradition and Testament* (ed. J. S. Feinberg and P. D. Feinberg; Chicago: Moody, 1981) 3-18. See esp. pp. 6-10, where Waltke relates this approach to the use of the OT in the NT. Cf. also "Is it Right to Read the New Testament into the Old?," *Christianity Today* (September 2, 1983) 77.

<sup>7</sup> Waltke, "Canonical" 7-8, lists three ways in which he differs from Childs.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

For Waltke the Psalter is packed with meaning. As new revelation was given, it unpacked the Psalter's literal meaning. This is refractory interpretation—that is, the NT writers unpacked the meaning of the OT by means of the revelation given in the Jesus event and Jesus' teaching. For Waltke this refraction is so widespread and complete that there is "unity between the Old Testament writers' ideal language and God's intention."<sup>9</sup> Thus for Waltke the human author's language was ideal, and its full meaning was supernaturally discovered by the NT writers.

The key distinguishing characteristic of Waltke's approach is his desire to allow the NT to determine so thoroughly the meaning of the OT. Waltke's view is similar to Kaiser's in denying *sensus plenior*, although their development of the similarity between the human and divine meanings and intentions differs.<sup>10</sup>

Various other evangelicals differ from Kaiser and Waltke by allowing a distinction between God's intended meaning and the human author's intended meaning in prophetic portions of Scripture. Their argument is based on the fact that ultimately God is the author of Scripture. God's deeper intended meaning is called *sensus plenior* or *references plenior*.<sup>11</sup> Most who hold this position are aware of the danger and arbitrariness involved in positing a *sensus plenior* without any limitations. Thus they seek "to establish a firm link between God's intention and the human author's intention so that the Old Testament prophet's message remains demonstrably the basis for the divine New Testament fulfillment."<sup>12</sup>

There are many reasons why this last group rejects limiting God's intention to the human author's intention. One of the main reasons is the

<sup>9</sup> D. L. Bock, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part 1," *BSac* 142 (1985) 219.

<sup>10</sup> For Waltke the meaning and intention of the ideal language of the psalmist, which we understand by reading later revelation back into it, is equal to the meaning and intention of God. Waltke does not clearly explain how much of the meaning and intention of this ideal language the psalmist himself understood. For Kaiser the meaning and intention of the OT prophet and of God are equal. Furthermore Kaiser refuses to consider subsequent revelation as relevant to the meaning of a Scripture passage.

<sup>11</sup> *Sensus plenior* is a concept first used as a definite label in interpreting Scripture by Catholic scholars around the turn of this century. For a summary of its development (esp. in Catholicism) see R. E. Brown, "The History and Development of the Theory of a Sensus Plenior," *CBQ* 25 (1963) 262–285; "Hermeneutics," *JBC* 610–619. Among evangelicals who would posit some sort of *sensus plenior* (or *references plenior*) are S. L. Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 50; J. I. Packer, "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics and Inerrancy," *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussion on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (ed. E. R. Geehan; Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971) 141–153; E. E. Johnson, "Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* (ed. E. Radmacher and R. Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 407–429; W. Dunnett, *The Interpretation of Holy Scripture* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 39–64; P. B. Payne, "The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention," *JETS* 20 (1977) 243–252; W. S. LaSor, "The *Sensus Plenior* and Biblical Interpretation," *Scripture, Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. W. W. Gasque and W. S. LaSor; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 260–277; D. A. Hagner, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," *Interpreting the Word of God* (ed. S. J. Schultz and M. A. Inch; Chicago: Moody, 1976) 78–104.

<sup>12</sup> Bock, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part 2," *BSac* 142 (1985) 307.

progressive nature of revelation and the fact that “the meaning of the Scripture became deeper and clearer as the literary corpus of the canon expanded.”<sup>13</sup> In many OT contexts “theological revelation had not yet developed to the point where the full thrust of God’s intention was capable of being understood by the human author.”<sup>14</sup> The divine nature of the messianic king as promised in the Davidic covenant is one example.<sup>15</sup> Walter Dunnett suggests that Isa 7:14, Hos 11:1 and even Isaiah 53 are further examples.<sup>16</sup> Elliott Johnson uses Psalm 16 as an example of what he calls *references plenior*.<sup>17</sup> Acts 4:23–27 and Mark 7:6 might be other examples of *references plenior*.

Philip B. Payne argues from the linguistic viewpoint that the divine meaning of a text cannot be equated with the human author’s intention because the human author’s intention cannot be defined beyond question. Payne points out that subconscious thought and perception are influential on human language and that we have no way of knowing these thoughts. Furthermore the Holy Spirit’s influence cannot be necessarily included as part of the author’s intention. Therefore at times a prophet may not have been aware of the full import of his words.<sup>18</sup> While Payne’s criticism of the authorial intention position is helpful and does deal with one aspect of intentionality, it does not deal with it in the same way most conservatives are speaking of it. Payne is dealing with the author’s intentions, and most conservatives are speaking of the author’s intended meaning.

Another reason why it could be argued that God’s intention need not be limited to the human author’s intention is the very doctrine of Scripture. Some use the analogy between our divine-human Lord and the divine-human book to argue that these divine and human elements cannot be separated in Scripture any more than they could not be separated in the hypostatic union between the divine and human natures of our Lord.<sup>19</sup> But B. B. Warfield points out that this analogy can be pressed too far. As he explains,

there is no hypostatic union between the Divine and human in Scripture; we cannot parallel the “inscripturation” of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son of God. The Scriptures are merely the product of Divine and human sources working together to produce a product in the production of which the human forces work under the initiation and prevalent design of the Divine.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> D. A. Oss, “Canon As Context: The Function of *Sensus Plenior* in Evangelical Hermeneutics,” *Grace Theological Journal* 9/1 (1988) 112.

