LARS HARTMAN

# Approaching New Testament Texts and Contexts

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*
*311*

Mohr Siebeck

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zum Neuen Testament



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Collected Essays II

edited by

David Hellholm and
Tord Fornberg

Mohr Siebeck

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# Preface

As all Biblical scholars know all too well, much valuable research is hidden in journals that may be difficult to find. In addition, many journals are in "small" languages that most scholars cannot read. But, to be fair, journals have the great advantage that valuable research often can be published relatively quickly. The risk, however, is great that the new ideas just disappear into the void.

Much of what is written is of lasting value. As a consequence, it stands out as an important task to collect what is written by leading scholars and make it available for the scholarly community. It is thus a great honor for us to be able to publish a number of articles by our Doktorvater Lars Hartman, a widely renowned Biblical scholar. After having acquired his doctoral degree with a dissertation about the Synoptic apocalypse in 1966 and having spent a couple of semesters at Harvard Divinity School, Hartman returned to Uppsala University, where he served as professor of New Testament exegesis. His books include a study of 1 Enoch 1–5, a book of early Christian baptism, and two commentaries, on Mark and Colossians.

An earlier volume with papers by Lars Hartman was published in 1997 by Mohr Siebeck, *Text-Centered New Testament Studies. Text-Theoretical Essays on Early Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (edited by David Hellholm) as WUNT 102. We are most grateful to the publishing house that they once again have been willing to publish a number of scholarly essays by Lars Hartman. Thanks to this willingness, these essays will be easily accessible for decades to come.

No parts of Hartman's above-mentioned books are included. Together with the already published volume of essays the present volume will cover the main areas of Hartman's scholarship: basic hermeneutical topics, the gospel of Mark, early Christian baptism, and the Greco-Roman environment of the early church.

Layout, typesetting and compilation of indices has been done by Christer Hellholm of Progressus Consultant AB, Karlstad.

It is our hope that this volume, together with the earlier published collection of essays, will contribute fruitfully to the work of coming generations of Biblical scholars, and like Hartman's work be of service to the university as well as to the church.

Hammarö and Uppsala March 27, 2013 *David Hellholm* *Tord Fornberg*

# Part I

# Exegesis and Hermeneutics

# 1. Commentary
## A Communication about a Communication[1]

### 1. Theoretical Presuppositions

Throughout the centuries Jews and Christians have produced commentaries on their holy scriptures. The history of commentary writing is long, and a look into it confronts the student with several genres, usages and spiritual contexts that have determined the production of commentaries and their use. That history will not be taken into consideration here,[2] although it is a presupposition for the fact that some of us still put ourselves to writing such books, and, of course, for publishers to invest money in publishing them.

But what is a commentary?[3] The title of this paper seems to presuppose that we know the answer. If, however, we look up the word in Webster's dictionary, we find that it defines a commentary as, among other things, "a series of explanatory notes or annotations." Nothing is said about any exposition of a text or interpretation of it, as we would expect and as sometimes an editor of a commentary series may delineate the purpose of the series in question.[4]

Actually, however, the definition in Webster's dictionary corresponds to what a commentary was like in antiquity: notes or memoranda, for example such as for a lecture, or from a lecture (as taken down by students), or to a text, often without any systematic order. Thus, when Origen wrote commentaries, they were precisely such notes to biblical books. Commentaries belonged to the lecture hall or lay on the lecturer's desk. But if we look for a running interpretation by Origen of a biblical text, it is to his homilies that we are referred.

The preceding paragraph mentioned the "interpretation … of a biblical *text*." When, however, Origen's commentaries and homilies deal with narratives, they

[1] Paper delivered at a symposium arranged by Brill Publishers on July 28, 2008 in Oslo to honor Peder Borgen for his long engagement in the board of *Novum Testamentum*.

[2] For this history see Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools," in *Cambridge History of the Bible* 2, Cambridge 1969, 197–220; Basil Hall, "Biblical Scholarship: Editions and Commentaries," in *Cambridge History of the Bible* 3 (1963) 38–93; Douglas R. Jones, "Commentaries: a Historical Note," in *Cambridge History of the Bible* 3 (1963) 531–535.

[3] A few contributions to the discussion of what a commentary may be are Gerhard Lohfink, "Kommentar als Gattung," *BibLeb* 5 (1974) 1–16; René Kieffer, "Was heißt das, einen Text zu kommentieren?," *BZ* 20 (1976) 212–216; Wolfgang Schenk, "Was ist ein Kommentar?" *BZ* 24 (1980) 1–20; Frank H. Gorman Jr, "Commenting on Commentary: Reflections on a Genre," in: *Relating to the Text,* (eds.), Thimothy J. Sandoval/Carleen Mandolfo, London – New York 2003, 100–119.

