
The Pastor His Seminary Training

The Pastor as Exegete

Wisconsin Lutheran
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“After the fall, theologians are not born, but are made, namely taught by God through the written Word.”

~ John A. Quenstedt

The Lutheran church came into existence by God's grace using the external means of Luther clinging to the Scriptures as the infallible, saving Word of God. Our church's most striking characteristic is binding itself to the Word, without which our other chief characteristic "By Grace Alone" would be unthinkable. For the Confessional Lutheran church, the Scriptures truly are the living speech of the almighty God. And so, you and I, every time we open our Greek or Hebrew texts, sit in fear of the Word that causes the enormity of our task and the weight of our responsibility to cause our stomach to churn and our skin to shiver. And so it should be. We have been convinced by the Spirit that the Word is the only power of God for salvation. We say along with Luther, "*God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and Sacrament.*"¹ Woe to us if we adulterate the Word of God. Yes, the work of an exegete is weighty business.

Before we get to exegesis, a review of our hermeneutical presupposition.

My Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary² defines hermeneutics as, "The science or art of the interpretation of literary productions, especially of the sacred Scriptures; the study or teaching of the principles of interpretation: distinguished from exegesis, which is the practical application of the art." Hermeneutics is the science or art of understanding. Whenever we read a piece of literature, an e-mail, the newspaper, we, consciously or not, are applying the science of hermeneutics.

As admirable and respectful of the Scriptures as it sounds, we do not, because we cannot, approach the Word of God *tabula rasa*. We come pre-wired with a sinful nature that wants to make all the world bow at our feet and when it doesn't, we exercise revisionist history and re-write the text so that it reflects us as the king of the universe. We have the same inclination toward Scripture, if it were not for the gift of faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us.

And so, we approach the Scriptures with a presupposition of faith which the sacred text itself has worked in us: that it is what it claims itself to be, the very Word of God.³ Our entire hermeneutic is based upon the presumption that the Bible is divinely inspired⁴, as such it is without error⁵, can be trusted in all it says⁶, and is to be taken literally⁷ (not literalistically).⁸

¹ Luther, "Smalcald Articles" *The Book of Concord*, Kolb, Wengert eds., Part III, Art. VIII : 323, ¶10.

² Rescued from the bin outside the library of the old Northwestern College, Watertown, WI during the amalgamation in 1995.

³ Ex. 17:14 "Then the LORD said to Moses. . ."; Ex. 24:4 "Moses wrote down everything the LORD had said.";

1 Th. 2:13 "when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it *not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God*, which is at work in you who believe."

⁴ 2 Tim. 3:16 "All Scripture is God-breathed"; 2 Pt. 1:21 "Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."; 2 Sam. 23:2 "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue."; 1 Cor. 2:13 "we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit."

⁵ Num. 23:19 "God is not a man, that he should lie." Jn. 17:17 "Your word is truth." Jn. 10:35 "The Scripture cannot be broken."

⁶ Num. 23:19 "Does he promise and not fulfill?" 1 Cor. 2:4,5 "your faith does not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."

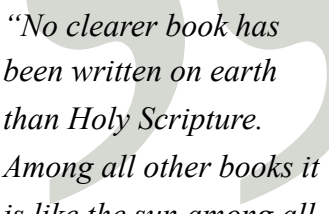
⁷ Dt. 4:2 "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it."; Rev. 22:18,19.

⁸ John Schaller is emphatic: "The infallibility of Scripture stands and falls with the doctrine of verbal inspiration. And since we cannot give up the latter without losing all solid ground under our feet, we will fight to the last for the former. . . He who can find errors in the Scriptures gives up their divine origin not only in part, but denies it entirely; indeed, he does not even grant the holy writers their human right, that they knew what they were writing about, that they wanted to and could write the truth." Westerhaus, *The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and their Message*, IV, 10.

As we go about our exegesis, we're constantly asking questions of the text. Two have already been answered and remain as foundational presuppositions: the Bible is historical literature. God worked out his plan of salvation in history and revealed his saving truth in a relationship with the lives of believers at specific times and places. Our second presupposition is the grammatical setting. Obvious perhaps, but essential, because God inspired men to use their human language to communicate his truths to fallen mankind. Human language follows rules that define for us the plain meaning of each word and thought, within the context and the dimension of any figurative language being used.

Unless this biblically revealed hermeneutical presupposition is clearly understood and practiced as a foundational approach to the Scriptures, exegesis will fail in producing a truthful, God-given meaning. "What good finally is the greatest expertise in working with the original languages of the Bible or the most complete acquaintance with the Bible otherwise, if the individual's approach to the Bible lacks the proper presuppositions of faith?"⁹

At the risk of belaboring this topic of hermeneutics, I would suggest that our seminary training may have left us with the impression that we "had it all figured out." We were taught how to evaluate the variants and perform textual criticism. (Why are these books canon and not others?) We had the importance of historical and grammatical setting¹⁰ impressed upon us. (What's the worldview of the author, the genre of the writing style, the climate of the times, who are the recipients of the text?) We deconstructed Bultmann's "Existential Demythologizing," dismantled "Gospel Reductionism," and blew up Boer's "Divine-Human Mystery," all variations of a rationalistic literary critical approach to Scripture.¹¹ After all of this study, and asking at the end of two semesters of hermeneutics, "How could they get it so wrong?" we were in no position to think that there could be more to learn. In fact, for the purposes of being made a good Confessional Lutheran exegete, we received an excellent foundation. Our New Man was made stronger, our Old Adam with his "rewrite God's Word" ways was drowned and we learned how to make Scripture-based judgments and deductions dictated by the text itself.¹² And yet, within the over-arching discipline of hermeneutics, our training in this area was only a beginning.



*"No clearer book has
been written on earth
than Holy Scripture.
Among all other books it
is like the sun among all
lights."*

Luther
St. L. V:334

⁹ Hoenecke, 7. • Preuss, I:339 observes: "Doctrine (dogmatics) must be the result of sound exegesis, and exegesis the result of the correct application of hermeneutical rules. Only when the hermeneutical principles are sound and biblical will the doctrine be sound. Where the basic hermeneutical principles are abandoned, a radically different theology, unevangelical in nature, will result."

¹⁰ Historical setting: a) Author; circumstances, age, frame of mind, purpose of writing time and place. b) To whom; social situation, economic, educational, religious, political geographical, agricultural, personal/personality. c) World situation; social, political, religious. Grammatical setting: Word meaning, syntax, grammar, genre.

¹¹ If you need a refresher on this topic revisit David Kuske's text, *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way*.

¹² Never: confuse law and gospel, violate the laws of logic, contradict any other teaching of Scripture, propose anything that is not implicit in Scripture. Do take our premises from Scripture.

With this basic definition of hermeneutics and our Confessional Lutheran “presupposition” defined, let’s move on to the area of exegetical theology.

1 History of Exegesis

A definition of exegetical theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) organizes its curriculum under four divisions of instruction. It is within the area of biblical theology that exegetical theology is taught. When Juniors are introduced to New Testament exegesis, three points are emphasized as to how this kind of study of the Bible is:

- a) careful;
- b) a drawing out of meaning from the original language of the New Testament;
- c) dependent upon our knowledge of the historical setting of the inspired text as well as the grammar of Koine Greek.



Combining these three “keynotes” into one definition we could summarize:

Exegetical Theology is a study of God drawn from a careful, word-for-word, and phrase-for-phrase examination of what he says in the original languages of his Word.¹³

Francis Pieper wrote, “The first and foremost duty of the exegete consists in holding the flighty spirit of man to the simple word of Scripture and, where he has departed from it, to lead him back to the simple word of Scripture.”¹⁴

While it goes beyond the assignment of this paper, it seemed beneficial to this writer that we take some time and briefly review the history of exegesis before we arrive at the time period known as the “Wauwatosa Theology.”

¹³ The 2013/2014 WLS catalog gives the following description:

Biblical Exegesis – Thorough, intensive, and reverent study of the Holy Scriptures is the very heart of our seminary training. No one can be a God-pleasing public witness of Christ unless with a believing heart he understands the message which our God and Savior has called us to proclaim to a world of sinners. Certain books of the Bible are taught with special thoroughness in exegetical courses. In this study individual words and phrases, as well as literary structure, are examined on the basis of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Intensive language study during his college training has prepared the seminary student for this work. An exegetical study of both an Old and a New Testament book is given in each of the three seminary years in the classroom.

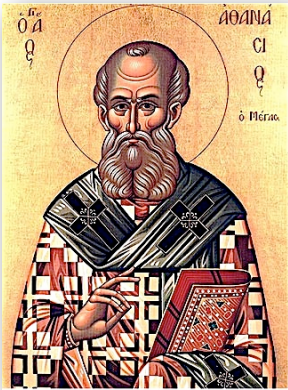
¹⁴ Pieper, F, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 360.

History of exegesis – The Greek Fathers.

Origen (185-253), has been called the “first scientific exegete of the Catholic Church.” He studied the Scriptures systematically and held them to be divinely inspired, but learned from Philo that the literal sense is not always proper, but at times symbolic.¹⁵ He’s known for his threefold sense of exegesis: 1) The literal, 2) the psychic, and 3) the spiritual sense. It is this third spiritual sense which Origen emphasized, with it having three distinct aspects, the a) allegorical, (reveals a hidden meaning); b) tropological, (moral guidance); c) anagogical, (mystical, seeks allusions to heaven or the afterlife).



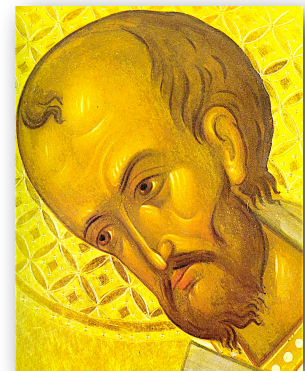
Origen



Athanasius

Athanasius (295-373), brought exegesis to bear against the Arians, and in so doing revealed the purpose of Scripture: to declare to the world that the only Savior, who is eternally God and Son of God, became flesh for our salvation. He took Origen’s idea of Scripture’s “purpose,” and reduced the threefold sense of meanings to one principle that Scripture must be interpreted by itself, revealing one simple sense. By this method, he constantly refocuses our attention on Scripture’s aim: to reveal the two natures of Christ as Savior.

John Chrysostom (347-407) has been dubbed the Doctor of biblical condensation.¹⁶ “When you hear God spoken of in terms of anger or wrath, be careful not to take these words in their usual human and material significance; what we have here is merely a language of condensation.”¹⁷ While holding that the Scriptures were the inspired, infallible Word of God,¹⁸ Chrysostom is saying that God speaks to us in metaphors; in other words “Says” ≠ “Means.”¹⁹



Chrysostom

¹⁵ Gnosticism and Platonic thought systems weighed heavily in Origen’s exegesis. His allegorical method emptied history of its meaning, thus obscuring the progressive character of biblical revelation. For him, places represent spiritual states; to go up and to go down correspond to spiritual movements.