<sup>14</sup> Bock, “Evangelicals” 308.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; Dunnett, *Interpretation* 61–62.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, “Author’s Intention” 421–428. For further suggestions of examples of *sensus plenior* see Hagner, “Old Testament” 94–104; LaSor, “*Sensus Plenior*” 270–277.

<sup>18</sup> Payne, “Fallacy.”

<sup>19</sup> See E. D. Radmacher, “A Response to Author’s Intention and Biblical Interpretation,” *Hermeneutics* (ed. Radmacher) 436.

<sup>20</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948) 162. Other theologians also allow for a distinction between the divine and human meaning in Scripture; cf. A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1907) 139, 197, 206, 235;

Warfield goes on to state that in this instance the only analogy is the fact that in both cases the human and divine are involved, though very differently. He states that "in the one they unite to constitute a Divine-human person, in the other they cooperate to perform a Divine-human work."<sup>21</sup> This cooperation guards the Bible from error because the human can never act out of conjunction with the divine. The human is initiated, controlled and guided by the divine. For this same reason, however, the human author is not necessarily lifted to the level of the divine author in every respect. He is controlled by the unerring guidance of God, but he is merely an instrument or mouthpiece of God.<sup>22</sup> To state this principle differently, for God to mean all that the human author means does not imply that the human author means all that the divine author means. The doctrines of revelation and inspiration do not demand such an equal sharing of understanding.<sup>23</sup> God's meaning can be more than the human author's, but it can never be less than that of the human author.<sup>24</sup>

Another reason for not limiting God's intended meaning to the human author's intended meaning is the fact that God's intended scope of meaning extends beyond the immediate historical audience. The authoritative nature of Scripture and many of the promises of Scripture extend far beyond the original recipients. It is in this context that Hirsch states: "Yet certain texts such as the Constitution of the United States and the Bible do seem to require that meaning go beyond anything that a human and historical author could possibly have willed."<sup>25</sup>

The concept of mystery in the NT also differentiates between God's intention in OT prophecies and the human understanding of them.<sup>26</sup> This is most clearly seen in Rom 16:25–26, where Paul states that the revealed mystery was in previous ages hidden but is now manifested through the prophetic writings. These mysteries were contained in the OT Scriptures and were part of God's intention in the OT prophecies. But they were not made clear until they were realized or actualized in Christ (Heb 1:1–2). This is consistent with Jesus' instructions in Matt 13:52 concerning the

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R. Paché, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 53, 60; M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 1.235.

<sup>21</sup> Warfield, *Inspiration* 162.

<sup>22</sup> R. P. Richard, "Levels of Biblical Meaning," *BSac* 143 (1986) 124, comes to the same conclusion as this paper concerning this issue, but he incorrectly bases it on an analogy with the incarnation of Christ when he states that "if the divine *became* human, it does not mean that the human *became* divine" (italics mine). As Warfield says, there is no hypostatic union but rather only cooperation between the two in the writing of Scripture (*Inspiration* 162).

<sup>23</sup> R. Bierberg, "Does Sacred Scripture Have a Sensus Plenior?," *CBQ* 10 (1948) 182–194; W. Kaiser, "A Response to Author's Intention and Biblical Interpretation," *Hermeneutics* (ed. Radmacher) 439–447; and "Single Intent" 123–124 all make the point to which this work is objecting here. Kaiser's main difference with those who would posit *references plenior* seems to be with the idea that the prophet did not understand his own meanings (*Uses* 23).

<sup>24</sup> Richard, "Levels" 125.

<sup>25</sup> E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967) 121–122. See pp. 121–126 for further discussion of this concept.

<sup>26</sup> See R. L. Saucy, "The Church as the Mystery of God," *Dispensationalism: Israel and the Church* (ed. C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 149–150.

scribe who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old (cf. Mark 4:11; Matt 13:11).

The key argument for not limiting the intention of the divine author of Scripture to that of the human author is the testimony of Scripture that the prophet or human speaker did not always understand his utterance. Main passages used to support this argument are Dan 12:6–9, John 11:44–52 and especially 1 Pet 1:10–12. Kaiser deals with these passages in great detail and concludes that the only thing the OT prophet did not understand was the time of the fulfillment of his prophecy.<sup>27</sup> First Peter 1:10–12 is the linchpin in this argument.

The main debate in 1 Pet 1:10–12 has been the meaning of the phrase *tina ē poion kairon*. Does it mean “who or what time” or does it mean “what time or what manner of time”? The first option is more likely here. As Wayne Grudem has argued, it is more consistent with the actual Greek usages of *tis* and *poios*.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore 1 Pet 1:12 states that it was made known to the OT prophets that they were not ministering the things concerning Christ’s sufferings and subsequent glory to themselves but to the NT people of God. That would be hard to comprehend if they understood all of it themselves.

For the reasons given above it is best not to require a total identification between the intent of the human and divine author in every instance. Biblical examples and statements show that the human authors of the OT did not always intend all the meaning that emerges from their statements in their NT usage. Furthermore the human authors were not always aware of all the referents to which their statements would be applied in the NT.<sup>29</sup> Also, the doctrine of Scripture does not require the divine meaning of a promise to be limited to the human author’s understanding of it.

## II. AUTHORIAL INTENTION AND E. D. HIRSCH

The writings of E. D. Hirsch, Jr., have been used extensively—especially by Kaiser—to support the concept that the meaning of a text must be limited to the intention of the human author. Hirsch explains this position in *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), but in a 1984 article he has, in his own words, changed his theory of meaning to a new and different theory that is conceptually distant from his original one.<sup>30</sup>

Since he has been quoted often by evangelicals in discussions about meaning, it is important that we understand how and why he has changed his position. Also his so-called new theory is important for this essay because it suggests some guidelines in limiting further dimensions of meaning.

<sup>27</sup> Kaiser, *Uses* 21.