[4] See, e.g., the prefaces of volumes in the Sacra Pagina or Word Biblical Commentary series.

raise a question that can be put to several commentators, namely: do you comment on a text or on an event? Origen represents a common way of reading in that he identifies the contents of a narrative with an historical event, and it is this event that he discusses in his commentaries and homilies. But along with text linguists and narratologists it is useful to make a distinction between three worlds: the narrative world, the world of narration and the historical world.[5] Thus, for example, in their narratives about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Matthew and Luke each presents a narrative world. (Narratologists may label it the diegetic level.) The world of narration, on the other hand, is the one in which this narrative is delivered by the narrator and received by the audience. (Narratologists sometimes call it the extra-diegetic level.) In that world Matthew turns to his audience and Luke to his. The historical world, finally, is the one in which the historical Jesus appeared around 30 CE in Palestine. In consideration of these distinctions the following discussion will pertain to commenting on texts, and this is true also when we turn to commentaries on narratives.

In what follows a simple model of human communication will provide us with a number of concepts by which to analyze how a commentary functions as a piece of communication:[6]

In a given Situation and with a certain Purpose a Sender communicates a Message through a Text to a Recipient.

Let us apply this model to the passage in 1 Corinthians 1 where Paul begins to argue against the Corinthian dissension. The Sender is of course Paul, and the Recipients are the Corinthian Christian community. The Situation that determines the Text is the dissensions of the addressee. Paul's Message has primarily to do with his Purpose with regard to the Situation, namely to suppress the dissensions and to provide an argument for why they must do so. In his argument Paul also asks a couple of rhetorical questions, "Was Paul crucified for you?"; "Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" (1 Cor 1:13). These queries reflect aspects of Paul's views on Christ, on the importance of his, and on baptism, but they primarily function as elements of his argument for a message with a precise purpose in a very precise situation.

When exegetes interpret Paul's text they produce a text on Paul's text, and the result is a second communication that can be described in this way:

[5] See, e.g., Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics,* London – New York, 1983; repr. Routledge 1991, 91–95; also Elisabeth Gülich/Wolfgang Raible, *Linguistische Textmodelle, Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten* (UTB 139), Munich 1977, 212–238.

[6] For a more detailed version of this model and for comments on it see Gülich/Raible in the section quoted in the preceding note, and also Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative,* Ithaca – London 1986, 152–172. One aspect that is left aside here is the performance, that is, the non-linguistic side of the communication, such as gestures, voice modulation and other outward factors that can determine the reception of the audience; see Gülich/Raible, *Linguistische Textmodelle*, 33–34. [Hartwig Kalverkämper, "Körpersprache", in: *HWR* 4 (1998), 1339–1371 (Lit.).]

Through a Text[2] a Sender[2]/the Interpreter, in a Situation[2] and with a Purpose[2] interprets a Text to a Recipient[2] as containing the Message of the Sender[1] with a certain Purpose[1] to Recipient[1], who is in a given Situation[1].

Applied to a New Testament professor who gives a class on 1 Corinthians, we get the following: through a Text[2], that is, his/her comments, a Sender[2], that is, the teacher in question, in a Situation[2], that is, in the class, interprets Paul's Text to Recipients[2], that is, the students, as being Paul's Message to the Corinthians, with the Purpose to eliminate the dissensions. The teacher does this with the Purpose to teach the students a bit of Pauline exegesis.

Above reference was made to Webster's definition of "commentary," which actually corresponds to what commentaries were like in antiquity. As a matter of fact modern NT exegetes are well acquainted with a commentary that meets this definition, and that, accordingly, is something else than a text-interpreting commentary of the kind presupposed in the model of interpretation above. The work in question is of course P. Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*.

Billerbeck's quotations of and references to rabbinic passages are supposed to shed light on the NT texts.[7] But what does this material tell a present day reader about the diegetic world that, say, Mark presented to his readers? Very little, unless one presupposes that the narrative world of Mark is identical with the historical world from which Billerbeck's material is taken and which is also supposed to be similar to that of the historical Jesus.

We now turn to commentaries in the sense of the word we are used to, and, as already indicated, the model of interpretation will thereby serve as an analytic instrument. However, to mention "interpretation" means approaching a field full of philosophical and hermeneutical mines. Already words like "understand" and "interpret" are slippery and capable of several meanings. The following discussion will largely keep away from hermeneutics, but nevertheless a few words must be spent on "interpretation." Following on the previous discussion, interpretation, broadly defined, is the use of other, clarifying words to express the same contents as the text interpreted. But, in addition, the word interpretation will also be used in another, stronger sense and will stand for not just a clarifying, but a deepening of the contents of the text interpreted. This comes close to what is normally called interpretation, not least when biblical texts are concerned.[8]

Representing the matter in this way presupposes that the biblical texts do not just mean anything whatever you like. To return to the communication

[7] Schenk ("Was ist ein Kommentar?," 3–4) discusses the functions of such *annotationes*-commentaries as compared to an interpretive task; he then also refers to Herbert Braun, *Qumran und das Neue Testament,* Tübingen 1966. In principle *Der neue Wettstein* can be said to belong to the same category of useful tools for doing exegesis; they do not interpret the biblical texts but can help the interpreter to do so by providing material that sheds light on vocabulary, concepts, etc.