¹⁶ Chrysostom’s exegesis was dictated by two defining words: *συγκαταβαίνω*, God’s “coming down,” meaning his condensation, and *ἀκριβεία*, “perfect manner,” meaning the exactitude of Scripture. What he was attempting to do, without saying so explicitly, was to confirm that Christological confession conditions exegesis itself. One cannot adequately grasp the condensation and the *ἀκριβεία* of the divine Scriptures without first having acknowledged in faith the One who is in person the divine condensation made human *ἀκριβεία*.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, *Exposition on Psalm 6*, pg. 55, 71.

¹⁸ One of the early church fathers to defend the “symphony” of the gospels when some were accusing them of contradicting one another. Each biblical affirmation, he maintained, is illuminated by many other statements in the Bible. This is Chrysostom’s way of pointing out what we today call the analogy of faith.

¹⁹ It has been written of Chrysostom that his idea of the divine condensation of God should normally lead the biblical scholar to an exegesis that is both historical and grammatical. Really?

History of exegesis – The Latin Fathers.

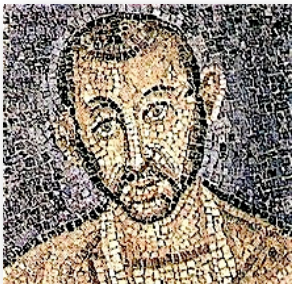
Tertullian (155-222), is noted as the first great exegete of Latin Christianity.²⁰ Against Marcion,²¹ he held to a literal method of exegesis, long before this method was promoted by the School of Antioch.²² Seven key hermeneutical concepts have been distilled from his exegetical work:



Tertullian

- 1) Scripture is to be interpreted as a whole.
- 2) A literal sense is to be considered first; the spiritual sense only if context calls for it.
- 3) A verse must be understood in its context of biblical time and biblical audience.
- 4) Proceed from the known to the unknown. Explain obscure passages by clear passages taken as a whole.
- 5) The Scriptures do not contradict themselves.
- 6) Respect the inner consistency of each individual author and the unity of Scripture as a whole, but the interpretation must also be in harmony with the rule of faith.
- 7) Only those within the true Apostolic church can rightly interpret the Scriptures.

Tertullian was a verbose and at times forced exegete of the Scriptures, but his “principles” above bear great resemblance to those of the old Lutherans, as well as ours, as we will see.

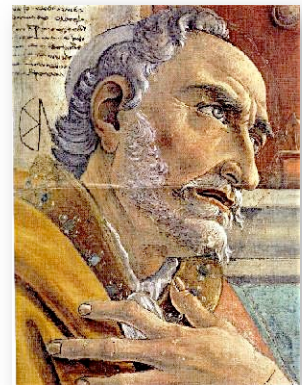


Ambrose

Ambrose of Milan (340-397), was influenced by Origin’s threefold interpretation of Scripture. He was a pastor first, exegete second, so he tended to be both moral and mystical in his exegesis.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), was very Christocentric. Unlike Tertullian, his knowledge of biblical Greek was extremely limited, so his analysis of the New Testament was based primarily upon the Latin Bible. On the positive side, he was regarded by

Luther as “Paul’s most trustworthy interpreter.”²³ “Holy Christendom has, in my judgment, no better teacher after the apostles than St. Augustine.”²⁴



Augustine

²⁰ “Thanks in part to him, biblical exegesis passed from the Greek to the Latin language.” Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis*, vol. 2, 11. • It is true that many years after his conversion he held to the heresy of Montanism, but this should not detract from his contribution to biblical exegesis. • Montanism: Claimed to receive revelation directly from the Holy Spirit, and their messages were as valid as that of Jesus himself. They recognized female bishops and presbyters.

²¹ Marcion: A dualist. Held that the wrathful God of the Hebrews was a lower deity than the all-forgiving God of the New Testament. Jesus was the Savior sent from God, Paul was his chief apostle, and rejected the Hebrew Scriptures and its God.

²² School of Antioch: Exegesis was literal and typological. Christology distinguished between the human and divine.

School of Alexandria: Exegesis was allegorical. Christology emphasized the union of the human and the divine natures.

²³ LW, XXXI, 39.

²⁴ LW, XXXVII, 107.

Luther's exegesis.

We have read so much Luther that we are sure of his exegetical approach: The Scripture *is* God's Word, therefore it is inerrant, infallible, and has the power to change hearts. It should be noted that in his early days, Luther allegorized the text with the best of them. In time, his exegetical work came to reflect the principle that "our God will save those who do not profess to be wise, but simply believe the Word, while those who follow their reason and despise the Word shall go to their doom in their vaunted wisdom."²⁵



Luther further elaborates on the attitude of the exegete:

That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first duty is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that if it pleases God to accomplish something for His glory – not for yours or any other person's – He very graciously grant you a true understanding of His words. For no master of the divine word exists except the Author of these words, as He says: "They shall all be taught of God" (John 6:46). You must, therefore, completely despair of your own industry and rely solely on the inspiration of the Spirit.²⁶

Luther is not advocating that with "prayer and despair" the Holy Spirit will zap the translation onto the page. He was well aware that the Triune God uses means. He stressed the importance of knowing the original languages²⁷ to both expound and defend, while expecting the workman to faithfully apply his tools. He explained²⁸ that he studied the Bible the way he gathered apples. First, he shook the whole tree, that the ripest might fall. Then he climbed the tree and shook each limb, and when he had shaken each limb, he shook each branch, and after each branch every twig, and then he looked under each leaf.

²⁵ St. L., XII, 656.

²⁶ Plass, ¶233, 77.

²⁷ On the importance of knowing the original languages, Luther noted: "There is a great difference between a simple preacher and an expounder of Scripture. [For the simple preacher] to interpret and treat Scripture for himself, and to oppose false teachers, this is a task beyond his powers. [Further on, Luther states:] Where there is a knowledge of the language, the preaching is fresh and strong. . . in proportion as we love the gospel, let us watch over the languages. For not in vain did God have His Scriptures set down in these two languages alone — the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek. These languages, therefore, that God did not despise but chose above all others for His Word, we too ought to honor above all other. . . And let us be sure of this: we shall not long preserve the gospel without the languages. LW 45, 340-378. "To the Councilmen of All German Cities, that they establish and support Christian Schools."

Luther continues: "The languages are the sheath in which the sword of the Spirit is contained; they are the basket in which we carry this jewel; they are the vessel in which we hold this wine, they are the larder in which this food is stored. . . . If through our neglect we let the languages go (which may God forbid!) we shall not only lose the gospel, but come at last to the point where we shall be unable either to speak or write a correct Latin or German. As proof and warning of this, let us take the wretched and woeful example of the universities and monasteries, in which men were not only unlearned in the gospel, but corrupted the languages so that the miserable folk were fairly turned into beasts, unable to write correct German or Latin and well-nigh losing their natural reason to boot."

²⁸ D. Martin Luther's Werke, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden* 2. Band. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1913. p. 244, Nr. 1877. (A similar quote is also found at: D. Martin Luther's Werke, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Tischreden* 1. Band. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1912. p. 320, Nr. 674.)

Post-Reformation exegesis.

Luther possessed a fresh, exciting approach to theology where he seemed to discover something new everyday. He had a flare for dramatic and even overstated speech. Most of his writings are captivating and fascinating. Not so with these later men. Their writings are hard reading, and often one must dip deep to draw water.

It would be beneficial for us to spend some time examining the development of exegesis after the death of Luther. This time of post-Reformation Lutheran theological development is often referred to as the era of “Classical Lutheran Orthodoxy,” or, the “golden age of orthodoxy.” It covers the time from the Formula of Concord (1577) to roughly 1725. Many of the participants were either framers or signers of the Formula of Concord. It is a period marked by a confident, aggressive spirit and a creative approach to theological issues. Creative, as in the development of a systematized approach to dogmatics beyond that of the commentaries of the church fathers; beyond that of Melancthon’s rudimentary *Loci Communes*. Creative, as in applying the timeless truths of God using flexible terminology and expression applied to the changing times. (Not “creative” as in becoming a separatist, flushing 1 Corinthians 10, and saying “*I can do my own thing because Christian freedom says that I can.*”)²⁹



Chemnitz

This “golden age” was filled with men we respect.³⁰ They recognized, as did Luther, that their theology was no better than its biblical basis. Upon exegesis, not the authority of the church, not the commentaries of the church fathers, but on exegesis of the Scriptures alone, they stood or fell. They would be the last to defend any statement of doctrine not grounded in Scripture.

The rise of such stalwart and gifted men of faith can only be attributed to the grace of God keeping His promise that “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*” (Mt. 24:35). The external conditions leading to this rise of exegetical energy was that a crisis faced the third, fourth, and fifth generations of Lutherans after the Reformation. While the foundation of the



Selnecker

²⁹ This past summer I spent two weeks in Australia. It’s a wild, fantastic, and amazing land with flora and fauna that is so different from anything we know here in North America that one simply gasps, “How great thou art!” Among the more interesting creatures that I encountered was the Koala bear. From my North American worldview Koala’s were fuzzy, lovable, docile creatures that you wanted to cuddle with. On the contrary they are the asocial separatists of Australia. They spend virtually their entire lives perched in the branches of eucalyptus trees, away from the rest of the animal kingdom, coming to the ground only to serve their need to move to the heights of another tree. Their diet is almost exclusively eucalyptus leaves, with the oil causing these furry little adorables to spend their entire lives in a perpetual state of intoxication. When an animal, or a gawking tourist, comes too close to their perch, they’ll attempt to drive them away by “voiding” on them from above. Perhaps we have a new mascot for those who have redefined the word “creative.” The koala: looks warm and fuzzy, is really a buzzed separatist that dumps on you when you get too close and show concern.

³⁰ Martin Chemnitz (1522-86), Nikolaus Selnecker (1530-92), Balthasar Mentzer (1565-1627), John Gerhard (1582-1637), Abraham Calov (1612-86), John A. Quenstedt (1617-88), John Baier (1647-95), and David Hollaz (1648-1713).

Reformation was still intact, the climate of thought had changed in the late 16th and 17th centuries with a host of new issues challenging evangelical Lutheran theology. How were they to defend what had been won? How were they to fight, and win, the battle for the faith in their day? They had received a precious legacy called the Reformation and now they needed to assess the damage, consolidate their forces, and continue Luther's work. This is primarily what Lutheran orthodoxy saw its task to be.