<sup>28</sup> W. Grudem, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 74–75. Grudem builds on the work of G. D. Kilpatrick, “1 Peter 1:11: *Tina ē poion kairon*,” *NovT* 28/1 (January 1986) 92.

<sup>29</sup> Bock, “Evangelicals” 308.

<sup>30</sup> E. D. Hirsch, “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” *Critical Inquiry* 11 (December 1984) 202–225. For his earlier position cf. n. 25 *supra*.

Hirsch explains that what he originally meant when he spoke of the meaning intended by the original author was the text's fixed meaning, the (physical) objects referred to by the words in the author's mind at their originating moment. He realizes, however, that difficulties arise with this theory when future fulfillments and applications of the meaning depart from what one might have originally expected. Hirsch solves that problem with a concept-extension theory. He now believes that a verbal meaning with a future-directed intention may have an indefinite number of future applications. He has changed his 1967 statement from "there is no magic land of meaning outside of human consciousness" to "there is no magic land of meanings beyond the whole extent of human consciousness, past, present and future."<sup>31</sup> Such a correction leads to a deepening concept of meaning. Hirsch states:

In my earlier account, I argued that meaning, while not restricted to what was going on in the author's mind, was restricted to what the author *could* have entertained at the time of composition. I held that meaning was an affair of consciousness and that it could contain nothing that was not implicitly part of the author's intentional object. The boundaries of that historical object were the boundaries that enabled meaning to keep its self-identity. My current views are more capacious than before, both because I see new exemplifications as part of a self-identical meaning and because I also consider minor conceptual adjustments to be part of the selfsame meaning. While this change in my theory cannot possibly please those who prefer clear-cut and definite models of reality, my stress on the provisionality of speech and on the delicate ad hoc judgments entailed by the provisionality of language have brought the theory closer to the complex truth about what responsible speakers and interpreters actually do, and should continue to do.<sup>32</sup>

Hirsch posits the extension of meaning on the basis of a concept-extension theory of meaning. He explains:

If all the meaning-intentions of a text were in fact concepts, then the concept-extension model would indeed clarify the problem of future readings of a text. For, on that model, the intended meanings would stay the same, and the readings would be genuine meaning-fulfillments so long as the filled-in blanks were instances subsumed by the original concepts.<sup>33</sup>

He says further:

We cannot limit meaning to what was within an original event any more than we can limit a concept to its original enunciation. A concept is by its nature both an "internal" generality and an "external" array of things embraced by the generality; it is both an "intention" and an "extension." To think of several different items belonging to the extension of a concept is certainly not to think in each case of a different concept! When I think of my Schwinn instead of my son's Blue Streak, I do not thereby change my concept of a bicycle. When I apply Shakespeare's sonnet to my own lover rather than to his, I

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 202.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 223–224.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 208.

do not change his meaning-intention but rather instantiate and fulfill it. It is the nature of textual meaning to embrace many different future fulfillments without thereby being changes.<sup>34</sup>

Hirsch limits this extension of meaning as follows: "In my account, the identity of meaning in different applications is preserved only when the application is an instance subsumed by the original intention-concept."<sup>35</sup>

Hirsch states later that "when older texts have broad meanings, we can easily produce modern exemplifications so long as the original meaning is understood as being itself an exemplification of a broad and still valid concept."<sup>36</sup> This discussion leads to the obvious question: "How far can meaning be adjusted . . . before it loses the self-identity which, by definition, is the essence of meaning?"<sup>37</sup> His answer is that meaning "can tolerate a small revision in mental content and remain the same—but not a big revision."<sup>38</sup> He suggests further that two (speech) contents are still close enough to represent the same meaning if "we are able to subsume both contents under the sort of speech intention we deemed to have been probable in the historical circumstances."<sup>39</sup> Hirsch feels that on the basis of the provisionality ("looking ahead") of speech, interpreters can adjust old concepts to new beliefs as long as the adjustment is in the spirit of the historical speech intention and is not greatly distant in character.<sup>40</sup> Hirsch's suggestion that a verbal meaning with a future-directed intent may have an indefinite number of future applications is clearly appropriate for Scripture in light of its progressive revelation and divine authorship. Also his guidelines for the identity of meaning in future applications are helpful: (1) Meaning is preserved only when the application is an instance subsumed by the original intention-concept, and (2) meaning can tolerate a small revision in mental content and remain the same, but not a big revision. The small revision in mental content Hirsch allows in a further application of meaning is still subsumed under the original conceptual sense and is the type of adjustment in meaning that is consistent with the application of a statement to a further situation. This leads to a discussion of where meaning resides in an utterance.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 210.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 214. Hirsch's theory has tremendous implications for understanding Scripture, in which the divine author controls the process of inscripturation and may have applications and referents in mind for the message of the text that the human author did not realize.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 219. Hirsch is speaking in this context of changing dated meaning to what is believed today, not of fulfillment of prophecy. But the same principles seem to hold.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 221.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. See his examples on p. 220. Recently I pondered the problem of a legitimate "concept extension" when I was writing a note of thanks for a cassette tape a friend had given to me. In the note I wrote that I was listening to the tape in my "car." I actually drive a Ford Aerostar van. Should I have used the word "auto," "vehicle," "van," or "car"? I decided that any of these words, or any of a number of others, would be acceptable to communicate my message without violating the concept. I chose the word "car" for the sake of simplicity. At this point in this essay the reader should note that although Hirsch's idea of conceptual sense is very helpful, his binding of meaning to "speech intention" can be problematic. It is suggested later in this essay that meaning be tied to the affirmation of the text rather than the author's intention.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 222–223.