[8] Cf., e.g., chapter two in Gerhard Sauter, *The Question of Meaning: A Theological and Philosophical Orientation,* Grand Rapids, Mich. – Cambridge (uk) 1995a.

model: through a text somebody, say, Paul, tells somebody, say, the Corinthians, something in a certain situation with a certain purpose. The present writer is of the opinion that it is possible for a commentator of this text to catch fairly well what Paul seems to have told his readers. This is true also of Mark as well as of Ben Sira and Epictetus. They are ambiguous only to a certain degree.

Two remarks should be added: first, the approach here adopted means focusing on what the addressees got out of the text. Secondly, the present writer is not so conceited as to believe that his interpretations are decisive answers to the question of what a text, say, by Mark, told its audience. It must also be underlined that the interpretations can become more varied when it comes to an interpretation in the stronger sense: when the interpreter tries to expand on an underlying basic ideology or on ideological implications, for instance, of the text; still, only the first communication is in view. So a present day interpreter may interpret Mark in a class, and not only try to clarify what Mark told his readers, but also attempt to translate this message, performing, say, some kind of demythologizing. The teacher is still clarifying Mark's message to his first century recipients, but wants the students to see what was at stake on a deeper level. The ideas of the text are not simply objects on a shelf in a museum of ideas but are humanly interesting, we may even dare to say, existentially interesting.

So far for interpretation. When we now go on to discuss what a commentator does when commenting a text, the model of interpretation will, as stated, determine the course of the discussion. For the sake of clarity the deliberations will be illustrated by examples from the New Testament, mostly from the Gospel of Mark.[9]

Thus, in a certain Situation Mark tells somebody something with a certain Purpose and does so through his Text. A certain commentator can be interested in different elements of that model, e.g., in the Situation, that is, in a given situation in the history of the early church. Another commentator may concentrate on the author, asking, e.g., how Mark thought, what were his biases, etc.

So a commentary is a Text$^2$ on Text$^1$, and this Text$^2$ is written with a certain Purpose with regard to a Recipient$^2$, that is, to the readers of the commentary. Thus one question to be asked when writing a commentary or studying one is: which Recipients does the writer of a commentary have in view? Pious Bible readers? Students of divinity? The guild of scholarly exegetes? A writer may not necessarily choose only one group of addressees, but the choice has consequences for where the accents of the commentary are put. Thus, if a commentary's principal recipients are supposed to be students of divinity, some energy might be spent on demonstrating how a literary analysis of the texts leads to exegetical consequences, and it also becomes important to show how the cultural back-

[9] The reason for the choice is very practical: a couple of years ago the present writer published a commentary on that Gospel: Lars Hartman, *Markusevangeliet 1–2*, Stockholm 2004–2005. An English revised version *Mark for the Nations. A Text- and Reader-oriented Commentary* is published by Wipf and Stock Publishers 2010.

ground of Recipients[1] colors the communication between the biblical author and his first addressees.

Most commentators discuss how scholarly colleagues have dealt with the different exegetical problems raised by the individual pericopes. This has also to do with the issue of the audience. When a commentary richly refers to how exegetes have dealt with a given text, this may certainly be of use to students of exegesis and can teach them how others have interpreted a given text. Referring to the scholarly discussion of course also means giving credit to the colleagues for their work.[10] But for the task of interpretation these references mean little, and the Bible-interested lay people do not bother about what Pesch or Gnilka has said concerning this or that pericope.[11]

Thus the commentator tells somebody something about a given Text. However, this Text is not, so to speak, just a naked text, but the commentator's reading of it is determined by the fact that precisely he or she is the one who reads it. This means focusing on the Sender of Text[2]. The writer in question does not only apply certain methods, such as some kind of reader-response criticism, but she or he is also a person of a certain character, being rooted in a specific scholarly and/or religious tradition, having particular experiences and prejudices, of which he or she is conscious only of some. Is the exegete who produces the commentary a rationalist, a somewhat refractory churchman, or something else entirely? The answers to such questions are not without their interest to the readers of the commentaries and can determine and indeed be most helpful in their reading.

## 2. Mark 1:9–11

When we now continue our discussion of how the factors of the interpretation model are taken into account by a commentator, we will use as an exemplary text the story of Jesus' baptism according to Mark 1:9–11.

What Mark says is communicated in an interplay between the factors involved according to the communication model. A basic factor is of course Mark's medium, the Text. In our case there are no serious problems in the manuscript tradition or any linguistic difficulties that require a discussion, and they can thus be left aside. Most commentators are not philologists and avoid tackling complicated linguistic issues. All too often they do, however, not think of using the help one can get from the older Church fathers; after all, the New Testament texts are written in their cultural environment in their language. Origen, for

[10] In the Mark commentary by the present writer (see the preceding note) very few such references were made, since it was presupposed that the students can easily get this information in other commentaries.