The old Lutheran theologians of this time can be characterized as both constructive and conservative. They had a robust respect for tradition, the church fathers, Luther, and the Lutheran Confessions. They showed a greater reluctance even than Luther to break from the past. They distrusted "new doctrines," and this temperament was well expressed in Selnecker's hymn stanzas:

And ever is there something new, Devised to change Thy doctrines true;
Lord Jesus! as Thou still dost reign, These vain, presumptuous minds
restrain;

And as the cause and glory, Lord, Are Thine, not ours, do Thou afford
Us help and strength and constancy, And keep us ever true to Thee.³¹

This conservative conviction had the attendant circumstance of openness and enthusiasm. Born from the necessity of the times and the challenges they ushered in, they were searching to find new effective approaches to the study and advancement of true theology. Now there's a good definition of "creative.":

It is not the purpose of this paper to deliver a definitive history of this period, so let's summarize the nature and genius of the "golden age of orthodoxy":

- 1) A conservative attempt to preserve the evangelical legacy of Luther's Reformation;
- 2) An ardent zeal for the purity of the evangelical doctrine;
- 3) A definite confession and doctrinal position.

And so their "Lutheran hermeneutic" was defined.³² Which leads us nicely back to our immediate topic.

In summary, a review of post-Reformation exegesis has revealed eight classical hermeneutical principles:

- 1) *General alertness of the day*. They availed themselves of every help toward understanding and eliciting the meaning of the divine word.



Mentzer



Gerhard

³¹ "Lord Jesus Christ, With Us Abide," original stanzas 6 & 7 (TLH, 292).

³² To flesh this out just a bit further, five important characteristics of this hermeneutic emerge: 1) Doctrinal unity, 2) Polemics, 3) Catholicity and confessionalism, 4) Luther and Lutheran orthodoxy, 5) Exegesis and dogmatics.

- 2) *The necessity of the Spirit's guidance for the interpretation of Scripture.* A fundamental presupposition for all exegesis is that the interpretation of Scripture is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It often requires a “sacrifice of the intellect.”³³
- 3) *The fundamental hermeneutical rule: establishing the literal meaning of the text.*³⁴ The hermeneutical task was always first and foremost to establish the once-for-all meaning of the Scripture text.³⁵



Calov

- 4) *There is one literal sense (Sensus literalis unus est).* The oneness of the meaning is a constant and cannot be changed, otherwise Scripture becomes a waxen nose and makes a chaos of all biblical exegesis.³⁶ If a text can possess multiple meanings, what then becomes of the clarity, inerrancy, or the authority of Scripture?³⁷ As Calov observed, “The Holy Spirit did not speak with a studied ambiguity concerning matters of faith.”³⁸
- 5) *Scripture is the interpreter of itself (Scriptura est suis ipsius interpres).* The true sense of Scripture must be, and can only be, derived from Scripture itself.³⁹ The author of all Scripture, the Holy Spirit, must be allowed to have his own voice, be his own interpreter. Any trade-off of this principle turns Scripture into a lifeless skeleton, or better, a silent idol, that must be animated by the church (or the translator). Saying that “Scripture interprets itself” is saying that the authority of Scripture lies within itself; the principles of hermeneutics are self-contained within Scripture.⁴⁰

³³ Such submission and commitment to the truthfulness of Scripture was an absolutely necessary hermeneutical presupposition.

³⁴ “Fundamentally the interpretation of Scripture is an analytical activity whereby the genuine sense of biblical passages that are not immediately clear is accurately investigated, descriptively drawn out, and set forth.” Hollaz, *Examen*, Prol. III, q.48 (1718 ed.), p.179.

³⁵ cf. Preus, 323, 324. The hermeneutical rule that we cannot depart from the natural, literal sense of Scripture, unless Scripture itself suggests such a practice is predicated on a number of well established facts:

- The high and lofty content of Scripture surpasses utterly the critical judgment of man’s thoughts (1 Cor. 2:14).
- The clarity of Scripture is utterly spoiled when one twists its meaning according to one’s own preferences.

³⁶ “Only the literal sense of Scripture is valid for establishing doctrine and teaching in the church.” Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, II, 422.

³⁷ This hermeneutical practice was directed against Origen’s allegorizing, a practice followed by Roman Catholic theologians of this time.

³⁸ Calov, *Apodixis Articularum Fidei*, p.51.

³⁹ Preus, 330. “It is not reasoning in a circle to say that the Scriptures explain themselves. The official document of a ruler is explained by that document itself. The meaning of a father’s last will and testament is explained by that will. The sun is known by its own light. So it is with Scripture.”

⁴⁰ Hollaz divides the hermeneutical aids suggested by Scripture itself into three classifications: antecedent, formal, and consequent.

- The *antecedent* aids for interpretations are: prayer, a previous acquaintance with the articles of faith, a solid knowledge of the biblical mode of speaking (historical, poetical, apocalyptic), a love for the truth that desires only to find the genuine sense of a text and interpret it clearly, the continued and repeated reading of Scripture.
- The *formal* aids: a careful and analytical examination of the words and phrases of the biblical text, a careful consideration of the scope and intention of the text (the glory of God and instruction of believers), careful study of the context, an exhaustive collation of parallel passages so as to gather all possible data on the great biblical themes, continual reference to the analogy of faith.
- The *consequent* aids: the means necessary for serious application of the biblical theology, translating the literal sense of the divine words into teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

This is in stark contrast to the view held by the Roman Catholic Church which claims sole authority to interpret the Scriptures—the authority to animate the text. Reflecting its hermeneutic against Timothy George’s article “*Reading the Bible with the Reformers*,” one respondent wrote:



Quenstedt

Either the Church is ontologically and theologically prior to the inspired Scriptures or it is not. If it is, then sola scriptura-based challenges to the Church are out of order.... To claim that “Reformation exegesis resisted the disintegrating impulse of deconstruction” invites the rebuttal that the Reformation’s rejection of ecclesial priority was itself a factor in the eventual rise of deconstructionism.⁴¹

Another added:

The “reformers” have left behind a book truncated to suit their own purposes. When did the Bible become the “inerrant and inspired Word of God”? Was it when Holy Mother Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, finally collected and codified all the books of sacred Scripture, or was it when the reformers removed what clashed with their views and then labeled those books Apocrypha?⁴²

In closing his article, Dr. Mirus reasserts the Roman Catholic hermeneutic of authority:

[The Lutheran Reformers] were unable to read it [the Bible] as fruitfully as their predecessors [the church Fathers], who actually accepted the authority of, and lived within, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

It is astonishing that Timothy George, a foremost exponent of committed Protestantism, has not yet come far enough in thinking about his faith to even begin to acknowledge the question of authority, or to hint at the need for a Church which possesses a Principle of Authority. . . . any reform or recovery of the past which does not reconnect with the Church and her authentic Magisterium is utterly doomed to disintegrate all over again.⁴³

“If the words of Scripture were not to be accepted according to their intention but only as they commend themselves to our way of thinking, then the thoughts that are taken from the Scriptures themselves cannot be considered to be clear and lucid.”

Calov
Preus, vol. I, 324.

Sadly, we ourselves commit the same “Principle of Authority” over the Scriptures when we do not execute a thorough and faithful exegesis of the text, then cobble together a sermon using overused phrases (from other texts), generalized scriptural truths, and hashtag gospel maxims, or worse, wanting to make a point and then finding a “proof text” to substantiate it.⁴⁴

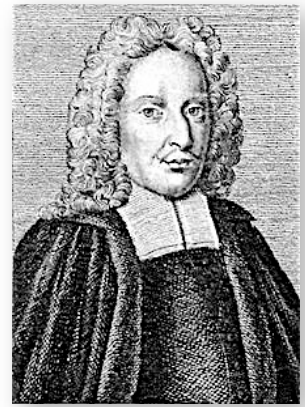
⁴¹ Mirus, Dr. Jeff, “The Exegesis of the Reformers: Authority Redux,” <http://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otc.cfm?id=807>

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ The old adage holds true: “Any text taken out of context is a pretext.”

6) *The unity of Scripture.* The Christocentricity of Scripture unites the formal (sola scriptura) principle of theology with the material principle (justification through faith in Christ) in such a way that neither stands alone, but each complements the other perfectly. The Christological unity of Scripture infers also a doctrinal unity, not just that we might know something historically about Christ, but that the Spirit might draw us to him through faith, and in and through him receive life. This gospel message permeates all of the sacred writings. It should be noted here that with regard to apparent contradictions in Scripture,⁴⁵ the orthodox Lutherans, in contrast to the Calvinists, would rather live with such difficulties than offer unfounded and unconvincing speculations as solutions.⁴⁶



Baier

7) *New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures.* The New Testament explains and interprets the Old, and such an exegesis of the Old is final and unassailable.

8) *The legitimacy of consequences drawn from Scripture.* Against the Socinians,⁴⁷ the Lutherans insisted that it was a legitimate exegetical practice to draw consequences from Scripture and that these consequences had the force of doctrine. Jesus himself appealed to consequences in demonstrating fundamental articles of faith. He proved the resurrection of the dead from a passage that did not explicitly teach the resurrection (Mark 12:26).⁴⁸



Hollaz

Do these eight principles not sound an awful lot like Tertullian's? In fact, do they not sound essentially identical to what we have learned here at WLS?

⁴⁵ The analogy of faith: This does not mean that there are not logical gaps (lacunae) between the articles of faith. It does mean that one section of Scripture can often help us in finding the meaning of another section of Scripture addressing the same article of faith. Romans chapters 3 and 4 help us understand James 2, since they are both dealing with two sides of the Christian life. Paul, how a person is justified; James, how a justified person looks.

⁴⁶ Flacius, *Clavis Scripturae*, II, 39. "There is absolutely no true contradiction anywhere in Scripture, but those things that seem to conflict with each other are so regarded because of our limitation and extreme ignorance, inasmuch as we do not have an adequate understanding of the subject matter or the language of Scripture or do not consider sufficiently the attendant circumstances. Therefore those matters in Scripture that seem to be contrary to each other are so only to those who do not consider the background, persons, times, and relative circumstances of those matters."

⁴⁷ Socinians: Rejected the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Christ, the doctrine of original sin. Rejected virtually all the tenets of Christian orthodoxy.

⁴⁸ Mark 12:26 "Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?"

A history of seminary training in exegetical theology.

The story of our seminary's training in exegetical theology is told in the history of orthodox teachers followed by the theological development of our synod and its attempt to start a training system.

Founding and Muehlhaeuser years.

The theology of the Wisconsin Synod during the Muehlhaeuser years and beyond can be described as generic Lutheranism. It is fair to say, and historically accurate, that the early founders of our synod (Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, and Wrede) had no qualms about serving Union and Reformed Christians.⁴⁹ This is what the mission schools instructed them to do and the mission societies expected of them. In 1853 John C. Wallmann became the new director of the mission school in Barmen. He was decidedly more Lutheran than his predecessors and thus the men that he trained were more confessionally minded. It was Wallmann's proteges that led the efforts to get the synod to take a more unequivocal position regarding the Union and the Reformed churches and members.



Adolf Hoenecke.