## III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF SENSE AND REFERENT IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The two main theories concerning meaning for Biblical hermeneutics are that meaning distinguishes either (1) the "sense" (the definition[s] of the word[s]) or (2) the "referent[s]" (the specific object[s] referred to by the word[s]) of a passage. John S. Feinberg suggests meaning ought to include at least the following: "the notions of reference, use within a context, the performance of a speech act, and the idea of connections of language. These items, as well as the demand that sentences be grammatical, seem to be the basic constituents of a proper theory of meaning."<sup>41</sup> Feinberg states that referential theories have historically been the most prevalent theories of meaning.<sup>42</sup> The key notion of these theories is that "a linguistic expression (word, phrase, sentence) has its meaning in virtue of what it names."<sup>43</sup>

With time, however, proponents of referential theories have come to realize that there is more to meaning than just name and referent.<sup>44</sup> There is also the sense or descriptive content of the name or expression involved, "in virtue of which and only in virtue of which it refers to its reference."<sup>45</sup> With the reference is a sense that is even more basic to the meaning and allows one to identify the referent.

Feinberg, Thiselton, Osborne and Silva all list various objections to referential theories.<sup>46</sup> (1) Each term in a sentence does not refer to one and only one thing at all times. (2) The meanings of words vary according to their use in various language situations. (3) Not every term has a referent (i.e. words like "if," "and," "of," "about"), and other words have no observable object to which they refer (i.e. God, love, salvation, etc.).

Thiselton concludes that "we cannot invoke a referential theory of meaning as a basis for hermeneutics. But we are entitled to ask whether the language of the New Testament carries a referential dimension of meaning."<sup>47</sup> He states further, however, that "questions about reference remain an important part, even if not the major part, of hermeneutical inquiries."<sup>48</sup>

Caird brings up further questions concerning the relationship of reference and sense in meaning.<sup>49</sup> After emphasizing the distinction between sense and referent, Caird states that nevertheless they "are so intimately

<sup>41</sup> J. S. Feinberg, "Truth: Relationship of Theories of Truth to Hermeneutics," *Hermeneutics* (ed. Radmacher) 35.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 28–30 for his discussion of "referential theories."

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 28–29.

<sup>45</sup> J. R. Searle, "Introduction," *The Philosophy of Language* (ed. Searle; London: Oxford University, 1971). Cf. further pp. 2–3; Feinberg, "Truth" 28–29; A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 121–124.

<sup>46</sup> Feinberg, "Truth" 29–30; Thiselton, *Horizons* 123–124; Osborne, *Spiral* 75–78; M. Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 100–108.

<sup>47</sup> Thiselton, *Horizons* 124. When he speaks of a "basis for hermeneutics" I take him to mean that a referential theory of meaning will not serve as a comprehensive basis for hermeneutics.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980). Caird's chapter on "The Meaning" is most helpful in this regard (pp. 37–61).

linked that failure to identify the referent is bound to diminish our understanding of the sense."<sup>50</sup> He also posits five relationships that may exist between a speaker and his intended referents and suggests that in three of these cases it is legitimate to "transfer an utterance to a fresh referent without violence to the principle that its sense is determined by the intention of the original speaker."<sup>51</sup> This is how he explains most instances of the fulfillment of the OT in the NT. He notes that a change of referent casts a reflection back on the sense, but he does not see the change of referent as finding or giving new meaning to the OT text.<sup>52</sup> This discussion, as well as Hirsch's, both suggest that a basic dimension of meaning is the sense of the linguistic expression.

Furthermore meaning, as Louw says, "involves a multiplicity of features on a variety of levels."<sup>53</sup> A word means nothing apart from its context, and this same reasoning should be applied to phrases and sentences found in larger contexts. Thus the complete meaning of an utterance or a Biblical passage can only be determined by a consideration of the words, phrases, sentences and complete context.

This discussion will proceed on the supposition that the basic dimension of meaning is the sense or concept communicated in the linguistic expression and that this meaning can only be determined in context.

#### IV. THE DISCUSSION OF DIVINE MEANING IN EVANGELICALISM

Although there is much evidence that in Scripture the divine author's meaning cannot be limited to the human author's intended meaning, and although the evidence indicates that meaning is not limited to the referents of a text but has further dimensions, scholars are not agreed about how to explain the fuller divine meaning in Scripture. In this section I will seek to summarize five discussions of this issue. The five works cited here contribute to the current discussion in evangelicalism of the divine meaning of Scripture.

1. *Douglas Moo and sensus plenior.* Moo has suggested five different solutions to the phenomenon of *sensus plenior* resulting from the use of the

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 59. He seems to be suggesting that the meaning change of an OT passage resulting from a change of referent is a value change more than it is a sense change (i.e. M<sup>V</sup>, not M<sup>S</sup>). In his discussion of the role of intention in the user's meaning Caird gives five different kinds of referents found in Scripture. The first two are (1) referent<sup>P</sup> (= particular and nontransferable) and (2) referent<sup>G</sup> (= general statements applicable to any member of a class). Between these two extremes are three other kinds of referents that he suggests are the linguistic justification for most instances where the OT is said to be fulfilled in the NT: (3) R<sup>RT</sup> (= a statement about a particular referent, which contains enough general truth to be readily transferable to another), (4) R<sup>U</sup> (= a description in some detail of a person who is not yet known to the author), and (5) R<sup>M</sup> (= mendicants, or words thrown out at a not fully grasped object). See pp. 56 ff.

<sup>53</sup> J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 50.