[11] See nn. 14 and 15 below.

example, was much better in Greek than we are, however much we look things up in grammars and dictionaries.[12]

As a text the passage under study has a particular compositional structure. In Mark 1:9–11 the baptism is very briefly mentioned and is immediately followed by a vision: Jesus "sees" the heaven opened and the Spirit descending on him like a dove and a voice is saying, "You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased." This structure implies that the kernel of the story is the vision with the heavenly words. Most readers need this information – the scholarly exegete, when reading it, realizes that the colleague knows how to handle narrative structure.

One further aspect of this textual surface is that the statement on the Son has a meaningful place in the larger composition of the evangelist. The Son is first mentioned in the headline of the book that in a few traditional terms informs the reader about the main character of the following pages, Jesus, the anointed, the Son of God.[13] Then there are a few signposts along the way: via our passage, and the narrative on the transfiguration (9:2–8) on to the comment of the centurion after Jesus' death (15:39).

A particular way of focusing on the Text is to investigate its history of tradition or its redaction history. In a study of Mark this means asking how Mark has treated motifs or textual traditions that he has taken over. To some commentators this is so important that the question of what Mark's readers might have learned from the text plays next to no role. In this kind of approach the Text is analyzed in such a way that its function within communicative acts between a Sender and his Recipients is largely neglected. On the other hand, to a commentator who is mainly interested in the Text as involved in an act of communication the history of tradition and the redaction history are not as important issues. This is so, even if, in our case, there are reasons to assume that the wording of the heavenly voice is influenced by early Christian usage of the Bible (i.e., the *graphai*, or scriptures of Israel) in Christological reflection.[14] However, redaction history can shed some light on certain features of the Situation of the Markan communication, and so we will return to that topic when we consider the element of the communication model that was labeled the Situation, in which and with regard to which Mark's communication took place.

A concentration on the communication between Author/Sender and Recipients also may mean refraining from trying to look into the head of the author, in our case of Mark. It is common for the writers of commentaries to regard it their principal task to find out the personal theological tendencies of the biblical

[12] I had the occasion to realize this fact in "Grammar and Exegesis," in: *For Particular Reasons* (FS J. Blomqvist); eds. Anders Piltz et alii, Lund 2003, 133–141. [No. 8 in this volume.]

[13] Thus, I prefer the longer text of Mark 1:1, assuming that "the Son of God" belongs to the original text.

[14] Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium 1* (HThK 2/1), Freiburg i. Br. – Basel – Vienna 1976, 92–127, assumes that behind the vision lies a so-called *Deutevision*, originating in the Jerusalem church.

author, and to do so through analyzing how, in our case, Mark has supposedly revised and edited the traditions he takes over. It can happen that commentators are so interested in the author's personal bias that they leave aside the present shape of the text, the actual means of the author's communication with his readers. He is studied as a theologian of the early church, and what he is actually doing to his addressees in a given piece of text becomes less interesting.[15]

There are other ways to reconstruct a Markan theology, namely by means of the text as it stands. Indeed, you assume that Mark meant what he said. Then you systematize certain aspects of the messages that Mark conveys to his readers in the individual pericopes as understood within the whole of the gospel. In that way you may, for example, delineate a Markan view on the person of Jesus or on what Christian ethics could be like.[16]

The next element to consider in the model is the Readers/Recipients of the communication of the biblical author. Their cultural and religious backgrounds form decisive presuppositions of how they apprehend what they hear. So a commentator should inform his/her readers of how he/she imagines these readers. In Mark's case, assuming that they are Gentile Christians is not very original, but seems clearly to be the case.[17] Mark also seems to presuppose that they have received some Christian education, and that it is meaningful to quote passages from the Old Testament to them, indeed to allude to such passages (already in 1:2f.). Such presuppositions are especially significant when the heavenly voice in the baptism text (1:11) contains an echo of Psalm 2. It might very well be that they could have caught some of these echoes only after having been instructed in the Christian community. There were presumably differences within the audience when it came to how deep their orientation was in terms of the scriptures, theology, etc., but the author assumes some such general knowledge.

This brings us to the factor of the model that was labeled the Situation. Here the commentator has to give his/her reader some insights into the world in which the communication took place. In our case this is the Situation of the Recipients of Mark. There were things that were self-evident to Mark and to his readers but about which the reader of today knows little or nothing. Nonetheless they form as it were a sounding-board under the music played by Mark in his text.

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[15] E.g., Pesch, *Markusevangelium 1*, 48–62; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus 1* (EKK 2/1), Zürich – Einsiedeln – Köln • Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978, 25–30.