Adolf Hoenecke more than anyone else, in close cooperation with Johannes Bading (Wallmann's first student to arrive in Wisconsin), played the decisive role in bringing about change in doctrine and practice which took place in the 1860s. Hoenecke's experiences with Reformed theology and its practical church life (his father-in-law was a Reformed pastor in Switzerland) led him to the conviction that even an external union such as that in Prussia involved a denial of the revealed truth and Word of God, that one could not in good conscience obey the governmental prohibition against attacking Reformed errors.⁵⁰



Moldehnke and the opening of our first seminary.

By the time that Hoenecke arrived on the scene the core of men who had worked together in the Northwest Conference toward a more confessional practice in the Wisconsin Synod had moved to the Watertown area. "An 1857 statement on the relation of the Synod to the congregations points out that

⁴⁹ Westerhaus, I:3,4 – "It is apparent that the Wisconsin Synod in its beginning was committed to being Lutheran and holding to the Lutheran Confessions. Not apparent from the constitution was the Wisconsin Synod's attitude toward other Lutheran bodies or to the Prussian Union. . . . In keeping with the directions of the German mission societies, the Wisconsin Synod in these early years served not only Lutheran, but also Reformed and Union Christians whenever members of the latter two confessions did not have pastors of their own."

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, I:6,8.

every congregation which joined the synod thereby also pledged its adherence to the U.A.C. and made Luther's Small Catechism the instruction book for its youth."⁵¹

The 1863 Wisconsin Synod convention voted to open its own seminary to be located in Watertown. Pastor E. Moldehnke was called to teach. August Pieper describes the state of our early seminary training: "At our seminaries dogmatics predominated to such an extent and the exegetical and historical disciplines receded into the background so much that besides Pastoral Theology only Dogmatics was studied. . . The exegetical treatment of a significant section of Scripture almost never occurs."⁵²

While Pieper may exaggerate a bit here, he rightly points to the reliance upon "Father Theology" (*Väter Theologie*) and "Theologians of Quotations" (*Zitaten-theologen*). Bible passages were routinely quoted in doctrinal essays, but as used by the old dogmatists and were handled as proof texts without any exegetical examination of their content.

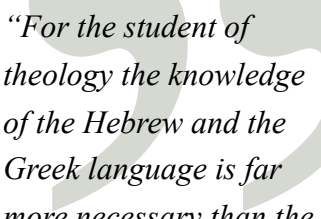
In his little book *Exegetical Fallacies*, D. A. Carson properly warns all of us about the careful handling of God's Word so that we can "hear" it a bit better:

It is all too easy to read the traditional interpretations we have received from others into the text of Scripture. Then we may unwittingly transfer the authority of Scripture to our traditional interpretations and invest them with a false, even an idolatrous, degree of certainty. Because traditions are reshaped as they are passed on, after awhile we may drift far from God's Word while still insisting all our theological opinions are "biblical" and therefore true.⁵³

This is a clear call, a strong warning, for us to always go back to the source.

The "Wauwatosa Theology" and its influence on WLS exegetical training.

The "Wauwatosa Theology"⁵⁴ is a term used to define a time of teaching done in Wauwatosa by J.P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller from 1908 to 1920.⁵⁵ To collapse and condense the involved historical setting that led to the development of the "Wauwatosa Theology," let it suffice for the purpose of this paper to report that it was a protest against "a methodology, pervasive in Lutheran orthodoxy, in which the dominance of dogmatics actually put the historical and connected study of Scripture out of



"For the student of theology the knowledge of the Hebrew and the Greek language is far more necessary than the study of scholastic theology or of the Fathers or of philosophy."

Theol. Antisyncretistica,
Thesis 4, Calov.
Pieper, F.,
Christian Dogmatics, I, 159

⁵¹ *ibid.*, I:4,5

⁵² *TQ*, v.10, p.3 • J.P. Koehler, recounting the training of pastors at both St. Louis and our seminary observed, "Exegesis and history seem everywhere to have been considered secondary subjects." *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207.

⁵³ Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 17.

⁵⁴ Pastor Peter Prange's excellent series, "The Wauwatosa Spring," in our *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* serves as a superb history of the development of what has come to be known as the "Wauwatosa Theology."

⁵⁵ 1900-1943 if we include the full service of each of these three men. 1900-1929 if we accept the Protestant definition, which would indicate the departure of Prof. Koehler.

business. . . . This methodology led to an unprincipled rummaging through the Bible to find proof passages for positions already determined ahead of time.”⁵⁶

John Philipp Koehler

Koehler considered himself to be first and foremost a historian, so it’s interesting to discover that he, as did Pieper, set the goal of being scriptural theologians (*Schrifttheologen*). Both achieved it. It was their objective to train future pastors who would see in the gospel the God-given power for bringing true spiritual life to dead and sluggish hearts and lives, who through “original and independent study of the Scriptures would reinvigorate the life of the church.”⁵⁷



Koehler, along with Walther and Pieper, Stoeckhardt and Hoenecke, and later Schaller as well, wanted to let Scripture and not human reason be the interpreter of Scripture. Koehler comments, “We say, the assignment of the exegete is simply nothing else than to say: Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”⁵⁸

Koehler taught hermeneutics while at the Wauwatosa seminary. An outline for his course has been preserved⁵⁹ and lends valuable insight into the development of the “Wauwatosa Theology.” Koehler asserts that the rules of biblical exegesis form a “Doctrine of Holy Scripture in its Importance for Exegesis.” His outline can be found as Appendix A.

Koehler echoes the principles of Tertullian, Luther, and the “golden age.” It is from a sermon preached for the 1925 seminary school year⁶⁰ that we first hear the term *Zusammenhängendes Schriftstudium*. The term means a connected, or systematic, study of the Scriptures on the basis of the original languages with constant attention to the larger context. This is the exegetical kernel of what we today call the “Wauwatosa Theology.” Keep the whole of a biblical book in mind during the exegesis of the individual phrase and sentence.

Zusammenhängendes Schriftstudium:

“A connected, systematic, study of the Scriptures on the basis of the original languages with constant attention to the larger context.”

⁵⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, xi.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* 212.

⁵⁸ *TQ*, v.1, #2, Apr., 1904, p.81

⁵⁹ E.E. Sauer translated. *Faith-Life*, v.23, #9, 1

⁶⁰ *Wauwatosa Theology*, I, 99.

August Pieper

August Pieper described the manner of procedure for writing his *Isaiah II* commentary:

In the exegesis itself I sought to establish the meaning of each verse on the basis of its grammatical construction and to follow the line of thought through to the end without deviation. I spared no pains in the effort to discover at the end of each smaller and larger section the true content, the controlling point of view, and the goal toward which each part of the discourse was moving.⁶¹

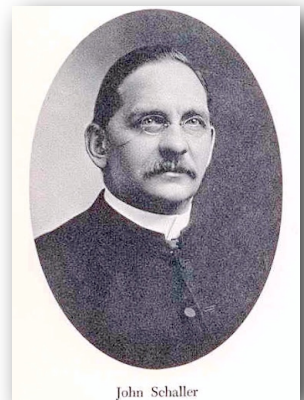
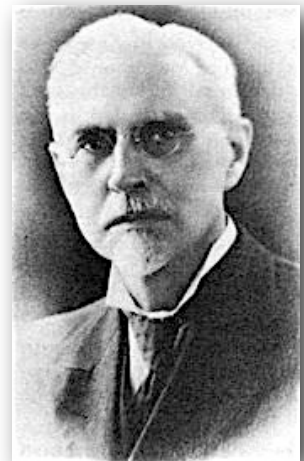
This certainly sounds like Luther's "shaking the tree" illustration. Pieper placed high emphasis on the context, both immediate and broader. This is the historical-grammatical method exercised by a maestro. Pieper also spoke of this *Zusammenhängendes Schriftstudium*:

The public teacher of the Word who wishes to work with success, may not leave one book of Scripture unstudied. . . Yes, if our professors, pastors, and teachers actually wish to attain to ripe, manly or mature knowledge of the Scriptures, then we dare not be satisfied with the mere knowledge of individual verses and passages, be they ever so many, but must learn and know the Scriptures BOOK BY BOOK.⁶²

John Schaller

Pieper remarked in his obituary for Schaller, "He became a mature master in the knowledge of the gospel. . . above all else the study of the gospel directly from the source, independent Scripture study, not passage by passage, but book by book, ultimately from the original text. . . He also was completely of one mind with his colleagues in agreeing that the historical-exegetical studies must claim first place as laying the foundation."⁶³

Someone who is uninformed might conclude that the introduction of the Wauwatosa Theology represented a major change from the Hoenecke theology previously taught at the seminary. But the doctrinal content of the Wauwatosa Theology is almost completely identical with that which preceded it. If there was any change from the Walther-Hoenecke days to the Wauwatosa Theology days, it was first and foremost a change in method.



John Schaller

⁶¹ Pieper, *Isaiah II*, 20. The quotation continues: "Accordingly, each separate portion has been supplied with a summary of contents which shows its logical connection with the next larger portion. The contents of the separate sections and discourses and their relation to each other determined the superscriptions of the discourses and chapters; from these the headings of the three large divisions of the prophecy. These headings will, I hope, enable the reader to follow the development of the thought and to apprehend the general point of view of each part of the whole book."

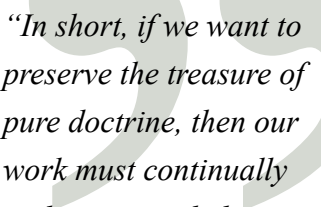
⁶² 1919 Wis. Synod Proceedings, 41. This quotation is preceded by: "The Bible consists of many individual books. They were carefully placed together by God through men to form a well-ordered whole, to reveal completely to us God's plan for our salvation. No one book contains everything. Only all together contain the whole. Therefore"

⁶³ Westerhaus, IV, 5 fr: *TQ*, vol. 12, p.99.

As we've seen from our review of the history of exegesis, these men were doing nothing novel in the history of the church: they were returning to Scripture. In fact, they were following a hermeneutic that was nearly a millennium and a half old, dating as far back as Tertullian (155-222).

This idea of *Zusammenhängendes Schriftstudium*, is one of, if not the most important, emphasis of the Wauwatosa Theology.⁶⁴ The Wauwatosa faculty sought to realize the principle of sola scriptura more fully in a practical way in seminary training and theological work in general by dropping the undue use of, and reliance upon, the works of the dogmaticians of the 17th century, and stressing the importance of direct coherent study of the Scriptures as much as possible in the original languages. This emphasis was maintained in my day at the seminary. I know that it is still paramount today.

I can think of no better evidence of this in recent history, or of a finer example of the Wauwatosa Theology at work, than the way our synod has addressed the matter of what translation we will adopt for use in our official publications. Pastors from each district were assigned sections of the original language texts to translate and then compare to the translations of the three finalists (NIV11, HCSB, ESV). Searching the Scriptures in the original languages has played a decisive role in clarifying this subject for us. Or take the example of the recently drawn-up draft statement entitled, "On the Subject of Women Lectors in Worship Services." The same process, on a smaller scale, has occurred, with the draft filled with six biblical citations of support. For this kind of work we should continue to be grateful to our Lord.