OT in the NT.<sup>54</sup> (1) Jewish exegetical methods may explain the citation techniques used in the NT, but they do not always explain how the fuller meaning was found in the original OT texts. As one example, Moo uses the combination of Ps 110:1 and 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–34 on the basis of verbal similarities (apparently “on my right hand”). The rabbinic classification for such a connection is *gēzērâ šāwâ*. (2) Typology will explain many applications of the OT in the NT. Moo defines a type as “a biblical event, person, or institution which serves as an example or pattern for other events, persons, or institutions.” For example, the experiences of Jesus (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:45) are the ultimate fulfillment of the experience and feeling of David in Psalm 22. (3) Kaiser’s theological exegesis will work in some uses of the OT in the NT. Kaiser, who does not allow the meaning of a text to exceed the limits of the human author’s intention, finds a fuller significance in some texts through the informing theology he claims undergirds their contexts. In the case of the quotation from Deut 25:4 in 1 Cor 9:9, the meaning of the OT text must be the principle that workers deserve to be rewarded if Paul is making this connection on the basis of theological exegesis. (4) *Sensus plenior* is allowable in some passages. *Sensus plenior*, a deeper meaning of words, is distinguished from typology, a deeper meaning of things. Moo limits *sensus plenior* to what can be adduced on the basis of revelation or further development in revelation (the application to Christ of Ps 2:7, “You are my son”). (5) The ultimate canonical context is a basis on which one may find a fuller sense in a text than the human author was cognizant of. For example Ps 8:6, which in its original context describes ideal man, can be applied to Christ in 1 Cor 15:27 because NT revelation shows that no one but Christ fulfills the role of the ideal man. Paul is not appealing to a hidden meaning in the text but to the meaning the text has in the light of the significance of Christ.

Moo implies that meaning can be drawn from the texts of the OT in a variety of ways. And when the meaning the NT authors found in an OT text does not correspond to the grammatico-historical meaning or the informing theology of that text, it is best to think they read the text against the background of the whole scope of revelation as preserved in the developed canon.

2. *Vern Poythress and the divine meaning of Scripture.* Poythress, building on Waltke’s canonical process approach to interpretation, argues that because Scripture has a divine meaning that meaning is more fully understood as its canonical context develops.<sup>55</sup> Using Psalm 22 as an example, Poythress suggests there are three different progressively larger contexts in light of which any particular passage of Scripture may be read:

<sup>54</sup> D. J. Moo, “The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986). See p. 195 for his definition of typology, which is taken from D. Baker, “Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament,” *SJT* 29 (1976) 153.

<sup>55</sup> V. S. Poythress, “Divine Meaning of Scripture,” *WTJ* 48 (1986) 241–279.

(1) the context of the author and historical circumstances of the book in which the passage occurs, (2) the context of the total canon of Scripture available up to the time the book containing the passage was compiled, and (3) the context of the completed canon.<sup>56</sup> He argues that these three readings of Scripture are complementary and not contradictory. A fuller understanding at a later level does not mean our earlier understanding at the first level was wrong.

In his illustration of this procedure from Psalm 22 Poythress focuses on the first and last steps (original historical context and completed canon). As he admits, there are problems with his second step (meaning in the canon of Scripture given up to the time the Biblical book in question was completed). He does comparatively little with it to distinguish it from his first step as he develops his example.<sup>57</sup> A key contribution of Poythress' study is his conclusion concerning the message of Psalm 22. He asks: "What is the *correct* understanding of what God is saying in a verse like Ps. 22:16; 22:18 or 22:1? Is it the understanding we gain from approach (1), or the understanding we gain from approach (3)? The answer, I think, is both."<sup>58</sup>

Poythress not only suggests that there are two (or perhaps three) levels at which one may determine the sense of a text but also strongly affirms that a later understanding does not annul an earlier one. This will be important for our later discussion. He also differentiates between the fuller meaning a reader now may discover in Psalm 22 on the basis of later revelation and the meaning of Psalm 22 in its original context. This distinction in meaning distinguishes him from Waltke.<sup>59</sup>

3. *Douglas A. Oss and the canonical context.* Oss, building on Poythress and Waltke, suggests that the meaning of a Scripture text can be "multi-dimensional."<sup>60</sup> He argues that by virtue of a text's integration into the whole of Scripture and in light of its historical origins there may be many "strata" of the single expressed meaning of a Biblical text.<sup>61</sup> These strata or further dimensions of the single meaning of the text are revealed as the canonical context of the text expands and are what he calls the *sensus plenior* of the text. Oss suggests that

the dynamics of the process are similar to those involved in viewing a master painting. If the painting were viewed from the perspective of its component parts (e.g., brush strokes, figures, and shades of colors), it would not have the same impact as it does when viewed as a whole. When viewed in its entirety, the integration of the colors, figures, and brush strokes constitute [*sic*] a structure with properties not derivable from its parts. Each component of the painting takes on even more meaning when viewed in the light of

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 267.

<sup>57</sup> Here he seems to be laboring to follow Waltke, "Canonical" 10–14.

<sup>58</sup> Poythress, "Divine" 271. He reminds us that God was interested in edifying people in OT times also (p. 272).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 275, 278.

<sup>60</sup> Oss, "Canon" 115.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 127.

the entire structure. Yet each of the three components also has intrinsic value: brush strokes reveal the artist's level of competency with brush techniques, figures reveal his ability to express dimensions and spatial relationships, and colors express his penchant for selecting aesthetically pleasing or provocative combinations of hues. A single brush stroke thus has multiple dimensions, none of which is separable from the single brush stroke. The same phenomenon of understanding occurs when biblical discourses are integrated into the larger canonical context.<sup>62</sup>

To this point Oss' discussion of dimensions of meaning and his suggestion that a text has strata of meaning appear to be helpful. He adds that the meaning discovered in a later context (NT) makes our understanding of the earlier context (OT) more precise. The later context eliminates some earlier (possible) meanings and focuses attention more exactly on other possible meanings when an OT prediction is not clear.<sup>63</sup> But he goes on to state that

it does not seem that a fine distinction is necessary between what the human author expressed *in the historical situation* and what God may mean *in the light of later revelation*. There is no "added" knowledge, only strata of knowledge already present in the canon. Thus one can affirm both the historical meaning and the *sensus plenior* without reading into the author's expressed meaning something that is distinct from it. The expressed meaning of the text can include both. If one distinguishes at this point between the historical meaning of the text and that which is apparent in the light of later revelation, it creates problems for our understanding of certain OT promises. Specifically, if the historical meaning that is "in" certain OT promises is retained in a form distinct from the meaning these promises have when considered in light of later revelation, then some of God's promises were never fulfilled.<sup>64</sup>