[16] Francis J. Moloney does something of this sort in *The Gospel of Mark,* Peabody, Mass. 2002, 352–353, *et passim*. The outlook is fundamental to Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (JSNTSup 164), Sheffield 1998. Also Lars Hartman, "‚Was soll ich tun, damit ich das ewige Leben erbe?' Ein heidenchristlicher Leser vor einigen ethischen Sätzen des Markusevangeliums," in *Eschatologie und Ethik* (FS G. Haufe), ed. Christfried Böttrich, Frankfurt am Main 2006, 75–90. [No. 12 in this volume.]

[17] See, e.g., Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 34; Camille Focant, *L'évangile selon Marc* (Commentaire biblique NT 2), Paris 2004, 37.

In addition, there is what we could call the specific Situation, that is, features that belonged to the concrete experience of the Christian addressees of Mark, such as the shadow cast over their existence by persecutions in the past and maybe more to come (cf. Mark 13:11–13). Above it was also mentioned that sometimes redaction critical analyses might give indications about particular features of the specific Situation of a communication.

Of course it is all the more important that a commentator takes into account the specific situation of the NT letters to individual communities with particular problems. It is, for example, of decisive importance to the one who wants to shed light on what Paul was saying to the Romans in Rom 6:1–14 that what seems to be a teaching about baptism is primarily an argument in a situation where Paul's theology of justification is under attack for leading to immorality.[18]

Considering the general Situation, we have seen that the words of the heavenly voice, "You are my son," are the kernel of Mark 1:9–11. Which associations would Gentile Christians get from such a designation? Some commentators find references to Israelite history of religion relevant and cite myths and rituals belonging to the sphere of divine kingship in the Ancient Near East.[19] But what do they say about the conditions of the understanding by Mark's readers? More likely it should have meant something to them that in the Roman empire one also knew to speak of sons of the gods; there were such sons among gods, heroes, rulers, philosophers, and miracle workers.

Here a commentator has to make a choice, although maybe she or he does not always make it consciously. Often the commentators refer to OT passages to shed light on the Markan passage,[20] or may make an excursion into early Judaism, say to Philo or to the Qumran texts,[21] or into Hellenistic history of religion.[22] In practice the commentator may follow the ancient commentary genre, i.e., collect scattered notes to a text which serve other purposes than the interpretation of Mark's message in this text.

## 3. Final Comments

Finally, to the Situation that determined the readers' reception of the textual communication also belongs the way the text was used. As this colors the reception of the Message, a commentator asking what a passage told its readers should have an opinion of how the biblical text has functioned among the readers.[23] As

[18] See, e.g., Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis, Minn. 2007, 390–412.

[19] Friedrich Hauck, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (ThHK 2), Leipzig 1931, 16–17.

[20] E.g., Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (AB), New York 1999, 66; Adela Y. Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis, Minn. 2007, 147–148.

[21] Thus, e.g., Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 66.

[22] See, e.g., Erich Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium* (HNT 3), Tübingen $^{5}$1971, 10.

[23] It means a particular aspect in the Situation when one suggests that the story of Jesus' baptism at least to some recipients has worked as a cult legend, having Christian baptism in view; thus Collins, *Mark*, 147.

to the Gospel of Mark, the present writer is not alone in his belief that the gospel of Mark functioned in the Christian community, in education and in readings at the common worship.[24] This means a particular filter for the reader's/listener's understanding of the message of our Markan passage. Readings carried out at an occasion of worship are open to other semantic dimensions than the merely objective-descriptive ones. In such a context one encounters Mark's citation of the words of the heavenly voice with particular key signatures. There is more of chiaroscuro in the scene than, say, in the one where Herod's daughter says: "Give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter" (Mark 6:25). Regarding the gospel in this manner has consequences in terms of how to view its Purpose – to mention a further factor of the communication model. The purpose then is more to edify than mainly to inform.

Insofar as a commentator should interpret the text, we now, at last, arrive at the message Mark conveys to his readers. Colleagues who have discussed what a commentary is have declared that it should elucidate the message or the meaning of the text for the readers of the commentary.[25] There are, however, many possible ways of understanding such a statement, depending on which interpreter says what to whom in which situation with which purpose. Picking up the somewhat formulaic terms of the interpretation/communication model, we might differentiate between at least the following typical cases. (Message$^1$ is the Message of Sender$^1$ to Recipients$^1$; Message$^2$ is the message the Interpreter takes to be the Message of the Text or of Sender$^1$ to Recipients$^2$; by "rephrasing interpretation" I mean the simpler, non-deepening interpretation I mentioned when defining "interpretation" above.)

1. The Interpreter/Sender$^2$ provides Recipients$^2$ with a rephrasing interpretation of Message$^1$ to Recipients$^1$.
2. The same as 1 above, but presupposing that Message$^1$ is also the Message$^2$ to Recipients$^2$.
3. The same as 1 above but in addition also interpreting Message$^1$ in a deeper or more wide embracing way; still, however, the focus is on Message$^1$ to Recipients$^1$.
4. The same as 3 above, but adding a Message which applies Message$^1$ to Recipients$^2$.