"In short, if we want to preserve the treasure of pure doctrine, then our work must continually and unceasingly be exegetical"

J. Schaller
TQ, v. 9, p. 7

One last observation while we're on this topic. Koehler and Pieper were both vocal about the spiritual lukewarmness and spiritual deterioration they observed in the synod of their day. Koehler wrote that institutions, like individuals, went through predictable stages of development. He wrote of "mental torpor, spiritual ossification, downward trends, termites of disintegration, ecclesiastical disintegration and decomposition."⁶⁵ Other symptoms he observed that attested to this spiritual deterioration were such things as divisions within a synod, strife between congregations which supposedly were in fellowship, evidences of Pharisaism, intellectualism, and dead formalism.

Pieper was no less vocal. He wrote about the signs indicating spiritual decline vociferously: disinterest in the gospel, fewer families holding family devotions, omission of table prayers, great interest in self with declining love for God's Word. And he attributes this spiritual decline, at least in part, to the spiritual lukewarmness of pastors and teachers, mechanical execution of church duties, bored and boring preaching.

⁶⁴ I came across this wonderful little summary definition of the Wauwatosa Theology from Peter Prange's paper *E. Arnold Sitz and the Protestants*: "The evangelical application of historical-grammatical methodology not only to Scripture but to all situations, especially as they relate to the tender care of the soul."

⁶⁵ Hensel, *Faith-Life*, 44.3, 1971, 1, 7-11.

Does any of this sound familiar and timely?

And what precisely did these two Wauwatosa theologians recommend by way of remedies to the deteriorating situation they saw developing in their church? Unity by way of agreement to produce their own Lutheran Bible translation? Hardly. Both men looked to the more widespread and more intensive use of the direct, coherent method of studying Scripture, which they had been advocating, to bring about the hoped for spiritual renewal—true spiritual unity.⁶⁶

Exegetical training at WLS

The question arises every now and then as to why WLS doesn't ease the educational requirements in order to produce more candidates for ministry. In case this topic hasn't yet been put to bed, I refer you to a 1961 essay presented by Erwin Kowalke in the footnote below.⁶⁷ The current curriculum requires WLS students to spend 352 hours in exegetical classes. Add 192 hours in isogogical courses that require extensive work in the original Greek, and students will have spent 544 hours in exegetical study.

My specific training

During my pre-seminary days while sitting in the Gospel of John Greek class I recall thinking to myself, *“We learn to translate the words, but can we ever transport ourselves back 2,000 years and really get into the heads of the writers and put ourselves into the context of the time, place, setting and (here's the real crux) thus the particular use and meaning of the distinct verbs, nouns, particles, and conjunctions?”* It's a thought that drives my curiosity to this day. Well, that's our job. The work of an exegete is weighty business.

⁶⁶ “It is by means of this Word that the world, the church, and our pastors must be healed, if they live in it, that is prayerfully and faithfully think it through, reflect on it, study it. One can't live in the gospel without being illuminated through and through by its light, without being warmed through with its glow, without being set aflame with its fire with the Spirit through and through.” Pieper, 1919 Synod Proceedings, 36.

⁶⁷ In 1961 Erwin Kowalke was asked by the Conference of Presidents to prepare an essay to be presented to the 36th Biennial Convention of the Synod. The purpose of the essay was to address 1) growing demands that the educational requirements be eased in order to produce more candidates for ministry and, 2) a proposal to establish a practical seminary. Both reasons were closely tied to the shortage of pastors in the synod at this time. Professor Kowalke responded forcefully against any compromise to the current curriculum of the time:

“When it is suggested that we drop or cut back this or that subject, we are forced to ask ourselves if we have the preparatory course that we really want for our ministers. The ministry, as we have conceived and practiced it in the Wisconsin Synod, is one of teaching and preaching. We want our pastors to be theologians, not social workers. We want them to preach biblically, exegetically, with an interpretation and application based in independent study of the Scriptures, in the original whenever necessary. We should not want a ministry that is dependent on what it copies from others, that is uncertain, wavering, unable to make up its mind because it lacks the ability to find out for itself what the Scriptures say. It is not possible to acquire that ability except through a knowledge of the original language of Scripture. We can't afford to slight the languages” (Kowalke, *An Evaluation of our Present Ministerial Training Course*, 161).

After the diagramming process, we then moved to the exegesis worksheet with which we are all familiar. While the look, organization, and process (written out or computerized) of this worksheet may have morphed for you over the years, it is still the mainstay of our exegetical work. It highlights the word or phrase, the vocable meaning and form, its significance, and is then followed by a summary statement and an application.⁷⁰

Word / Phrase	Vocable Meaning/Form	Significance
Τοιγαροῦν	"Therefore" - conj., what follows is a conclusion based on what precedes	On the basis of all that is said in chapter 11, an important conclusion is going to be made.
καὶ ἑαυτοῦ	"also self" - emphatic καὶ, the use of the pronoun and the position all put stress on the subject; the writer includes himself along with the Hebrews	The writer wants to emphasize that the conclusion to be drawn from the heroes of chapter 11 is an important one for both the Hebrews and him.
ἵνα	"let us keep on running" - present tense + ongoing action; hortative subjunctive = an urgent request or exhortation	The writer invites and urges the Hebrews not to stop but to continue the running they are involved in without stopping or even pausing for a break
ἵνα ὑπομονῆς	"by means of patient endurance" - ἵνα indicates the means by which something is done; υπομονή has a dual form: patient endurance or enduring patience	The only way the Hebrews can continue running is to be patient and to combine this patience with strong perseverance.
τοῦ ἀγώνος	"the hard contest" - ἀγών = a difficult struggle; a fight with the verb "run" it means a difficult race; the article indicates it is a specific race	The race the Hebrews are running is not one that is unfamiliar to them; but a specific well-known one, the one they are now struggling with which occasioned this letter. He 10:26-24 gives us a glimpse of how difficult this race has been for them.
ἵνα ἡμεῖς ἴνα	"which is set before us" - present tense + ongoing condition; attributive etc. = a characteristic of the race the writer wants to stress above everything else; passive = someone else has set this race before them	There are two important characteristics about this race the writer wants to stress: it is not one that will soon be at an end for either the Hebrews or himself, and it is not a race that has happened by chance, but one that God has set before them. He develops this truth in more detail in vv 4-11 which follow.
<p>Summary: The author now draws a conclusion for the Hebrews and for himself on the basis of chapter 11. That conclusion is in the form of an urgent invitation and exhortation. He invites and urges them to keep on running with him the difficult race that God has laid out before them. The way for them to do this is to be patient rather than complaining and whining and not to stop running but to continue with strong endurance. He wants them to remember this one point particularly. This race is not part of their lives by chance, but it is a race God himself has laid out before them to run.</p> <p>Application: The author includes himself because like the difficulties the Hebrews faced, it is a difficult race which every Christian faces as he or she lives in this world. Cf. Acts 14:22: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." Life will not be a breeze for us but often a hard struggle. The way we can run it is by patiently taking it day by day and enduring in the face of any difficulty, remembering above everything else that it is not some fickle fate that has given us this race to run, but God himself.</p>		

With that we practiced, and practiced, and practiced some more. The syllabus for every language class we received at WLS had as one of its stated objectives something to the effect of *“That the student grow in exegetical skills, including the ability to make applications.”* We modified and tweaked our suggested seminary *“Steps in Doing an Exegesis,”* and I think it’s safe to say that the majority of us still use the same process to this day. But did you notice a constant refrain repeated throughout this process? They’re synonyms: *“vocable meaning”* and *“individual word.”* Have we ignored, failed to develop, or follow through with the suggestion to diagram the sentence so that we can give *“constant attention to the larger context,”* but rather have we focused on word studies as the be-all and end-all of our exegetical work? How can we see the forest if we’re focusing on the trees?

If our focused determination to mine every golden nugget from God’s Word is to satisfy ourselves that a thorough word study equals a thorough exegesis, let me just throw this out there and maybe rock your exegetical world a bit: It’s been said that *“words are pointers, not containers.”* Let me give you an example: The literal translation of the Italian phrase *daré allalucé* is *“To give to the light.”* This is its *“containerized”* lexicon definition. But what the container *points to* in the context of everyday Italian life is the real *meaning*. It *means “to give birth.”* It is also commonly used at the funeral of an Italian Christian when they have been taken home to the *“kingdom of light”* (Colossians 1:12). Now that’s a word picture that should give you some mileage in a sermon, except *daré allalucé* doesn’t appear in the Scriptures.

So now that you have the idea, one quick example using the word *“λογικῆν”* from Romans 12:1⁷¹ [Fem Acc Sg of *λογικός*]. It is translated as *“spiritual act”* in the NIV84, and *“true and proper”* in the NIV11. The sense of the sentence, paragraph and context wants us to translate the word *“logical.”* Yet, look up *“λογικός”* in your lexicon and you’ll find no such definition. The closest you’ll come is Thayer’s definition of *“agreeable to reason, following reason, reasonable.”* Search the New Testament for any

⁷⁰ Let it be noted that chapter seven of our text also taught a *“running exegesis”* process for times when *“a word by word exegesis may not be necessary,”* for example the historical books of the New Testament, the Gospels, and Acts. Personally, I’ve never used the *“running exegesis”* process. I tend to use my diagramming and worksheet method.

⁷¹ Romans 12:1: *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual (λογικῆν) act of worship.”*

other evidence of “λογικός” and you’ll encounter it again only in 1 Peter 2:2, again translated as “spiritual.” I would suggest a contemplation on “as newborn babies greatly desire the logical/reasonable (it’s the only solution) pure milk” as a fuller explanation by Peter as to how people of God who have left their former pagan condition and ungodly activities will logically grow in holy living.

Changes in training from my time at WLS to today.

So, is the Wauwatosia Theology still alive and well at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary?

I was assigned from this seminary to my first call when I was 43 years old. I have a son that’s been in the ministry now for two-plus years who had some of the same professors that I had in class. Perhaps the biggest change that has occurred from my time to the present, only 12-plus years, is that now the seminary class rooms have big-boy tables for desks instead of the 1943 formica plastic school-surplus squeeze-the-maturing-tummy-between-the-seat-and-the-desk classroom furniture, the addition of computer generated slides projected onto screens instead of chalkboards, and the replacement of books (Greek and Hebrew texts and lexicons) with computer programs that analyze every form as you hover, or highlight, your cursor over the word. (There’s that individual “word” again, where’s the larger context?) All this to say that the changes haven’t been radical from my time here at the seminary to the current day. I was encouraged to read massive portions of the Scriptures in English and the original languages. So was my son. The “steps of doing exegesis” that I learned, my son learned.