He uses the promises to David in 2 Samuel 7 as an example. He states that any claim for the literal fulfillment of the promise "for a permanent and peaceful earthly dwelling place for the nation" in 2 Sam 7:8–11 "creates grave problems for our understanding of God's promises."<sup>65</sup> So, for Oss, Israel as originally concerned is not Israel as ultimately conceived. He suggests that the "literal" meaning of these verses is only understood in light of the entire canon and all the elements of the progress of revelation. What he is doing, however, is canceling clear OT prophecies and erasing one stratum of meaning.

For all of Oss' emphasis on progress of revelation, he is here destroying part of the progress. By saying that the canonical meaning is the original meaning he substitutes a progress of realizations for a progress of revelation and does exactly what amillennialists have charged dispensationalists with doing: He flattens out the OT and NT meaning.<sup>66</sup> Here it will do no good for him to argue that by limiting the context one establishes autonomy over the

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 117. The example he gives is how Moses' wish in Num 11:29 comes to pass in the fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. (italics mine).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

text.<sup>67</sup> This argument goes both ways, and his approach suggests God had no discernible meaning for the original recipients. Nor will it do to argue that the approach suggested in the final section of this essay diminishes the larger framework of the whole canon. The canon has no framework if individual texts are not allowed to speak for themselves in their original context.

4. *Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard's reader-response approach.* William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard suggest that the best possibility for explaining multiple meanings in a text of Scripture is what they call a "legitimate reader-response interpretation."<sup>68</sup> They argue "that in their interactions with the biblical text readers do 'create' meaning."<sup>69</sup> They explain that understanding a Biblical text is like a conversation between friends in which each tries to understand the other person and each person's understanding is based on his prior experiences and individual situations. They limit the legitimate possibilities for such interpretation by setting themselves apart from other reader-response critics' work. They state: "Properly informed, readers may *not* discover meaning unrelated to the intention of the author or the historical meaning of the texts to be interpreted."<sup>70</sup>

Their emphasis is helpful in two ways. (1) They do allow for different legitimate interpretations in different communities of believers. They are aware of the fact that a new dimension of meaning may be generated when a text comes into a new historical context.<sup>71</sup> Here of course they are speaking of meaning that is realized in our reading of the text, not in the NT author's reading of the OT. (2) They emphasize the importance of understanding a text in its literary context instead of trying to find the author's intended meaning. They affirm that

when we read a literary text or listen to an oral message, we cannot read the author's or speaker's mind; we can only work with the written or verbal message. In biblical interpretation, when we have only the written text to study, our goal is to understand the meaning of that text.<sup>72</sup>

The weakness of their approach is the general and subjective limitations and controls they suggest for correct interpretations.<sup>73</sup> I would wish that instead of saying the Biblical readers "create" meaning in their interactions with the Biblical text they would say they "realize" meaning.

5. *Millard J. Erickson's authorial affirmation theory.* Erickson analyzes E. D. Hirsch's "old" view of authorial intent, lists eight aspects in which it

<sup>66</sup> See V. S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 78–110.

<sup>67</sup> Oss, "Canon" 110.

<sup>68</sup> W. W. Klein, C. L. Blomberg and R. L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 138–145.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 139 ff., 149, 150, 145 n. 107.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 145, 149–150. See Osborne, *Spiral* 366–368.

is inadequate, and then suggests needed modifications and correctives.<sup>74</sup> Erickson is apparently influenced in some of his suggestions by Charles Morris' theory of semantics.<sup>75</sup> Although the inadequacies of the "old" Hirsch and Kaiser view of authorial intention that Erickson delineates are persuasive and to the point, I will focus on the modifications and correctives he makes to this theory. The words Erickson uses indicate, as he says, that he is for the most part in agreement with Kaiser and Hirsch against a reader-response type of interpretation.

First, Erickson suggests that instead of speaking of the original author's "intention"—a term fraught with ambiguity—we speak of the author's "affirmation" or "assertion" in the text. These latter terms still emphasize the "act of the writer in producing the writing,"<sup>76</sup> but they focus on the product rather than the process and "avoid any appearance of conscious intention as a prerequisite for meaning."<sup>77</sup>

Further, as well as consciously allowing for the role of the Holy Spirit as the coauthor of Scripture he posits that the terms "signification" and "significance" should be used respectively instead of "meaning" and "significance." This removes the tendency to identify "meaning" with meaning then and "significance" with meaning now. Furthermore it allows for the fact that the original author could have and probably did intend to give both meaning and significance (i.e. referents and principles in the original context).<sup>78</sup> Erickson suggests that the original signification (i.e. referents and principles) and the later significance of it are both aspects of the text's meaning. The later significance is the application of the principles found in the original affirmation in a new context. Erickson's terminology does not limit meaning to only a referential aspect. It also allows "the affirmed meaning to include future persons and situations, as well as those to whom the writing was originally addressed,"<sup>79</sup> a possibility apparently required in some prophecies.

6. *Summary.* This survey demonstrates that the issue of divine meaning in Scripture is a major topic of discussion among evangelicals. It also demonstrates that several different solutions are being suggested. If this sampling of positions is any indication there is also a growing consensus that any divine fuller meaning in Scripture is closely related to the development of the canon of Scripture. It also suggests a desire to move away from discussion about the intent of the human author and instead to focus on the message of the text. Working from what I feel are the strengths of these writings I will now suggest some starting points for the continued discussion of the divine meaning of Scripture in evangelicalism.