These cases look different in practice, depending on the variables of the model. Thus, which is the task of the Interpreter (more or less academic?, more or less

[24] See Lars Hartman, "Das Markusevangelium ‚für die *lectio solemnis* im Gottesdienst verfasst'?," in *Geschichte–Tradition–Reflexion* (FS M. Hengel), ed. Hubert Cancik et alii, Tübingen 1996, 147–171. [Reprinted in Hartman, *Text-Centered New Testament Studies* (WUNT 102), Tübingen 1997, 25–51.]

[25] E.g., Kieffer, "Was heißt das, einen Text zu kommentieren?"

pastoral?), which is the Situation of the Interpretation (academic?, pastoral?), who are its Recipients (scholars?, students?, pastors?, Bible-reading lay-people?), and which is the Purpose (academic training?, Bible study?, preaching?). It is important also to note that some of the possible cases presuppose a particular ideological position, namely that the interpretation given suggests that it represents God's message to Recipients[2]. It should also be pointed out that the differentiation above certainly is more clear-cut than reality. One commentary may in fact represent several combinations of the variables. However, the distinctions may possibly serve as an invitation to reflection, both on the side of the interpreters and among the users of their commentaries, on the central questions: "What am I actually doing when commenting," and "What is going on in this commentary?"[26]

In our Markan example obviously the kernel of the message is that the Jesus whose work the following book is about was God's son equipped with the Spirit. One may be of the opinion that the commentator should only hand over this message to the present day reader without any further explanations; this may be reminiscent of case 1 above, as well as of case 2. Somebody may add that the designation God's son means that Jesus is acting on behalf of God. This represents a small beginning of what was called a deepening interpretation and comes a little nearer to case 3. In the commentaries we thus encounter different degrees of interpretation, from a simple paraphrase using traditional biblical terms, on to "trans-culturations" of the message that require some sort of demythologization in order to make the then-message (Message[1]) understandable to the reader of today.

So we have mustered some aspects of commentaries, asking how they appear when regarded as pieces of communication about texts that basically are themselves acts of communication. The above reflections have had a limited scope, which is due not least to the fact that hermeneutics has largely been left aside; this is so either hermeneutics is taken as a philosophical discussion of the usage of and the understanding of textual signs in general or it is understood as principles of how to interpret and possibly apply biblical texts in new times. This bracketing of philosophical and theological hermeneutics may be regarded as a *religionswissenschaftliche* attitude rather than a theological one, but even so this narrower perspective might stimulate our ways of approaching biblical commentaries. Asking which factors in a textual communication are a commentator's focus may be clarifying both to writers of commentaries and to their readers, and actually even invite them to pose hermeneutical questions: in which sense does a given approach interpret a biblical text – if at all?

[26] In my own commentary (see note 9) I have adopted an attitude that very much corresponds to cases 1 and 3, assuming that the main purpose of my commentary is to expose the now-readers (Recipients[2]) to what was the then-message (Message[1]) to the then-readers (Recipients[1]) and its purpose.

# 2. Exegetes – Interpreters?

## 1. Exegeses and Interpretation

All students of theology know that the Greek word *exēgēsis* means "explanation" or "interpretation", and so to them exegesis means biblical interpretation. Accordingly, an exegete is a Bible interpreter. But questions are now and then raised about whether we exegetes deserve our designation. Such misgivings may be heard from different quarters, but, above all, the methodological multiplicity and variety in the field today, including the advance of hermeneutics, make it natural for us to reflect for a moment: are we exegetes interpreters?

In the following paper, dedicated to my friend and exegetical colleague, Professor Karl-Gustav Sandelin, I will try to focus precisely on this issue: how far and in which sense do exegetes interpret when doing exegesis? I will deal with that question by regarding a number of common methodological approaches. What I do may be taken as belonging to hermeneutics, but that certainly does not mean that I discuss hermeneutics, which is a much larger field than the one covered here.

When exegesis was taught in the medieval universities, an interpretation of the Scriptures certainly took place, and it served above all to provide biblical arguments for the dogmatics of the Church.[1]

The Reformation brought no real change in *why* exegesis was used – that is, to bolster dogmatics and ethics – but it did change *how much* it was used, since the dogmatics and ethics of the then new Reformed churches rested in principle on Bible interpretation only. It is only fair to state that the principle of *sola scriptura* was – and is – illusory; this became obvious when *sola scriptura* theologians fought each other with biblical arguments: inherited or newly established presuppositions determined and supplemented the interpreters' understanding of the Scriptures.