I’m in favor of the desk upgrade. I like the Powerpoint/Keynote graphical teaching method because I learn better from visuals. But for me, I still need my books. I use an Apple Macintosh laptop with Accordance instead of Logos, but only for printing out my exegetical worksheet. I still pull out my books and hand write my translation, not because I don’t know how to make Accordance “tap dance,” but because it keeps me engaged, yet distanced, so that I can still keep an eye on the “larger context.”

Am I, are you, concerned that we’ve introduced electronic exegesis at our seminary? Have we eased our requirements? The use of computers was introduced the year after I graduated in 2001. At the time, I was concerned. Today, I’m not, because I’ve seen the pastor that the Holy Spirit, through this seminary, has produced out of my son, his classmates, and the men that have come to serve in my area in the pastoral ministry. Because word study alone, and word roots, and parsing, and analysis isn’t all there is to exegesis – it’s just the beginning. There’s the larger context of Scripture that needs to be absorbed and then incorporated into the current sermon. There’s the application to the social buzz, cultural trends, and everyday tsunami highs and lows that need to be understood, related to, and addressed in the context of *this* particular text to *this* particular flock.

My impression is that the caliber of men that are being graduated and assigned today are more in tune with what’s going on in the world around them, and how to apply the scriptural truths to this world, than when I graduated only 12 years ago. (Perhaps a knock on the table for our seminary faculty would be appropriate at this point.)

3 Continuing education in exegesis

Mature or mature.

As one of my brothers in ministry used to always remind us at conferences, “Keep it fresh!” Perhaps this is the place for us to examine our own continuing education in the area of exegesis. It’s a skill that I would venture to speculate most of us feel comfortable we have mastered. To quote again from Carson:

Like much of our theology, our exegetical practices in most cases have been passed on to us by teachers who learned them many years earlier. Unless both our teachers and we ourselves have kept up, it is all too likely that our exegetical skills have not been honed by recent developments. Hermeneutics, linguistics, literary studies, greater grammatical sophistication, and advances in computer technology have joined forces to demand that we engage in self-criticism of our exegetical practices. Moreover, some of the developments have so spilled over into broader areas of Christian endeavor (e.g., the impact of the new hermeneutic⁷² on our understanding of contextualization in world missions) that mature thought is urgently required. The sum total of all useful exegetical knowledge did not reach its apex during the Reformation, nor even in the past century. As much as we can and must learn from our theological forebears, we face the harsh realities of this century; and neither nostalgia nor the preferred position of an ostrich will remove either the threats or the opportunities that summon our exegetical skills to new rigor.⁷³

We can mature or mature, grow or atrophy. The culture we live in, the desperate need for clear and impassioned communication of the gospel, our faithfulness to the divine call extended to us all demand that we heed this wake-up call to mature in our exegetical (and preaching and teaching) skills. To say that we’re maintaining what we learned at our beloved seminary is a fallacy. Our world is racing past us. . . and if we’re not growing we’re withering.

Since Carson is not from our circles, it may be easier for some of us to dismiss what he has just urged us to seriously consider for ourselves. Well then, consider the same idea from one of our own. In 1917 the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States resolved “to name a committee, which in the coming two years was to inform itself as thoroughly as possible regarding the curriculum and course of study in our institutions of higher learning.” The report from the Education Committee of the Joint Synod was delivered and accepted at the August 20-26, 1919, 15th Synod Convention held in New Ulm, Minnesota. A 1989 edition of “Faith-Life” published a translation by Philemon Hensel of this report entitled *The Wauwatosa Seminary Ideal: independent theologians, faithful pastors*:

⁷² Some expositions of the “new hermeneutic” argue that a text has many meanings, none of them objectively true, and all of them valid or invalid according to their effect on the interpreter. Is this Origen as a post-modern?

⁷³ D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 20.

“ . . . the pastor of our time must possess a thorough, scientific understanding of the gospel; only this will ward off actual narrow-mindedness and allow for proper breadth of vision; only this will create the proper aptitude to teach, which does not consist in running through a dogmatic locus, by way of an ancient church pericope, following a repetitious pattern whereby one soon preaches oneself dry and the hearers dead; but in *showing the hearers the whole wealth of Scripture*, interpreting and applying the most important passages from it, for doctrine, for reproof, for improvement, for instruction in righteousness; *only this will insure independence*, so necessary in our time when everything is in constant flux, and the pastor daily sees himself confronted with new situations where memorized formulas leave one in the lurch, and only one who is oriented in the full gospel can find his way.”⁷⁴

I presume that most hearers of this paper are still fairly sharp in their Greek exegetical work. Since we spend so much time working in and preaching on the New Testament, it's the Hebrew that has probably taken on the dull edge since our college and seminary days. Just a few quick thoughts on this: Consider the two summer Hebrew classes offered at MLC. Watch for Professor Paustian's 5-day, 15-hour Hebrew review class that is periodically available during Summer Quarter. Get yourself a copy of *Light on the Path* or John Jeske's *Treasures Old and New*.⁷⁵ Leave it on your desk and use it every day. Purposely plan to preach on an Old Testament text once per month or once per quarter. How often do you select a Hebrew text for exegetical work at Winkels and conferences?

What does exegetical theology look like in this busy pastor's life?

There was a time in the early years of my ministry that I would faithfully translate the text, look for preaching points, let these thoughts germinate, then confer with my commentaries. If I had been a faithful workman, rarely was there a time when a commentary surprised or informed me of some point that I had not already found during the process of my exegesis. Today, I rarely tap my bookshelves to consult a commentary. For me, Luther's comment applies: "It is much better to see with your own eyes than with another's."⁷⁶

Our job, to borrow a phrase from Ernst-August Gutt, is to yield the intended meaning of the original text without causing the listener (or reader) unnecessary processing effort.⁷⁷ In other words, be logical, orderly, clear, and concise in your transmission of the text from the original language to the ability, or level, of your flock. Go from "A" to "B" in a straight line. (Except Lowrey's Loop doesn't do that, it's more of a French curve, but you get the point.)

I serve as pastor of a 380-soul congregation in Ottawa, Canada's capital. I am chairman of our district's constitution committee, president of WELS-Canada, chairman of the Canadian Mission District Board, all while working with a PSI student in the Montreal area, a prospective colloquy man from the same city, and the usual pastor, congregation, and member issues that come with a Canadian national church

⁷⁴ Hensel, *Faith-Life*, 62.3, 1989, pp. 12-17.

⁷⁵ Available from Northwestern Publishing House. Published 2009; catalog # 15N0767.

⁷⁶ Luther, St. L. XXII:54.

⁷⁷ Gutt, *Relevance Theory; A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*, 42.

in its infancy. I think I have a very clear γινώσκω understanding of the word “busy.” I don’t have time to change my mind, let alone my routine, or grand plans for MLC remedial Hebrew school with Professor Paustian, or “the Hebrew school of minor prophets” with Professor Nass, or WLS Summer Quarter. So, I did the only thing that I could do to keep my language skills from withering. I kept using my language skills. In sermon and devotion preparation, Catechism, and weekly Bible class prep. I intentionalized looking up the Greek or Hebrew of key words and phrases I came across in my for “fun,” for myself, devotional reading in English. In September of 2012 I started plowing through the Gospel of John in Greek. I just kept going without looking up vocables. That lasted up to chapter 15, when I was called to serve as a vacancy pastor in October. A month later I was asked to write this paper for you, and I agreed. I’ll leave it to you to determine whether it’s been beneficial. The point of all this is not about me gloating (or whining) about my busy schedule. The point is, the vast majority of you have schedules just like mine. We are all deluged with work and deficient in time.

My exegesis begins with a reading in English of the upcoming pericope on Sunday afternoon. I let it ruminate for a day. My selection of which reading to preach on is a split input based upon preaching to myself and what’s happening at St. Paul that week. As I work through my text study for each sermon, I protect enough time to be able to read the greater context in English (preferably in the original), review the basics of grammar and syntax, and not just race through the translation process in order to say, *“There, you’re done.”* I ask myself a lot of questions of the text: *“Now, why again is that δὲ there? The ἵνα conjunction I see, where’s the subjunctive? And the subjunctive of a ἵνα clause means what again? Oh yes, the subjunctive is the subject of the purpose clause, what the ἵνα clause wants to get done.”*

But more than simply reviewing the basics, when I really get cooking with gas is when I notice something that leads me to ask: *“Why is he doing this with the sentence structure? I’m noticing a pattern here. Where is this point coming from? Why is he saying it this way? Did he say it this way earlier, before my sermon text?”* But this takes time.

When the church historian in me wants to dig into my beautiful sets of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and *Old Testament* to research the etymology of a word, the exegete in me is not so inclined to put full platinum credence in everything written in these lexicons. A Herodotus historical definition of ὑπηρέτης as “under-rower” is of little use in the New Testament context of 1 Corinthians 4:1 where “servant” is the idea.⁷⁸ I spend far more time with my *Concordance to the Greek Testament*, looking up the word in question and referring to its use in the context of other New Testament texts.

I still refer to my TDNT/OT, but carefully because they have a propensity for pigeon holing words into the “Hebrew or Greek mind” based upon supposed semantic limitations of words of the language in question. These lexicons tend to follow the thinking that somehow Greek is the superior language for

⁷⁸ I use this example intentionally as a way to encourage you to read Professor Ken Cherney’s article “General Linguistics and Some Exegetical Fallacies,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 106:3, (Summer, 2009) : 173-185.

God's New Testament revelation because unlike Hebrew it has a past, a present, and a future tense and is therefore better equipped to deal with the time aspect of New Testament revelation. The thinking goes that New Testament writers needed to be able to look back to what God had revealed in the *past*, grasp what He was going to do in the *present*, and anticipate (reveal) what God was going to do in the *future*. But didn't Isaiah have similar needs? Were the ancient Hebrews unable to distinguish and communicate past, present, and future because their language has only two aspects? Of course not.

As the linear structure of the text progresses, I watch for a corresponding concentric pattern of organization. (Not a chiasm, that's something else to watch for.) As an example of how important it is to have a *Zusammenhängendes Schriftstudium* approach to our exegesis, let's presume that our sermon text is based upon Ephesians 5:18-21. But we're not going to begin there.

In Ephesians chapters 1-3 Paul explains that faith is not the work of a believer. Being made right with God (justification), and the faith that he gives, "is by grace" (Eph. 2:8,9). Chapter 4:1-16 begins the sanctification section with a general address regarding the unity of believers. Chapter 4:17-32 addresses the "Christian's walk" in more detail, focusing on their new man. Paul zeros in on the contrast between their former way of life and their new life in Christ. As Christ's followers they have been given the ability to lay aside their old self with its lusts, speaking falsehood, stealing, and not laboring. As new people in Christ they no longer deal with one another in bitterness and anger, but in a tender-hearted (good inner feelings from the gut) and forgiving way. Why? God has forgiven us because of what Christ has done. He is our motivation.