<sup>74</sup> M. J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 11–32.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 20 n. 25.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 31.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 24–25.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

## V. LIMITATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS OF DIVINE MEANING IN SCRIPTURE

The suggested limitations and explanations of divine meaning of Scripture given in this section are presented with the assumption that the divine meaning of Scripture is not limited to the intention of the human author.

First, in our discussion we would do well to follow Erickson's suggestion and replace the ambiguous term "intention" with the terms "affirmation" or "assertion" of the text. This focuses our study on the product (the Scripture passage), not the process (the conscious intentions of the author at the moment he wrote). It draws our attention to his intended message (i.e. what he intended to communicate), not the intention of the message (i.e. why he communicated). Furthermore it emphasizes the literary dimension of the message in the text and the importance of literary context for meaning.<sup>80</sup>

Second, as each of the writers referred to in the previous section argues, we cannot separate meaning (original referents) and significance (later applications) as Kaiser and the older Hirsch writings suggest. Meaning has many aspects. It includes referents, concepts, implications, goals and attitudes, among other things. We cannot say a Biblical statement only had a referential aspect of meaning in its original context, nor can we say the conceptual meaning found in the original statement cannot be applied to referents other than those to whom it was originally addressed. This is especially true since God is also the author of Scripture, and all Scripture is profitable for God's people today (2 Tim 3:16; 1 Cor 10:5-6; Rom 15:4). Perhaps Erickson's suggestion that we use the terms "signification" (for original meaning) and "significance" (for a later significance or application of the original meaning) would be a good place to pick up the discussion.

At the same time, when we say we cannot separate meaning (original referents) and significance (later applications) we must remember that the broader definition of meaning suggested here is not meant to imply that there is no difference between the original signification and a later significance. They are different dimensions or aspects of meaning. A legitimate significance of a Scriptural text for a later reader is still a dimension of the text's meaning. This is necessary because God's message had significance for the original recipients that extended beyond the referents he referred to, and God spoke authoritatively through that message. Furthermore that authoritative message was for all future hearers. The meaning of God's Word has a personal aspect through which the reader is to encounter God. If that aspect is not included in our definition of the meaning of a text in each literary context in which it is cited, we are missing the very purpose for which Scripture was given.<sup>81</sup>

At this point we would do well to remember, as Poythress and Oss argue, that a strict separation between "meaning" and "significance" "results in a loss of normativeness for the message of the Bible."<sup>82</sup> They say that "this

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 31-32.

<sup>81</sup> Oss, "Canon" 125.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

kind of strict separation is tantamount to agreeing with the view of neo-orthodoxy, which also holds to a dichotomy between the propositional context of a text and one's personal encounter (application) with the text."<sup>83</sup>

Third, I would therefore suggest at least three possible levels at which one may read a Biblical text. The first level or dimension of meaning is the original signification of the text. This is what the text affirms or asserts in its original literary context and includes various dimensions of meaning, including referents and implications. The second possible dimension of meaning (a canonical meaning) in a text of Scripture is a divine fuller meaning that transcends the understanding of the human author of the text and is only known by later revelation from God. This is commonly called *sensus plenior*. This dimension of meaning is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the OT citations in the NT. But it also comes into play when the OT quotes itself and in other situations where Scripture interprets Scripture. Waltke suggests there are three distinct points in the progressive perception and revelation of the text of a psalm that are occasioned by the enlarging canon: (1) the meaning in the earlier collection of the psalms associated with the first temple, (2) the meaning in the final and completed OT canon associated with the second temple, and (3) the meaning in the completed canon of Scripture, including the NT.<sup>84</sup> It is possible in some gospel accounts that events took on added dimensions of meaning when placed in the literary context of the gospel. Therefore the canonical dimension of meaning, the divine fuller meaning, may itself include several dimensions or levels.<sup>85</sup> The third dimension of meaning in any text is the significance of that text to hearers who make a legitimate application to their own situations of the original affirmation of the text. This dimension of meaning has as many applications as different situations it encounters. We commonly call this dimension the application of Scripture. The reader-response theory described above and Hirsch's concept extension theory help us understand this dimension.

The three most basic dimensions of meaning can be demonstrated from a passage like Psalm 22. The original signification of the text is what it asserts in its original literary context concerning David. The second dimension of meaning, the divine fuller meaning, is revealed in the NT where it is applied to Christ, who fulfills the typological pattern established in the original context. The third dimension, the application of Scripture, is the significance of the text to the OT believer or the Christian who applies it to his personal struggles and problems. This is the same dimension that is involved when we apply the teaching of the book of Joshua to the Christian life. Each of these last two dimensions may involve many levels depending on the number of other Scriptures that give more insight into the divine

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Waltke, "Canonical" 9.

<sup>85</sup> Bock suggests that the Luke 4:16–30 account had prophetic meaning in its preliterary context but took on a greater messianic prophetic meaning (understanding?) in its literary context in Luke 4.

intention in the message of the Psalm and the number of different applications of the Psalm to life situations.

A suggested limitation of divine meaning is that not all texts of Scripture have a divine fuller meaning that transcends what the text can be understood to affirm in its original context. Here when I speak of divine fuller meaning I am speaking of the second dimension just discussed, the canonical meaning. This seems obvious and leads to the fifth suggestion: A divine fuller meaning is only known by later revelation of that fact in passages where Scripture is overtly utilized or interpreted, or perhaps occasionally where implications from a later Scripture open up understanding of an earlier passage.<sup>86</sup> This emphasizes the importance of a canonical approach to interpretation in which any Biblical text may be interpreted in light of its ultimate literary context, the whole canon of Scripture.<sup>87</sup>

Sixth, if the divine fuller meaning of a text is one dimension of that text's meaning we would expect that the divine meaning be, in the words of Hirsch, an "extension of the concept" found in the original verbal meaning. Most evangelical scholars are concerned at this point that the divine fuller meaning not do violence to the original affirmation of the text or violate the thrust of its wording. Instead it is expected to "agree with or expand by *natural implication* the human author's wording."<sup>88</sup> Although this principle generates great discussion with respect to a few difficult quotations of the OT in the NT, it is foundational to the typological connection the Biblical writers often make between the OT and the NT, where God's activity in the earlier context is a pattern of his later escalated work.