Everyone who has looked at the history of our New Testament discipline knows that 18th century Enlightenment brought about the beginning of a change. Some Protestant exegetes began to regard the Bible as a collection of writings which could be investigated in the same manner as other material from the past, by using scientific tools and methods, and without any dogmatic or creedal bias. To these exegetes, exegesis was not interpretation for the needs of the Christian

[1] Robert M. Grant 1963, 116–127; Werner Georg Kümmel 1972, 19–21. [See also William Baird 1992, XV–XIX.]

community, but scholarship of the same kind as that applied to, say, Plato's dialogues or Plutarch's *Moralia*.[2]

After this beginning, critical and/or historical approaches have gradually been accepted by practically all biblical scholars, although at the Roman Catholic faculties this was not generally the case until this century. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church still expects her exegetes to function within the Church and not to depart from the overall God-centered ideology of the Bible.[3] Even though among Protestant churches the issue is seldom as explicitly articulated, these churches often place similar expectations upon the exegetes at the Protestant faculties. Therefore, today most scholarly exegetes are expected to interpret the Bible in some sense of the word and, in doing so, at least to be conscious of the fact that the majority of their students are being trained in order to interpret the Bible to the Christian community.

Although it is easy to recognize a possible tension between critical scholarship and expectations of Christian Bible interpretation, I will not deal with this problem here. I will, however, take for granted an understanding of interpretation which stays within common scientific borders. As such it should be acceptable both to ordinary literary critics and historians of ideas and to churchmen, although the latter may want to pursue it further beyond scholarly exegesis into the fields of normative application to dogmatics, ethics etc.

## 2. Two Models

I begin by presenting two models, the first of which is one of *communication:*

– In a given Situation a Sender communicates a Message through a Text to a Recipient with a certain Purpose.[4]

Such a model can be applied to both a Festschrift article and to, say, Mark's gospel. In scholarly work on a given document, one can concentrate on particular elements of its communication: for instance, on the text, studying, say, its structure or its grammar, or on the Sender and his/her Situation.[5]

Before combining this communication model with one of text interpretation, my use of the word interpretation should be clarified. I adopt the following definition:

[2] [Cf. Baird 1992, 3–57.]

[3] Commission 1993, 493–514.

[4] E.g. Elisabeth Gülich/Wolfgang Raible 1977, 21–26.

[5] Of course one can refine this model through differentiating between the Situation of the Sender and that of the Recipient, but in order for the communication to work, these two Situations should have so much in common that to an acceptable extent communication is established, i.e., that the Message gets through and its Purpose is achieved at least to such an extent that the process is not meaningless. Thus, in this case I refrain from differentiating between the two situations mentioned.

– An expression "A" is an interpretation of the expression "B", if "B" can be understood in such a way that its meaning is expressed by "A" in a clearer, more distinct or more complete way.[6]

To this definition two remarks should be added: firstly, it is so softly formulated that it admits that "B" can be understood in more than one way. Secondly, as to "meaning": its denotation is, to say the least, a bit vague.[7] In this connection I will use the term in a rather common sense manner, hoping that this will not cause any unnecessary obscurity. I will, however, make some use of E. D. Hirsch's distinction between "meaning" and "signification", in so far, namely, that "signification" actually takes into account a sort of interpretation that may mean slightly more of a "fusion of the horizons" of the text and of the reader (to use Gadamer's term)[8] than is contained in my definition's wording "clearer, more distinct or more complete way".

For my purpose the communication model should be complemented with one of text *interpretation:*

– In a given Situation an Interpreter interprets a Text as a Sender's Message to a Recipient in a certain Situation with a certain Purpose.[9]

Since exegetes are re-reading older texts, this interpretation model needs to be modified: We differentiate between the original Situation in which the communication took place and the secondary Situation in which the Text is interpreted by persons other than the original recipients and/or interpreters. So, if I designate the original Situations, Interpretations, etc. with the superscript 1, and the secondary ones with the superscript 2, we get:

– In Situation$^2$, Interpreter$^2$ interprets the Text to Recipient$^2$ as the Sender's Message$^1$ to Recipient$^1$ with Purpose$^1$ in Situation$^1$. [See now article no. 1 in this volume.]

This latter variant of the model represents what can be called an historical interpretation. For example: At the end of the 20$^{th}$ century a Finnish academic teacher gives a lecture (Interpreter$^2$ and Situation$^2$) to his students (Recipient$^2$) and interprets a passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians (Recipient$^1$) who were about to accept circumcision as demanded by the Jewish Torah (Situation$^1$); in his lecture the teacher explains how Paul argues when he tries to persuade the Galatians not to do so (Message$^1$ with Purpose$^1$).

My definition characterized interpretation as expressing the meaning of "B" in a clearer, more distinct or more complete way. But the Interpretation presented by Interpreter$^2$ can be more or less penetrating or profound. The extent to which this "more or less" is applicable depends not least on the type of text: a road description does not normally lend itself to any subtler interpretation, whereas an

[6] Filosofilexikonet 1988, 551, my translation.
[7] Filosofilexikonet 1988, 362–366, 460–462, 506–507.
[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer 1979, 258f.
[9] Göran Hermerén 1982, 270–273.

autobiography may do so. So also in the example from Galatians: an interpretation may restrict itself to analysing the logical sequence of the argument but may also go further, exposing, for instance, what kind of relationship between human beings and God is implied by Paul's argument. In the second, subtler, interpretation one may talk of an attempt to expose the "signification" of the meaning of Message[1].