Chapter five continues this general address to all Christians by urging us to be imitators of God. Paul is here fluctuating between specific examples of their former old selves and applying the spiritual truths to those examples. Beginning at 4:30 Paul begins to leave the specific examples and move into "loftier" spiritual application (motivation) for living the new life in Christ.

Paul is writing here like a sine wave of AC current on an oscilloscope. He moves up and down (or back and forth, if you prefer) between example and spiritual truth. This analogy limps because it appears to prioritize Paul's earthly examples (the bottom of the sine wave), with the spiritual truths (the high side of the sine wave). The point is that like a sine wave, both conduct and spiritual truth are part of the same life. The two halves of the sine wave cannot be disconnected from one another, nor can conduct and spiritual truth in a Christian's life.

At Ephesians 5:3 Paul returns to more examples, but he begins to tighten up his "sine wave" fluctuations between example and the spiritual. He intertwines the two more and more closely until he peaks with the Isaiah quotation in verse 14.

Verses 15-17 draw the conclusion ($\sigma\upsilon\upsilon$) from the previous verses by giving one more general exhortation. Now, finally at our sermon text, verses 18-21 at first appear to flip back to the specific examples mode. Verse 18 adds one more example of how a Christian is not to live. It may seem that Paul

is adding this matter of not getting drunk as an afterthought, or as a parenthetical statement. In reality, he is concluding his great “sine wave” exhortation to Christians on an upbeat tone; he’s ending with “dos” not “don’ts.” Now we’re ready to exegete our sermon text.

I would have never seen this structure if I had not taken the time to translate the Greek in a larger context. I believe this process paid great dividends to this exegete and was edifying to the hearers of the sermon. Do I have time to work this process for *every* sermon? No, not anymore. But I encourage you to give it a try and look for a larger concentric pattern. I’ve added another example of this diagramming process at the end of this paper in Appendix B.

Here are a few other items on my checklist that I watch out for:

- Will I have to tighten up the proximity?⁷⁹ The further removed the audience is from the primary setting, the more danger there is that they will either fail to recognize what has been implied in the text, or misconstrue what has actually been said due to interference from the audience’s assumptions relating to their own physical, historical, sociocultural, linguistic environment, or biblical literacy. (This really plays a factor in Bible translation.)
- What’s the contextual situation? What information does the author include, omit, or modify in comparison with the other gospels, their other writings, and how does he rhetorically structure and shape what he has written, for instance, through repetition, descriptive detail, direct speech, intensifiers, figurative language, inserted commentary, and other literary devices? Although we can only assume how the original audience reacted to these different narrative techniques, it is possible to come close enough through careful use of linguistic tools (such as discourse analysis) to fill out the story for our hearers.
- As one of our beloved professors once pointed out, I’m looking for one (or more) of those four key doctrines that are contained in every text of Scripture: original sin, justification, effective means of grace, and/or the theology of the cross.
- An initial verbal form followed by $\delta\epsilon$ in Acts and Luke, I have noticed, signals something distinctive going on, a shift in perspective.
- An initial $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\iota\delta\omicron\upsilon$ followed by a new participant indicates a connected action sequence.
- Why is that subordinate adverbial clause there? (Prepositions used as conjunctions to tell the “why, when, purpose, or result” by modifying the main verb. ($\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\tilde{\omega}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\tilde{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$, cf. Lk.11:1)
- Attributive adjectival participles: Remember that they convey a characteristic of the subject.
- Tenses: *Continue* “asking, seeking, knocking” (Lk. 11:9,10).
- Verbs ending in “ζω” ($\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\gamma\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$, “to bring near”) are high energy verbs (Lk. 12:53; Mt. 3:2).

⁷⁹ Proximity: How “close” is the audience to understanding the writer?

Why do I attempt to go through all of this as part of my exegesis? Because it's what I've been called to do, and it keeps me from preaching *about* the text, and really preach the text.

I regularly check the reviews written in *The Shepherd's Study*.⁸⁰ When it was first started I convinced myself that I was just too busy for one more thing to read. But I found Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies* reviewed there, read it, and learned loads of exegesis-expanding points to consider. Now, I can't afford *not* to check out this resource. If reading this text has done nothing else than make me aware of not making faulty generalizations,⁸¹ over-specification or unwarranted associative jumps,⁸² inadequate analogies or illustrations, then my time has been well spent.

Sermon preparation is where our exegetical work comes into play most often, as we sit down to prepare his weekly message to his people. I've never been so busy that I haven't made the time to make sure that I begin my sermon work with prayer and exegesis. It serves a dual function: a firm base for the preparation of God's Word, and a regular reminder that this is God speaking. It keeps me tuned into God's Word in spite of any personal opinions I may have about a matter (John 8:31-32).⁸³

4 Connection of exegetical theology to . . .

Exegesis is the "foundational," or the "queen" of the four disciplines. It captures the inspired Word of God in the inspired original language. It's as close as we can get to the mind of God until we are brought home to heaven. The connection of exegetical theology with historical theology has already been amply demonstrated by the first half of this paper.

Practical theology

The "practical" payoff of regular exegesis and everyday practical theology is as intimate and direct as the marriage of doctrine and practice. The more time you spend in the living Word of the Holy Spirit, the better prepared you are to "give the reason for the hope that you have," counsel a teen about that tattoo or "lovely" nose ring she wants to get, or render solid counsel about end of life issues to the family of their dying parent. In truth, I have peppered practical applications of exegetical theology throughout this

⁸⁰ <http://wlsce.net/shepherds-study>

⁸¹ Mt. 24:24 "to deceive even the elect, if that were possible" inferring the unstated reply that it is not possible. Ultimately, in the end, true believers will not finally be deceived. However, Barnabas was deceived for a time (Gal. 2:11-14). Five of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 warn about deception in the church.

⁸² Php. 4:13 "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (NIV84). The "everything" cannot be completely unqualified (e.g., jump over the moon, turn sand into gold). The "everything" in this context is contented living in the midst of food or hunger, plenty or want (Php. 4:10,12).

⁸³ John 8:31,32: "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

paper. But really, what's more practical than being filled up with the living Word of life and then applying it on a daily basis to yourself and then your flock?

It has been said, and it is true, that the gospel is only one generation away from extinction. It is contingent upon each generation to rediscover the gospel truths afresh for themselves, and this applies to, just like the old Lutheran theologians, us.

Dogmatics

The dogmatician in me is reminded: “Koehler. . . learned to observe the right method of the dogmatician, which builds on careful exegesis, of language, and history to convey to the human mind no more and no less. . . the eternal divine truths which the Spirit has revealed to faith.”⁸⁴

“For the young theologian to learn to work independently, he must be led to the sources. He must learn to read Holy Scripture in the original languages and in it to do independent research.”⁸⁵ I leave you an example in the footnote below.⁸⁶

Linguistics

Now, before you dismiss this topic of linguistics as a viable candidate for further study and growth in your translation of God's Word, consider the following observation regarding the hermeneutic of the old Lutheran theologians:

“The orthodox Lutherans are open to any light that extra-biblical linguistic analysis might shed on the understanding of Scripture. . . . the orthodox Lutheran theologians, far from being exegetical obscurantists, were unhampered and alert exegetes who, laboring under the authority of the divine Word, desired to avail themselves of every help toward understanding and eliciting the meaning of that divine Word.”⁸⁷

So, let's avail ourselves. . .

Unless you're Moses, the Apostle Paul, or one of the other inspired writers you'll never have experienced direct phonological (oral, audible) communication from God—also known as immediate revelation. You and I are restricted to graphological (written) communication of a formerly phonic⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 214.

⁸⁵ Hensel, *Faith-Life*, 62.3, 1989, p. 13.

⁸⁶ I recall teaching a CAP (Congregational Assistance Program) doctrine class on the topic of justification. One member who had come from a strong Arminian background was contesting the fact that it is *all* by God's grace. They quoted Ephesians 6:15, “*with your feet fitted with the readiness (ἔτοιμος) that comes from the gospel of peace,*” and insisted that this “readiness” was our predisposition to “choose” for God. After pointing out that this understanding was in conflict with what the rest of Scripture had to say about the matter, we agreed that I would do a study of this word in context for the coming week. The word ἔτοιμος is used in three ways: 1) readiness for good works (Titus 3:1; 2 Timothy 2:21); 2) readiness to bear witness to the gospel (1 Peter 3:15; Ephesians 6:15); 3) readiness for the return of the Lord (Matthew 24:44; Luke 12:40). The best way to be ready for the coming of Christ is never to forget the presence of Christ, which is a free gift of the Holy Spirit. ἔτοιμος is a sanctification word. This settled the matter.

⁸⁷ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. 317, 319.

⁸⁸ Or some other form of transmission, since we haven't been told how verbal inspiration works.

communication from God to the inspired writers—also known as mediate revelation. The challenge with graphological communication is that it doesn't communicate "tone and tenor." Or, does it?

Linguistics is the science that attempts to understand language from the point of view of its "inner workings" — what linguists call *internal structure*.⁸⁹ It emphasizes the spoken language, not the written. For the linguist, writing is merely talk that has been caught in flight and pinned down on paper so that the words can be heard again.

As so far described, we've been taught to exegize our text at the word analysis level (morphology⁹⁰) [Present, Active, Indicative, 3rd person, singular; or, Piel, Waw-consecutive, Impf, 3ms], the word meaning level, and the sentence level (grammar, syntax, and diagramming). From there we make every effort to keep the sentences within the context of the greater paragraph. The outcome is that we focus on all the smaller parts of the text with great care, often microscopic care, and then we're able to know the meaning of the text. *Violá!*, you're done.

If we agree that this approach could be called a "microstructure" exegetical process, there is a branch of linguistics called "discourse analysis" (DA) that takes a more "macrostructural" analysis of the text. Imagine being lifted high above in a hot air balloon and being given a view of the larger textual landscape to determine how the textual units stand in a hierarchical and sequential relation to each other (linear versus concentric, for example). This process is enormously helpful in showing how the individual parts of a biblical book are related to the whole.

There's new terminology to learn. "Cohesion" refers to how individual sentences are linked into larger units, to determine what they're pointing to. "Coherence" is a dimension that refers to the various ways a listener or reader makes sense of a text. All of us expect a sermon to be "coherent" in the sense of being relevant and clear. "Cohesion" and "coherence" have a common concern in that they stress the need to see language as a dynamic interaction between speaker (God) and listener (us), or writer (Holy Spirit) and reader (us).

To call a larger section of Bible text a "discourse" is to take into account all the relevant situational features that shape that particular text: place of writing, occasion, writer's or reader's circumstances. But don't we do this now already? To use the words of one of our retired colleagues: "*The meaning of what is said must be derived from the reason for saying it.*"

When you put this all together, what you have is not a flat line of content, but a sine wave of added form, an EKG with added context. You've just moved from *οἶδα* to living-color *γινώσκω*. The picture has been transformed from pencil sketch to retina display; maybe even 3-D stereoscopic vision.