The meaning in its original context takes on new dimensions of meaning when the text is placed in a different context. As God's revelation progresses, the meaning is often filled out or escalated and a new dimension of meaning is evident that was not originally understood. In this regard the concepts and statements of Scripture have possible fields or ranges of meaning, as words do. When the concepts or statements are placed in a different context they take on a meaning consistent with the new context and yet still within the range or field of meaning of the statement or concept.

Key to this discussion of dimensions of meaning is the fact that when we speak of the original affirmation of a text and the later-revealed fuller dimension of that text's meaning we are not speaking of one meaning or the other, nor are we speaking of two different meanings. In such a situation

<sup>86</sup> Erickson, *Evangelical* 32; Moo, "Problem" 207–209.

<sup>87</sup> Moo, "Problem" 205–209. Cf. also J. R. Riggs, "The 'Fuller Meaning' of Scripture: A Hermeneutical Question for Evangelicals," *Grace Theological Journal* 7/2 (Fall 1986) 220.

<sup>88</sup> Bock, "Evangelicals" 309; cf. Riggs, "Fuller Meaning" 215. Riggs raises four key questions concerning *sensus plenior* that have been discussed in the Catholic dialogue on this issue and that may be helpful for ongoing evangelical discussion: (1) Can a passage possess a fuller meaning if the human author was unaware of that fuller sense? (2) Is the *sensus plenior* merely a literal sense to Scripture or in actuality a second sense to the literal meaning? (3) What is the nature of the difference between the fuller sense and the typical sense of a passage if there is a difference? (4) What is the range of *sensus plenior*? Does it relate to the use of the OT in the OT, the use of the OT in the NT, and/or the use of the NT in the later Church?

we have two dimensions or aspects of meaning. It is a both/and situation. A later-revealed fuller divine meaning is not a new meaning of a text. It is a legitimate extension of the concept affirmed in the text in its original context, which is a part of the total divine meaning of that text.

Finally, this is not to say that a later-revealed fuller divine meaning annuls the affirmation of the text in its original context. In such a situation, neither text can be read into the other. As argued above, such an approach would flatten out revelation and destroy the original affirmation of the text. Beyond that, in typological passages it would destroy the historical basis of the typological relationship. Here someone might argue that if God does more in the NT fulfillment of OT promises and types than he promised in the OT then he is not unfaithful if he does not fulfill literally the OT promises.<sup>89</sup> But how can a retracted promise in the OT text be the basis for the Church's faith and confidence? In Oss' example from 2 Samuel 7, how can the dismissal of any claim of a literal fulfillment for the nation of Israel be the basis of the Church's hope? Or, if some of God's promises to Israel are typological of experiences of the Church—such as the Church's election, participation in the new covenant, and salvation—then how can such an application be any comfort to the Church if God does not keep those promises made to the nation of Israel in the OT context (1 Pet 2:9–10; Rom 9:25–26)?<sup>90</sup>

## VI. HERMENEUTICAL CATEGORIES

What does all of this discussion mean with respect to the hermeneutical categories used to classify the use of the OT in the NT? Let me make a few suggestions. (1) We should not differentiate between analogy and typology on the basis of finding the same meaning in a typological connection and a different meaning in an analogical connection. This is sometimes done because typology involves a fulfillment of Scripture and analogy is merely an application of Scripture. One implication from this paper is that typology and analogy are both extensions or dimensions of the original affirmation of the text, since a legitimate application of a text is one dimension of that text's meaning. The difference between typology and analogy is that with typology there is escalation of meaning and a context of fulfillment.<sup>91</sup> (2) If there are dimensions of meaning in a text and since typology is by definition based on an historical truth, a later typological connection does not annul the original affirmation of a text. (3) There is great overlap between typology and *sensus plenior* as they are often defined. Typology by definition involves an extension of the concept found in the original affirmation (a

<sup>89</sup> B. K. Waltke, "A Response," *Dispensationalism* (ed. Blaising) 358–359.

<sup>90</sup> W. E. Glenny, "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2," *Dispensationalism* (ed. Blaising) 184–185.

<sup>91</sup> Two works that are helpful for describing the typological-prophetic application of the OT text in the NT are D. J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983) 30–34; D. L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern*. See also Glenny, "Imagery" 156–187.

pattern). This is of course a fuller divine meaning. Moo differentiates the two by describing *sensus plenior* as the deeper meaning of words and typology as the deeper meaning of things.<sup>92</sup> Since words represent things, the distinction is difficult to maintain. My point here is that there is great overlap between typology, canonical exegesis and what some call *sensus plenior*. Perhaps we need to think more about their interrelationship. Or perhaps we need to define them more precisely.

#### VII. CONCLUSION

The evidence from Scripture, theories of meaning, and the current discussion of meaning in evangelicalism suggests that meaning in Scripture may be multidimensional—that is, the meaning of a passage of Scripture is not limited to its original signification or application. The meaning in the original context may take on new dimensions of meaning when the text is placed in a different context or as the canonical context grows. The further dimensions of meaning are extensions of the concept found in the original context. These further dimensions of meaning are able to be subsumed under the original conceptual meaning. They do not do violence to the original conceptual meaning. Moreover the further dimensions of a text's meaning do not annul the original contextual meaning. Instead, consistent with the progress of revelation they add a new dimension to the meaning of the text.

<sup>92</sup> Moo, "Problem" 202.