The problem at issue when we ask about the relationship of Interpretation[2] to Message[1] is not dissimilar to that encountered when an attempt is made to translate a metaphor from one language into another in which that metaphor does not work: either another metaphor must be found or that which is expressed by the metaphor must be said without recourse to any pictorial language. But in order to do so, the metaphor in the first language must be analysed and a choice made from its several possible meanings. In a similar way, there can be several suggestions as to a possible Interpretation[2]. For the sake of simplicity I take both the "profound" and the "less profound" Interpretation[2] as ways to interpret Message[1].

One can imagine a less historical and, say, more existential approach:

– In Situation[2], Interpreter[2] interprets the Text with its Message[1] as having Message[2] for Recipient[2] with Purpose[2].

This describes an attempt to translate the original message (as far as it can be reconstructed) into one which is understandable and relevant to a modern audience, that is, its "signification" to them. Imagine, for example, a modern interpreter interpreting Paul's argument against circumcision just referred to. He/she may claim that as a Message[2], the Galatianstext teaches an evangelical freedom from any religious legal rulings either from the Bible or from the Church (whether the "Church" be the Curia of today's Rome or the synod of this or that Protestant church). Or, thinking in the mode of existentialism, he/she may maintain that it is all about the authentic liberty which comes from having made the existential decision of faith.[10]

One may say that both of these interpretations are attempts at a translation and an application of the text's original message, but nevertheless a translation that makes the message so different from a Message[1] that it deserves to be described as Message[2]. But since the promoters of the latter kind of interpretation were convinced that the Bible is about existential issues,[11] they may even claim that such an interpretation does not present a Message[2], but what I just called a "profound" Interpretation[2] of Message[1], representing its "signification". Thus, the relationship between Message[1] and Message[2] may be a matter of discussion, and it seems that the borderline is not always so sharp between a "profound" Interpretation[2] of Message[1] and an Interpretation[2] which strives for a Message[2] of the Text which is relevant in Situation[2].

[10] Rudolf Bultmann 1967, 28ff.

[11] Cf. Karl-Gustav Sandelin 1993, 89–94.

This "existential" or translating approach is similar to, but nonetheless different from, another model which could be described as a pious Bible reading:

– In Situation$^2$, Interpreter$^2$ interprets the Text to Recipient$^2$ as the original Sender's Message to Recipient$^1$ *and* Recipient$^2$ with Purpose$^1$ in Situation$^1$ as well as in Situation$^2$.

To use the almost classic wording of Krister Stendahl: this means identifying "what the text meant" with "what it means".[12]

If, for a moment, we endeavour to apply the elements of this interpretation model to medieval ways of doing exegesis, we might describe its interpretative work in this way:

– In Situation$^2$, Interpreter$^2$ interprets to Recipient$^2$ the Text of Sender$^2$ as Sender$^1$'s Message$^2$ to Recipient$^2$ with Purpose$^2$ in Situation$^2$ which has a spiritual identity with Situation$^1$.

We should then also bring in a particular application of my definition of interpretation: medieval exegesis applied the principle of Scripture's four senses 1) the historical or literal, 2) the allegorical or Christological, 3) the tropological or moral or anthropological, 4) the anagogical or eschatological. This would then, to a medieval understanding, fulfil the task of expressing the meaning of the text in a "clearer, more distinct or more complete way".

But in order to find out what is hidden in my rewriting of the interpretation model as applied to medieval exegesis, it needs to be elaborated even a little more: In Situation$^2$ (the medieval Church) Interpreter$^2$ (say, a *doctor biblicus* in Prague) interprets the Text to Recipient$^2$ (his students of theology); but the Sender's Message to his Recipients (say, Paul's to the Galatians) becomes an even more original Sender's (the Holy Spirit's) Message$^2$ with Purpose$^2$ through Interpreter$^2$ to Recipient$^2$ whose Situation" has a spiritual identity with Situation$^1$ (the Church being one) in that Interpreter$^2$ is a representative of the Church's ministerium which is guided by the Spirit and is in solidarity with Tradition.

After these preliminaries, we come to the main part of this article in which I will compare some common exegetical approaches with the model of historical interpretation, and, in doing so, note how the model's different elements are variously focused. The approaches will be illustrated by features drawn from Matthew's version of the story of Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:13–17). Every exegete knows that the boundaries between some of the approaches are not very sharp; a scholar who uses modern rhetorical criticism may, for example, very well combine this approach with insights from the history of religion. And even exegetes who use tools from literary criticism often (but not always!) pay respect to historical criticism.

[12] Krister Stendahl 1962, 420.