⁸⁹ Black, *Linguistics*, 5. "Internal structure": The speech sounds and meanings, including a complex grammatical system that relates the sounds and meanings.

⁹⁰ Morphology: (*μορφή*) The study of the parts of word meaning (morphemes) that are assembled to form words. [Ex: "I will hear" = *ἀκου* (hear) + *σ* (will) + *ω* (I)]

Philippians for example has a comprehensive macrostructure that determines and controls word choice and the construction of its sentences. This structure has a specific communicative goal: to persuade the Philippians to put aside their differences and to live for the gospel with single-minded purpose *because of Christ*. This understanding of the letter's function shows that it is misunderstood, or only partially understood, if read *merely* as a theological discourse on the person of Christ, an apologetic for suffering, an exhortation to maturity, a letter of friendship, or in any other way that ignores the letter's rhetorical purpose. The various parts of the letter are not a random accumulation of general precepts. What emerges in the course of Paul's argument is an overarching governing pattern designed to dispose the readers to act in accordance with his instructions and appeals, namely, to strive for "unity for the sake of the gospel" *because of Christ* (Php. 1:27).⁹¹

Is this process not precisely what the Wauwatosa Theologians were advocating? *Zusammenhängendes Schriftstudium*: "A connected, systematic, study of the Scriptures on the basis of the original languages with constant attention to the larger context." For we who are charged with interpreting the meaning of God's Word, it seems to this writer a natural extension of our exegetical heritage to identify how the various parts of the text, especially the ambiguous ones, relate to the whole. There is no foolproof method of translating, but linguistic tools can certainly aid us in better understanding the Word of God. Yes, the work of an exegete is weighty business.

A few words on the matter of translations.

By the time this paper is presented to you, our synod in convention will have decided what road to take regarding the translation issue—whether we have chosen to hitch our cart to the NIV11, embark on our own translation project, or follow an eclectic approach. In light of all my research for this paper the following may be of some insight regarding the discussion.

Back in my day at WLS, our hermeneutics professor would patiently try to teach the previously mentioned basics of translation. Without our knowledge, he was teaching us the baby-basics of linguistics: dynamic equivalence versus formal correspondence (a literal translation). But as we've said, what we're after is meaning, successful communication.⁹² What if the meaning of the more literal translation escapes the reader? In other words the source language is translated into the target language so directly that communication is not successful? (Example: You give your literal Greek word order sermon translation to a member to read.) This raises two very important issues in exegetical and translation work: 1) There will always be a need for pastors, for a trained theologian to be on site to explain to the flock what is being said. 2) It also illustrates the truth that there is no perfect translation, even if we WELS pastors (along with help from others) create our own. Why? Because our goal is

⁹¹ cf: Black, *Linguistics*, 193.

⁹² Relations between languages can generally be regarded as two-directional, though not always symmetrical. But translation as a process is always uni-directional: it is always performed in a given direction: from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). The challenge comes in supplying the appropriate TL equivalent, because the goal after all, is to convey the meaning of the original to the target language hearer/reader.

seems, is to re-create an accurate representation of the source language into English without an understanding of who our goal audience is.

Let me explain. The sections of the ESV that I recently compared for the Translation Evaluation Committee (TEC) from 1 & 2 Samuel, and 2 Chronicles, were very close to the wording of the original language (think updated NASB). There were little nuggets of translation brilliance contained within these sections, but I am unconvinced that this translation would be beneficial for successful communication in Sunday worship, catechism classes, or Bible classes. The nuggets of translation brilliance would be understood by the audience that had the ability to translate the original Hebrew first into English, sit back and compare how the ESV had rendered the original, and utter in wonder, “Why can’t I translate so beautifully?” But notice that this goal audience is not your average person in the pew; it’s the language-trained pastor. The ESV is also successful communication for us pastors because from memory, we bring to it the greater context of the setting—Old Testament Bible history. So back to the translation issue. It seems to this writer that the best question to answer for ourselves is not what we *want* to communicate by our translation, but what we reasonably *can* communicate.⁹³

We have been trained to be exegetes, not translators. So now comes the question of “*Can* we communicate the original text, and to whom? Who is our goal audience?”

In concrete terms, a translation can communicate the full intended meaning of the original only if the receptor audience has access to the full context envisaged by the original communicator. Any approach to translation that believes the communication of the full meaning can be achieved by a good translation alone, *regardless of receptor context*, is doomed to failure.

The converse of the last statement is also true. The less the context available to the receptors resembles the context assumed by the original communicator, the less the meaning conveyed by the translation will resemble the original. This limitation holds true regardless of whether the translation is literal, idiomatic, or dynamically equivalent.⁹⁴

All this means that the ESV will be successful communication to an audience of pastors because they have acquired sufficient biblical background knowledge. They know the context. They know what is being said, and what is being implicated by what is said. This is context. But we wouldn’t be creating a translation to be successful among our clergy alone. We could supplement the missing context for those without sufficient biblical knowledge, those unable to draw the correct implications from the text, by producing study footnotes. This is one approach.

The other approach is to develop a translation that imbeds the “as full as possible” context, with its implicated meaning, into the final translation. Now we’ve moved into the area of equivalence. Freer translations (dynamic equivalence) communicate more of the meaning of the original to receptors

⁹³ Gutt, *Relevance Theory; A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*, 67. The ability of WELS exegetes to faithfully and accurately communicate the meaning of the original text (*what* we want to communicate), I am reservedly optimistic that this we can accomplish. It’s the bigger question of, “*Can* we? And to whom?”

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 67,68

(readers) as long as they lack sufficient biblical contextual knowledge. But the more knowledge of the biblical context the receptors acquire, the less helpful the “extra” explicated meaning becomes. In fact, there is a point where the distorting influence of explication prevents users of a freer translation from getting as close to the meaning of the original as users of stricter translations.

If the average Bible reader is growing in his or her knowledge of biblical context, sooner or later the freer translation will prevent a deeper understanding of the original meaning. It is true, that new readers will always be coming along who lack sufficient biblical background, and for them a freer translation will serve well.

So what’s my point? The answer to the question: “Who is our goal audience?” Freer and stricter translations serve two different reading constituencies. The freer translation is easier for those who have little biblical background; the stricter gives a richer meaning to those with more biblical background. However, there still remains a contextual gap between present-day readers of either translation style and the original audience. In other words, how can we ever go back 2,000 plus years and get *every reader* of this one proposed translation into the setting? Answer: Go with what is available, because that’s why God in his wisdom gave shepherds to the flock.

These matters of translation are important issues to wrestle with. Back to the original proposition: It’s not what we *want* to communicate by our translation but what we reasonably *can* communicate. For those dedicated to the idea of WELS producing its own translation, I cannot encourage you enough to spend the time surveying the landscape of what we would be getting into. Has anyone who has proposed that we embark on our own translation contacted Ernst Wendland, the only professional Bible translator in our fellowship, and asked him about the feasibility and practicality of this idea? At least read his paper in the WLS essay file? Read one of the suggested linguistics texts in this paper’s bibliography. Force your way through it and by the time you come to the summary chapter I think that you’ll agree, the work of an exegete is weighty business. The work of a translator is difficult at best. The work of a new translation is monumental.

Conclusion:

So where does all of this leave us? Full circle back to our opening quotation, “*After the fall, theologians are not born, but are made, namely taught by God through the written Word.*” Our seminary has given us an excellent foundation. We will not wander far if we approach the Bible with humility and determine to focus on core truths. In time, the Spirit will bless our efforts to hone our exegetical skills by objective study and a devout, prayerful single-mindedness to become the “workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). ✠ Soli Deo Gloria ✠

Appendix A

Koehler's "Doctrine of Holy Scriptures in its Importance for Exegesis."

I. Its Divine Origin.

- A. The Bible is God's Word and therefore the infallible foundation of all theology.
"Through faith in the forgiveness of sins we bring to Scripture the assurance given us by the Holy Spirit that everything which the Scripture says about itself is true. Only in an evangelical manner, by continually bringing these thoughts into connection with the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, can we understand and discuss these thoughts aright."
- B. The same Holy Spirit operates in all individual books of the Bible, which have been given by God to man in the course of fifteen centuries.

II. The Human Form of Scripture.

- A. The formation of the text which is to be interpreted is the task of the professional text critics.
- B. Determining a canon is a matter of human history.
- C. The character of the people among whom the writing originated must be considered in working out an exegesis.
- D. The individuality of each writer must be taken into account.
- E. The exegete must be well versed in the languages of the original text.

III. The External Purpose of the Scriptures.

- A. Take into consideration the difference between law, gospel, and evangelical admonition.
- B. Keep in mind the differences between the Old and the New Testament.
- C. Keep in mind that Christ is the center of Scripture.

Appendix B

An example of linear versus concentric structure taken from Luke 7:36-50, Jesus anointed by a sinful woman.

▶ Linear structure:⁹⁵

- a) Setting (v. 36) – Jesus is having dinner as an invited guest at the home of Simon the Pharisee.
- b) Trigger (vv. 37-38) – The sinful woman bursts in upon the scene and performs a series of expressive acts in worshipful honor of Christ.
- c) Conflict (v. 39) – Simon silently criticizes the woman’s behavior as well as Jesus’ apparent acceptance of it.
- d) Comment (vv. 40-43) – Jesus turns to the offended Simon and tells him the tale of the two debtors.
- e) Confrontation (vv. 44-46) – Jesus contrasts the woman’s loving acts of devotion with Simon’s failure to accord him the expected acts of hospitality.
- f) Climax (v. 47) – Jesus applies His parable: the greater “debtor” (the woman) is forgiven; the lesser “debtor” (Simon), we infer, is not.
- g) Resolution (vv. 48-56) – There are two contrasting reactions to the events: outrage and resentment burn in the hearts of the noble guests present, while the woman, having been “forgiven,” and thus “saved,” goes her way “in peace.”

▶ Concentric structure:

- A) Introduction (vv. 36-37a) – The principal characters: Jesus, a Pharisee, a sinful woman.
- B) Action (vv. 37b-39) – The woman demonstrates her love for Jesus.
- C) Response (v. 39) – Simon makes a wrong judgment about the woman, and Christ too.
- D) Comment (vv. 40-42) – parable of the two debtors, illustrating grace, forgiveness, and gratitude.
- C’) Response (v. 43) – Simon makes a correct judgment about the woman, and by implication, Jesus as well.
- B’) Action (vv. 44-47) – Christ compares the woman’s outpouring of love with Simon’s complete lack of it.
- A’) Conclusion (vv. 48-50) – The principal characters in retrospect: Jesus, the Pharisees, the the “forgiven” woman.

⁹⁵ I’ve borrowed this example from Ernst Wendland’s article in D. Black’s *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, 106, 108.

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